

Publisher Spotlight: Christina Brashear of Samhain Publishing

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MV: Today's interview is with Christina Brashear, publisher of Samhain Publishing. Samhain just recently received RWA recognition status. Congratulations on that feat. I know all your RWA member authors are thrilled. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule for this interview.

CB: Thank you for inviting me to be interviewed, I'm honored to be able to speak with you about Samhain.

MV: Tell us a little bit about your publishing background.

CB: Nothing formal. I've been an avid reader all my life, as I grew into adulthood I focused more on romance than any other genre. The "literature" required of a student left me depressed so I'd rebel by reading the one genre that seems to drive the English profs nuts. <g> I like reading about the struggles, trials and tribulations a couple goes through when forming a family. I like happy endings.

I spent most the '80s going from one corporate job to the next, collecting a range of bizarre skills. When I first tripped into the publishing world by beginning as an editor, I found that my learned experiences from my former positions were perfect for this work. I advanced from editor into publisher rapidly due to my ability to organize, hire and delegate as the company grew. It's almost like a natural ability. I have a feel for this industry that can't be taught.

MV: What do you enjoy most about your job?

CB: I love just about everything about it. As a child, when it was my turn to choose the game my friends and I played, it was always "office". lol Paper, pens, filing, everything about it. The Samhain team of editors, artists and staff are a great group of people I absolutely adore. Being able to work with the authors who write the books I love is simply a thrill in and of itself. But bringing to the public these great works is the most rewarding.

MV: What do you personally like to read? And do you write as well?

CB: Romance! Love me some Futuristic, Suspense, Westerns, Contemporary, SciFi, I could go on. Spicy erotic to the sweet, love them all! I also like mainstream as well, but my fave is Romance. It's that happily-ever-after that keeps me going.

Nope. Have absolutely no ability to write fiction. Got an A+ in Business Correspondence in college, but that's as fictional as I get.

MV: Why did you leave Ellora's Cave, and how do you think Samhain Publishing differs from EC?

CB: Same thing that often happens in business, opposing ideas on the direction a company is or should be going develop between team members and the relationship is terminated. Nothing out of the ordinary.

First, our initials are SP. Opposite end of the alphabet! Seriously, though, I could list a million things that wouldn't really mean anything to the average reader or writer. We both publish

books, we both have presence on the web, that's what most people see. The differences are subtle but many. Samhain is a general house developing many genres of fiction—and hopefully soon, nonfiction—instead of focusing on a specific genre. Samhain only wholesales and doesn't retail, we focus on publishing the books and let others worry about the retail side of things. We're a lot smaller right now, but we're pretty scrappy.

MV: What is the submission process at Samhain?

CB: Right now we're closed to open-call submissions while in the midst of this year's convention season. We've recently hired a number of new editors and they need to catch their breath. ;) We still receive submissions for special projects, agent referrals and editor invitations. However, that being said, whether via invite or open-call, the author is expected to submit a query, synopsis of the work and at least three chapters. The work comes in through the submissions email, <editor at samhainpublishing dot com> and is assigned to an editor.

MV: What is Samhain's usual response time on queries, partials, and full manuscripts? Who makes the final decision on which manuscripts will be offered a contract?

CB: We generally run faster than the eight to ten weeks allowed, but sometimes it might take that long. Each editor has the authority to accept, decline or ask for a revise/resubmit on the manuscripts they review. They trade off manuscripts if they feel they are too biased to give it a fair reading. Sometimes the content or subject matter of a book might not suit the tastes of the editor who received it. We all have emotional reactions to specific topics. Instead of automatically declining, the editor will hand it off to another editor so that the work gets a fair reading. I'm proud of the editors and their innate fairness; they are doing an excellent job.

MV: As an author who doesn't write "Red Hots", how do the more mainstream works do at Samhain?

CB: "Red Hots" or erotic romances are the genre de jour these last few years. The more mainstream works don't garner the same sales volume, but, if they have the "it" that grabs the attention of the readers, they do quite well. Often they don't have the same first week sales of a hot book, but with the excellent reviews they get, they can sell very steadily. And, in total fairness, some don't do well at all. Ultimately it's all in the hands of the readers and what catches their attention. That's why I get so persnickety about the sales blurbs. The blurb on the sales page is not to be a modified synopsis, it's a marketing tool, the hook to get the shopper to at least read the excerpt. The excerpt should be a section that leaves them wanting more, so much so they can't help but buy the book. ;-)

MV: When titles go to print, what is the usual print run?

CB: There is no usual. Some get print runs, some are POD. It all depends on the intangible as well as the tangible such as the digital sales. With the new partnership with Ingrams Publisher Services, I'm hoping that all the books will get a print run because we'll be scheduling so far forward, the booksellers can budget for their buy and pre-order the books. The more pre-orders, the larger the initial print run.

MV: Promotion is always part of the author's job, but what does Samhain do in addition to promote their authors?

CB: I've recently hired someone to handling marketing and ad buys. She's doing a phenomenal

job in finding new avenues on the internet and making routine buys in hardcopy venues such as Romantic Times Bookclub magazine. We've partnered with IPS, as I mentioned above. IPS allows us to look more like a NY house in that we can load all the coming titles into the ordering system so buyers can see what's coming ahead. They also have a sales force that will be pitching our titles to their clients, like B&N, Books A Million, and the independents.

MV: What are the advantages for an author's submitting to SP instead of a traditional New York publisher?

CB: It is easier to get your submission read. From what I've learned, the "slush pile" is rarely looked at in the NY houses, to get into NY it's who you know or having an agent. I would also say you get your work out faster, at least in digital, and you still do, but we've had such a great response from authors our schedule seems to be consistently filled at least six to nine months forward since February of last year. I've heard it takes a couple years to get your book out in NY from initial acceptance. We're less than a year in most cases.

I think we're a great place to really learn your trade, learn the ropes and improve your writing while making a name for yourself. We love finding new voices in world of literature, as much as we enjoy the works from our favorite veteran authors. We fully expect a number of our authors to move on to NY when they catch the eye of those editors. We only hope you won't forget us and still publish with us every now and then. ;)

MV: Pull out your crystal ball and tell me what market trends do you envision for the near future? The distant future?

CB: I don't have a crystal ball and I don't worry about trends; they'll take care of themselves. I see a great future for electronic books and Samhain intends to have a variety of titles, authors and genres to supply those new-to-ebook readers with lots of reading pleasure. Samhain is really all about the story, not about the trend. Fads come and fads go, but good books live on.

MV: What's new on the horizon for Samhain?

CB: Nuts and bolts stuff mostly. The IPS partnership goes live on April 2nd and Amanda and I have to learn their processes and tune ours to fit theirs. We are also, at the same time which is totally insane, in the middle of having a royalty program set up so we just have to upload the sales data and it will calculate the royalties and keep track of the advances and whatnot. I'm excited about it; it's going to rock when it's up and running. But the migration of all my spreadsheets into the system is a long arduous process which I hate and part of the reason I was soooo glad to leave the IT world. I hate data migrations. LOL

MV Is there anything else you'd like to share with MCRW's members?

CB: Amanda and I will be at RT and I hope to meet some of MCRW's members there, please say hi to me! She and I will be attending BEA in June and I'll be at RWA National with Angie James, Samhain's Executive Editor in July. She'll be taking appointments on Saturday I think. I'll be holding the bar down regularly, so stop by.

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Mary Varble aka Marie-Nicole Ryan is a proud Samhain author. **Too Good to be True** is currently available in electronic formats from Samhain Publishing at

<http://samhainpublishing.com>. Her web site is <http://marienicoleryan.com> and she blogs regularly at <http://marienicoleryan.blogspot.com> and <http://romanticsuspense.blogspot.com>.