



Agent Nadia Courier judged the finaling entries in our WE ALL WIN Best Opening Hook contest. As with all our contests, this one was about seeing how our openings fared with readers, fellow writers, and with an experienced agent.

As the coordinator of this contest, I have to say that I was very pleased with the response of our divas to enter and to judge. Thanks, gals! When you read over the entries and Nadia's comments, please keep in mind that what one agent likes or dislikes may not be the same with another agent or editor...or even a critique partner. Write the story of your heart and see what may.

~Gina Welborn

Romance Divas WE ALL WIN Best Opening Hook Contest

Entry #70 Definitely Not Quite Dead by Sela

Paranormal Romantic Comedy

Brava

22K

~*~

After years of questionable decisions, Sabine Harper could now categorically state that this was the stupidest thing she had ever, ever done in her life. She was standing in front of a crumbling crypt with her younger cousin, nineteen year old Lily, waiting for the original airhead to try to raise the dead.

Lily, in her newly purchased Goth girl garb, raised her black manicured hands and began to intone what she probably thought was a spell for disinterment. It sounded like Pig Latin. The rest of the Moron Squad marched solemnly around the grave, carrying black candles. Sabine backed away and leaned against a convenient cypress tree, waiting for the drama to be over so she could go back to her boring, warm, well-lit home.

She had griped at Lily the entire way to the cemetery. "I don't know why you can't pick a normal hobby, like studying poisonous snakes."

END OF ENTRY



WE ALL WIN Best Opening Hook Contest Scoresheet

Scoring will be done on a 1-10 point scale with 10 being the highest. Please do not score a zero (0) or give half-points.

 9 Does the first sentence/paragraph raise a question that compels the reader to go on?
Does the first sentence/paragraph shock, startle, entrance, or amuse?

 8 Is the protagonist likeable or at least compelling?

 8 Is the tone or mood of the novel clear or at least hinted at: dark, light-hearted, suspense, serious, erotic, comedy, etc? Does the mood/tone of the entry match the genre and/or target publisher listed?

 8 Overall, how hooking is this opening?

Comments: (optional)

I LOVE THE LINE: “She was standing in front of a crumbling crypt with her young cousin, nineteen-year old Lily, waiting for the original airhead to try and raise the dead.” – THIS SHOULD BE THE OPENING LINE!!! The only thing the first sentence tells you is her name. I’d open with the cool one: Sabine Harper was standing in front of a crumbling crypt with her cousin, nineteen year old Lily, waiting for the original airhead to try and raise the dead. – I’d keep reading. ☺ I’d keep reading anyway, but there ya go... they have a section for comments.

TOTAL SCORE: 33 /40

GW: Sela, Nadia is interested in seeing more!

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Romance Divas WE ALL WIN Best Opening Hook Contest

Entry #7 Shadow's Embrace by Linda

paranormal

90 K

TOR

~*~

"Kneel." The whispered word was edged in steel and black velvet. Not a request, but a command.

Cian remained immobile; no outward movement betrayed his rage over the queen's insult. He stood nude, stripped of his weapons and still she demanded more. Complete subservience. The bitch.

He remained standing within the entrance of her private chamber.

Chamber, he nearly snorted, more like her personal whorehouse. Tallow wax candles and bolts of crimson-stained satin hung from the rafter's and stone walls. Inlaid within the walls were precious stones glowing colors of the rainbow. The queen's personal magick made the room shimmer with vibrancy.

She frowned as a cruel glint filled her eyes. Her white skin gleamed the color of moonlight. Green hair so dark it looked black hung in soft waves down her back. Black intense eyes gazed into his.

Within those eyes glowed the colors of heaven.

END OF ENTRY



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 9 Overall, how hooking is this opening?

Comments: (optional)

Ok – I LOVE this opening hook. The first sentence is a little overwritten, I would've been happy with:

“Kneel.” Not a request, but a command.

-- Those are the two parts that made an impression on me – the others were slightly confusing in a poetic-writerly sort of way. The rest is HOT. I like the idea of a naked guy and a queen – I'm so sexist. ::sigh:: -- but my first reaction is... Ooohhhh boy. This is going to be a HOT book, with a HOT strong character, and if the queen is either a villain or a good guy (girl?) well, strong characters all around. GOOD STUFF, great work.

TOTAL SCORE: 32 /40

GW: Linda, Nadia is interested in seeing more.



Romance Divas WE ALL WIN Best Opening Hook Contest

Entry #90 Bound By Honor by Dawn

fantasy romance

125k

TOR

~*~

“All the power in the world can be yours.”

His soft words whispered along Emeline Renshaw’s skin. Such promise. Such glory. Such evil.

She shuddered. One failure had not changed him.

Emeline stepped closer to the shimmering gate embedded in the palace basement’s rough stone wall, clasping her trembling hands in front of her. “What do you want from me?”

Notekyn smiled, but his eyes remained as hard and cold as the glittering sapphire she wore around her neck. “Your cooperation. For it, I will reward you greatly.”

“And if I don’t cooperate?” She swallowed. With his physical connection to Synovia destroyed, he didn’t have the power to reach beyond the gate and harm her.

His smile widened. “You know what I can do.”

Icy claws ripped through her chest. Panic surged. He did have the power. She staggered, fell to her knees inches from the gate, and clutched the bodice of her gown. Her fingers struggled to grab hold of the chilling force that strangled her. He’d taken her magic once. To do so again would kill her.

END OF ENTRY



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 8 Overall, how hooking is this opening?

Comments: (optional)

This sounds so familiar? Hm...

I really like it, but I have SO many questions – is that good? Yeah, I guess so – of course, they would need to be answered really quickly, as a lot of people will “keep asking” for about three pages. After that, give me the info! I do love the concept and the segue you have going here – for an opening hook, it’s fabu.

TOTAL SCORE: 29 /40



Romance Divas WE ALL WIN Best Opening Hook Contest

Entry #61 Ghosthunter by Jax

St. Martin's Press

90K

Paranormal

~*~

“How can you go without it for centuries?” Tiffany Elerslie blurted to her leader with a straight face.

Sienna spewed coffee down her new white shirt.

“Damn!” She placed the cup on its saucer and reached for her napkin.

All patrons of the distinguished Bourgeois Jardin Tea Room turned to look at her, appalled by her sudden outburst. She felt like snarling, but thought better of it.

“I’m not going to have this discussion with you right now, Tiffany. Nor do I ever want to speak to you about what I do or do not do on my free time.”

Was it just her, or was she missing something? Of course it didn’t matter that she was a mere leader of the Ghosthunters. After all, her army of women warriors only protected innocents and eliminated demons and evils on a regular basis. For Gods’ sakes, did she have to be fumble fingers, too!

Apparently the stern look wasn’t getting anywhere with her friend.

END OF ENTRY



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 6 Overall, how hooking is this opening?

Comments: (optional)

When I read "Was it just her, or was she missing something?" – I was a little confused about who "she" was... is it Tiffany or Sienna. I assume it is Sienna. Also, how was she being fumble fingers? She spewed? I like the concept though – what does she do with her free time? Great first line!

TOTAL SCORE: 26 /40



Romance Divas WE ALL WIN Best Opening Hook Contest

Entry #57 It Ain't Over by Lynn

Ellora's Cave

25K

Romantica

~*~

Shoulda, woulda, couldas. Lately, Caroline Banks' life was filled with them. Today was no exception.

She shoulda gone with her gut when Liddy called and invited her on this ski trip. If she'd only done that, she woulda been warm and comfy at home, curled up with a bowl of popcorn and watching her favorite DVD.

And for the kicker, she coulda turned tail and headed straight home as soon as Rob Alexander's hulking figure loomed in the doorway. Coulda, but she didn't.

They say hindsight's twenty-twenty, and she was inclined to agree. Especially now.

Since she hadn't done any of her shoulda, woulda, couldas, she was trapped. Literally. She'd gone to fetch her coat, and Rob just happened to follow to get his at the same time. And now they were locked in the closet. Together.

END OF ENTRY



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 7 Overall, how hooking is this opening?

Comments: (optional)

The first sentence is too long, Caroline Bank's life was filled with Shoulda, Woulda, Couldas – and then day she got locked in a closet with Robert Alexander was no exception.

-- I like the concept on the rest. It's straight forward, it gives all the information you need without feeling like an info dump, it's quick and still covers a lot of ground. Good skill and craft here... I'd just tighten it up a bit to make it zing!

TOTAL SCORE: 27 /40



Romance Divas WE ALL WIN Best Opening Hook Contest

Entry #9 Lube Job (Working Title) by Sienna

Harlequin Blaze

70-75K

Romantic Suspense/mystery

~*~

“A Blow Job, and Jack Me Off, then Cum in your Mouth. Show me what you’ve got.”

Ember Ashbrook, a.k.a. Flame, pasted on a smile as she bent to give her potential new boss an up close and personal view of her double D breasts as a D.J. pumped in music.

Normally she hated using her female attributes to get a job, but this time she had no choice. She needed this job and now. Even if it meant burying her Ivy League education beneath air headed acting.

“I’d like to have an orgasm before we open in an hour, Flame.”

“Yes sir, Mr. Mercer,” she said. With all thoughts of her debasement blocked, Flame showed him just what she was made of.

She sucked in a breath and went into the most complicated act she had. Hips gyrating to the funky beat, body and bottles spinning, ice clinking and in a few seconds she had a perfectly executed and mixed Blow Job on the bar before him.

“Nice moves and excellent routine Flame. Now let’s see how it tastes.”

Flame felt heat barrel up her insides as his eyes held hers and he swallowed. Being a bartender at Lube Job might not be so bad after all--once she caught a killer.

END OF ENTRY



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 7 Overall, how hooking is this opening?

Comments: (optional)

OK – two things I had issue with, neither of which is a big deal (i.e. someone else will love the same thing that I disliked here). I feel like I just watched a gratuitous sex scene. Like, how they plaster some tits and ass in a shot to keep you interested? I was confused at the sexual references, before I figured out that they were in a bar (I'd have that come earlier... ugh, no pun intended); and I thought the last line was completely a 180 from what I was reading. I need a little more lead in.

In general – how do I feel about 180 or sex-pot openings? I think that I'm okay with them --- if it's needed. Like, if I think the writing is going to be weak or if the plot is going to be weak, then I need some sensationalism to bolster me up (t&a is never against the rules in those cases)... but, reading your opening, I'm not sure it's NEEDED. Can you start it some other way? I want to know the character, why SHE is there, why she NEEDS to be there... and not just some funny drink names? You have about the length of the opening hook to get someone interested in your character and your story – right now, I feel like I need to watch a porno.

That said – the writing is there. There is talent. You just need to refocus a little.

TOTAL SCORE: 26 /40



Romance Divas WE ALL WIN Best Opening Hook Contest

Entry #41 Flying Freakville by Tawny

YA (college) chick lit

approx 50K

Target Publisher: Pocket YA chick lit program

~*~

Prologue

My life sucks.

Now before you go getting all judgmental and call me a spoiled-brat-whining-loser, give me the chance to illustrate the suckiness that is my life. But where to begin? I suppose I could start at the beginning...but, nah. You'd get bored and use this book as a projectile weapon against your bratty baby brother who refuses to leave your stuff alone and my story would never be read. I would never be understood. And the mystery of what happened to the mall on Christmas day would never be solved.

Ohhhh. Did that one get your attention? Uh, uh, uh! I'm not tellin'. We'll get to the mall thing after I explain why my life sucks. So sit back, prop up your feet and get ready. You're in for a wild ride.

By the way, my name is Cat Moran. And I live in a house full of freaks.

END OF ENTRY



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 6 Overall, how hooking is this opening?

Comments: (optional)

I liked this opening – but I didn't love it. Why? Obviously it has mucho potential, and I like that she took a risk not only writing in first person, with a really strong voice – but she also did something really risky – she talked directly to the reader/audience. That's extremely overt and hard to pull off. That said, I don't think that this opening really feels like a college voice, and I think the author cheated (just a hint) by doing the whole: “Oh, by the way – this is my name” thing. You worked so hard and were so daring to do the strong voice and the over-talk-to-the-audience thing that to see you go back and “cheat” by using one of the oldest YA tricks in the books! GAH! Ok... but, needless to say, shows tons of promise. I'd do a little more tweaking. :>

TOTAL SCORE: 24 /40