

I try not to read my reviews. Sometimes I can't help it. Review sites send them to me. That's okay. When they do that, it means they're good reviews and I can bask in the glow. I used to get Google alerts. You know how to do those, don't you? Just put in a request for an alert any time your name or a specific book comes up on the web. Put it in quotation marks for a specific book. Then you'll get these alerts with a link to the review or pirate site that has your book up. I don't bother with these any more. They can be demoralizing. I pay Muso, a company that attacks the pirates for me now, fifteen dollars a month to take care of that. The reviewers? I can't find a cheap hit man for the ones who don't love me. Did I just write that?

Okay, so not everyone is going to love your work. And that's what the previous paragraph should have said. Not love *me*, love my work. But we know the reality is that we take slams to our work personally. It has our name on it. A bad review can make us take to our bed with a gallon of Blue Bell ice cream and make us doubt our own talent. So don't read them. Stop right now. I love Goodreads but there's nowhere else that you will find such a range of reviews as there. I definitely don't read my reviews on that site. I like to post reviews of books I read there but am very cautious about giving anything under a three star review. Do unto others. That's my motto.

Now if you're unpublished, maybe you're making the contest rounds. So you have some criticism coming your way there. I even entered a contest recently with a chapter from a young adult I was trying out. I didn't make the finals. Now for a multi-published author, this felt like an epic fail. And I got some criticism from judges. First thing I did? Looked at the qualifications of the judges. Did those judges even READ young adult fiction? Some didn't. So I wasn't putting a lot of stock in what they said. Even if they were published authors. I'm sorry, but I read a lot of it and it's way different from adult romance. (Defensive much, Gerry?) But there were a couple of points made by judges that I had to consider valid. Hey, I'd paid good money to enter this contest so I should try to get something out of it.

Here's what I say you should do. First, if you don't final or win a contest, take a breath, calm down and let the results cool off for a few days. Then, when you are able to be objective, which took me a week or more, see if there's a pattern to the comments. If there is, this is an area you should study. If one judge had an off-the-wall thing they hated, ignore. If all of your scores are pretty low, pay attention. This may not be the genre for you. Me? I'm taking my toys and going home. I have a following in adult paranormal. So I'm back to the drawing board for an adult paranormal proposal.

Final thoughts on criticism. I do judge a few contests. I see entries that come in that shouldn't. They aren't even formatted properly. Do your homework and at least get the basics down before you subject yourself to that punishment. Also, use spell and grammar check. Please. And read your stuff aloud at home before you send it off. This will help you spot sentences that don't make sense and words that are missing. Take some basic courses in point of view and characterization. Don't waste a lot of money on contests before you are ready to enter. Instead invest in good on-line RWA University courses. Pat Kay teaches great ones. I see them listed in the RWR and the e-notes on-line monthly.

I don't sign my name when I judge. I don't want a disgruntled newbie coming at me with a pitchfork. I can be kind but also tactfully cruel. I won't be doing you a favor if I ignore a bad manuscript and send you blithely on your way without the proper criticism. I spent decades in a very honest critique group. They are still telling me when I get off track. If you can't take criticism, darling, you're in the wrong business.

Gerry Bartlett is the author of the nationally bestselling Real Vampires series. Her tenth book, *Real Vampires Know Size Matters* was a December, 2013 release. You can read more Perils articles or sign up for her newsletter at gerrybartlett.com.