THESIS PROPOSAL

Jacob Goldstein

Thesis Critique

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From a young age I have been influenced towards fantasy stories, and while it's hard to attribute any one reason towards that fascination, I think it largely has to do with the breadth of imagination that comes from fantasy and science fiction stories. I enjoy big worlds and magic that give me a lot to think about. Worlds that break away from the mundane, giving us escape into unreal and imaginative places. And not just to run away from what we know, but to reflect and reimagine what we perceive, to restore and reinvigorate through a speculative mirror of "what ifs." Worlds that can be used to metaphorically explore our own, and avoid reiterating the world we already know and understand. I enjoy creating narratives within these places because they allow me to consider and imagine so much more than the laws of physics, they encourage me to reinvent them. I want to tell stories that break free from the mold of what we know because I want to explore and come to understand worlds where the rules are different. Compelling characters and narratives deserve compelling worlds to live in.

My first strong introductions to fantasy and worldbuilding were *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkein. The way these novels explored vastly new worlds made it memorable and enjoyable in a way that was much more detached from the narrative itself. I found myself able to enjoy hearing descriptions and prose about a world that I had never seen, through the vehicle of a narrative. This created a passion for in-depth worldbuilding. The other two fantasy authors that greatly influence me are Patrick Rothfuss and Brandon Sanderson.

Rothfuss's *The Name of the Wind* was the book that made me first want to write, and what I admire most about it was not just the worldbuilding, but the prose itself and how the act of writing could be as enjoyable as what it described. This was where I first feel I began to pay attention to how sentences were structured to create narrative and world.

Brandon Sanderson is an author I've found myself consistently following, not for grand experimentation or perfect poetic prose, but for his narrative consistency. He is one of the most prolific, if not the most prolific, fantasy authors today, and I think consistent and concise narratives in a genre known for having incredibly lengthy prose is something I look up to. His balance of narrative and worldbuilding is closest to what I want to display in my own works.

For past projects at PNCA I have often tried to investigate narrative structure to accompany my instinct towards worldbuilding. Learning how an outline evolves from beginning to middle to end has been important to me because I want to make new worlds, which are often large and intimidating concepts. In the creation of new worlds I find that I can get distracted from the narratives I try to tell within them, so keeping focus on the narrative is something I want to improve. Our characters are our companions and guides on narrative journeys, and if their story doesn't interest and lead us through their world, it can be more like reading a history book than a story, especially with fantasy.

I have made storyboards with VR and video games, poetry that considers narrative, short stories, and outlines and drafts for novels while at PNCA, and in all of these projects I have noticed my tendency towards worldbuilding. What I need and want to improve most at is creating a compelling narrative within these worlds, with realistic and enjoyable characters and events.

With this in mind, for my thesis, I would like to create a collection of fantasy and science fiction short stories that could exist as vignettes from fictional worlds I have created. These would be stories set in different timelines and settings that may not always be connected or expressive of a single world. Using structural concepts such as Joseph Campbell's Hero's

Journey as my guide, I will create an assortment of stories that explore speculative spaces with narratively focused excerpts.

These narratives could function in a variety of ways, from standalone stories, to early concepts of chapters for a novel. But, most importantly to me, they will read as concise and understandable narratives despite a fantasy backdrop. This collection will help me complete multiple narratives start to finish so that I have products to reflect on and examine my own skills with. The collection will be four stories of an estimated length of around eight thousand words apiece. My goal is to have completed outlines and polished drafts by the beginning of April. I will use the remaining time to edit and polish the works before presenting my thesis in late April.

These stories can be used in the future to showcase my skills as completed narratives. I can also use this work to transition to other creative writing mediums by displaying a practiced ability to write well structured narratives on any scale. This will help transition to larger works like novels that I would eventually like to make. Fantasy and Science fiction worlds concisely explored in shorter fiction will help me in keeping up a narrative focus that I aspire to.

End

Questions

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As asked by my thesis panel I have created a working title for my collection and also looked for a throughline in my works. After considering much of my work, I think my throughlines are adventure, and characters working towards/gaining abilities, often magical in nature. My working title is "Seeking Magic in the Unexplored Mirror".

I am making fantasy worlds because I enjoy exploring new concepts of reality, and I found I usually want to have my characters explore these realities for some reason or another. Fantasy's importance to me is in the complete lack of reality that it begins from. Everything in a fantasy world is symbolically interpreted to make sense of ideas that have little basis in our reality, and everything has a sense of newness and the unknown. This is why I want to move my characters around the world, because the feeling of a journey to unknown areas provides more symbolic connections to be made, and a general curiosity and wonder. This is the "Unexplored Mirror" to me, the speculative consideration of fantasy.

"Seeking Magic" is something that I think sits more at the heart of plot and character. In exploring new places, I link a lot of character growth to concepts of skills or abilities that can be gained as more physical ideas in a fantasy world. When characters overcome odds or venture to new places and put themselves at risk, they gain something. In fantasy I like to consider how growth can be simulated in an imaginative and "larger than life" kind of concept. This often manifests as some form of "magic" that can supercede the rules of our reality in a grandiose way. Using fantasy I can simulate more imaginative concepts of character growth in narrative.

"Seeking Magic in the Unexplored Mirror" will thus be a collection of stories connected in theme by characters seeking magic through riskful exploration of fantasy worlds that symbolically reflect ideas of our reality in their more fantastical nature.

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Jacob Goldstein Artists Statement

I'm Jacob Goldstein and I enjoy imagining and creating fantasy and science fiction narratives and worlds. I have written four short stories in a collection called *Wayward's Travelers*: *The Boys, The Thief, The God Girl,* and *The Guides.* In each story, the characters must work to undo and understand the curse that draws them all toward the land of Wayward. Each story is a stand-alone adventure that expands the mythology of this world. Themes of hierarchy and religion are a centerpiece in this world through gods and guides that are inherently more powerful than normal human beings.

My intention was to create character-driven narratives that engage real relatable events and ideas while simultaneously creating a believable and important fantasy world. I believe it can be frustrating to keep up with an excess of new information in fantasy, and that's why I wanted the world to be more of an enjoyable backdrop to meaningful character situations.

I've been influenced in this direction by Brandon Sanderson. His work keeps readers turning the page, but they are still very well built and complex worlds, and this what I am currently aiming for.

My plan for these pieces after graduation is to put them up on social media individually over time and to eventually continue the world I've built in a longer narrative.

As a seemingly complex fantasy world is unraveled through the characters of Wayward, I hope my readers can enjoy and find meaningful reflections of our own world.

WAYWARD THESIS CREATIVE BRIEF

PROJECT VISION

I have created a collection of fantasy-based short stories/vignettes. They are four stories that could stand alone from each other but are also connected through one fantasy world and recurring phenomenons that are unique to that world.

The collection is called Wayward's Travelers. In this generally medieval based fantasy world, a land called Wayward exists that curses people. When they are cursed they must find a prophet and then head to Wayward and form a group to enter and remove their curses. The cursed people who enter are called travelers. Each of the four stories deals with characters who are in their own unique situations within this world when they get cursed. Through each character and story, we learn more about the world and how people live with and react to this unique phenomenon.

AUDIENCE

My audience is largely young adult readers. The writing structure is not overly complex, and the content is also not excessively mature. I tried to layer my ideas and themes through accessible worldbuilding and interesting character scenarios.

I want my stories to be accessible to those who may not always enjoy genres of sci-fi and fantasy because I've always felt that fantasy was a genre that didn't need to seem so exclusive. "Fantasy" is simply defined as "the faculty or activity of imagining things, especially things that are impossible or improbable." It's fiction taken a bit further. At their heart, these stories are about basic human problems that can connect with most audiences if given a chance.

METHODS AND MATERIALS
To stay on track this semester I created a calendar approach to successfully meet my objectives. I scheduled specific writing hours every Sunday and had weekly goals set up with my mentor. This helped me manage my course workload and create a dedicated space every week where I would turn off my devices and focus solely on refining my written work.

I started by making plot outlines for each of the four stories. Once I was satisfied with the "shape" of the stories I started fleshing out the compositions, hitting 4K words a week. My approach was to draft each of the stories from beginning to end and then return to each of them later to give them editing polish. After each of the four stories was completed consecutively, week after week, I would then be able to go to the first with a month's break. I believed that having a little time away from the first drafts would help me return with a fresh perspective.

COMPARITIVE MEDIA

My writing as of now is very influenced by Brandon Sanderson, who is a current author in Fantasy, but other major influences also include J. R. R. Tolkien and Patrick Rothfuss. Historically fantasy has often been very dense and world focused, without as strong of a focus on perfect narratives or amazing characters. Brandon Sanderson has a very plot-focused approach that still preserves the sense of a larger world and that is what this collection is trying to emulate the most.

MARKET PLACE APPLICATION

After graduation, I plan to try and publish this work. I want to release these over time as individual parts of a collection on social media and I've been considering the idea of a serial novel. I hope to use these pieces to grow an audience for my work while I begin working on longer narratives. They can also function as materials to show editors and employers as I continue on after PNCA.

WAYWARD THESIS PRESENTATION

Wayward's Travelers is a collection of stories about characters in a medieval based fantasy world where people are often cursed to enter a land called Wayward. Four characters lead us through different portions of the world and reveal how they are affected by the curse, and how the world works. The world is influenced mostly by medieval settings and basic ideas of fantasy but is more character-focused.

I find fantasy works as an interesting backdrop for a group of characters with their own compelling circumstances; I try not to sit too much on the details of the world. I want people to be able to enter the worlds I create without difficulty, I am aware of how detailed and complex fantasy and science fiction can become. I believe stories with relatable characters and easily identifiable metaphors can engage anyone, regardless of genre, and that is what I aimed to create.

I decided to write a collection of short stories because I wanted to perfect the basic frameworks of narrative on a manageable scale before tackling longer more complex pieces. Recently I have been influenced by writers like Brandon Sanderson who focus on quick-paced engaging stories that are still sci-fi or fantasy-based. These genres can be very detailed in their world-building, and sometimes it's very disorienting with all of the information they throw at you.

I want to create stories that still build an interesting world while keeping the focus on the characters and their circumstances. By making something more accessible to casual readers, but still situated in fantasy, I hope that discovering these worlds feels like less of a chore, and more like an adventure for everyone involved.

I enjoyed crafting the shorter narratives despite being initially concerned that I wouldn't be able to put as much worldbuilding in them. I was concerned the larger world-building would get lost because those details can be challenging to establish in shorter works. I was forced to consider what details were most important to include and elaborate on. This allowed me to focus more on making the story itself interesting because it had to be more compact.

I still ended up imagining the world beyond the story and creating ideas that didn't show on the page, but these ideas function more as an invisible framework my stories can lean on. The most important and meaningful details still appeared on the page. By creating compact narratives, I feel confident I can replicate the process in longer-form.

My stories are connected and create a sense of a larger world. My plan was for the stories to connect, and in later chapters, the various characters would meet. The stories were conceived so that each of the characters would end up needing to find each other and enter the place called Wayward to lift their curses. In this selection of stories, I chose to not have the characters interact to keep the stand-alone feel of the stories.

If these narratives were to continue in novel form, I would definitely have the characters come together. In a longer form, I see the early stories as the beginning, and them coming together and entering Wayward would be the middle.

Unfortunately, the real world obstructed my ambition. The coronavirus and my own personal circumstances derailed my productivity around halfway through the semester. Previous to that I felt I was working at a professional level and pace. The work being presented here represents my four shorts in the rough form they were in mid-semester.

The first three pieces require a hard edit and the fourth piece is unfinished. When I come back to these pieces in the future I have strong ideas of what characters to bring into focus and which to keep as supporting characters. I am extremely proud of the world-building I was able to create in such a finite space. For the time being, these characters exist on their journey, as am I, slowly inching our way to Wayward.