

The Secret Handshake for Writing a Successful Series

Michelle Grajkowski, Stephanie Rowe, Pat White

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages:

- To build readership
- To develop long-time relationships with characters
- Job security – a three book contract versus a one book

Disadvantages:

- Will readers hesitate to pick up book 3 or 4?
- Can you keep material fresh and interesting to you?

Ways to connect books:

A) Tied together through recurring protagonist: Stephanie Plum, Father Timothy (Mitford series), Jack Ryan

B) Tied together through what I call community, or world: Suz Brockmann's Navy Seals and Troubleshooters

C) Multi-author generated series

Key points when writing a series:

- EVERY BOOK IN YOUR SERIES MUST BE ABLE TO STAND ON ITS OWN!
- Make sure the rules you create in book 1 are those you can live with in later books
- Tricks to layering in your next book's protagonist:
 - introduce in chapter one; re-introduce in last chapter
 - use this character's POV
 - end the book with a story question involving this character
- Think Big! Map out your ENTIRE series character arcs, along with your individual book arcs
 - What's happening from the first book to the last that ties these people and this world together?

A) Returning Protagonist:

- Must love your character so much you want to come back over and over again.

- Secondary characters are strong, but supporting, not necessarily worthy of their own books.

Advantages and disadvantages:

- Branding is easier because you can call it the Stephanie Plum series, or the Troubleshooter series
- Again, you must really love your character to want to jump into her head over and over again.
- What will make you reader want to stick with Harry hero for five or six books?

B) Tied together through community/world

The world is very important. That is the one commonality that grounds your reader. CONSISTENCY is key. Make the reader feel instantly comfortable returning to a familiar place. Same with characters. What do they look like, how do they act? Your reader should know them as well as a BEST friend.

A word or two on...Secondary characters

- You must control them and also open the door for their own books, IF THAT IS YOUR PLAN. It's a tricky balance. If you don't plan to feature them in another book, you may not need their point of view.
- If you plan to feature them in the next book, you can introduce them in the last chapter of the current book with a pressing issue or challenge they'll need to deal with in the next book.

REMEMBER: Never bring in bits and pieces from other books' storylines, assuming that the reader is up to date.

C) Tied together through author-generated series

Again, being consistent with your world is key. Create a bible that you all refer to including definitions and photos. Read each other's work if you plan to use another author's character in your book.

Tools to help create a series:

Collaging – creating your world visually to help ground you.

The Magic Binder:

Notebook

Logline (high concept 25 word description of story)

One Page Synopsis

Character Expose

Locale

Timetable

Research and sources

Longer synopsis with turning points

Outline (if you use one)

Sticky notes

Fun Stuff!

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