

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: A Series of Salacious Events

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It is a common topic in any social scene: have you seen the latest episode of Outlander? What about Game of Thrones? Do you have any idea what's going to happen? The culture around series publications, and the water cooler talk about the latest episode, might seem relatively modern, but it actually has deeper roots than most people think.

Before radios and talk shows became popular, books were the cultural medium that kept people on their toes, eagerly waiting and guessing to see what would befall their favorite characters next. Why wouldn't they just read the whole book instead of waiting, you might ask? Well, it would be because they only had bits and pieces at a time.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, publishing books in various installments was the thing to do. Many famous authors like Arthur Conan Doyle, Charles Dickens, Alexandre Dumas and even Harriet Beecher Stowe published some of their books in various installments through magazines, newspapers, or independent serial publications called fascicles. The benefits of this were, for one, it was much cheaper than publishing full-sized novels. For another, publishing in bits and pieces allowed their work to reach a larger audience.

Aurora was no stranger to these serial publications. Starting around the 1880s, the Banner published a series of dramatic and even salacious novellas. A few chapters were published every week or so, and some included previous chapter summaries to remind the readers what had happened before. In true soap opera fashion, Aurorans could keep up with stories like *An Egyptian Romance*? *A Story of Love and Wild Adventure*, which ran in the Banner in 1886, or *My Lady's Secret*, one of the first serials to run in 1880. Other titles of note?with the juiciest stories?were *The Red Witch: The Wooing of Constantia* (1901-1902), *Confusion of Caste: Identity vs. Nobility of Soul* (1902), and *The Mysterious Crime on the S. S. Neptune* (1900). The creativity and passion put into these serials was no doubt enjoyed and appreciated by avid readers of the Banner, especially when checking in to see if Vassalla's marriage was contested (*S. S. Neptune*) or whether or not Constantia had finally given in to her avid paramour (*The Red Witch*). When introducing a new serial at the conclusion of another, the Aurora Banner (February 14, 1902) claimed that "our readers will welcome our new story; its characters are well drawn and its plot unusual." The simple introduction ends with one command: "Follow it."

It appears that the last serial publication run by the Banner was *Lady Betty: Across the Water*, which ran from mid-1911 to 1912. As more and more space in the newspaper was given over to events unfolding overseas and increasing hostility between nations, the space for serials began to decrease. The serials shifted to small short stories or single publications and eventually faded from the Banner entirely by the outbreak of World War I. The publication of novellas became more popular and dramatic radio shows rose to the top as a favoured medium for pop culture consumption.

Despite the changes in media, the allure of the cliffhanger has stood the test of time.