

EPISODE 37

What's the #1 Thing You Gotta Nail in a Rapid Release Series?

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

Once again, this episode is sponsored by my upcoming rapid release series, The Windhaven Witches. This series is new adult paranormal suspense and Secret Legacy, book 1, comes out on September 15th. Then, the remaining four books launch one a month through the end of the year. For those of you who don't know, 50% of the royalties from Secret Legacy are being donated to the American Cancer Society in honor of my brother, who I lost in 2016 to brain cancer, a dear friend of mine who is fighting pancreatic cancer, and now, also my father-in-law who recently lost his battle with kidney cancer and pneumonia.

So, as you can imagine, this past week has been a bit of a downer for me. Last Wednesday, we lost my father-in-law and since he, and most of my husband's family live in England, it's really hard for us to be there and show support for the whole family. Colin has been on the phone with his mom almost daily, but it's still difficult. Plus, with the whole coronavirus pandemic going on, plane tickets to the UK are not only extremely limited, but they're insanely expensive. Then, even if we could afford those plane tickets, the English government requires all Americans to quarantine in a hotel for 14 days BEFORE being released on the rest of the population.



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And as one more layer of complication, funerals are limited to 25. Our family alone is 8. Needless to say, we're finding a way to join the funeral via the internet, but it's not the same, either.

So, while it was the 4th of July weekend, it was still kind of a somber affair. We didn't go to the normal parade, since it was cancelled. We didn't go see the big fireworks in town, because our favorite spot was shut down. We did have a small BBQ with our family and two friends, then lit off some small fountain fireworks in the backyard. That was fun, though.

Hopefully your 4th of July weekend was better than ours, and if you don't celebrate because you live elsewhere, hopefully you still had a great weekend. I can't believe we're already into July here, people!

For me, this means knuckling down and focusing even more on that rapid release series. I've been doing A LOT behind the scenes, prepping *Secret Legacy* and *The Windhaven Witches* as a whole, for hitting the bestseller lists. I'll be talking more about the strategy behind list-aiming in another episode down the road, but for now, just know that I'm eyeing the time. As of this recording, I have 69 days before it launches and there is a TON of stuff to do.

However, one of the biggest helps I've run into is NetGalley. I signed up for a blog tour that boasted a NetGalley opt-in for a different package. As someone who used to work in a bookstore, I had always thought that NetGalley was for traditionally published books only. Boy, was I wrong! I did some research, however, and ended up joining the Independent Book Publisher's Association. They're a great site that offers some incredible benefits to indies like us - namely reduced rate NetGalley postings and even media outreach with ARC copies. Both of which I am using for *Secret Legacy*.

Now, when it comes to NetGalley, I have been pleasantly surprised by the interest in *Secret Legacy*. According to IBPA, it's gained a lot of interest in both impressions and reviews left for having only been out for a month.

However, one of the interesting repetitive aspects of the reviews is the despise for anything "insta-love" as well as a desire to develop the characters further. Which leads me directly into today's topic, actually.

What is the #1 thing you gotta nail in a rapid release series?

Well, as I'm even being reminded of right now, it all comes down to character development. Which makes total sense. If you want a series to continue on to be successful, your readers have to resonate with the characters you give them.

Thanks to my NetGalley reviews, I've been able to put some important changes and tweaks in place on this series before it even launches. At least in the first book. But I also have to tread a careful line because I do have four books in which to develop the characters and give them larger arcs.

However, this does give me food for thought on why my Diana Hawthorne novel is so popular. I started her book with the characters in mind before I ever developed the story. In fact, each character is very distinct and offers their one unique take on the world. And they're each very commanding in their own right. In the *Windhaven Witches*, the characters are vastly different, but I created the story based off of a dream I had when I was 14. The characters are secondary. And because each character is only beginning to develop their powers, for some readers, they may not be concrete enough for them. It's a price I may need to pay for them to see the bigger picture, at this point.

The thing to remember with rapid releasing is that not all series will be successful. The Windhaven Witches may not even be successful. But I won't know until I give it all I've got. The same goes for you.

However, as I continue writing the series and then, as I move on to the rest of Diana Hawthorne's extended series, characterization is taking a seat at the front of my mind.

So, at this point, perhaps some of you are wondering... "How do you create characters that are compelling?"

Let's talk about the 5 most distinctive ways you can make your characters stand out.

Diversity - We've talked about this a lot in recent weeks thanks to the Black Lives Matter movement and LGBTQ Pride month being in June. But the truth of the matter is, we live in a diverse and colorful world. When we create characters that embrace this concept, not only is it more indicative of the world we live in, but it also makes it easier to see our characters and to paint their perceptions of the world. If your main character is old, black, Asian, gay, or disabled, just as some examples, it grounds the reader into some distinguishable characteristics that add dimension to them right off the bat. Those qualities will be part of the character's internal core and they'll see and act differently in the world because of it.

Distinguishing Features - To continue on with this, let's talk about distinguishing features you can give your character. In Pendomus, I gave my main character, Runa, a scar across her face and two different colored eyes. It was a deliberate way to draw attention to the difference of who she was. The idea of adding heterochromia to Runa came from my best friend Sherry, who was born with two different colored eyes.

But it also added to the idea that she could see things that were in two places at once. Think about your main character and add in things like flaws, deformities, hair and eye color. Remember, people are all unique, and there's no such thing as perfect. So, don't fall into the trap of molding your characters into perfection, either. Let them be uniquely flawed in all they are—distinguishing features included.

Speech – Every person talks a little different. At least until they hang around each other for a long period of time. So if you have new characters coming together. Think about how you can make their conversations and word choices vastly different. Do they have certain phrases they like to use? Do they have an accent? Do they use their language in a straight-forward and abrupt way? Or do they tiptoe around things? The way people say things can distinguish their personalities right off the bat and help your readers identify with them, or not.

Nervous Ticks – Do any of your characters have nervous ticks or just strange physical gestures or habits? If not, think about adding some in. Maybe one twirls their hair. Another one fiddles with their ring, or maybe they're constantly licking their lips (an annoying habit of one of my characters that my husband can't stand! HA!). Do they have any gestures they rely on when they're happy? Are they reserved? Adding in physical ticks can really help layer your character in ways you might not even be aware of.

Internal Conflicts – Last but not least, give your character some internal conflicts. This will often stem from understanding their backstory. If possible, you'll want to download a character sheet. For those of you interested in Rapid Release Roadmap when it's available again, it does come with an extensive character and worldbuilding template in Scrivener. However, for now, you can be asking yourself questions like:



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- What is their family dynamic? (How many members are there? How do they interact?, etc)
- Was their childhood happy or troubled?
- Where did they grow up?
- Were they rich, poor, middle class?
- Who are their friends and how did they meet?
- Were there any traumas in their lives?
- What are some of their happiest memories? Worst memories?
- Why did they choose their career?
- How many romantic relationships have they had? Were they good or bad? Why did they end?
- What is one thing they would wish to change about the past?
- What are their biggest fears?
- What are their interests, hobbies, and passions?
- What things and people do they like best? Dislike?
- What makes them angry, sad, or happy?
- How do they cope under stress?
- Do they act differently around friends than around family?
- Are they introverts or extroverts?
- What do they want most out of life?

Each of these aspects adds a level of dimension to your characters and makes them more real. When you're starting out, the more questions you ask and the more you get to know your character, the better. However, be careful when you're creating characters not to go into exposition overload as you start writing. This is something I've seen from time to time with my mentees and it's the first thing we start hacking out of stories. Not everything they've ever dealt with has to make it into the story. You as the author just need to understand how it influences them and shapes the way they act, react, and interact.



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Personally, I don't think as authors we'll get it right 100% of the time, but the point is to do our best and continue to progress in our craft. Every book, every series, and every character we develop makes it easier to write the next one. In *Secret Legacy*, I've made some changes, like I said, but I won't know if they were enough to hit the mark with *Secret Legacy* until more reviewers read the updated version.

Even if it doesn't, I know that for some readers, the ones who get my dorky pop culture references and twisted sense of humor, the series is already doing well. And in all honesty, it's possible I'm nitpicking on a book that's averaging a 4-star rating anyway.

For me, the most important lesson in all of this is to continue to make characterization a priority and use it to drive the plot forward.

Okay, guys, so that's the end of the discussion today. By far, having great characters is the #1 thing you gotta nail in order to keep your readers coming back for more. So, let's take this discussion online. Are you in my Author Revolution Facebook Group? If not, join today for free and we can talk about crafting those unique characters. I'd love to hear your process for creating new characters or developing the ones you have even further.

As a reminder, if you'd like to download the transcript from today's episode or find an easy to click link to any of the sites we talked about today, like NetGalley or IBPA, be sure to head over to authorrevolution.org/37. It's all there waiting for you.



One final reminder: this podcast episode is sponsored by my upcoming rapid release series, the Windhaven Witches. Slowly but surely I am increasing my preorders on all sites – Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and iBooks being the biggest ones. If you're a reader who wouldn't mind spending \$3 to help an indie author make her dream come true on becoming a NYT bestselling author, I encourage you to purchase Secret Legacy on all three sites. It's 99¢ wherever books are sold – ebook form, of course. Not only will you be helping me make a dream a reality, actually in more ways than one, but you will also be donating 50% to the American Cancer Society.

Until next time... Go forth and start your author revolution.



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