

Romantic heroes grace novel covers, dreams

Early Sunday I was lost in Omaha, waiting for my romance hero to rescue me, after my friend had accidentally left me behind.

So at 2 a.m., alone and careless in front of an empty parking garage, I reflected on what I had learned over spring break about romance writing and heroes.

My research had started with a phone interview with Tye Damon, a New York romance cover model and spokesman for Zebra Books. Damon was scheduled to speak at the second annual University of Nebraska at Omaha Romance Writers and Readers Conference on March 25-26.

As a reporter, I was curious about male models and their lifestyles. As a romance writer, I was eager to learn more about making fictional heroes come alive for my readers.

Damon didn't disappoint. He was candid about modeling, and he shared some sizzling publishing tips and insight into romance heroes.

Besides writing adventure romances, Damon models for a new line of romance books.

That's where "A Man's Touch" comes in. "A Man's Touch" is a line of romance books written from a man's point of view instead of the heroine's. The first book comes out in August, with Damon on the front and back cover.

Another book he is writing is nonfiction — "Romance and the Romantic Hero," he said. The book includes self-help tips, romantic tips, pictures and exercises.

"Plus, the book profiles why cover models are becoming so popular in the '90s," Damon said.

But jumping from the cover of paperbacks into real life has its drawbacks.

"I love being around the women, and I don't mind the autographs, but sometimes it can get to you... especially when women follow you into the bathroom," he said.

Damon was scheduled to appear at the Crossroads Mall in Omaha Thursday night for a pre-conference autograph signing party. Unfortunately, he canceled because of a family emergency.

But in front of the Read All About It bookstore on the raised platform were four other "heroes" autographing pictures and smiling at the women gawking at them from a safe distance.

Three of them, wearing blue jeans and sleeveless cutoff denim shirts, made Arnold Schwarzenegger look like Opie on "The Andy



Sandy Summers/DN

Russ "Savage" Guerrero, former Chippendale model, works as a romance-novel cover model. Besides being a freelance model, Guerrero performs singing telegrams and works for a children's newspaper. In 1995, Guerrero will appear on the cover of the Avon Romance "Lady of Summer" by Emma Merritt.

Griffith Show."

The Three Huskateers were none other than Kris, Kurt and Jim Bartling, hog farmers from Unadilla, destined to adorn the covers of fitness magazines and romance novels.

Kris and Kurt said they had interrupted their University of Nebraska-Lincoln education to join older brother Jim in New York.

Since last year, the Nebraska "triplets" have successfully harvested a living cultivating the look of the blue-eyed Midwest farmer with a strong cleft chin and long blond hair. Their hard bodies appear all over the country on Hallmark cards, fitness magazines, TV shows, comics and book covers.

"With the three of us together, very few

women have the guts to walk up and talk to us," Jim said. "Women who are confident do, but the introverts will look at us and act like they don't even see you."

While romance modeling may be just another notch in the Bartling brothers' weight-train-

See **MODEL** on 10

Christian band rocks, talks of relationships with Jesus



Concert review

"I hate racism," Smith said. "It sucks." McKeehan said, "God doesn't judge on the color of skin. He sees the heart, not the skin color."

The group got up close and personal with fans, sitting on the edge of the stage for a set of soulful acoustics.

A remake of U2's "40" drew roars with a gravelly Smith solo.

The band took advantage of the relative calm to share some personal stories and convictions.

McKeehan told about the band shooting the video for "The Hard Way" in a maximum-security prison.

He said the experience taught them all how much they had in common with the people they met behind the bars.

"We three guys make mistakes. We don't deserve the stage. We stumble and fall all the time.

"The beauty of stumbling and falling is this ... at least you realize you don't have it all together. God didn't say we'd never stumble and fall; he just said he'd be there to pick up the pieces."

The mood continued as McKeehan wrapped up the concert.

"Our generation is a generation with a lot of problems. Some problems we inherited ... other problems we created on our own.

"Either way we're looking for answers, a way out of our problems. We have found a permanent answer — that permanent answer is found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

"He will set you free at last; you won't be searching anymore."



Courtesy of Creative Artists Agency

From left, Kevin Smith, Toby McKeehan and Michael Tait form the rap/soul/rock trio DC Talk.

Lyrics from "I Don't Want It" urge people to wait until they are married to have sex — "Don't give it up 'til ya tie the knot."
"Socially Acceptable" blames secular humanism and a society out of whack for making things that used to be wrong, right. The interracial group also takes a strong stand against racism.

— Adeana Leftin