

Chapter 1 : Writing As Alicia Scott Series - Lisa Gardner

*NIGHT GUARDIANS series includes Shadow Force, Shadow Watch, Shadow Hunter, Shadow Surrender, Shadow Warrior, and Shadow Whispers. You may also enjoy the complex characters and storytelling of N. Bruhns, A. Stuart, and E. Palfrey.*

Does that mean you should join the crowd? Read a little of everything to figure out what suits your writing style best. I remember when I first started reading romances, I was a teenager and, at that point in my life, I was satisfied with both the Harlequin teen offerings as well as some of the raciest types of books around Carter Brown Mysteries. In my twenties, I got a little more conservative in my reading, yet in my own writing I realized that the stories I had in mind required more overt sexuality. I discovered that I liked Silhouette Intimate Moments because the emotional and physical love scenes were nicely balanced. A lot of the other category romances were too unbalanced either all sex, no emotions or all emotions, no sex for my tastes. I also found that I liked the more racy "romantic erotica" most, as long as the emotions and characterizations were on even ground. Let your characters decide the level of intimacy, not publisher guidelines. I used to base everything I wrote on what the publishers might buy. Target your publisher, then tailor what you write to that set of guidelines. The same is true for love scenes. In every one of my books, the level of intimacy is a little different, depending on what that particular hero and heroine dictate. Restless as Rain and Forever Man are strongly what I dub "romantic erotica" because the emotions are as hot as the physical lovemaking. The characters in these books are very extreme, larger than life and they demand a sexuality that suits their personalities. In First Love, the sexual tension is definitely there from start to finish and the love scenes are satisfying without being overtly erotic. However, the hero and heroine in this book are in need of emotional healing, more so than sexual healing. Their lovemaking is part of that healing process, and it suited them to have emotionally sensual love scenes rather than down-and-dirty, deep ones. The heroine in the book was very innocent and naive. When she thought of lovemaking, it was always in a more "romantic" sense and, because she was so private, having more low-key love scenes were appropriate. The sexual tension remained throughout, however. Give them what you promise. I read a Silhouette Intimate Moments a couple years, when they first introduced their "mainstream" theme, that was a wonderfully written story. Ultimately, however, I finished the book so disappointed I had to write to the editors about it. This was a story that had all the ingredients of a fantastic read. So why was I disappointed? I was expecting a romance, a romance that would blossom and the characters come to life as they fell in love. What I got was a romance that was a shadow to the external mystery and characters that came to life mostly in the external aspects. I felt very little for the characters in terms of their love bond. When they married at the end, I was only mildly glad. That same month, I read a Terry Brooks fantasy novel that contained a secondary element of romance that was never brought to complete fruition. I finished the book and immediately started the next in that series, completely satisfied. So why was I disappointed with the romance I bought, but not with the fantasy? Because in the first, I fully expected a good, solid romance that was equally balanced with a good, solid plot. In the fantasy, I never expected a romance, but there was one there nevertheless. The moral of this story: Respect your readers for the time and money they invest in your book. If you set them up for a romance, give it to them in spades. If you set them up for a heavy, emotional drama, give it to them. If you set them up for a steamy romance that keep getting hotter and hotter, deliver it. Make love scenes real instead of hokey or overly sentimental. A friend of mine told me recently that the editor-in-chief of a major trade house skips the love scenes when she reads because so many are utterly boring. So how do you make your love scenes real? People and relationships are tricky things. You need those things to make a character three-dimensional. The relationship between a man and a woman is, I feel, the most complex one in existence. Here you have two people, each with their own emotional baggage, screwball ways and contractions trying to or fighting against! The road to that point is utterly fascinating. You make your love scenes real by making your characters real. A fully fleshed out character will make your reader look at the world around them and the people in it in brand new ways. And a fully developed character will certainly make you want to find out what turns them on. In a romance, you take

for granted that these two were destined, meant to be, fated, designed for each other by God Himself. Therefore, every single look, touch, sense is made larger than life between them. The sexual tension must reach the breaking point and satisfy the reader and characters only temporarily until happily ever after. When the hero touches the heroine, even accidentally, the reader can see sparks igniting between them. When he looks at her, a profound feeling comes over the characters and the reader. The emotional impact needs to be conveyed through their every encounter. Start sexual tension from the get-go. Exaggerated awareness between your hero and heroine needs to begin immediately, the first time they come together in your novel, and it needs to increase in depth with each subsequent meeting. I remember I was critiquing a story for an unpublished writer a couple years ago, and we were at least halfway through the story. In this example, the hero and heroine are in the room together for the first time in two years. Notice the details as you read this excerpt: The way they look at each other, their breathing, right down to the sound of their voices when they talk reveals the depth of their feelings for one another. Lori not only lost her train of thought, she lost all coordination. How could she prepare herself? A man who, now at thirty-eight, affected her twice what he had in her troubled teen years. Their gazes met and locked, sweeping her out of reality on a tidal wave of emotion, like always. Why had nothing changed? Certainly not in her present or future. God, he was sexy. Dark, dangerous, that sense of the untamed just barely suppressed below the surface His face was more mature, more shuttered than ever before, and impossibly handsome. He had dark eyes that seemed to hold all the mysteries in the universe, a long nose that flared slightly when he was mad, frustrated. The features of his face seemed to be carved from stone. He sees that in the heroine as soon as he meets her and it creates a breathless tension until they meet again. The key to writing a great love scene is to not get mired in either the emotional aspect or the physical for too long. They want each sense to be well explored -- seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting. Does it make you hot? Or does it make you laugh out loud? Along the same lines, you may consider certain words too crude, rude or shocking to use in a romance novel. I kept shying away from the word too. So I used the test I mentioned above and said it out loud. It definitely made me hotter, and not simply out of embarrassment at saying something like it. It simply refused to go away. Brett would definitely think something this erotically, shockingly crude. Now, whenever I read this scene, I feel the hero is so fleshed out, he could step out of the scene and leave me breathless in reality! Set the scene and the mood for yourself and your characters. How do you get yourself into the mood to write a love scene? Set the scene in your mind. Set the scene in your own living room if it helps you. Take note of things in their natural form. Scents, sights, tastes, sounds, textures. Put on his jacket. Imagine the sensuality of a love scene in a romantic horror novel where the heroine both fears and is helplessly attracted to the mysterious, potentially dangerous hero. The heroine would be aware of the temperature of the room, the coldness, and the way she warms when the hero appears in the doorway. She would be aware of that shift of tension within and without her own body. The moonlight spilling across the stone floor. His voice would both unnerve her and catapult her excitement You can apply these sensations to any genre of romance. Use your characters background and experiences in your love scenes.

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