

## **Writing a series character in fantasy**

So, you've got an idea in your head for a fantasy novel, and what you've come to recognize as your writer's intuition—that little “Hey! Shut up and listen!” voice in the back of your mind—is telling you that you have more than one book simmering in there. Don't freak out; this is a good thing, especially with fantasy. While readers do enjoy standalone books, they get positively giddy over the thought of a series. I mean, who doesn't like to find a series with characters that seem real, and each book feels like a visit with old friends. A book with a story that keeps you up late at night, groggy the next day, and has you sneaking peeks of where you left off under your desk at work or school.

But, if you do think that you've got more than one book brewing, there are a couple of questions you need to ask yourself, and things you need to think about, before you dive in.

**Is your protagonist better suited to a series versus a standalone novel?** Raine Benares, the protagonist in my admittedly quirky, action-adventure fantasy series, has family, friends, professional associates, enemies, people from her past who carry over into her present and—most importantly for a series character—into her future. With Raine, there are stories within the stories. If you have the sense that your protagonist has a lot more to tell you than he or she is revealing right now, you could have yourselves the makings of a series character.

In each book in my Raine Benares series, the main conflict from that particular book is resolved at the end, but other smaller conflicts that popped up during the course of that book—and the story arc and the relationships between Raine and the people she knows and encounters—continue to change and grow.

**What kind of story do you feel compelled to tell?** Is it a “one problem/mystery per book” along with overarching character development? Meaning that while the story's main conflict is resolved, the protagonist and other characters have more to tell. Or is the core of your story initially a small problem, and as the book progresses, is revealed to be but the tip of a very large and dangerous iceberg? This would be a story where the more that is revealed increases your protagonist's involvement, entangling him or her in a situation way beyond what they've ever dealt with before. Both scenarios are perfectly viable candidates for a series of books.

In the second scenario, as more of that story iceberg is revealed, the story (and the problem your protagonist is facing) gets bigger and the stakes keep going up. My books turned out to be of the dangerous iceberg variety. I say “turned out to be” because I didn't start out planning it that way. I saw my Raine Benares series as being two, *maybe* three books tops. Well, I'm writing number six now, proof that you don't really know what you have until you get into it and walk around in your protagonist's shoes, or in Raine's case, boots. When you're writing that first book, unless you have a functioning crystal ball and the skill to use it, you really have no idea how many books will be in your series.

**Carry character traits and quirks consistently from book to book.** This is true of both your protagonist as well as a supporting cast in a series. I discovered—and revealed to my readers—more of Raine’s past in each book, as well as tidbits from my supporting cast: Raine’s friends, family, and even my villains. Yes, villains, plural. I’m a firm believer in keeping my characters on their toes. If you can keep all those details in your head, great. If not, make a cheat sheet for yourself. Believe me, if you don’t catch a mistake, your readers will.

**And the best part about writing a series character . . .**

Just as readers love a group of characters that they can get to know and look forward to seeing again and again, the same is true for the author. I’ll admit it, I’m a series junkie. There’s nothing I love more than discovering a series that just “hits the spot” like a tall, cold glass of iced tea. (Yep, I’m a Southern girl.) I’m also a character-driven reader. My favorite books have characters that I can either identify with or would like to have a drink with. I like quirky, funny books with just the right touch of snark, and a story that moves like a freight train. That’s what I like to read, so that’s what I like to write. And that’s my best advice: write what you want to read. If your readers enjoy your main character as much as you do, your editor will want you to keep him or her around for a long time.

**Great character development books:**

*Characters & Viewpoint* by Orson Scott Card

*Characters, Emotion & Viewpoint: Crafting Dynamic Characters & Effective Viewpoints* by Nancy Kress