

**EVENT TITLE:** Bad to the Bone? Crafting Deviant Characters

**EVENT DESCRIPTION:**

In criminal justice, the opposite of deviance is conformity. By definition, then, all activism is a deviant act. Still, predators are deviants too. How does this rich and unpredictable concept enliven our work? What can we learn from inhabiting a deviant's mind? What does deviance mean when law enforcers crack down on activists and marginalized people? Four multi-genre authors discuss how and why they develop deviant characters, from fierce sympathetic LGBTQ+ rule breakers to heinous villains.

**EVENT CATEGORY:** Multiple Literary Genres Craft & Criticism

**EVENT ORGANIZER & MODERATOR:**

**Event Moderator: Jessamyn Violet**

Jessamyn Violet is an author and musician based in Venice Beach. Originally from Boston, she holds a BFA from Emerson College and an MFA from California College of the Arts. Her novels *Secret Rules to Being a Rockstar* and forthcoming *Venice Peach* both feature artistic characters exploring and experimenting with deviant behavior.

**EVENT PARTICIPANTS:**

**Francesca Lia Block:** Francesca Lia Block, M.F.A., is the author of more than twenty-five books of fiction, non-fiction, short stories and poetry, and has written screenplay adaptations of her work. She received the Spectrum Award, the Phoenix Award, the ALA Rainbow Award and the 2005 Margaret A. Edwards Lifetime Achievement Award, as well as other citations from the American Library Association and from the New York Times Book Review, School Library Journal and Publisher's Weekly. In addition to writing, Francesca is a beloved and devoted teacher. She was named Writer-in-Residence at Pasadena City College in 2014 and in 2018-19 became a Visiting Assistant Professor in Creative Writing at the University of Redlands where she was a finalist for Professor of the Year award.

**Maurice Carlos Ruffin:** Maurice Carlos Ruffin is the author of National Bestseller, *THE AMERICAN DAUGHTERS*, a New York Times Editor's Choice published by One World Random House. Ruffin is the winner of several literary prizes, including the Iowa Review Award in fiction and the William Faulkner–William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition Award for Novel-in-Progress. His work has appeared in the New York Times, the LA Times, the Oxford American, Garden & Gun, Kenyon Review, and *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America*. A New Orleans native, Ruffin is a tenured associate professor of Creative Writing at Louisiana State University, and the 2020-2021 John and Renee Grisham Writer-in-Residence at the University of Mississippi.

**K. "Kayla" Ancrum:** K. Ancrum, is an author of award winning contemporary YA notably *THE WICKER KING*, *DARLING* and the critically acclaimed *ICARUS*. She is a recipient of the Junior Library Guild Gold Standard and received additional accolade from School Library Journal, Publisher's Weekly and Booklist.

**Sophia Babai:** Sophia Babai is an award-winning writer, editor, and creativity coach. Her writing deals with diaspora, the construction and deconstruction of identity, and ghosts. She has been published in the award-winning anthology *BODY TALK: 37 Voices Explore Our Radical Autonomy* as well as *The New York Times*, *Thrive Global*, *Autostraddle*, and *Disability in Kidlit*. Her clients have written multiple #1 *New York Times* bestsellers and have won the Astounding Award for Best New Writer, the Washington State Book Award, the Nebula Award, the World Fantasy Award, and more.

## **OPENING REMARKS AND HOUSEKEEPING ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Welcome, and thank you all for attending “Bad to the Bone? Crafting Deviant Characters” – a seminar on the importance of creating deviant characters, and effectively bringing them to life. As Frank Zappa once said, “Without deviance from normality, there can be no progress.” And there has perhaps never been a more important time to be progressive in our work.

To be deviant is to be stronger than average, to be able to forge your own way, against staggering odds as well as the status quo. Whether for good or for bad, it is always important to pay attention to, and usually impressive to watch. Those who are deviant can demonstrate that just because a situation looks bleak does not mean that it is impossible. This is exactly the type of trailblazing inspiration that can save lives by showing people there can be ways forward that no one has ever seen before.

My name is Jessamyn Violet and I’m truly honored to be your moderator for this panel. As both an author and musician originally from the East Coast, the elevation of deviant voices will always be top priority to me. I grew up in a stifling, severely homogenous New England environment, one in which it was especially isolating and even dangerous to be strange. If not for the words, works and courage of deviant artists, characters and writers of the time—and some of them are in this room right now, I’m especially thrilled to be able to say—my own life would have had a much different plotline. Now, more than ever, we must spotlight and elevate those who have the ability to be fearlessly unique, who aren’t afraid to stand tall in their own fiercely unconventional ways. And that is why I’m especially excited that we are all here to talk with some incredible writers who have been and intend on continuing to do just that: Kayla Ancrum, Maurice Carlos Ruffin, Sophia Babai, and Francesca Lia Block. Let’s get started by hearing introductions from each of you and a word about what deviance means to you in your own life and work.

## **PARTICIPANT INITIAL REMARKS:**

**Francesca Lia Block:** I have written for both adult and YA readers in the past and now focus entirely on adult fiction. My first book came out in 1989 and I’ve published over 30 books (fiction, nonfiction, poetry) since then. I am interested in telling compelling stories that explore the darkness, including the definition of darkness. When I was writing some YA books in the 90s, my protagonists were often deemed “deviant” by some critics because they strayed from the “norm.” Meaning I had a lot of LGBTQ+ characters, punks, etc. I did not consider these characters deviant because they were the norm in my life. Now LGBTQ+ characters have gained much acceptance, though not, in my opinion, enough. In my current adult work, like *House of Hearts*, *Beyond the Pale Motel*

and *The Elementals*, I define my deviant antagonists as wounded people who intentionally harm others for their own sake/satisfaction, and my protagonists as complicated but loving (and also wounded) characters who struggle internally with their own darkness and live lifestyles that may deviate from what some people consider the norm.

**Maurice Carlos Ruffin:** I write for teens and above. I could imagine reading my own books when I was 15 but also enjoying them as an adult. I've been publishing stories and articles since high school, but publishing books since 2019. My third book is out now. For me, deviancy is about how society doesn't protect those who are not favored. Whether it's a queer Black girl in slavery times or an adult male lawyer who struggles to conform to the country's racial expectations, my characters are outsiders searching for community. I hope readers and audiences will learn to pay more attention, be less judgmental, and support all human beings in our journey toward self actualization. And I work to hold myself up to that standard.

**K. Ancrum:** I write speculative fiction for young adults. I debuted in 2017 at the beginning of the commercial uptick in LGBTQ+ content in the YA English language markets. I tend to approach deviance as the sociological matrix of oppression within which my work exists. In regard to deviance as a precursor to criminality, I consider my work as a piece of media supporting something that has in the past been considered criminal behavior. Creating queer content with the purpose of longevity—in a society that vacillates on whether marginalized identities and expressions of sexual and romantic behavior are deviant or not—requires a firm understanding of your work as it exists in times of feast or famine. Such that, in the future, when a child in a much colder and hungrier world than we're in now, stumbles upon my work, the environments that I create showcasing "deviance" will be an expression of a human domesticity so tender and heartfelt that it defies the term. I believe my job is to make art to exist as food for survival.

**Sophia Babai:** I write literary fantasy for adults and teens, and have been publishing primarily short fiction since 2010. As a therapist who has worked primarily with LGBTQ+ youth and refugees, as well as a queer person and child of refugees myself, I am fascinated by the endless human need to create "norms" and narratives that almost no one fits into, and the way some deviations are celebrated while others are punished. Most writers seek to challenge these norms; and yet, in the process, we often crystallize them. My hope is that we can shift from seeing deviance as a deliberate moral statement and start recognizing it as the human condition. Instead of asking, "why isn't this person normal?", I hope we begin to ask "how and why did we decide what qualifies as normal in the first place?"

## **MODERATOR QUESTIONS**

1. **What is the context in which deviancy appears throughout the full body of your work? Characters, social scenarios, etc?**

2. **When designing deviant characters or social situations, are you most inspired by the exploration of counter/outsider culture itself, or is your interest in deviancy dependent on whichever theme or plot you're currently exploring in each book?**
3. **When constructing a Deviant character (in Fiction or Nonfiction), how important is it for the reader to sympathize/empathize with their deviant actions? How do you go about achieving reader empathy or reader repulsion, as fits your purpose?**
4. **Within your stories, how do you prefer to write the surrounding characters reacting to your deviant character or situation. Is the nature of deviancy an accepted "fact of life" within your work or treated as aberration?**
5. **Do you know how your audiences tend to react to your deviant characters? Do you feel they understand what you are trying to do with your work?**
6. **Have you ever seen yourself differently as a result of embodying a Deviant's mind or creating a villainous character? How do your own ethics guide your character creation?**
7. **What do you feel your work (in particular) brings to the greater whole of your chosen genre?**
8. **What importance do you believe deviance in art brings to our understanding of society and our understanding of ourselves?**
9. **Who is your favorite deviant character from other media and why**
10. **Why do you enjoy deviant characters?**

## QUESTION ANSWERS

### K. Ancrum

**What is the context in which deviancy appears throughout the full body of your work? Characters, social scenarios, etc?**

- Books Discussed: [The Wicker King](#), [Icarus](#), [Hollis Brown](#).
- [Doylist vs Watsonian Social Deviancy](#) (My work as Doylist, but not Watsonianly deviant)
- [K. Ancrum books as Parable and what that means under this context.](#)  
(Preservation and documentation of art by and for groups considered socially deviant) \*mention [John Waters](#)

**When designing deviant characters or social situations, are you most inspired by the exploration of counter/outsider culture itself, or is your interest in deviancy dependent on whichever theme or plot you're currently exploring in each book?**  
(purpose: tell why you like writing deviant characters and where your intentionality kicks in while writing them)? **Do you do any psychological research on these deviant characters before writing them?**

- [Answer: Outsider culture](#)
- [Preservation of socially deviant groups as radical act](#)
- [Yes I do stringent research: primary resource, academic source,](#)

**When constructing a Deviant character (in Fiction or Nonfiction), how important is it for the reader to sympathize/empathize with their deviant actions? How do you**

**go about achieving reader empathy or reader repulsion, as fits your purpose?** (purpose: discuss the “are you a bad person because you write deviancy” early in the panel so we can get that out of the way before reaching the deeper questions)

- Unimportant, under the context of my work specifically.
- Love as a primary motivator: love from the author to the audience, love as the impetus for the actions of the characters.
- Earnestness and tenderness as a delivery system for moral lesson. \*mention A Wrinkle In Time

**Within your stories, how do you prefer to write the surrounding characters reacting to your deviant character or situation. Is the nature of deviancy an accepted “fact of life” within your work or treated as aberration?**

- Fact of Life
- Discuss: Issue Books, the transitionary era of LGBTQ+ YA fiction and where my work lands due to the year of my debut.
- Aberration presented as unrelated to the qualities that make the characters socially deviant within our framework. Badness as what you *do* not what you *are*.

**Do you know how your audiences tend to react to your deviant characters? Do you feel they understand what you are trying to do with your work?** (purpose: A lot of writers get anxious about their readers feeling some type of way about their work and hearing from us about what its like on the other side will be really helpful to them)

- Variable! Teens get it, Educators get it, Critics get it. Adults reading teen YA and self-inserting for their own entertainment sometimes tend to struggle.
- Ideological purity and rigidity: the drawbacks and the sacrifices of holding fast to my self-imposed dogma

**Have you ever seen yourself differently as a result of embodying a Deviant’s mind or creating a villainous character? How do your own ethics guide your character creation?** (purpose: Only when the audience has been made to understand the answers to the questions above, can we talk about our feelings about ourselves and our own ethics within a now constructive environment, instead of defensively.)

- Under the context of my work: No.
- My own ethics do guide my character creation.

**What do you feel your work (in particular) brings to the greater whole of your chosen genre?** (purpose: People at this point should be making purchasing decisions so this question should kind of round out and remind them of what they learned in the first question. What kind of books we write and who our main audience seems to be.)

- Competitors vs Collogues: My relationship with other authors writing LGBTQ+ content. Ex: My belief that we’re all on the same team, all necessary and our wins are shared.
- Book Recommendations for people who might be seeking something similar to my work, but different tonally.

**What importance do you believe deviance in art brings to our understanding of society and our understanding of ourselves?** (purpose: big picture question. Why are we all here at this panel? Inspiration to writers who want to write deviant characters.)

- Necessary documentation of marginalized groups, based on the political situation  
\*mention Harlem Renaissance and Pre-Hayes Code Film
- Per the work of my peers: Healthy space for internal speculation.

**Who is your favorite deviant character from other media and why?** (purpose: decompression from potential heavy answers, a fun “get to know you question”)

- Tony Stonem from UK Skins.
- Discuss: Formative Media
- Discuss: What it is to be struggling in a developmental stage.

**What do you enjoy most about writing deviant characters?** (Purpose: decompression, get to know you)

- Reader decompression: How each category of my target audience is processing what I’ve chosen to write about.
- The delicious vanity of being Seen.

#### **Post Panel Questions:**

**Can you tell us something about your next writing project?**

- Hollis Brown: Horror Romance about Possession.

**For all of the attendees who enjoyed this panel, which of the books from your backlist should they start with?** (I have never attended a panel where someone didn’t want to know this at the end)

- The Wicker King, Icarus, Hollis Brown

## Sophia Babai

**Opening Statement:** I write literary fantasy for adults and teens, and have been publishing primarily short fiction since 2010. As a therapist who has worked primarily with LGBTQ+ youth and refugees, as well as a queer person and child of refugees myself, I am fascinated by the endless human need to create "norms" and narratives that almost no one fits into, and the way some deviations are celebrated while others are punished. Most writers seek to challenge these norms; and yet, in the process, we often crystallize them. My hope is that we can shift from seeing deviance as a deliberate moral statement and start recognizing it as the human condition. Instead of asking, "why isn't this person normal?", I hope we begin to ask "how and why did we decide what qualifies as normal in the first place?"

**What is the context in which deviancy appears throughout the full body of your work? Characters, social scenarios, etc?**

- Frequently write about criminals, social outcasts, as well as people who are marginalized in various ways — disabled, queer, biracial, religious minorities etc

**When designing deviant characters or social situations, are you most inspired by the exploration of counter/outside culture itself, or is your interest in deviancy dependent on whichever theme or plot you're currently exploring in each book?** (purpose: tell why you like writing deviant characters and where your intentionality kicks in while writing them)? **Do you do any psychological research on these deviant characters before writing them?**

- The entire idea of writing within the narrow band of what we consider non-deviant feels deeply false – I've never fit into that hegemony and frankly I wouldn't know how to write it
- Yes, I do stringent reader

**When constructing a Deviant character (in Fiction or Nonfiction), how important is it for the reader to sympathize/empathize with their deviant actions? How do you go about achieving reader empathy or reader repulsion, as fits your purpose?** (purpose: discuss the "are you a bad person because you write deviancy" early in the panel so we can get that out of the way before reaching the deeper questions)

- Sympathize/empathize no — understand yes.
- My interest is not necessarily in likable or moral characters but it is in writing complex and believable characters
- Small human details — people who deviate are often seen as a shapeless haze, "criminals," "queers," etc. rather than as whole humans

**Within your stories, how do you prefer to write the surrounding characters reacting to your deviant character or situation. Is the nature of deviancy an accepted "fact of life" within your work or treated as aberration?**

- A range of responses — again the focus is on complexity, so the same character will receive sympathy from some, disgust from others, tokenization from yet more
- I want to cast a mirror to our cultural obsession with the idea of “normal” — often the reaction to deviant characters is more telling than the deviance itself
- Fact of Life

**Do you know how your audiences tend to react to your deviant characters? Do you feel they understand what you are trying to do with your work?** (purpose: A lot of writers get anxious about their readers feeling some type of way about their work and hearing from us about what its like on the other side will be really helpful to them)

- A lot of excitement, a lot of “thank you for seeing me”
- Anxiety especially on the part of marginalized communities, e.g. “you’ll make them think all of us do xyz”

**Have you ever seen yourself differently as a result of embodying a Deviant’s mind or creating a villainous character? How do your own ethics guide your character creation?** (purpose: Only when the audience has been made to understand the answers to the questions above, can we talk about our feelings about ourselves and our own ethics within a now constructive environment, instead of defensively.)

- Yes, a deeper understanding of my own darkness and what I do and don’t consider just

**What do you feel your work (in particular) brings to the greater whole of your chosen genre?** (purpose: People at this point should be making purchasing decisions so this question should kind of round out and remind them of what they learned in the first question. What kind of books we write and who our main audience seems to be.)

- Different, narrower perspectives
- Pushing against hegemony especially in re: depiction of Muslim characters

**What importance do you believe deviance in art brings to our understanding of society and our understanding of ourselves?** (purpose: big picture question. Why are we all here at this panel? Inspiration to writers who want to write deviant characters.)

- Helps us understand our own judgements and assumptions
- Helps us see outside of boxes, and to notice those boxes exist at all

**Who is your favorite deviant character from other media and why?** (purpose: decompression from potential heavy answers, a fun “get to know you question”)

- Armand from television Interview with The Vampire
- ideas of morality, villain vs. victim and the overlap, the delight of seeing masks fall away

**What do you enjoy most about writing deviant characters?** (Purpose: decompression, get to know you)

- Writing normative characters sounds boring and constrained
- The world is strange and complicated and fiction should be too

**Post Panel Questions:**

**Can you tell us something about your next writing project?**

- When They Come For Us: a literary fantasy about a fraudulent medium and her man-eating ghost, explores the compression and commercialization of identity in the age of social media.

**For all of the attendees who enjoyed this panel, which of the books from your backlist should they start with?** (I have never attended a panel where someone didn't want to know this at the end)

- "Trigger Warning" in the anthology BODY TALK, written under the pen name Nat Razi
- "What You Think a Woman Looks Like" in Autostraddle magazine, written under the pen name Nat Razi

## Francesca Lia Block

- 1. What is the context in which deviancy appears throughout the full body of your work? Characters, social scenarios, etc?** (purpose: Tell us about your books and why you were chosen for this panel) I have many LGBTQ+ characters in my work, and I don't consider them deviant. I do also write about characters who engage in threesomes, drug and alcohol abuse etc., but I don't define this as deviance either although the drug and alcohol use can of course become harmful to the character and their loved ones. I consider substance use a form of "normal," if not always healthy, human coping in a difficult world. However, I also write about racism, sexism, homophobia, sexual abuse, incest, violence. To me this is "deviance" from what I consider should be the "norm" of human kindness.
- 2. When designing deviant characters or social situations, are you most inspired by the exploration of counter/outsider culture itself, or is your interest in deviancy dependent on whichever theme or plot you're currently exploring in each book?** (purpose: tell why you like writing deviant characters and where your intentionality kicks in while writing them) As mentioned, my friends and I, our beliefs, our lifestyles, may be considered "deviant" or "counter culture" but I consider this just "culture" since it is my world. Sometimes in my work the real "deviancy" (read: antagonism) is shown through characters in opposition to the counterculture.
- 3. When constructing a Deviant character (in Fiction or Nonfiction), how important is it for the reader to sympathize/empathize with their deviant actions? How do you go about achieving reader empathy or reader repulsion, as fits your purpose?** (purpose: discuss the "are you a bad person because you write deviancy" early in the panel so we can get that out of the way before reaching the deeper questions) Again, my protagonists may be deviant from the norm but to me they are often heroic partly for that reason, especially in today's current climate and with the Right's definition of "normal." I don't expect the reader to empathize with the antagonists to a great extent, although I do want the antagonists to be dimensional. In terms of the writing craft of it all, I think characters with wounds, wants and clearly developed antagonists are more sympathetic. When we know the initial wound that motivates someone it is easier to understand, if not fully empathize, with them.
- 4. Within your stories, how do you prefer to write the surrounding characters reacting to your deviant character or situation. Is the nature of deviancy an accepted "fact of life" within your work or treated as aberration?** (purpose: bring up the Watsonian/Doylist perspective as it pertains to craft. How our world impacts or does not impact worldbuilding on a technical level, etc ) My counter culture protagonists are not written (from my "Doylist" view) as aberrations nor do they really think of themselves that way ("Watsonian") . My antagonists either represent the 'norm' and see the protagonists as aberrations or they are violent, more traditionally "deviant" characters (i.e. serial killers, murderers, child abusers) who attack the protagonists for other reasons.
- 5. Do you know how your audiences tend to react to your deviant characters? Do you feel they understand what you are trying to do with your work?** (purpose: A lot

of writers get anxious about their readers feeling some type of way about their work and hearing from us about what its like on the other side will be really helpful to them) In general, readers who understand my world view have found me. I am very grateful for this.

6. **Have you ever seen yourself differently as a result of embodying a Deviant's mind or creating a villainous character? How do your own ethics guide your character creation?** (purpose: Only when the audience has been made to understand the answers to the questions above, can we talk about our feelings about ourselves and our own ethics within a now constructive environment, instead of defensively.) I was once asked on a panel how I embodied the mind of a serial killer in *Beyond the Pale Motel*. This process can be painful and disturbing. I had to do a lot of gruesome research for this book and for *House of Hearts*. But the characters were essential to the story and ultimately were in service of discussing the topic of violence against women or externalizing violence against the self that can be caused by internalized hatred. My ethics do guide character creation in terms of how I define each character in my mind and try to represent them on the page. I think it's important to write complicated characters even if they are problematic. Ultimately, the same positive messages can be conveyed by a 'negative' character failing as by a 'positive' character succeeding.
7. **What do you feel your work (in particular) brings to the greater whole of your chosen genre?** (purpose: People at this point should be making purchasing decisions so this question should kind of round out and remind them of what they learned in the first question. What kind of books we write and who our main audience seems to be.) I try not to think too much about genre and just want to write captivating and compelling stories that express my beliefs about the world and hopefully engage and move and even, ultimately, console or comfort my readers.
8. **What importance do you believe deviance in art brings to our understanding of society and our understanding of ourselves?** ( purpose: big picture question. Why are we all here at this panel? Inspiration to writers who want to write deviant characters.) Again, I think it's important to question the definition of deviance and "normalcy" especially in today's world. For me, the central question may be: is it "normal" or "deviant" to be who one is when that doesn't harm others? I believe this is "normal." Is it "deviant" to want to harm others? I hope this is so. I want to live in that world. I'm afraid we are moving more and more into a different kind of world.
9. **Who is your favorite deviant character from other media and why?** (purpose: decompression from potential heavy answers, a fun "get to know you question"). Emma Bovary. Anna Karenina. The poems of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. The female protagonists in Shirley Jackson books. Flannery O'Connor's characters. I enjoyed reading about the protagonist in Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*. In film, the recent Joaquin Phoenix Joker movies. *Red Rooms* was horrific but powerful in its exploration of the mind of a woman obsessed with serial killers. I am interested in *Lolita* because though I don't like Humbert Humbert, Nabokov gets us to stick with him because 1. He shows his characters wound ,with the death of his first love when he was young, that helps us understand his hebephilia, and 2. The language itself seduces us to keep reading.
10. **Why do you enjoy deviant characters?** (Purpose: decompression, get to know you)

I like explorations of the darkness whether through the eyes of the light or the eyes of the darkness.

**Post Panel Questions:**

**Can you tell us something about your next writing project?** I am currently developing, with director Rebecca Thomas, a film based on *Dangerous Angels: The Weetzie Bat Books* and another based on *House of Hearts*.

For all of the attendees who enjoyed this panel, which of the books from your backlist should they start with? (I have never attended a panel where someone didn't want to know this at the end)

*House of Hearts* and *Dangerous Angels*

## Maurice Carlos Ruffin

1. **What is the context in which deviancy appears throughout the full body of your work? Characters, social scenarios, etc?** My first book *We Cast a Shadow* is partly inspired by Toni Morrison's *Sula*. My narrator is a self-hating Black southern lawyer who doesn't conform to the expectations of his community. My short story collection, *The Ones Who Don't Say They Love You*, features many queer protagonists as well as main characters who challenge race, class and relationship expectations. My latest, *The American Daughters*, deviates from common slave narratives by bringing to life a spy ring of women and girls who love each other more than white society hates them.
2. **When designing deviant characters or social situations, are you most inspired by the exploration of counter/outsider culture itself, or is your interest in deviancy dependent on whichever theme or plot you're currently exploring in each book? Do you do any psychological research on these deviant characters before writing them?** I'm most interested in how the pressures of society cause my characters to reveal their true selves. My research comes from life and the people I know or have been.
3. **When constructing a Deviant character (in Fiction or Nonfiction), how important is it for the reader to sympathize/empathize with their deviant actions? How do you go about achieving reader empathy or reader repulsion, as fits your purpose?** Most people are deviant in some way, but we're trained not to acknowledge that fact. My characters are interesting because they think and act with all the complexity of real people.
4. **Within your stories, how do you prefer to write the surrounding characters reacting to your deviant character or situation. Is the nature of deviancy an accepted "fact of life" within your work or treated as aberration?** It's a mix. My characters are often stealth until they're not. But sometimes we meet them as their full selves.
5. **Do you know how your audiences tend to react to your deviant characters? Do you feel they understand what you are trying to do with your work?** I understand that my readers appreciate the work. One reader wrote me a thank you note. He had top surgery and said that reading my stories helped him through a difficult time.
6. **Have you ever seen yourself differently as a result of embodying a Deviant's mind or creating a villainous character? How do your own ethics guide your character creation?** All the time. I don't write ethically perfect deviant characters. They do wrong and make mistakes. I have to put myself in their shoes to do this. That process changes me.
7. **What do you feel your work (in particular) brings to the greater whole of your chosen genre?** Nobody's writing New Orleans stories, but I am.
8. **What importance do you believe deviance in art brings to our understanding of society and our understanding of ourselves?** If we're going to survive this mess we find ourselves in, we need know our neighbors even as we stop minding their business.
9. **Who is your favorite deviant character from other media and why?** Evelyn from *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. She has all these expectations that limit her life but

she comes to realize that she contains multitudes. Really, that movie is about being a writer. How could I not love it?

10. **What do you enjoy most about writing deviant characters?** They're interesting and fun. Just like me.