

**Course Title:** Reality Bites: Writing Sci-Fi and Fantasy

**Course Code:** FIC 137 W

**Instructor Name and Bio:** Lauren Kate

Lauren Kate is the author of eleven novels, including the Fallen series, *By Any Other Name* and *The Orphan's Song*. Her books have sold over 10 million copies worldwide and have been translated into more than 30 languages. The feature film *Fallen* was released in the US in 2017. She received an MA in creative writing from UC Davis and is a former acquiring editor at HarperCollins.

### Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: Thursdays, 12:30PM-1:30PM PST (tentative)

Meeting location: Zoom

The class sessions will be recorded, but it's important to participate live as often as possible to get the full benefit of the course.

### Course Features:

- Live session
  - Discussions, workshop, and Q&A
  - Requires interaction and active participation
  - Guest speakers
- Assignments & Coursework
  - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas
  - Required discussions in Canvas
  - Students will submit one large workshop piece
  - Instructor will provide feedback on assignments

### Course Summary

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, and writing exercises to warm up your speculative muscles. Beginning in Week 3 or 4, two 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).

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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.

*\*Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

## Grade Options and Requirements

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - Students must attend or watch at least 7 class sessions.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - Students must attend or watch at least 7 class sessions and complete their workshop and critiques.

*\*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

## Textbooks/Required Materials

Circe by Madeline Miller  
The Starlit Wood  
Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott

## 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 1-5**
- **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**

The particularities of world-building are what separates the speculative from all other fictions. In this course, you will do all the world-building that all writers do (the rules between character relationships, for example: Exactly how much will a husband put up with from his wife before he leaves)—and then you'll do so much more. You get to write all new rules for a new world. Perhaps time operates differently in your speculative world. Perhaps power is derived from an unexpected source, such as fear. Maybe your characters can fly, speak telepathically, cast spells. Each of these possibilities requires clear rules set up around them—like scaffolding—in order for them to make sense to a reader. The world of a speculative narrative should feel as interesting as it does believable. It's made interesting by your creative choices. It's made believable by your effort to give the reader all the information he or she needs when she needs it.

- **Reading: Lamott, pages 44-94**
- **Reading: Miller, Chapters 6-10**

### **Week 3: Character Focus and Elements of Story**

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 LeGuin 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 11-15**

### **Week 4: 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: Miller, rest of novel**
- **Peer Workshops**

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**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**

- **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**