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## Unabashedly Bookish: The BN Community Blog

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### Dani Noir – Out from the Shadows

by [Jill\\_Dearman](#)

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Nova Ren Suma's new book is for tweens but holds much appeal for film geeks of all ages. Below, my writer to writer interview with this fluid and fascinating novelist.

JD: How did you first conceive of Dani Noir

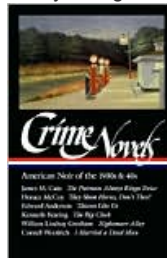


Dani Noir and what noir films have influenced you the most? Noir literature?

NRS: The origin of Dani Noir can be pointed back to one particular noir classic: *Gilda*, directed by Charles Vidor, starring Glenn Ford and of course the inimitable Rita Hayworth. I saw that film for what I think was the first time when I was in the very early stages of developing this novel. All I had in that rough version of the manuscript was the setting of a movie theater, a flimsy idea for a lonely summer, a snarky narrator to do the talking... and that was it. I'd decided the theater would be showing a summer of noir movies, and to get myself in the mind frame I rented as

many noir films as I could think of, including ones I hadn't seen before.

Enter Rita Hayworth. So there I was, trying to find the heart of my story, when I found this movie. I was struck by her character's mystery, her layers-her story was complicated, and tainted, and not entirely unsalvageable by the end. It was a great inspiration. And beyond *Gilda*, if you read this novel you'll see some clear influences coming from other classics such as *Double Indemnity*, *Touch of Evil*, *The Third Man*, *The Lady from Shanghai*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*,



(Note: read the literature of film noir in: [Crime Novels](#) --JD) and more. These films were really the soundtrack for this novel, and when I look back I see how they color every scene.

JD: How do you switch gears between YA and adult fiction?

NRS: I used to write only adult fiction, but switching gears to YA was far easier than I expected-and felt so natural. For me it's two things: Being true to the voice, and the point from which the story is being told. If I'm writing an adult character, I'm writing an adult story. If I'm writing a teenager, it's likely I'm writing YA. I always write in first person-it's my favorite voice to try to capture as a writer, and also my favorite voice to read-so it's my characters who decide what I'm writing more than I do.

But there's more to it than the voice. For me, when I'm writing for adults I feel more removed-I tend to write those stories as if looking back from a distance. I think I could set out to write the same coming-of-age story about the same girl, but if I decided to write it as an adult story it would have a far different flavor than writing it as YA.

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Dani Noir, for example—which is technically tween, not YA—was so in the moment, it came out in present tense. There's no sense of the future, no perspective, and I think that speaks to my character more than anything else. You watch her make her mistakes as she makes them; only later does she gather any wisdom about what she's done.

Right now, I'm still all about writing in the moment. The novel I'm in the midst of writing, called *Imaginary Girls*, is YA and it feels so alive, so exhilarating to put down on the page, that sometimes I think I'll never go back to writing adult fiction. Not to mention that the YA community is so phenomenal, I can't imagine living without it. So we'll see. I'm happy here, so I think I'll keep my gears where they are for a while.

JD: How does your process differ when writing long form vs. short form?

NRS: When I'm writing a short story, I write the opening paragraph or at most the first few pages and then I skip forward and write the final scene. Only after the end is down do I go back to page 1. My challenge is how to connect the dots and get myself to my end point realistically and without too many diversions. I'm very aware of the limited space, so I have to cut down the moments to only the essentials. Writing a short story, a solid and satisfying short story, is a great feat and I'm still far from reaching it. I think of Alice Munro's stories, how she can recount an entire life—no pieces missing—all in a handful of pages. Of course, that's very intimidating, but why not aspire to great things?

When I'm writing a novel, I feel like there's breathing room. And as a writer who tends to write long anyway, I think I'm more suited to novels. I'm not concerned with my stage time when I'm writing a novel... I just let myself write and cut later. I avoid focusing on word count or page count until after the first draft is all out—no point stressing over it early on. I also use an outline when I'm writing novels; I never outline short stories. They feel like very different animals to me.

JD: When do you know that one of your short stories is fully "cooked"?

NRS: I could keep cooking my stories until I burn them to bits, if you want the honest truth. I'm a serial reviser. Nothing ever feels done to me, not even when it's in print. (I've been known to do a reading of a published short story and tinker with the words as I read it aloud from the podium, and I know I'm not the only writer to do that.) So I can't say that any story I've ever written is fully cooked. But if I can read one of my stories straight through without cringing, or stopping to redo a paragraph, then I'm willing to send it out on submission and see what an editor thinks.

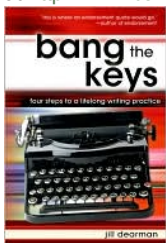
JD: You've blogged a lot about distraction issues. Any wisdom to share with our readers?

NRS: I have terrible habits and distracting myself while writing is one of the worst. I blame the Internet. No, that's not fair—I blame myself and how I use the Internet. You've actually caught me the week I had to take drastic measures and make a vow to remove myself from social-networking sites like Twitter and Facebook. My manuscript is due in a mere few months, and I wanted to start off this month with renewed focus. I have to tell you: This week without tweeting and Facebooking has given me a lot of pages, pages I'm really excited about. When this week is over, I need to be sure I use social-networking sites responsibly, like a grown-up. In other words, I absolutely should not be logged on to Twitter when I'm writing.

So that's my wisdom: Drastic measures are sometimes needed when a deadline is on the horizon. And, don't worry, the Internet will still be there when you get back. At least I hope it will... I'm off Twitter and Facebook till tomorrow, so I guess I'll find out!

For more on Nova: <http://www.novaren.com> and for tips on writing please go to the salone at <http://www.bangthekeys.com> and check out my new book,

[Bang the Keys](http://www.bangthekeys.com). Until then, see you at the movies!



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by [BLOGGER Ellen\\_Scordato](#) on 11-18-2009 03:24 PM

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heard Nova Ren at a reading at Books of Wonder in NYC - really great stuff. I'm a fan of YA, too, and I appreciate the insight about how the pov of much YA can be so vivid, so 'in the moment' that it's totally refreshing.

I just love this book, and I thank it for making me watch Gilda. Before I read the novel, Gilda was on On Demand cable and so I checked it out, for the first time. Fabulous! And even my cat couldn't take his eyes off the screen.

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by [BLOGGER Jill\\_Dearman](#) on 11-19-2009 08:05 AM

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One of the best films of all time! Next on your list, I hope, will be Rita H in "The Lady From Shanghai." Have a feeling Dani Noir will spark a whole wave of young noir fans.

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