

Smart Bitches

OUR FAVORITE SNARKY BLOGGERS TALK ROMANCE

AS ROMANCE FANS, we're sometimes derided for our taste in fiction. To the rescue come the Smart Bitches, Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan, who've penned *Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels*, out this month from Fireside. The ladies tackle stereotypes, favorite subgenres and sexual logistics. Look out especially for the Big Misunderstanding Land, a board game outlining common mix-up plotlines (highlights include: "He sees her leave a bar with some sleazy guy ... it's her secret twin!"), and a suggested line of greeting cards for historical heroes titled, "Holy Crap I Raped a Virgin." We caught up with the duo and IMed about their — and our — favorite genre.

RT: So why did you decide to write a book?

Sarah Wendell: Let's see. We wanted to write a book because there is nothing so perfectly guaranteed for success as two bloggers with no publishing history writing a nonfiction account of an under-represented genre during the worst economic downturn in the last 30 years.

Candy Tan: We have impeccable timing.

SW: Two words: Auto. Win. What could go wrong?! A more honest answer would be that we stumbled into romance blogging because we had something to say. So we tripped into publishing because we had something to say in print about romance novels.

RT: Your book was both a love letter to the industry and a sarcastic taking to task of all the clichés. How did you manage to get both tones across?

SW: Because no one but romance fans know the truth about the genre: The best is on par with the classics. The worst, as Candy wrote, is more vile than you can imagine.

CT: It's like smack-talking with a really good friend. You love her, and you know her really well. You know all her good points, and you know when you can tease her about something.

SW: And you can say to her, "DUDE, what is UP with all the VIRGIN WIDOWS!!?"

RT: Since you guys are good at saucy comebacks, what do you



Candy Tan



Sarah Wendell



say to people who hate romance novels?

SW: I sentence them to a lifetime of bad sex. Until such time as they open their minds and stop being such judgmental douchebags.

RT: You also talk about a lot of awesomeness of the subgenre, like pirates! Why pirates?

CT: Oh man. Pirates.

SW: Candy looooooves pirates.

CT: Men in tight pants.

SW: Buckling their swashes.

CT: Cross-dressing girls. Confused sexuality. Homosexual tension. Adventure on the high seas.

RT: What's one thing you would like to change about the industry?

CT: ... only one? A healthier, more open attitude toward sexuality, toward both hero and heroine. The hyper-masculinity you see in the heroes binds them in different ways than the purity we expect from certain types of heroines, but it's still binding them. In some ways, we're much more accepting of heroines being masculine, or showing masculine traits. Reading contemporary romances from the early '80s feels somewhat strange because it was always such a big deal that the heroine had a career and was having — OMG — PREMARITAL SEX.

SW: For me, in short: good fathers? SEXY LIKE, WHOA. And yet the most

common image of fatherhood in romances are those who have fatherhood thrust upon them suddenly with a secret baby, and that's unfortunate. And a discredit to men who demonstrate a more contemporary definition of masculinity by being kind, caring, attentive, involved fathers.

CT: It's instant conflict. Just add "secret baby"!

SW: Involved fathers = SEXY. So I'd like more realistic portrayals of what truly defines masculinity, especially as it pertains to what Candy said about binding men to limited characteristics.

RT: What do you hope people will get out of your book?

CT: Part of the reason we started the site and wrote the book was because we wanted to explode a lot of stereotypes about women and why we read romance.

SW: And I hope people are both entertained and laughing while also rethinking their preconceived notions about the genre and the women who read it. Women who write and read romance are amazing, amazing creatures, and they don't get nearly enough credit.

CT: If they're already romance novel readers, I hope they laugh and cringe and go, "Oh god, they nailed it exactly."

RT: And maybe have a greater appreciation for pirates?

CT: Hell, yeah.

SW: Everyone should have a greater appreciation for pirates. Yarr.

— Elissa Petruzzi

Get more snark at SmartBitchesTrashyBooks.com.