

Getting backstory in without dumping all at once.

BAM: Backstory Dribble

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/3650.html?s=pdf>

**BAM**  
**ADVANCED FICTION**  
**TECHNIQUES:**  
**THE BACKSTORY DRIBBLE**

**CYN MOBLEY**

# **BAM: ADVANCED FICTION TECHNIQUES**

Published by:

Greyhound Books  
2000 Stock Creek Road  
Knoxville, TN 37920  
[www.bamwriters.com](http://www.bamwriters.com)

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the authors, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in reviews.

Copyright 2008 by Cyn Mobley

ISBN trade paperback: 978-1-59677-078-2

ISBN Ebook: 978-1-59677-077-5

First printing, Sept 2008

# **CONTENTS**

Introduction 7

Prologue/Epilogue 11

Flashback 17

Narrative Paragraph 21

Appositive Phrases 25

Word by Word 29

Troubleshooting 31

Conclusion 35

*BAM AFT: The Backstory Dribble*

## Introduction

Backstory: it's one of the biggest challenges facing writers. How do you get it in? How do you bring your reader inside your protagonist's world without simply dumping five pages of backstory and authorial intrusion on the reader?

The answer is the backstory dribble. It's gotta come in gradually, within the flow of the main story.

I've been meaning to write about backstory for a long time but couldn't decide how to approach teaching it. Then I woke up one morning with the concept almost completely outlined in my head, a way of talking about backstory techniques arranged by length. Within that framework, we'll also talk about how important backstory is and what it accomplishes.

The major backstory techniques are:

- Prologues
- Flashbacks
- Narrative paragraphs
- Appositive phrases
- Descriptive words

### What is backstory?

Normally, when you began working out of story, you start with something rather vague. Perhaps it's an idea, a fragment of the song, or just a good "I wonder what if?" People tend to start with general feelings or themes rather than specifics.

Now, this isn't always treated true. For instance, I started one book called *The Apocalypse Year* with just an opening line: The frogs

## *BAM AFT: The Backstory Dribble*

died first. (Available on Amazon.com very soon, I hope.)

But generally speaking, story start with an overarching concept, a penumbra if you will. From that, a story will develop. Then structure. Then plot. Then scenes. You need to understand that progression of detail and concreteness in order to understand where backstory fits in. That sequence again:

- Penumbra/story/structure/plot/scenes

So how you get the backstory in? And do you need every bit of backstory that you know in your story?

The first question is a matter of technique and we'll cover those later in depth. The second is perhaps the most difficult story question you'll have to answer.

First, you must distinguish between history, technical info and backstory. History and backstory are directly related: backstory is a subset of history. Both are about the characters and their contexts.

- History
- Backstory
- Technical info (techno)

Technical info (what I'll call techno most of the time) is different. It can be part of the current culture the characters live in or it can be fascinating information about the past world. Techno is part of building a realistic world. It's what makes the world real to your readers by making your readers feel like they truly understand another world, that all they need is a sharp knife and they, too, could perform open heart surgery or solve an arcane puzzle with their knowledge of cryptographic techniques. Techno makes the reader feel like they are insiders in that world. Techno consists of world details. It is current context.

Backstory, on the other hand, is a broader canvas. It's a subset of history, the part of history that the reader must see. It has to do with the setting, the stage, the characters, almost anything. It is historical context.

## *Cyn Mobley*

Think of it in terms of the theater. When you look at a real stage, you don't see the entire theater. You don't see the lines and the weights and the lights overhead because they're masked by the top curtain. In fact, the stage you see is only a small part of what actually exists.

That part that you don't see is history that is not backstory. The stage you see is backstory. If you'd see it on the stage, it's a visible and ongoing portion of the backstory.

Backstory is the reason the people are in trouble and the reason that they act or react the way that they do. When you're in the phase of taking your story between the penumbra and the actual structure, you're going to be thinking about backstory. If you've read my other books, you know that you should be thinking about your character's strengths and weaknesses. Those are backstory, the flaws and why they exist and you want to tell the reader a bit about those. You don't necessarily want to tell the reader about every trauma that the main character resolved when he was thirteen years old unless it actually matters. Sometimes you've simply got to know what the structure looks like before you can decide what backstory should be visible and what shouldn't be.

This is important: understand the difference between history and backstory. History, the reader doesn't need to know. Backstory, the reader does.

Let me repeat that: backstory is what the reader needs to know. History is not.

So backstory and techno are what you have to share with the reader. So how do you do it? The word you want to keep in mind is DRIBBLE.

### **Why a dribble?**

Because you don't want to splash in all at once. Not these days.

Now, granted, there was a time when the forward motion in novels would simply stop and the author would do pages and pages of background on each character, then returned to the story. That isn't today and that isn't good pacing anyway.

The problem with backstory is that it doesn't move the story



Getting backstory in without dumping all at once.

BAM: Backstory Dribble

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/3650.html?s=pdf>