

How to Become a Serial Writer

by D.V. Berkom

Charles Dickens did it. So did Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. And Orson Scott Card.

Serial writing has a history that's rich and varied, from the *Arabian Nights* (in which Scheherazade weaves awesome tales to entertain King Shahriyar in order to keep from being whacked the next day), to Stephen King's *The Green Mile*. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jack London and Robert Louis Stevenson are a few other notable authors who worked this way.

Some of the most fun I've ever had as a writer happened when I started to work in serial form. It taught me to get into the story quickly, keep the reader's interest, and leave them wanting more. There is no room for wasting words. You have to write lean.

So, what is a serial, you ask? It's a series of short stories with a unifying theme. They can be as long or as short as you want to make them. I liken them to the Saturday matinees my parents used to watch, only the stories are told in words, not images. Each matinee had a cliff-hanger at the end, something to keep the moviegoers coming back the next week. The type of serial I write is very much like that. I work at creating a fast-paced story, with a definite beginning, middle and end. The difference between a serial and a regular short story is that the end leaves the reader with the question, what happens next? and makes them want to read on.

My character's "prequel" turned out to be the perfect vehicle for serialization. I'd written two novels about Kate and had always wanted to explore what caused her to make certain choices in her past. And voila! *Bad Spirits* was born. The five-part series deals with the time before the other novels when Kate was much different than she is now, and shows us why she made the choices she did. It also introduces a few of the characters who appear in the other books.

Serial writing is a great form for those of us with day jobs and limited time to write. When life gets too hectic, sometimes the thought of writing a novel and the intense immersion required for that form is intimidating. I find that if I tell myself I only need to write 5,000 words (give or take) for the next story, it keeps me interested and motivated, and I don't feel quite so overwhelmed at the prospect. The best part of writing a serial is once I'm finished, I can combine the stories into a novel (or novella), and make it available to readers who may not want to wait for each installment.

Give serial writing a try. You might find that you enjoy working this way. I did.