

Interview with a Barefoot Writer: Jennifer L. Armentrout

By Mindy McHorse

"I keep writing. As an aspiring author, that's what you have to do, too. You can't let any negativity get to you. You have to keep trying, and, most importantly, keep writing."

— #1 New York Times & International Best-Selling Author, Jennifer L. Armentrout



Jennifer L. Armentrout

A common goal for many Barefoot Writers is to someday publish a book, so this month, we turn to a seasoned novelist for advice and inspiration.

Meet American novelist Jennifer L. Armentrout, who has published over 20 books since 2011 and recently earned the title #1 Best-Selling Author for both The New York Times and USA Today. Though her writing success doesn't stop there — it was just announced that Jennifer's Young Adult (YA) Covenant Series is in the process of being adapted for television by Herrick Entertainment, and her Young Adult novel Obsidian has been optioned for a major motion picture by Sierra Pictures.

Along with Young Adult novels, Jennifer writes New Adult (NA) and adult romance under the pen name J. Lynn. She carries the distinction of being a "hybrid" author, having both self-published and signed deals with major publishing houses. Her most recent book deal with HarperCollins landed in the high six-figure range.

It's clear that Jennifer's readers adore her. All her novels rank between four and five stars on Amazon's rating system. Her Twitter followers are about to break the 30K mark, and she boasts over 57,000 "Likes" on her author Facebook page.

When she's not working on a novel, she likes to read, work out, and watch zombie movies. Jennifer lives in West Virginia with her husband and their two dogs, Diesel and Loki. Enjoy the pointers she shares for aspiring novelists, including how to become an author and why social media is such a powerful tool for writers.

You've said your dream to be an author started in high school, in freshman algebra class ... what's the rest of the story?

Yes, and that explains my dismal grades in math! Even though I always loved to write, I didn't pursue writing in college. I majored in psychology and worked for a few years in the field before realizing it really wasn't for me. But it wasn't until 2007 that I decided to write seriously, and it was then when I wrote Half-Blood. I basically decided it was time to follow my dream and really do something I enjoy.



Do you network with other authors?

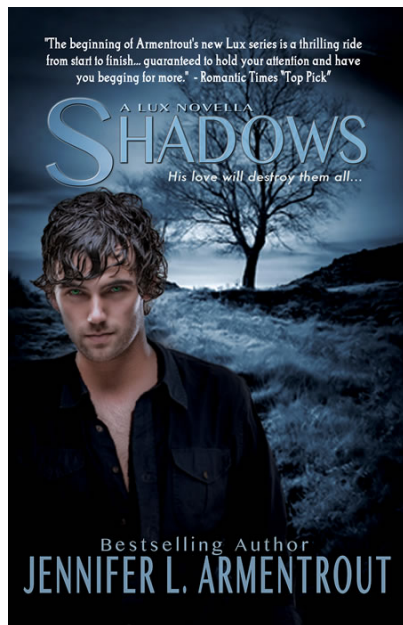
I do a lot of book tours, with signings at bookstores and conferences. Every signing or event with other authors could be considered networking, but I don't tend to look at meeting another author in that way. I think of it as forming a friendship with someone who is in the same profession.

What would you say is the biggest benefit to those connections?

It's great to be friends with other authors because it gives me a chance to work through ideas or discuss certain aspects of publishing with someone who may understand the situation differently than someone who isn't an author.

You've mentioned the idea for the "Wait for You" series came to you in the shower. What about the rest of your ideas — where do they come from?

The fact that I came up with the idea for Wait for You in the shower has become a running joke with my agent. But most of my ideas are just as random as when I came up with the idea for Wait for You. As a matter of fact, most of my ideas come when I'm doing everyday things. I've also come up with ideas when I was walking through Target, working out, or even riding on a train. I think I'm always subconsciously looking for new ideas, so they pop into my head at strange times.



You chose to use the pseudonym J. Lynn for your New Adult books and your adult romances. Are you glad you did it?

In retrospect, I would probably just use my real name for all of my books to avoid any confusion. I chose to use J. Lynn to differentiate between my YA, NA, and adult books because the content in my NA and adult books might not be appropriate for my YA readers. However, all of my books have both names on them, so I don't think that it makes a big difference at this point.

You're called a hybrid author since you've both self-published and published with some of the big publishing houses. Do you prefer one option over the other?

Like with everything, there are both good and bad aspects to both options. I think that working with a publisher can be great because a publisher is going to have a lot of resources available to an author. The publisher is going to get behind your book and help with promotion, etc. This can be a little harder with self-publishing. But, that being said, you can definitely get your book out there when you self-publish even without the backing from a publisher. You also have control of all aspects of the book including editing, covers, and promotion. I think it really depends on the book to determine which method will work.

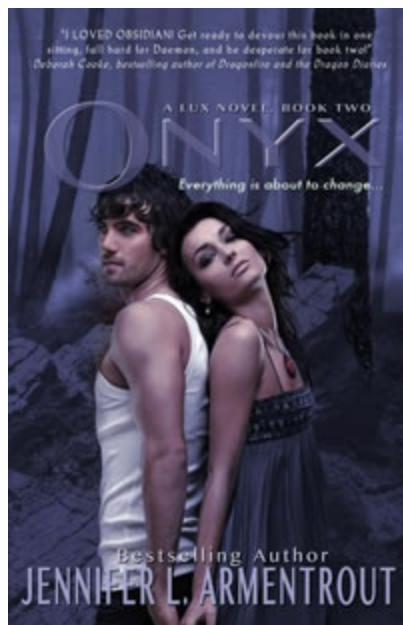
When Wait for You hit #1 on The New York Times and USA Today best-seller's lists, how did you celebrate?

I love handbags, so I bought myself a really nice one to celebrate. It gave me a good excuse to get a new one.

And has the recognition of being a best-selling author prompted any changes in your writing process or goals?

I wouldn't say that it's changed my writing process, though I feel a little more pressure to write another book that will hit a list. However, I try not to think about it when I'm writing because I don't want it to affect the story. I want my stories to flow naturally, and if I'm trying to write what I think needs to be written to hit a list or sell more books, then the story will come across as forced and won't be well-received anyway. It would be a cycle that wouldn't work.





What's your advice to aspiring authors?

Write every day, even if it's just 100 words a day.

What about self-confidence? What does it take to be brave enough to put your work "out there"?

It's difficult to put yourself out there because the publishing world can be hard on your ego. You really do have to learn to hear "no" a lot, and you also have to take a lot of criticism. But, at some point, you just have to give it a shot or your stories won't get out there into the hands of readers. I was rejected a lot before I actually received a "yes" — well over a hundred times, actually. And even once you're published, you can still get rejection in the form of books being

turned down (Wait for You was rejected). Or you might not get invited to certain events, etc. I keep writing, though. As an aspiring author, that's what you have to do, too. You can't let any negativity get to you. You have to keep trying, and, most importantly, keep writing.

What's the hardest part about writing for you?

Writing the fight scenes in my novels is the hardest part of a book for me. It's tough because I have to imagine the entire action sequence to make sure that the moves are actually possible. I don't want to write a scene that would be physically impossible.

And what's the easiest part of writing?

The easiest part about writing is probably the banter. I love to write the dialogue that includes some back and forth between characters and it comes naturally to me because I tend to be sarcastic.

Where do you do your best writing? In a dedicated office? A café?

I've been trying to work in my office more, but I prefer to write in my living room with the TV turned on. I can't write if someone is in the room with me, even if we aren't talking, and I have to have some type of background noise.

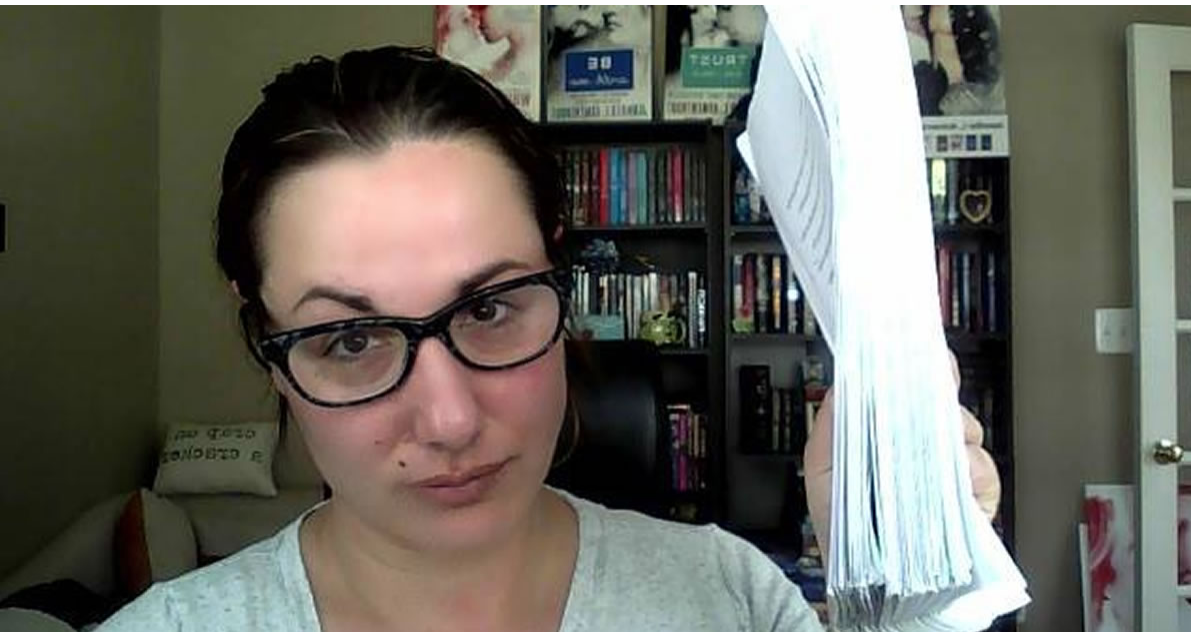


What's one thing about you no one knows?

I've never eaten apple pie.

We'll have to remedy that! Now tell us, how do you organize your writing projects?

I'm not organized when it comes to writing. I don't outline or plot. I come up with a basic idea and characters, then I sit down and start writing. The entire process is extremely unorganized when I think about it. I always tell myself when I'm writing a book that I'm going to plot the next one, but I don't ever actually do it.



What do you do to take advantage of the freedom that comes with essentially being your own boss?

There's some freedom with being an author, but there are so many people and considerations involved in the publishing process that I don't have as much control over my time as you might think because of deadlines, edits, events, and signings, etc. I do enjoy the freedom of working from home without a set schedule every day, but I still spend most of the day writing.

What's your advice to aspiring writers on how to build an author platform?

I think that social media is an important part of building an author platform. I would suggest that aspiring writers start to be active on social media even before they've sold a book, or if they've already sold a book, then I would suggest becoming active on social media immediately. It's important to look at social media as more than just a place to talk about your books, but as a way to build relationships with readers.

This interview was previously published in the May, 2014 issue of *Barefoot Writer*. To read more interviews from fellow Barefoot Writers be sure to check out [The Barefoot Writer's Club](#).

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