

Report on MiPA General Meeting—March 8, 2022

12 Participating on Zoom

Transmedia Storytelling—From Books to Hollywood and Beyond



Speaker Josef Bastian

Josef Bastian is a Midwest author and poet whose sense of humor, depth of spirit, and reflective imagination resonate within his poetry and prose. Josef currently has more than a dozen books in print that focus on the power of storytelling for people of all ages. His organization is called Folktellers.

Key Ideas from Folktellers

Stories have power. Whoever holds the story, wields the power. Books are the core in this universe. When you change the medium, you change the experience. Here are some examples. It is called transmedia storytelling.

A woman with dark hair is wearing a futuristic, glowing blue visor that covers her eyes. The visor has a bright blue light and some faint, illegible text on it. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

**DIFFERENT WAYS TO TELL
YOUR STORY:**
TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

When you change the medium,
you change the experience



Multiplatform, immersive
stories that deepen audience
engagement

The Marvel Universe didn't begin whole cloth. Multiple storylines were merged. We can do this too. Using multiple platforms can make the experience deeper and richer. For Disney, it all began with a mouse.

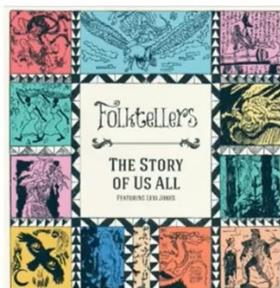
The Folktellers Experience

Josef's story begins with just a middling boy whose grandfather disappears. He then learns that his grandfather was a "storyteller" and that he is the apprentice. Shadow people appear who want to steal the stories. It's a layered dark fantasy. Most early readers were between 9 and 12, and then he expanded the stories for older children.

The Process

In the traditional process, in an ideal world, a successful book series sells options for TV and film, and that blows up with merchandising, licensing, and gaming. This is normally a linear process.

In the transmedia approach, the story can start anywhere, perhaps with only a concept. Most do start with a successful book series. Folktellers pitched to Hollywood as soon as the book awards were in. It is important that the series is complete. It took almost 15 years for him to complete this book series—it needed to be done before selling in Hollywood. Don't make the *Game of Thrones* mistake. Details of who does the screenplay and other factors are negotiable. Don't give up full control. Build a good team that understands the other businesses.



FOLKTELLERS IN MUSIC

They got into music quite early. They wrote and recorded their own movie trailer music—the theme music. Music was baked into all their pitches. They also tested the water in the merchandising world: T-shirts, jigsaw puzzles, hats, games, car decals, etc. This is all part of building a "universe." Josef brought in lots of experts, who learned from each other. Now, a new book is finished every 6 months. Also, an animated version is coming out soon. They are working with [Lion Forge](#) from St. Louis, who have won Oscars.

Overall, the book writer should be the steward of the platform; the nucleus. Other writers may ask to write in the same universe—be sure they are true to the story. A good example are the Disney spin-offs from Star Wars, like *The Mandalorian*. They have remained true to the original storyline.

The key lesson for us is to “play the long game.”

Storytellers for Literacy

He tells young students that their life is their story and that they need to be accountable for that. All of our stories merge together to make our universe. Teachers and others like this message. So they developed a simple program using their books and encouraging the students to make a movie trailer. Then they would make the movie trailers, and they made it a contest with a big celebration and prizes. Folk-tellers couldn't bring this directly to every school, so they made a “program in a box” to be given away.

Jennifer mentioned that she has currently developed discussion guides for some of her books to give to schools.

Q and A Session

Q1. What inspired you to make the story time series?

A1. During a slow period in his life, he read an inspiring story called [Red Dwarf of Detroit or the Nain Rouge](#). He began to write a variation of that, and it took off. He searched for lost folktales and that created the series.

Q2. Do you prefer screen writing, poetry, or book writing?

A2. He enjoys writing narrative. In screen writing, things are shown visually, but he prefers describing them. Poetry can be done more quickly. He once liked spending the day writing, but not so much anymore.

Q3. Your strategy seems to require a massive investment of both time and money.

A3. His prime strategy was, “I have to get this story right.” Hollywood is locked down—you can't just walk in. There is an agent industry to help you get in.

Q4. Is that changing with all the streaming content?

A4. Anyone can publish easily now. But that creates more noise, so in some ways it is harder—too much competition. As a creator you have to be flexible, maintain your center, and persevere. “An overnight success takes 20 years.” For Josef, there was a bit of luck. With a bunch of investors, an unknown guy came to the meeting. He said, “Let's take this to Hollywood now,” which was quite a shock. The lesson—be visible. Create a footprint where you can be found.

Q5. Have you done any live theater in your universe?

A5. No, but the transmedia approach is designed to splinter. So theater would be good.

Q6. How did you incorporate a board game?

A6. We didn't actually complete that development; it was a concept idea. Board games and video gaming are linked. We worked with a Oregon team. Think about all the places your ideas can go, and stage the rollout so you don't saturate the market.

Q7. This seems like a LOT of effort—how did you remain sane?

A7. Building the team was the key. I couldn't sleep before I had a trusted core team. It's much more chill now. Tell people in a new market to just "open the door" to a rich universe. Spend your time marketing with a compelling story. Don't try to sell it yourself. Be sure the intellectual property is locked down legally.

Q8. How did you hook up with your illustrator—he's great?

A8. I interviewed over 150 illustrator/artists. I was looking for something special. I asked them to read the books and I needed to hear the echo of the stories in their ideas. You need to let your team live their ideas too, to bring their stories too.

Q9. Where do other writers fit in your universe?

A8. In the animated series, we need screenwriters for that. We also need a good "show runner" that we can work with. Sometimes they are only a show or two ahead of the next broadcast. I don't want that pressure.

Q10. What are you doing with Lion Forge?

A10. They will license the IP and then produce the show. You have to do this with an agent. Everyone wants to work with Lion Forge now. I only had 20 minutes to pitch my idea and then they said how they would do it.

Q11. Will Lion Forge use your illustrations?

A11. They asked for the book and the "pitch bible" for them to work with. You have to have that ready to hand over. If you meet their criteria, then you get a meeting.

Q12. Have you strategized how the movie and animated movie will help sell more books?

A12. In the visual media you have to condense, you can't just add more pages. The protagonist has to show up right away. It all has to be condensed. My first goal in all this was to create things to engage my sons in reading—it worked.

Q13. Tell us about your writing process.

A13. Every writer's process is different. My process is to have many ideas bouncing in my head. I think of it as a frayed rope that has to be knitted together and improved every day.

Q14. Do you have a day job?

A14. I have a consulting job, which leaves a lot of time to write. I have now written 25 to 30 books.

Q15. Was it ever too much?

A15. Yes. There was always doubt. My mind said, "You can always stop." But I never wanted to. Positive feedback helps. For a while I dreamed that I would die before the series was finished. I told my family where to find the pages.

If anyone wants to stay in touch, reach out to Jennifer.