

Secrets of Romantic Suspense: A Series of Eight Lectures

By Lisa Gardner

Lisa Gardner is the New York Times best-selling author of multiple suspense thrillers, including THE PERFECT HUSBAND, THE OTHER DAUGHTER, THE THIRD VICTIM, THE NEXT ACCIDENT and THE SURVIVORS CLUB. In her eleven-year career, she has written romantic suspense novels for Silhouette Intimate Moments as Alicia Scott as well as mainstream suspense for Bantam Dell as Lisa Gardner. This lecture series draws upon nineteen-books worth of experience, as well as several independent articles on romantic suspense.

This lecture series first ran in 2002 as an on-line class offered through the Kiss of Death Chapter of the Romance Writers of America. Fabulous writing classes are still available each month through KOD; you can check the website at www.rwamysterysuspense.org for current courses.

Originally, Q&A was part of the course structure. In this format, however, the lectures are being offered as a simple download. If you want the full class experience, you can check with KOD on when the on-line course might be taught again.

Hope you enjoy!

Course Introduction

This lecture series is based on my shorter article, “The Seven Secrets of Romantic Suspense,” also available at www.LisaGardner.com/TricksoftheTrade.htm. For this course, each point has been fleshed out as an in-depth lecture to help the writer better understand each issue in developing a romantic suspense novel. People who have read my synopsis lecture series will recognize some similar material in the market and plotting segments, but there is plenty of new information as well.

Following is a brief overview of each lecture.

Lecture I. The Romantic Suspense Market

What exactly is romantic suspense? How do you determine the proper balance of romance versus suspense in your novel? Is there still a market for these kinds of books? We will examine how different publishers approach romantic suspense and how to determine what is the right balance of these two key elements for your writing. Finally, Lecture I includes a fabulous article discussing the future of the romantic suspense market.

Lecture II. Research

Good novels start in the library. Whether you need to learn about a new location for your hero's backstory or forensic details for your plot, you will need to do research. Lecture II covers the three main levels of research, plus tips for the most difficult (and fun!) kind of research—the face-to-face expert interview.

Lecture III. Establish a Setting

Some people argue that setting doesn't matter much in novels anymore—we are all moving to very streamlined writing with lots of dialogue and very little description. So who cares about the scenery? These people haven't read Tami Hoag's *Night Sins* or Nora Robert's *Montana Sky*. In both of these novels, setting is an integral part of the tone and feel of the work. Hoag has gone so far as to describe the chilling cold in *Night Sins* as a secondary character, imperative to what's going to happen next. Lecture III will examine what setting can—and cannot—do for you.

Lecture IV. Develop Those Characters

LaVyrle Spencer liked to say it's not *what* happens in a novel, but *who*. I would certainly second this. Characters are the single most important part of any novel. Introduce believable, credible, compelling people in your book, and the reader will follow them anywhere. Lecture IV discusses not only how to create compelling protagonists, but how to give them worthy opponents.

Lecture V. Plot, Plot, Plot!

Once you have people, they must do something. In a romantic suspense novel, of course, they also must do a little bit of everything—fall in love, save the world, and then live happily-ever-after. Sometimes a novel can be a very busy place. Lecture V will look at general plotting techniques, as well as discuss the importance of melding the developing romance with the developing mystery for a perfect fit.

Lecture VI. Sexual Tension, oh, la, la

It is a romantic suspense class after all, and whether you want to include actual sex scenes or not, you definitely must have sexual tension. Think *Remington Steele*, *Cheers*,

The Scarecrow and Mrs. King, and a lot of the *ER* subplots. The potential of romance is a tantalizing, titillating affair. Lecture VI looks at how to use sexual tension to increase the overall suspense of your novel.

Lecture VII. Let Them Breathe

With all this stuff going on your novel—research details, setting details, character details, plot details—it is easy burn out your reader. Lecture VII discusses the fine line of bringing the reader along, without overwhelming her, through the strategic use of humor, sex, and sheer chutzpa.

Lecture VIII. End with a Bang

After building all this careful crafted tension—will they or won't they fall in love, will they or won't they save the day—you can't just yell cut and write the end. You need a grand finale, the big shebang. Lecture VIII will analyze how to build to the big finish.