

## The Birth and Feeding of a Series Story Arc By Claudia Dain, Sabrina Jeffries, and Deb Marlowe

### Why Do a Series at All?

- Readers love to read them.
- Authors love to write them.
- Larger canvas allows author to play with larger themes or longer character growth arc
- You can show a hero/heroine's journey through years as well as through the progress of a romance.
- Marketing and promotion are simplified, for you **and** the publisher

### Organizing

Decide the defining principle of your series ahead of time.

- World (the world created is the main attraction): Stephanie Plum series, Dragonriders of Pern, Carpathians.
- Character (a single character is the series draw): Anita Blake, Eve Dallas, Sophia Dalby.
- Hook: It can be a family (Bridgertons, Mallorys, Bedwyns) or an externally created group (Royal Brotherhood, School for Heiresses) but the characters spin around this gravitational center.
- Foundational Plot Arc: A central conflict that will be resolved at the end of the series. Lots of mainstream series have this, like Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings, but in romance, while the romance plot is resolved within a single book, the foundational plot arc continues.
- Mystery: a mystery may be as small as what is the identity of a character (Sabrina's Michael or Julia Quinn's Lady Whistledown) or as large as who hid the jewels or killed the family patriarch.

For purposes of this talk, however, we're discussing series where the defining principle isn't static. It has its own arc, either a mystery or a battle to be resolved or a character growth arc.

## Preplanning

The more planning ahead you can do, the better. It will save you grief down the line. Here are a few tools that WE use. You may think of others:

- Timeline (example on transparency) containing key events that affect the series story arc as well as the individual stories (Sabrina's is color-coded to show which story it goes to)
- Character summary chart (example on transparency)
- Story arc summary in synopsis-type format
- Notebooks with pictures of things important to the world
- Pictures of characters
- Techniques to make the reader eager to come back to the series

## Challenges

- Publishing industry challenges:
  - Lines end abruptly.
  - Contracts end abruptly
  - Series die due to poor sales or bad marketing
  - Publishers decide to expand a series when author hadn't planned for it
- Writing challenges:
  - Characters can evolve in ways you didn't anticipate.
  - Too much info too early can lock you in later
  - Hard to balance how much series info to put into each book without sacrificing integrity of that one book.
- Challenges presented by readers: What do you do when readers fall in love with a character you hadn't planned on continuing?
- Marketing challenges: How do you promote/market the final book when you can't give away the "mystery" in back copy, etc.?

### ***About the presenters:***

Claudia Dain ([www.claudiadain.com](http://www.claudiadain.com)) is the *USA Today* bestselling author of the Courtesan Chronicles, wherein a former courtesan aids the ladies of the Regency in getting the men they deserve, in ways they do not expect, while serving her own secret agenda.

Sabrina Jeffries ([www.sabrinajeffries.com](http://www.sabrinajeffries.com)) is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Heiress Series, about a lady's school run by a schoolmistress whose budding romance with her anonymous benefactor evolves over six books.

Deb Marlowe ([www.debmarlowe.com](http://www.debmarlowe.com)) is the award-winning author of *An Improper Aristocrat* and the upcoming *Her Cinderella Season*