



Vampire hunter sinks teeth into merchandising

By [Jay MacDonald](#) • Bankrate.com

Looking for fantasy adventure with a little bite? Sink your teeth into Laurell K. Hamilton's "Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter" series, the sexiest, scariest and funniest tales of undying (and undead) love ever to claw their way onto the bestseller lists.

In Hamilton's alternate reality, vampires, werewolves and assorted monsters have been granted equal rights by the U.S. Supreme Court. They live among us, running businesses, getting haircuts, sponsoring blood drives, just regular Joes.

Hamilton's plucky alter ego is your attractive girl-next-door, working two jobs to make ends meet: as an animator she raises the dead to solve inheritance disputes and preternatural crimes; as a badge-carrying vampire executioner she hunts down rogue neck-biters and destroys them.

Back in 1994 when the series began with "[Guilty Pleasures](#)," Blake insisted, "I don't date vampires. I kill them." In her 12th installment, "[Incubus Dreams](#)," she's not only the main squeeze of master vampire Jean-Claude but shape shifter Micah as well.

Hamilton learned the power of storytelling early on. Born in Heber Springs, Ark., she was raised by her grandmother in tiny Sims, Ind., (pop. 100) after her father abandoned her and her mother was killed in an auto accident. Her grandmother always had plenty of "bloody bones" stories from Arkansas to share with the wide-eyed Hamilton.

The fang queen repaid the favor in 2000 by launching a new series featuring Merry Gentry, a faerie princess private detective named after her grandmother. At 93, Laura Gentry claims she still reads all of her granddaughter's books.

Since her aptly named debut, Hamilton has gone from guilty paperback pleasure to hardbound bestseller. She and Jonathan, her husband of four years, run a St. Louis marketing company that spends much of its time generating merchandise around the Anita Blake series.

Bankrate.com checked in with Laurell Hamilton by phone at her home near St. Louis.

[excerpt]

Bankrate: You moved into merchandise in a big way the past couple years.

Laurell K. Hamilton: Yes. I'm usually the idea person. Darla, Jonathan and I are the creative team. None of us has a business background, so that has been very interesting. We try to do business with

people who are local. Our first T-shirt was a little rubber ducky with big blue eyes and fangs and it says "Jean-Claude's tub toy."

Bankrate: Are you a tough customer?

Laurell K. Hamilton: Well, artists are a good example. We've worked with some artists who don't make their deadlines. I don't care how good you are, if you want to hang in a museum that's fine, but if you want to do business with me, make your deadline. I'm an artist, writing is an art too, but I make my deadlines.

Bankrate: Do you enjoy the business side?

Laurell K. Hamilton: Yes, strangely enough I do. I enjoy the marketing and I'm good at marketing. I'm good at saying this will sell or that will sell. It's as simple as, would I want to wear it? If the answer is yes, then I find that a lot of people will agree. Just like with the books -- I write what I want to read. The original idea was just to get my name out there. Every person who wore my T-shirt or had a tote bag or a lunch box was a walking billboard. At first, we really didn't think it would make money; we just thought we would run it up the flagpole and try it. And then it caught on. The merchandising has really helped. People are really enjoying the T-shirts, the coffee mugs. They like being able to feel like they're a part of the work.