A COVER THAT KNOWS WHERE IT BELONGS

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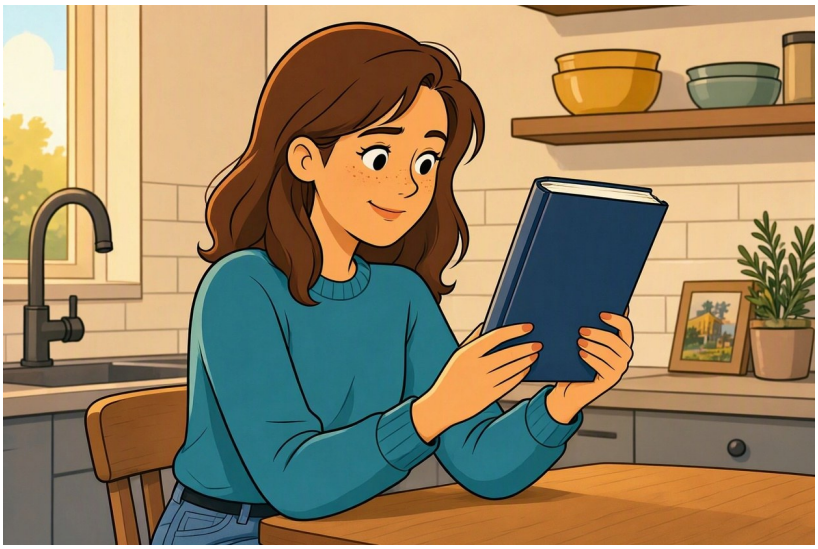

Helping the right readers recognize your book

Mabel loved her new cover.

It featured a moonlit castle, a silver sword, and a magnificent dragon whose wings stretched almost from one edge to the other.

There was only one problem: her book was about a retired florist solving a theft at the village cake competition.

The dragon was excellent. He had simply reported for duty at the wrong novel.

For an independent author, a cover helps a reader make a quick decision about the experience inside.

Begin with the book's promise

Before gathering pictures or choosing colours, describe the reading experience.

Is the story warm and reassuring? Dark and unsettling? Does the romance lead the story, or does a murder arrive before anyone has finished the tea?

Your cover doesn't have to illustrate a particular scene. It should make sense beside books that offer a similar experience.

Study several professionally presented titles in your category. Notice patterns in imagery, lettering, colour, and tone.

You are learning the visual language readers already understand.

Prepare a useful brief

If you hire a designer, include the genre, intended audience, tone, title, author name, and a short description of the story. Mention any series plans and the formats you expect to publish.

Share a few relevant cover examples and explain what you notice about them.

"The title is easy to read" gives a designer more useful direction than "this one has a nice feeling."

Be clear about anything essential. Then leave room for the designer to do the work you hired them to do.

Let the lettering participate

A beautiful image can only do so much if the title looks as though it has become tangled in a hedge.

Check the relationship between the title, author name, and other elements. Consider contrast and readability.

View the cover at the small size a reader might encounter online. Can you still recognise its subject and tone? Does the title remain reasonably clear?

For a series, think about how future covers could belong to the same family without all wearing exactly the same jumper.

Check the practical details

Confirm that you have appropriate permission to use the images, illustrations, and fonts in the intended publication and promotion.

Ask the designer what usage rights and files are included. Keep the agreement and relevant licence records.

For print, the full cover must fit the final production specifications. A changed page count can affect the spine, so coordinate the cover with the finished interior and the printer's requirements.

Inspect a physical proof when possible. A screen can be very flattering about colours.

Choose feedback carefully

Ask readers familiar with your genre what kind of book they expect from the cover.

That question is often more revealing than asking whether they like it. A cover can be attractive and still make the wrong promise.

Mabel eventually chose a cheerful village scene with a suspiciously unattended cake.

The dragon took the news well.

He was already being considered for a fantasy trilogy, where his particular skills were much more likely to be appreciated.

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