

THE *BAG* OF **Holdings**

BY NANCY HOLDER



Back during the Twilight of the Gods,

or at least, the end of the first run of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. my agent suggested to me that I try to write some books that were like Buffy, about a strong girl or woman battling occult forces. Editors sat with me in bars and talked about looking for such books; and when I discovered Bombshell at Harlequin, I figured everyone was talking about the same thing. And we were!

We now have a genre—or subgenre, depending on whose definition you're using—called urban fantasy. Jim Butcher's Harry Dresden series and Charlaine Harris's Southern Vampire novels about Sookie Stackhouse have both made it onto TV (THE DRESDEN FILES ran for one season the Sci-Fi Channel; TRUE BLOOD debuted on HBO on September 7.) Urban fantasy is everywhere, and it is a natural fit for SFWAnS looking for more places to sell their work.

Speaking of work, writing this column wasn't much work at all. I put out a call on a few lists (and e'd a few editors and authors), and find my column has been written for me

by these generous souls.

So most of the rest of this month's column will be a round-robin of Q&A, some lists, and tips from the pros of urban fantasy. After much dithering, I cut a few responses that overlapped what another interviewee had to say.

Here are my responders. In the case of the authors, I've tried to provide some current or upcoming titles and/or series. Many of them have excellent websites and forums where you can learn even more about UF, writing, and the life of a working professional writer.

Authors

- Charlaine Harris, the Sookie Stackhouse Southern Vampire series: *From Dead to Worse*
Kelley Armstrong, Otherworld series: *Personal Demon, No Humans Involved*
Jenna Black, the Morgan Kingsley series: *The Devil You Know, The Devil's Due*
Jennifer Stevenson, *The Brass Bed, The Velvet Chair, The Bearskin Rug*
Diana Pharaoh Francis, the Crosspointe series: *The Cipher, The Black Ship*
Irene Radford, W/A P. R. Frost, *Hounding the Moon, Moon in the Mirror, Faerie Moon*
Cindy Holby, the Wind Series: *Fallen*; W/A Colby Hodge, *Twist* (and others)
Susan Wright, the Slave Trade trilogy; coming in 2009: *Confessions of a Demon*
Sharon Ashwood, the Dark Forgotten series: *Ravenous*
Anton Strout, the Simon Canderous series: *Dead to me, Deader Still*
Chris Marie Green, the Vampire Babylon series: *Midnight Rein, Break of Dawn*
S.J. Day, the Marked series: *Eve of Darkness, Eve of Destruction, Eve of Chaos*

Urban Fantasy

Editors

Ginjer Buchanan (and a partner in urban fantasy crime, as the author of *Highlander: White Silence*) with Anne Sowards looking over her shoulder; and Liz Scheier.

The Merry Marketeer (and another wearer-of-two hats)

Anton Strout, who says of his other job: “By day, he works for Penguin Group USA in their paperback sales department as a National Accounts Associate and is also a sales rep to the Barnes and Noble College Chain of bookstores. Yes, it is as glamorous as it sounds.”

THE QUESTIONS

NH: *How do you define urban fantasy?*

Charlaine Harris: Urban fantasy is a mystery/suspense novel with strong supernatural elements. Often it’s set in cities, but not always. (I write rural fantasy.) The protagonist most often is some kind of supernatural creature or has some extraordinary ability.

Kelley Armstrong: UF almost invariably has paranormal elements. What’s currently being called UF usually has a suspense plot (overcoming a threat, finding a killer) but to say THAT’S urban fantasy ignores the fact that the UF genre has been around for a very long time, and it was only recently co-opted for this particular sub-genre. I’ve heard it said that it must be contemporary—so what do we call all the ones that take place in historical time periods? Labeling has always been a huge problem for this sub-genre. When I started, my books were called dark fantasy, then supernatural thrillers, then paranormal suspense, and now, apparently, they’re urban fantasy.

Jenna Black: I like to steal my agent’s definition: it’s fantasy, set in the real contemporary world, only the things that go bump in the night are real. Right now, the term is primarily used to describe books that are written in first person in a dry, witty tone. The tone is almost like chick lit, although the underlying plot and conflict is much, much darker.

Cindy Holby: I define it as an alternate present or future on earth where there is danger at every turn and paranormal beings are present.

P.R. Frost: Urban Fantasy for me is a fantasy novel set in modern day, in a society very like our own but with a paranormal twist. Some go very dark, others are light and fluffy. The common ground seems to be the narrator looking at life sideways in order to cope with monsters invading the urban or suburban landscape. Patricia Briggs says she was told her books have to have Vampires, Werewolves, and the heroine must have a complicated love life. Works for her; she made #1 on the NYT.

S.J. Day: There are two worlds existing alongside each other—one similar to the one we live in and a preternatural underground functioning undetected by the majority of the non-fantastical population. The story usually follows a single character’s journey. The

Urban Fantasy for me is a fantasy novel set in modern day, in a society very like our own but with a paranormal twist. Some go very dark, others are light and fluffy.

focus of the plot is usually on the main protagonist’s ability to maintain the balance between the two worlds, although sometimes the protagonist functions almost entirely within the fantastical world. While there may be romantic elements, they are adjunctive and not expected to end in a “happily ever after”

Ginjer Buchanan: Urban fantasy is a subset of contemporary fantasy. It takes place in the here and now, usually, and in what is more or less recognizable as “our world” as opposed to a created fantasy world. It has a dark edge and the fantastical elements typically include beings that are associated with horror, such as vampires and werewolves.

Jennifer Stevenson: The feel is gritty. The take on magical beings, magical creatures, or magical practices is offbeat or irreverent to genre tropes, whether funny or dark.

Sharon Ashwood: Urban fantasy is a very elastic genre. Often it concerns the unexpected, whimsical collision between fantasy and our everyday world, the horrific and the human—and all the pain, beauty, and humor that comes from that. It ranges from very dark to outright comedy, deeply philosophical to froth. Often it includes creatures like vampires or elves, but there are lots of other elements coming into the mix from myth, folklore, and the horror genre. Someone is always coming along with a new, fabulous twist.

Liz Scheier: Urban fantasy is best defined by a series of “mostlies”: contemporary fantasy, mostly fairly gritty, mostly somewhat snarky, mostly with a female protagonist, mostly in series, mostly action-packed.

Anton Strout: UF is a pretty big bucket that covers a lot of ground when it comes to supernatural fantasy that happens in a modern setting.

Chris Marie Green: This is a fun question for me because when my first “urban fantasy” book, *Night Rising*, came out, I had no idea that’s what I was writing. I had heard that urban fantasy used a first-person voice and had a noir feel to it, and the real-life setting played a huge part, almost become a secondary character in itself. My Vampire Babylon series uses a third-person, heroine-centric point of view, and it definitely has the “noir, city-setting” thing going for it. Also, urban fantasies aren’t straight romances, but they can have strong romantic elements.

NH: *What is the best way for an SF or fantasy author to break into urban fantasy?*

Several responders: Read a lot of them. Write one. Write a good one. Write a damned good one.

S.J. Day: First of all, know what it is. There are a lot of books out there using the “urban” label in an effort to capitalize on the popularity of the genre that aren’t UF at all.

Cindy Holby. I would say the Shomi line at Dorchester is a good place to start because they are broadening the genre.

Kelley Armstrong: Publishers are looking for the old “same but different.” In other words, they want stories that fit into the genre, but explore a new area of it, preferably something other than vampires, werewolves, and demons. There is plenty of mythology out there, but writers keep sticking to these tried-and-true favorites. Editors have enough vampire novels—they want a fresh take on the paranormal.

Diana Pharaoh Francis: Some people say that YA is easier to break into, but I don’t know that that is true. I do know that editors are far more selective about what vampire and werewolf stuff they will acquire, since there are already a lot of books with those on the shelves. Writing a book with a different take on them or with a different kind of story will seem more fresh.

Susan Wright: This year, Marjorie Liu published her urban fantasy, *The Iron Hunt*, after her successful paranormal romance Dirk and Steele series. I wrote my urban fantasy novel, *Confessions of a Demon*, after I published an SF trilogy, *Slave Trade*, and a fantasy duology, *To Serve and Submit* and *A Pound of Flesh*. I was lucky to have encouragement from my former editor at Roc, Liz Scheier (Jessica Wade is currently my editor.) Liz worked with me to develop *Confessions of a Demon*—she wanted an urban fantasy with an infusion of hot sex that is set in New York City. I’ve lived here for twenty years, and I really know and love the city.

Jennifer Stevenson: Paranormal romance, hands down. Build your world, design a story that focuses on the heroine, add a happily-resolving relationship to taste, and stir. The romantic relationship does not have to dominate the story in the current market. Even fantasy editors are buying this stuff because it sells better than straight fantasy (I am told.)

Anton Strout: Well, I can tell you how I got my break. I went to conventions, talked to a lot of the writer panelists and really listened to what they had to say. Over time, I got to know them better and asked them to keep me in mind for any new anthologies there might be openings in. One of the editors,

Jean Rabe, came to me and said that one of the anthologies she was working on had come in short on total word count and they had some room if I could put something together in just a few days and it was good. I wrote like a madman and turned it in. They approved it and that got me started. Each writing credit helped build my legitimacy until I got an editor and an agent to take a chance on my long form fiction. Outside of taking criticism well and honing the craft of writing, I’d say networking was a big part of it. Take in what editors, agents, and other writers are telling you and apply it to your work.

Charlaine Harris: If the author has never experienced the mystery or suspense genre, I’d advise immersion in writers like Dennis Lehane, Robert Crais, Lee Child, Linda Fairstein, Tess Gerritsen, and Laura Lippman. An immersion in these celebrated mystery/suspense writers will give anyone a quick course in writing dark urban. Then throw in a werewolf, and voila! Urban fantasy.

Of course, it’s not that simple, but that would be a start, anyway.

NH: *Who are the publishers of urban fantasy? Who are the editors?*

Aggregate response: “almost all of them”

Anne Sowards and Jessica Wade at Ace
Ginjer Buchanan at Ace
Cameron Dufty at Ace
Diana Gill at Harper Eos
Devi Pillai at Orbit
Ed Schlesinger and Jennifer Heddle at Pocket
Sheila Gilbert at DAW
Betsy Wollheim at DAW
Jennifer Enderlin and Rose Hilliard at St. Martin’s
Heath Osborn at Tor
John Scognamiglio at Kensington
Julie Ullman at Spectra
Betsy Mitchell at Del Rey
Liz Scheier at Del Rey
Chris Keeslar at Dorchester
Leis Pederson at Berkley

Paranormal romance publishers, such as Signet Eclipse and Luna at Harlequin, are also publishing urban fantasy that has a primary focus on the romance side

Traditional science fiction houses

Liz Scheier: We don’t have an urban fantasy program per se, but I came on board the Good Ship Del Rey specifically to expand the contemporary fantasy program, focusing heavily on urban fantasy. There’s a lot of great stuff coming up the pike!

**Build your world, design a story that focuses on the heroine,
add a happily-resolving relationship to taste, and stir.**

Ginjer Buchanan: We don't have an urban fantasy program. The books are published in Ace and Roc both, in all formats. All of the SF/F editors buy it, plus a couple of the romance editors. (Anne Sowards concurred.)

NH: *How is urban fantasy different from paranormal romance?*

Liz Scheier: Good question; it's often a very fine line. To my mind, it comes down to the focus of the book; if you can remove the romance and still have a great story, you've got urban fantasy on your hands—if you can't, you've got romance. Some of the best urban fantasy series have the heroine choosing between a few possible guys, or having a few relationships along the way, which doesn't tend to go over too well in romance.

Ginjer Buchanan: In urban fantasy, there is more emphasis on the world-building and the plots (which often involve a mystery) and less on the romantic entanglements of the characters (although there often are such entanglements.)

Kelley Armstrong: Urban fantasy often has elements of romance, but it's not the main plot. The quick-and-dirty way to tell them apart? If you take the romance out of the story and it falls apart, it's paranormal romance. If it could stand without the romance, it's urban fantasy.

Jenna Black: For a book to be considered paranormal romance, it must end happily for the lead couple. This is not

true of urban fantasy. Urban fantasy is usually told from the first person point of view, and is usually an ongoing series. If the protagonist reaches a happily ever after at the end of book 1, then where is the conflict for later books?

P.R. Frost: Not a lot. I've seen Luna books that could have been published by Ace. In general I'd say that romance is a little heavier on the relationships. But the romance world has changed since I got my first rejection saying "Too much plot, not enough romance." The romance can stretch over books now.

Diana Pharaoh Francis: For paranormal romance, the primary element is the romance and the relationships between the romantic leads. Often, if there is too much world building or too much story outside the romance, readers will complain... They simply aren't as interested in that side of the story.

Also, paranormal romance ventures into some places that urban fantasy often avoids, like ghost stories, for instance...Additionally, paranormal romance can also embrace science fictional aspects. Finally, you can expect a lot of sex, often explicit, in a paranormal romance.

Susan Wright: The world-building is more intricate when it comes to the supernatural elements and the plotting in urban fantasy novels. Paranormal romance sometimes leaves the paranormal aspects unexplained or inconsistently applied because the character interaction and the developing relationship get the primary focus...Some urban fantasies have explicit sex, like Laurell



Also, while the whole world can be at stake in the Urban Fantasy universe, there is less emphasis on big heroic set pieces a la Tolkein than one might find in a fantasy epic.

K. Hamilton, the godmother of the cross-over from fantasy to romance readers.

Chris Marie Green: It seems like UF concentrates more on a core character than a couple, and when the chips are down in paranormal romance, the survival of the couple is the focus, rather than the survival of the individual or society in UF.

Jennifer Stevenson: If you absolutely do not want to pair up your heroine with anyone, or for that matter if your story is free of girl germs in any form, then I'd call it urban fantasy. Even a sniff of a romantic relationship can get you sliding over to the Pink Side of the Force.

My new books, *The Brass Bed* and *The Velvet Chair*, were originally meant to be urban fantasy, until Sue Grimshaw, the Borders buyer for romance, got hold of *The Brass Bed* and convinced my editor to buy a third book and release them a month apart (with co-op) if I would skew them more toward paranormal romance. [They are being published through Ballantine—NH.] This meant resolving the love triangle I'd built to last eight books in the third volume, *The Bearskin Rug*. The door's still kind of ajar there...but romance readers ought to be satisfied for the moment. The series is reviewed about equally as romance and as fantasy.

Sharon Ashwood: This is a tricky issue, because the line is very fuzzy. My book, *Ravenous*, is action-oriented urban fantasy, but it has a very strong romantic element that's central to the plot and it does resolve at the end. Where does *Ravenous* fall on the line between UF and paranormal fantasy? I'm not sure. I ended up calling it "urban fantasy romance" because it's the best description I could think of.

Anton Strout: It's a fine line. As a very general rule, I'd say the amount of explicit boinking that happens. When the focus of the book is more on who hooks up with whom, or which were-jaguar hooks up with which were-blue whale, yer probably in paranormal romance territory. When plot is primary and sex is secondary, I'd say you're getting to the urban fantasy realm. And looking at the covers in either section of a store, you can tell. The romance ones have more skin showing and ripped bodices. A lot of tattoos these days, too.

S.J. Day: UF focuses on the quest—whatever the protagonist needs to accomplish. There may be slight romantic elements, but they're never the focus of the story. UF rarely ends in an HEA, because that was never the goal. Paranormal romance focuses on the journey two characters make to reach HEA. There is a paranormal sub-plot, but it's used as a conflict to further the romance. There's always an HEA, because that's the true quest of the story.

Charlaine Harris: Just at a glance, less relationship material, more action.

NH: How is urban fantasy different from straight science fiction or fantasy?

Charlaine Harris: Urban fantasy has more character development than straight science fiction and is more often anchored in the modern world than fantasy. Again, these are big generalizations.

S.J. Day: UF is set in a contemporary world that resembles the one we live in. Science Fiction is set in a futuristic world with elements based on current or in-development science and/or technology. Fantasy is set in a world that has not, does not, and will not exist anywhere but in the imagination of the author.

Jenna Black: Frankly, I'm not sure it really is different. I consider it a subset of fantasy. Most urban fantasies fit much better under the fantasy umbrella than under the romance one. The reason urban fantasies are sometimes shelved in romance is that some of them are fairly sexy and that the protagonist is often female. Also, because fans of paranormal romance tend to be fans of urban fantasy, and that's a big market to tap into. But a reader who picks up an urban fantasy thinking it's a romance is likely to be disgruntled when she gets to the end of the book and the romance hasn't ended happily.

Ginjer Buchanan: I would think the difference between urban fantasy and science fiction is obvious. As the "the difference between urban fantasy and fantasy"—urban fantasy is a sub-genre of fantasy, like quest fantasy or high fantasy.

J.R. Frost: Setting. And logic. There have to be viable reasons for demons and witches and vampires and werewolves. They need a history and a culture. Magical creatures can be good guys as well as villains.

Diana Pharaoh Francis: It's generally in a contemporary setting, and often involves creatures of fairy and myth. Often it will have a noir/detective feel, though more and more writers are expanding beyond that. But in all honesty, I think that urban fantasy rubs shoulders with steampunk and tomorrow fiction, as well as fairy tales. There is definitely overlap. But as with all fantasy, magic is inherent to the stories.

Susan Wright: Urban fantasy is based in the real world around us, but it has a paranormal twist, creating an alternate reality to our own. Science fiction looks to the future and out in space, while fantasy is set in other worlds, whether they are quasi-historical or not.

Jennifer Stevenson: More grit; a sense of ordinary life gone weird but not insupportably so. "Magic, Inc" by Robert Heinlein is a good example. Characters find that carrying a poodle cane when they take out the garbage, or smoking indoors to keep pigeons from stealing lighted cigs off their lips, are workaday hassles, no stranger than sluggish rush hour traffic or the fuss of trying to vote before you go off to work.

Sharon Ashwood: ...One difference is the contemporary, urban setting—it may stray into other worlds but it is always based in contemporary earth.

Here are a few gross generalizations:

- * UF is usually less concerned with science than with magic.
- * Also, very often there are characteristics from the mystery and/or thriller genres—the protagonists are frequently involved in solving crimes or keeping the peace. (For example, my story has a detective, a ghostbuster, and a vampire in charge of keeping the supernatural element in line.)
- * There's an element of secretiveness (do humans know about the supernatural world or not?)
- * Also, while the whole world can be at stake in the UF universe, there is less emphasis on big heroic set pieces à la Tolkein than one might find in a fantasy epic.

Anton Strout: I think urban fantasy can be a great "gateway drug" for readers to cross from regular fiction over to fantasy. It's grounded enough in our everyday world that most readers know of, but then there's the twist of something supernatural on top of it. I think it makes certain readers come to the fantasy section because they read a book that crossed those lines...or they watched *Buffy* and miss it. If I talk long enough, all roads lead to Joss [Whedon-NH.]

NH: *Wearing your hat as an urban fantasist, what organizations do you belong to? What benefits do they provide for UFers?*

Aggregate responses:

SFWA
Novelists, Inc. (Ninc)
Broad Universe
SF Canada
FF&P (RWA chapter, "Fantasy, Futuristic, & Paranormal")
Paranormal Readers/writers
Fangs Fur Fey (see more later)
SFNovelists
Horror Writers Association
International Association of Media Tie-In Writers
Internet readers groups:
Romantic SF
Paranormal Romance
Worlds of Fantasy
SF-FFW Yahoo Group for networking among other women sf writers

Jenna Black: The only organization I belong to is RWA. While urban fantasy is not romance, fans of paranormal romance generally tend to enjoy urban fantasies as well—as long as they know what to expect when they open the book. I've belonged to other organizations in the past, but in my opinion, RWA is by far the best and most supportive of them, and I get the most out of it. I particularly enjoy having a local chapter, so I can meet with fellow authors on a monthly basis. I also belong to a number of online chapters: Kiss of Death (the mystery suspense chapter); Fantasy, Futuristic, and Paranormal (the woo-woo chapter!); and PASIC, the Published Authors Special Interest Chapter. Each of these chapters helps me connect with others who write what I write—and who **read** what I write!

Charlaine Harris: I belong to Mystery Writers of America, Horror Writers Association, SFWA, and IACW (International Association of Crime Writers.) Of course I belong to Sisters in Crime. I'm going to join Romance Writers of America (RWA) if I can ever remember to fill out the form and send in my money. None of those would benefit urban fantasy writers specifically, but they all have their own plus sides.

Chris Marie Green: I belong to Ninc, which boasts published novelists from diverse genres, as well as RWA, which helps

This is tough because Urban Fantasy crosses so many genres that it can fit into almost any convention—fantasy, mystery, horror, romance—but it's never an ideal fit. No matter where I go, I can almost guarantee someone will say my books don't really fit the convention's genre.

me develop the romantic aspects of the stories. But I'm open to other organizations!

NH: *What conventions do/should UFers attend? (Your answer can be none.)*

Kelley Armstrong: This is tough because UF crosses so many genres that it can fit into almost any convention—fantasy, mystery, horror, romance—but it's never an ideal fit. No matter where I go, I can almost guarantee someone will say my books don't really fit the convention's genre. What would I recommend? The romance ones because there's so much reader crossover, and the fantasy ones because they're just really fun <grin>.

Charlaine Harris: I go to a variety of conventions because my books attract a broad spectrum of readers (yay!). I go to both science fiction and mystery conventions, and I try to go to Romantic Times when I can.

Jennifer Stevenson: I attend RWA National but not solely for help with paranormal romance/urban fantasy.

S.J. Day: Comic-Con, DragonCon, World Fantasy...there are a lot of SF/Fantasy conventions, of course. Most are as receptive to UF authors as they are to other sub-genres of SF/Fantasy.

Jenna Black: I'm not as up-to-date on SF/F cons, so I can't really comment on those. What I can suggest is the Romantic Times Booklovers convention. Although this convention is geared toward romance, a lot of urban fantasy authors attend, and a sizable percentage of the crowd reads urban fantasy. It's very expensive—much more so than f/sf cons—but it is great exposure.

Diana Pharaoh Francis: ...[Fangs Fur Fey] is a growing community and this year at Conestoga were invited to create a Con within a Con, focusing on Urban Fantasy....A lot of UF writers go to Comic-Con, RT, RWA, as well as other sf/f cons. I don't know that there are any "shoulds." I've always been a fan of WFC (the World Fantasy Convention), simply for the potential for connecting with a range of folks.

P.R. Frost: Whichever cons you usually attend. Check the schedules of your favorite author and see where they go. I hang out at RadCon in Pasco, Washington; Norwescon in Seattle; Baycon in San Jose, CA; and Orycon in Portland, OR. East coast writers

have their favorites. Armadillocon and Foolscap tend to be more book-oriented without the costumes, media, gamers. RWA National is more like World Fantasy, more business related, a place to meet other authors, editors, agents, and publishers.

Chris Marie Green: Comic-Con, San Diego, is very UF-friendly. You can have signings and be on panels. However, it's gotten incredibly crowded, and you're only one of thousands of products that are being touted.

NB: Romantic Times (Orlando, April 22-26, 2009) will have three Urban Fantasy panels and a hybrid paranormal vs. urban fantasy. <http://guest.cvent.com/EVENTS/Info/Summary.aspx?e=b9e5bab5-c13d4395-9cfd-ce2f6b441271> [NH]

NH: *Who should aspiring authors be reading (in addition to you?)*

Susan Wright: Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks* is essential reading.

Liz Scheier: (All of ours is as of yet unpublished!) Outside of Del Rey, I LOVE Kim Harrison and Vicki Pettersson; upcoming names from us are Nina Harper, Stacia Kane, Alisa Sheckley, and Lucy Snyder.

Ginger Buchanan: You know, if you aren't drawn to the material, you probably aren't going to be able to write it with any verve—and if you are drawn to it, you probably don't need me to tell you who the authors that you should be reading are, because you are already reading them. However, the very short list would include Ace/Roc's Charlaine Harris, Patty Briggs, and Jim Butcher (I'm allowed three from my own company!); Harper's Kim Harrison; Grand Central's Carrie Vaughan, and Bantam's Kelley Armstrong.

Charlaine Harris: Oh, gosh, there are so many now. I particularly like Jim Butcher, Kim Harrison, Laurell K. Hamilton, Rob Thurman, Lilith Saintcrow, Patricia Briggs, and Simon Green. But I've read many books I've enjoyed, and I can't list all the writers.

Jennifer Stevenson: Some names of well-known UF/paranormal writers are: Charlaine Harris, Julie Kenner, Mary Janice Davidson, Mindy Klasky. If you are looking for something less ferociously pink, you might look at authors who have been called the gonzo futurists—David Prill, Bill Fitzhugh, Christopher Moore, even Carl Hiaasen, although his work is more tabloid than speculative, if we're taking in terms of magic.

A shoutout from SF writer Laura Mixon: Will Shetterly and Emma Bull.

Sharon Ashwood: See list below, plus Rob Thurman and Jeaniene Frost.

Anton Strout: Other than me? * cough shameless



self promo cough * Jim Butcher, Neil Gaiman, Charlaine Harris, Christopher Moore, even Jasper Fforde's Thursday Next series.

Jenna Black: This is always a hard question for me to answer, because I'm friends with an awful lot of UF authors and hate to leave anyone out! I'll limit my list to only people I don't know well. The early Anita Blake books by Laurell K. Hamilton are a great place to start. Those first 8 or so books are almost iconic as urban fantasy. I'd also recommend Kim Harrison, Rachel Caine, Jeaniene Frost, Patricia Briggs, and Jim Butcher.

Diana Pharaoh Francis: ...Some writers I think who are very good and doing some unique things are Laura Anne Gilman, Ilona Andrews, Patti Briggs, Scott Westerfield, and Rob Thurman. Marjorie Liu does some excellent paranormal romance.

Chris Marie Green: Nancy Holder! Vicki Pettersson has a superhero angle to her urban fantasies, so that shows you it's more than just about vampires and shapeshifters. Marjorie Liu is great, too.

Other authors mentioned: Eve Kenin, Marianne Mancusi, Liz Maverick

NH: *Who are the current big names of UF?*

Many authors mentioned Laurell K. Hamilton, Jim Butcher, Kim Harrison, Patricia Briggs, Kelley Armstrong, Jenna Black, and Charlaine Harris. Here are some additional names:

Jenna Black: The authors listed above, plus Rachel Vincent, Keri Arthur, and Vicki Pettersson. (If I'm leaving anyone out, I blame it on insufficient caffeine!)

Sharon Ashwood: Simon R. Green, Lilith Saintcrow, Rachel Caine.

Diana Pharaoh Francis: [In addition to those already mentioned] But that doesn't even touch the YA market, which is booming. Authors that are big names there include Melissa Marr, Holly Black, and Justine Larbalestier.

S.J. Day: also mentioned Keri Arthur and L.A. Banks.

NH: *What are the websites and blogs for fans and authors of urban fantasy?*

Charlaine Harris: Almost all the writers I know have their own websites and blogs. Some of them even put original short stories on their websites.

Aggregate answer:

<http://community.livejournal.com/urbanfantasyfan/>
<http://www.urbanfantasywriters.com/>
http://community.livejournal.com/fangs_fur_fey
<http://urbanfantasyland.wordpress.com/>
<http://fivescribes.blogspot.com>. (Stacia Kane interviewed in "Demons, Ghosts, & a Psychic Smackdown")
<http://tezmilleroz.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.leagueofreluctantadults.com> (Anton Strout's group blog)
<http://dearauthor.com/wordpress>
<http://bittenbybooks.com/>
<http://bookspotcentral.com/>
<http://fantasybookcritic.blogspot.com/>
<http://jackiekessler.com>

NH: *Do you think UF is a trend, or is it here to stay as a genre?*

Liz Scheier: Absolutely here to stay, though I think it will expand in scope.

Charlaine Harris: I hope it's here to stay. The market may get oversaturated, and the tide may rush out. I don't know how many of us will be left standing then.

This is a list of urban fantasy authors provided by author Susan Wright. Her novel for Roc, *Confessions of a Demon*, comes out in 2009. The sequel, available in 2010, is *Demon Revelation*. Her website is www.susanwright.info.

Kat Richardson (Greywalker/Poltergeist)
Rob Thurman (Nightlife/Moonshine/Madhouse)
Patricia Briggs (Mercy Thompson series)
Kelley McCullough (Webmage)
Rachel Caine (Weather Warden series/
Morganville Vampire series)
Stephenie Meyer (Twilight series)
Jeaniene Frost (Halfway to the Grave)
Jeanne C. Stein (Anna Strong Chronicles)
Vicki Pettersson (Sign of the Zodiac series)
Mark del Franco (Unshapely Things)
Karen Chance (Cassandra Palmer series)
C. E. Murphy (The Negotiator trilogy/the Walker Papers)
Laura Anne Gilman (Retrievers series)
Simon R. Greene (Nightside series)
Richelle Meade (Succubus Blues)
Eileen Wilks (World of the Lupi series)
Jackie Kessler (Hell on Earth series)
Anya Bast (Elemental Witches series)
Kelley Armstrong (Women of Otherworld series)
Jim Butcher (Dresden files)
Chris Marie Green (Vampire Babylon series)
Alexis Morgan (Paladins of Darkness)
Jenna Black
Yasmine Galenorn
Patti O'Shea (Light Warriors)
Alexandra Ivy
Alyssa Day (Atlantis series)
Cheyenne McCray (Magic series)
Christine Warren (The Others series)
Kresley Cole (Immortals)
Lara Adrian (Midnight Breed)
Keri Arthur
Nalini Singh

Kelley Armstrong: I think it's a trend like any other. I'm very grateful for it, of course. When my series started in 2001, it was a real struggle. LKH was just becoming popular, and Charlaine Harris and Jim Butcher were just starting out, so no one seemed to know what to do with these books (my first, *Bitten*, was marketed as mainstream fiction...about werewolves.) Getting in on the first wave of a genre that's become so popular was incredible luck. But it's not going to last. When the bubble pops, those who started writing UF because we loved it will keep doing so, albeit for a smaller audience.

Jennifer Stevenson: It's a trend. Ride it if you like it. Don't worry about it if you don't. At least the market has gotten big enough that there will be a permanent home for such books in all seasons, if you have built your fan base up during the current craze, or if you are good enough to break in after the craze crests.

S.J. Day: It's already been in existence for some time now, but everything in publishing waxes and wanes. I think the UF genre will suffer from its trendiness, because publishers and authors are using the UF label and cover art look on books that are actually paranormal romances. Confusing readers leads to consumer unhappiness, which in turn leads to diminished sales. But once that stops happening I think UF will settle into its established demographic and continue to perform well. I also think that paranormal romance will veer away from the heavily sexual themes it's employing now, as the erotic romance trend continues to decline, and that will strengthen its position so that using "urban" in an effort to boost sales won't be as appealing.

Sharon Ashwood: I think it will stay as a genre. Having said that, all genres rise and fall in popularity.

Anton Strout: I think it's here to stay as a genre because I think it mixes up a whole bunch of other genres that have already made their mark. The detective story, mysteries, romance, traditional fantasy...these are all genres that are here to stay and urban fantasy is a nice blend of all those things.

Jenna Black: I think (hope?) it's here to stay, although won't stay this hot forever. Right now, readers are hungry for more, more, more, but at some point the market will hit its saturation point. However, I don't think the current fans of urban fantasy will turn their backs on it when that happens.

Ginger Buchanan: ...[I]t's not a genre—it's a sub-genre. It's actually been around for awhile. (Tanya Huff, anyone?) I suspect the huge boom will slow up, but having produced at least eight or nine New York Times bestselling authors (add Karen Chance, Keri Arthur, and Laurell Hamilton—a sub-genre unto herself)—[to the reading list of big-name authors-NH.] It isn't going completely away any time soon.

Diana Pharaoh Francis: I think it's here to stay, and I think it will continue to push its boundaries and eventually be termed contemporary fantasy.

Susan Wright: Since 1987, when Ace published Emma Bull's debut novel, *War for the Oaks*, urban fantasy has gained traction. I think the success of the Harry Potter books has proven that readers like novels of the modern-day world mixed with fantastical elements. In March 2008, Orbit Books, the SF/F branch of Warner Books, reported that urban fantasy is increasingly showing up on the bestseller lists: 11 of the Top 20 Fantasy bestsellers in the US that month were urban fantasy titles, including the Top 3.

Chris Marie Green: As an extension of fantasy, I think it's here to stay. Actually, I think it has a lot in common with the "real approach" we've seen with movies and comic book material *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight*, and *Iron Man*. They've taken these fantastical elements and made them grittier and able to exist "underground" in our society. UF has introduced another way for us to hold ourselves up to a mirror, and I think that's going to be relevant for a long time.

NH: *Do you have anything to say about UF that I haven't covered?*

Jennifer Stevenson: I'd say, lighten up. I see far more dark UF/paranormal on the shelves than light. The sameness of the covers and the relentless self-seriousness of all those demon hunters and vampire fanciers makes me worry about saturation. Of course I'm writing light UF/paranormal myself, so I favor it.

Sharon Ashwood: A lot of UF has refreshingly intelligent writing, kind of a mix of adventure and social commentary and self-parody all at once. Some of that I think does come from Joss Whedon's excellent writing—because I really do think his TV series gave UF a reference point in popular culture—but also because as a new genre, it has attracted a lot of bright, adventurous minds. The bar has been set very high very quickly. It's an exciting genre to be working in.

Ginger Buchanan: We get submissions all the time from both new authors and already-published authors who have made a conscious decision to "break into the genre." Now and then, one will have a flair for it (our own Patty Briggs, for instance, began her career writing a completely different kind of fantasy.) However, more often than not, the manuscript smells of the labor-a-tory. Here's a quick and easy self test to administer: if you can't name your three most and least favorite *Buffy/Angel* epis, more than likely urban fantasy isn't the genre for you!

Nancy Holder mini-bio: Nancy has stories out in *The Living Dead*; *Immortal*; and the *Mammoth Book of Vampire Romances*. Writing as Carolyn Keene, her collection, *Nancy Drew, Girl Detective: Ghost Stories* is on the shelves now.

