

# Portal

E N T E R T A I N M E N T

## **Immersive Writing Lab – Storyworld Writing Competition**

Part 1 - Storyworld - Logline, Timeline, Dramatic Pressures, Genre

Storytelling is intrinsic to human culture yet Writing compelling stories is far from easy. As such the very idea of a STORYWORLD that may encompass numerous stories from multiple points of view across multiple media is undoubtedly daunting.

But if there were no challenge we wouldn't bother and if writing were easy, everyone would do it. Welcome to the Immersive Writing Lab 2013 Writing Competition.

Over the next few months we'll be posing a series of Writers Guides covering 5 major elements that comprise a storyworld project to guide your thinking and help you articulate your big ideas into form.

- World
- Character
- Multi-stranded Plot
- Audience
- Memories

The first of these, 'World', is where we'll begin - the high-level expression of the central concept and spine of your creation.

The writing of a Storyworld project and proposal is as much about convincing the reader of the brilliance of your ideas as it is about expressing the detail of your Storyworld. It's crucial to remember that the first Audience for your project is the Reader of your proposal. You need to convince them and excite them, challenge and provoke them. But most importantly of all, you need to express your Storyworld to them with Clarity, Specificity and Efficiency.

In this way there are 4 elements that define and express your world:

### **Logline, Genre, Dramatic Pressures and Timeline**

A Logline is a common device used in all forms of media; books, movies, TV shows. It is a concise and very short distillation of the essence of your story. In a feature film this is most often a sentence focused on a particular Character, in a particular Place with a particular Problem. But when the canvas is a multi-platform and interactive World, rather than just a single plot feature film, we need to paint in bigger strokes. Yet, at the same time, a good logline should always be a focused distillation, an encapsulation of the central burning idea. An idea so bright it compels the reader to want to read more.

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Your logline should present the fundamental conflict in your storyworld. Not the conflict or predicament of an individual character but a conflict and predicament that impacts upon EVERY character in your world.

The logline might express;

- the 'what if'
- the extraordinary circumstance
- the forces in opposition
- a unique combination of events

Think of the Logline as a tool; something you will write and re-write to continually refine your storyworld's essence.

As an example; the winner of last years IWL competition was BLACKOUT by Laura Grace & Elizabeth McGuane. and their logline of one short paragraph sums up the world in a very compelling way.

**After a series of terrorist attacks the government's temporary lockdown on public access to the internet has been in place for ten months. The outside world is screaming at the UK to end Blackout, but the taste of absolute power is proving hard to shake for some and an underground movement of hackers known as the Network are a flame that cannot be put out.**

In 5 lines we know a lot about the world - the problem, the forces in conflict, the social groups and the dramatic challenge. And yet we are not locked into a single plot or an individual character. This is a world in which many stories may be told and the potential is huge.

High fantasy and science fiction seem obvious candidates for Storyworlds but the idea is not genre specific. A satirical situation-comedy scenario is as much a specific storyworld as the universe of Star Wars. But in this, defining and being specific about the Genre of your storyworld is vitally important. Genre is not a set of rules or a formula, it's recognising the long standing mythologies of human experience that shape the stories we tell. Thriller, Fantasy, Science Fiction, Horror, Comedy, Satire, Romance - these are all platforms on which your story can stand. Moreover, Genre speaks to audience expectations, what your audience will recognise, desire and anticipate from the experience of entering your storyworld.

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Ultimately we engage with stories because we like to Worry. Intrigue, mystery, suspense, horror, hope are all emotions we feel when we are made to care about the fate of characters within a given world. This is just as vital in a Storyworld as it is in a feature film, and the ability for the storyworld to generate these feelings and make your audience Care is driven by the Dramatic Pressures you exert upon the world; these pressures create the Stakes of the narratives. What is at risk? What might be lost? This idea is fundamental to all stories but the difference in a Storyworld is that they require 2 vital properties;

1) the stakes need to be high enough and big enough that they can sustain the drama for multiple characters, multiple plots across multiple media.

and

2) the problems of the storyworld need to be virtually unresolvable.

If the world and its characters can easily or quickly solve their problems then the storyworld is unsustainable. High-drama genres generally deal with this issue by having huge antagonists that are all-powerful. More comedic and lighter genres often solve this problem by 'reset' where the problems are continually overcome but reset themselves. Think of how the TV series Battlestar Galactica has the constant threat of the Cylons that can never be overcome but only 'escaped' and evaded - versus the way a comedy storyworld like The Simpsons where all its characters, circumstances and antagonists have continual 'reset'. The Simpson family may overcome the failings of modern American society each episode, but they can never 'win' and the comedic forces of the storyworld will always reset. In either case, the dramatic pressures need to be powerful, compelling and sustainable. they need to apply to the whole Storyworld and generate high stakes for all the characters who live there.

The final thing to consider is the Timeline of your Storyworld. Defining the 'here and now' of a world is more conceptually focused if you can clearly articulate how the 'here and now' came to be? It's useful to think of your storyworld Timeline as not just a series of things that happened but rather as moments in time that fit three broad types.

## INFLUENCING EVENTS

- things that happen that alter behavior from that point on or which shape, redefine or alter a character, entity or institution. In other words, an Event that has profound influence on world.

## DECISIONS

- specific choices taken by a character, society, organization or entity which represent a fork in the road. Points on the timeline where there was a clear choice and a decision was made that altered the trajectory of the 'storyworld' forever.

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## MILESTONES

- a moment or event in the timeline where a threshold was passed and from which there was no going back for a character, institution or society. A timeline Milestone is a saturation point, a moment of critical mass and transformation.

These three different event types allow us to think through the storyworld timeline in a more specific way and see the Dramatic rather than just Intellectual appeal of the world. We can see Influencing Events and Decisions as being dramatic triggers that lead to Milestones, thresholds of no return in the storyworld. And it is the constructing of Milestone thresholds that are the foundation of your Storyworld - the rules in which it will function.

How did your storyworld come to be the way it is...? And what about that timeline makes the 'here and now' of your storyworld dramatic..?

A Storyworld is not an easy thing to conceive or write but these 4 things should set you on your way - Logline, Genre, Dramatic Pressures and Timeline

In the next article we'll look at CHARACTERS in your storyworld....

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