



JUST THE PLOT

THE WORLD'S A HORRIBLE PLACE!

At least 80% of the world's population lives on less than \$10 a day. One in four people in the world lack electricity, and one in six don't have access to clean drinking water. They can't read, write, or sign their own names.

90% of our large fish are gone forever, and one in four mammals now faces extinction. We've killed 95% of the planet's apex predators. We are running out of oil but we just keep sucking it out, we'll even frack it from underneath ancient people's homes.

A child just died of hunger. And now another. One just died from thirst, and since then another has passed away drinking dirty water to quench that thirst.

A billion people don't have safe drinking water and a full third of the world lacks access to basic sanitation. One single agent, the bacteria that causes diarrhea kills 1.8 million children each year.

There are 70 million human people enslaved on the planet right now, not to mention the billions of individuals of other species that continue to exist in concentration camps worse than any the world's ever seen, force fed from the moment they are born in prison until the second they are slaughtered in terror. Our ocean is sick and dying, our soil is barren and run dry of nutrients, there's rubbish absolutely everywhere and now it's not just the fish eating plastic but we are too.

Billions live in misery and want even worse than the worst you could experience in the Stone Age.

And yes, most of the people alive today are much better off than they have ever been, with food, shelter and entertainment of a quality unlike any history, and are far more likely to live into old age than any of their ancestors. Peter Diamandis says, "the availability of almost everything a person could want has been going upward rapidly for two hundred years and erratically upward for ten thousand years before that. This is a generation that has access to more calories, watts, lumen-hours, square-feet, gigabytes, megahertz, bushels per acre, miles per gallon and dollars than ever before." Yeah. But there are hundreds of millions who still live in abject poverty. The disparity is worse than ever. And maybe the proportion of those suffering has dropped, but with populations explosive growth the net suffering is worse than ever before.

I know what you're thinking - why is this guy just depressing the absolute hell out of us? I thought we were sharing tips on how to grow together in book publishing and he's just up here ranting about the worst stuff ever.

Well, yeah - the world sucks.



LOST THE PLOT

My name's Martin Green and I'm a director of a small but rapidly growing independent Aussie publisher called Pantera Press, where I run an imprint called Lost the Plot where we try to save the world by making great books with vital information and sweet art providing the younger generation with the tools they need to take stewardship of this rock from the dinosaurs that are sucking it to death.

I'm up here to talk to you about impact, ambition and why we've been scratching around in the dark for ten years and what we've learned. We started this thing up in 2008 because we wanted to make a difference - to have an impact.

Let's talk about social purpose business.

This is Lao Tzu:

*Wise souls don't hoard;
The more they do for others the more they have,
The more they give the richer they are.*

The world needs better businesses. Ones that achieve business outcomes while being conscious of their impact on the world we share - because this current system based solely on the maximisation of profits without any regard for the impact on society and environment can only continue to lead us towards darkness. There is a better model, where businesses are the stewards that lead and protect our future. In Australia, 65% of people believe business should take the lead on change and not wait for the government. Among the younger generation, there is an expectation that business be a force for positive and social change - with 72% of millennials in agreement with that statement.

There are four kinds of organisations - a for profit business where the goal is making money. One with a corporate social conscience, which makes money and gives back. A charity, which does good, and a social purpose business - which does good and makes money and maybe gives it back.

This final type of business has shown a real growth trend. Many people now think that doing good should just be part of how we do business. No longer does money have to come at the expense of making change - making change is now seen as a fundamental attribute of good business - because if you're not doing good, and anyone can be, why aren't you? And what are you contributing?

Social purpose business has even become a competitive advantage. When quality and price are equal, social good is the most important factor to 53% of consumers making a purchase globally. As the founder of TOMS said, "Today's consumers have so many options and are so distracted that it takes something special to get our attention. More than buying stuff, we want to be part of movements and surround ourselves with like-minded people that share our view of the world."



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Pantera Press is a social purpose business that invests in Australian writing culture, education and the future.

If I can ask you to cast your minds back to 2008, you would all recall that this was an incredibly disruptive and scary but also interesting time.

We used it as an opportunity to challenge traditional publishing and shape a new business.

What we were seeing in book publishing in 2008 mimicked a lot of what we were seeing in other industries globally – companies were becoming extremely risk averse. We saw the bigger book publishers focus on their sure bets, getting their established and well selling Australian authors to write more books per year as well as buying ANZ rights to international best-selling authors and publishing them here.

So, for a new writer options were limited: they could try to publish overseas, they could put their manuscript in the bottom drawer and not think of it again, or they could try self publishing - which was a fairly different proposition back then as compared to now.

Looking at the longer-term ramifications for our industry, what this meant was that Australia was not investing in writing culture or the next generation.

Although it sounds overly dramatic, this new reality in publishing meant that Australians from future generations might not encounter as many great new Australian books or great new Australian authors - and that means that we'd be missing out on recordings and reflections of our culture itself.

And, thankfully, ten years on and due to the efforts of many, this situation has since changed - but this void was the catalyst to start Pantera Press. In order to take that risk on new authors that other publishers couldn't we needed an innovative model, not restricted by traditional infrastructure like other publishers were and we needed a fresh approach to allow us invest in that next generation of both readers and writers.

We saw this as an opportunity to do more than just fill a void, but to combine business, philanthropy and the arts.

Long story short, Pantera Press was born - a business whose financial success and community purpose were co-dependent.

What do we mean by that? Every activity that we undertake at Pantera Press, we ask ourselves – are we contributing to Australian culture.

So to break that down, for us, this meant taking a holistic view when looking at developing our business model.



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First and foremost, we wanted to fill that void. So we wanted to find and nurture new Australian writers, who we saw as having international and best-seller potential.

We wanted to handpick these talented authors and help build their brands from day one. And we took a long term approach, signing authors, not books - agreeing to spend more upfront in order to build their brands and not just drop 'em when the first book doesn't sell enough.

We now have a wonderful list of home-grown Australian authors, some award-winning, some best-selling and all with critical acclaim. We were recently identified as a heat-seeker by Bookscan, as a small publisher showing massive growth - 2.6 times on the year before - and we were nominated for Small Publisher of the Year at the Australian Book Industry Awards and have been nominated several times.

We put out one of the year's best selling political autobiographies, which was also a timely reminder on the state of indigenous fairs in Australia, a look at how far we've come and how far we need to go. In a slow second quarter for the book trade in general, we've managed to sub more of our books than ever before - and we just put out 10 000 copies in the first run of a YA title by a debut author - which is pretty crazy coming from a little dude like us and a long way from where we started. So we're doing our thing, that's one way we can have an impact.

But we also know if we were looking at investing in the next generation and Australian writing culture we needed to do even more.

So born from this, also from day one, was our "Good Books Doing Good Things" philosophy.

Our friend Bill Nye the Science Guy said:

*Altruism is not a moral or religious ideal ...
It is an essential, biological part of who or what we are as a species.*

This is where we get to the bit about ambition and drive - the driving force for us to go and do what we do every day is to help others, to grow this thing as big as we can get it. Because the idea of what we do, it's not about just making books - it's about having as significant an impact as we can. 'Cos the world's awful, remember?

For us, it was all about finding what would make our lives valuable for ourselves. Martin Seligman illustrates in Flourish,

*"Doing a kindness produces the single most reliable momentary increase
in well-being of any exercise we have tested."*



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Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*,

“Don't aim at success - the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue...as the in unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a course greater than oneself.”

Muhammad Ali,

“Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth.”

Though people will work to get the things they think will make them happy, like toys, houses, nothing makes us happy like striving for a greater overall goal. Freud said,

“Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness.”

Doing something for the community gives us purpose. It is not what we get, but who we become, what we contribute... that gives meaning to our lives.

*“Life is a gift and it offers us the privilege, opportunity and responsibility to give something back by becoming more.
This is what makes life worth living.”*

That's Tony Robbins.

This is the point - to find a purpose greater than yourself and devote your life to doing it. And since you care so much about it, getting out of bed for it and grinding on it - is easy. It's fulfilling, it's fun. When work is your passion, it doesn't feel like work at all.



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We make three kinds of books - we do the Aussie fiction, for the culture, (and we would also love to do NZ fiction, if you'll have us), we do important non-fiction about stuff that matters, ideas, debate, which we touched upon briefly, with its own more obvious impact - and we do the Lost the Plot stuff, that's my imprint - another way we can change the world, maybe just a little bit.

I've done my three minutes on how the world sucks and it's not fair already, so I won't get into again too much here, but what we're trying to do with Lost the Plot is help - to spark change in an individual, in communities, or in the wider world. The forever young of today are the most voracious, information hungry beasts the world has ever seen - you've seen us, millennials, walking around with our necks bent all weird just scrounging for the next piece of content we imbibe. We just can't get enough.

However, we are in an absolute information glut right now - there is more new information created every day than there was in the entirety of human history up to 2003. Where finding valuable information used to be like trying to find a scarce plant in the desert, it has become like finding a specific plant in a jungle.

Now this info's all out there, it's all useful, but it needs to be curated and it needs to be delivered. At Lost the Plot, we're focused on the big issues facing our time and our people, things like climate change, plastic pollution, the death of the ocean, the end of biodiversity, anxiety, depression, suicide, people getting fat and dying about it, sleep quality, equality - for women, for other cultures, for animals, bad light and unjust social norms.

We want to find and promote that old timeless wisdom, scientific answers, well informed speculation, thought provoking stuff inspiring people to stand up straight and breathe to their belly, to stay grounded, get out in nature, become gritty and determined and take personal responsibility and find respect and compassion - because god knows there's not enough of that around.

And then we take all the words, chop out 80%, write it in plain English and dress it up with sick pictures from amazing young artists all around the world to make a beautiful, treasurable object - it's like the Instagram's Instagram, kids books for the ADD generation of adults.

So far we've only put out one book that truly represents our aims, it's called Space is Cool as Fuck - it's huge, it's dope, and we hope it accidentally gets into the hands of many young children so that they become scientists and astronauts.

So, those are the good books and they do good things. But then what we do, once we sell these books we use that money to invest in charities that teach kids how to read and write.

Cos education, see - that's how we're gonna save the world.



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*“If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales.
If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.”*

- Albert Einstein

Let me preach to the choir for a minute. Books are the tool for transformation - personal and culture. It all changes when you start reading - all of a sudden you're a smart person who can learn anything. And the whole world opens up. We've all met people who have said that such and such book changed my life, and probably all feel that way about certain titles ourselves - in fact, there are books that have shaped entire civilisations.

Now let's talk about children - (our future). Illiterate or minimally literate children perform poorly, in education, health and employment. Too many won't graduate from high school. When they are grown, they'll barely earn enough to stay above the poverty line and are far more likely to engage in criminal and antisocial behaviour.

Your average middle class kid gets 1700 hours of one-on-one picture book reading before they start school. A kid from a low income family is exposed to 25.

Literacy is the best predictor of a child's success both in school and throughout life. Neil Gaiman spoke of a time he listened to a talk about the building of private prisons in America. This is a huge growth industry, and so they need to plan for their future growth - but how many cells will these prisons need? And how many prisoners will there be 15 years from now? Turned out, this could very easily be predicted using a simple algorithm based on asking what percentage of 10 and 11 year olds couldn't read. It is not a one to one correlation, but it is a very real one.

Gaiman says - Fiction does two things of great importance - first, it is a gateway drug to reading - the drive to know what happens next, to want to turn the page the need to keep going even if it is hard because someone's in trouble and you have to know how it will all end. That's a very real drive. It forces you to learn new words and to keep going, and you learn that reading is pleasurable and once you know that you're on the way to reading everything.

The second thing fiction does is to build empathy - you get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know. You learn that everyone out there is a me just like you, you're being someone else and when you return to your own world, you're going to be slightly changed. Empathy allows us to function as more than just self-obsessed individuals, it allows us to form groups and function as a society and believe and strive for something above ourselves.

And it's this putting something above us that keeps us going. Now remember, the world's spiralling out of control. There are two things you can do to reduce population growth - one, believe it or not, is to improve health. There is a perfect correlation, as you improve health, within half a generation the population growth rate goes down.



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And we can talk your ear off about health and we've got some ideas about that, but the other thing we can do is provide education - specifically, teaching every child on the planet the basics of literacy, mathematics, life skills and critical thinking.

We're coming to a future where education will be delivered on personal computers - decentralised, personalised and extremely interactive. I'd like to present you a case study:

Professor Sugata Mitra won the TED Prize in 2013 for his talk about a school in the cloud. Prof Mitra was head of research and development for NIIT Technologies, one of new Delhi's top computer software companies.

Their fancy office was separated from an urban slum by only a tall brick wall. Mitra cut a hole in the wall and installed a computer and a trackpad with the screen and pad facing into the slum, connected it to a web browser and walked away. The kids couldn't speak English, didn't know how to use a computer and had no idea what the internet was. Within minutes, they'd figured out how to point and click. By the end of the day they were teaching each other how to surf the web.

He repeated the experiment in several locations and found the same thing, and the experiment has since been repeated all over the world: kids working in small, unsupervised groups and without any training can learn to use computers very quickly with a great degree of proficiency. So Mitra went further, and in a small village in southern India he sought to find out whether a group of impoverished Tamil-speaking twelve year olds could learn to use the internet to teach themselves biotechnology in English - using technology none of them had ever seen to teach themselves a subject they'd never heard of in a language not one of them spoke.

Mitra returned two months later and when he tested them they averaged scores of 30 percent - not enough to pass an exam but a remarkable result in two months with no tuition. When Mitra added the simple element of a teacher using the grandmother method - just standing behind the kids and encouraging them, there scores jumped to 50% - the same average as the high-school kids studying biotech in new Delhi. Refining the system further and installing the technology in schools, scores jumped to 76% percent. Just a bunch of kids around a computer with free access to the world's information.

The point of that story is to say that although some of the challenges facing the world seem insurmountable, there are simple solutions. There are solutions to solving the education crisis, and that is the magic pill that solves everything else.

There are 123 million children who are not in school, and two-thirds of them are girls. According to UNESCO, providing these girls with education is "the key to health and nutrition; to overall improvements in the standard of living; to better agricultural and environmental practices, to higher gross national product and to greater involvement and gender balance in decision making at all levels of society." Educating girls is the greatest poverty reduction strategy around, and it's possible!



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So, I was saying - we use the money to teach kids how to read. We set up the Pantera Press Foundation in 2015 to formalise our commitment to educating kids, because we firmly believe that education is the key to unlocking the potential of the future.

Over the years we have partnered with a variety of different organisations. Small programs investing in teachers, through to major writers festivals. And on the not for profit and charity side we've partnered with organisations like The Smith Family's Let's Read Program who we helped build 14 new Let's Read centres around Australia to help kids under 5 from disadvantaged families developed the building blocks for literacy.

With Mission Australia, The Chris O'Brien Lifehouse and the footpath library we gave over \$¼ million dollars in books to people in need over Christmas.

On top of this we also encourage our readers to do more.

Our readers understand that by buying a Pantera Press author, they are not only getting a gripping story but that because we invest in new authors and in the kinds of programs I've just mentioned, they are directly contributing to Australian Writing Culture themselves – just by buying a Pantera Press book.

In fact, The 14 Let's Read Centres I mentioned that we built around Australia, were in part donated by readers of our books.

Most recently we've partnered with The Sydney Story Factory as a foundational partner to launch their new centre in Western Sydney, to provide accessible education to underprivileged and marginalised children of diverse backgrounds.

One problem with education is that our current system is built around fact-based learning but the internet makes almost every fact instantly available online. We're training our children in skills they rarely need, while ignoring those they absolutely do. Teaching kids how to nourish their creativity and curiosity, while still providing a sound foundation in critical thinking, literacy is the best way to prepare them for the future.

And that's why we love the Sydney Story Factory so much - they light that spark of creativity in the kids. Sydney Story Factory is a not-for-profit that runs creative writing and storytelling workshops for marginalised young people aged 7 to 17. Supported by their community of expert storytellers and volunteer tutors, young people are empowered to create stories of all kinds, which they publish and celebrate. They help young people develop the skills and confidence to find their voice and shape the future.

It all starts at home for us, but this is something that can be expanded all over the world and as we continue to grow and expand, we hope to be a part of that change.



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So how do we do that?

We find the best people and we unite under the banner of the mission that we all believe can have that impact that gives us meaning and allows us to give back all the advantages we ourselves have benefited from.

Ray Dalio tells us, work is either what you do to earn your money for the life you want to have or what you do to achieve your mission, or some mix of the two. Make your passion and your work one and the same and do it with people you want to be with.

That's the key to success for us - and what will turn us into a great organisation. A great organisation has both great people and a great culture. Great people have both great character and great capabilities. Getting the right people and the right chemistry is so important because if you find, develop and support good people, they will find and develop and own good ideas. We've been working hard on putting together a superteam, with the final two members starting in the coming weeks.

And one thing we've learned from our time is the importance of fit and how important it is to hire great people, and once you do - give them the space and time to really get work. The biggest thing some of our employees have said they really value is the flexibility to just sit and think, to dictate their own time to run the best course of action.

You can't get more time, so how you choose to spend the time you have is critical - focusing on what matters means saying no to things that don't, and that involves discovering which is which - It doesn't take a lot of time to design a good plan, but the results are invaluable - so having that space to work out your plan and strategize can change everything. We encourage everyone to every now and then just go home and take a day to think. And you know what else we do, we have fun and we also work standing up and try to keep moving so we don't all die in an office.

We're only a little publisher, but we've got big ambitions and right now we're growing at a rate that suits them.

I heard the environmentalist/explorer/engineer/entrepreneur/writer/storyteller/director/producer James Cameron talk recently and he mentioned off-hand during question time that, along with having created, produced, directed, written and edited the highest grossing film of all time twice, when he was diving nearby where he had dived as deep into the ocean as any man ever has, he may have discovered the conditions and microbes that were the genesis of life on Earth. I mean this to say that if anyone is qualified to say this, it's James Cameron:

"If you set your goals ridiculously high and it's a failure, you will fail above everyone else's success."



I DON'T THE PLOT

Don't rule out a goal because you think you can't achieve it - great expectations create great results. So find a big goal, and go hard at it.

We're trying to get huge to save the world. And yeah, we might be small - but if you think you are too small to be effective, you have never been in the dark with a mosquito.

I know I don't need to tell any of you this, but what we all do here as book publishers is vital to the culture and the future.

You educational publishers teach children the skills they need to live their best lives, and the trade publishers, we inspire them to attain those skills. And we should all be satisfied with that, cos these kids are gonna save the world from us and all the evil that we've done to it.

And the stories we help tell will resonate and our culture will survive and thrive, as long as we have a literate population.

And that's why we're in the creative industries - it's obviously not to make a boatload of cash - but it's why we get up every day and do what we do - because the world sucks and it's not fair - and

WE CAN ALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

