BETA READERS

By

Ava K Michaels

My second panel at Chapter Con is about Beta Readers… those special people who authors need and I hope this post will help. Once again, there’ll be a link at the bottom for you to download this as a doc, if you want it.

First thing I’d say… authors need to check their ego at the front door. Sorry, but it’s true, if you can’t do that… stop reading now. If you’re brave enough, and can, carry on.

So? Who are they and why do you need them?

They’re not your best friend, family, or someone too close that they’re just going to tell you what they think you want to hear. Any author who thinks that family or friends won’t do this… hmm nope, they will, and you’re kidding yourself I you think otherwise.

They have to be able to tell you things that you might not want to hear, and might even have you in tears or want to throw a tantrum or eat a ton of chocolate huddled in the corner … for example, plot holes that means you’ll have rewrites to do, sometimes even major ones. Something we all hate to have to do but is necessary for a story.

They should also be from the demographic of your story, as in, readers of the same genre you’re writing. Readers who love pnr if that’s what you do, contemp romance if that’s your thing. Don’t have a group of betas that love horror reading a historical romance because they won’t give you the feedback that you need or want. It’s a waste of your time and theirs.

A team of Betas should be made up of people with different strengths too, some who’re great at spotting those pesky plot holes, some who are good at pointing out character flaws, some who can see where a book’s flow is slowing so much that it gets boring… yes it happens and if you have someone on your team who’ll actually tell you, then they’re gold and you need them to be *able* to tell you so you can fix it.

It means you’ll be putting out the best story you can, and you have to have a thick skin and have a relationship open enough with them to feel comfortable to give you this information. – Remember my first comment… leave your ego at the front door.

If you get all upset with them if they do give you this information … they’ll turn tail, run, and not only that, they can talk to other betas and you’ll soon find it impossible to find new members for your team. Oh, and don’t ever moan about a beta online, that’s a huge mistake. They are your team, you should cherish them, even if they give you feedback that you don’t particularly like. If something they say really isn’t something you agree with… you can discuss it, calmly of course, in your FB group… get other betas input on it… and this is an important part… if the other betas side with them… take heed. That’s something you should have, a closed separate group for your betas where you can chat if need be.

Where to find these elusive, magical creatures? You can look for betas in your reader group on FB, or if you have a newsletter, you can set up a googledoc and ask for applications that way. If you do it via your newsletter, make sure to ask pertinent questions and ask people who they’ve beta’d for before, and also ask if you can reach out to the authors they’ve beta’d for. THAT is a telling question, if they say no to that, that’s a red flag and I’d skip them. If they say yes, then you can either reach out to the author or not. The fact they’ve said yes says something in itself **but** a beta reader is a special relationship, you’re handing over your baby, and I’m very wary of who I give mine to, so if I were you and you don’t know the person, I’d be checking them out first.

Set up a bookfunnel account to send if you’re starting out, they log who gets what etc, and the files themselves are digitally marked and let people know this as a ‘disclaimer’ at the bottom of the email you send if you want, if you’re feeling wary of your files being pirated. You can also have page one with This is a Beta Copy of and your title on the file if you want to.

There’s the timing of when to give to betas too. I know some who give them after it’s been to editors… I don’t do that. I give them before it goes to my editor. Why? Because I want to fix anything that needs sorting before my editor gets hold of it. I’ve had my team in place for a while, and they tell me how it is. Straight! They know that’s what I want and don’t hold back.

Sue, my PA went to Chapter Con with me, and she’s on my team, and she caught a great big hole in my last book. One that readers would’ve seen and I’m certain would’ve been in the reviews they left, and not in a good way. As soon as she said the name of a character… I knew what I’d done, but it was Sue who caught it, before it went to editing. If I’d left this to after editing, it would’ve left chunks of text in several parts of the book… unedited, or I would’ve had to pay for those to be re-edited. So, for me it makes sense to send before. This is obviously a personal choice, but it works for me, and it’s how I’ve done it for a while now.

Of course, this is a personal choice, but it makes sense for ‘me’, it might not for others, but you make it work for you. It’s what life’s all about, isn’t it? Getting something in place and making it work for you. My team members have different strengths and I use them to the max and love them all for them… even when it means I have to do re-writes. It’s their job after all. So, there it is… Beta Readers and my take on them. I hope I’ve helped, even a wee bit.

Ava xx

If you want to download this as a doc… click HERE.