

Anthrofiction Network's Short Story Contest, Overarching Theme for 2011

I thought it might be fun to have interlocking themes for the short story contest this year. If one plans ahead one may create a single story in four stand-alone parts.

The overarching theme is **Foreign Affairs**—when they go right and when they fail. Thus the four sub-themes consist of: 1) an inciting incident that creates a problem, 2) a first attempt to solve the problem, 3) a second attempt to solve the problem, 4) and finally a solution to the problem.

Must I create linked stories? No. Since it's impossible to prejudge prior to the winter quarter, I can hardly make it a requirement. Write anything you want as long as it uses the current quarter's theme, and it follows the regular rules. Only create linked stories if you want to.

How do you link stories on this site? Can't really. It's more a concept than a physical thing.

Is it possible to turn in two linked stories per quarter? Yes, but think more along the lines of chapters, rather than two halves of a single story. Chapters often have a clear beginning, middle, and end. That is, there's some sort of resolution, but also a hook to pull the reader into the next chapter. For example the first quarter could have a setup chapter followed by the affair chapter, or the affair chapter followed by a pre-diplomacy scramble-for-damage-control chapter.

How do I get people to read things in the right order, or let them know this quarter's story is a continuation of last quarter's story? Clever titles.

Will there be credit for creating a series of linked stories that span 2011? No plans at this time, but there should be. Can't really judge that until the winter quarter.

Finally, unless I get specific instructions from you I will leave all the stories up for the full year.

The Theme for Spring: A Foreign Affair

What is an affair? Encarta defines it as:

1. **business matter:** a matter that has been attended to or needs attention, especially business
2. **occurrence:** an event or occurrence that is referred to or is known about – *that odd affair at work last week*
3. **social event:** a social event
4. ~~**something of a particular kind:** an object or item of a particular kind – *the house is a ramshackle affair*~~
5. **sexual relationship:** a sexual relationship between two people not married to each other
6. **scandalous incident:** an incident that attracts public attention or notoriety

Of these, all work except the fourth definition, which is why I struck it through. For a single overarching work in four parts, A Foreign Affair becomes the inciting incident. So the sixth definition will probably combine with one of the others to become the affair part of your theme.

What do I mean by foreign? That depends on your storyworld.

In the modern world it almost always means another nation, but in some parts of this world clans, tribes, and city-states still hold sway. What it doesn't mean is Vermont versus New Hampshire—unless

your storyworld is an alternate universe where Vermont and New Hampshire are free to raise their own armies and declare war on each other.

And that's the real test. Are your foreign powers free to declare war on each other?

In conclusion, your foreign affair needs to start something that has the potential to lead to war. It should not end with the declaration of war, that's left for a later story.

The Theme for Summer: Diplomacy

Diplomacy is all about conflict, but conflict which tries to avoid bloodshed. Encarta defines it as:

1. **international relations:** the management of communications and relationships between nations by members and employees of each nation's government
2. **skill in international dealings:** skill in managing communication and relationships between nations
3. **tact:** skill and tack in dealing with other people

If you're following the suggestion to link your stories throughout the year, then this quarter will be about diplomats trying to untangle the problems caused by your Foreign Affair, and before those problems lead to war.

The Theme for Fall: Physical Conflict

When diplomacy fails, conflict can escalate to the physical level. This could mean war, terrorist attacks, or something else. It's a simple idea and almost anything goes.

The Theme for Winter: Peace at Last

Let's turn to Encarta again; they define peace as:

1. **freedom from war:** freedom from war, or the time when a war or conflict ends
2. **mental calm:** a state of mental calm and serenity, with no anxiety
3. **peace treaty:** a treaty agreeing to an end of hostilities between two warring parties
4. **law and order:** the absence of violence or other disturbances within a state – Peace reigned throughout the land.
5. **state of harmony:** freedom from conflict or disagreement among people or groups of people

Freedom from war doesn't necessarily mean prosperity and happiness.

If you're linking your stories this is the final chapter and perhaps brings your characters full circle.

Special note: These instructions subject to change, so check back each quarter.

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