

ROMANCE WRITERS SUMMIT

Crafting Must-Read Backstory

HOW TO TURN BACKSTORY INTO STORY FUEL

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Characters grew out of their
backstory.

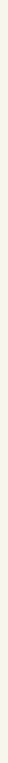
Unique angles.

Hows & whys.

Explains everything.

MUST-READ BACKSTORY

Backstory can kill Story....



HOW BACKSTORY CAN KILL STORY

- Slows the pace
- There-and-Then vs. Here-And-Now
- Conveys information rather than evoking emotions

Writing backstory for ourselves

Want the reader to know something, so we...tell them

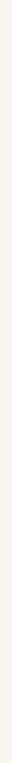
Relay facts & information

Hope data stands in for emotional investment

Backstory that tells readers something isn't Story

MUST-READ BACKSTORY

...backstory can also save Story.



4

Keys to
Must-Read
Backstory



CRAFTING MUST-READ BACKSTORY

Key #1:

MAKE IT COMPELLING

Key #1:

Make It
Compelling

- Compels the *character*
 - Drives them to actions big & small
 - Pre-story & in-story
- Made them who they are in pivotal ways

Key #1:

Make It
Compelling

- Key & Primary Motivator
 - For romance conflict
 - For story goal
 - For daily life

Key #1:

Make It
Compelling

Compels romance
conflict

- Why can't they just fall in love??
- Reason they don't like/are in conflict with other romantic lead
- Reason they're (unwillingly) drawn to other lead

Key #1:

Make It
Compelling

Compels them to
pursue 'Big Story' goal.

Key #1:

Make It
Compelling

Inciting Incident
Isn't Enough!

Key #1:

Make It
Compelling

It's personal now.

Key #1:

Make It
Compelling

...and compels
them to scene-
level, 'daily life'
actions & choices

Key #1:

Make It
Compelling

The little things matter!

- Lifestyle
- Opinions
- Habits
- Likes/dislikes

CRAFTING MUST-READ BACKSTORY

Key #2:
A SINGLE DEFINING MOMENT

Key #2:

Single Defining Moment

- Vague, generic, or general is never as powerful as highly specific

Key #2:

Single Defining
Moment

- The devil--and the power--is in the details

Key #2:

Single Defining Moment

- Doesn't have to be worst thing ever for world at large!

Key #2:

Single Defining
Moment

- Craft a moment in time that wrecked them...
- ...and shaped them forever

Key #2:

Single Defining
Moment:
How It
Shapes Them

How It Shapes Them

- Intense, Frozen Emotions
 - .No-go zones
- Shards of Glass

Key #2:

Single Defining
Moment:
How It
Shapes Them

How It Shapes Them: Emotions
(*cont*)

- They adapt to accommodate the shard of glass

"Little things"

Story goals

Relationships / Romance

Key #2:

Single Defining
Moment:

How It
Shapes Them

How It Shapes Them: Beliefs

- Core Beliefs/Guiding Principles

Key #2:

Single Defining
Moment:

How It
Shapes Them

How It Shapes Them: Beliefs
(*cont*)

- Inflexible & absolute
- Dictates how see self & the world, and how they respond

How to Craft a Single Defining Moment

Key #2:

Single Defining
Moment:
How It
Shapes Them

- Find/craft a single moment in time that changed everything
- Identify how it made them feel
Single, visceral emotion
- Identify a core belief from it
Belief about self/world that will inform them from then on
- Make other romantic lead be worst thing ever for it
 - embodiment of it
 - pushes on shard of glass
 - tests/challenges core belief

Key #2:

Single Defining
Moment

Example

CRAFTING MUST-READ BACKSTORY

Key #3:
LAYER IT

Key #3:

Layer It

- Intense experiences have layers
- Of Belief
- Of Emotions

Key #3:

Layer It

Examples of Layers

Second Layer Emotions

Anger? Under it is shame

Shame? Under it is fear.

Fear? Under it is guilt.

Guilt? Under it is anger.

Key #3:

Layer It

Examples of Layers

Second Layer Beliefs

"You can't trust anyone."

Under it is "I can't trust myself."

"The weak get destroyed."

Under it is, "I am weak."

Key #3:

Layer It

Second layer emotions & beliefs
are the ones protagonist is
hiding...
even from themselves

Key #3:

Layer It

Example

Key #3:

Layer It

- Second layers give ideas for plot points
- Second layers give new reveals for reader & tests for character later in story
- Second layers give Pit of Dedspair / All Is Lost (& theme!)

CRAFTING MUST-READ BACKSTORY

Key #4:

PLOT TAPS BACKSTORY, HARD

Key #4:

Plot Taps
Backstory

THIS plot for THIS character

- Make it perfectly crafted to deconstruct them

Key #4:

Plot Taps
Backstory

Awesome plots that would be difficult for anyone are awesome...

...But not as awesome as plots that are hard because of THIS character's backstory

Key #4:

Plot Taps Backstory

- Engineer events that push protagonist into situations that are uniquely difficult because of backstory

Test/upend/require to face &/or change:

- Core beliefs drawn from backstory
- Worst fears
- Frozen emotions/shard of glass

Key #4:

Plot Taps Backstory

- Ensure actions required to succeed are in direct conflict with core beliefs
- Require them to face/feel something they've been avoiding
- Require them to do something never could/would have done at start

Key #4:

Plot Taps Backstory

- Gives backstory here-and-now relevance
 - No longer info dumping
 - What happened in past has direct consequences for the choices facing now

Key #4:

Plot Taps
Backstory

- Adds Tension

Key #4:

Plot Taps
Backstory

Does every story need deep-dug
backstory?

Do you always relay the
details?

Key #4:

Plot Taps
Backstory

Reverse Engineer It!

4 Keys To Crafting Must-Read Backstory

- MAKE IT COMPELLING
- FIND THEIR SINGLE DEFINING MOMENT
- LAYER IT
- MAKE THE PLOT TAP BACKSTORY, HARD

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