LEGAL STORIES
Narrative-Based Property Development in the Modern Copyright Era
By Gregory Steirer

Tracing the emergence of what the media industries today call transmedia, story worlds, and narrative franchises, Legal Stories provides a dual history of copyright law and narrative-based media development between the Copyright Act of 1909 and the Copyright Act of 1976. Drawing on archival material, including legal case files, and employing the principles of Actor-Network Theory, Gregory Steirer demonstrates how the meaning and form of narrative-based property in the twentieth century was integrally bound up with the letter and practice of intellectual property law during this time.

Steirer’s expansive view of intellectual property law encompasses not only statutes and judicial opinions, but also the everyday practices and productions of authors, editors, fans, and other legal laypersons. The result is a history of the law as improvisatory and accident-prone, taking place as often outside the courtroom as inside, and shaped as much by laypersons as lawyers. Through the examination of influential legal disputes involving early properties such as Dashiell Hammett’s Sam Spade, H. P. Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos, and Robert E. Howard’s Conan the Barbarian, Steirer provides a ground’s eye view of how copyright law has operated and evolved in practice.

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