

Romance Writers of America  
Board Meeting Agenda  
August 13, 2022  
12:00 p.m. CST  
Virtual Meeting

**Saturday, August 13**

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**CALL TO ORDER:** President Clair Brett called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. CT on Saturday, August 13, 2022.

**ROLL CALL/CERTIFICATION OF QUORUM:** Secretary Siera London called the roll. Eight Board members were present: Officers Clair Brett, Siera London, and Brooke Wills; Directors-at-Large Louisa Cornell, Marian H. Griffin, Mary Karlik, Jacki Renee, and Nancy C. Weeks; PRO Advisor Catherine Stuart was absent. RWA Staff members Leslie Scantlebury, Erin Fry, and Jackie Padilla were present. With a majority of the Board members needed to establish a quorum, there were 8 voting members present, the Chair declared a quorum.

**The following RWA member guests were in attendance:** Donna Comeaux, Trish Edwards, Debbie Flinn, Pat Garcia, Tammy Hoganson, Shayne Huxtable, Carla-Elaine Johnson, Anita Learned, Nance Leonard, Deloris Nash, Emily Sewell, Kim Smallwood, Katherine Smits, Romy Sommer, Ellen Spain, and Marie Tuhart.

**The RWA Mission Statement and the Anti-Trust Statement were read into the record.**

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT - C. Brett**

As I write this President's report the RWA 2022 national conference is in the books. With over two hundred attendees, a more than 100 percent increase from the 2021 retreat, I am calling this a resounding success. When I stepped in as president in January, the 2022 conference was up in the air.

The staff and Board of Directors have all been busy bringing back member benefits that went on hiatus and creating innovative programs and workshops, while also reviewing and making plans for programs like Pen2Paper and RAMP for the coming year.

Siera London, Brooke Wells, and myself worked with our business consultant to interview and find a media group to come on board and work with staff on our social media presence, and I

am happy to say that on May 10 there was a motion and approval by the board to give the Big Buzz Media Group that contract. Our designated person has been working closely with staff to create an ongoing social media plan, which if you follow RWA you have no doubt seen. As they get to know our industry and our organization better, we are hopeful this will be a wonderful opportunity for RWA.

RWA has also been participating in advocacy throughout the industry. Our Policy committee has been giving monthly updates in eNotes about things members should be aware of and on May 12, the board of directors approved an Amicus Brief – *Warhol vs. Goldsmith*- to sign on to. As other concerns arise that would have an impact on the romance industry, we will continue to do so.

Other Actions Without Meetings that happened this quarter were as follows: On April 14 board members approved committee members for committees that needed to be populated or added to. On May 6, the board of directors voted to approve the April board meeting minutes. July 13, A motion regarding conference expenses, service Award Recipients, approval of more committee members, and a vote to relinquish our deposit to the San Francisco Marriott were all approved.

RAMP is currently in full swing, and both mentors and mentees are highly anticipating the mentee showcase in Oct. with industry professionals getting their eyes on the mentees' work. I also hope you all enjoy the new digital RWR that lands in your inbox monthly. Erin and the committee are hard at work to curate timely and useful articles, and chapters now have a place to put their upcoming events again.

As president I have had the opportunity to speak to chapters that have invited me to attend their meetings via zoom to connect and interact with members, which I enjoy.

I am looking forward to our continued work for the organization and need to thank this year's board of directors: Siera London, Brooke Wells, Jacki Renee', Louisa Cornell, Marian Griffin, Mary Karlik, Nancy Weeks, and Catherine Stuart. Without their dedication and belief in RWA, our work would be impossible. I also want to acknowledge all our committee chairs that can focus those goals of the board of directors down to actionable tasks to get that work done and get the benefits out to our members. And, to the staff, Executive Director Leslie Scantlebury, Senior Project Manager Erin Fry, and Accountant Jackie Padilla. These ladies keep the doors open and the lights on, and through the last few years took on many more jobs than what I have listed. It is not always easy to do what they do, but they manage to do it with grace. I would not be able to do my job without their constant support and guidance.

We continue to have weekly staff and cash flow meetings to keep abreast of the status of the organization, but we also continue to work to bring member benefits that are inclusive and diverse in all ways. As we work toward our diversity goals and to make sure that one member's

barrier to entry is the same as another's, we will keep having the discussions that inform those decisions.

We will be voting on some more important committees and task forces for the coming fiscal year and will need volunteers to fill those. If you have considered in the past or are just thinking about wanting to volunteer, I encourage you to sign up on the website.

## **SECRETARY'S REPORT - S. London**

### **MOTION TO APPROVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

*Griffin moved to approve the following committee members:*

*Conference Workshop Committee*

*Member: Jennifer Graybeal*

The motion was adopted in an Action Without Meeting on April 14 with 8 votes in the affirmative, 0 against, and 0 abstentions.

### **MOTION TO APPROVE APRIL BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

*Brett moved to approve the April Board meeting minutes.*

The motion was adopted in an Action Without Meeting on May 6 with 8 votes in the affirmative, 0 against, and 0 abstentions.

### **MOTION TO ENGAGE WITH BIG BUZZ IDEA GROUP**

*Brett moved to engage with Big Buzz Idea Group for consultation and to manage RWA's social media presence.*

The motion was adopted in an Action Without Meeting on May 10 with 8 votes in the affirmative, 0 against, and 0 abstentions.

### **MOTION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE AMICUS BRIEF – WARHOL VS. GOLDSMITH**

*Brett moved to request \$8,000 from the ACA fund to file an amicus brief with the Authors Guild on the Warhol vs. Goldsmith case.*

The motion was adopted in an Action Without Meeting on May 12 with 8 votes in the affirmative, 0 against, and 0 abstentions.

### **MOTION REGARDING CONFERENCE EXPENSES**

*Brett moved that ACA funds be used to cover conferences expenses such as keynote speaker fees, audio recordings, and other expenses as deemed appropriate.*

The motion was adopted in an Action Without Meeting on July 13 with 8 votes in the affirmative, 0 against, and 0 abstentions.

### **MOTION TO APPROVE SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENTS**

*Brett moved to approve the following members as recipients of RWA's Service Award.*

The motion was adopted in an Action Without Meeting on July 13 with 8 votes in the affirmative, 0 against, and 0 abstentions.

**MOTION TO RELINQUISH DEPOSIT TO THE SAN FRANCISCO MARRIOTT**

*Brett moved that RWA should relinquish the \$50,000 deposit to the San Francisco Marriott for the 2027 Annual Conference to be released from the existing conference contract.*

The motion was adopted in an Action Without Meeting on July 13 with 8 votes in the affirmative, 0 against, and 0 abstentions.

**MOTION TO APPROVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

*Brett moved to approve the following committee members:*

*Membership Committee:*

*Alexi Venice*

*Sharon Johnson*

*Sayre Ambrosio*

*Jean Joachim*

*Unpublished Members Benefit Committee:*

*Aparna Devershetti*

*Jennifer Althiser*

*Kelsey Bonacker*

The motion was adopted in an Action Without Meeting on July 13 with 8 votes in the affirmative, 0 against, and 0 abstentions.

**TREASURER'S REPORT - B. Wills**

See attached reports.

## CASH POSITION

July 2022	March 2022	Difference
\$941,753	\$1,026,530	(\$84,777)

## NET INCOME (LOSS)

Net income as of 7-31-22 is (\$213,979).

## MEMBERSHIP

Total General and Associate members as of 8-1-22 was 2,693 – a decrease of 3.61% from June to July.

July Membership Data			
New	Reinstated	Lapsed	Renewed
30	14	156	142

Last year, at this time, our membership attrition rate was 2.57%.

## NOTES

- RWA sold the note on the building, which was seller financed, for \$400,000.
- The SBA has extended the EIDL loan repayment deferment; the payments should now begin in December 2022.

## BUDGET VS ACTUALS: TOTAL

### Revenue

- Dues income is below the budgeted amount by about \$33,923.
- New & Reinstatement fees income exceeded the budgeted amount by \$2,975.
- The RWA Virtual Conference in November missed the budgeted income amount due to lower than expected attendance. However, the expenses also came in lower and RWA had a positive net income.
  - The net income for the virtual conference is \$44,076.
- The RWA2022 conference in National Harbor surpassed the budgeted income and had many more attendees than anticipated.
  - The bills are still coming in for this conference, so the final net income is unknown at this time.
- RWA is bringing in more income than budgeted from educational offerings.
- Advertising income is on the rise now that the digital RWR has launched.

### Expenses

- Overall RWA did well on limiting expenses.

# Romance Writers Of America

## Budget vs. Actuals

September 2021 - July 2022

	TOTAL	
	ACTUAL	BUDGET
Income		
3000 Dues	318,292.24	349,290.00
3100 Conferences / Meetings / Events	134,717.25	244,450.00
3300 Other Regular Revenues	86,275.93	42,765.00
3400 UBI Revenues	4,052.00	2,945.00
3500 Donations	54,996.31	
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$598,333.73</b>	<b>\$639,450.00</b>
GROSS PROFIT	<b>\$598,333.73</b>	<b>\$639,450.00</b>
Expenses		
5000 Salary Expenses	291,534.44	276,395.00
5100 Payroll Tax & Benefits	4,204.92	40,621.68
5200 Depreciation & Amortization	35,188.50	35,188.50
5300 Insurance Expenses	4,816.29	9,460.00
5400 Property Expenses	0.00	
5500 Information Technology	100,856.49	117,987.00
5600 Office Expenses & Supplies	5,288.33	10,372.00
5700 Telephone & Internet	2,552.43	3,570.00
6000 Advertising & Marketing PR	12,699.10	9,870.00
6100 Audio Visual	24,289.36	29,823.00
6200 Awards	17,748.51	11,325.00
6300 Bank & Credit Cards Fees	12,324.63	23,425.00
6400 Catering	33,480.86	30,307.50
6500 Other Exhibit & Meeting Costs	56,579.95	8,300.00
6600 Professional Fees	202,036.23	170,503.00
6700 Shipping		3,000.00
6800 Travel	8,712.21	14,310.98
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$812,312.25</b>	<b>\$794,458.66</b>
NET OPERATING INCOME	<b>\$ (213,978.52)</b>	<b>\$ (155,008.66)</b>
NET INCOME	<b>\$ (213,978.52)</b>	<b>\$ (155,008.66)</b>



# Romance Writers Of America

Balance Sheet  
As of July 31, 2022

	TOTAL
<b>ASSETS</b>	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	
1000 Cash	529,302.30
1100 Investment Accounts	412,450.92
<b>Total Bank Accounts</b>	<b>\$941,753.22</b>
Other Current Assets	
1300 Other Current Assets	953.00
1400 Prepaid Expenses	2,660.72
1500 Inventory Asset	2,916.00
<b>Total Other Current Assets</b>	<b>\$6,529.72</b>
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>\$948,282.94</b>
Fixed Assets	
1600 Land	0.00
1610 Building	0.00
1620 Building Improvements	0.00
1630 Furniture & Fixtures	0.00
1640 Computer Equipment	519.72
1650 Office Machines	0.00
1660 Software	55,832.42
<b>Total Fixed Assets</b>	<b>\$56,352.14</b>
Other Assets	
1700 Long-term Assets	42,016.20
<b>Total Other Assets</b>	<b>\$42,016.20</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$1,046,651.28</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Other Current Liabilities	
2200 Other Current Liabilities	50,091.54
2700 Deferred Revenues	107,426.23
<b>Total Other Current Liabilities</b>	<b>\$157,517.77</b>
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>\$157,517.77</b>
Long-Term Liabilities	
2300 Long Term Liabilities	149,900.00
<b>Total Long-Term Liabilities</b>	<b>\$149,900.00</b>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$307,417.77</b>
Equity	
2800 Designated Funds	586,916.39
Opening Balance Equity	1,190,601.56
Retained Earnings	(824,305.92)
Net Income	(213,978.52)
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>\$739,233.51</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	<b>\$1,046,651.28</b>

**OFFICE REPORT - L. Scantlebury**

Staff:

Erin Fry – Senior Project Manager

Jackie Padilla – Accountant

Leslie Scantlebury – Executive Director

<b>Member Type</b>	<b>03/29/2022</b>	<b>08/01/2022</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>Affiliate</b>	29	29	-1
<b>Associate</b>	975	975	-66
<b>Charter</b>	19	19	5
<b>Charter Honorary</b>	2	2	0
<b>General</b>	2,360	2071	-289
<b>General Honorary</b>	7	7	0
<b>Honorary</b>	67	67	0
	<b>3,459</b>	<b>3,459</b>	<b>-351</b>

**RWA 2022 Board of Directors Election**

The 2022 Election opened on Monday, August 1 and will close on Monday, August 15 at 5 p.m. CT. Election results are expected to be sent to President Clair Brett and Executive Director

Leslie Scantlebury on Tuesday, August 16.

President - Clair Brett  
President-Elect - Open  
Secretary - Jacki Renee  
Treasurer - Brooke Wills  
DAL - Anita Learned  
DAL - Laina Turner  
DAL - Louisa Cornell  
DAL - Marian Griffin  
DAL - Ursula Renee  
PAN Advisor - Open  
PRO Advisor - Open  
Chapter Advisor - Antonia Cyn

### **Big Buzz Media Group**

In May 2022, RWA began working with Big Buzz Idea Group on social media marketing efforts.

## **POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE - M. Karlik**

Our meeting began at 6:37 pm CST. Trish Edwards officiated our meeting. Minutes read, changes made, and approved by Donna Comeaux.

### **News & Updates**

Our News & Updates have been running late, but we are committed to do a better job issuing them for publication on the first of each month.

### **Crypto-Currency**

At one point, Bitcoins sold for as much as \$68,789.63, but prices have dropped to under \$18,000.

We have warned our members on numerous occasions to beware of this phenomenon. This is uncharted waters, and little is known about the pitfalls or the benefits of purchasing Bitcoins. For one thing, the SEC is having a difficult time regulating them.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/savingandinvesting/anthony-scaramucci-former-trump-ally-victim-of-the-crypto-crash/ar-AAZKvfl?li=BBnb7Kz>

**Recommendation:** We recommend the Board reiterate this warning against Crypto Currency/Bitcoins/NFTs in their next monthly newsletter.

### **Mergers & Acquisitions/Legal Issues**

#### DOJ v. Penguin Random House

DOJ's suit to block Penguin from acquiring Simon & Schuster is set to begin trial on August 1, 2022.

#### DOJ v. Filippo Bernardini

Bernardini is being prosecuted for stealing a manuscript. Prosecutors told Judge Colleen McMahon they are reviewing "a deferred prosecution request" (commonly called a DPA; and is an informal type of probation). Judge McMahon adjourned the case until September 10, "to facilitate discussions concerning a pre-trial disposition."

#### Hachette, HarperCollins, Wiley, and Penguin v. Internet Archive

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), with co-counsel Durie Tangri, is defending the Internet Archive against a lawsuit which threatens its Controlled Digital Lending (CDL) program. Hachette, et al., claim CDL has cost their companies millions of dollars and is a threat to their businesses.

Both sides have submitted motions for summary judgement.

Internet Archive is a nonprofit organization and basically behaves in the same manner as a library. It will be interesting to see how this case is decided. To read more, go to:

<https://www.eff.org/cases/hachette-v-internet-archive>

### Astra Acquisition

Astra Publishing House acquired sci-fi/fantasy publisher DAW Books. For more information, go to: <https://www.publishersmarketplace.com/dealmakers/detail.cgi?id-2313&s all&sort=sales>

DAW was previously distributed by Penguin, and will now be distributed with all of Astra's titles by Penguin Services.

### RBMedia

RBMedia has acquired Upfront Books. They work with publishers, self-published authors, and literary estates.

### CAA (Creative Artists Agency)

CAA has acquired ICM. ICM is valued at \$750 million.

<https://lunch.publishersmarketplace.com/2021/09/caa-to-acquire-icm>  
<https://lunch.publishersmarketplace.com/2019/12/icm-sells-a-stake-to-private-equity/>

### **Copyright Infringement**

Canada Hockey, L.L.C. d/b/a Epic Sports, Michael J. Bynum v. Texas A&M Athletic Department, Alan Cannon, Lane Stephenson

Following a denial of hearing by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in February, publishing company Canada Hockey L.L.C., doing business as Epic Sports, and Michael Bynum, a sportswriter and editor, have now filed a petition for writ of certiorari with the U.S. Supreme Court in their appeal of a copyright case against both Texas A&M University

and a pair of school officials. The petition claims the Fifth Circuit's decision leaves copyright holders "at the mercy of state infringers."

To read more, go to: [Petition Asks SCOTUS to Clarify Takings Clause in Context of Copyright Infringement](#) - From IPWatchdog.com

**Recommendation:** FYI, no action for the board at this time.

### Amazon – Authors Fighting Piracy

The site listed below gives detailed accounts of two authors losing revenue because of Amazon's lax policy on copyright screening. Authors publish their books on Amazon, only to find out later that a third party copied their books and listed them on Amazon for sale. The books are visibly different in print style, quality of paper used, and the size of the book is different. Literally, there are two copies of the same book on the Amazon site—one legitimate; the other, not. Needless to say, authors lose revenue because of Amazon's negligence.

Authors say Amazon needs to be more proactive about copyright screening, and a new small-claims board could help. But the Policy and Advisory Committee is of the opinion that RWA needs to take the lead by spearheading constructive dialog with other organizations to see how prevalent this issue really is among them.

Go to Bloomberg Law's webpage to read more: <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/ip-law/amazon-self-publishers-eye-emerging-legal-arena-to-fight-piracy?context=search&index=0>

**Recommendation:** This problem should be addressed with great urgency by making our members aware of this issue through every media platform available to us. Second, we might engage in dialog with other organizations to see if this problem has surfaced and determine how problematic it might be. If it is widespread, we'll need to join forces with other organizations to send a letter to Amazon, making them aware of this problem. In that letter, we should strongly make our next course of action known if they do not outline and implement a remedy to this issue. Though no RWA member has issued a complaint, it's a matter of time before they do.

### **E-Books – ACX Returns**

Amazon's ebook return policy is still a problem and according to Jane Friedman's Hot Sheet report, things are not going to change in the near future.

Amazon analyst, Tim Carmody, offers solutions, but all of them are self-serving and do not satisfy authors. Read more about Tim's solutions here:

<https://www.getrevue.co/profile/tcarmody/issues/amazon-s-digital-returns-problem-1235229>

More on Amazon Returns Policy (Romy Sommer, copied from [discussion board](#))

Everywhere on social media these days authors are complaining about Amazon's ebooks return policy and how it is affecting their income.

This is a very similar issue to the one with Audible a year or more ago which this committee had been tracking. RWA joined Authors Guild and a number of other organizations to [protest the Audible policies, and received marginal results](#). Should RWA reach out to those organizations to determine if more can be done to curb returns at Amazon?

The issue reached critical proportions recently with a number of high-profile Book Tokkers encouraging their followers to return ebooks read via Amazon for full refunds after reading, resulting in a huge upswing of returns for many Indie authors. This is ethically problematic, because readers are consuming the whole book without the author earning a cent, and in the end, it is actually COSTING authors money. Amazon still charges the author a delivery fee to the customer's device. So, authors are actually paying Amazon to have their books read, rather than the other way around! [Many authors and readers have joined a Change.org petition](#) to ask for a change in this policy.

It's possible this lenient return policy complies with EU regulations for online purchases. However, ebooks are not the same as other online purchases. It's not like gym equipment or electronics that might fail after a couple of weeks. Ebooks are consumables, like cereal, and no one would suggest returning a box of cereal after consumption!

What should Amazon do about their return policy?

If there's enough pressure on Amazon, it's highly probable Amazon could negotiate a carve-out for ebooks (though it's highly unlikely the EU does not already have carve-outs for consumable products!).

In addition, as with the Audible returns policy, the window period for returns could be reduced. Audible (owned by Amazon) reduced their return window from 365 days to 7 days. An improvement, but we all know a reader can read an entire ebook (or listen to an entire audiobook) in 7 days, so it's still a cheat. (And if we ever get Amazon to engage with negotiations, we should address this issue with Audible as well.) Audible customers are now also limited to returning no more than two audio books per year.

Many authors are calling for Amazon to refuse full refunds to those who have read past a certain percentage of the book (especially if they read to the end) as well as a narrower return window. Another request is to red flag customers who routinely return every ebook

purchase, or to limit the number of ebooks a reader can return for a full refund in a specific time period.

**Recommendation:** Join forces with Authors Guild and put pressure on Amazon to change this practice. We should request Amazon issue/outline all changes in writing. Present Amazon with our next step approach if things do not change. It is our opinion Amazon should feel more “heat” for this unfair practice. It is also very important RWA advocate for its authors, even if it does not have the resources to spearhead the fight.

In addition, please consider going on a month-long boycott. Of course, we would need to explore effective ways to pull this off, but there should be a way to hinder Amazon from making money off our authors by not using their services for a time.

### Audio Books

Authors Guild raises flag for authors on Spotify’s expansion, stating their primary concern is Spotify will pressure authors and publishers to put their books into a subscription-based system.

To read more, go to: <https://www.authorsguild.org/industry-advocacy/what-spotify-expansion-into-audiobooks-could-mean-for-authors/>

### **Publishing Activities**

#### Trade Sales

On July 11, 2022, Publishers Marketplace reported trade sales are down by 8.5%. Adult books down by 10.9%; hardcovers down by 21.6%; and mass market sales down by 22.4%. Even children’s sales were down by 2.6%. Ebooks, down by 8%.

Returns for adults and children’s books were down 20.6%, compared to 16.6% last year.

#### Comic and Graphic Novels

Sales have increased in this category by 62% in 2021 in both the U.S. and Canada. Combined print and digital download sales were \$1.28B in 2020; and \$2.075B in 2021.

#### Disability in Publishing

This organization first began on Twitter and was founded by and for disabled publishing professionals (<https://twitter.com/DisabilityinPub/status/1471297109890674688>) late last year and officially launches this month.



On July 22, in a virtual townhall, they will discuss its goals and mission, introduce their members, and field questions. For more information on the virtual meeting, go to: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/disability-in-publishing-virtual-townhall-launch-event-tickets-381959690717>.

**Recommendation:** Announce this organization in our August News & Updates. Paper Shortage Effects

Because of our severe paper shortage, U.S. magazine publishers halt some print subscriptions and offer digital editions. *People* and *Better Homes & Gardens* are now offering digital editions of their magazines.

### **Distribution and Supply Chain**

The expected shipping volume bounce post China lockdown has failed to materialize and has resulted in carriers continuing their aggressive blank sailing (skipping ports or entire routes) strategy. 2M alliance (Maersk and MSC) was the most aggressive, cutting back its services by 71% at the beginning of summer.

U.S. import container volumes grew by 5.9% in June. While consumer demand has slowed in the UK, it has continued at a steady pace in the U.S. through 2022, despite warnings of inflation. Total U.S. imports grew another 3% in the first five months of 2022 after rising 13.1% in 2021. Some of this growth is attributed to normal seasonality; retailers and other importers tend to send non-time sensitive holiday goods to the east coast earlier in the summer and use the west coast to expedite shipments as they get closer to the holiday season. The difference this year is that imports to the east coast are arriving earlier as shippers seek to avoid potential disruption as it relates to west coast labor contract negotiations, which began in May.

In the past, port congestion has mainly affected the west coast, most notably Long Beach. While the west coast represents over two-thirds of container ships waiting for berths in January, it is currently one-third--with many carriers and shippers avoiding Long Beach and opting to route shipments to the U.S. east coast. This eastward shift now burdens Houston and New York with as many containerships waiting for berths as LA and Long Beach, which saw an average of 22 containerships waiting at berth during June--a 33% drop from May, and a 79% reduction from the start of the year combined. While we have seen rates soften throughout 2022, if volumes continue as expected, we are unlikely to see rates tumble this side of Christmas.

**Recommendations:** Mention in the September issue of RWA's Newsletter that members should heed the warning to shop early for Christmas. There will be a shortage of goods due to the delays at port. More importantly, we need to also warn our readers that book publications will probably experience even more delays.

### **Imprints**

## HarperCollins

More than 250 employees of HarperCollins announced they will strike on July 20<sup>th</sup>. They want higher pay, improved family leave benefits, a greater commitment to diversifying staff, and stronger union protection.

Thousands have supported the employees by signing a petition, urging the company to settle a fair contract.

## Allida Books

Harper Children's and Clarion Books have launched Allida Books. The imprint will launch in early 2023 and its mission is "to encourage marginalized writers and artists to explore stories they are most passionate about and to craft narratives that defy expectations."

Allida's first titles will be *You are Here: Connecting Flights* – a middle grade exploration of contemporary Asian American identity; *An Impossible Thing to Say*, a YA novel-in-verse by rapper Arya Shahi; and *Secrets*, a middle grade graphic novel by Cindy Chang.

**Recommendation:** Make our members aware of this new imprint in our August News & Updates.

## **Boutiques**

### Barnes & Nobles

For the fiscal year ended April 30, and a restatement of the results of their 2021 fiscal year, their adjusted net loss increased by \$8 million.

## **Cancel Culture -Book Banning**

Librarians are feeling the strain of cancel culture and strong efforts to ban books. In recent days, librarians are being labeled as pedophiles on social media, embarrassed and called out by politicians, and have been reported to law enforcement officials. This has resulted in many leaving their profession, while others have been fired for refusing to remove certain titles from circulation.

## **United Kingdom**

### Ingram Content Group UK

They will expand their operations to compete as a trade wholesaler of books and will launch their full service in September 2022. To read more, go to:

<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/ingram-to-start-uk-wholesale-operation-entering-market-dominated-by-gardners>

Attendees: Trish Edwards, Donna Comeaux, and Claudine Gandolfi  
Absentees: Romy Sommer, Nina Bocci, Mary Karlik, Debra Winkler

## VIVIAN TASK FORCE REPORT - J. Renée

The Romance Writers of America Board of Directors charged Board Member Jacki Renée with developing an ad hoc committee to deconstruct the inaugural THE VIVIAN contest and answer the following questions:

(1) How does RWA encourage more marginalized authors to enter THE VIVIAN?

(2) What, if any, improvements are needed for THE VIVIAN?

In response to this charge, THE VIVIAN taskforce has evaluated and assessed the inaugural contest and have completed a recommended action plan summarized in this report.

### **CHARGE:**

DETERMINE WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ATTRACT MORE DIVERSE AUTHORS AND SUBMISSIONS WITH DIVERSE CHARACTERS AND BACKGROUNDS

Item I.

The inaugural Romance Writers of America THE VIVIAN contest continued a pattern of failing to attract submissions by marginalized authors identified as "...those excluded from mainstream social, economic, educational, and/or cultural life. Examples of marginalized populations include, but are not limited to, groups excluded due to race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, language, and/or immigration status." (F.O Baah and B. Riegel *Nursing Inquiry*. 2019) as was the case with the RITA Awards (1990-2019) and Golden Heart Awards (1981-2019). Submissions consistently centered around characters who identified as cis-gendered and Caucasian ensconced within U.S. Judeo-Christian culture.

The taskforce has found that outreach and marketing are key to attracting a more diverse author pool submitting to the THE VIVIAN. The outreach should be targeted and specific with RWA intentionally extending contest background and information to:

- Acquisition and literary agents
- Bloggers
- Nonprofit organizations
- Publishers
- Community centers
- Independent bookstores
- Book clubs
- Podcasts
- Websites
- Conferences, retreats and workshops including, but not limited to
  - Kundiman Retreat
  - Comadres and Compadres Writers Conference
  - National Black Writers Conference
  - Voices of Our Nations Arts Workshops
  - GayRomLit Retreat

- Lamda Literary Writing Retreat
- Kimbilio
- Macondo
- Academic and Public Libraries
- Research Facebook/Twitter/Instagram groups
- Request that chapters publicize the push for more diverse judges and submissions
- Contact publishers' DEIA offices to request a push for participation by diverse authors
- Contact national advocacy groups to publicize the contest
- Try to get interviews with organizational or national publications

#### Item II.

Judges who read and review submissions with characters and plots which fall outside American and Judeo-Christian cultural models were likely not represented in the cadre of those trained to judge the works entered into the contest. This is speculative, but based on the entries to the contest and demographic data results from the survey, the likelihood of this being the case is high. Also, when more diverse authors or entries with diverse characters, settings or backgrounds are entered into the contest, judges familiar with cultures of marginalized communities is paramount to a fair rendering of scores to these works. Therefore, judges must be familiar with not only DEIA practices but also the nuances and subtleties of multiple cultures. Sensitivity readers or editors familiar with writings and cultures outside what has traditionally been submitted to RWA contests should be available to provide insight and suggestions. A diverse pool of trained judges is imperative to holding an unbiased and equitable contest.

#### **CHARGE:**

DETERMINE WHAT, IF ANY, IMPROVEMENTS ARE NEEDED FOR THE VIVIAN

The taskforce reviewed each aspect of THE VIVIAN from its inception through the announcement of contest winners. This aspect of the charge is reported in phases and the taskforce has put forth the following information and recommendations:

#### Contest Policy & Procedures

*Policies and procedures are the roadmap for the operations of the contest. They give guidance for decision making, streamlining the contest process, and ensuring the contest moves forward efficiently with equity and fairness to entrants.*

#### **Findings:**

*The taskforce found that the staff and the Board did not adhere to the contest policies and procedures as put forth in Section 17 of the Romance Writers of America Policy & Procedures manual. A lack of checks and balances by the staff and Board was partially responsible for the difficulties with the 2021 THE VIVIAN.*

- *Staff could not locate the 2019 RITA Contest Assessment Report that would have been compiled by the previous contest administrators*

- *Staff could not provide 2019 RITA entries submitted in November 2018 that would have been collected by the previous contest administrators*
- *Staff could not locate 2019 RITA contest administration policies written by previous contest administrators*
- *Staff could not locate 2019 RITA statistics collected by previous contest administrators*
- *Staff lacks proficiency in the operations of the contest website*
- *There is no policy for rescinding an award*

### **Recommendations:**

*Create a policy and procedure manual specific to contest administration*

1. *Include a policy for rescinding an award*

*Create a formal document entitled Contest Administration Rules*

1. *Include a rule for rescinding an award*

*Form a contest committee to assist the Executive Director in the execution of RWA contests*

1. *Committee members must sign a Nondisclosure Agreement*
2. *Committee members cannot enter or judge an RWA contest while serving on the committee*
3. *The Board appointed liaison cannot enter or judge an RWA contest while acting in their board capacity*

*Create an ad hoc committee to develop the contest assessment report with no input from the contest committee or the Executive Director*

*Staff must be trained on the frontend and backend of the website*

### **Contest Rules**

*The taskforce concluded that the rules of the contest were followed except for one. We recommend the following revisions for improvement of the rules.*

### **Statement of Purpose**

The Vivian recognizes excellence in romance writing and showcases author talent and creativity. We celebrate the power of the romance genre with its central message of hope-- because happily ever afters are for everyone.

### **Recommended language for Statement of Purpose**

*THE VIVIAN recognizes authors who have mastered the craft of romance writing and showcases their talent and creativity in producing romances that are equitable and inclusive and are exemplary models of the romance genre. We celebrate the power of the romance genre with its central message of hope and love, because "happily ever afters" are for everyone.*

**Finding:**

*No vision statement exists to establish how well the purpose is adhered to.*

**Recommendation:**

*A vision statement would provide the means by which a foundation of trust is established to ensure that future contests are conducted professionally, efficiently, and equitably.*

**Entrant Eligibility**

Entry to the Most Anticipated category is open to entrants who have not accepted a publishing offer for, or self-published a work of original fictional narrative prose of 20,000 words or more under any pen name by January 4, 2021

**Finding:**

*The Most Anticipated category had the highest number of disqualified entries in the first judging round of THE VIVIAN than any other category.*

**Recommendation:**

*Romance Writers of America bring back the Golden Heart contest or a contest solely for entrants who have not accepted a publishing offer for, or self-published a work of original fictional narrative prose of 20,000 words or more under any pen name by closing date of the contest.*

**Entry Cap**

- Based on the number of judges accepted by November 23, the final entry cap for The Vivian is 850 entries, and the cap has been met. Entrants will be released off the waitlist in the order of entry. *(Updated November 23)*<sup>1</sup>
- Each entrant may submit up to two entries. Entrants will be able to enter one title for the first two weeks the contest is open. Members and non-members will be able to enter a second title from the third week the contest is open until the maximum number of entries is reached or the contest closes, whichever comes first.<sup>2</sup>
- Individual categories do not have entry caps, including “Most Anticipated.”<sup>3</sup>

**<sup>1</sup>Finding:**

*The entry cap had to be updated early in the opening of the contest.*

**<sup>1</sup>Recommendation:**

*The number of trained and qualified judges should be known prior to the opening of the contest.*

*The number of qualified judges for each category and entry cap should be based on the number of judges available. Judges' application training and selection should happen at least one month before the contest opens. No category should have a standing cap.*

**<sup>2</sup>Finding:**

*The interpretation of the words first two weeks is subjective. Two weeks can be interpreted as*

*ten (10) business days or fourteen (14) calendar days.*

**<sup>2</sup>Recommendation:**

*Provide actual dates rather than a general timeline, especially when there is a “final entry cap for the contest.”*

**<sup>3</sup>Finding:**

*Individual categories with no entry caps make the contest vulnerable to having more entries and not enough judges.*

**<sup>3</sup>Recommendation:**

*Establish individual category entry caps. Judges’ application selection should happen at least one month prior to the contest opening so the entry cap is already determined.*

## Entry Requirements

### All Entries

- Entries must be a work of original Romance Fiction. In order to be defined as a romance, all entries must have the following:
  - **A Central Love Story:** The main plot centers around individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work. A writer can include as many subplots as he/she wants as long as the love story is the main focus of the novel.
  - **An Emotionally Satisfying and Optimistic Ending:** In a romance, the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love.
- If applicable, placement of watermarks shall be restricted to the header and footer of each page of the book. Watermarks placed across the text of the pages may result in disqualification of the entry.
- RWA reserves the right to administratively disqualify an entry. In that case, the entry fee will be refunded and the file deleted.

**Recommendation:**

*The following statement be added under All Entries: Entries should not contain objectionable content that is potentially insensitive, upsetting, offensive, or inappropriate to specific cultural groups.*

**Recommended language addition**

*RWA reserves the right to administratively disqualify an entry at any point in the contest. In that case, the file will be deleted, and the entry fee may be refunded.*



## Category Descriptions

### Romance with Religious or Spiritual Elements

Works in which spiritual beliefs are an inherent part of the love story, character growth, or relationship development, and could not be removed without damaging the storyline. These novels may be set in the context of any religious or spiritual belief system of any culture.

### **Recommendation:**

*Data results from the survey indicate that most people believe this category should be changed. However, the taskforce found that the description of the category is inclusive of all members of faith-based communities. Romance Writers of America should promote its contests to groups and authors who write love stories that are based on beliefs outside of Christianity. There is a market for these stories and RWA must encourage those authors to enter and/or judge the contests.*

## Scoring Overview

### Round One Scoring

- The purpose of this first round is to establish a minimum standard for submissions.
- Round One will have three judges per entry.
- Although the judges will receive the entire work, they will be instructed to read only Chapter One (or the Prologue and Chapter One if a prologue is present) and answer five yes/no questions.
- Each entry will receive a total of 15 answers (five yes/no answers times three judges). Every entry that receives seven or more 'yes' answers will progress to Round Two.

### **Findings:**

*The term “minimum standard” is vague and should specify the requirements as noted in the entry requirement for submitting a work to the contest [see above (Entry Requirements – All Entries)].*

*Without reading the entire work, judges may find it difficult to accurately ascertain the purpose of Round One.*

### **Recommendations:**

*Make language of purpose of Round One specific to the requirements for all entries into the contest [see above (Entry Requirements – All Entries)].*

*Round One judges should read the entire work.*

### Round Two Scoring

- Round Two will have five judges per entry.

- The judges will read the entire book and assign scores according to the rubric.
- There are 10 areas to be scored per entry, plus a tie-breaker question. The scores for each area will be combined and the entry will receive a score of between 10-100 from each judge. The highest and lowest scores per entry will be dropped. Finalists will be determined based on the average of the remaining three scores.
- The top scoring 5% of each categories' entries based on the number of qualified entries received will advance to the Round Three/the final round, excepting that no category will have more than 10 finalists. Any fraction will be rounded up to the next whole number, not to exceed 10 finalists. However, no entry receiving less than 85% of the total possible score will advance to the next round.

**Finding:**

*No written statement of purpose of Round Two*

*The top scoring 5% of each categories' entries based on the number of qualified entries received will advance to the Round Three rule was not followed as described. For example:*

1. Contemporary Long category had 127 initial books and 108 went onto round two; 5% of 127 should have been 6, but with rounding to the next number for the finalists, 7 went on.
2. Contemporary Short category had 53 entries. All of them progressed from round 1 to round 2. However, the number of entries moving forward (based on 53 entries) should have been 2 (for the 5% threshold). Using the same idea earlier that since technically, 2.65% would have been the right number for 5% that they upped it to 3 finalists. However, contest administrators upped it to 4 finalists.

**Recommendation:**

*For uniformity of the rules, a statement of purpose should be written for Round Two.*

*Establish a minimum number for qualified entries in each category to advance to Round Three/the final round, excepting that no category will have more than 10 finalists.*

**Round Three Scoring**

- Round Three will have five judges per entry.
- The judges will read each finalist book in the category they are judging and assign scores according to the rubric.
- There are five areas to be scored per entry, plus a tie-breaker question. Each entry will receive a score of between 5-25 from each judge. The highest and lowest scores per entry will be dropped. The remaining scores will be combined, and the winners will be determined by the cumulative highest score.

**Findings:**

*No written statement of purpose of Round Three.*

**Recommendation:**

For uniformity of rules, a statement of purpose should be written for Round Three

**Judging and Judges**

The purpose of The Vivian Contest is to recognize excellence in published romance novels and novellas, and our goal is to create a contest that is equitable and inclusive. Judges must have a deep love for and knowledge of romance fiction and believe that everyone deserves a happily ever after. The ideal judge will be able to provide a fair assessment of all assigned books and will abide by RWA's core values and our anti-discrimination policy.

**Recommended language for Judging and Judges statement**

The purpose of THE VIVIAN is to recognize excellence in published romance novels and novellas, and our goal is to create a contest that is equitable and inclusive. *Judges must have a deep love for and knowledge of romance fiction and believe that everyone deserves a happily ever after. The ideal judge will be able to provide a fair assessment of all assigned books and will abide by RWA's core values and our anti-discrimination policy.*

**Judge Eligibility**

- Individuals must demonstrate an adequate understanding of romantic fiction to effectively critique story characters and plot. Book reviewers, librarians, professional critics, bookstore personnel, and authors are examples of individuals who possess the background necessary to serve as judges.

**Recommended language for first bullet under Judge Eligibility:**

*Individuals must demonstrate an understanding of romantic fiction to effectively critique the story, characters, and plot. Book reviewers, librarians, professional critics, bookstore personnel, and published romance authors are examples of individuals who may possess the background necessary to serve as judges.*

\*\*\*\*\*

- Selected judges must agree to complete DEIA and contest training and follow the prescribed rubrics when judging.

**Recommendation for fourth bullet under Judge Eligibility:**

*Judges must complete and successfully pass DEIA, sensitivity, and contest trainings and agree to follow the prescribed rubrics when judging.*

\*\*\*\*\*

- First Round judges must read the first chapter (or first chapter and prologue if present) for each assigned entry.
- Second and Third Round judges must read the entire book or manuscript for each assigned

entry.

**Recommendation for bullets eight and nine under Judge Eligibility**

*Combine these bullets to read: First, Second and Third Round judges must read the entire work for each assigned entry.*

\*\*\*\*\*

- To the extent permitted by law, RWA will track and analyze all submitted scores. In the event there is a concern that a judge's scores are out of compliance with the rubric or constitute a violation of RWA's Anti-Discrimination policy, the judge may be contacted for more information. If the explanation given is unsatisfactory, RWA reserves the right to remove an entrant from the Vivian contest and/or the future judging pool. These decisions will be made by RWA staff. Decisions can be appealed to the RWA Board.

**Finding for bullet ten:**

*Possible conflict of interest.*

**Recommendation:**

*Romance Writers of America Board members who enter the contest must recuse themselves from decisions related to a contest entry to maintain the integrity of the organization and its contest rules. Appeals must be handled by the staff and contest committee.*

**First and Second Round Eligible Judges**

Individuals who fall under the following categories whose application has been submitted and accepted are eligible to judge the first and second round so long as they have completed the required training:

- RWA General Members
- RWA Associate-Writer Members
- Non-RWA member authors who have published in romance fiction within the past five years, do not work for a publisher or agency, and do not acquire works of romance fiction
- Book reviewers who have published critiques of at least three works of romance fiction within the year prior to the contest open date and have an established platform or contribute to an established platform such as a personal blog or social media or YouTube account dedicated to posting reviews. Reviewers who post solely on platforms such as Goodreads, BookBub, NetGalley, online retailers, or similar are not eligible.
- Booksellers and Librarians who are currently employed at a bookstore or library or who have been employed at a bookstore within three years prior to the contest open date.
- Professional critics who are paid by a media corporation (e.g., *The New York Times*, *Library Journal*, etc.) for critiques and have had three published critiques of romance fiction within the year prior to the contest open date.

### Third Round Eligible Judges

Individuals who fall under the following categories whose application has been submitted and accepted are eligible to judge the Third so long as they have completed the required training:

- Book reviewers who have published critiques of at least three works of romance fiction within the year prior to the contest open date and have an established platform or contribute to an established platform such as a personal blog or social media or YouTube account dedicated to posting reviews. Reviewers who post solely on platforms such as Goodreads, BookBub, NetGalley, online retailers, or similar are not eligible.
- Booksellers and Librarians who are currently employed at a bookstore or library or who have been employed at a bookstore within three years prior to the contest open date.
- Professional critics who are paid by a media corporation (e.g., *The New York Times*, *Library Journal*, etc.) for critiques and have had three published critiques of romance fiction within the year prior to the contest open date.

### Recommendations:

#### *First Round Eligible Judges*

*Individuals who fall under the following categories whose application has been submitted and accepted are eligible to judge the first round if they have completed and passed the required DEIA, sensitivity, and Round One rubric trainings:*

- *RWA General Members*
- *RWA Associate-Writer Members*
- *Non-RWA member authors who have published in romance fiction within the past five years, do not work for a publisher or agency, and do not acquire works of romance fiction*
- *Book reviewers who have published critiques of at least three works of romance fiction within the year prior to the contest open date and have an established platform or contribute to an established platform such as a personal blog or social media or YouTube account dedicated to posting reviews. Reviewers who post solely on platforms such as Goodreads, BookBub, NetGalley, online retailers, or similar are not eligible.*
- *Booksellers and Librarians who are currently employed at a bookstore or library or who have been employed at a bookstore within three years prior to the contest open date.*
- *Professional critics who are paid by a media corporation (e.g., *The New York Times*, *Library Journal*, etc.) for critiques and have had three published critiques of romance fiction within the year prior to the contest open date.*

#### *Second Round Eligible Judges*

*Individuals who fall under the following categories whose application has been submitted and accepted are eligible to judge the second round so long as they have completed the required DEIA, general sensitivity, and Round Two rubric trainings training:*

- *RWA General Members*
- *Non-RWA member authors who have published in romance fiction within the past five years, do not work for a publisher or agency, and do not acquire works of romance*

*fiction*

- *Book reviewers who have published critiques of at least three works of romance fiction within the year prior to the contest open date and have an established platform or contribute to an established platform such as a personal blog or social media or YouTube account dedicated to posting reviews. Reviewers who post solely on platforms such as Goodreads, BookBub, NetGalley, online retailers, or similar are not eligible.*
- *Booksellers and Librarians who are currently employed at a bookstore or library or who have been employed at a bookstore within three years prior to the contest open date.*
- *Professional critics who are paid by a media corporation (e.g., *The New York Times*, *Library Journal*, etc.) for critiques and have had three published critiques of romance fiction within the year prior to the contest open date.*

### *Third Round Eligible Judges*

*Individuals who fall under the following categories whose application has been submitted and accepted are eligible to judge the second round so long as they have completed the required DEIA, general sensitivity, and Round Two rubric trainings training:*

- *Book reviewers who have published critiques of at least three works of romance fiction within the year prior to the contest open date and have an established platform or contribute to an established platform such as a personal blog or social media or YouTube account dedicated to posting reviews. Reviewers who post solely on platforms such as Goodreads, BookBub, NetGalley, online retailers, or similar are not eligible.*
- *Booksellers and Librarians who are currently employed at a bookstore or library or who have been employed at a bookstore within three years prior to the contest open date.*
- *Professional critics who are paid by a media corporation (e.g., *The New York Times*, *Library Journal*, etc.) for critiques and have had three published critiques of romance fiction within the year prior to the contest open date.*

### *Judge Matching*

- *Judges will be asked to indicate which categories, subgenres, and sensuality levels they feel they are most qualified to judge and with which they are most familiar.*
- *Entrants will be asked to indicate the subgenres and sensuality level their entry contains.*
- *Using the above information, entries will be sorted and assigned to judges via a computer program to ensure the judges are both qualified to judge and familiar with the entries they receive.*

### **Finding:**

*Under the current judge matching program used by Romance Writers of America it is possible to assign a judge an entry in their category if that judge is also a contest entrant in the same category because there is no manual check and balance.*

### **Recommendation:**

*Romance Writers of America staff and contest committee establish a streamlined check and*

*balance system to ensure contestants in a specific category cannot judge within that category.*

## Contest Rubrics

### Round One

#### Opening

A compelling opening grabs the reader's attention from the first paragraphs and makes them want to turn the page.

1. Is the opening compelling?

#### Characters, Plot, and Dialogue

Skilled elements include clearly-defined characters, plot elements that draw the reader into the set-up, and dialogue which supports the story and is realistic to the characters.

2. Does the work show skill in character, plot, and/or dialogue, if present?

#### Authorial Voice

A strong authorial voice communicates with vivid word choices and lively language.

3. Is the writing dynamic and the voice distinct?

#### Mechanics

Well-edited prose contains minimal errors in spelling and grammar to disrupt the flow of the story. Deliberate colloquial or stylistic choices (including intentional mis-spellings) do not count as errors.

4. Does the prose contain minimal (no more than 5) errors in spelling and grammar?

#### Overall Impression

5. Would readers want to read more?

#### **Recommendation:**

*Revise Round One rubric to establish that the entry meets the minimum requirements for a romance (central love story and HEA or HFN), the category, and does not contain objectionable content that is potentially insensitive, upsetting, offensive, or inappropriate to specific cultural groups.*

1. *Does it have a central love story?*
2. *Does it have an HEA or HFN?*
3. *Is the work free from objectionable content?*
4. *Does the entry fit the category?*
5. *Overall Impression: Was the reader engaged throughout the work?*

### Round Three

The judges will read each finalist book in the category they are judging and assign scores

according to the rubric.

There are five areas to be scored per entry, plus a tie-breaker question. Each entry will receive a score of between 5-25 from each judge. The highest and lowest scores per entry will be dropped. The remaining scores will be combined, and the winners will be determined by the cumulative highest score.

### Characters

Main and side characters should be multidimensional and not stereotypical. Main characters should have clear goals and motivations which add to narrative conflict.

5: Main characters are fully realized, unique, and compelling, with distinct narrative voices.

Character point-of-view engages reader sympathy, greatly enhancing the emotional arc of the narrative. Side characters add interest and resonance to the main characters' journeys.

4: Characters are fully realized and distinctive, with unique emotional arcs.

3: Characters are well-developed and consistent.

2: Character development is consistent with goals and motivations, but is predictable.

1: Character development is inconsistent, or one-dimensional. Goals or motivations are contrived.

### Romance and Plot

Plot and romance are skillfully set up and believable (or the reader is able to suspend disbelief). Each scene is essential.

5: The plot and romance are skillfully set up and consistent with the genre, while still being original and unexpected. Character goals and motivations are integral to moving the plot forward. The romance progresses hand-in-hand with the wider storyline. Each scene is essential.

4: The plot and romance fit genre expectations while containing original twists. The progress of the romance is essential to moving the plot forward. All scenes are essential.

3: Character moments and plot elements enhance the story's forward momentum. The romance and the storyline work together to hold the reader's attention. All scenes are essential.

2: The plot and romance do not contain fresh elements or intriguing spins on tropes. Character goals and motivations may not be integral to moving the plot forward.

1: The plot and romance are cliched, too easily resolved, or contain holes. Character arcs and plot arcs are not integrated.

### Conflict and Climax

Believable conflict keeps the main characters apart while they work towards clear, understandable goals. These stakes build to a strong climax or final turning point, and to a satisfying resolution, or to the unification of story elements.

5: The conflict is strongly integrated with the character arcs, containing intriguing details that keep the reader invested in the climax and resolution.

4: The conflict builds naturally and believably from the character arcs to a well-detailed climax and resolution.



- 3: The conflict builds naturally from the character arcs. The climax details are engaging.
- 2: The conflict builds to a somewhat detailed and interesting climax.
- 1: The conflict is incompletely or too easily resolved, leading to a weak climax.

#### World Building

The world of the story is clearly defined and complete, but not intrusive. The story's sense of time and place is built with consistent details and appropriate research.

- 5: The world is vibrant, consistent, and clear, grounded in sensory details that enhance the impact of the story.
- 4: The world is complex and unique, with details that contribute to the emotional and narrative impact of the story.
- 3: World-building details are consistent, with some emotional impact on the story.
- 2: The world of the story contains details that do not add significantly to the impact of the story.
- 1: The world of the story contains dry or confusing details that leave the reader ungrounded.

#### Authorial Voice

A clear authorial voice exhibits strong and varied word choices and uses fresh, non-clichéd language to enhance the narrative.

- 5: Authorial voice is unique and interesting, with a clear point of view and strong control of mechanics. The writing is lively, expressive, and engaging. Word choice is vivid, precise, and inclusive, steering clear of clichés and stereotypes.
- 4: Authorial voice is clear, consistent, and distinctive. The writing is fluid and engaging, with strong word choice, and steers clear of clichés and stereotypes.
- 3: Authorial voice is clear. The writing is fluid, with somewhat varied word choice.
- 2: Authorial voice is consistent and readable.
- 1: Authorial voice would improve with stronger word choices and/or eradication of clichés.

#### **Findings:**

*It is possible for finalists in the category to be judged against one another rather than independently.*

*Round Three questions are similar to Round Two questions.*

**Recommendations:**

*To guarantee the uniformity of all rounds, entries in the final round should be randomly assigned to judges.*

*Round Three questions should focus on the marketability of the work. Scoring remains the same.*

## Judge Recruitment and Training

**Findings:**

*There is no written documentation of the judge recruitment and selection process.*

*There was no training on the judging rubrics to ensure judges had an understanding of what was expected of them in each round.*

**Area of concern:** *Judges were able to take the “Implicit Bias” quiz as many times as needed to pass in order to move forward in the selection process.*

**Recommendations:**

Romance Writers of America create a document outlining its judge recruitment and selection process and practices.

Judge training should be updated to ensure proficiency in DEIA, general sensitivity reading, scoring rubrics, the process of judging, and the elements/tenets of the contest categories.

Establish the number of times a prospective judge can fail a training quiz before they are removed from the selection process.

## Judging Timelines

**Recommendation**

*Should Romance Writers of America implement the taskforce’s recommendation for round one judges to read the entire work the judging timelines must be adjusted.*

## Returned and Reassigned Entries

**Finding**

*There was no tracking completed.*

**Recommendation**

*Romance Writers of America staff and contest committee must establish a system for tracking returned and reassigned entries.*

## Measurable Goals

*The purpose of measurable goals is to assess progress to ensure you stay focused, meet deadlines, and know when you are getting closer to achieving your goals.*

*Although the inaugural Romance Writers of America THE VIVIAN contest had the highest number of diverse finalists [authors and characters] in the history of the organization, the number of marginalized entrants and works did not live up to the spirit of THE VIVIAN.*

## **Recommendations:**

*Set goals for the number of organizations RWA contact to attract contest entrants and judges from marginalized groups.*

*Set goals for the promotion of the Romance with Religious and Spiritual Elements category.*

*Set goals for the judge recruitment and selection process*

*Capture pre- and post-contest surveys that cover a range o*

## **ROMANCE EDUCATION INITIATIVE COMMITTEE - J. Renée**

### **Romance Education Initiative Committee Report – J. Renée**

- **Own Hearts Own Voices Program**

The REI Committee will be looking into restructuring this program into a series of seminars on the topic of diversity in the romance writing and publishing industry with the help of the RWA University Committee.

- **RWA University**

The RWA University committee met on Wednesday, July 21, 2022.

Since the March 2022 update, we have hosted three webinars (“Writing the Second Acts Romance”, “Setting as a Character” and “Writing Novels with NovelPad”). We have also scheduled a How to Build Your Own Review Team webinar for September 10, 2022.

We are currently working with an editor on a webinar that will give authors a look at what happens behind the scenes at a publishing company. We hope to host this class in October 2022.

The attendance for the webinars vary. To date, the most successful class was “Becoming an Entrepreneur” (March 2022). We need to look at what we did differently with that webinar and try to apply the same strategy for future classes.

We have an “Author Economics” Survival Guide scheduled for an August 2022 posting. Authors are also working on guides for “Developing the Author Business Plan”, “Organizing an Author Retreat” and “Preparing for an Author Signing.”

Jacki Renee and Ursula Renee have discussed a possible seminar series on “Diversity in the Romance Writing Industry.” Jacki Renee will work on the proposal and the goal is to host the first seminar in the beginning of 2023.

Ursula Renee and Marian H. Griffin are working on a Writing 101 series that would consist of webinars and Author Survival Guides. These will focus on what authors need to know when preparing manuscripts. Some of the topics we will include are grammar, punctuation and formatting. We hope to start offering these classes and guides in January 2023.

Things that we need to consider for the future are the number of webinars we would like to host each and the number of Author Survival Guides we would like to post.

- **Romance Author Mentorship Program (RAMP)**

A total of 23 Mentees have been paired with Mentors for RAMP 2022. For the next several weeks, mentors and mentees will work closely together to revise the mentee's full manuscript and discuss the business of writing. RAMP 2022 will culminate with two events for mentees, a Traditional Showcase that features over twenty agents and editors, and an Indie Author Weekend featuring self-published authors, freelance

experts, and more. Mentees also have access to archived educational programming on topics related to careers in both indie and traditional publishing.

Structural planning of Indie Author Weekend has begun, and more information will be provided to the board before it is submitted to RWA staff to update the organization's website.

- **RWR**

The committee has met and is working on acquiring articles for the upcoming issues of the RWR.

- **Unpublished Members Benefits Committee (Pen to Paper Program)**

The Unpublished Members Benefits Committee first convened June 26, 2022 and has met almost weekly since that time.

Pen to Paper Program assignments have been made. Most positions are filled at this time.

Extensive recommendations for revisions to the program were made as a result of feedback from guides and participants in the inaugural Pen to Paper program of 2021-2022. These recommendations have been reviewed and committee members are in the process of implementing them.

As a result of the extensive revisions needed, a timeline for the program has been. The timeline is the foundation for the program and many projects require actionable support from the board and RWA staff.

The Pen to Paper page on the RWA website is in the process of revision pending finalization of timeline dates. Expected completion is 8/7/22. The information will be provided to the board for review before submission to RWA staff to implement with a target date of 8/15/22.

The Pen to Paper Participant Information form has been revised and will be provided to the board for review before submission to RWA staff with a goal of launching the form on 8/15/22.

Guide applications are being revised pending finalized timeline dates. Projected completion is 8/7/22 with a target date of 8/15/22 for launch.

Guide and Participant Onboarding curriculum revision will begin 8/2/22 with a series of UMBC meetings specifically for this purpose. Guide onboarding materials are projected to be completed by 9/2/22. Participant Onboarding materials are projected to be completed by 9/30/22.

Curriculum revisions for Units One and Two are in progress with completion targeted for 9/16/22.

Technology infrastructure evaluation has started with exploring Facebook groups and the capabilities of the platform. This needs actionable support from RWA staff and board members for technical assistance, especially with training guides and participants and administering groups. Target date for completion is 9/6/22.

**MOTION #1: ESTABLISH TRANSITIONS TASK FORCE**

Brett moves to establish the Transitions Task Force. The purpose of the task force is to work toward continued stability and growth of the organization going forward when the partnership with SC Ventures has finished. It is intended that this task force will work to further stabilize and bring RWA into an inclusive and equitable organization able to fulfill our mission to all its members, and to further increase membership.

*The motion was adopted by general consent.*

**MOTION #2: CANCEL 2022-2023 THE VIVIAN CONTEST**

Renée moves to cancel the 2022-2023 THE VIVIAN Contest:

Rational: canceling the 2022-2023 THE VIVIAN Contest will allow the Board time to appoint a Contest Committee Chair and populate the committee. This will also give the committee time to review the entire THE VIVIAN Task Force report and implement recommendations.

*The motion was adopted by general consent.*

**MOTION #3: ESTABLISH THE RWA CONTEST COMMITTEE**

Renée moves to form a standing committee RWA Contest Committee.

*The motion was adopted by general consent.*

**ADJOURN:** President Brett adjourned the meeting a 12:20 p.m. CT.