

Message or not?

Does a good novel need a message? Does it need to say something important about the human condition, offer some insight into our shared humanity, or is it enough to be simply entertaining? What is the purpose of literature? That's a biggie. I can only answer for myself.

I know there is nothing wrong with entertainment. God knows I enjoy engrossing stories in which the hero battles a formidable foe, wins, and incidentally, gets the girl at the end. If it is well done, people enjoy reading it (or watching it), but let's face it. Those stories are immediately forgettable. We've seen them repeated all of our lives.

So now, Mr. or Ms Author, what if you want to create something that outlives you? Is that too lofty and prideful a goal? I don't think so. Very few of us will change the world, but maybe there is a middle ground between short-lived entertainment and earth-shattering profundity.

I have realized that I would like to at least make people think, beyond the pages of my books. I would like to bring light to bear on some topic or point of view that my reader may not have previously thought much about. In short, I'd like to send a message. With that in mind, I wrote my first book, *Development*. There, under the guise of a mystery/drama, I wanted to show my readers how short-sighted and destructive mankind can be when we exploit nature for greedy ends. I hope I wasn't heavy-handed about this and that the message was nonetheless contained within the story.

With my next book, *Carrie's Secret*, I confess I wanted to simply create a good mystery. I tried for entertainment and nothing more than that. I wanted to engage readers in a puzzle, the basic formula for a mystery. But that did not fully satisfy me, so now, with my third book, *Empty Luck*, I am trying to meet the two goals. Yes, I want the story to be entertaining, but I also want it to say something about the power of transgressions and guilt, and maybe sacrifice and redemption. I'm still working it out, but my goal is to include a message within a good story. Time will tell if I succeed.