

Attracting a reader

Book titles don't write themselves, though author Jessica Andersen says she wishes they would. She leaves titles and covers up to her publishers. It's their job to attract the reader, she says, and her job to hook them in the first few pages.

Who writes your book titles?

Jessica Andersen, romance author

Jessica Andersen: Up until about two years ago, I passed my manuscripts in with numbers, because I was so bad with titles. It would be "Manuscript 15," "Manuscript 16," "Manuscript 17." So, really, I tried the title thing, and my editors were just, like, "Really, give up." So, titles have never been super-personal to me. I can't get emotional about titles because that's business. That's their job to help guide me a little bit in what's going to help get that book in the reader's hands. So, what I think would be a great title for a book might not be something that, in their experience, is going to get the reader to pick that book up off the shelf, flip it over, and look at the back copy. And maybe, hopefully, read the first couple of pages. Because once you've read the first couple of pages, then I can work; that's my job. My job is to suck you in, and to make you pick that book up and buy it. Their job is to create the cover and create the title that's going to help me do my job.

What makes a good cover?

Jessica Andersen: My sense is that it's a funny compromise between specificity and generality that's going to make a cover work: that it's specific enough so it doesn't look like everything else that's on the shelf, but, it's general enough that it doesn't give a reader a reason to go, "Ew, no, I don't like that kind of book." And I'm a reader, and I'm a consumer, and I'm a buyer, and I know that I make those decisions when I walk past books.

Jessica Andersen: I think you try things, and things that work one year don't work another year. You know, covers go through phases just like anything else. You'll see-- we've had headless-guy covers for a while now, where you've just got the chest, and the head's cut off right about here, so that the reader can kind of put their own face on things. Those are pretty popular. In the context of my covers, I found-- I think the covers that were too heavily, too much on the pyramids, and too much on the background of what's going on in the story might have turned some readers off, where, like, "Hmm, not really so much into the pyramids." Whereas, they might love a great paranormal story.

Has a cover or title ever made you want to buy a book? What books could use a title or cover change?

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