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PODCAST  
TRANSCRIPT

## EPISODE 71

# *The Truth About Reading in Your Genre*

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Welcome back to the podcast! Well, after a couple of weeks of spectacular expert interviews, (and if you don't know what I'm talking about, definitely go back and check out the last two episodes because I interviewed Clayton Noblit from Written Word Media and David Gaughran and both were incredibly insightful!)

Okay, so after all of that, I decided to interject with a little bit of my own commentary again this week. However, I will also mention there are some more INCREDIBLE interviews lined up over the next couple of months, guys. Like, we're talking more than one fangirl moment kind of interviews. Totally not even gonna lie.

However, in the meantime, I want to talk about something that I get asked a lot about and my guess is, you've probably wondered about it as well.

Should you, or should you NOT read books in your own genre?

Because I help run a local nonprofit for writers, I get asked this a lot because they're mostly new to writing, new to publishing, and overall new to the logistics of storycrafting.

Often times, their biggest fear when it comes to reading in their own genre is: What if I accidentally plagiarize?



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That's a legitimate fear, right?

While I totally get it, we have to remember, plagiarism is intentionally stealing an idea or words of another and passing it off as your own. In the world of writing, though, that would mean taking a concept and word-for-word copying it. Or pretty damn close, anyway.

Black's Law Dictionary defines plagiarism as such: The act of appropriating the literary composition of another, or parts or passages of writings, or the idea or language of the same, and passing them off as the product of one's own mind.

Look, in the grand scheme of storytelling, there are most likely no new ideas. I mean, not completely anyway. There are just new ways of telling the same themes over and over again. If you look into story structure, for instance, there are only 7 main story archetypes. We talk about that in my mini-course, the Story Cure. So already, you're limited by the story frameworks that are out there. In my mind, here's how you can tell whether or not your story is plagiarized (and ultimately, how to avoid that).

Let's ask a few questions to get to the root:

- Are you deliberately copying someone else's work or ideas? If yes, obviously you are plagiarizing. Back away and get your own ideas, dammit.
- Do you spend a lot of time trying to change the way your story is told so it doesn't look or sound too much like another author's? If so, you're probably on the wrong path my friend. It's time to turn back and brainstorm your own stuff. (at least if you are writing with the intention of selling). If you're writing for the intention of LEARNING, then that's another matter. But that's the topic for a whole different episode.

However, if the source material from where you got the idea or concept isn't clear to the reader – it's not plagiarized. It might be "inspired by" the other story, but it's not plagiarism unless you are lifting the exact words or premise and making it your own. However, if someone who picks up your book, and it doesn't require that the reader to know anything about the other book or books (assuming you didn't deliberately plagiarize, eh-hem), then that IP belongs to you.

Let me give you an example: I loved an episode of Angel called I Will Remember You. It was the first episode of Angel I'd ever seen and I never watched Buffy at all before that. However, after watching this episode, knowing NOTHING of those characters and the world that was created for them, I was so heartbroken for them, I knew I had to start from the beginning and find out how they got there. In this episode, it basically shows Angel, a vampire with a soul, getting his soul back and his wish to be human, albeit accidentally. Buffy, a vampire slayer, had fallen in love with him, but over the course of their relationship, realized they couldn't be together because if he got as they put it in the show, "too happy" – aka, had sex – his soul was removed and he became Angelus. Well, Buffy was in town when all this went down and they realized they could be together – thanks to this new humanity. It was a masterful episode, that gave you a glimpse into the beauty and sacrifice of their love. Of course, by the end, he realized he couldn't continue helping Buffy and saving the world as a human and he went to the "powers that be" begging to have his vampireness, I guess, returned. They agreed, but only on the condition that Buffy wouldn't remember (the day would be rewound), so he alone would carry that burden and avert the situation that made him human in the first place. Long story short, it inspired the story I wrote called Love is a Merciless God. However, if you were to read this story, you'd never in a million years know it was inspired by that episode, if I hadn't have told you. There are no vampires, for starters. It's about a Guardian Angel who falls in love with her human charge. For me, it was the emotions I wanted to invoke. The way the strings were pulled to keep you on the edge of your seat. The way the beats were woven.

I wanted to build people up, tear them down, build them up again, before tearing their hearts into pieces. I'm mean, what can I say?

So... what about fan fiction, then? Well, that depends. If characters that are the intellectual property of another – whether it be an author, corporation, or something else are in your book – as in, you are writing the story as or with them, then that kind of fan fiction should not be published for the intent of sale without expressed permission from the IP holder. So, for instance, if you wrote fan fiction series about Disney Princesses – you are free to do so, but you are NOT free to sell those books without getting the written consent of Disney. Otherwise, you would probably be sued.

However, if your story is inspired by that of another, meaning you liked aspects of it, but created a new world that is in no way tied to the source story, then most likely you're good. Think 50 Shades of Grey – which was fan fiction of Twilight, for example. Or Love is a Merciless God. While the themes might be similar to their source, they are unrecognizable to the source story. Hopefully that helps.

Now, all that being said, I'm no copyright lawyer, but this is how I understand it. If you're ever in doubt, your best bet is to reach out to a lawyer and have them walk you through the legalities before you hit publish.

So, back to the topic at hand – reading in your own genre. Here's my take: I firmly believe you should be reading anything and everything. In your genre, outside your genre... whatever floats your boat. Reading connects us to our role as authors. We subconsciously learn story structure by reading the masters who come before us – or our contemporaries who write alongside us. We also learn by deliberately dissecting their work in order to improve our own craft.

Stephen King has even been known to say, “If you don’t have the time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.”

I’m 100% in agreement. But I’ll even go a bit further. Here are my pros for reading in your genre. Let’s see if you agree with me.

1. Get inspired – I remember many times when I’ve read books and had to write down a quick note about a character archetype, a plot point inspiration, or something else when I was in the middle of reading. Whenever I start a new story, I have an inspiration list I can pull from in order to improve my stories, my characters, and my storytelling overall. Besides, sometimes, we just get stuck and we’re not sure what we’re missing in our own works. Reading can unlock that creative part of your mind and jog loose the perfect idea you were searching for.
2. Get better at your craft – Like I said earlier, it helps you get better at writing. Both because you absorb the story structure, characters, themes, etc. into your subconscious – which helps you naturally write better. But you can also be very deliberate about learning how a master storyteller weaves a story and make mental note of it so you can implement those tools of the trade in your own writing.
3. Find tropes and trends you didn’t know about – Look, we’re not omnipotent. If we’re not reading, we won’t know what’s selling. Then, when our own books don’t perform because we’re not hitting reader expectations, we have no one to blame but ourselves. I hate to admit it, but when I started getting some feedback on *Secret Legacy* in the Netgalley group – I didn’t know there was such a hatred of perceived “insta-love” because I’d been so busy that I hadn’t gotten my reading in! Thankfully, that’s changed and I find myself reading now, more than ever. And I’m soooo grateful for it.
4. Find what you like and what you don’t – Look, sometimes you think you’re writing in a specific genre, then you read some of the books in it and realize, “Oh, hell no... that is NOT me.” I can say with pretty clear certainty, I am NOT a straight up paranormal romance author.



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I've read enough of those books to know I'm more of an urban fantasy, dark fantasy, paranormal fantasy author. But paranormal romance, eh, not so much. Same with some of my friends. My dear friend Kim is writing a new mystery series and the way she was describing it sounded like a cozy mystery to me. So, as part of her research, she went and read a few. After a handful, she declared COZY, she was not. LOL!

5. Be entertained - There are some ridiculously TALENTED writers out there and not only is it a pleasure to read their stories, but 100% inspirational, as well. I have always been a reader, and I have a feeling you were, too, I mean, why else would you choose to write books over, make movies, for instance? So, going back to that love reinvigorates my love of the craft, my love of storytelling, and entertains me, like nothing else. Plus, I don't know about you, but when I read a really great story – and one that's in my genre – it lifts me up to know that if they're successfully selling books, then I can, too!

Obviously, reading outside your genre is beneficial, too. It gives you insights you can mashup and bring together in new and interesting ways. I'm a genre-mashing lover, if ever there was one, so that's something I lean into a ton! In essence, just read, dammit. There is very little cons to this scenario.

Okay, so I hope I helped you realize that reading in your genre is actually a hella good thing. However, I do NOT condone or say that it's ever okay to intentionally plagiarize or copy someone else's work. Don't be that person. That's not cool, man. (Did you hear my Mom voice? That was totally my mom voice.)

However, I think inspiration is incredibly valuable and can bring you to new heights with your writing, as long as you're doing it the right way. :)



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Now it's your turn. I want to hear what you think! Let's bring the discussion over to the Author Revolution Facebook Community and we can talk about it there. I want to know your take on reading in your own genre and your thoughts on inspiration versus plagiarism.

In addition, don't forget that you can head over to today's show notes at [authorrevolution.org/71](http://authorrevolution.org/71) to download today's transcript or get a link to things we discussed today.

Alright guys, that's a wrap. Next week, I'm excited to say I have another expert interview for you. Ryan Zee from Plottr will be with us, talking about how to best utilize Plottr to make incredible progress on your stories.

So, until next time... Go forth and start your author revolution!