

Brooke Blogs

Live, Laugh, Love, Blog

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Sequels

by *David Burnett*

It has been several years, now, but I well remember reading *Game of Thrones*. I read it slowly because I was enjoying the story. Even though I very much wanted to find out what would happen, I was reluctant to hurry through it, preferring to stretch my enjoyment over as long a period of time as possible.

It was a long book! The Starks of Winterfell were the good guys and the Lannisters were evil. I loved Danny, the woman who birthed the dragons. I was appalled when Edard was executed, and I was excited when his kingdom, the entire North, in fact, rose against the evil king. I turned the pages looking for their victory. I imagined ways in which Edard's younger daughter might rescue her sister from the clutches of the enemy. I hoped that Jon would leave the Wall and go south...

The book ended, and multiple crises were left unresolved.

There was, however, a sequel.

If you are at all familiar with *Game of Thrones*, you know that there are a host of sequels. I read only a few pages of the second book, and I suspect that I would have been no more satisfied at the end of it than I was at the end of the first.

I have a love-hate relationship with sequels.

A sequel, as we all know, is a book that continues the story or the theme that first appeared in another book. There are at least three forms that a sequel may take, three ways in which a second book – or a third, fourth, or fifth book – may be related to the original.

Brand New Story

Sometimes a sequel is a completely different story from the one in the original book. The original story is over. It is complete, and it can be read and enjoyed on its own, without the sequel. Readers, in fact, are often surprised when the sequel hits the shelves in the bookstores.

The sequel, in turn, is also a complete, independent story that can be enjoyed on its own. It generally occurs later in time than the original. Typically, it revolves around the same characters – or some of them. The sequel, however, is not a direct continuation of the original story. It does not pick up the day after the original ended. Although reading the original might enhance one's enjoyment of the sequel, having read it is not essential since the sequel supplies any important background information. One has the impression that the author completed the first book and then thought, Well, I have another story to tell...

Nicholas Sparks's book, *The Wedding*, is generally acknowledged to be a sequel to *The Notebook*. The first book is about Noah and Allie, how they met, how they fell in love, how they died. *The Wedding* is about Jane, their daughter, and her husband, Winston. Noah appears in both books, although he is a central character only in the first. *The Wedding* tells a different story concerning the same family.

In this type of sequel, the books stand alone. Each book is satisfactory in and of itself.

Tell me more, Tell me more...

The first book can stand alone. At its end, the story is complete, and the reader needs no more information in order to enjoy the book.

The sequel, on the other hand is closely tied to the original, very dependent on it, and cannot be understood or enjoyed if the first book has not been read. While the first book can be enjoyed without the sequel, the sequel makes no sense without the original.

Gone with the Wind and *Rhett Butler's People* are an example of this type of sequel. At the conclusion of *Gone with the Wind*, Rhett walks away, leaving Scarlet, disappearing into the foggy Atlanta night. *Rhett Butler's People* was written some eighty years later as one attempt to tell what happened next. It involves some of the same characters, as well as many new ones. It is set after the war although there are flashbacks to earlier events.

Millions of people had read and enjoyed *Gone with the Wind* long before even the idea of the sequel was born. A reader, however, could not enjoy *Rhett Butler's People* unless she knew the story of *Gone with the Wind*.

Bethany Claire's book, *Love Beyond Time*, and its sequel, *Love Beyond Reason*, follow this pattern. *Love Beyond Time* has a satisfactory ending, but a reader would be lost if she attempted to read *Love Beyond Reason* first.

Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone can be enjoyed with no knowledge of the remainder of the series. The Deathly Hallows, however, makes no sense without an understanding of the story contained in the other six books.

A Never-Ending Story

Today, many sequels seem to be planned in advance. The first book often concludes with a "cliff hanger," a twist in the plot designed to hook the reader and obligate her to dive into the sequel in order to obtain closure. The sequel picks up immediately where the previous book ended, and neither book is complete without the other; neither can be enjoyed without the other.

The Hunger Games is, at heart, the love story of Katniss and Peeta. They find themselves participants in a "game" in which contestants publicly battle to the death and in which there can be but a single winner. Their love, so obvious to the millions who are watching the contest, forces the government to accept them both as victors. As they return home – in the final pages of the book – Katniss tells Peeta that her show of love was simply an act that was designed to assure that they both would survive. The reader knows, immediately that a sequel is around the corner. The Hunger Games has no satisfactory ending. Neither it, nor its sequel, nor the second sequel can be read alone. One must read all three books in order to enjoy the story.

No single book in Deborah Harkness's All Souls Trilogy is satisfactory by itself. The Game of Thrones series is another example. My wife reached the fifth book, and she is no closer to anticipating the ending than I was after reading the first.

I love sequels of the first two types!

When I enjoy a book, I frequently find myself constructing sequels, imagining what might happen next, what crises might occur, who might fall in love with whom. At the end of December, I completed Dunham, an excellent book by Mariah Jovan. I thought about the book for days, imagining various scenarios involving several of the characters.

When I truly enjoy a book, I am happy when I find that the author has enjoyed it, too. When I like the characters enough to create additional plot lines, I am excited to find that the author has chosen to do the same thing. When I want to know more, I am pleased when the author chooses to tell me more.

I object to sequels of the third type.

When I reach the last few pages of a book, only to discover a new twist in the plot, one that cannot possibly be resolved in the space that remains, I feel cheated! I purchased the book in good faith, expecting to enjoy the story and the experience of reading it. I should not have to read a second or third book, or more, in order to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

This pattern occurs so frequently, today, that marketing plans are built around it. When the sequel is published, one of the books will be offered free, the author knowing that anyone who wants to enjoy either book must also purchase and read the other one.

So, as I said, I have a love-hate relationship with sequels. “A Brand New Story”? Bring it on! “Tell me more, tell me more”? Bring it on! “A Never Ending Story”? Don’t even let me start the first book!

<http://brookeblogs.com/handfasting-david-burnett-guest-post-giveaway/>