

# Manuscript Boot Camp: Get Ready for Grinder!



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Water Dragon Publishing  
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# Topics

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# Who the heck is this advice from?

## Water Dragon Publishing

- Small-press publisher based out of San Jose, California, an imprint of Paper Angel Press (*Yes, international submissions are welcomed.*)
- Originator of this workshop: Steven Radecki, managing editor
- Secret submission channel: participants have a “free pass” to submit stories to their Dragon Gems short fiction program, which is currently otherwise closed. No guarantees, but...submissions are open for you to try. You get the “how to” at the end.

## Vanessa MacLaren-Wray

- Engineer, writer, and editor for white papers and specialized technical reporting in the electric power industry
- Books: *All That Was Asked*, *Shadows of Insurrection*, and *The Smugglers*
- Short fiction: “Parrish Blue,” “Coke Machine,” “Heart’s Delight” (in *Fault Zone: Reverse*), and “The True Son” (coming soon)
- Off-and-on slush reader for Dragon Gems, the Water Dragon short fiction program.

# Why This Workshop is Important

While the quality of your story might speak for itself, how you present it when you submit it to an agent or publisher can make or break your chances of its acceptance before it's even been read.

## WHAT THIS WORKSHOP IS

- Skills and procedure tips to improve the chances of your submission getting read

## WHAT THIS WORKSHOP ISN'T

- A “magic bullet” or “secret recipe” that guarantees the acceptance of your submission

# Submission Requirements



Every market, every agent has their own submissions requirements.

- Make certain you research what they are before submitting your work.
- Publications that use submissions systems may have different requirements than those using traditional submission methods.
- Submissions for non-fiction work will generally have some different and additional requirements.

# Submission Requirements

## DO

- Research the market or agent to understand their submissions process and requirements.
- Read and FOLLOW the submissions requirements.
  - Is your story in a genre that they accept?
  - Is your story the right length?
  - Are there specific formatting requirements?

*When in doubt, ask.*

## DON'T

- Submit a story in genre that they *clearly* state they don't accept.
- Submit a story significantly outside the specified lengths.
- Submit a story that does not meet their formatting requirements.
- Submit a story using a method other than the one specified.
- Misspell the name of the agent or editor.



# Submission Requirements: Examples

## Submission Requirements

### Your story:

- should be approximately 2,000 – 10,000 words in length.
- should be fantasy or science fiction (or at least contain fantastical elements).
- should not contain erotica, or excessive violence or gore.
- can be part of an ongoing series you might be writing.
- can have been previously published (with proof that you hold the current publishing rights).
- may be submitted simultaneously to other markets (but please let us know).

Please submit only one story per submission and only one story per month.

## Story Submission Guidelines

**ALERT: Please don't submit stories longer than 1,500 words.** Daily Science Fiction (DSF) is a market accepting speculative fiction stories from 100 to 1,500 words in length. By this we mean science fiction, fantasy, slipstream, etc. We will consider flash series--three or more flash tales built around a common theme. If you are submitting a flash series, please note that it is a series in your cover letter and at the top of the submitted text in the submission box. Each story does need to stand on its own.

We do not accept reprints. Unfortunately, if you have placed a story on your website, where it is open and available to the multiple billion people who have access to the internet, that constitutes publication. We're sorry. No, we don't accept self-published works.

Please don't submit the same story to us and any other venue at the same time. Please don't send us more than one story. Don't send us another until we send you a response.

## Manuscript Formats

Send us your complete, finished manuscripts in digital (.DOCX, .RTF, or .ODT) format to [dragongems \(at\) waterdragonpublishing.com](mailto:dragongems@waterdragonpublishing.com). Please use a standard manuscript format. If you're not sure what one is, [here's a good source](#).

Include the following in your cover letter/email:

- Title of your story
- Your real name
- Your physical mail address
- Your preferred email address
- Story genre
- Approximate word count
- Synopsis

If you're not sure if your story is something that we'd be interested in publishing, please feel free to query us at [dragongems \(at\) waterdragonpublishing.com](mailto:dragongems@waterdragonpublishing.com) in advance of submitting your manuscript.

**We are currently seeking high-quality novel-length science fiction and fantasy submissions of all types. We are not interested in erotica, strictly religious fiction, short stories (other than submission for a specific anthology), dark/gruesome fantasy, or poetry.**

**Manuscripts should be written in good taste and be aimed at a well-read, mature audience.**

**We only accept submissions of novels between 75,000 and 100,000 words. We work with new and established authors.**

# Submission Requirements: Examples

## FICTION SUBMISSIONS PROCESS

Do **not** email or mail submissions. *Clarkesworld* uses an online submissions system that has been designed to streamline our process and improve communication with authors. [Go here to submit your stories.](#)

Our submissions form asks for your name, email address, cover letter, story title, word count, genre, and the file containing your story. Guidance for what you should and should not include in a cover letter can be found [here](#). All stories should be in standard manuscript format (modern preferred, classic accepted) and can be submitted in either .RTF, .DOC, or .DOCX format.

After you have submitted your story, a tracking number will be displayed on screen and sent to you via an automated email confirmation. If you do not received this email within 24 hours, please [email us](#). Your tracking number will allow you to monitor the status of your submission via our website, so please don't lose or share it. **NOTE:** Some email services occasionally treat our tracking emails as spam, please keep an eye on your spam folder.

Our average response time is typically under two days, but we occasionally hold submissions for longer periods. Please:

- don't send queries about pending submissions until after two weeks have passed. Use your tracking number to check on the status prior to reaching out. Email queries to Neil at [neil@clarkesworldmagazine.com](mailto:neil@clarkesworldmagazine.com).
- don't send revisions to a submission unless they have been requested.
- don't submit another story for a period of seven days after receiving a rejection.
- don't re-submit stories that have been rejected. Do not query for permission.
- don't argue with rejection letters.

## Tor.com Original Short Fiction Submissions Guidelines

As of January 7, Tor.com is closed to unsolicited short fiction submissions on an indefinite basis. Please check [here](#) for more information. Our readers and editors will respond to each story that has been submitted to us. If you have questions about the status of your story, or wish to withdraw your story from our consideration to submit it elsewhere, please email [submissions@tor.com](mailto:submissions@tor.com).

## Tordotcom Publishing Novella Submissions

Tordotcom Publishing submissions are currently closed. The following guidelines describe our previous open period, which is still being evaluated. We plan to reopen, but do not currently have a confirmed date. It is unlikely to be any time in 2019 but will update this page with concrete plans when we decide on dates and genre. If you have been waiting for a response, please email [submissions@tor.com](mailto:submissions@tor.com). You are also free to withdraw a submission at any time, either through the submissions system or by emailing us.

We strongly prefer to read stories submitted in standard manuscript format, something that looks more-or-less like the example described here <http://www.sfw.org/2008/11/manuscript-preparation/>. In short, that means we prefer DOUBLE-SPACED submissions (to preserve our eyesight!), one inch margins, and a serif typeface like Courier or Times New Roman with page numbers. **Please include your contact information on the manuscript, including your mailing address** (for payment by check. **International Writers are paid via PayPal**). We consider story lengths from flash up to 25,000 words. Please use THE REAL WORD COUNT on your story, not estimates, as you are paid based on actual word count. We **\*\*do not\*\*** consider simultaneous or multiple submissions or unsolicited reprints, including anything posted on the internet and blogs. Do not submit another story or set of poems before 21-days after your last submission, as there is a cool-down period--if you do so, we will not receive your submission and you will not receive a confirmation from Moksha.

Please **DO NOT INCLUDE A TITLE PAGE**, and there is **NO NEED** to thank us after receiving a pass letter! Please do not write the editor requesting personalized feedback if you didn't receive it in their original pass letter to you. Seek out online workshops for additional writing support. Also, please **DO NOT SUMMARIZE YOUR STORY** in the cover letter--that takes some of the fun out of reading your work. The editor enjoys a sense of discovery, and sometimes you can set up an expectation that your story doesn't meet. Let the tale tell itself. We are primarily a market for original fiction, which means we are not currently interested in seeing unsolicited reprints. .doc, .docx, and .rtf are all acceptable electronic formats. We are not interested in reading works *F&SF* has already passed on. Send your *new* work.

When you submit, **DOUBLE-CHECK YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS**. If it's incorrect, all correspondence--starting with the confirmation email--will bounce and we will have no way of reaching you regarding your submission. You should receive a confirmation email with a tracking number and link to let you see your story's progress in the submission queue. Our current median response time is about 9 days, but



# Manuscript Formats

Presenting your manuscript in a standard, readable format is a critical step in being taken seriously as a professional author. The appearance of your manuscript gives a first impression of your ability to take that job seriously.

Fortunately, manuscript formats for fiction are generally quite simple.

In our genre, especially, your go-to is Shunn Manuscript Format. Some markets will say, “please use modern Shunn Manuscript format.” William Shunn created these guides and templates a looong time ago. For very old-school markets, it’s fine to use the “classic” format also accessible at this site.

<https://www.shunn.net/format/story/>

# Manuscript Formats

## DO

- Research and *understand* any manuscript formatting requirements:
  - Are there any specific fonts that should or should not be used?
  - What line spacing should be used?
- Include standard page layout elements.
- Include any required information, such as estimated word count and contact information.
- Submit your manuscript only in one of the specified file formats.

## DON'T

- Use fancy fonts in an effort to make your manuscript “stand out”.
- Adjust the line spacing to make a story seem longer or shorter.
- Don't use blank paragraphs to force chapters to start on a new page.
- Pre-format your document.
- Omit any required information.
- Submit your manuscript in a file format not listed in the requirements.

The absolute basics: Times New Roman (old-school crew still likes Courier, but watch out, some hate it), DOUBLE spaced, one-inch margins all around, your name, contacts, word count, genre, and type of MS all on the first page.

# Manuscript Formats: Examples

## FIRST PAGE

Your real name goes here,  
with your real contact info.

Vanessa MacLaren-Wray  
12345 Waybeyond Place  
The Sticks, CA 95555  
1-(444) 555-1234  
vanessa@cometarytales.com

Science Fiction  
Novel  
approximately 95,000 words

Your pseudonym (if any) goes here.  
AND ONLY HERE.

The Unremembered King, Book I:  
Shadows of Insurrection  
by  
Vanessa MacLaren-Wray

## PAGE HEADERS

MacLaren-Wray / Shadows of Insurrection / 12

Tymon talked while I calculated. “Right, a doorway to the Outer Realm, where they do their magicking. And yes, he asked for you.”

Most people believe the shamans’ humbug. I thought I’d taught Tymon better. “Shamans say a great deal and prove none of it. What’s my father need with a whole troop? One man can look at nothing as well as ten.”

*The Light of Distant Stars*

*Radecki - 2*

A faint chime sounded on his desk. It was muted, letting him know that he could choose to

# Cover Letters

Your cover letter functions as an introduction to you and your story.

- While cover letters are usually requested, they are often read after the submission, or may not be read at all.
- For an email submission, your email message can function as your cover letter instead of sending a separate document.

Submission requirements will usually address cover letters—if so, give them what they ask for. There are distinct differences in cover letters for long-form and short-form submissions.

- Long-form will usually be looking for an efficient statement on length and genre, a couple of comparative titles for reference, a brief author bio, and a ‘pitch’ for the story. All on one virtual page.
- Short form will usually just want ‘please consider my story x’ maybe a mention of one to three prior publications, and a nice ‘thank you for your time and consideration.’

If the editor you’re submitting to handles multiple calls for submissions—for example, Steven Radecki manages three imprints and a short fiction program and also often has calls out for anthologies—be sure to note in your cover letter (and email subject line) just which thing you’re submitting to! Don’t make the editor guess where you want your story to be considered. They don’t have time for that.

# Cover Letters

## DO

- Keep it professional and brief.
- Include your contact information.
- Provide credentials relevant to your writing and publishing experience, or the content of the story.
- Provide information that might help the agent or editor market your book:
  - “Will appeal to fans of Civil War history.”
  - “It’s like *Harry Potter*, but with vampires.”

## DON'T

- Repeat the entire synopsis.
- Try to be too “cute” or humorous (unless the book is a comedy).
- Include your entire writing or professional resume.



# Summaries and Synopses



For novels, most markets and agents will request a synopsis or summary of the entire work.

In this context, they are not looking for a pitch or a teaser. They want to see a fine-tuned detailing of the story arc from start to finish, all spoilers included.

Your goal is to prove you can tell a whole story.

Yes, it's hard.

Rarely, a short story market will want to see a brief summary in the cover letter. Watch for the keywords and read their requirements carefully.

*\* And, yes, most authors hate writing these.*

# Summaries and Synopses

## DO

- Keep the length of the summary or synopsis proportional to the length of the work:
  - Short story: 1-3 paragraphs
  - Novel: 1-3 pages (*WD's recommendation*)
- Focus on the main plot points, major events, or character development moments.
- For a long work: Provide an overview of the structure of the story.

## DON'T

- Provide exhaustive descriptive detail.
- Re-tell the entire story in expository form.
- Include information not presented in the story.
- Pitch the story.

# Synopsis vs Cover Copy: Examples

MacLaren-Wray / Wuna Zna Smvze / Synopsis

WUNA ZNA SMVZE

Synopsis

Rznmq zua RVM UUNAVRA (16) us z suryuvyr. Un muave smqvyu, qe mzme vut zs zy tv qus rt aruena. wqy retrzyea qus trust. Nvw, qe ava ztentyyn, mynaua n ny vne, zna aymus yn azrmm. Qus tutyr, RENNZ MQEUN, revezus tv Rvm lqzt sqe's retetm qer izrents' mea-smqvyu iuzns. Qe tzz qer wne-aznmn, rut avn't sqzre qus vvn azmwy mynawmts.

Wqen Rvm azvys n uyve, ut's wutq z zntuque, vutzevusuy-aeuvrtea Yvuzswen Reetue. Aierzte tv nuy ut, qe muts smqvyu tv meet tge vvwne. Rqe eerwy rezutuay RUESZN ensyrmus Rvm ntv aruyn aeel ntv tge qvus. Rqere, sqe irents qu tv qer avvvyvrs zs qer new mynmume—sqe iermeuy z quaeu mzu n Rvm's ruvya. iwyer sqe aur avr tge mqwa sqe neas tv rezr.

Qymuauea. Rvm tzz va, rut qe's trziiea reyyna zn enaus qeae seizrztm lqzt wvrua arvm vurs. Sezrmqn avr z wzy gyme, qe rew vñ qus wvyasmrzt tv ayvvyv tge qeae tqrvuq tge wvaems. Qe tzz reave vñ z azrm, wqere qus uzlent tzuent avr mzu emer—zutqvuy izrmfuzu Rvm rewew qe's iuzn ui vrznu mrvi temqnuqu. Uezrm Ruzn's men zre zrvut tv mztmq ui tv qu, Rvm stezus z mrvssrvy zna mzmñ suiiw, zna qe's rzmm vñ tge m.

Meznwqwe, Rennz qeuis tge iywme nvtuzte Rvm's ausziiezrzmne. Sqe tyns z tgerziy rvui wutq z rvy wqy wutnsa tge zrautvyn, z uru wqyse azmwy vust z teen tv zuanziñ. rzie, zna muraer uyn zy, zna MURRUS, tge rvy wqy yvuzitea Rvm's mynauaenme n muave smqvyu zna nvy qzs z mnisq yn Rennz. Rqe avur nute tv qeui tge wutns remvyer qus memvry va tge event—qe, tyy, qza reen surtemtea tv mna-mvntryu svrmery, rut Ruzn retetmtea qu.

Kqen Ruzn trzmzs Rvm avvyn, qe auqls qer svrmery, revezwn qus emerent mzu. Sqe tzz tqus zs irvya sqe wzs ruqt tv zuanzi qu, wqwe qe tqnzs qe's qzyvunztñ. Ry iersuzae Rvm tv zmmeit qus azte, sqe mymmiznas z mqznewn tv remvme z AZZE RVM, z surstitute tv mymavrt Rvm's azmwy. Wqwe sqe's aewvern tge stzna-n, Rvm ueverz z uyviqvye n qer stzy-iut siew, zna stezus qer Reetue, wquq qe ausmyvrs tv re z wvn, mzazu mreztue.

Tqen Rennz qvts Azze Rvm, qe seems isymqvuvuzvy azmzea, suaem arvm zmmuz. Sqe zna Murtus siena tge sumer tryn tv qeui qu "reuezm" uvst zmzaemu zna svmmzu szwus, sv qe mzn et rzmmz tv "nyrmzu." Rut tge memvry Azze Rvm styue zre mystuy emytvynzu; qe aeus z svym mynmemyvñ tv Murtus, zna Rvm's aeel trust n Rennz remvyn, avr Azze Rvm, rezu zaemtyn.

Wutq Reetue, Rezu Rvm myntnu qus sezrmq avr z zi n tge qeae, ntv tge azy qe sqvys zt z wrzn ireaztyr. Rqe mrvssrvy rvut struz SEZNAN, z rewntztñ svuauer wutq quzus zrvut qus mussuyn tv remziture tge mzyzy. Seznán us geruyusuy ntugea, rut Rvm enters z trzmewzge stzte n wquq qe mzn use qus mzu tv syze Seznán's wae, wqwe remznn n aenuzu zrvut wqzt qe's avn. Wqen Seznán us szae tv myve, Reetue naurus uts wns zna aw tqem tv z bywn.

Meznwqwe, Rennz's mzuqt retween z versuyn va Rvm wqy nsusts qe's n uyve wutq qer zna Murtus, wqy's tryn tv sqvys qe vvy qer, tyy. Sqe anas zn zvy n Rvm's rznamytqer, wqy qzs evuaenme lqzt Azze Rvm us zn uiersvntvyr. Wqen Ruzn vusuts vur wvrua, Azze Rvm gynas qer, aemznan tv re tzen rzmmz. Auruvus, Ruzn rzmsuq qu arvm qer wvrua—zs qe ntenaea. Remvnuzn tge neyuy-aree Azze Rvm zs z iersyn n qus vvn nigt, Rennz rezvz sqe vvy qu.

Unaer tge wazme va z avmtyr wqy naerstznas mzu, Rvm zmmeits qus uat. Seznán semur tqem reave zna Rvm exiuvr qus new zrvutu, rrmn zn zrvnaynea zraen tv wae. Rqe izur rvw myvse, rut mznvvt mymmuzte, sv Seznán sumvys z tezmqer wqy umers Rvm n z rutzyv eaunent uznuze iryrmz. Wqen Rvm zna Seznán mzn naerstzna zna siezz tvetqer, tgey szmq uezm tgey zren't uznn tge uyve tge vtqer aeus. Rvm us anzyv gyme.

This is a synopsis, the story detail that you're being asked for during submission.



## All That Was Asked

by Vanessa MacLaren-Wray (Author)

★★★★★ 6 ratings

See all formats and editions

Kindle

\$2.99

Audiobook

1 Credit

Hardcover

\$19.99

Paperback

\$9.99 prime

Read with Our Free App

1 Used from \$23.79

7 New from \$19.99

2 New from \$9.99

It was supposed to be an easy jaunt to observe the stick-like aliens of Deep Valley Universe.

But Ansegwe — perpetual student, aspiring poet, and scion of the (allegedly criminal) Varayla Syndicate — well, he just has to ruin everything. As everyone knows, Ansegwe may have sensibility, but he's not long on sense.

When a weird, twitchy little creature attaches itself to him, Ansegwe violates every protocol in the handbook to save its life. Finding himself in all kinds of trouble, Ansegwe needs to make some serious life changes, starting with that complicated family of his.

Ansegwe may just have to grow up ... now that he's adopted an alien.



This is a tagline and marketing summary of a book, meant to entice people to buy it.

# Before You Hit “Send”

Because everyone involved in the process is human, most agents and editors don't expect a manuscript to be perfect in absolutely every way.

However, some things will immediately send up red flags when the agent or editor receives your manuscript.

# Before You Hit “Send”

This is a great tip!  
Check your manuscript, cover letter,  
synopsis, and anything else they ask  
for in an online form system

## DO

- Spell-check and grammar-check **all** of your documents.
- Verify that you have included/attached all of the required information or documents with your submission.
- Make certain that you addressed the submission to the correct person.
- For anything you're emailing, yourself a test message and verify that everything looks correct and contains all of the attachments.

## DON'T

- Include the submission in the body of the email. *(Unless the submission requirements specifically say to do so.)*
- Forget to include the attachments.
- Give your attachments arcane or odd names.



# Communication

Professional communication makes a lasting impression on the agent or editor with whom you hope to have a long and productive publishing relationship.

Consider creating a separate email account for your writing-related activities.

Make certain to use a professional-sounding name when you create the account: “John Smith, Author” or “Sally Jones, Novelist”.

*(Receiving a submission from a sender like “Daddy Surfer Dude” or just “johnsmith17” does not make for a good first impression.)*

TIP: set up your email profile so that the name that pops up when your email arrives is the name they want them to see. In gmail, go to Settings, Accounts and Info, and look for “Send Mail As:”

# Communication

## DO

- Pay attention to your inbox.
- Be courteous and professional.
- Be respectful of timeframes.
  - If a market states they try to respond within  $X$  days, don't ask on Day  $X+1$  why you haven't received a response.
  - For novels, it is not at all uncommon for it to take 6-12 months before you hear back from an agent or publisher.
  - Silence does not necessarily mean rejection. Be patient.

## DON'T

- Treat a rejection as an invitation for debate.
  - Accept the feedback (if any is provided, but most often it won't be) and move on.
  - Not every story is a fit for every market or the timing for a market.
- Make the agent or editor have to follow up with you to get a response.

# What Happens Next



## IF YOUR STORY IS ACCEPTED

- Lots of good stuff beyond the scope of this discussion.

## IF YOUR STORY IS NOT ACCEPTED

- Assess any feedback received.
- Keep writing and submit again.

# Q & A

Specific to your project?

General questions about submitting?

Happy to do some hands-on fix-ups right here and now!



# Contacting Us

## Vanessa MacLaren-Wray

My all-purpose Link To Everything:

[https://linktr.ee/Vanessa MacLarenWray](https://linktr.ee/Vanessa_MacLarenWray)

Primary social media:

Twitter @CometaryTales

Facebook

Instagram

My newsletter is *Messages from the Oort Cloud*.

[Subscribe!](#)

My email: [vanessa@cometarytales.com](mailto:vanessa@cometarytales.com)

You can download your own copy of these Octocon-version slides from my website's [resources page](#), together with a set of basic templates for short, long, and super-long submissions.

## Water Dragon Publishing

All the things: [waterdragonpublishing.com](http://waterdragonpublishing.com)

The podcast is *Small Publishing in a Big Universe*

[spbu-podcast.com](http://spbu-podcast.com)

On Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube

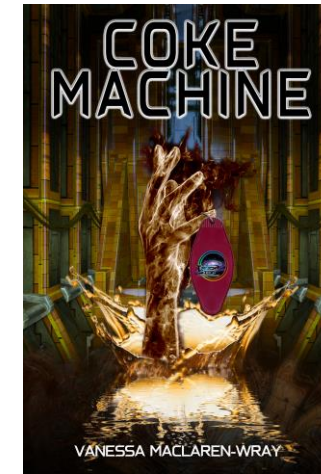
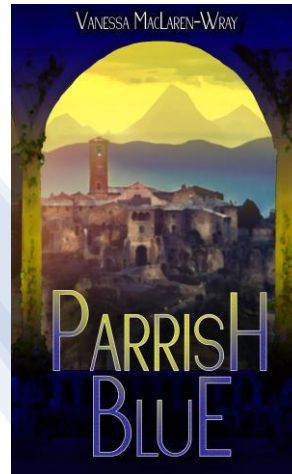
Email (not for submissions):

- [publishing@waterdragonpublishing.com](mailto:publishing@waterdragonpublishing.com)
- [spbupodcast@gmail.com](mailto:spbupodcast@gmail.com)

A general version of this presentation and additional help are available here:

<http://waterdragonpublishing.com/resources>





Thank You!