

[An Interview with Heather Rigney](#)



Author Heather Rigney has made a name for herself with *The Merrow Trilogy*, which follows lovable screw-up anti-hero Evie McFagan as she deals with her nemesis/counterpart Nomia, a mermaid. Both experience self-discovery and both leave a path of destruction in their wake. All three books have garnered praise, and helped Rigney build a loyal fanbase.

Now that the trilogy is complete, I sent Rigney some questions about her thoughts on her work, the characters, the process and her future.

Bobby Forand (Motif): How did the idea for *The Merrow Trilogy* come about? Was it always meant to be a trilogy?

Heather Rigney: I was invited to collaborate on a now-retired, anthology called DIVE. It was a collection of short stories about mermaids or merfolk. Four authors were involved, and I wrote a story called "Mermaids are Not Nice." That was the birth of both my antagonist, Nomia, and protagonist, Evie McFagan. The short story received a lot of praise and more than one person stated that I needed to expand the world I had created. From there, I thought, "I should make a trilogy out of this!" I had no idea what I was getting into.

BF: Who was your favorite character to write? Why? Did that character change as you continued to write?

HR: Evie was easily my favorite character to write because she is based on my worst behavior. She says all the things I want to say but don't. Evie went through a lot of changes. Her evolution needed to happen because she's at rock bottom when we first meet her. The only direction she could go was up. I tried to create an arc for her that worked with her bad habits and helped elevate her from unlikable anti-hero to unlikable, unlikely hero.

BF: Which book was the most fun to write? Why?

HR: They all had different vibes. Book one was a blast because it was my first real book and I had so

much fun attempting to be a writer. Book two was a slog. I felt a huge sense of pressure to deliver, and it made the work feel like a burden. I got very sick after *Hunting* came out, and I think it was my body's way of telling me I pushed my stress quota too far. *Caging* was the most fun. I felt confident and more carefree because I knew it was the last one.

BF: How did you feel once the third book came out, meaning *The Merrow Trilogy* was complete?

HR: I felt relieved. Here is a secret that I don't want anyone to know: I don't like mermaids and I never did. You know when you are little and you mention to a relative that you like owls and then next thing you know every holiday or special occasion finds you swimming in owl paraphernalia? That's my connection to mermaids. I never liked them, I just thought it would be a marketable topic to write about (and coincidentally paint — I have several mermaid paintings because I thought they would sell). Once the last sentence was written, I felt a huge sense of release, a new freedom from mermaids.

BF: Have you thought about any of the characters during your daily life since completing the trilogy?

HR: I often wonder what Evie would think of Trump. Wherever she is, you know she has a pink hat and a RESIST bumper sticker.

BF: Looking back, is there any part of the story you wish you could change?

HR: There are a lot of mistakes in book one. I didn't have a good solid direction and if I had the chance to rewrite it, I would. But that would be strange and almost like time-traveling. I'm sure I would mess up the known universe in some way.

BF: What are your plans now that the trilogy is complete?

HR: I recently took a job as the elementary art teacher at the Lincoln School in Providence, and I am loving it. I didn't realize how much I missed teaching. It has become a full-on immersive compulsion that leaves little room for writing at the moment.

BF: Rhode Island plays a part in the story. How accurate are the locations you use as the setting? What made you choose the locations you did?

HR: The trilogy is my love letter to Pawtuxet Village, a unique area of both Warwick and Cranston on Narragansett Bay where I live. It's such a great place filled with rich history, neighborhoods within neighborhoods, quirky individuals and a fantastic community that is always changing. I love being part of it and I really wanted to highlight all the wonderful qualities that I adore, such as Gaspee Days — a time where we honor colonial rebels who burned down one of His Majesty's ships during Pre-Revolutionary War times. All of the streets and locations are as close as possible to reality unless I altered them slightly to fit with the story. For example, Little Falls Cafe in the Village has been renamed Heart Attack Heaven and is no longer a bakery/coffee shop but a charcuterie/coffee shop.

BF: What was your biggest challenge writing the trilogy?

HR: Not having any prior knowledge of how to write a trilogy. I had no idea what I was doing and the process almost broke me. At that point in my life, I was blessed with the gift of time. I had left teaching to stay home with my young daughter. I don't think I could have written three books while I was teaching and raising a family.

BF: Describe your writing process. How has it changed since you started writing?

HR: For starters, I use the writing program Scrivener. It has revolutionized my writing. Being a visual person, I needed to lay out all my chapters and see them in multiple ways — not just one linear format as it is with Word. Scrivener allowed me to write multiple story arcs and then jumble them into one cohesive novel. I color-coded everything so I could see how the different threads wove into the braided final product. Another change was my ability to start with the ending first and work toward it. After I finished the first book, *Waking*, I wrote the final chapter of *Caging*. I used that as my finish-line marker while writing book two, *Hunting* and book three, *Caging*.

BF: What is your favorite and least favorite part of writing?

HR: My favorite part of writing is creating characters. I love crafting beings with subtle quirky traits, unique physical properties, and the nuances of how someone would speak. We are all, in the real world, wonderfully different. We all have our own way of doing things and reasons for why we do them. I like watching and observing people in the real world and then translating that into a fictional character.

My least favorite part of writing is editing. God, how I hate editing. I hate re-reading something I have already read a thousand times, fully knowing that I am most likely missing a glaring error that some reader will point out just to embarrass me.

BF: How have you marketed *The Merrow Trilogy*? Have you noticed its popularity grow?

HR: I did everything I could afford, and a few things I couldn't, to promote my trilogy. I have gone to almost every event I have been asked to do — library signings, book fairs, comic and horror conventions. I have done virtual book tours, countless interviews for blogs and newspapers. I called all local newspapers and sent out press releases every time I released a book. I have thrown huge parties for each book release. I put first edition copies of *Waking* in Little Free Libraries around the state. I have left my books in airports and other public places. When I travel I put bookmarks up in Starbucks. I am shameless in my promotion! This summer I will be doing a sunset cruise of Providence Harbor with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council. Yes, I will be on a boat, trying to sell books.

BF: What are your thoughts on self-publishing? Please discuss both the pros and cons.

HR: Pros: You are in control of everything from writing, to cover design, to marketing, to branding, to accounting, to promotion, to quality control. It's all you, all the time. No one will tell you that what you are doing is wrong.

Cons: See above. It's exhausting wearing all those hats when all you want to do is write. Giving up creative control when you write for a publisher, and not yourself, allows you to focus on your craft. However, in today's market, you still have to self-promote no matter who signs your paycheck.

BF: Please give a tip to anyone interested in writing and releasing work of their own.

HR: Do it. If you want to write and you have something you want to share with the world, just do it. There are so many resources out there for DIY publishing right now. Why not see if you're any good? Once the reviews start coming in, pay attention to what they're saying and fix the issues. You'll only get better with practice. Sitting around saying, "I could write a book," does not make you a better writer. Putting the time in and practicing is what makes it happen.

BF: Please state an interesting and unknown tidbit about The Merrow Trilogy.

HR: I am proud to say that I have created my own little feminist manifesto. I attempted to examine the way women were perceived in the past and in the present by both society and themselves. Each of my female characters represents a different stereotype. I included the female pariahs such as the sloppy failure of a mother, the cougar, the adulterer and the aggressive alpha. I included the rape victim and the sex worker. I explored issues of the glass ceiling throughout time and issues of the sublimation of women by men. To some degree, both my parents were feminists and they raised me to recognize that I would always be fighting against the fact that I was female. My dad always said that I could do anything, no matter what, because I was strong and I was a fighter, being female should never be a drawback, it's a superpower. You just have to fight twice as hard. I'd like to think the women in my book did just that — they fought twice as hard to be themselves as I fought to be something I never trained to be: a writer.

Learn more about Heather Rigney by checking out her Amazon Author page:

https://www.amazon.com/HeatherRigney/e/B009GSPRPU/ref=dp_byline_cont_book_1