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USC's Hollywood, Health & Society Announces Winner of \$20,000 Grand Prize in Blue Sky Scriptwriting Contest

Oriana Schwindt's Merryville ('Love and Light') Is a Murder Mystery in a Utopian Town

LOS ANGELES, April 10, 2023—The \$20,000 grand prize in Hollywood, Health & Society's first Blue Sky Scriptwriting Contest has been awarded to writer Oriana Schwindt for her pilot for the series *Merryville* ("Love and Light"), about a murder mystery in a small utopian town in Pennsylvania that has served as a model of peace, prosperity and sustainability for 50 years.

Schwindt's script was one of nearly 100 contest entries received, and among five finalists announced in October of last year after going through two rounds of judging by TV writers/producers and experts on the topics. Each of the finalists received a \$7,500 fellowship. The contest was conducted in partnership with the [Future of Life Institute](#), the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) and the [Writers Guild of America East](#).

"This is amazing!" Schwindt said after being told that her story took the \$20,000 grand prize. "My sincere thanks to everyone involved in this decision. It's an immense honor.

"As an inveterate doomer and writer of dystopia, I'd been looking to challenge myself by imagining a better world for once, and this contest was the perfect opportunity to do just that," added Schwindt, a journalist, podcast host and alum of the Warner Bros. TV Writers' Workshop who loves the fantasy and sci-fi genres. "What a joy it was to solve society's problems—and then introduce an entirely new set of them!"

"We were delighted to tell Oriana that her *Merryville* script won the grand prize," said HH&S Director Kate Folb. "And we celebrate her imagination as well as the imaginations of the finalists and other writers, who all drew attention to stories that offer a promising version of the future."

In addition to thanking Folb, Schwindt singled out her writing mentor on the script—Emmy-nominated veteran TV producer and showrunner Neal Baer (*Designated Survivor*, *Under the Dome*, *ER*)—for shepherding her project along. His feedback and suggestions, she said, were "crucial to helping to make this win a reality."

Said Baer: “What a pleasure it was working with Oriana as she shaped and delivered a powerful story about the potential of technology for doing good in the world.”

The judges called Schwindt’s *Merryville* an “interesting and unique premise that was super entertaining,” and “a very clever combination of a successful new world order married to a detective thriller.”

In addition to Schwindt’s script, the other four fellowship finalists were:

- *A Bright World According to Beto* (episode titled “The Start of It All”) by Gabriele Almon
- *Ancestral Dreaming* (episode titled “Eden Dreams”) by Marcella Guerriero
- *Inflection Points* (episode titled “Confront Nature”) by Peter Andrews
- *The Things We Harvest* (pilot episode) by Nathan Patton

The Blue Sky competition called for pilot scripts set in a future world that we aspire to live in; one that is peaceful, environmentally sustainable and depicts a fair and equitable society, using artificial intelligence and other forms of technology to benefit humanity.

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[Hollywood, Health & Society](#) is a program of the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center that provides entertainment industry professionals with accurate and timely information for storylines on health, safety and security. Our free resources include expert briefings, panel discussions, screenings, a quarterly newsletter, social media and more. The program’s funding, past and present, has included generous support from the CDC, The SCAN Foundation, the California Health Care Foundation, the John Pritzker Family Fund, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and N Square, among others.

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