

Writing a sequel by Wen Spencer

Someone has asked how do you write a sequel when you have so much backstory from book one. This is my answer.

I hate writing sequels as you have this entire book... or maybe in the case of DOG WARRIOR... three books worth of story that all seems SO important. Why else write the book in the first place? But really, unless this is a straight trilogy like Lord of the Rings, where it could be presented as one book, each book should be a stand alone novel.

The trick of writing a sequel is to pretend that you never wrote the first book. La la la -- there's no first book. Yes, it's hard to do, but it's vital.

When you wrote that first book, each character, hopefully, had a background and things that happened to them before the book started. As you wrote the first book, you told only what related to the story. If you had two main characters that had known each other since childhood, mostly likely you simply stated "they knew each other since they were kids." The only time you would mention alllllllll those years they knew each other were maybe little quips -- "Yes, I do stupid things, but you're the one that licked a toad by mistake!" -- but the only time you would create a big chunk of backstory and plunk into the book was when it related to the story at hand.

For example, Bob and John are best friends from childhood. You want to show why John trusts Bob completely but Bob doesn't trust John fully because of something that happened when they were 12. It's important because during the book John is going to trust Bob blindly, but at the last minute, Bob is going to let him down.

You have your little quips of unexplained barbs -- no you really don't know why Bob licked the toad -- but you do show or retell in its entirety, is an event that happened when they were 12 where Bob covered for John, leaving Bob to take the brunt of the punishment. John now trusts Bob completely, but Bob, smarting for the punishment he took unfairly, doesn't want to go through that again. This event is important to the story at hand, because it creates in the reader a firm grasp of the character's motivations important FOR THIS BOOK.

That story is now told. The characters trusts or distrusts are now cast. On to the sequel.

Important facts on Sequel:

1. Most readers have already read Bob and John at age 12.
2. Some readers haven't, however, read this information or forgot.
3. There remains a childhood of events not covered in book one.

4. And maybe most important.... it doesn't matter to this story. (Or at least, shouldn't. Rarely do the same events matter since THAT situation/feelings should have been resolved in book one.)

Now you're impulse to say "everything in book #1 matters" but no, rarely does it matter. Readers accepted in book one, John and Bob are friends. They will accept in book two that they are friends... or enemies.. without a lot of explanation. It is the preset situation of this book that ALL books -- first, second, eighth -- come with.

In book two, what matters is that John and Bob have fallen in love with the same woman. When they were 16, John stole Bob's girlfriend. Now it might relate back to the events of age 12 -- Bob might have trusted John and overlooked John stealing his girlfriend because John protected him when they were younger -- but that event isn't the pivotal point in book two. This book they are competeing for the same woman -- again -- so the key information is the teenage girlfriend.

The cool thing about this is that this teenage romance thing is new to EVERYONE -- old and new readers alike. It's important to this book. And the events of the first book have the same weight, now, as all the years they've been friends. John's betrayal of book one is now on the same level as licking the toad. It happened some time in the past and it was part of what shaped these characters -- and most importantly -- it's not part of THIS story.

Now you will find that discussions naturally detour into events of book one. Characters seem to open their mouth and book one comes spilling out. RESIST!!!! This is the writer you doing what is easy. Backstory is easy -- you know it inside and out. It seems so important! But it's not. Don't let it landslide into this book and bury the current book. You measure it out with eyedroppers, just like you would any other background info.

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