

INTO THE

STORYVERSE

GEORGE JOHNSTON

Into the Storyverse
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Preface

So, you have this book in your hand. A whole spectrum of possibility lies before you. Yes, it is constrained by language and bound by paper, but you are holding something fundamental to life: a story. Stories connect us and enrich lives. Stories tap into something we all have: imagination. I envisage you assessing the value of this book. Maybe you are thinking, *What's Into the Storyverse about? What will I be getting into if I delve into this tale?* Let me explain.

The *Storyverse* is the universe of connected stories that surround us. It is a world as evocative and as real as the one you currently inhabit. How can it be real if it is fiction? Simple, you read the words and as your imagination takes flight, the story becomes tangible to you. Every moment of every day you live out a story that is yours alone. The sad fact is many people have grafted someone else's fiction onto their own special story. They have listened to fears induced by themselves and others and have sunk into anxiety and depression. Struggle is fundamental to life and it is infused into the fabric of this story told through traditional narrative and poetic verse. It is innovative and unique and I hope you can set your imagination free and enter *Into the Storyverse*.

The main character is about to walk out of the next page and into your imagination. His name is Dusty. You will follow him; looking over his shoulder and inside his

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head. He lives in South East Queensland, his parents hailed from South East Asia, but he is most at home on the road traveling to where his heart takes him.

Dusty's journey is one of faith, but the language in his head is not the language he speaks because words are, and always will be, inadequate; getting twisted and convoluted with use. Actions speak louder than words. For Dusty, the creative force that holds everything together is love. He names this 'God'. But Dusty has no appetite for academic discussions about belief. His world is shaped by his experience of grief and loss. You are about to enter into this world and while words can never be enough, they can be evocative. As you read, disconnect yourself from where ever you are physically and open your mind to the Storyverse. Enough preamble, it's time to turn the page. Dusty is about to walk across the aftermath of a devastating bushfire.



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Tall choking walls of smoke turned day into night then flames brought a hell on earth that was halted only by the ocean. That was yesterday, a day burned into his memory. He is crossing this black no-man's-land from the narrow sanctuary of the Tasmanian beach. Only ashes and charred memories of life remain here. He absently touches his arms and face, feeling the scars that were seared into his skin years before yesterday's violent conflagration.

In the smoking silence, there is only the feeble intrusion of his boots crunching on the gravel and the rasping of each laboured breath as his lungs struggle with the polluted air. Stooping to place his hands on his bent knees, his head dips as if the weight of maintaining life is crushing down on him. In this position, the straps of his backpack pull awkwardly on his neck and shoulders. He had forgotten about the burden for just a moment. The contents of his pack call to him again, pulling him back to a reality that he is not ready to face.

It is now exactly one month since his closest friend Alan died by his own hand, leaving Dusty with only ashes and some artefacts to carry with him. As he sinks to his knees, a casual observer may assume that he is in prayer or overwhelmed by the destruction that lies before him. The reality is more complicated. The horror of yesterday's destruction merely sparks his memory of being close to death and feeling powerless to protect the people around him. Dusty had not been able to accept any hugs of consolation after Alan's suicide, for in his heart he strongly felt that he was responsible for his friend's death. It all

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started for him years ago in an overturned car at the bottom of a gully. If only he had known what to do at that time, then maybe things would have ended differently. For Alan, it all started even further back in time.

Turning back to the sea, he reaches the gritty sand and sheds his clothes like a snake awkwardly shrugging off its skin. The ocean, with its rolling surf, draws him into its embrace.

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*Floating free
In the foaming sea
I dip between each cresting wave
I look ahead and I am almost brave
As water rears up then curves down
To the sandy hidden ground
Will the wave smash me
Or can I ride it free?
Either way, it's up to me
Floating in the moment
Between the bad that was
And the good that can be
Or was that the good that was
And the bad that can be?
Either way, there is not much time
Duck under the wave
Or ride it in
Maybe it's better
To avoid looking at what was
Or what might be
Just stay in the current
Floating free.*