

# Wattpad Tips, Tricks, & Secrets

By Lindsey Buroker

## *How To Win Followers and Influence Readers on Wattpad*

Posted by Lindsay | Posted in [Guest Posts](#) | Posted on 01-08-2013

I've had a few folks write guests posts about Wattpad in the last year and I keep running across news stories on Wattpad authors getting picked up by publishers, so it must be *the* place to be right now. At the least, it's *a* place where you can offer samples (or full books) of your work for free and build an audience.

I'll say from my own experience (I have the complete Emperor's Edge Book 1 up over there and part of Book 2) that it's working to sell books (I've had Wattpad readers send me notes saying they picked up the rest of the series). As with a lot of ebook marketing strategies out there right now, it seems to favor those with series — hook them with the first book and hope they'll go on to buy the rest when those ones aren't available for free. I might go more into my own experiences there at some point, but I've got a meaty guest post for you today from an author who's been on there longer and has a *lot* more page views than I have on my stories. I chat with David Alastair Hayden on Twitter, and I've started to think of him as the Wattpad pro! So, without further blathering, here's his advice:

## **How To Win Followers and Influence Readers on Wattpad**

By now most people here know that Wattpad is an online community for reading and sharing stories. It has a highly active base of readers/writers and allows them to build reading lists, vote for and comment on individual chapters, “follow” their favorite authors, and interact with other reader/writers via both public and

private messages. For me, Wattpad has been a wickedly fantastic way to connect with readers, sell books, and build toward that holy grail of 1,000 true fans.

Currently, I have a healthy 1.1 million reads on Wattpad for The Storm Dragon's Heart and over 900 followers. That doesn't make me the biggest name on Wattpad, but it certainly ain't too shabby either. For a fantasy adventure book aimed at the lower end of the YA market, I'd say my numbers are excellent. But I didn't earn readers and convert them to buyers by accident, or by simply spinning a good yarn.

I used a system.

## **My Wattpad Technique**

### ***Step 1) Post Regularly***

I post one chapter each week, every week. Choose a day, let everyone know (see author notes below), and stick to it. The reason for this is two fold.

Once readers find and become fans of your work they will know when to come looking for more. They will descend in mass on your newest chapter and the burst of reads, votes, and comments will shoot your book up the hotlist for your genre. This will give you increased visibility similar to that of appearing on a bestseller list on Amazon. As I released the later chapters of The Storm Dragon's Heart, the first book in my Storm Phase series, each one would rocket me into the Fantasy Top 5 and the Teen Top 50.

Also, Wattpaders are avid readers and they will consume your latest literary offering far faster than you would imagine possible. Because they want it now, all of it. So, if they know when to expect your newest post, it will dampen the urge to make impatient comments.

**A Note on Timing:** While posting The Storm Dragon's Heart, I experimented with different times and days. I found that the best time to post chapters for maximum impact on visibility was on Friday or Saturday.

## **Step 2: Post Lots**

On Wattpad, “reads” is the number of times any particular post has been viewed. So if your book has 10 chapters and each chapter has been read 10 times then your book has 100 reads. Readers can also vote on posts. Votes work and are tallied similarly, except where reads are passively gained as people open up a chapter, votes must be intentionally activated.

Obviously, the more chapters your book has the more opportunities you have to gather reads and votes. The more reads and votes you have the more visible your book will be on the site and the more new readers are likely to discover it. If you don’t write short chapters already, then I strongly advise that you break the book up by scenes. In fact, the wriggling of hooked readers on Wattpad affirmed my belief in short chapters for building tension and keeping the virtual pages flipping.

The Storm Dragon’s Heart has 54 chapters out of 85k words. That’s a huge plus because one hooked reader will give me 54 reads by the end. This is a distinct advantage. Make the chapters worth it and be prepared for the pestering of readers desperate for more story.

Short chapters is also a great way to turn impatient readers into book buyers. [Book 2: Lair of the Deadly Twelve](#) has 70 chapters and I am posting one each week. But both it and [Book 3: The Forbidden Library](#) are already available for purchase on Amazon and the other booksellers. Readers who just can’t wait will go ahead and buy the book.

## **Step 3) Link to Your Book**

When you post or edit a chapter, there is a spot to add tags and such, like keywords on KDP. If you click on the “Advanced” tab in that section it will let you add pictures and videos and an external link. This external link is where you can enter the link to your book on Amazon. It is very simple to do but not obvious. It doesn’t have to be an Amazon link. It could go to B&N or your book’s page on your website. If you do link to Amazon, the link will say “Amazon.”

That link is insufficient. It’s a tiny link. No one will see it. No one will click it. Trust me on this. Despite having that link from the

beginning, I had readers message me over and over telling me my book was wonderful and that I really should get it published. I got tired of answering this and had a little stroke of genius. (See Step 4.)

You can and should post active links to all your sales pages in your Wattpad profile. But you cannot put links in the chapters you post. Wattpad will automatically strip them. You can put a direct link as a comment though. So when readers ask you where they can get your book or suggest that you get it published (and they will, no matter how clear you make it that the book is available for purchase) feel free to respond with a link.

### ***Step 4) Add Author's Notes***

At the start of each chapter I put the following note:

You can buy this book and the rest of the STORM PHASE series at Amazon, B&N, Kobo, iBooks, and Smashwords.

And at the end of each chapter I put this note for a finished book:

You can buy this book and the rest of the STORM PHASE series at Amazon, B&N, Kobo, iBooks, and Smashwords. You can sign up for my newsletter, follow me on Twitter, or like my Facebook page. For more information, see [dahayden.com](http://dahayden.com). Your support is appreciated. Thanks for reading!

Or I will put this end note for an ongoing book:

I will post one chapter each week, but there are 70 chapters, so this may take a while. If you just can't wait, you can buy the complete book and the rest of the STORM PHASE series at Amazon, B&N, Kobo, iBooks, and Smashwords.

You can sign up for my newsletter, follow me on Twitter, or like my Facebook page. For more information, see my website [dahayden.com](http://dahayden.com). Your support is appreciated. Thanks for reading!

Once I added the notes and started peaking into the Top 10 on Fantasy, I started getting steady sales. And it was pretty obvious that Wattpad was the cause. As I would release each new chapter and the book popped onto those popularity lists, I got an immediate bump in sales on Amazon and other booksellers.

Of course, once the book was nearly finished, this boost trickled off. Readers could see the end in sight and were more patient. I'd estimate that before Book 2: Lair of the Deadly Twelve debuted, I generated about 200 sales off of Wattpad for The Storm Dragon's Heart which was priced then at \$5.99. (At the time my sales were in a huge slump. Not having a sequel to the first book in a series can do that.) Now, I'm getting steady follow-through sales on Book 2: Lair of the Deadly Twelve and Book 3: The Forbidden Library as well from impatient readers who don't want to wait two years to get the rest of the story. It has become impossible to judge how many, but I'd say quite a few. Storm Phase Book 2 actually outsells Book 1 on Kobo and iBooks.

### ***Step 5) Be Sociable***

Wattpad offers loads of opportunities to interact with people and promote yourself. Some people have had success with the forums, sometimes called clubs, and such. I wouldn't know. There is, however, one thing you definitely should do on Wattpad. It doesn't even take much time or energy.

Reply to all the comments on your chapters. Be friendly. It only takes a few minutes each week. If someone posts a rude comment to one of your chapters, you can delete the comment. I had one over-eager young fan who sometimes got too aggressive and needed moderating. Eventually my fans started reporting his comments and I didn't have to do anything anymore.

At the bottom of your profile page is your message board. Readers can post messages just like they were posting comments on a chapter. And you can respond in kind. Or, if you click the checkbox that says "broadcast to followers" under the message box, that message will be sent to all of your followers. Depending on how they have their notifications set up, your message will appear on their Wattpad newsfeed and be sent directly to their email. This is a great way to announce new projects just like you would with a newsletter. Beside that checkbox is a button that lets you post the message to Facebook as well.

## **Step 6) Get Featured**

The only promotion I have done on Wattpad is participating in their Writer Partnership Program which allows select authors to “feature” their completed book on the site. Being “featured” brings in a mass of readers through the advertising exposure by the powers-that-be on Wattpad. Your book will appear on the “Featured” page in the discovery section of the site and on the rather ubiquitous “Books You Might Enjoy” banner. They also allow you to write a guest post for their blog.

There are two ways to get “featured” on Wattpad. You can simply post your entire book and then ask to be. This is the path I most often see indie authors take. If I had known it existed when I first started on Wattpad, this is probably what I would have done, too. I’m glad I didn’t. That’s not to say that you can’t or won’t get results with this method, you will.

But by posting a chapter a week, I slowly built up a list of followers before the Writer Partnership Program contacted me. It allowed me to cleverly time up my “featured” promotion with the release of Book 2: Lair of the Deadly Twelve. My numbers exploded. Waiting to tap that Wattpad promotion helped me reach a much broader fan base than I would have if I had used it earlier. I saw the same huge spike in readers others see after being “featured” but that was on top of my original followers.

And that’s it!

Ok, I lied. Wattpad is a big, complicated social network. So as you wade in, there are a couple of other things you should note and or consider.

## **More Notes**

### ***Sequels***

Most published authors put up sample chapters to the sequel as an excerpt and leave it there. If you do this, I strongly advise marking it as an excerpt in the title so no one will be mistaken.

I’ve chosen, however, to serialize Book 2: Lair of the Deadly Twelve as well. It won’t all be posted on Wattpad until early 2014. Barring

the unforeseen, Book 4 and possibly Book 5 will be out by then and dedicated readers will have to soldier on or dive into their lunch/latte/iTunes money. Will I post Book 3 on Wattpad? I have no idea. I'll figure that out when I get there.

I also have a complete posting of my adult fantasy novel Wrath of the White Tigress on Wattpad, and I'm serializing Chains of a Dark Goddess which is in the same series. I don't think Wattpad has boosted or harmed the sales of those two books because ...

### ***Rated R Books***

If your book is Rated R it will not appear on the charts and will, apparently, be difficult to find by searching. It also won't be eligible to become featured. This cripples the promotion of such books and is why *Wrath of White Tigress* has far, far fewer reads than *The Storm Dragon's Heart*. It's not just because YA is a stronger category. You will, of course, find books with Rated R material that are not marked as such, but I do things the right way because ... Well, you can't be evil all the time, can you? I think Captain America taught me that. Well, he probably said something along the lines of "do the right thing" and "be a good person," but I have my own interpretations.

### ***Peer-to-Peer Critique***

There is a lot of fan fiction on Wattpad. A whole lot. If you don't know who One Direction is already, you will find out. (A boy band. I'd give you analogies, but doing so would reveal my true age.) Teens writing fiction for other teens, especially fanfic, can succeed (get TONS of votes, reads, and fans) with subpar writing because they're writing things their peers will like and enthusiastically support. Peers support their peers, and they critique them. The interactions between peers are very different than those on publishable writing. You cannot and should not compare your numbers to the numbers for books like this. You might, however, want to check out these books to see what teens are into if you write YA.

### ***The Real Reason to Use Wattpad***

But here's the one thing you must accept: Most Wattpad readers are not going to buy your books. It's just not going to happen for myriad reasons. I've had readers with low incomes thank me for posting quality fiction for free (for this I've been blessed by the names of strange gods). I have many young readers, too, who maybe don't have the money or allowance, or live in nations where wealth isn't so plentiful. I had one reader tell me that he was planning to buy my books after he finished saving up for a guitar. The hope is that they will share their love of my work with friends who do have money to spend on books with boy wizards, Asian settings, fetches that turn into diaries, and cat-girl ninjas.

Many Wattpadders who buy my books message me to let me know they're supporting me, which is touching, and I always thank them profusely. I have a few fans who've bought my books yet still drop by to vote on new chapters and leave me comments on what they liked in the chapter. You really cannot get that kind of feedback anywhere else. I have had dark days brightened by my Wattpad fans and their enthusiasm. The comments on the chapters they love, the begging for more chapters when they know I'm only giving one each week, pestering me because I forgot to post ... these are things I cherish.

## **How to Connect with Readers Using Wattpad**

Posted by Lindsay | Posted in [Guest Posts](#) | Posted on 20-03-2013

As some of you know, I started posting [The Emperor's Edge on Wattpad](#), figuring it was one more place I could have that first book out there for free (I may post Book 2 as well). I've heard from other indie authors who have leveraged Wattpad's massive reader base to gain fans, often before they've launched their first novels.

I'm not rocking it over there with EE yet (and admittedly haven't done any networking or anything to reach out to people — I've just been posting my chapters and announcing them on Twitter), so when the more Wattpad-experienced [Nicolette Andrews](#) offered to write up a guest post on the subject, I said, yes, please. I'll turn you over to her now:

### How to Better Connect With Readers Using Wattpad

First of all, thank you, Lindsay for letting me take over to talk about my experience with Wattpad and gathering my army of cohorts/followers.

I want to say, I love Wattpad. I have been on the site for a year now and I have met some of the most amazing people you'd ever hope for. I was fortunate enough to find a niche of people who love High Fantasy and love to read and write. Wattpad, to me, is like the ultimate reader/writer social media outlet. And like any other media outlet it's the ideal place to get to know your readers. I'm going to talk about a couple things that is unique to Wattpad and that I've utilized in keeping in touch with my readers.

### Dedications

On Wattpad you upload each chapter at a time and it formats it to almost an e-reader format that can be read online or on a mobile app. As the author for each chapter you are given a variety of choices on how to customize said chapter, among other things you can add pictures, videos and a cast (if you so choose). What I love to use is the dedication. When you dedicate a chapter to another Wattpad

member, they are notified and it shows up on their page. It's a nice way of saying 'thanks' to some of your more devoted readers.

## **Broadcasts**

The broadcast is similar to a status update or a tweet only instead of it just been part of the thread on a home page, it is directly emailed to any of your followers. (Almost like a built in mailing list.) This is a great way to email teasers, do reader polls, or for me I found volunteers to help me edit my novel 'Diviner's Prophecy'. But use the broadcast sparingly, multiple emails in a day about what you had for breakfast or posting for the tenth time that day that your book is now on the Kindle can become overwhelming and no matter how much they like your stories, they will stop following.

## **Comments and Replies**

Another great feature of Wattpad is the comments. Readers have the option to give feedback chapter by chapter, and if you're posting once a week like I do with my works in progress, sometimes there's kindly worded threats to write faster. What's wonderful about this feature is that you can respond to these comments and often times they open up a dialogue about your book. The more you interact with readers, in my experience, the more likely they are to stick around to read more of your work, even if you take forever to post the next installment.

## **Reading Other Readers' Stories**

This is something I personally like to do but not many authors think it's worth the time. Now to be clear I only read stories that interest me and at times I have been requested to read other peoples stories and I will read for a while and give feedback as much as I can but you have to draw a line in the sand somewhere. When reading other authors stories I like to make sure I comment and vote. (I would want them to do it for me!)

## Stay Active

Like any other social media site, persistence is key. Unlike other social media sites, Wattpad is tailored to readers and writers meaning it's the ideal place to promote your work, connect with fans, and build a supportive village that will be ready and willing to purchase your books.

*You can connect with [Nicolette on Wattpad](#), [Twitter](#), or [her website](#), or pick up over first novel at [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), or [Smashwords](#).*

## **Using Wattpad for Book Promotion with CJ Archer**

*As authors, we're always looking for new ways to stand out and attract readers to our work. The online world presents numerous opportunities, some of them effective, some not so much. I've been aware of Wattpad for a while, but haven't had a chance to tinker around there much yet. I learned that independent author CJ Archer has had some success there and asked her if she'd answer a few questions. If you're looking for new ways to promote your work, you may find this short interview useful.*

**Thanks for stopping by, CJ! First off, could you give us an overview on what the Wattpad site is all about?**

Wattpad is a place where writers connect with other writers as well as readers. They can get feedback on their “works”, interact, and build a community. For readers, it's a place to read free stories and find new authors.

**It sounds like you and quite a few other self-published authors have been using Wattpad as a promotional tool. What strategies are you using?**

I initially put up a few chapters of one of my self-published books on Wattpad, but it gained very few readers. I decided to investigate the site further to see what works and what didn't. I found that authors who had the most success were posting young adult books, posted the entire book, and they interacted quite a bit. So I put up the first book in my new YA trilogy, THE MEDIUM. I posted a new scene every few days until the entire story was up, which coincided with the release of the 2nd book.

*Something to keep in mind is that Wattpad is geared towards teenage readers (mostly female) who want to read free books.*

When I started posting THE MEDIUM, I interacted in a few relevant communities to gain some initial exposure. Since THE MEDIUM is historical paranormal romance, I posted in “clubs” that focus on

these three genres. I made sure to include the cover image in my posts. It's a professionally designed cover with a striking model. I've since had people tell me they were attracted to the cover, then went on to read the blurb and first chapter.

If you do use Wattpad to post the first book in a series, expect some backlash from readers who want to read the subsequent books for free too. Make it obvious that the Wattpad book is part of a series, and that you will not be posting subsequent books. I think it's important to keep the price of the remaining books low, so that readers on a tight budget won't feel cheated. Most will be happy to pay you for your efforts if they enjoyed the first book and they don't feel ripped off by an expensive 2nd book.

**How much time do you spend over there? Do you have to comment on other people's work to get folks to check out yours?**

In the first week of posting THE MEDIUM I spent perhaps half an hour per day, mainly posting in the clubs and commenting on other people's works as well as updating mine. After that, I tapered off my efforts and now I only reply to comments left on my story which takes only a few minutes. If another writer asks me to comment on their Wattpad story, I'll usually take a look at the first chapter and offer some encouraging comments and some tips.

**If someone started posting a novel at Wattpad today, how long do you think it might take for him/her to attract an audience and (we hope) see some sales?**

This is not an easy one to answer. I think if you put in some early effort over a few weeks, you should see some reads quite quickly. BUT it all depends on whether readers like your story, connect with the characters etc, otherwise they'll abandon the story without finishing it. A lot of Wattpadders won't read anything until it's complete, so it pays to post the entire book and mark it as "complete".

**Does it seem like certain genres do better than others over there?**

Stories geared towards teenage female readers do better on Wattpad. Romance is very hot on the site, but also the most competitive category.

**Do you have any comments or advice for authors who might be worried about putting their published work out there for free?**

Personally, I'd only post entire books on Wattpad that I'm comfortable having free. For me, this means only the first book in a series, never the subsequent books. Since *THE MEDIUM* is also free at all the major ebookstores (currently waiting on Amazon to price match), I'm content to have it on Wattpad in its entirety. I've heard of other authors posting the entire book for a limited time, then scaling back to only a few chapters after they've gained some reads. I haven't tried this, however, and I'm not sure if I will.

**Thanks for taking the time to answer my questions, CJ!**

*You can find CJ on her site, Facebook, and Twitter, and you can check out her books on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Smashwords. Of course, you can read The Medium on Wattpad too.*

What do you guys think? Have you tried Wattpad? I've had an account there for a while but haven't done anything with it yet. I may try posting my free ebooks over there.

## **Are There Really “Secrets” to Self-Publishing Success?**

Posted by Lindsay | Posted in [Tips And Tricks](#) | Posted on 05-01-2016

If you visit the Writers’ Cafe on Kboards in any given week, you can find authors plotting ways to engineer a bestseller or asking if there’s a way to work the system in order to “stick” on Amazon. Everybody wants success — of course! So, what’s the real secret to getting it?

Well, not surprisingly I’m going to tell you that for the vast majority of us, it involves thinking of this as a career, writing a lot of books, and accumulating more and more readers along the way.

The good news is that you don’t need to be anywhere within sniffing distance of the Top 100 on Amazon to make good money. *Really* good money.

If you find an indie author who has several full-priced ebooks (not 99 cents) in a series under a 10,000 sales ranking on Amazon, and they’re there consistently from month to month, that author is probably going to clear six figures this year. The more books you have out (that are selling at least moderately well), the easier it is to make that kind of money.

So what are my tips for making things sell moderately well?

I’m going to assume you’ve already read blogs and forums or have listened to podcasts and know the basics: write in a series, have awesome cover art, have a blurb that appeals to the target audience, have entertaining and well-edited stories, and pay attention to what’s working right now in the marketing world (we talk a lot about this on our [Science Fiction & Fantasy Marketing Podcast](#), and most of the stuff applies to all genre fiction).

Beyond that? Here are my three suggestions:

### **Develop your own unique voice**

I don’t think this gets emphasized enough in self-publishing circles. It’s what turns your books from a commodity into something that

readers *must* have because no other author can deliver the same experience. It's what gets people to not only read the book they chanced across on Amazon but to continue on and read your other books and your other series, as well. If you've had one series that sold well but then launched a second one to the sound of crickets, not having a compelling voice may be part of the problem (especially if those series are in the same genre).

So, how do you develop a unique and compelling voice?

Honestly, this mostly comes from writing a lot and from not being afraid to put your personality above the prettiness of the words. When you get started, your voice will often sound a lot like the voices of whoever your favorite authors are. That's okay. It's probably somewhere after your first 500,000 or million words that you stop emulating others and find your own style. Eventually, you internalize all of the writing rules and learn to stop worrying so much about whether your sentences have too many "to be" verbs. You just write, with the story flowing straight from the creative part of your brain to the keyboard, and it comes out in your voice.

Your voice has your sense of humor, it has your prejudices and passions, and it has your unique way of looking at the world. Essentially, it's *you* on the page.

Will everybody love your voice? Of course not. But for those who have similar tastes, it will be an amazing match. Some of those readers will become lifelong true fans. You get enough true fans, and you won't need to worry about paying the bills again (so long as you keep writing).

## **Publish consistently**

I don't think this gets emphasized enough either. For the most part, your six-figure (and more) indie authors of today are people who have been publishing the kinds of books their readers want regularly for years.

Not everybody can publish 10 books a year (few can!), but if you can publish one or two or three a year, and keep doing it regularly, you've got a much better shot at lasting success than someone who goes on a tear and publishes six books in six months and then disappears for three years.

Why?

With every new book that you put out, it's like a doorway, a chance that someone can find a way into your world. And readers who have already found you will get used to thinking, ah, it's November... I wonder if so-and-so has a new book out, since she usually publishes something in the fall. You'll become a part of their regular schedule, something they look for at certain times of the year.

Time is on your side, too. Fans are accumulated over months and years. You'll promote your books again and again, each time finding a few more readers. Even people who didn't grab your stuff instantly will see your name again and again in the genre lists that they browse, and maybe it'll be Series #3 that finally draws them in.

Also, the more books you publish, the more likely it is you'll have something hit. Yes, you can write to genre tropes and try to engineer a bestseller, but that's more likely to fail than succeed, unless you already have a big audience built up. The truth is that even the big publishers, corporations that have piles of money to throw behind advertising, don't know ahead of time what's going to hit.

In my own experience, it's usually the book you *don't* expect to be a hit that ends up sticking at the top of your category on Amazon for months. And the book you thought would push all the right buttons and become a big seller just does okay. Fortunately, for indie authors making 70% on each ebook we sell, steady earners are just fine. You can quit your day job once you have a stable of steady earners.

## **Consistently market your books**

There's that word consistency again. People really do underestimate the power of sticking around after so many others have dropped to the wayside.

I'm not one of those people who says you have to spend %X of your time marketing or that you have to do something every day, but I do try to do something every month that will result in a few hundred more readers trying one of my Book 1s. If I'm lucky and score a Bookbub ad, maybe that will be a few thousand. But that doesn't always happen.

What are the things you can reliably do each month?

- Play around with running sales on your Book 1 and buying a few ads.
- Join (or create) a multi-author boxed set with your series starter in it, or do an anthology with all-new fiction that leads into your series.
- Join (or start) a mailing list campaign with other authors in your genre, where you put together a list of everyone's free or 99-cent books and then each agree to share the list with your subscribers.
- If you're in KDP Select, try rolling Countdown Deals where each month (or even week), you have something that's on sale for 99 cents.

I'm a big fan of doing things that have lasting impact when it comes to marketing. Back in 2011, I had audiobooks made of the first three books in my Emperor's Edge series, and I put them out there for free via [Podiobooks](#). I still have people emailing me to tell me that they first found my books that way. Ditto for Wattpad. I don't do anything to promote stuff there, but I have the first three books in that series up there, too, and people still find the posts and read the books that way, some going on to buy the rest of the series.

Try different things. Keep track of what moves the needle. Avoid wasting time and money on the things that don't. Month after month, if you keep getting new people to try your work, you should be able to increase the number of fans you have, and you'll get to the point where you always have people moving through your various series and buying your books. Income becomes steady and reliable. And voila: you become a successful author.

## **5 Ways to Promote Your Free Book 1** **Series Starter**

Posted by Lindsay | Posted in [Book Marketing](#) | Posted on 15-10-2015

You've probably heard that a lot of indie authors made their careers by giving away tens of thousands of copies of their series starters. (For me, [The Emperor's Edge](#), has been free since late 2011). You may also have heard that free doesn't pack as much punch as it used to (i.e. it's harder to get people to notice your free ebook and give it a try). I won't deny the truth of that. There are a couple of things that have changed:

*Amazon "hid" the free lists*

A couple of years ago, when you browsed through a Top 100 category at Amazon, you would see the top selling paid books side by side with the top downloaded free books. People didn't have to click a special tab to see the free lists.

Amazon also doesn't show free books in your also-boughts. If you look at the fourth book in my Dragon Blood series, [Patterns in the Dark](#), you'll see Books 2, 3, 5, 6, and the 3-book omnibus in the first page of the also-boughts. You won't find Book 1 in there because it's currently free.

This lessened visibility means it's harder for people to stumble across your free book on Amazon. Readers have to consciously click over to the free ebook lists and browse for new stories to download. Some people still do that, but many don't, especially if they're Kindle Unlimited subscribers, which brings us to the next change.

*Kindle Unlimited has reduced the need for readers to hunt for free books*

In 2014, Amazon rolled out its Kindle Unlimited subscription service. Now, for \$10 a month, readers can borrow and consume all of the ebooks in the lending library, which is a lot of books! You can see in my post from last week that [Amazon offers a lot of incentives to get indie authors to enroll in KDP Select and KU](#).

A lot of price conscious and voracious readers — exactly the kind of person who might have surfed those free lists before — are now grabbing KU books instead of hunting for freebies. In essence, everything in KU is a “freebie” for them, so long as they keep paying their \$10 a month.

*There are more free books out there as competition*

As I said, many authors have built fan bases and sold a lot of books by having their series starters out there for free, both in Amazon and on the other stores. Everybody now knows that you can get a book made permanently free or “permafrees” on Amazon (a store that doesn’t allow you to price a book at less than 99 cents via the dashboard) by making it free elsewhere and waiting for Amazon to price match. You can also get a free ebook in Barnes & Noble (another store that doesn’t let you choose free as an option via the dashboard) by going through a distributor, such as Smashwords or Draft 2 Digital.

In addition to the widely known price-matching trick, KDP Select also allows its authors to make enrolled titles free for a few days each quarter. The result is that at any given time, there are a lot more free titles available these days than there used to be. And, as we’ve said, there may be fewer people looking for free books.

With all that being said, is having a free series starter out there still a viable option? Can it still “make” a new indie author’s career?

Yes, I believe so. In fact, I know so, since that’s how I kicked things off with my pen name last year. The pen name was anonymous at the time, so I was starting from scratch. You can read more about how that went in my [4-weeks-in](#) and [10-weeks-in](#) posts from last year. The short answer is that launching with three titles in a series the first month and making the first one permafrees, at least for a while (it’s now 99 cents and in KDP Select), helped a lot.

But, as I said in the beginning, it’s not enough anymore to just make your book free. You have to promote it! (Most of us have always had to do some promotion, but there was a time when you could get thousands of downloads or even tens of thousands of downloads fairly easily.)

Here’s my list of five ways to get more people checking out your free series starter:

## 1. Buy Advertising

This is the obvious one. If you've got some reviews already and the average is decent, it shouldn't be difficult to get some ads. There are a handful of lists out there with links to the major sponsorship sites (and many of the minor ones) that will promote your freebie for anything from a couple of bucks to hundreds of dollars. (Don't pay hundreds unless it's for a Bookbub ad!)

Ads do two things. First, you get immediate downloads from the people getting the sponsor site's newsletter or following them on Facebook. Second, the downloads from those people help push your ebook up to a better slot in your category on Amazon, thus meaning that more of the people who surf the free lists will find and try your book.

Some authors like to buy an ad or two every month to keep the sales of subsequent books trickling in, and others like to "ad stack," where they'll buy several ads on consecutive days to try and stay at the top of their category for longer. Either plan can work.

## 2. Put an excerpt (or serialize the entire novel) up on your site and use social media to plug it.

Authors often struggle to figure out how to use social media effectively. It's tough to get people to buy things on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, etc., and if you write a lot of sales-pitchy tweets or posts, you might find yourself blackballed by your target audience.

It is, however, easier to promote when you're giving something away for free. People are less likely to roll their eyes at the sales pitch and more likely to click and take a peek. They have nothing to lose but a few minutes of their time.

Andy Weir of *The Martian* fame started out serializing his novel on his website. Something that doesn't always get mentioned was that Andy had a blog readership before he got started serializing the novel, so this isn't necessarily a path to ultra success for everyone, but the combination of free + serialized installments + social media can definitely work to build an audience.

(You don't have to serialize, but that gives you something to promote every week when you post a new installment, instead of always promoting the same free ebook.)

I've posted excerpts of my books and promoted those, usually with new releases, and I've definitely had people tell me they first bought one of my books because they got caught up in the excerpt.

Aside from my experience with Wattpad (more on that below), where I was serializing books that were already published, I haven't tried serializing an entire novel yet. It is, however, on my to-do list for 2016 — serializing the first book in a new trilogy I have planned (before I publish anything).

### **3. Using Facebook advertising to drive readers to your mailing list (where they receive your free ebook for signing up)**

Facebook is different from the sponsorship sites. Instead of paying a flat fee to have your book appear in a newsletter or on a site for a day, you pay per click (that click can go to a landing page on your website or directly to your book's page on Amazon). You can target readers far more specifically than you can on other advertising platforms (i.e. you can have your ads display only to women over 30 who are fans of X popular author who writes in a style similar to yours).

The downside of Facebook advertising is that you might be paying 50 cents or more per click. That's a lot if your only goal is to give away a free ebook.

Thriller author Mark Dawson has pioneered a system of using Facebook to get people to sign up for his mailing list. He sends them a couple of free ebooks from his starter library and then, after they've had a chance to read those books, tries to get them to buy a boxed set of later books in his series. By using affiliate links and tracking clicks, he can see which sales come from his list and how much each newsletter signup is worth in the end. I.E. maybe he pays a dollar or two to get people to sign up, but if the average person ends up earning him \$5 or \$10 in book sales, then it's worth it.

This is something I'm planning to try soon, but I can't speak from personal experience yet, so I'll direct you to Mark. He has three free videos up that explain things (his goal is to get you to buy a course on the subject, but there is a lot of good information in the free videos).

## 4. Wattpad

I have the first three books in my Emperor's Edge series up for free on Wattpad. It's a big site where authors will post everything from completed novels to installments of new projects that they're working on. There are a lot of people that read books on the site, especially teens, who may not yet have a lot of money to spend on paid ebooks at Amazon.

Like many authors, I've had trouble converting those Wattpad readers to paid sales, but I have definitely had people write to me and say that they first discovered my ebooks there and went on to buy the rest of the series. I also figure that young readers who may not yet be book buyers will become adult readers with income to spend sooner or later. Maybe they'll remember my series fondly and come back to it (or other titles I've written) one day.

Note: since there are so many writers on Wattpad, it's like anything else in that it's a struggle to be noticed. I never had much luck networking with others (I didn't put much effort into it either), which is usually recommended there. Posting your complete novel in installments seems to help, and as time passes, more and more people stumble across the book and give it a read. If you have an awesome cover (I still need to redo my EE ones, so I can't say that I do), that can go a long way toward attracting attention.

Note 2: I've never seen anyone have a great deal of luck by only posting the first few chapters of a book here, though lots of authors try it. A lot of readers, if not the majority of readers, wait until a book is marked complete before jumping into it.

## 5. Podiobooks

Podiobooks is a site that will host your completed audiobook (so you have to turn your Book 1 into an audiobook before you can do this) for free and then send it out to iTunes, where people can

chance across it, much as they would a podcast. I have the first three books in my Emperor's Edge series out there where people can listen to them for free.

I won't lie: audiobooks are expensive to create unless you do it yourself (and then it's time consuming, which is expensive in another way). Because of that, this method won't be for everyone.

That said, because there is that higher barrier to entry, there are a lot fewer free podiobooks out there with which to compete. There are thousands of free ebooks in each genre on Amazon, whereas you might only find hundreds of free podiobooks in iTunes in your genre (if that).

I published my podiobooks in 2011 and 2012. I do absolutely nothing to promote them, but I still get people emailing me to let me know that they found my series this way (and often asking if I'll ever put the rest of the books into an audio format!). Some of those listeners go on to buy the ebooks in the series. (If I had audiobooks for the rest of the series, they would probably buy that way instead, which can be more lucrative than ebooks.)

If you're going to be putting your books out in audio format anyway (I'm doing my Rust & Relics series through ACX right now), then you could also consider putting a free version of Book 1 out there. Then people who enjoy that can go on to buy the rest of the series through iTunes/Amazon/Audible.

There's my list of five ways to promote your free Book 1. Do you have any to add? Or any experience with these that you would like to share?