

{ ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT }

Write of Passage

Novelist Susan Kearney, BBA '76, Banks on Romance



While reading a science fiction romance novel by Johanna Lindsey at her kids' swim practice, **Susan Kearney**, BBA '76, had a realization: "I could write that."

As it turns out she could and did. Kearney now is working on her 54th book and is a *USA Today* best-selling author, primarily of science fiction and paranormal romance novels.

"Before I wrote my first book I didn't know how to type or write, and I hadn't taken many English classes because I didn't like literature," says Kearney. "I wrote that first book by hand, all 600 pages."

Several thousand pages later Kearney is firmly ensconced in her paranormal romance niche. Her title *Lucan*, chronicling the exploits of a telepathic dragon-shaper, hit bookstores in August. A tale of dragon love may seem a bit unusual for the uninitiated, but Kearney's fans have long embraced her cast of unconventional characters. She's written about sentient computers, time travelers, and asteroid miners to name just a few. And she has



Susan Kearney, BBA '76, has penned more than 50 sci-fi romances, many of which are bestsellers.

been published by the Tor, Grand Central, and Harlequin imprints since scoring her first deal with that original handwritten tome, *The Challenge*, which eventually was published as her 34th book in 2005.

Some would say Kearney's pre-publishing career choices were as uncommon as her plot devices. Post-graduation she traveled the world as a professional exhibition diver. As part of her act Kearney staged comedy sketches, swam in a dolphin tank, and lit herself on fire.

But after getting married and settling down she dove head first into the more traditional realm of real estate, flipping houses and making her way in the commercial and industrial markets. Today she's based in Tampa, Fla.

What is the most important thing Kearney learned at business school? "Use

other people's money to make money."

Now she falls back on a different tactic: the happy ending. It seems to be a particularly sound strategy in such turbulent economic times. In fact Harlequin Books, which has published a number of Kearney's titles, reported an uptick in 2008 sales even as the economy took a serious nosedive. Readers are just looking for a safe haven from harsh realities, she says.

They're also looking for a good cover shot, she notes. ("I beg for sexy guys on the cover.") But to really make it big in her genre it's key to net a big print run and secure plenty of space at retail. And like the cliché dictates, sex does sell. But Kearney only pens love scenes between two committed individuals (human or otherwise) who are emotionally connected.

"Gratuitous sex is boring," says Kearney. "When I write a love scene, I want it to be there for a reason. If you skip it, I don't want the book to make sense. To me what makes sex interesting are the emotional underpinnings.

"I might put the characters through hell," she continues, "but they're going to end up together. Since people know there will be a happy ending, I have more freedom with the plot."

Because Kearney incorporates so much science fiction into her books, her readership is diverse and even includes a significant male contingent. Plus Kearney believes readers who were introduced to paranormal content by way of Harry Potter and *Twilight* may one day transition to her style of romantic fare. But even as the audience expands the author stays true to the one reader who matters most.

"Do I make a living and sell some books or do I write what I love?" she says. "I don't think I could really write a book I didn't like. Plus if it has a good story, it will sell." ✨ —Leah Sipher-Mann