Lessons Learned in Writing
Born to Storms

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Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is to provide some of the lessons learned from writing "Born to Storms". The author hopes that this will prove helpful for other people writing on our climate crisis:

Lessons Learned, Planning:

1. **Story Type** – I can recommend a specific story type, a Hero's Journey. This is a truly ancient story type, for example The Iliad, but has been used successfully in modern times, Star Wars.

   The idea of these classic stories was made popular by Professor Joseph Campbell with his "The Power of Myth" TV series.

   In the Hero's Journey, we meet a young person who is living his or her own normal life as best they can. Forces far beyond our hero's control then force the person into action.   He or she then gathers a team and seeks out big problems that occur to the team as great adventures.   Sometimes they win, sometimes they lose, but they have all committed their lives to a great fight.

   This is the classic story that our young people need today. This is the story that we have now written in *Born to Storms*.

2. **Do *not* write** – Do **not** write another dystopia! In these human societies are falling apart from the problems of our climate crisis. These stories do not teach our children what to do about these problems but rather spread the belief that nothing can be done now.

   Do **not** write stories with cartoon villains representing the problems of the climate crisis and then defeating them in fantasy ways. These stories only spread false beliefs and expectations.

3. **Logline** – You need a really good logline; it is the foundation of building support for your effort – especially money--.

   Some of you can remember old time TV Guides, the TV listing in newspapers. This listing had a single sentence description of the plot. The logline for "Born to Storms":

   > Set in the 2020s, a young woman, Sarah, supported by an Artificial Intelligence, JanetA, driven from her home by storms and rising seas, embarks on a life-affirming struggle to find and support many people in action on our climate crisis.

4. **Working Title** – You will need a working title for the piece to help you focus your mind on the task. Do not fall too in love with it. If you end up with a commercial publisher, they have the write to change the title and cover art without so much as letting you into the discussion. Their decision will be based on "What will sell this book?". Yours will not be.

5. **Write in Scenes** – The ultimate win would be to have your story be made into a TV series or movie. This is the path to reach large numbers of your target audience; short stories and novels certainly are not going to do this today.

   Write the work as a series of connected scenes. Use lots of dialogue. Make descriptions be what characters are seeing at the moment. Put any technical information in a separated paper for the project Web page.

   What you want is for a filmmaker, producer, or director (new or seasoned) to read your story and be moved to envision his or her movie in the mind's eye. It is that envisioning that will make or break the project. They are very good at this, just as most technical people are good at it too.

6. **Shtick** – All franchises (and that is precisely what you want to write) must have a Shtick. The Shtick here is a group of ideas that define the series. For Star Wars the shtick is the light saber and the Force. For Star Trek, the shtick is the Enterprise and the transporter. The shtick is definite copy written and is the foundation of the value of the franchise.

   For *Born to Storms*, the shtick is the Human/Artificial Intelligence symbiosis between Sarah and JanetA. You will need to devise your shtick early in the writing process. Do not use the shtick of existing franchises without written permission; this includes *Born to Storms*.

7. **Story Magic** -- All stories for young adults must have some magic these days, but classical magic is completely unrealistic and only supports unworkable solutions in any real world. Therefore, the magic in this story comes from the words of Arthur C. Clarke:

    "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

    Think a lot about where your story's magic will come from.

8. **Elevator Pitch** – You will need an elevator pitch. An Elevator Pitch is a very specific piece of literature:

    > Imagine, you are waiting for an elevator at work. The door opens and there stands your boss with just enough room in front for you to step on. The door closes and he asks, "Got any good ideas for me?" You then have exactly two minutes to sell your great idea, no pictures no graphs, only words. Your career depends on how well you sell your idea!

    An Elevator Pitch is far longer than a slogan or a banner but it is much shorter than a formal presentation. It should run about 350 to 400 words.

    Above all, the elevator pitch must sale the idea without boring the listener.

   Lessons Learned, Process

9. **Coursera Course** – *Born to Storms* was written in a course on novel writing from Coursera, "Write your first novel" from the University of Michigan. This worked well, but took a lot of time, for the first 13 chapters. In the course the students wrote one chapter a week (2500 words) and then reviewed each other's work. Five reviews are required before you can move to the next chapter. The number of students still in the course dwindles over time. As soon as the number dropped below five, the class froze. Still it was a good course.

10. **Target Length** – You need a target to focus your efforts. A basic novel is about 50,500 words. There are long novels but they usually come from very popular writers. Shorter forms can could become collections, but are rarely published by themselves.

11. **The 1000/10,000 Rule** – For nearly all human endeavors, a novice needs to put in about 1000 hours before he or she knows if she has any talent in the area. If the person quits before them; they clearly have no interest. If the person then shows some promise they can push on to 10,000 hours which is what it takes to master a field.

    You can expect to reach the 1000 hour mark writing your first novel. Then you will know.

12. **Time Commitment** – Writing a novel requires writing about 500 words per day and going over yesterday's work. This goal should be accomplished six days a week and takes several hours.

13. **Computer Read Editing** – I like the editing technique of having my computer read me each chapter out loud. I use "Natural Voice 15" with the speed set at 2.

    Spell checks reliably find non-words. A computer read helps find wrong words.

14. **Table Read** – It is helpful to get a group of your friends together and talk turns reading a few "finish" chapters of your novel. For now, this may have to be done over Zoom. Members of your target readers group are best. They can the dialogue of assigned characters. They will find problems you missed.

    The author is responsible for snacks and wine.

15. **Don't put it on Web –** Putting your novel on the Web counts as publishing and makes it hard for a conventional publisher to consider. You can put short sections on the Web for review but remove them after a reasonable time. Do not put more than one or two chapters on line at any one time and do not put the finished version on the Web.

16. **Profession Proofing –** If you are not a professional writer, you need to have your work professionally proofed. This was my single largest expense. I can highly recommend "Elisabeth, the writer's midwife" at Service Scape.

17.

18. **Budgets** – Since I already had the editor I used (Microsoft Word), the only major expense was the professional proof reading. For this we settled on a figure of $12,000 by negotiation.

    I also paid $300 for the cover art. Which I needed both for the Web page and for the paperback cover.

19. **Web Page** – A project Web page is a good place to put technical articles and reference lists that you feel you must provide on a technical topic like our climate crisis. Do not put this stuff in your story!

    The Born to Storms Project Web page is:
    https://bigmoondig.com/Stories/BMDStoriesBtS.html

20. **Finding an Agent** – Most new authors will need an agent to sell their book. This search can take months and most new authors need to have a finished novel to show for consideration.

Fortunately, software is now available to make this process doable. I used Query Tracker. I sent out about 110 emails over two months. I received back about 30 replies, all of them polite no's, by three months. I then needed to move forward so that I would have a reference to put in my technical papers, therefore I pushed ahead with Amazon Books.

21. **Amazon Books** – Amazon Books has a major advantage over any other self-publishing ventures in that the work is then distributed though Amazon. Some of this exposure is include with your listing, but you can buy more from Amazon if you like.

This is definitely a self-publishing exertion. You have to reformat your work first for the e-book and then, with much more effort, for the paperback. This process took me about a week and I found it difficult. The primary problem is that the work must be reformatted for a publishing software that you do not have any experience with. Take your time and work very carefully.