Course Title: Reality Bites: Writing Sci-Fi and Fantasy
Course Code: FICT 137 W
Instructor: Lauren Kate

Course Overview:

This course focuses on reading, writing, and discussing speculative fiction. We will study the fundamental elements of story (plot, character, setting, world building, point of view, etc.), discovering together how what makes a story “work” changes from one writer to the next. We’ll start with craft readings from Anne Lamott, a fantasy novel from Madeline Miller, short stories from the anthology The Starlit Wood, and writing exercises to warm up your speculative muscles. Beginning in Week 4, two to three students will submit a short story or novel excerpt (500-5000 words) to be workshopped in our zoom sessions (see below for more information on workshops).

We will read carefully and respond constructively to our peers’ writing. Thoughtful examination of others’ work is always a beneficial exercise to hone our own writing; we learn new things about our stories via our contributions to other writers’ work. We will give great consideration to ideas for revision, so that by the end of the course you will know where you’d like to take your short story or novel excerpt next.

Student Expectations:

- Completion of reading assignments and participation in discussions
- One short story or novel excerpt submitted for workshop (500-5000 words)
- Weekly engagement with your fellow students’ writing (written, during zoom sessions, or both)

Grade Options and Requirements:

Students have these grading options for this course:

- **No Grade Requested (NGR)**
  - No work is required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided. (Not suitable for those requiring proof of attendance/completion.)

- **Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)**

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continuingstudies@stanford.edu
650-725-2650
Score will be determined by student participation. Credit is given at 70% completion of requirements.

- **Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)**
  - Letter grades will be assigned according to these general standards: A=Excellent (90-100%), B=Good (80-89%), C=Satisfactory (70-79%), D=Minimal Pass (60-69%).
  - Written work will largely determine a student’s grade.

**Tentative Zoom Schedule***:

**Thursdays 11 am -12 pm (Pacific)**  
*Please note that the Zoom schedule is subject to change depending on workshop availability. Zoom sessions will be recorded for students unable to watch live.*

**Tentative Weekly Outline:**

**Week 1: Start with a Concept**

Speculative fiction begins with a concept. It asks a question, and the story’s work is to attempt to answer this question—or, perhaps, to show how it is unanswerable. The more adept you are at articulating your concept when you begin writing, the easier it will be for you to bring your speculative world to life on the page.

The day-to-day act of writing speculative fiction is no different from writing any other form or genre of fiction. We are as concerned with character development, attention to point of view, a coherent and believable plot, and clear, vibrant language as any writer. But where other stories might have their origins in a character or a conflict or a historical setting, speculative fiction should be born out of its concept. This week, we will hone our concepts down to a single sentence.

- **Reading:** Miller, Chapters 1-7  
- **Reading:** Lamott, pages 1-43  
- **In-class writing exercise:** Write a short scene (max 750 words) in which one of your characters witnesses another character getting out of some mode of transportation (car, boat, hovercraft—whatever exists in your world) and stumbling. Show us how this world is unlike ours. Show us how these differences impact these characters.

**Week 2: Speculative World Building/Workshops Begin**
The heart of this class will be the workshops, which begin this week and will stretch through the penultimate week of the course. Workshops require giving and receiving constructive feedback, so please read carefully and be prepared to speak to your peers’ stories. We will aim for candor, bravery, respect, and a sense of humor both in writing and critiquing. My goal is to facilitate rather than to dictate the discussion; student participation determines the success of these workshops.

- **Reading:** Lamott, pages 44-94
- **Reading:** Miller, Chapters 8-14

**Week 3: Workshops Continue**

Moving along through our craft reading, this week we’ll turn our focus to character and plot. We’ll discuss how both operate in the Miller novel. We’ll also make sure that everyone is prepared for next week’s workshop and critiquing.

- **Reading:** Lamott, pages 95-130
- **Reading:** Miller, Chapters 15-21

**Week 4: Workshops Continue**

- **Reading:** Miller, Chapters 22-27
- **Peer Workshops**

**Week 5: Workshops Continue**

- **Reading:** Story from Starlit Wood
- **Peer Workshops**

**Week 6: Workshops**

- **Reading:** Story from Starlit Wood
- **Peer Workshops**

**Week 7: Workshops**

- **Reading:** Story from Starlit Wood
- **Peer Workshops**

**Week 8: Workshops**

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• Reading: Story from *Starlit Wood*
• Peer Workshops

**Week 9: Workshops**

• Reading: Story from *Starlit Wood*
• Peer Workshops

**Week 10: Notes on Revision**

Our focus during this last week will be revision. We’ll do a final writing exercise geared toward revising the story you’ve workshopped in the class. Your reading for this week will address what to do after the first draft. In our final zoom session, you’ll come with ideas for revision of your story and the group will offer feedback on one another’s plans. We’ll discuss next steps, including how to gain perspective on your own story, how to seek further critiques from writers, and (eventually) how to approach publication.

• Reading: TBD
• Planning for the future of your story

**Weekly Schedule:**

**MONDAY:** I’ll send an email introducing the week and directing you to the new Forum threads, including your Discussion Points about the week’s readings and any writing exercises due that week.

**WEDNESDAY:** We’ll hold our zoom sessions from 1-2pm PST. I hope you’ll join us, though you’re not required to come every week and should feel free to drop in for shorter periods of time if needed.

**FRIDAY:** I encourage you to join in our forum conversations throughout the week, but please do post your workshop responses and discussion question answers by Friday at 5pm. Once workshops begin in Week 4, you will submit your story or novel excerpt by 5pm PST on the Friday before your Wednesday workshop.

**A Final Note:**

Throughout the course, please reach out to me should you need extra time on an assignment, a brief break from the course expectations, etc. I’m happy to work with you to make the course suitable to your needs and time constraints, while also ensuring that all students receive the feedback they signed up for.