

# Red Branch Heroes.

## Bellyfeel Case Study



2015



## An Interactive Transmedia Story.

Red Branch Heroes is an interactive communal storytelling experience set in Northern Ireland. We worked on the project with Anna Zaluczkowska.

Anna is a writer and producer of interactive media, film and TV. She is also a lecturer who currently works at Leeds Beckett University. We have worked with Anna numerous times over the last 7 years, from initially consulting on her media degree courses at the University of Bolton. Then, we ran some interactive research development at the University and following on, created some live transmedia story campaigns with her and her students.

More recently, she wanted us to get involved with this story, initially called The Community, and then became the Red Branch Heroes.

***Red Branch Heroes is a highly charged multiplatform story about life in Northern Ireland; where the celebrity obsessed digital public of today meets the myth and legend of yesteryear in a search for a special person. A hero.***



***Using the backdrop of a TV reality show that is searching to find a new Cuchulain, a modern champion of Northern Ireland, Red Branch Heroes is an interactive social reality experiment.***

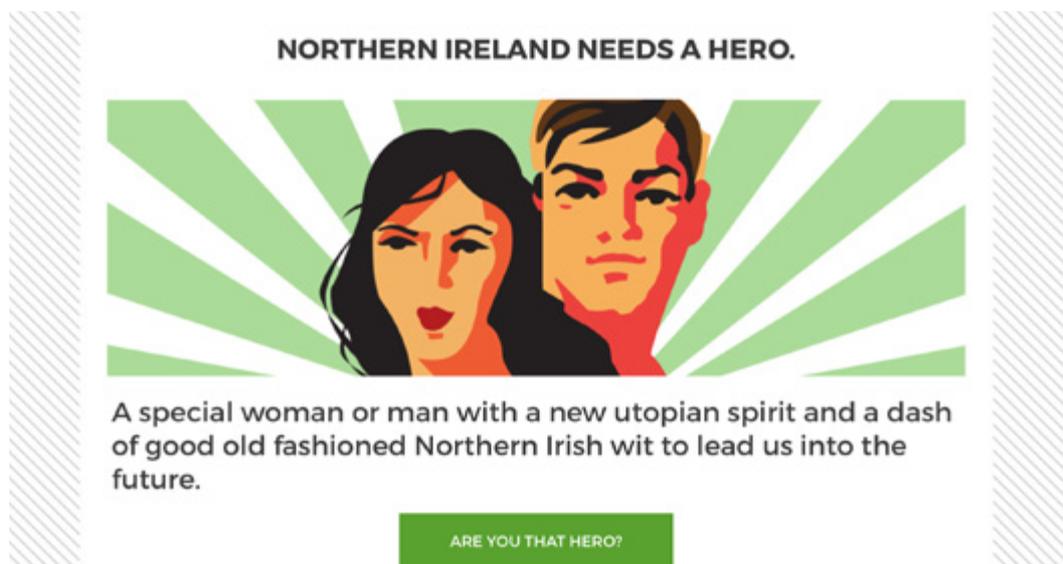
Krishna Stott – Bellyfeel:

Anna had a bunch of amazing, but random ideas and it was our job to help her distil the idea down into something that would create engaging stories, and be a compelling experience for the audience. This was also part of a research project so there were many rules that we had to stick to in terms of what we were able to do.

***Working with Bellyfeel is always exciting and I don't think this project would have worked so well without their expertise. They are a perceptive, thinking, challenging and talented group of people, open to new ideas and who have their finger on the pulse of digital developments. Work with them if you get the chance. Anna Zaluczkowska - Senior Lecturer and Course Leader for BA Filmmaking - Northern Film School***

It was quite difficult to start with. The rules governing the idea were restrictive and we had various meetings where we talked things down different routes and drew numerous user experience charts on big pieces of paper. After a few of these meetings we discovered a way of creating an experience that delivered what Anna wanted, and would potentially be an interesting and compelling experience for the audience.

We then took this idea, which was all about having the audience involved in the story, being under the microscope as far as the writer was concerned, and made it part of a live campaign where the story was expanding and being delivered at the same time.





Our job was to create an online and multiplatform environment for this story to begin, grow and flower. We were dealing with the technical aspects as well as helping define the direction of the story. We came around to the idea that we would recruit an audience of judges to a fake reality TV show in Northern Ireland. That's how we would tell the story.

**WE WANT YOU!**

**CAN YOU MAKE LIFE CHANGING DECISIONS?**  
**CAN YOU WORK AS PART OF A TEAM?**  
**DO YOU WATCH REALITY TV PROGRAMMES?**  
**DO YOU HAVE STRONG OPINIONS?**  
**DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG?**  
**ARE YOU A GOOD JUDGE OF CHARACTER?**  
**COULD YOU SPOT THE NEW CUCHULAIN?**

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**BECOME A JUDGE!**  
CLICK HERE

We need judges who will choose the Red Branch Hero for our reality TV series. You don't have to leave the comfort of your home to take part. It happens online.

We are looking for people with strong moral conviction to be our judging panel.

**AND THE BEST JUDGE WILL WIN £100 CASH!**

We know that you are up to the challenge. Our competitors will need your support and help to assist them through a series of challenges and ordeals. Take part and help us build the future of Northern Ireland.

To volunteer and help judge the Red Branch Heroes please fill in [this survey](#).



*We sometimes did not know what would happen next. I was not even sure if the heroes were real people or actors. The same goes with the judges, however, it did not matter. It was fun. Audience Member*

We did a recruitment campaign and collected a lot of data about the audience. They had to fill in a questionnaire, which gave us a lot of information about their sexual, religious, political and social leanings. Then we invited them into a members only site where we delivered the story campaign over time.

Basically, the people who came in as the audience, unbeknownst to them at the initial starting point, were actually part of the story telling experience. It was very experimental in that respect. As reality TV judges they were introduced to characters that Anna had written (in great detail) that were illustrated by a submission. In some cases it was a submission of a photo of the contents of their handbag, in other scenarios it was a comic strip that the character had drawn about himself, or it was a photo story that they had made, or it was them saying, "I want to submit myself as a bottle

of wine. This is what I'm like.”



The judges were introduced to the candidates via their submissions and they voted them down to three - at which point we cast those three from actors, as real people.

*I was quite surprised when I chose Leo. I thought he seemed real. Audience Member*

This took the whole story and experience up a notch, and those actors were then part of the story in a very live way. They were quizzed, questioned, skyped and filmed repeatedly, with that activity leading us to a conclusion with many revelations. Good and bad things were revealed and the three characters were then put out to a much wider vote. One was chosen.



## Who do you choose Now?



**Alice**



**Leo**



**Mary**

That was the story.

There was also a sub plot of somebody working for the fake production company. This was a magical figure who was bewitching certain characters and creating havoc behind the scenes.



It was quite an involved story process.

It was very challenging from an organisational point of view. We ran the recruitment, the story campaign and the social aspect and then we dealt with the actors. We were going backwards and forwards to Belfast; casting and filming - project managing that aspect of it. Anna was writing - analysing what was going on with the characters and the audience and then pushing the story forward.

The technical challenges were to keep it really simple, which we did from the beginning. Our solution was to have a membership site and various marketing and recruitment tentacles coming off from that. The membership site allowed us to control communications, drip feed content and allow the audience to interact with each other as well as the producers and actors.

***I liked the forums, I liked having someone like Sky as our guide and I enjoyed thinking about the nature of the characters. Audience Member***



Then we ran the show in conjunction with Anna who was looking at it from a 30,000-foot view whenever possible. It worked really well. We got very high percentage of engagement and interactions from the audience. We didn't have a massive audience but the ones that we had were very involved, we had a very high percentage of people being involved, which was great.

***Bellyfeel know how to make transmedia but they also know how to push the boundaries of that world. Working with them has meant I was able to experiment and find out what's possible. Anna Zaluczkowska - Senior Lecturer and Course Leader for BA Filmmaking - Northern Film School***

You can have a look at how the story played out here: [www.bellyfeel.co.uk/downloads/RedBranchHeroes.pdf](http://www.bellyfeel.co.uk/downloads/RedBranchHeroes.pdf)

As an experience, it was a great project to be part of and we learned a lot about transmedia and live storytelling, as you always do with these kinds of projects. With this project in particular we learned a few new things that will really influence what we do going forwards.



The biggest thing was having an interesting interactive environment with stuff going on where the audience were very busy with that. Within that scenario stories emerged and we were able, with Anna, the writer, develop those stories and expand them. We worked on the stories that the audience were responding to.

It was a great project.