Cover Design

Do's and Dont's of DIY

Scan to download workshop PDF

NJRW Put Your Heart in a Book Conference
October 2019

Jamie Banta

w/a Babette James

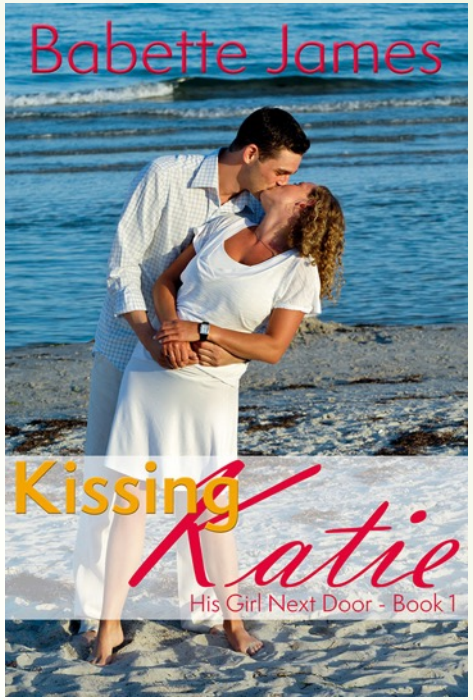
JamieBeeDesigns.com

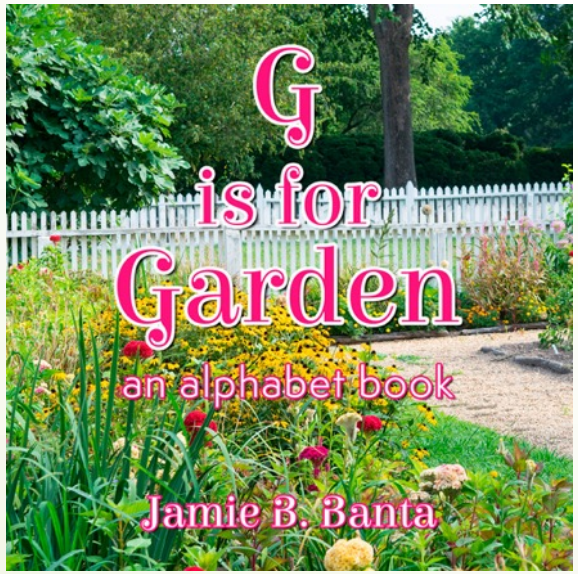
I
am

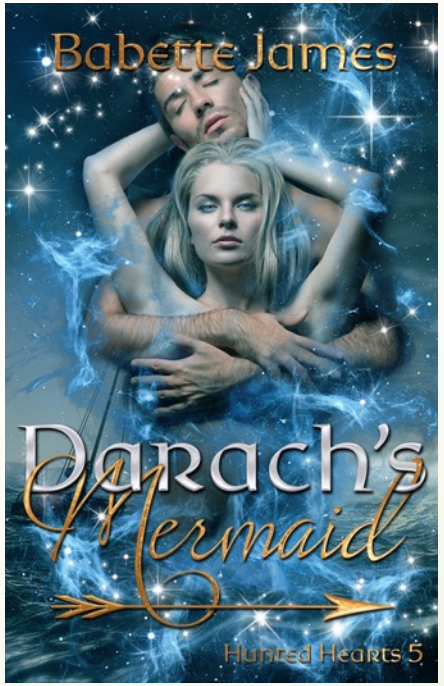
Artist

Author

Photographer







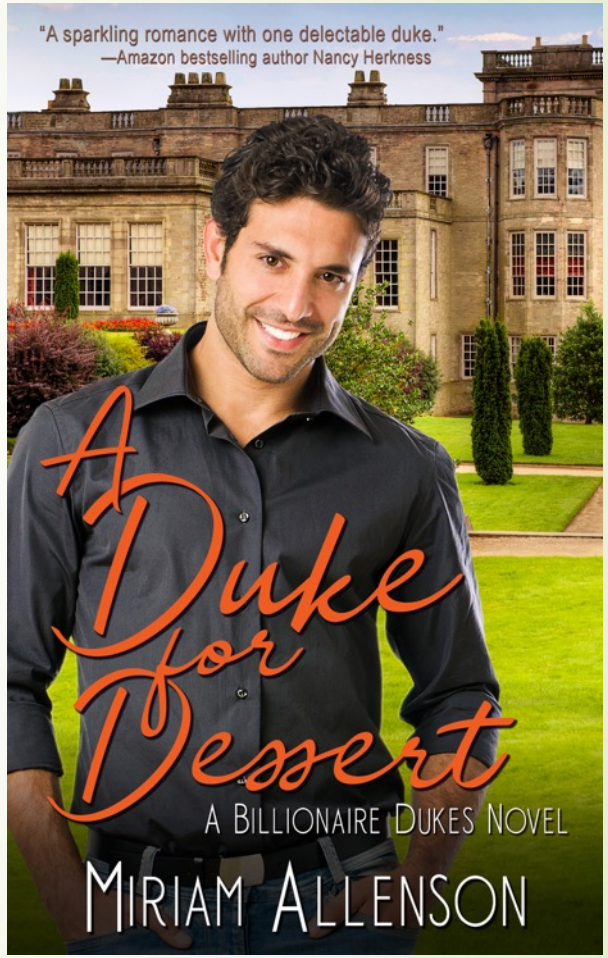
Welcome

Think you're ready to dip your toes into Do It Yourself cover design?

You want your book to have the best possible cover, one that helps make your story shine and captures your reader's attention and emotions, but as an Indie author you don't have an art department to turn to.

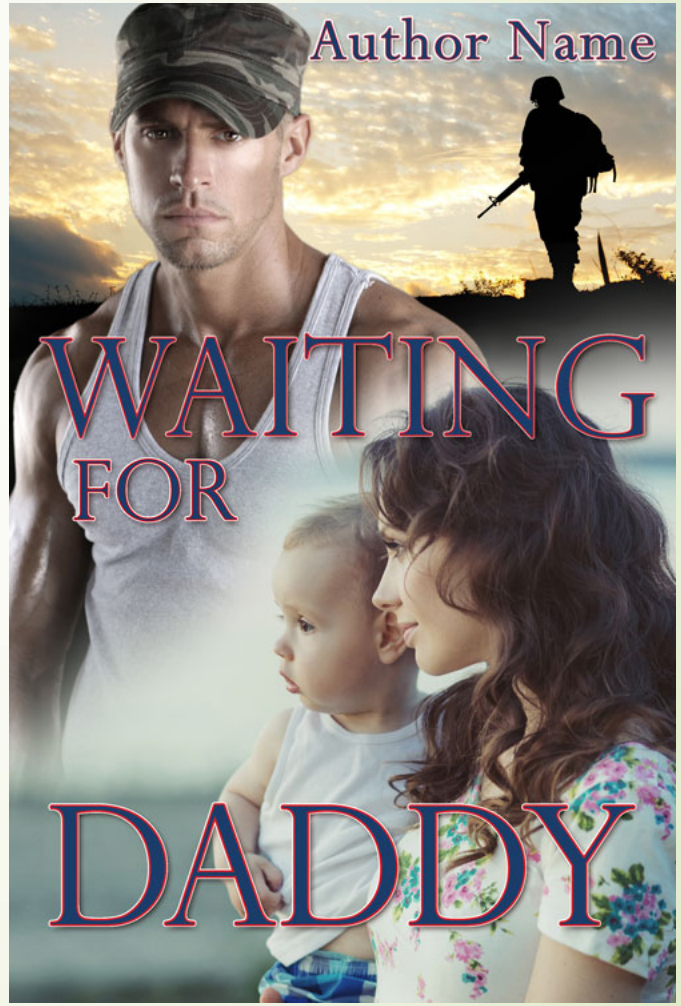
It's time to decide: hire out or put on your cover designer hat.

In this short workshop we'll cover questions to ask yourself before deciding to do your own cover or hire out. We'll outline basic knowledge, tools, and resources you'll need to create your cover. We'll discuss some of the many pitfalls to watch out for, review good cover design practices, and go over the steps to plan an attractive cover you love.

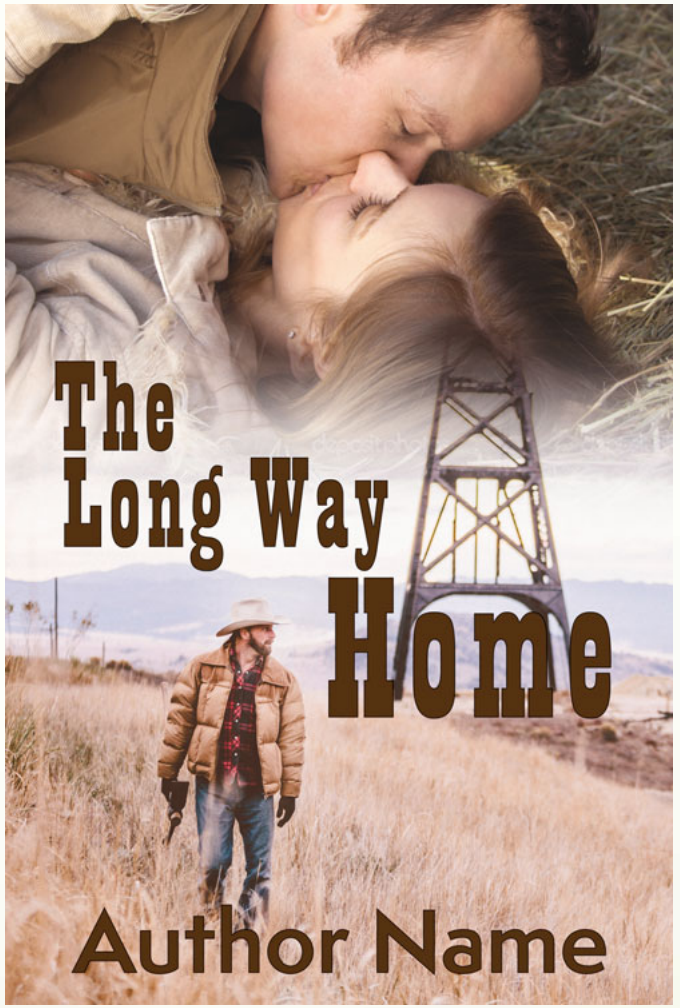


Why Cover Design?
A Book is Judged by Its Cover

- The job of a cover is to attract a reader's attention and grab their imagination.
- You may have less than two seconds in which the buyer decides to pick up your book.
- A cover is a vital important tool in your marketing.
- Cover design is more that typing your name and title on a pretty image.
- A good cover design can be very simple or complex.
- A cover design can contain one image, no images, or many images blended into a composite.



Since You've Been Gone
Author Name


The Long Way Home
Author Name

Warrior Angel
Author Name

Part 1 - Do your own cover or hire out?

Some questions to ask yourself before doing your own cover

- If your answer is, yes, I want to do my own cover -
  - Do I have the time?
  - Do I have the skills to put the cover elements together or desire to learn the skills?
  - Do I have the programs and/or apps to produce the cover? Can I afford them?
  - Have I researched the cover types for my genre?
  - Do I know what my readers are looking for to catch their eye and interest.
  - Do I know what elements I need in my cover?
  - Do I know the varied cover requirements of my distributors? (Amazon, Nook, Apple, etc.)
  - Am I doing an eBook and/or print?
  - Do I want a stock or custom image, photograph, or illustration? Can I afford them and can I afford the size I need?
  - Do I know where to obtain images and fonts for my cover? Do I understand the licensing?

Part 1 - Do your own cover or hire out?

Some questions to ask yourself before hiring out

- If the answer is, yes, I want to hire out-
  - Do I know what I want my cover designer to create?
  - Can I afford to pay the cover designer? Cover designer prices can range from $5 to thousands.
  - Have I researched the cover designers who make covers I like in my genre?
  - Do I know what elements I need in my cover?
  - Do I know the cover requirements of my distributors? (Amazon, Nook, Apple, etc.) and will my designer provide the different sizes and resolutions I need for my eBook and/or my print book and for my marketing?
  - Do I know what is included in the designer's fee and what costs extra?
  - Do I have the time to work with the designer's schedule?
  - If I am writing a series, do I want my designer to design the overall look of the series or work one book at a time?

Part 2 - Basic Tools & Resources – Programs & Apps

Do I have the program or app that I can design the cover in?

There are many ways to create your cover image. The industry standards are **Adobe Photoshop, InDesign, and Illustrator.** These programs are expensive and can have a steep learning curve, but have all the tools you need to get the job done.

Other programs that I have heard people use with varying success and frustration levels, are:

- Canva
- Paint.net
- Gimp
- Word
- Pixlr
- DAZ Studio
- Inkscape
- Adobe Spark

(This list is simply for convenience, not my recommendations. Research and see what works for you)

Photoshop CC File Edit Image Layer Type Select Filter 3D View Window Help
Wed Oct 16 5:34 PM
Adobe Photoshop CC 2019
Broken King.psd @ 100% (stock-photo-low-key-image-of-beautiful-diamond-queen-crown-on-old-book-selective-focus-medieval-period-concept-572341624, RGB/8)
Defenders of the Crown I
The Broken King
tomertu
Navigator
Color
Layers
Channels
Paths
Smart Filters
Camera Raw Filter
Layer 11
100%
1575 px x 2475 px (300 ppi)

Part 2 - Basic Tools & Resources – Stock Photos - Free

- Yes, there are place you can obtain free photos, but -
- Read the fine print on each site. Know the restrictions on how and where their images are allowed to be used, i.e. personal, editorial or commercial use, etc., if the images can be edited, if they must be attributed the photo to them, if there is a model release…
- A few sites are:
  - Unsplash
  - Wikimedia Commons
  - Pixabay
  - Library of Congress
  - Deviantart

Part 2 - Basic Tools & Resources – Stock Photos - Paid

- Again, read the fine print on each site. Know the restrictions on how and where their images are allowed to be used, i.e. personal, editorial or commercial use, one project, standard vs. extended license, etc.
- A few sites to explore are:
  - depositphotos.com
  - shutterstock.com
  - dreamstime.com
  - fotolia.com
  - istockphoto.com
  - periodimages.com
  - romancenovelcovers.com
  - thekilliongroupimages.com
  - jennleblanc.photoshelter.com
  - gettyimages.com

(This list is simply for convenience, not my recommendations. Research and see what works for you)

Part 2 - Basic Tools & Resources – Fonts

- Again, read the fine print on each site. Make sure you know the licensing.
- A few sites to explore fonts are:
  - Fontsquirrel.com
  - Fontspace.com
  - Urbanfonts.com
  - Dafont.com
  - Creativemarket.com
  - ThehungryJPEG.com

(This list is simply for convenience, not my recommendations. Research and see what works for you)

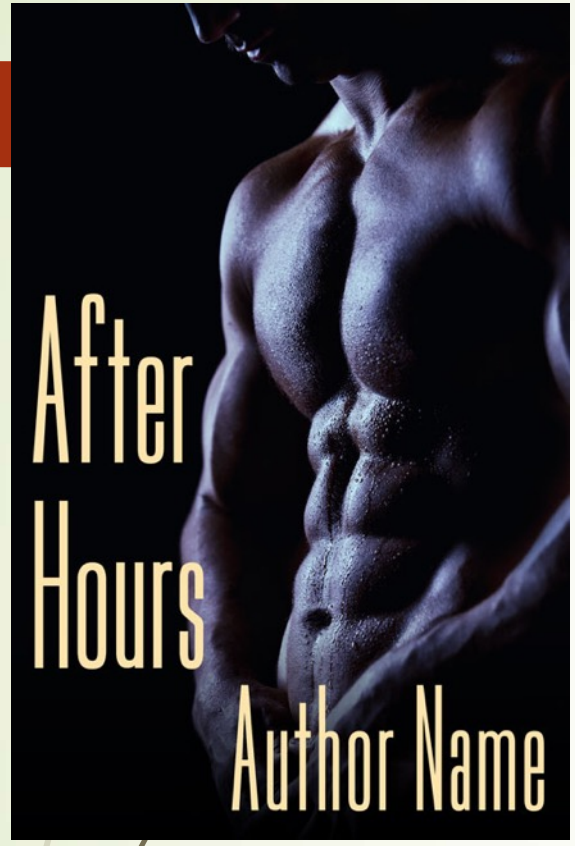
Part 2 - Basic Tools & Resources – Places to Learn

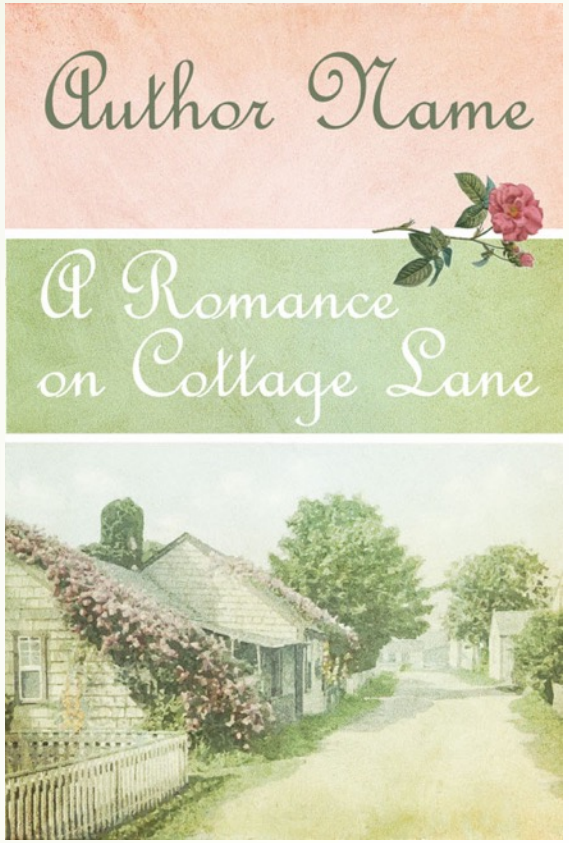
- YouTube
- LinkedIn Learning
- CreativeLive
- diybookcovers.com/help/
- thebookdesigner.com/book-design/

(This list is simply for convenience, not my recommendations. Research and see what works for you)

Part 3 - Good Cover Design Practices
Keep in mind -

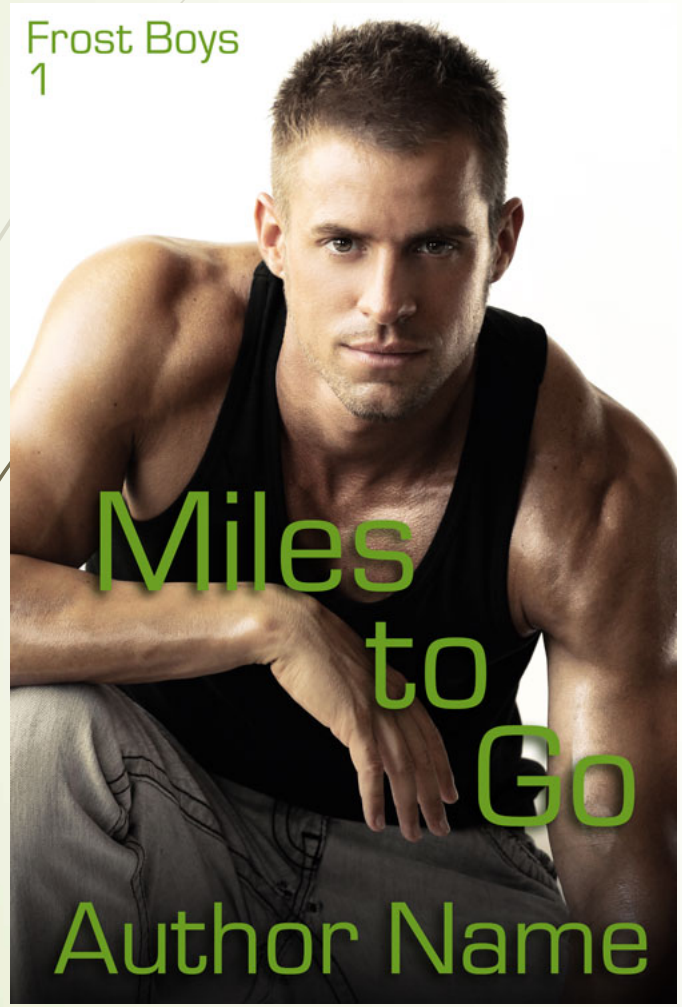
- A cover does not tell the whole story in one image.
- A cover should tantalize, prick your reader's curiosity.
- Do I need the cover(s) to fit my existing branding?
- Do I need the cover(s) to fit new branding?
- Does what **I** want for my book support the marketability of my book in its genre?
- Does my cover support my message and reputation?
- Does my fiction cover elicit an emotional response?
- Does it look professionally made? Does it sell the book?

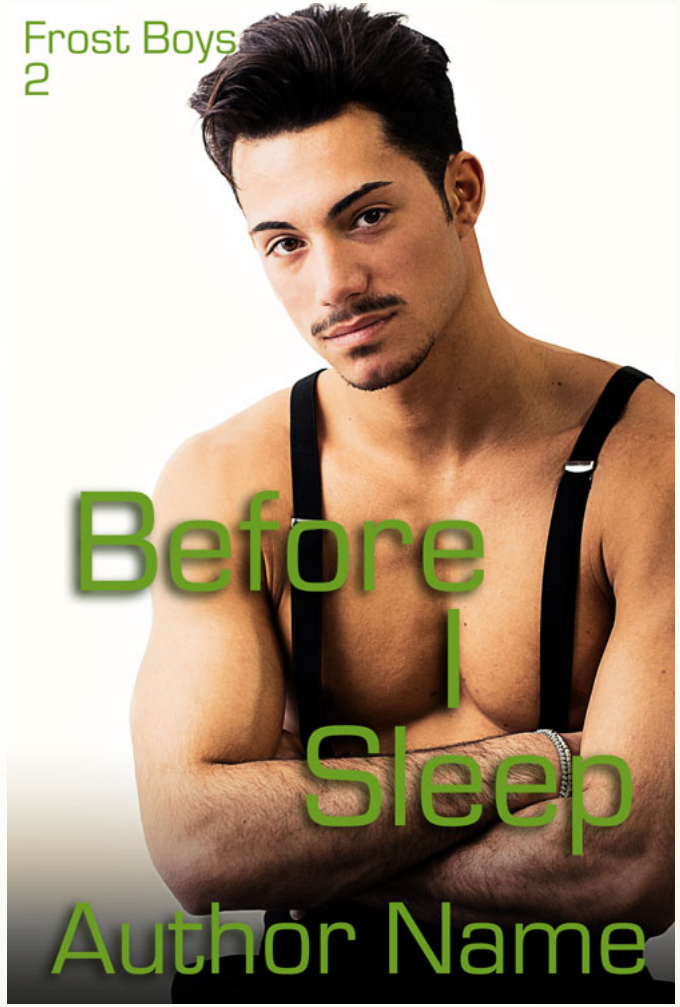

After
Hours
Author Name

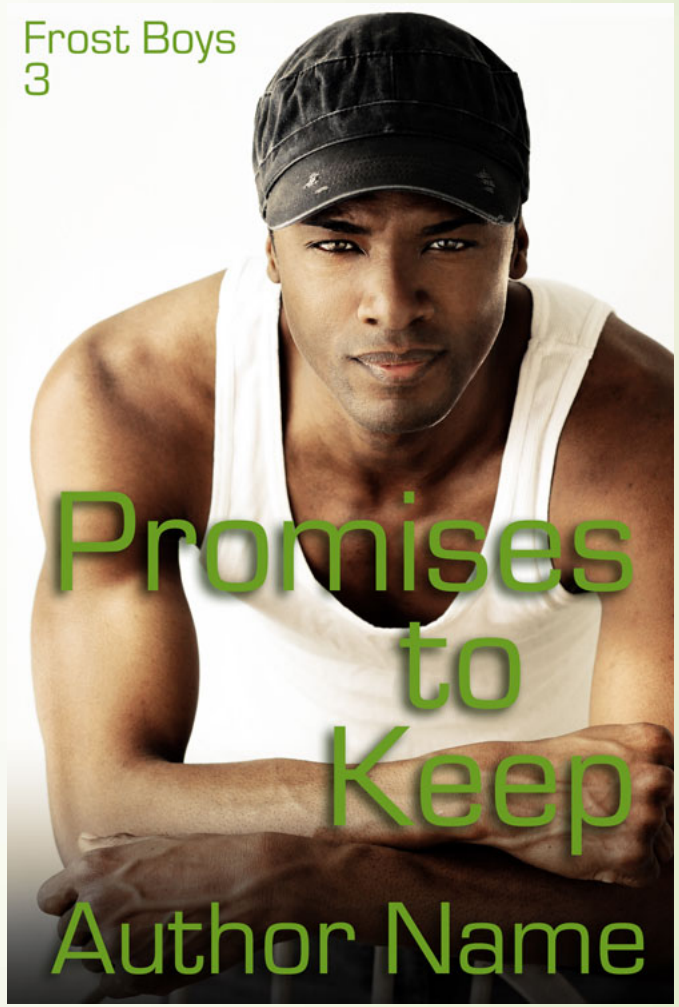

Author Name
A Romance
on Cottage Lane

WARRIOR
ANGEL
AUTHOR NAME

Love
Songs
Author Name


Frost Boys
1
Miles to Go
Author Name

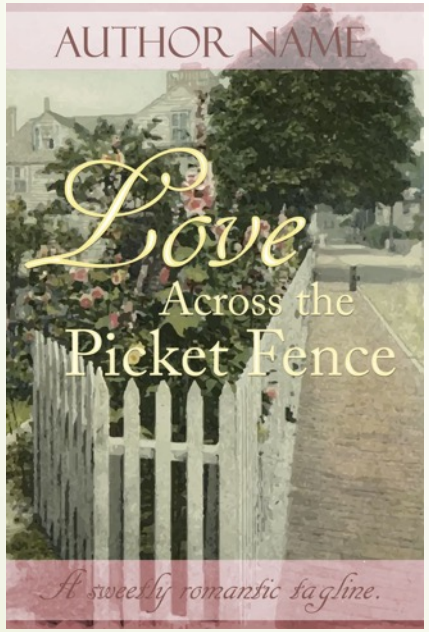

Frost Boys
2
Before I Sleep
Author Name

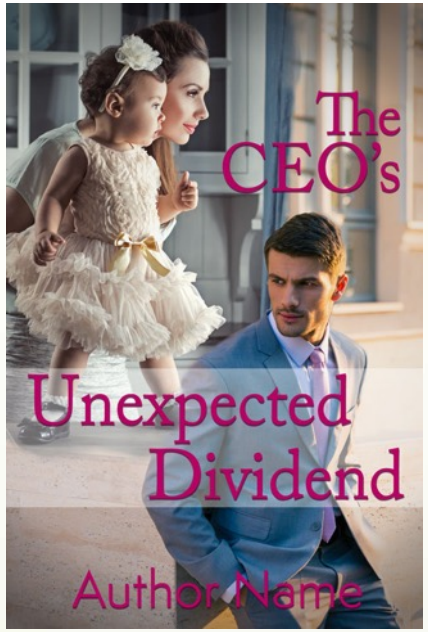

Frost Boys
3
Promises to Keep
Author Name

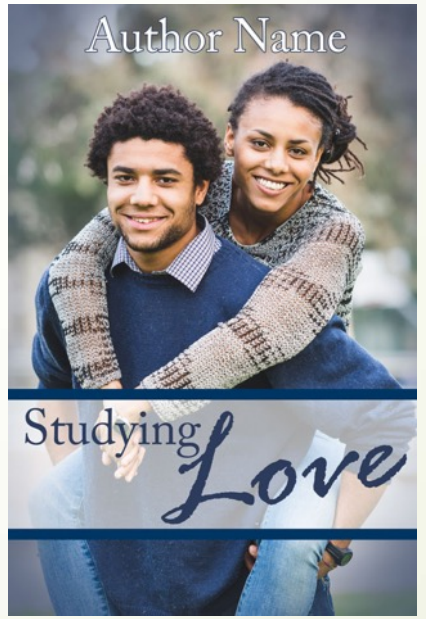
Part 3 - Good Cover Design Practices

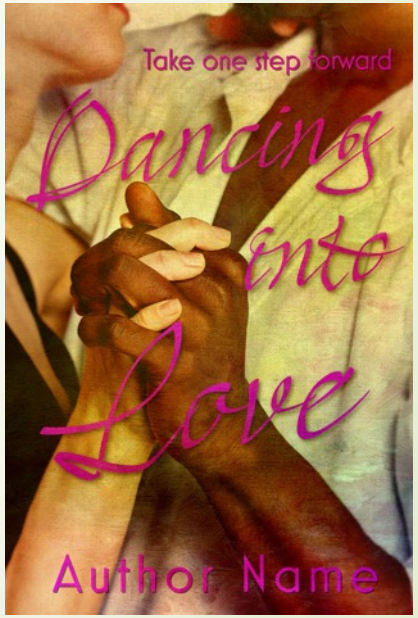
Keep in mind -

- Does my cover flow? The reader's eye wants a path to follow.
- My font choices tell a story, but are they telling the story I intend?
- Are my color choices making the correct emotional connection? Most colors have both positive and negative connotations.





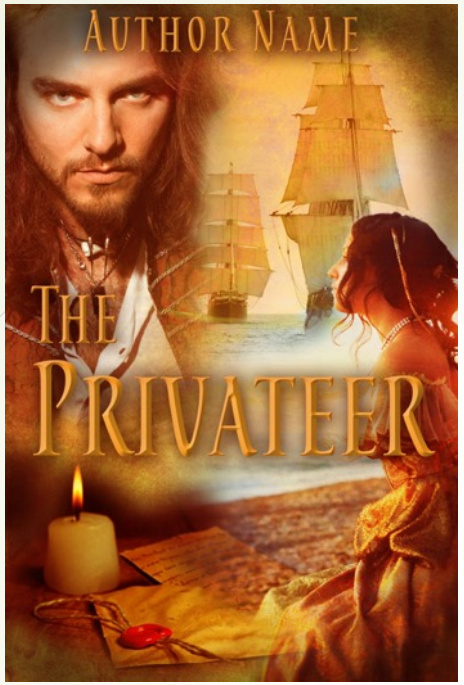


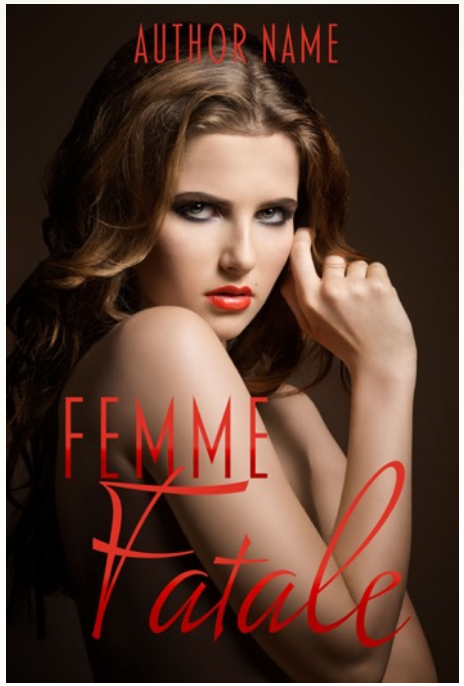


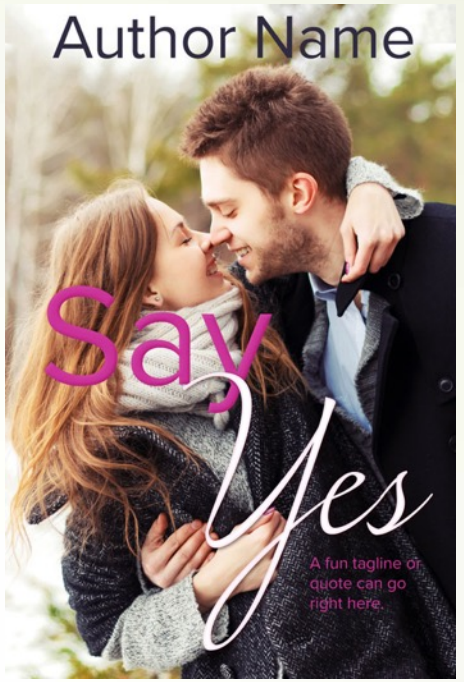
Part 3 - Good Cover Design Practices - Genre Styles

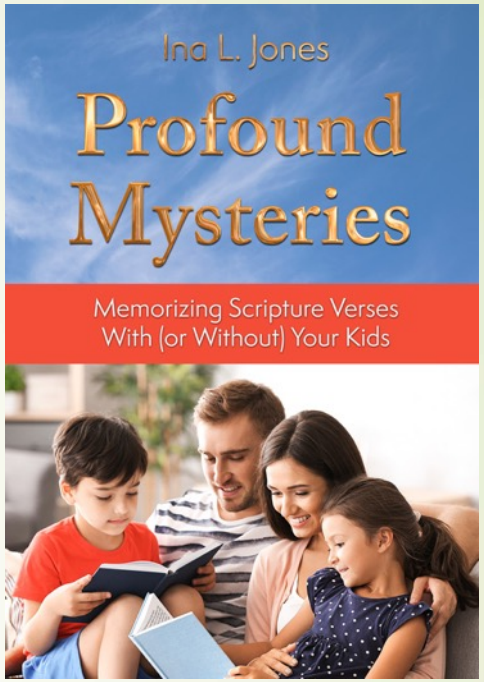
- Fantasy/Paranormal: Often darker lighting, richer color, and ornate fonts. Often major characters on the cover.
- Historical: Visual connection to the era. Often major characters on the cover. Sometimes painterly. Classic/historical feel fonts.
- Suspense: Often darker, dramatic images, clean, strong fonts
- Contemporary romance: Often lighter, brighter and more modern/informal. May or may not show major characters on the cover.
- Non-fiction: Simple, neat, and focused

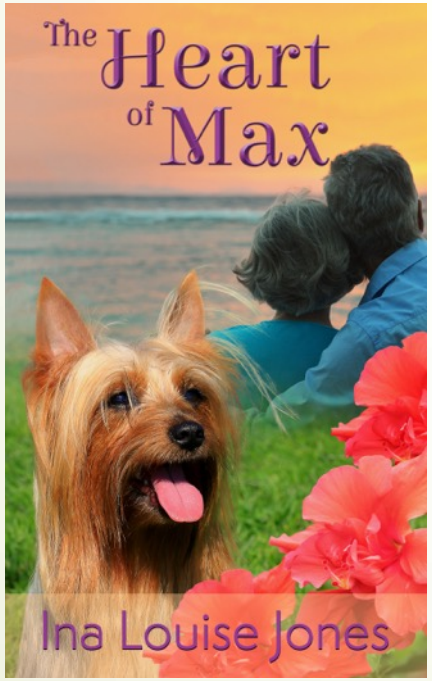
Babette James
Fergal's Enchantress
Hunted Hearts 3

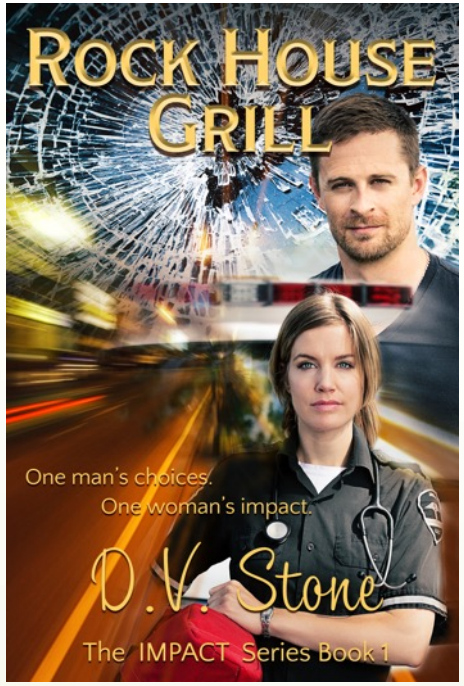

Author Name
The Privateer

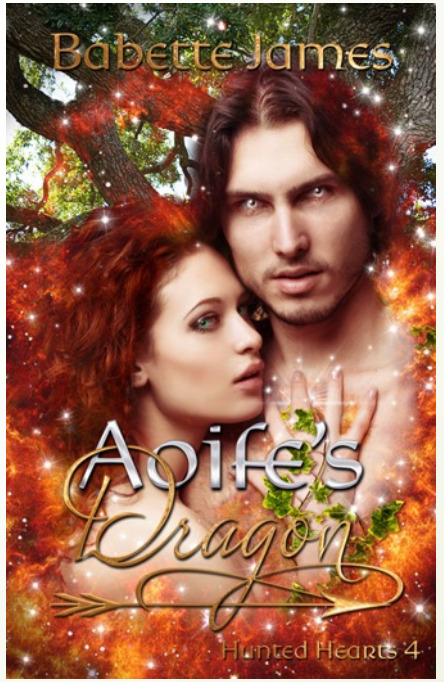

Author Name
Femme Fatale


Author Name
Say Yes
A fun tagline or quote can go right here.


Ina L. Jones
Profound Mysteries
Memorizing Scripture Verses With (or Without) Your Kids


The Heart of Max
Ina Louise Jones


Rock House Grill
One man's choices.
One woman's impact.
D.V. Stone
The IMPACT Series Book 1

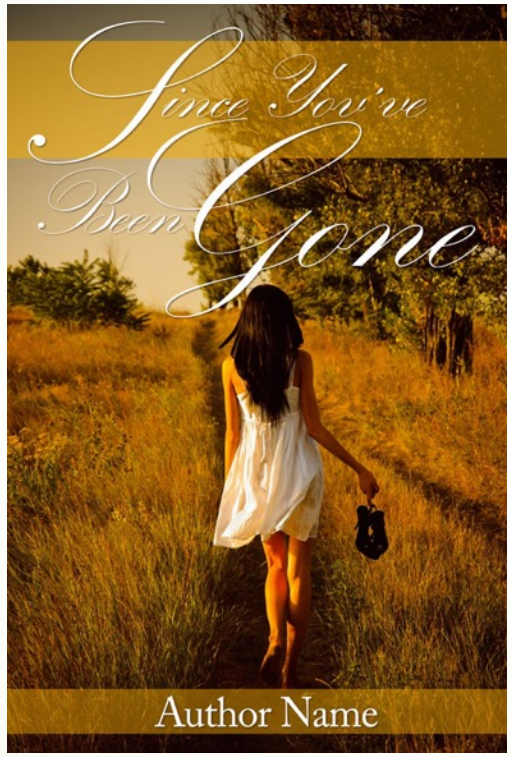

Babette James
Aoife's Dragon
Hunted Hearts 4

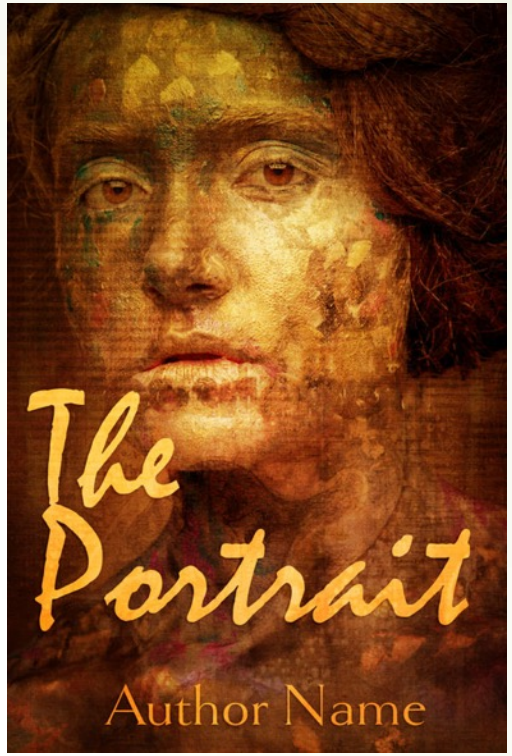
Babette James
Tempting Tessa
His Girl Next Door - Book 3

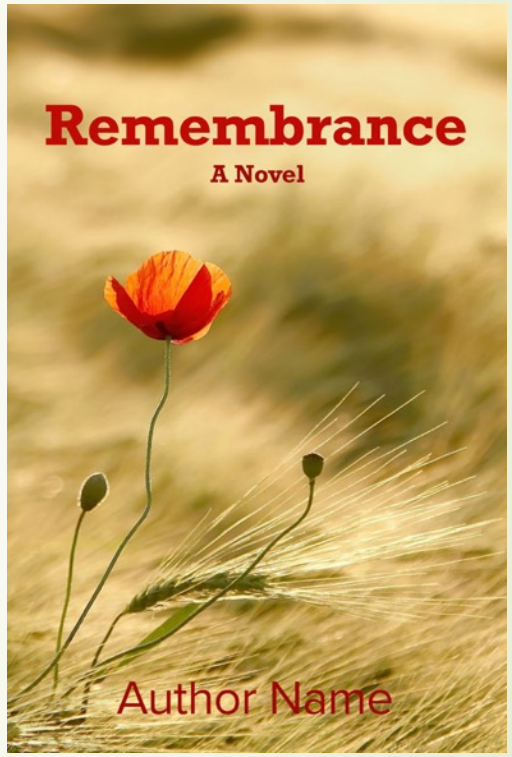
Part 3 - Good Cover Design Practices - Cover Styles

- Scene – An overall picture – think widescreen view
- Foreground Character(s) with background scene
- Close-up Character – focus is on the face or part of the face
- Symbol – focus on a single ring, tie, key, shoe, bouquet, etc.

Author Name
REACHING OUT
Daily Readings for Working Women


Since You've Been Gone
Author Name


The Portrait
Author Name


Remembrance
A Novel
Author Name

Part 4 – DIY Pitfalls

- Poor image resolution – those inexpensive small images look great tiny, but when viewed larger will be a fuzzy mess. Work with the largest image you can.
- Not following the distributor's directions. It would be nice if one size fit all, but read their directions and follow them. Very important for your print covers.
- Image vague at thumbnail size. When you shrink your design down to thumbnail, is it still eye-catching?
- Anachronisms: Watch out for tiny details out of place: a watch on a Highland warrior, a T-shirt under a Regency Duke's shirt, a tattoo on an inspirational heroine (unless part of the story, naturally), airplane in the sky of a Medieval Fantasy, make up, jewelry, shoes, background items, odd reflections…

Part 4 – DIY Pitfalls

- When creating a composited image, make sure no image edges, extra body parts, ghosting, odd cropping shows up.
- Make sure you follow any bleed requirements (the image needs to extend beyond the trim lines) for your print cover.
- Looks obviously homemade and low-budget– using casual cell phone photos, vacation snapshots, family member(s) posing, hand-drawn/ hand-colored. (These all can be well-done – however this item is directed at the ones that aren't.)
- Too many details. Too complex. Don't throw in the kitchen sink, Don't put the whole story on the cover. Go for clear and memorable.
- Designing on your emotions instead of what sells your genre. Yes, you always wanted a dog on a cover, and the heroine does have a puppy, and yes, it's a cute puppy that looks just like your childhood pet, but can that sweet fluffball really sell your dark romantic suspense?

Black Dotted Line = Trim Size
This is where your book will be cut to produce the final trim size.

Blue Dotted Line = Spine Fold
Fold placement may vary slightly.

White Area = Live Area
Position logos, text, and essential images in this area.

Red Area = Out of Live/Bleed
Your background artwork must fill the red area. Do not place logos, text, or essential images in the red area. If your artwork does not meet these requirements, it may be rejected.

Barcode Location & Size 2" X 1.2"

Back
5" x 8"
(127 mm x 203.2mm)

Spine Width 0.88" (22.225mm)

Paperback Book
Cover Template

5" X 8" Book
(127mm X 203.2mm)

0.88" Spine Width
(22.225mm)

Cream Paper

Front
5" x 8"
(127 mm x 203.2mm)

Part 4 – DIY Pitfalls

- Of course, never use images you just "found" on the web.
- Too many fonts, clashing fonts, too big or too small font size.
- Poor contrast, low contrast, warring colors.
- Stretching/squishing images to fit causing distortion. Stretching, squishing eBook cover to fit into Print cover.
- Clumsy "Photoshopping." Compositing, retouching, and photo-manipulation are art forms in their own right and can be challenging. Classy simple is always better than awkward fancy.
- Models that don't resemble your characters can irk readers. They don't have to be a perfect match, but if your hero has black hair, don't use a blond on the cover, etc.

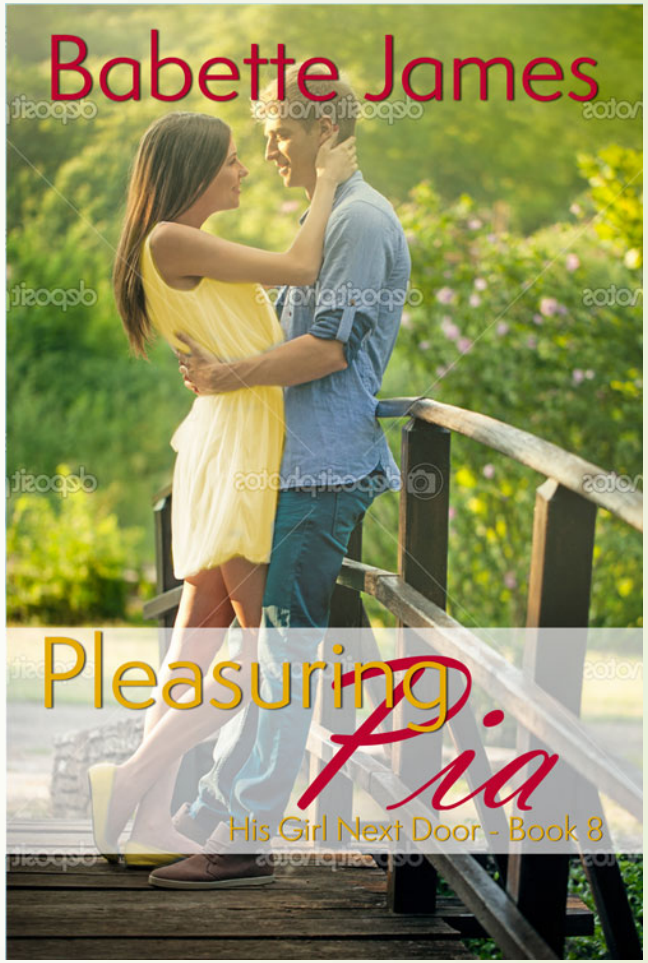
Part 4 – DIY Pitfalls

- Be very cautious when asking for opinions from others of your potential designs. Too many opinions, too many cooks in the kitchen can confuse your vision and muddle the final cover.
- Computer screens always show your images brighter and lighter than they will print and the colors may not be true. There are far more colors in the world of light than inks can make. Do test prints to see how the images translate into ink.
- Always get proof copies of your print books. Again, what is perfect on the computer screen may not appear correct on the printed cover.
- Thinking ink: Print Book images can darken subtly over time, lines can soften, contrast is lost due to action of the inks on the paper.

Proofs
Are
vital!

Part 5 – Cover Planning

- Research your genre. What are the best-selling books doing? Genre styles are important. A flowery cover won't work for SciFi. An half-clad, amorous couple won't work for Inspirational. Readers know what they want in their favored genre.
- Research your images & download comp images to play with.
  - Stock Images: Affordable, but the best ones are seen on many, many books.
  - Compositing multiple images is a way to make a more unique cover with common images.
  - Custom Photography: If you want to be unique, it will cost, but it will be special.
  - Paintings/Illustrations: Sometimes can be the only way to get exactly what you envision, but it can cost you.
- Save your money. Play with your comp images. Comps are free, low-resolution, water-marked images. Mock-up different designs. Don't buy your full resolution image until you are happy with the final design.



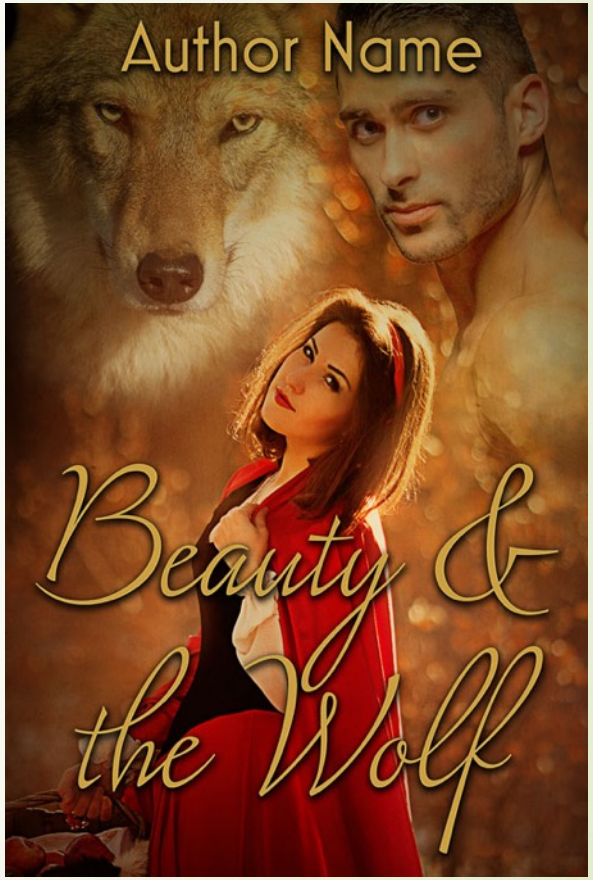
Play with comp images

Part 5 – Cover Planning

- Are there logical areas for your text?
- Does the image overpower the text?
- Does the text interfere with the image?
- Do you want a full cover image or in a box?
- Check that your cover looks good at different sizes down to thumbnail size. However, it's okay that the text *isn't* legible at thumbnail, because the webpage has all that information right next to the thumbnail. What is important is the whole *design* needs to look arresting, feel like quality.

Part 5 – Cover Planning

- Research your fonts. Use fonts appropriate to your genre. Text should stand out with good contrast. Pair fonts to work together, ex. Serif and sans serif, script and sans serif. Don't use more than two different fonts. Make sure even ornate fonts are legible. It may be lovely, but if you can't read it easily, it's useless. Make your text work with your images.
- Text priority is your title and your name.
- Do you have a great title? Is is long or short? Long titles can have a simpler image design. Short titles leave more room for image.
- Taglines and Subtitles. Think about whether you really want to fit more text into the limited space a cover gives you. Give thought to readability.



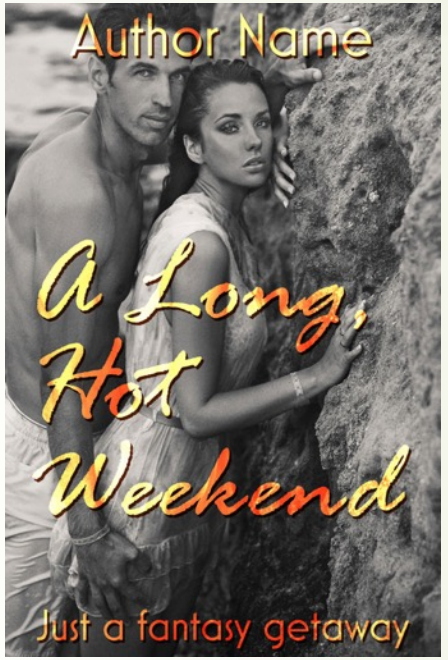
Part 5 – Cover Planning

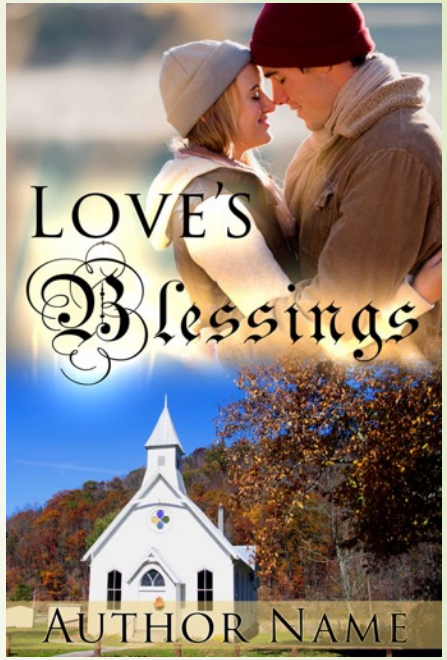
- You may need to make a barcode from your ISBN for your print cover. You may need to leave a blank box for the barcode to be placed. Check requirements. Stick to the templates.
- Do you have an imprint name? A logo? If you do, you may want them on your print cover and inside your eBook.
- For print books, make sure your spine and back cover blurb are clear and easy to read.
- Print books: know the size of your book, both dimension and page count. Page count affects the spine width, which affects the whole cover. Decide on the size of your book before designing your cover. It saves headaches.
- Even size matters in eBooks. Amazon likes 1.6 ratio (same as 5x8), other places like 1.5 (6x9). How your eBook is viewed affects how your cover appears.

Part 5 – Cover Planning Design Elements

Think about using:

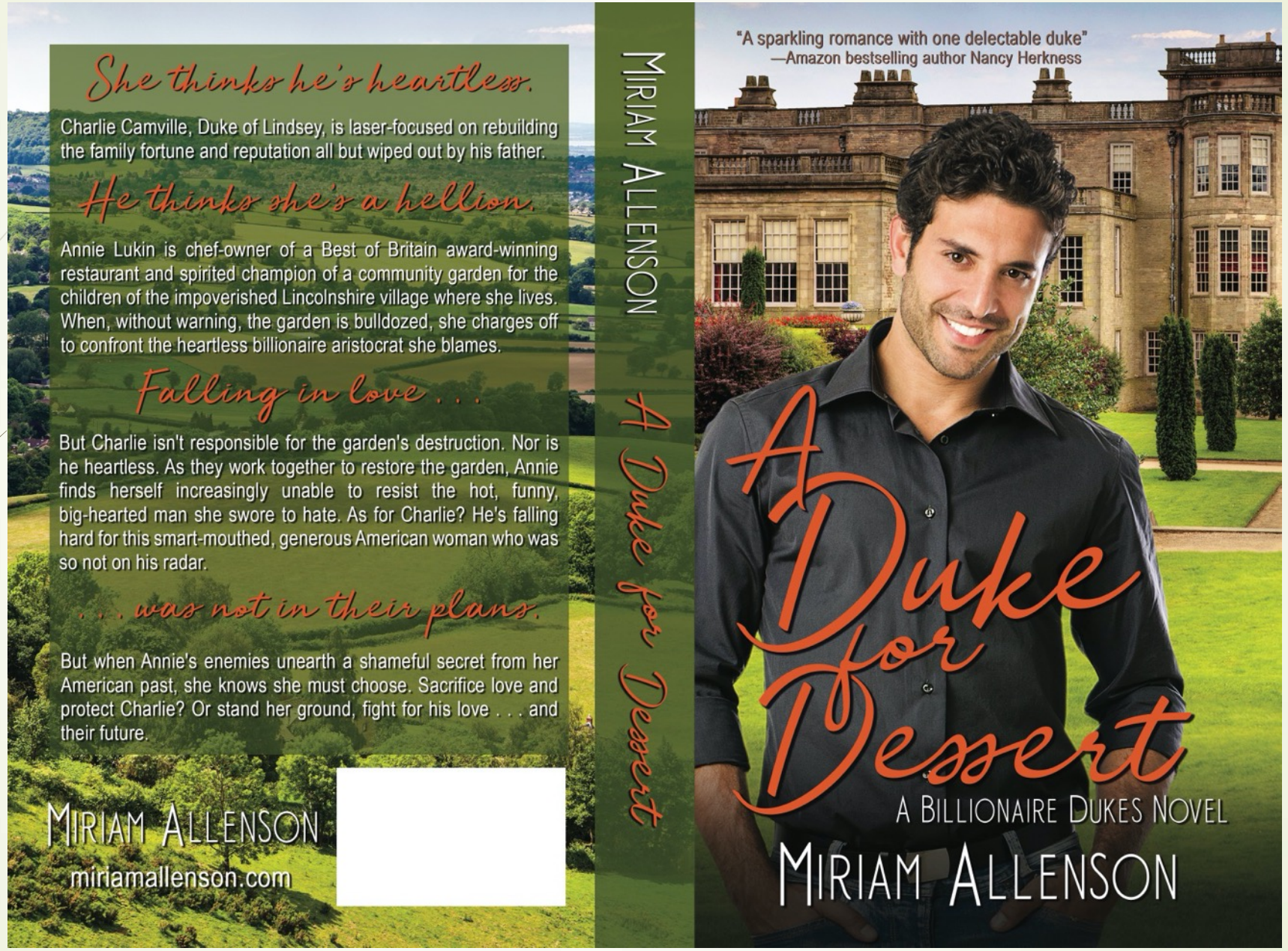
- Photographs
- Illustrations
- Shapes (solid or gradient)
- Lines
- Patterns
- Shadows
- Glows





Part 5 – Cover Planning Design Elements

- Front Cover May Have…
  - – Title – Subtitle (if any) – Author Name – Series Info (if any) –Endorsement (if any) – Other Info (if any)
- Spine May Have…
  - – Title – Author Name – Logo
- Back Cover May Have…
  - – Header title – About the book – Testimonials – Author bio – Author photo – Logo or contact info – Publisher Logo – ISBN and Barcode – QR Codes


She thinks he's heartless.
Charlie Camville, Duke of Lindsey, is laser-focused on rebuilding the family fortune and reputation all but wiped out by his father.
He thinks she's a hellion.
Annie Lukin is chef-owner of a Best of Britain award-winning restaurant and spirited champion of a community garden for the children of the impoverished Lincolnshire village where she lives. When, without warning, the garden is bulldozed, she charges off to confront the heartless billionaire aristocrat she blames.
Falling in love . . .
But Charlie isn't responsible for the garden's destruction. Nor is he heartless. As they work together to restore the garden, Annie finds herself increasingly unable to resist the hot, funny, big-hearted man she swore to hate. As for Charlie? He's falling hard for this smart-mouthed, generous American woman who was so not on his radar.
. . . was not in their plans.
But when Annie's enemies unearth a shameful secret from her American past, she knows she must choose. Sacrifice love and protect Charlie? Or stand her ground, fight for his love . . . and their future.
MIRIAM ALLENSON
miriamallenson.com
MIRIAM ALLENSON
A Duke for Dessert
"A sparkling romance with one delectable duke"
—Amazon bestselling author Nancy Herkness
A Duke for Dessert
A BILLIONAIRE DUKES NOVEL
MIRIAM ALLENSON

Get set, create!

- Cover design can be challenging, productive, fun, and even addictive.
- Give yourself time to learn your chosen tools and find the right visuals.
- Don't get frustrated, give yourself time to play and experiment.
- Enjoy the journey!

Babette James – Come Fall in Love

Contemporary and Fantasy Romance

https://BabetteJames.com

JamieBee Designs – Book Covers and More

You've written a great book.
Now it's time to make it shine!

https://jamiebeedesigns.com