

How to Write a Series: Master the Art of Sequential Fiction

By Holly Lisle

Intro

So you're crazy, too...

Series fiction is tough. If a novel is a marathon, then a series is Stu

Mittleman running a thousand miles in eleven days and 20 hours.

Crazy.

A cool kind of crazy. The kind where you're not alone, and people admire you if you succeed.

But crazy.

Welcome to the club.

Since you've already done four weeks of light theory and easy lifting, it's time to put some miles on your running shoes.

So this week, you're going to build your Story Core.

One important reminder. The lessons arrive once a week. **That doesn't mean you have to do everything in a lesson in one week.** Take your time, build carefully.

You're going to be living with what you build for a long time and a whole lotta miles.

Why you're writing the series

Concept 1

A series is not a novel.

If you plan a series, (as opposed to just writing a story until you stall, tacking on a cliffhanger ending, and picking up in a thing you call “book two,”) you do some real building beforehand.

Why?

So you don't burn out after writing a bunch of pages, tack on a cliffhanger ending, end the book in midair, and hope you don't piss off your readers so much that they won't pick up the next story.

If you plan a series, you plan the following things in advance:

- Why you're writing the series
- Why what you're writing matters to you (and why it will eventually matter to your perfect reader)
- What the big conflicts that drive the series will be
- And what KIND of characters will populate the series

What's the difference between a novel and a series?

A novel tells one or more stories in one volume. A series tells one story in multiple volumes, and a lot of shorter stories in individual volumes.

This is true of all series, including loosely linked stand-alone series.

Take the Robert Parker Spenser novels and the Lawrence Sanders Matt Scudder novels.

Both of these are loosely linked series of novels that can all stand alone. You can pick up any one of them in ANY order, and know what's going on without having read any other one. And if

you never read another one, you will have a complete experience.

Because this is true, you would think there was no bigger story.

But if you read either of these series from first book to last, you get so much more. You get characters that show up in early books, disappear for a book or ten, then reappear, having grown and changed (along with the author) in the meantime.

You get subtle story lines about the life of the main character, who also changes, ages, becomes more complex and more interesting because of these layers that are hidden.

Did the authors plan all those books in advance to create these beautifully constructed superstories that stretch across multiple volumes and years?

Not a chance.

The authors use good principles of series design, followed (either knowingly or intuitively) rules about the use of core elements, and because they did these two things, their series hang together with breathtaking beauty.

This week, you're going to start creating your series design, and you're going to make sure it includes the essential core elements that will keep it all together.

To do this you're going to build:

- An expanded series Sweet-Spot map
- An Octopus Diagram consisting of your Story Core and
- Your Series Tentacles

Where to buy

Holly's Writing Classes

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