

How to Create a Novel That Your Readers Won't Want to Put Down

by: Sheila C Skillman

There are five essential things you as an author must do if you want to create a novel that your reader won't want to put down:

- 1) Create empathy with the main character and their quest;
- 2) Captivate the reader with your tone of voice
- 3) Engage the reader's emotions
- 4) Keep questions open and
- 5) Build up suspense.

First, though, you must remember that only a proportion of all fiction readers actually want a novel they can't put down. Some readers like a novel that has a gentle pace that can indeed be put down, to fit in with their lifestyle, and can then be taken up some time later and the story picked up again without the reader having to go back and remind themselves who certain characters are and how they relate to each other. This in itself is a skill to be admired. But here we are talking about the kind of novel which has its audience hooked from page one, in such a way that engagement with the story is absolute.

- 1) Empathy with the main character and his or her quest - a reader's attention will be lost unless strong feelings are aroused about the chief protagonist and the central question of the novel. Of course this varies through different genres; and the reader of hard-boiled crime fiction probably won't talk in terms of "feelings" at all, but nevertheless there will be a powerful urge to continue reading, to care about what happens and to want to know the answers to the questions the author poses.
- 2) Captivate the reader with your tone of voice - a captivating tone of voice comes from the narration and from the main viewpoint character - there are many errors to be made here; if a reader feels patronised, fed too much information, or antagonised by the voice of the novel, nothing can more swiftly guarantee that they will give up on the story.
- 3) Engage the reader's emotions - the reason why a reader cannot put a novel down is also a great deal to do with the emotional stakes - do we fear for the main character; do we hope for them; how strongly do we care about the outcome?
- 4) Keep questions open - posing questions and structuring the supply of answers - within classic story structure there must be one central over-arching question which is kept open throughout the course of the novel; and when that question is answered, the story is over. But beneath that question many others must be set, belonging to the sub-plots; and when answers are provided to these subsidiary questions, they must lead to others, and so on.
- 5) Build up Suspense - this involves the careful selection of information, and critical decisions about what can be revealed to the reader, when; and what has to be withheld until later. A writer must exercise skill, fine judgement and instinct in this. Another

essential aspect of suspense has to do with viewpoint - what does each character know? It is vital that an author keeps strong control of this - and it is an area where mistakes can easily be made.

A truly unputdownable novel can make life rather difficult for a reader - you must have that open novel in your hand on the bus or train, whilst you are cooking, late at night in bed, even walking along the street... but making this happen can be great fun for a writer, and experiencing it is one of the greatest joys of being a keen reader of fiction. All readers can find ways of coping with it within their lifestyle - I certainly can!

S.C.Skillman is the author of "Mystical Circles"- a psychological thriller. "Intense psychological drama in a beautiful setting." You can buy the book on Amazon and through the Kindle Bookstore, or visit the author's website to find out more, and click the secure payment gateway to buy a signed copy at <http://www.scskillman.co.uk>.

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