**Hour One**

*While writing a novella or novel, you may consider turning your work into a series. If you do, there are several things to keep in mind. How you lay the groundwork in a first novel can help you easily launch subsequent storylines.*

Introductions and discuss their WIP

What keeps your attention when you read a series? (Brainstorm with the class, but have a list ready to write on a white board)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| * Storyline
 | * Character development
 | * Relationships
 | * ???
 |

Two popular series:

* *The Walk* series by Richard Paul Evans –

What would you do if you lost everything - your job, your home, and the love of your life - all at the same time? When it happens to Seattle ad executive Alan Christoffersen, he's tempted by his darkest thoughts. A bottle of pills in his hand and nothing left to live for, he plans to end his misery. Instead, he decides to take a walk. But not any ordinary walk. Taking with him only the barest of essentials, Al leaves behind all that he's known and heads for the farthest point on his map: Key West, Florida. The people he encounters along the way, and the lessons they share with him, will save his life and inspire yours.

* *Blue Justice* series by Lynette Eason –

Police officer Isabelle St. John loves her crazy, loud, law-enforcement family. All six siblings are involved in law enforcement or medical work in some way, and their mom is the police chief, there is never a loss of someone to hang out with--or fight with. And she knows they'll be there for her when things get tough. Like when her partner is murdered, and she barely escapes with her own life. Follow stories of Linc, Brady, and the rest of the St. John family as you learn their back stories and experience—firsthand—their trust in God and each other.

You want to talk TV, what about:

* *Downton Abbey* series –

The series, set on the fictional Yorkshire country estate of Downton Abbey between 1912 and 1926, depicts the lives of the aristocratic Crawley family and their domestic servants in the post-Edwardian era—the great events of the time having an effect on their lives and on the British social hierarchy.

* *The Fugitive*series –

An American crime drama television series aired on ABC from September 1963 to August 1967. Dr. Richard Kimble, a physician who is wrongfully convicted of his wife's murder and sentenced to death. En route to death row, Dr. Kimble's train derails over a switch, allowing him to escape and begin a cross-country search for the real killer, a "one-armed man" At the same time, Richard Kimble is hounded by the authorities, most notably by Police Lieutenant Philip Gerard.

Read … Read … Read

* + Study popular series and see how the masters did it.
	+ Read on how to write a series
* I highly recommend *Writing a Fiction Series: The Complete Guide for Novels and Novellas*, by Karen S. Wiesner

**Hour Two**

**While Majoring on the Majors …**

* + Know your characters inside and out.
		- Follow the growth of your characters.
		- Consider introducing new characters and leaving others behind.
	+ The story of their internal growth can be a major element to your stories
		- Character growth or new characters give you an organic flow to the passage of time. You may need to write thousands of words that will, very possibly, never be printed. But writing about your character helps you get to know them and see growth—or flaws. For example, if you have a street thug in your story, have them stop on the street and either give a homeless man some money or feed a puppy. Show the depths of their emotions. As we all try to grow, hopefully your characters will grow, too. This growth could be something to build on in later books.
	+ If your readers connect with your characters, they will be invested in your series
		- In *Downton Abbey,* were you glued to your set when Lady Edith had her baby? Did you eat up all the drama that followed? *When readers connect, they will follow.*

**… Never Neglect the Minors**

* + Note characters’ personalities. Excessiveness. Fears. Mannerisms.
		- Unless the characters did not make a profound change in the previous story, they need to be the same until you have them change.
		- Don’t be afraid to add profound changes. These add color and dimension. But stay true to the change.

Consider:

* + - Do you have multiple characters? You can separate them with:
			* Linguistics – do your characters come from a region of the country that can show through how they talk?
		- Maintain habits and personalities – In *Ladies of the Fire* series:
		- Lily-Rose was the level-headed one in the group.
		- Sugar likes to eat when the ladies get into deep discussions.
		- Fiona could be short-tempered and snippy.
		- Show off their differences – In *Ladies of the Fire* series:
		- Fiona’s African American. That is an element to their friendship that needs a voice.
		- Sugar comes from Eastern Kentucky and hillbilly roots. The Appalachian influence is strong.
		- Lily-Rose left wealth behind in Nebraska. Seldom discussed, but it shaped her present.
		- Allow your characters to grow (mature). Readers will appreciate their insight. It may help them mature along their way as well.

Consider:

* + - Losing/adding characters -
		- What are the elements that need to stay the same? In *Ladies of the Fire* series:
		- The backyard fire
		- Open—often painful—dialog
		- Strong friendship

Brainstorm using your idea/WIP. Let’s discuss characters/what they bring to a series.

**Hour Three**

Start strong. Aways treat each book as a stand-alone story

**If You Are Beginning a Series:**

* Plan an overarching story throughout your series.
	+ When writing a proposal to shop the series, include all the books and storylines
* Have fun! Set your coarse but allow yourself some wiggle room.

**Once You’ve Published Your First Book**

* Know your first chapter in the following books won’t be as difficult. While the author needs to give brief descriptions of their characters, all the detailed information will be in the first book.
* Know your timeline –too much time between books may leave readers with questions.

**If Your First Book Isn’t Finished:**

* Know your first book will hold the backstory for your following books. Take your time is sculpting that first story. The character’s personalities—unless something drastic changes them—*will carry you through the series*.

**Either Way:**

* Keep in mind, sequels have the capacity to improve because of …
	+ Character development
	+ Your writing skills improve
* Each book should be the same—but different
	+ Your readers fell in love with the first book or they wouldn’t be back for the second. Make sure to give them what they want, but differently. Different setting? Different goals?
	+ Stories expand, not repeat
* Always have your story moving forward.
* Continue developing minor characters
	+ In sequels, you may need to leave certain characters behind to make room for new ones
* As in life, people come … and people go
* If you love the characters you need to leave behind, consider having them:
	+ Appear in cameos
	+ Framing (in the first story and the last)
	+ Same person, different role
	+ Have them return to die

**Watch for Inconsistencies**

* + Time period – unless you write a prequel, keep the story moving forward. Have fun with this!

**The Importance of Being True to Your Characters**

* + Character personalities is the number one reason readers love series.
	+ All the while, allow your characters to mature … accept the changes in life.

**Satisfy a Reader’s Need for Closure, Yet Tease Them into the Next Story**

* + If possible, know the first chapter of the next book when you finish the current story you’re working on.
		- *Ladies Uncover a Secret* has an excerpt of *Ladies on a Mission* included.

**Speaking of What’s Next …**

* + Are you ready for the story after the one you’re writing now?
	+ Can you include an excerpt at the end of your work in progress?
	+ Deborah MacGillivray tells us, “If you imbue [saturate] your novel with that special life force all its own, your series will be strong from start to finish. If your readers don’t love the first book, the second one will never be read.”[[1]](#endnote-1)
	+ Each book should give the reader satisfaction when finished, while teasing them into the next. (Example, in *Ladies Uncover a Secret*, an abridged first chapter of the third book, *Ladies on a Mission* is included.)

**Arcs Everywhere: Story Arc … Series Arc … Plant Arc**

*Story arc* is the continual story line. The arc moves the character or situation from one place to another.

The most general Story Arc uses:

1. Introduction – We meet the character in their ordinary life. There’s a sense of balance. Make introduction very quickly.
2. Change – This internal change alters the life of the character affects them deeply—and will manifest itself externally.
3. Conflicts – the progressive complications that character faces and motivates them to establish their ordinary life again. *This will make up the bulk of your story*.
4. Choices – In order for a character to make a choice, their goals and motivations must be clarified from the beginning of the story. Focused on the goal, the character is pushed toward it by believable, emotional. And compelling motivations that won’t let them quit.
5. Crisis – (sometimes called “downtime”) This is the bleakest portion of the story when all hope is seemingly lost. Yet they overcome the obstacles before them and find the strength needed to push on.
6. Resolution – The character wins, resolution ensures, and balance is restored. Yet the character has changed. They cannot return to the person they once were. This of Ebenezer Scrooge.

*Series arc* is a plot thread introduced in the first book and alluded to in some way in every subsequent book. Points to focus on when setting your series arc:

* If your series comes to a definitive closure, the plot point must be resolved in the last book.
* While story arcs are short-term, series arcs are long-term. It runs beneath (paralleling) the individual story arc in each book.
* If a series arc is left out of even one book, the reader will wonder where the author is going
* NOTE: If a series is open-ended, it does not need to find resolution. (*Nancy Drew* books). However, it’s still good to have one. They can be simple (rags to riches, good wins over evil, people need friends, for example) and tie the books together. The *Ladies* series: Friendship is forever.

*Plant Arc* – This is an aspect of the story that sets up something that is yet to come. They may seem insignificant when mentioned but are crucial later.

* Plants may seem like throwaways, but you can pick them up later. (In *Ladies of the Fire*, it’s noted that Fiona’s eyes are blue. This doesn’t come into play until book *Ladies Uncover a Secret*.)
* The earlier plant arcs are set, the more believably they are when needed.
* Repetitive Designation – repeated references to a character or element that originally seem insignificant but later reappears and becomes important.
	+ Chekhov’s gun – a term derived from Russian Dramatist Anton Chekhov stating that you couldn’t put a rifle on stage if no one was thinking of firing it.
* Example of Plant Arcs :
	+ Indiana Jones’ fear of snakes
	+ *Ladies of the Fire*’s Sugar eats when she’s nervous
	+ Star Trek’s “Son Worship” episode

**Stand-Alone vs Cliff Hanger**

* Stand-Alone: A stand-alone story is one that has all the story threads tied up logically at the end and the reader isn’t left hanging on any specific story arc points.
* Cliff Hanger: is a method of storytelling in which the main character is in a precarious situation at the end of a story and the outcome of the situation is in doubt when the story closes (i.e., no resolution)

Thoughts on these styles

1. While a cliff-hanger is the epit0me of a page-turner, the greatest suspense comes at the end of the story when there should be resolution … and there is none. This leaves the reader frustrated and often will not read any more of the author’s books.
2. Readers want to know the time they spent reading will have a payoff at the end of the book.
3. When writing stand-alone stories, if the reader come in mid-series, they can make sense any book. Yet there must be a hook to keep them looking forward to the next story.
4. Tie up the story arcs within the story and introduce something/someone new that makes the reader wonder what happens in the next book.
5. When writing a cliff-hanger, if the author had a central group of characters as a touchstone, setting up the characters that will be featured in the next book works well.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Bibliography

James Scott Bell *Write Your Novel From the Middle: A New Approach for Plotters, Pantsers, and Everyone in Between* (CompendiumPress.org, 2014).

1. Karen S. Wiesner *Writing the Fiction Series: The Complete Guide for Novels and Novellas* (Writersdigest.com, 2013), pg. 9 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)