

## WRITING MANDESTROY – INITIAL PLANNING | by James Hockley

### Stage 1: Initial planning

It's fair to say that I'm not going into this completely blind, and this is why:

- It is a prequel, and I have written the subsequent book. So, I know what's going to happen, and therefore where I need to get to.
- It is written in a world that I have a good handle on.
- I already know the main character well, as he features in the novel.
- I have already been thinking about this character for some time, and as part of my getting to know him activity, I drafted the story of his 'revelation' – this forms the prologue of this short novella, and is already available on the website.

Now, this is a hell of a head-start, and I would call this the "research" phase of the project. But it's not a novel (or even a novella). Definitely not.

So, how do we plan to turn it into a novella? Well, first things first, we need a story. So let's shoot some ideas.

Ultimately, I want this to dovetail with the novel. This is achieved in part just by the fact that it has a common character, but I wanted it to be more than just 'background'. So I needed to find a way to bring the two together.

That being said, this chap does have an interesting story, and I want to tell it. So I need to take that into account too.

This presents a problem:

1. The subsequent novel is written at a point when our protagonist is already well established;
2. Whereas the story of his 'establishment' is all in the past.

So, how do we get around this? One of the beauties of writing is that the objective is only constrained by the imagination and the technical execution of that imagination. The obvious solution is some sort of flashback action, but this makes me nervous – jumping around too much will be jarring and bitty, and it is likely to ruin the arc of the story. But it is likely to be the only tool I have for this, so I will just need to be careful.

Now – how about that arc?

Well, it took me a remarkably long time to work this out given I was taught it in primary school (I'll write about this in my writing experience blog later in the year), but a good structure for a story is to have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

So, we have the broad theme for a story, but not a story itself. Is this the correct way to go?

In general – maybe not: the story is the most important aspect, so start here, and fit into your theme. But here we are writing a prequel, so theme is important. I don't think it really matters which route is chosen, and both aspects are ultimately important, so it's really down to personal preference / style.

But what we still have to design is an arc: a beginning, middle, and end.

To append this, I am also going to add in a prologue and an epilogue – the former because I like prologues and the way that they enable you to jump right into the action without necessitating the story arc; and the latter because this prequel needs to dovetail nicely with the novel being released later this year.

But between these two slices of bread, I need a beginning, a middle, and an end.

I “kind of” know where the end is going to be – it will close with the protagonist securing the deal that will bring the downfall of the enemy, and at the same time, earning him greater notoriety.

If we then make the novel about the process of securing this deal, then the beginning sets itself – it is the point where the deal is designed, but it needs buy in from all parties involved (we don’t want to write about designing the deal – that would be dull!) Fortunately this deal does require an alliance of sorts, and an alliance between rather fractured neighbours, so there’s plenty of potential friction to play with there.

And that leaves the middle – and we still haven’t tackled our protagonist’s past. Well, how about the deal looks like it’s falling at the first hurdle, and it is only our protagonist’s notoriety that keeps it on track? Then we can spend the middle section of the novella telling his story.

So, what does that leave me with? I think it leaves me with the following:

**Prologue:** ‘past’ – brief flash-back to the defining moment of our protagonist’s path, to set the scene for the reader as to the nature of the character and story arc.

**Beginning:** ‘present day’ – protagonist approaches unfriendly neighbours re: securing a deal which will overturn their common enemy. The reaction is not good, and his integrity is questions.

**Middle:** ‘history’ – we flash-back through the protagonists past, and witness the defining moments and decisions that make our protagonist who he is, and ultimately shape his notoriety.

**End:** ‘present day’ – notoriety declared, the aggressive allies are sated to a degree, and negotiations continue. Ultimately a deal is struck, but there is friction in getting to that place, and continued uncertainty on the outcome.

**Epilogue:** ‘fast-forward’ – we witness the execution of the plan (i.e. we see where there story directly dovetails with the later novel) and we see the plan progressing smoothly. But there is an air of uncertainty, and the outcome is left hanging. To find out what happens, we’ll have to read the novel!

Overall, this makes me nervous – because it is effectively a story within a story. Making this work will be difficult, but hopefully people will read it with an eye on the context (i.e. it is a prequel novella), but I still need to do my job and make it readable. Better get cracking.

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## **Stage 2: Plan a first draft**

I'm not going to do much more here than to jot down the brief description for each of the chapters I have decided that the novella needs. This has been lifted straight from my "writing software" – Scrivener; I am still getting used to it, but it does seem to work quite well.

PROLOGUE: The battlefield encounter with Mandahoi.

CHAPTER 1: Attempted alliance with Gorfinia and Mikaeta.

CHAPTER 2: Dealing with bullies.

CHAPTER 3: No longer bullied, but still struggling for respect. K rebels against his father who deems him adequate for only menial tasks, but what will he do?

CHAPTER 4: Two weeks on the streets almost drives him back home - almost. A fight breaks out in town between guards and mercenaries, and K acquits himself. He is offered conscription into the royal army.

CHAPTER 5: K's confidence knows no bounds, but he is out of place versus his colleagues. He is mocked for his optimism, and this attitude confuses him. He consults his books.

CHAPTER 6: Battle at Aperta, and things go badly - very badly. K is left with defiance that is misplaced vs. his comrades.

CHAPTER 7: The same nightmare as "P" - three Mandahoi on his case. Only this time we see it through, and we see that Kantal succeeds. He earns his place as an officer.

CHAPTER 8: Alliance reached, but there are still doubters.

EPILOGUE: The last leg of success as he draws through Altunia.

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## **Stage 3: Write a first draft**

This is version 1.1, and is linked in the website: <http://www.jhockley.com/epic-fantasy-world-of-ku/epic-fantasy-short-story-mandestroy/page-to-published/>