



Monday Spotlight: Marcia James

Hi! It's great to visit LASR this week and discuss one of my favorite topics -- dogs! ;-) Today, I'm blogging about fictional dogs, those 4-legged characters that make books so much fun.



When I wrote my first novel, comic romantic suspense *At Her Command*, I knew I needed the perfect canine foil for my DEA agent heroine. And what better drug-sniffing dog to go undercover than a tiny Chinese crested hairless dog? Who would suspect that unusual and petite breed of working for its Kibble? That character, Smokey, became my author logo.

[Speaking of Kibble, if you'd like a good laugh, check out this YouTube video of a Corgi doing his "Kibble Dance": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yD3yVwC0fig>]

Several of my readers questioned whether such a small dog would actually be used to fight crime, so I wrote the following mini-article:

Tiny Canines Take a Big Bite Out Of Crime

Move over German shepherds and Doberman pinchers! There's a new breed of crimefighter on the street. Law enforcement agencies are adding toy dogs to their K-9 units. No ten-pound weaklings, these miniature hounds have the same keen senses as their larger brothers, combined with the ability to search smaller, tighter spaces for everything from drugs to explosives.

The partnership between police and specially-trained dogs has a long, proud history. In 1888 in England, two bloodhounds were used to search for Jack the Ripper. And large breeds, such as Labrador retrievers, have been trained for everything from crowd control to cadaver recovery. It's not surprising these valiant dogs have found their way into fiction, such as romantic suspense author Iris Johansen's search-and-rescue dog

and mystery author Virginia Lanier's tracking bloodhounds.



In the early 1960s, South American officers chose smaller dogs to search ships for smuggled coffee. And the Belgian Malinois, a lighter, quicker version of a German shepherd, has been used by the military for years. Navy SEALs parachute into enemy territory with Belgian Malinois partners, jumping in tandem with the dogs. In addition to size, the dispositions of breeds are being taken into consideration, too. U.S. Custom's officials employ beagles to sniff luggage for banned items, praising the poochs' pleasant personalities.

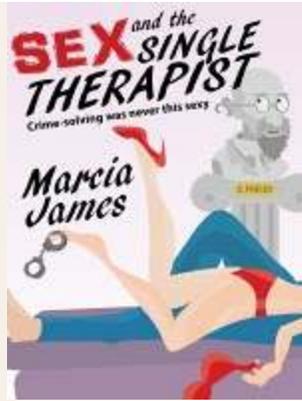
Law enforcement agencies, sued by suspects who claim large K-9 dogs damaged their property, are considering smaller breeds, too. Until recently, however, toy dogs were deemed too fragile for crimefighting. But an Ohio police department took a risk and appears to hold the record for the tiniest drug-sniffing canine: six-pound Midge, a Chihuahua-rat terrier mix.

Midge, who has her own tiny vest and goggles for riding on the sheriff's motorcycle, has been a PR phenomenon. Adults, including county jail prisoners, ask to pet her, and she's a hit at local schools. Midge shows youngsters you don't have to be big to make a difference. Here's a link to a CBS video of Midge at work:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/09/07/earlyshow/contributors/debbyeturner/main1982217.shtml>

Many officers, however, are embarrassed to have a tiny K-9 partner, finding the miniature mutts un-macho. The potential for humor in such a situation is irresistible to me. And it's always fun when an animal "matchmaker" has a hand...er, paw in the hero and heroine's happily-ever-after.

Since the release of *At Her Command*, every one of my books has included a Chinese crested hairless dog. But "cresties" aren't the only non-human characters in my books.



In my latest book, *Sex & the Single Therapist* -- the first in the "Dr. Ally Skye, Sex Therapist" comic romantic mystery series -- Ally has two cats, Crystal and Karma. And Marty, a big, black-and-white mutt who holds the world record for shedding fur, plays an important role in both the mystery and the romance. I really enjoyed having my Alpha hero, police detective Zack Crawford, fall for both the dog and the sexy sex therapist. Now if he could just stop worrying Ally's going to grade him in bed...

I'd love to hear about some of your favorite fictional animal characters! In addition to LASR's weekly prize, I'm giving away five copies of my *At Her Command* e-book this week (one a day) to a reader chosen randomly from each day's comments.

Happy reading!
-- Marcia James

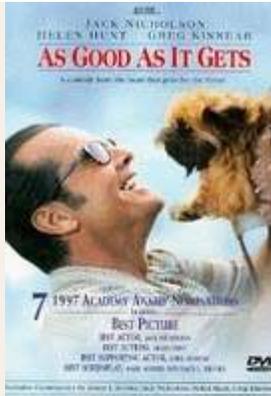
<http://www.blogger.com/www.MarciaJames.net>



For a chance to win this weekly prize, answer the question you find [here](#). For an extra chance, leave a comment.

Tuesday Spotlight: Marcia James

"PETTING THE DOG" -- Using a Hollywood Trick to Make Characters More Appealing



I'm sure you've seen it in movies and on television shows: the grumpy character falls for a pet and wins the audience's hearts. Remember Jack Nicholson and the Brussels Griffon dog in *As Good As It Gets*? Jack plays a cranky, obsessive-compulsive romance author who ends up taking care of a little dog that softens up the curmudgeon. Hollywood calls this device "petting the dog" -- a quick, visual way to let the audience know that a character has some redeeming attributes.

Fiction authors use the same trick. I particularly enjoy taking a big, bad Alpha hero and putting him together with a miniature pooch. It's so much fun to watch them bond.



I have little Chinese crested hairless dogs (aka "cresties") in all of my books and plan to keep including the unusual breed. Sometimes, a crestie might show up in a cameo instead of a starring role, but there will always be one in every story -- just like Alfred Hitchcock, who appeared in at least one scene in each of his movies. The ten-pound dogs often win the Ugliest Dog contests, but they are perfect for my humorous books.

There are a number of four-legged characters in my "Dr. Ally Skye, Sex Therapist" series. In the first book, *Sex & the Single Therapist*, Zack Crawford (the homicide detective hero) arrives at Ally's house to insist she drop her personal investigation of a patient's murder. Despite Zack's belligerence and frustration over Ally's amateur sleuthing, he's accepted by her two cats. Obviously, the cats have discerning tastes! And he's surprised at how difficult it is to hold onto his "mad" when petting a cat. Not long after, Zack ends up with a temporary houseguest, a canine crime witness. The scruffy mutt helps break down the wall around Zack's heart.

Animal characters have fiction-writing uses beyond making the two-legged characters more appealing to readers. They can be an important element of the plot (e.g., the search-and-rescue dogs in Nora Roberts' romantic suspense, *The Search*) or part of the

conflict (e.g., the abandoned dog in Jennifer Crusie's contemporary romance, *Crazy For You*).

What are your favorite movie or television animals? One of mine is Eddie, the Jack Russell terrier from the TV show, *Frasier*. [Click on this link for a montage of Eddie's scenes: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FikDu-UN5ew&NR=1>]

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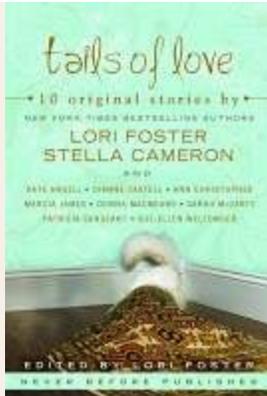
Wednesday Spotlight: Marcia James

Authors and Readers Support Animal Causes

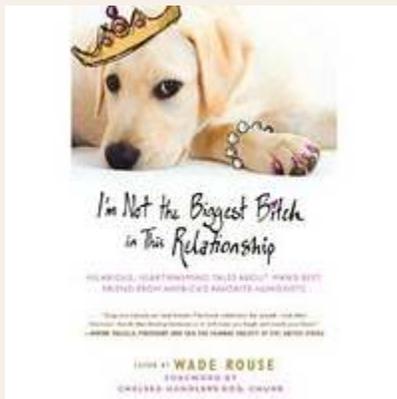


The romance community often pulls together to support important causes, such as Brenda Novak's annual online auction for juvenile diabetes research. When one of us is in need, authors, readers, editors, agents, and other publishing insiders donate goods and services to raise vital funds. And a cause near-and-dear to many of our hearts is animal aid and adoption.

The first online workshop I ever taught raised funds for Best Friends Animal Society (<http://www.bestfriends.org/>), the no-kill animal sanctuary in Utah that is known for taking in Michael Vicks' "unadoptable" fighting dogs (the basis of the television show, *Dogtown*). Over twenty other authors donated "lectures" to my workshop, and we presented Best Friends with a check for almost \$2,000.



I was pleased to be asked to participate in Lori Foster's benefit anthology, *Tails of Love* (Berkley). 100% of the ten contributing authors' advances and royalties were donated to the Animal Adoption Foundation, a no-kill shelter in Ohio. In addition to supporting a great organization, I had the opportunity to write a funny short story featuring my signature character: a Chinese crested hairless dog. If you like matchmaking animals, then you'll enjoy *Tails of Love*. Each of the ten stories in this anthology has an animal that brings the hero and heroine together. Not all of them are dogs or cats. There's also a pygmy goat and a monkey. Circle of Seven Productions created an adorable book trailer for *Tails of Love*. Click on this link <http://www.marcajames.net/books.html> and scroll down to video.



Another group of authors contributed to a humorous dog anthology, *I'm Not the Biggest Bitch in this Relationship* (edited by Wade Rouse), which will be released by NAL on September 6th. A portion of the proceeds from this book goes to the Humane Society and other local/national animal shelters and causes. For more about the book and authors, click on this link: http://waderouse.com/content/other_projects.asp?id=Upcoming%20Memoirs

Another way I've found to support animal causes is through the eBay-like charity auction site, Bidding For Good (<http://www.biddingforgood.com/>) You can browse the online fundraisers by event (looking for animal charities) and state (if you prefer to bid on local services and prizes). It's addicting for a shopaholic like me, but I've gotten some great deals while supporting very deserving non-profit organizations.

Animals thank us for our love and support every day. For an interesting look at how some therapy dogs are giving back to humans -- by listening to children read -- here's a

link to a video about Tail Waggin' Tutors:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SDDbkz4PvQ> As my fellow *Tails of Love* authors are fond of saying, "Go pets!"

What are some of your favorite animal-themed charities? Do you like to attend fundraisers for the Humane Society or donate gift baskets to silent auctions for your local animal shelter?

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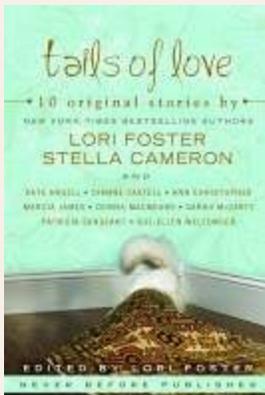
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Thursday Spotlight: Marcia James

Three Cheers for Four-Legged Matchmakers...or Why My Books Feature Canine Cupids



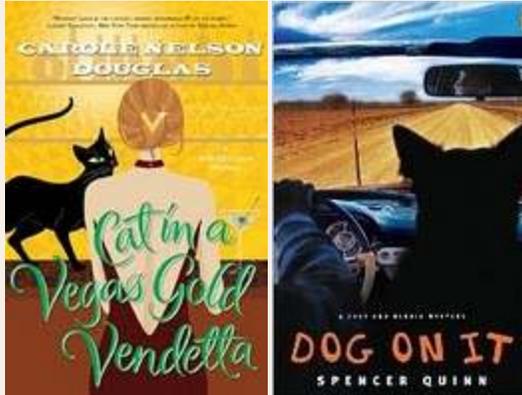
Don't you just love it when an animal character brings together the hero and heroine? I'm not talking about werewolves or other shape-shifters. Just every-day, garden-variety cats and dogs. Of course, Smokey, my Chinese crested hairless dog mascot, would object to being called a garden-variety anything. He's very proud of the fact that, in my books, he and his cousins continue to work their magic when it comes to introducing or reuniting soul mates.



I contributed a story, "Rescue Me", to Lori Foster's benefit anthology, *Tails of Love*, which offers ten romantic tales featuring animal matchmakers. In my story (and the majority of the others), the four-legged characters do not have their own POV

(point-of-view). Readers don't get to see what the animals are thinking; the POVs are saved for the two-legged characters. However, several of the stories do feature animals whose "internal dialogue" is on the page, bringing the reader into the animal's POV. We can see what the dog or cat is thinking and why it's doing what it's doing.

From the anthology's reviews and reader feedback, I learned that people either love or really dislike animal characters who have their own POVs. There doesn't seem to be a middle ground. It's an interesting phenomenon. Personally, I've always enjoyed mysteries and romances with thinking and sometimes talking animals.



Quite a few cozy mysteries feature feline amateur sleuths, such as the "Mrs. Murphy" series by Rita Mae Brown and Sneaky Pie Brown and the "Midnight Louie" series by Carole Nelson Douglas. And I love Spencer Quinn's "Chet & Bernie" mysteries, which are told 100% from the point-of-view of Chet, a very amusing canine detective.

Some authors, like Emily Carmichael, get around the animals-thinking "problem" by having cat or dog characters that are the reincarnation of a human. For example, her lite paranormals, like *Finding Mr. Right*, have a Corgi heroine who used to be a not-very-nice party girl and is now spending eternity making up for her sins by helping the human characters find their soul mates.

One of my favorite funny YouTube videos features a "talking" dog being teased by his owner. Here's the link, if you'd like to check it out:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGeKSiCQkPw>

So, do you enjoy books, movies, or television shows with animal POVs? Do you like hearing Fido's and Kitty's thoughts? If you do, what books, etc do you recommend featuring animals' internal dialogue?

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Friday Spotlight: Marcia James

Celebrate Your Pets Today



This is my last guest-blog this week on Long & Short Reviews, and I'd like to wrap-up my pro-animal posts with a call to celebrate your four-legged friends. If you have birds, snakes, fish, etc, they count, too! Pets bring so much joy into our lives that there are holidays throughout the year just for them. From National Dress Up Your Pet Day (1/14/11) to National Mutt Day (12/2/11), there's a year's worth of special dates for our furry, feathered, and finned friends.



Some of the holidays are pretty silly — such as If Pets Had Thumbs Day (3/3/11), Hairball Awareness Day (4/30/11), and Dogs in Politics Day (9/23/11). Others are very important — such as Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month (April), National Homeless Animal Day (8/20/11), and National Feral Cat Day (10/16/11).

My favorite animal holidays are those that encourage people to save abandoned dogs and cats. For example, June is Adopt-A-Shelter-Cat Month and October is Adopt-A-Shelter-Dog Month. In addition to the pets who find themselves in shelters thanks to owner indifference or death, there are now an amazing number of pets being given to shelters because their owners are losing their jobs and/or houses in this economy. The Humane Society, breed rescue groups, organizations like Best Friends Animal Society, and others are trying to save and place as many homeless pets as possible, but it's an uphill battle.



We can all help reduce the unwanted pet population by spaying or neutering our cats and dogs. I couldn't resist posting the cute photo of the dog who's a little reluctant to go through with the neutering procedure. But this is a serious topic. The Humane Society has declared February to be National Prevent a Litter Month and holds a Spay Day (2/22/11) to get out this vital message. [For a full list of animal holidays, check *Chase's Calendar of Events*.]

Smokey, my author logo and the Chinese crested hairless drug-sniffing dog from my first book, *At Her Command*, was an adopted shelter dog. And, if I were to give him a point-of-view, he would mention that many of the animals who act in television and film came from shelters. For example, Morris (aka Lucky), the "spokescat" for 9 Lives cat food — and his stunt doubles — were all shelter cats.



Here's Smokey's Top Ten list of canine actors — all of whom were rescued from animal shelters:

1. Benji (aka Higgins), the Poodle, schnauzer, cocker spaniel mix star of the *Benji* movies
2. Old Yeller (aka Spike), the mixed breed whose breakthrough role was the lead in the movie *Old Yeller*
3. Sandy, the Airedale-Collie mix from *Little Orphan Annie*
4. Fang, the drooling Neapolitan Mastiff from the *Harry Potter* movies
5. Bruiser (aka Chico), the Chihuahua and Rufus (aka Chloe) the Bulldog, who starred in Broadway's *Legally Blonde*
6. Kelly, Chip, Topsy, Stella, Zelda, and Bo, the six mixed breeds who played Max in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

7. Lucky, the mixed breed from the *Dr. Dolittle* movies
8. Happy, the terrier mix on the TV show, *7th Heaven*
9. Papi, the tiny star of *Beverly Hills Chihuahua*
10. Most of the canine cast of the movie, *Hotel For Dogs*

Here's a link to a funny YouTube video of an inventive shelter dog:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk3cVBhAmMQ>

I'd love to hear your favorite pet stories – rescued shelter animals, remembered childhood pets, funny animal anecdotes, etc. In addition to LASR's weekly prize, I'm giving away five copies of my *At Her Command* e-book this week (one a day) to a reader chosen randomly from each day's comments.

Thank you, Long & Short Reviews, for this opportunity to guest-blog for five days on favorite topic: dogs and cats!

Happy reading!

— Marcia James

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