



EPISODE 34

*Do Book Covers Matter if You  
Rapid Release?*

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Welcome back to the Author Revolution Podcast. Once again, I'm your host, international bestselling indie author, Carissa Andrews and CEO of Author Revolution, the author's source for all things rapid releasing.

Before we get started, I would like to mention this episode is brought to you by my new rapid release series, the Windhaven Witches. The month of June is dedicated to my Apple iBooks users and I've set a goal of hitting 500 preorders by the end of the month. So far, we are 10% of the way at 50. It's a great start, but still a longshot from 500 with only a couple weeks left to go. If you're an Apple device user, I would love for you to check out Secret Legacy Book 1 of the Windhaven Witches series. It's just 99¢ and 50% of the royalties are being donated to the American Cancer Society. If you've already preordered your copy, first of all, THANK YOU. Secondly, can you help me out by sharing a link to the Apple Books location? I would be eternally grateful.

Okay, so with all of that being said, we're ready to start this week's episode. Are you ready? Of course, you are. We've put this chat on the backburner for a while now and it's time we shed some light on it. If you're a new author or someone who is new to rapid releasing, you might be wondering if book covers really play all that big of a role in things.



**EPISODE 34: DO BOOK COVERS MATTER IF  
YOURAPID RELEASE?**

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If this sounds like you, I want to ask you a question. When you're in the mood for a movie or book, what's the first thing you go hunting for? Or perhaps a better question would be, what's the first thing that grabs your attention when you start searching? It probably isn't the synopsis or book/movie blurb. It's going to be the cover.

Here's why - we are visual animals. In fact, a study by 3M suggests we rely a whopping 90% on the visual information that's thrown at us. The remaining 10% of information is processed by the brain from the other four senses. To take this a step further, humans actually process a visual image 60,000 times faster than text.

Images, and in this case, book covers, when done right, can immediately set the mood, genre, and atmosphere for a reader. It can let them know they're in the right place and get them hyped to learn more. When done poorly it still sets a mood, perceived genre, and atmosphere, but rather than gravitating toward your book, they'll be swiping left.

None of this changes just because you choose to rapid release a series or multiple series. If anything, it becomes paramount. When you increase your publishing velocity, some of the promotional hype you would be putting together for a normal release might fall to the wayside. So, this might mean relying heavily on your ad spend to get the word out. When this is the case, it means your book becomes your most important advertising asset.

Each book cover in your series can, quite literally, make or break your profitability.

So, before we get too far, I want to talk about the main objectives of a good cover design. That way, you can get a clear idea of why they're so important:

Catch Reader's Attention FAST – Like I mentioned already, you have seconds to catch the attention of your ideal reader. Your cover needs to be a good balance between “fitting in” and “standing out.” We'll talk more about this in just a second.

Genre-Specific – Quite possibly, this is the #1 role a cover should play because it's also how you catch your reader's attention. Many authors, myself included, think that they need their cover to stand out in their genre, and in doing so, it needs to be completely different. Nothing could be further from the truth and I tell you this from experience. When I first launched the Pendomus Chronicles, all three books had a different cover, as did Oracle. But the longer I was in the game, the clearer my perception of my genre got. This made it easier to spot where I was going wrong and how I could fix it. When I relaunched my covers in April of 2018, sales tripled. I went from averaging \$100 a month across the four books to averaging over \$300 a month with that one simple change. That's the power of a genre-specific cover. And I'll tell you what, I will likely be redesigning them again soon.

Sets the tone for expectations – Within your genre, you can also set the mood and tone of the story. For example, my Windhaven Witches, while being a fantasy-based title, is darker. Another thing I've done differently with this series, at least for my list-run, is that I've also opted to veer from having a fantasy genre as my genre competition. Instead, I modeled my cover off of what the NYT seems to veer toward when it comes to their picks. There's nothing to say I won't redesign next year, but for now, I wanted to stick as close to something you could see on their list as possible. However, I've used a dark, gothic looking wallpaper as the background, tipped my hat toward the fantasy genre by including a font that's seen across the fantasy spectrum right now, and I chose a single item as a representation of the story. Each one of them is in red. All of this is a deliberate choice. Not only does it make it easier for readers to see that the series belongs together, but it sets the tone that something sinister could be afoot.

Develops your author branding – Lastly, your covers are an extension of your author branding. The more you write, the more covers you’ll collect under your belt. Readers will start to look through your backlist to see if you have others they want to dive into. If your covers relay a vibe for your author branding, they’ll very likely dive into all of your past books. But if they seem to hop around too much or diverge into completely separate genres, they might not go for those titles. At that point, it might be worth revisiting the covers for a redesign, or ask yourself if they’d be better suited under a new pen name.

Look, overall, the important takeaway here is that bad covers turn readers away from a good book and mediocre covers can have them scrolling by without even taking any notice at all. Both of these options are less than ideal.

So, here’s the thing. When we first start out, funds are limited. Believe me, I hear you. When I wrote Pendomus, I was on the verge of a divorce. When I wrote Polarities and Revolutions, I had just had my youngest son. The divorce and remarriage was over, but the financial turmoil from the divorce was hitting hard. Plus, I had been laid off from my full-time job two months before I gave birth. So, money wasn’t just tight, it was non-existent.

For the longest time, I was a one-woman show out of utter necessity. Scraping \$20 together for a single promo was a scary thing, I kid you not.

So, if you’re in this place and wondering how on earth you’re going to get a cover designed for your book or series that is up to snuff, let me just say this. You will always start where you’re at and improve when you can. While it might not be ideal, you can still learn a lot from putting your book out there with the best available cover to you now. In fact, I encourage you to. You will not profit by waiting until conditions improve. You won’t get better as an author, either. It’s a lot easier to rebrand a series down the road when you have more funds and more insight than it is to wait, pay a ton to a designer, and still lack the knowledge necessary to do better. You’ll just be throwing money away.

If you are both technologically inclined and have a creative eye, one option for you when you start out is to design the covers yourself. Now, I'm a graphic designer by trade. I went to school for it. And even with all of that, I can still make mistakes. I can get cocky and think I have things right but miss my mark. So, if I can do it, trust me, you can do it. However, with all of that being said, I have seen some fantastic covers come out of amateur designers. If you're willing to give it a go, or have no other choice, let's talk about a few tips to design a cover that will stick rock.

### **Tips for Doing it Yourself**

Research your genre to find inspiration and patterns - Go out to Amazon and other book sites to dig into the bestsellers in your categories. Make note of the typography. Where are they placing the title? What fonts are they using? What colors are they using? Do they have people on the cover? If so, what's the trend? Is it a cover cliché you can utilize to your advantage? Are they leaning heavily on abstract images? Write everything down that you can spot. Not only will this help you to design something, but if you do find funds down the road, you might be able to use some of the research to help them out.

Pick a design platform. Now, use all of the details you collected to start working on your cover. I use Photoshop for my covers, but like I said, I'm a designer by trade. I went to school and studied design on Adobe products. But you could also turn to places such as Canva, BookBrush, or another site of your choice.

Make sure it matches your genre -The #1 thing you want to keep in the forefront of your mind is making sure it matches your genre. Yes, you want it to match and look like it belongs there. I get it, most authors want their books to look like they stand out on their own, but you don't want to defy all of the genre standards in doing so. Don't worry about clichés. Your design is what matters. In fact, many clichés in covers could end up being the exact thing that helps your book slide into bestseller status. Yes, even your rapid released title. If you'd like to check out some book cover clichés, I'll link to a BuzzFeed article with some great ones.

Do you have all the must-haves? Title there? Subtitle or Series name? Author name? Placed the imagery you need? Barcode, if you're doing a paperback?

I would like to mention again that typography is big. Make sure your text is clear and harmonious with the rest of your image and the genre as a whole. Go back to your notes and take a look at placement for the must-have items because the hierarchy of fonts with the other visual elements tells your readers its own story.

How are your colors? Color sets the tone for your book, so use it wisely. If you're not sure about what colors to use, default to what's trending. Otherwise, do a search on the psychology of color and design to see what might work best for your book.

Before you get too far, be sure to test your cover at different sizes. Keep in mind, there are some cases where a book cover will be viewed in a thumbnail – like on Amazon, for example. Make sure as much as possible is clear, even at a smaller size.

### **Misc Design Tips:**

Images meant for screens require files to be built in RGB and set at 72 dpi

Print covers need to be designed in CMYK and set to 300 dpi

If you've never designed a print cover, don't forget that you'll also need to include a spine and back cover. KDP and IngramSpark both give you downloadable templates to make it super easy to do. But don't be surprised when the back cover comes first and the front cover comes second.

Get feedback from readers of your genre – If this is your first rodeo (or tenth), be sure to ask for feedback from your readers, or from readers of your genre, to see what they think. There are Facebook groups that are great for this (just search book cover design and a bunch will pop up). Incorporate any changes and feedback from anything that appears to be trending in the comments. If you get a few random comments you don't agree with, hey, that could be personal preference. But if you see multiple people with the same gripe, it might be time to do some tweaking.

#### Tips for Hiring a Designer

For those of you who have a little more cash at your disposal (or who don't have a creative bone in your body), you'll want to hire out your cover design. This could be a friend (as long as they know a thing or two, but if you want to earn more money, treat this as the investment it is and hire someone who knows what they're doing. This means getting professional recommendations by other authors in your genre to see what names pop up. Then, reach out to them for quotes.

Here are a few tips to consider as you venture down the design hire path:

Know your budget beforehand – If you only have \$150 for a cover, it gives you a clear boundary on who you can contact. Many designers will list their prices right on their website or in their Facebook group. Do yourself a favor and only reach out to designers who are in your price range.

Go through their portfolio – Once you have some contenders, flip through their portfolio to see if they have titles that match your genre. This will let you know whether or not they're capable of doing a good job on yours. If they do pretty work, but none of the covers match your genre space, keep looking.

Contact them to see their timeline - If the designer doesn't list their turnaround time on their website, it's time to shoot them an email or FB Message. Ask them about their turnaround times and if there are any other questions that are left lingering after you checked out their website. (For example, if you want the PSD files, how much would that cost, etc.)

TIP - Notice how they communicate. Are they fast? Are they pleasant? Terse? To the point? However they connect with you as a prospect is important, because if they're not cool up front, they'll likely be a pain in the backside down the road. No matter WHO thinks they are the most awesome. Find someone you can work with and who's fun to be around. Just like with co-authoring, these folks could be along with you for the long-haul. You want to have a good working relationship.

Create an "inspiration folder" for them - Great design doesn't happen in a bubble. If you want to make your designer happy (as well as satisfy some of your own visual creativity), you'll want to come up with an inspiration folder for them. This can include anything you for sure want on your cover (items, people, stances, etc.), your book blurb, backstory on the characters, and then plenty of other covers in your genre you admire. This gives your designer a good baseline for what you're expecting from him/her and also gives them a place to springboard from.

Give them creative license - A word from the wise. Don't micromanage their creativity. Give them the inspiration and then hand over creative license. Often times, what they come up with will be more incredible than you ever imagined. But if they do do a poor job, call them on it. I had a designer I was working with once and they literally plucked a stock photo and slapped my title on. No thought or effort went into it at all and it showed. I wasn't about to let that slide for a \$500 cover. Needless to say, I got a refund and had a different designer help. It happens. But know that most of the time, if you can provide the details to trigger their imagination, they'll pull through for you.



Make sure to communicate which covers you need. Last but not least, you need to be clear on the type of files you'll be expecting from them. Do you need: Kindle, paperback, hardcover/dustjacket, audiobook, or boxed set?

Each one of these is a different file, requiring a certain amount of work and effort. While each cover after the initial design is easier, they all have their own touch points and file needs, and you can't fake that. I can tell you from experience, the initial front cover and then the full paperback cover both require a lot of work. The audiobook is generally the easiest.

Now, as important as covers are, as an indie author, we have a special advantage over traditionally published authors. If we test out a cover and it doesn't seem to be converting readers, we have the opportunity to rebrand fairly quickly. You can always hire a new designer or come up with something new yourself. So, don't ever feel like this is a complete make or break situation. Sometimes, we won't know if it'll work until it's been tested. While I know that's not overly encouraging when you're investing so much time and money, keep in mind that getting it out there is still going to be better than letting it sit in your computer making ZERO dollars. Plus, every sale, every impression, every person you get to look at your book is another reader who might just be a superfan down the road.

Well, guys, I hope that was helpful and you were able to get some actionable items you can take away and put to use right away on book covers. The bottom line is, yes, covers are still important, even if you are rapid releasing a series. Every single cover will portray each story's essence and ignite the imagination of your ideal reader.



Don't forget, if you want to download the transcript, or find links to anything we discussed today, you can grab them by heading over to the show notes at: [authorrevolution.org/34](http://authorrevolution.org/34). Next week, I want to talk a bit about when it's time to cut a series loose. Does such a time ever exist and how do you know if you should abandon a series and take on a new one.

As a final reminder, this podcast episode is sponsored by my upcoming series, the Windhaven Witches. Please check out Secret Legacy on Apple Books if you have an Apple device to help me reach the 500 Apple preorders in June. If you don't have an Apple, don't worry. It's available on pretty much every other platform out there. No matter where you preorder it, you can rest assured that your purchase helps by donating to the American Cancer Society.

Well, my friend, that's all I have for today. Have a fantastic week full of writerly endeavors.

Until next time...

Go forth and start your author revolution.



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