



ARENA

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Fantasy Magazine

Coming in this edition

BETTER WRITER

We have a handy little guide from book editor Claire Bradshaw and Leo Babuta about 15 practical tips to be a better writer.

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COMPETITION

Our Quarterly writing competition. Would you like to win £100 and publication in this magazine? If so head on over to our website and enter

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WHO IS?

Our who is author this issue is author Jenn Lyons. We get under her skin and find out what makes her tick and what inspires her.

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Any Questions or if you need further information? please do not hesitate to contact us at

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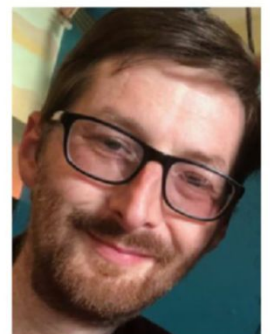
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Have you ever wondered what type of writer you are have a read through this and you will find out.

Letter from the editor

Hello and welcome to this second edition of Arena Fantasy Magazine. When I had the idea back in 2020 to create a new magazine, I had no idea how enjoyable it was, hard work but enjoyable and I do not regret it one bit.



Most other magazines tend to focus on Halloween during September, but by the time of print Halloween is six weeks away so I decided not to. However, on page 26 you will find part one of a story about The Scarlet King by sci fi author Patrick Lozon. Patrick wanted to try his hand at Fantasy and the results speak for themselves. Part two of the scarlet King will be in Decembers issue so why not subscribe. Also we have our Q&A chat with Jenn Lyons, that is on Page 14. Sadly, we did not have any entries for our top prize story but we have a very well written story for our 2k Short story by new and burgeoning author Victoria Liiv see Page 10

Of course we have a barrage of helpful articles for new and old authors alike. Like tips for getting over writer's block by NY Editors on Page 6 and How to write believable characters that's on page 18. As always we are on the look out for articles about any context about writing feel free to send to Submissions@arenafantasymagazine.co.uk. Again many thanks for reading. If you want to see any specific type of articles let us know.

Kind Regards
Andy Hesford | The Editor



A Guide to Becoming a Better Writer: 15 Practical Tips

If you've always dreamed of being the next Hemingway or Vonnegut (or even Grisham), or perhaps if you just want to write better essays for school or posts for your blog ... you need to sharpen those writing skills.

Becoming the best writer you can be isn't easy, I won't lie to you. It takes hard work. But it's worth the effort. And if it seems like an insurmountable task, there are some concrete things you can do today that will get you on the road to improvement.

Personally, I've been a fiction, newspaper, magazine and blog writer for 17 years now, writing for a variety of publications ... and I'm still trying to improve. Every writer can get better, and no writer is perfect. I think I've grown tremendously as a writer over the last couple of decades, but it has been a painful journey. Let me share some of what I've learned.

No matter what level of writer you are, there should be a suggestion or twelve here that will help.

1. **Read great writers.** This may sound obvious, but it has to be said. This is the place to start. If you don't read great writing, you won't know how to do it. Everyone starts by learning from the masters, by emulating them, and then through them, you find your own voice. Read a lot. As much as possible. Pay close attention to style and mechanics in addition to content.
2. **Write a lot.** Try to write every day, or multiple times a day if possible. The more you write, the better you'll get. Writing is a skill, and like any other skill, you have to practice it to get better. Write stuff for yourself, write for a blog, write for other publications. Write just to write, and have a blast

doing it. It gets easier after awhile if you practice a lot.

3. **Write down ideas, all the time.** Keep a little notebook handy (Nabokov carried around index cards) and write down ideas for stories or articles or novels or characters. Write down snippets of conversation that you hear. Write down plot twists and visual details and fragments of song lyrics or poems that move you. Having these ideas written down helps, because they can inspire you or actually go directly into your writing. I like to keep a list of post ideas for my blog, and I continually add to it.
4. **Create a writing ritual.** Find a certain time of day when you can write without interruptions, and make it a routine. For me, mornings work best, but others might find lunch or evenings or midnight hours the best. Whatever works for you, make it a must-do thing every single day. Write for at least 30 minutes, but an hour is even better. If you're a full-time writer, you'll need to write for several hours a day, as I do. But don't worry! It helps you get better.
5. **Just write.** If you've got blank paper or a blank screen staring at you, it can be intimidating. You might be tempted to go check your email or get a snack. Well, don't even think about it, mister. Just start writing. Start typing away — it doesn't matter what you write — and get the fingers moving. Once you get going, you get in the flow of things, and it gets easier. I like to start out by typing things like my name or a headline or something easy like that, and then the juices start flowing and stuff just pours out of me. But the key is to just get going.
6. **Eliminate distractions.** Writing does not work well with multi-tasking or background noise. It's best done in quiet, or with some mellow music playing. Do your writing with a minimal writer like

- WriteRoom or DarkRoom or Writer, and do it in full-screen. Turn off email or IM notifications, turn off the phone and your cell phone, turn off the TV, and clear off your desk ... you can stuff everything in a drawer for now until you have time to sort everything out later ... but don't get into sorting mode now, because it's writing time! Clear away distractions so you can work without interruption.
7. **Plan, then write.** This may sound contradictory to the above "just write" tip, but it's not really. I find it useful to do my planning or pre-writing thinking before I sit down to write. I'll think about it during my daily run, or walk around for a bit to brainstorm, then write things down and do an outline if necessary. Then, when I'm ready, I can sit down and just crank out the text. The thinking's already been done. For a great method for planning out a novel, see the Snowflake Method.
 8. **Experiment.** Just because you want to emulate the great writers doesn't mean you have to be exactly like them. Try out new things. Steal bits from other people. Experiment with your style, your voice, your mechanics, your themes. Try out new words. Invent new words. Experimentalize everything. And see what works, and toss out what doesn't.
 9. **Revise.** If you really crank out the text, and experiment, and just let things flow, you'll need to go back over it. Yes, that means you. Many writers hate revising, because it seems like so much work when they've already done the writing. But if you want to be a good writer, you need to learn to revise. Because revision is where good writing really is. It separates the mediocre from the great. Go back over everything, looking not only for grammar and spelling mistakes, but for unnecessary words and awkward structures and confusing sentences. Aim for clarity, for strength, for freshness.
 10. Be concise. This is best done during the revision process, but you need to edit every sentence and paragraph and remove everything but the essential. A short sentence is preferred over a longer one, and a clear word is preferred over two in jargonese. Compact is powerful.
 11. Use powerful sentences. Aim for shorter sentences with strong verbs. Of course, not every sentence should be the same — you need variation — but try to create sentences with oomph. You might find this easier to do in the revision stage, as it might not be something you're thinking about when you're pumping out that first draft.
 12. Get feedback. You can't get better in a vacuum. Get someone to read over your stuff — preferably a good writer or editor. Someone who reads a lot, and can give you honest and intelligent feedback. And then listen. Really try to understand the criticism and accept it and use it to improve. Instead of being hurt, thank your editor for helping you get better.
 13. Put yourself out there. At some point, you'll need to let others read your writing. Not just the person who you're allowing to read it, but the general public. You'll need to publish your book or short story or poem, or write for a publication. If you're already doing a blog, that's good, but if no one reads
- it, then you need to find a bigger blog and try to submit a guest post. Putting your writing out in the public can be nerve-wracking, but it is a crucial (if painful) part of every writer's growth. Just do it.
14. **Learn to be conversational.** Many people write too stiffly. I find that it's so much better to write like you talk (without all the umms and uhhs). People relate to it better. It's not an easy task at first, but it's something to strive for. And that brings up another point — it's better to break the rules of grammar in order to sound conversational (as I did in the last sentence) than to sound stilted just so you can follow the proper rules. But don't break the rules of grammar without good reason — know that you're doing it, and why.
 15. **Start and end strong.** The most important parts of your writing are the beginning and end. Especially the beginning. If you don't hook your reader in the beginning, they won't read the rest of your writing. So when you've written your first draft, spend some extra time crafting a good beginning. Get them interested and wanting to know more. And when you're done with that, write a good ending ... that will leave them wanting more of your writing.

Written by Leo Babauta & Claire Bradshaw
 Edited by Andy Hesford



Claire Bradshaw
 EDITOR

Working with writers. Shaping stories. Polishing sentences until they shine.

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Tips for Getting Over Writer's Block

It is a known fact that writers will sometimes will suffer from writers block I have suffered with it as an author. That is why it took me five years to complete my first draft. I wish that I had seen this post.

We join NY editors for some tips to help get over writers block. I found to get over my writers block I shelved my novel and focussed on writing short stories. Which is why I have several projects on the go at the moment. Feel free to share with us your ways to get over Writers block send to editor@arenafantasymagazine.co.uk and we can feature your tips in future issues.

Have you lost the ability to write creatively? Sure, you can technically write words on a page, but does everything you write sound dull, uninspired, and inauthentic?

Sounds like you have a nasty case of writer's block, but fortunately there's a cure.

Writer's block is rooted in fear and perfectionism, and you've got to pluck it out by the roots if you want your garden of creativity to blossom. Otherwise, the seeds of writer's block will take over your garden and corrupt everything.

While we'll provide practical tips on how to overcome writer's block in this post, let's start by addressing what causes it. By understanding the mental factors that lead to writer's block, you'll be able to get rid of it once and for all. Let's get started.

WHY DOES WRITER'S BLOCK HAPPEN?

Four things contribute to writer's block. Let's take a look at what these factors are and how they can stunt your creative flow.

Perfection

The pursuit of perfection may be admirable for certain goals, but for writing, it's actually harmful. No writer has ever written a perfect piece of prose. Some passages have come close, but perfection is always fleeting. Upon a second reading, most writers will find something to improve.

However, the idea that you can write a perfect story, paragraph, or even sentence is an insidious lie that will demotivate you before you even begin. (Besides, the closest you'll get to perfection is during the *editing* process— not while writing.) Don't expect perfection when you sit down to write and your writing session will go a lot easier.

Comparison aka Comparisonitis

Comparison is soul-crushing and fruitless. What's the point of comparing yourself to someone else who will never be you?

While your writing may never be perfect, it can be 100% authentically your own. Uniqueness is the best alternative to perfection. Cultivate a voice and storytelling style that cannot be compared to others.

“Uniqueness is the best alternative to perfection. Cultivate a voice and storytelling style that cannot be compared to others.”

It doesn't matter what others do if you're so unique that you can only be measured by your previous writing.

Lack of Inspiration

Stop waiting for a light bulb to appear above your head. That's what novice writers do. You do not have to wait for inspiration before you start writing. If you have an idea, that's inspiration enough.

Distraction

Our modern world is filled with diversions. Even when sitting in front of your computer, you're forced to fend off an onslaught of distractions, from phone calls to text messages to social media posts. It's hard to get in the right mind space to write when you're constantly hearing pings, rings, and chirps.

Creative writing happens when you allow your mind to wander. But constant interruptions will halt your imagination.

To overcome the above contributors to writer's block, remember the following:

- Don't expect perfection. Your writing will never be perfect, but that doesn't mean that it won't be good.
 - Don't compare yourself to others. They're not perfect either.
 - Don't wait for inspiration. She's not perfect either.
- Don't allow anything to distract you. Make writing a priority by turning off everything else. Now, let's get practical. Here's what you can do right now to get over writer's block once and for all.

WRITE ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE

Maybe you don't want to write about your past because it's painful or you just don't want to do it. I get it. But, you can still write. Instead of relying on your own creativity, use a writing prompt that someone else thought up.

Some writers use prompts as daily exercise. Here are a few places to check out when you need to find a writing prompt:

[Writer's Digest](https://www.writersdigest.com/prompts) -

<https://www.writersdigest.com/prompts>

[365 Writing Prompts](https://thinkwritten.com/365-creative-writing-prompts/) -

<https://thinkwritten.com/365-creative-writing-prompts/>

[Writing Prompts on Tumblr](https://writingprompts.tumblr.com/) -

<https://writingprompts.tumblr.com/>

LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR MAIN CHARACTER

One of the best ways to dig yourself out of the pit is to write about your characters.

But, you say, that's what I'm trying to do and I'm blocked.

Ah, but here's what's different: You're not writing your characters' main stories. You're writing their *backstories*. In other words, you're getting to know more about your characters, including their motivations. Sometimes, you're stuck because you don't know enough about your characters. Learn who they are and get unstuck.

GET DESCRIPTIVE

If you'd like to move beyond backstories but still want to work on your story, consider world-building.

World-building is the process of designing your entire world, from setting and time period to daily life and government. Immersing yourself in the protagonist's world can help you see what should come next.

We've created a couple of resources on world-building that you can check out here:

[Fantasy World Building 101: How to Create a Breathing World for Your Fantasy Novel](https://nybookeditors.com/2017/07/fantasy-world-building-101-create-breathing-world-fantasy-novel/) - <https://nybookeditors.com/2017/07/fantasy-world-building-101-create-breathing-world-fantasy-novel/>

[How to Build a Dystopian World](https://nybookeditors.com/2016/02/how-to-build-a-dystopian-world/) - <https://nybookeditors.com/2016/02/how-to-build-a-dystopian-world/>

(The above world-building tips can be applied to any work of fiction.)

JUST START WRITING

Even though you don't feel inspired...

Even though you don't love what you're writing...

Even though you feel hopelessly unoriginal...

You can still write.

So, why aren't you writing?

Even if you don't feel creative enough to write something completely new, you still have the ability to write. So, write about something that you know, specifically your past. Write about an incident in your childhood or explore a story from your parent's past. Here's your permission to write badly. The process of writing will help you formulate your thoughts and get into the creative zone.

Read well written books

All of us have a list of books we'd like to read. Choose one of them at random. Soaking up good writing can inspire you to get behind the keyboard again. Need some reading inspiration? Check out these lists:

100 Books To Read Before You Die -

<https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/100-books-to-read-before-you-die>

The Greatest Books—<https://thegreatestbooks.org/>

GO VISUAL

If you can't write, don't write. Instead, go visual. Head to [Pinterest](#) or your favorite stock image library (like [Pexels](#) or [Unsplash](#)) and search for images that remind you of your story and its characters. Consider pinning or saving especially striking images for later. Sometimes, getting lost in those beautiful images will spark your creativity, and give you a better reference than just your imagination.

TURN WRITING INTO A ROUTINE

Don't wait for the stars to align before you write. Writing is not a mystical experience. Inspiration is not going to take over your body and write through you. The only way that you're going to overcome writer's block is by writing through it.

Put writing on your daily schedule. Instead of writing whenever you get a chance, make your writing session a permanent part of your day, somewhere between brushing your teeth and going to bed. Force yourself to sit down (free from distractions) for at least one hour to write. You'll come up with something eventually, just to avoid being bored.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Writer's block happens to all of us, and it's never fun. The good news is that writer's block isn't a life sentence. In fact, if you address the root causes of writer's block, you will be able to eliminate it completely. If you are presently struggling with writer's block, use the above tips to pull yourself out of it.

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<https://www.firstwriter.com/>

Do you have what it takes to win one of our quarterly competitions? Can you write to a theme? If the answer is yes head to Page # to see what the requirements are for Decembers issue. To view full guidelines head to our website

<https://arenafantasymagazine.co.uk>

First Prize

Road to Justice

Victoria Liiv



The raiders had come and gone. Again. There was nothing left of the coin Arthur had gathered working at the repair shop all month. Even the piece of bread and a bag of carrots he'd hidden under his cot in the corner of Sunset Lodge's cheapest room were taken. The only thing making the blow a little more bearable was the fact he'd already paid his week's rent. The handful of raisins in his pocket helped to sweeten up the sour mood, if only a little.

When Arthur had filled his stomach with the treats he'd meant to surprise Charlotte with, he went in search of a bigger meal. He had nothing left to trade and wouldn't receive his next payment from the repair shop for six more days. There was only one thing left he could do.

He'd travelled all the way to the coastline and waited an hour for the high tide to recede. Watching

the waves splash against the rocks was a perfect distraction. He almost forgot what he was there for. Part of him wished he could stay staring at the blue horizon for eternity.

Down the cliff, past two cave openings - that filled with water every high tide and were of no interest to Arthur - there was an alcove in the rocks only accessible from the beach when the water was at its lowest. Arthur liked to think the alcove used to be an important ritual site. It would have explained the spirits still lingering around the spot even after hundreds of years of trash had piled up and given the place a new purpose. Being completely hidden both from land and the sea, people had started throwing their waste in the alcove. They didn't actually have to climb all the way down to do it. They'd just stand on top and let whatever they'd brought tumble down the cliff's edge and cling-clang its way to the bottom.

Someone's rubbish could become Arthur's treasure. He'd probably not find any riches, but certainly there'd be something he could fix up and sell for a meal. People threw away the most peculiar things.

The climb down had to be taken with utmost care. Arthur was still a bit short for some of the footholds and slipped once or twice during the descent.

"I'm taller than last year," he reminded himself.

Last year, when the raiders had come and Arthur had to find a way to also pay rent for his little room at Sunset Lodge in addition to the food, he'd taken the climb down the cliff with even more difficulty.

"Next year, I'll have no trouble at all."

He hoped to be more prepared next year to not need the excursion. Even though the coast was beautiful and the waves crashing against the rocks had almost magical ability to wash away his worry, he'd rather stay away from the alcove.

It was the spirits lingering around the ever growing pile of dump.

Arthur had yet to see them harm a soul and most of the time they were simply floating around in circles or going on about their routinely activities. He still got the creeps every time.

Nearing the small tunnel entrance to the secluded dumpage, he already felt goosebumps rise up on his arms.

"Don't be silly," he muttered to himself. "How many times have I done this now? Must be at least four. Never have they bothered me or even looked my way. Other than Big Billy, none of them acknowledge my presence at all. Big Billy is nice."

Big Billy was one of the spirits. It wasn't actually his name, but Arthur didn't know his real name. He'd gotten his name due to his bulky size and because he resembled Billy from the butcher's shop. Just a little.

Arthur passed by the first of the spirits just outside the tunnel to the rubbish dump. They didn't usually wander off onto the beach. At least Arthur hadn't seen them do so. But Arthur did not visit the coast all that often. Cold shivers shook him as the spirit looked through him with cold grey eyes.

Big Billy looked up from where he was sitting on

top of a mound of litter and nodded a greeting to Arthur after he'd squeezed through to the alcove. Arthur didn't want to be rude, so he nodded back to the ghost. Then he started to sort through the pile right at the entrance doing his very best to ignore all the other spirits lingering around.

Big Billy moved closer to observe his search. Slowly, reluctantly, he moved deeper into the alcove, knowing real well, he'd already found everything of worth from the first piles during his previous visits.

Braving up, he shuffled past a pair of spirits having a heated argument Arthur couldn't hear. They probably didn't hear him either, but he still muttered an "excuse me" when he got too close. One of his hands brushed through one of them. The ghost didn't even blink an eye, but Arthur felt a shizzle of electricity pass through him and he pulled away in a rush, backing into a pile of corroded metal mixed with something rotten behind him. Pieces of metal clanged and shifted at the collision with the boy. Two big carriage wheels slid off the top, almost hitting Arthur as they fell to the narrow pathway between the heaps. All of the balance in the metal rot filled pile suddenly shifted and threatened to collapse on him.

He took off in a run toward the entrance with the metal objects clanging behind him. There had to be another way to find a meal.

An unexpected "pssst" stopped Arthur from squeezing out of the alcove altogether when he'd reached the tight entrance. He turned around to see Big Billy pointing at something in the metal pile that had stopped collapsing in on itself. It wasn't the first time Big Billy had tried to communicate with Arthur, but it surprised him every time.

He turned his eyes in the direction of Big Billy's finger. Something glinted in a rare ray of sunlight, reaching down to the cavity in the earth. Something that would most certainly buy Arthur a meal and lodging for a whole year! Carefully, Arthur approached the pile of metal once more, making sure not to touch the two spirits that hadn't moved from their previous spot.

He couldn't believe his eyes. Right there in the middle of the pile of rubbish a sword was sticking out. One embellished with a golden handle and delicate guard design. Arthur spared a look at eagerly nodding Big Billy, before reaching out to grab the weapon. As

soon as he touched the handle he felt a sudden shift in the air. From the corner of his eye he saw the two spirits he'd passed just a moment ago staring right at him and a spike of fear passed through him. Without a second thought he pulled the weapon out of its resting place in a one swift movement and held it up in front of him. It was heavier than he expected and his hands shook with the weight of the metal.

As he looked around the dirty alcove, all of the spirits still lingering around floated closer to him, eyes pouring into his very soul. On quivering feet, he backed toward the alcove entrance doing his best to keep his one of a kind find up as a barrier between him and the suddenly very interested ghosts.

He didn't reach the entrance before he was completely surrounded. As one, the spirits dropped down to one knee, bowing their heads.

"King Arthur," Big Billy whispered from his own kneeling position. "With your permission, we'll pass on into the everlasting grace of the Sun God."

The boy looked at them in astonishment. "But I am no king. I'm just a mechanic."

"At your will, we will serve you for eternity," the spirit whispered back, his voice scratchy and sore from not being used for a long time.

"Serve me? I don't- I don't understand." Arthur wasn't scared anymore. He was worried and confused and didn't understand what Big Billy was trying to say to him.

The spirit gave him a sad smile. "It is in your power to release us or bind us for eternity."

"Then I will release you." His voice was shaking a little and the words came out in a buff, but as soon as he said them a gust of wind blew through the alcove taking all of the spirits within with it.

With a last smile Big Billy's whispers blew into the alcove. "You will conquer words and bring justice upon the people of Dantalon, King Arthur." Then he, too, was gone.

Left alone in the alcove, it suddenly felt even more unwelcoming. He rushed out and back up the cliff, struggling to climb even more with the weight of the sword pulling him down. Back in his room at Sunset Lodge, he decided not to sell the sword.

This was the beginning of resistance. People of Dantalon would be free of the injustice.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am Victoria Liiv. A writer, reader, nature lover and traveller at heart. I have been travelling through magical worlds since a very young age and want more than

anything to share the wonder with everyone else eager to escape from all things mundane.

In my everyday life, I found the magic in my partner, who gave me courage to move out of Estonia, the country I was born in, to an equally small but more known country of The Netherlands. He was also the one who encouraged and supported me throughout the writing process of *Through Hell and Highwater*.

You can find me here <https://vicwritesbooks.com/>





Autumn Fiction Competition

Here we have our ongoing competition where one entry can win a massive £100 plus be published in this very magazine. Runners up will get £50 plus publication, also every entry will be considered for publication.

Winners will be published in the winter edition.

Forbidden Friendship!

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Word count & Entry

Word count—No more than 4000 words (title not included)

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Closing date - **01 December 2021**

Winners will be published in the Winter issue released on the 15 December 2021—Good luck



Competition Guidelines

- 1) All entries have to be sent via email to Submissions@arenafantasymagazine.co.uk and are only accepted in English. Non-UK residents are welcome to enter but have to submit their entry in English.
 - 2) Please clearly state in the email which competition you are entering.
 - 3) MS word/word pad documents only in doc or Docx or txt format only.
 - 4) Please submit your entry with the following in the email body:
Name
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Word Count
Pseudonym (If Applicable)
Telephone Number
Mob (if applicable)
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 - 5) All entries MUST have the title, word count and page number in the footer. And be at least 1.5 lines (double spaced preferable)
 - 6) Postal entries will be accepted
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 - 8) Copywrite remains with the author.
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 - 11) Cheques are to be made payable to Andy Hesford - please email me on Submissions@arenafantasymagazine.co.uk for my postal address and on the back of the cheque please state your name, contact number and story title.
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Who Is?

Jenn Lyons

This month we have a Questions and Answer session with Author Jenn Lyons. Jenn Lyons lives in Atlanta, Georgia with her husband, three cats, and a nearly infinite number of opinions on anything from mythology to the correct way to make a martini. *The Ruin of Kings* and *the Name of All Things*, the first two books in Lyons's five-book debut epic fantasy series from Tor Books, *A Chorus of Dragons*, are available now. The third book in the series, *the Memory of Souls*

Tell us a little bit about yourself?

Let's see: I'm a lifelong geek who started playing table top RPGs when I was a child and never listened to anyone who wondered how that could possibly translate into a career. I was an graphic artist/illustrator/art director for twenty years until I decided to switch careers and become a video game project manager, which I happily did while writing nights until to my vast surprise the writing career took off.

What projects are you working on?

I'm currently working on revisions for book five of *A Chorus of Dragons*: the *Discord of Gods*. I can't believe I'm wrapping up this series! I'm also working on a stand-alone fantasy novel and a space opera novel.

In your opinion which is better Traditional Publishing or Self Publishing and why?

I don't think either are wrong. Some people are better suited toward one than the other, definitely. I don't believe I have the right mindset to be a good self-published author, but I know plenty of writers who have done extremely well for themselves that way.

Are you a pantsier, plotter or plantser? Why?

I prefer to say I'm a Milestoner. Meaning I create a list of milestones for myself and exactly how I get there is flexible. In my opinion, it's the best of both worlds.

Do you have a writing routine and what is it?

I like to sprint, which is writing as fast as possible in short 30 minute blocks of time.

What do you like about writing?

Oh, so much. I love being able to delve into different characters and personalities. I love the excuse to research and learn. I love that immense satisfaction that comes with typing 'The End' on a story.

What do you hate about writing?

I don't appreciate that I can't type as quickly as I think. It's very rude.

How many hours a day do you write?

It varies, but typically eight. But understand that 'writing' is more than the act of sitting down in front of the keyboard. Writing is also thinking, planning, plotting, and for some reason we're reluctant to admit that this too is 'real' work.

When did you first realize you wanted to be a writer?

Around the age of twenty-five, which is when my first husband dared me to write a book. So I did.

What was one of the most surprising things you learned in creating your books?

That I can finish books! Also, that apparently I'm a fast writer. I never thought of myself that way.

Do you have any suggestions to help the readers become better writers? If so, what are they?

Perfection is the enemy. It's far less important that you get the words down perfectly the first time than that you put them down in the first place.

When did you write your first book and how old were you?

Twelve. And no, it never once occurred to me to think that I wanted to be a writer. I don't remember a thing about it — not the plot, not the characters — but I remember using a hand-me-down Apple IIe to do the typing.

If you could go back in time to tell yourself as a younger author what would you say?

First, buy Google stock. Second, I would explain that there's no such thing as 'waiting for the muse to strike' — writers write.

How many books have you written? Which is your favourite?

Hmm, let's see. I have written ten books, four of which are published, with the fifth one coming out April of 2022. And it's really difficult to name a favorite, but I would say I had the most fun writing *The Memory of Souls*, the third book in the *A Chorus of Dragons* series.

Do you use any writing software? If so which ones?

I use WorldAnvil for tracking worldbuilding information,

Scrivener for writing, Write or Die 2 for sprints, and Aeon Timeline for, well, timelines (keeping track of when everything happens in relation to everything else is extremely important in this series.) I used to use Novlr when I was writing away from home but they keep refusing to add in footnotes, so until they do, I can't really use them.

Can you share with us something about your current book that isn't in the blurb?

Current book writing or latest book on sale? I'll assume you mean the later. It's the most like a horror novel of anything I've written yet, and also the most hopeful and optimistic of all the books so far. I think what I like best about it is that at the end of the day, the problems can't be solved with violence.

Does one of the main characters hold a special place in your heart? If so, why

Oh, they all do. Truly. It's important to understand that what eventually became the first book in the series, *The Ruin of Kings*, was based off a book I first wrote twenty-five years ago. I've spent decades with these characters. As you can imagine, ending the series is emotionally complex.

How many plot ideas are just waiting to be written and can you tell us about one?

I have a blackboard in a corner of my office where I write down plot ideas when they come along, so I can get them out of my system and return to whatever I need to be doing. For

example, the next book I'm working on is about a woman who was sentenced the death years earlier by being thrown from the mountains (where it is safe) to the lowlands (where the monsters roam). But fifteen years later, when a dragon shows up threatening havoc and devastation if she isn't found, a young prince has to track her down and convince her to come back and save the community that left her to die.

When you are not writing is there anything else you do?

Oh, so much. I'm an artist, so any number of art projects. I like beadwork, sewing, cooking, pyrography, crochet, embroidery, and I really want to get into upholstery. Right now I'm learning stenography.

Who is your favourite author to read?

Oh, I couldn't possibly narrow it down to one. I'm not just being diplomatic. The talent that's active right now in SFF is just extraordinary.

How do you manage your time?

Poorly. Being a project manager just means I have no damn excuse. I use a bullet journal and it's extremely helpful (when I can remember to use it.)

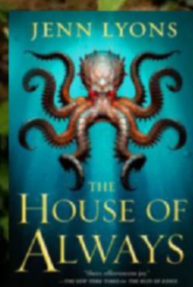
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Developing Your Characters' Points of View

by Melanie Anne Philips

Although you have a clear plot that you have created from the author's position, it will look quite different to each of your characters, depending on their particular situation and tempered by where they are coming from and how they see the world in general.

Now your characters aren't going to be thinking about the plot the way you do. They can't even see that there is a plot. Rather, they see their situation and have attitudes and feelings about it – some modest and some passionate.

They do their best to understand what's going on, where things are headed, what their options are, and what they might try to do to bend things more in a favourable direction for themselves and/or those they care about.

Your story will become much more involving if you can convey all your characters' different perspectives, including information about why they feel that way, what they want, what they don't, and even how they feel about each other.

This information can be doled out over the course of your story – a little bit each chapter or act. In this way, an air of mystery envelopes each character and your readers or audience are drawn eagerly forward to learn more about these people that they are becoming attached to.

To begin this process, review what you have developed about your characters and your plot. Now stand the shoes of each of them in turn and write a first-person description of how they see themselves and their situation, perhaps telling us about their hopes and dreams, but most of all, let them tell you about their place in the story and what it looks like to them, in their own words and through their own voice, mannerisms, and attitudes.

Here's a couple of examples from a sample story of mine – a comedy about a 105-year-old man who was just elected sheriff in an old western town besieged by a gang of cutthroats:

James Vestibule – The New Sheriff

You'd think at 105 I'd be entitled to some peace. But NO! I was born in 1765 when there was no US of A and served in the Revolutionary War. Fought in the War Of 1812 too, and met my good friend Francis Scott Key. In fact, it feels like it was one war on the heels of another. First as a soldier, then as an instructor, and finally as an informal adviser in the war between the states. Too much experience for them to let me be, I suppose.

I had always revelled in the patriotism and glory, but this last conflict left me sour – brother against brother – father against son against grandson (oh, my dear beloved Jonathan). And I think it was that – the loss of Jonathan – that tore me and my wife Amoire asunder. My son, Jacob, had sided with the Rebels, and he was a hard man, even cruel at times. His son Jonathan joined up with the Union. One day Johnathan came home on leave to visit us on our family farm in Kentucky, not knowing Jacob was already there. Jacob just saw the uniform and shot him dead. Once he saw it was his son, he turned the gun on himself and we lost both of them that day.

Amoire and I were cut with such grief we couldn't even talk, and in short order, we divorced. I left her to go out west and try to find some peace in my remaining years. But no sooner do I get here but they thrust a badge at me for the honorary position of a sheriff (due to my military experience) and now I have to attend meetings, sit in that rat hole of an office from time to time, and coddle the drunks, cheats, and ne'er-do-wells. Fine life. Honestly, I was still dreaming of that ranch Amoire and I had always wanted, but under the circumstances, I guess that really is just a dream...

NOTES: Okay – this has clearly taken a more dramatic turn than I intended in a comedy. Can I use it? Don't know yet. Sometimes a good dramatic foundation can enrich a comic character by giving it more depth than simple superficial laughs. You can be sardonic, cerebral, philosophic, and ironic. And in the end, you can make their dreams come true, adding a feel-good experience and a sense of relief to what would just have been a simple comedy if the dramatic depth had not been plumbed.

One thing is sure. This character inspires me.

Let's try the same thing with a really minor character in my story and see what happens:

Nancy Lacy – Blacksmith

They made fun of me as a child. Mancy Nancy they called me on account of my size. And then I'd bash 'em in the face and they wouldn't call me that no more. But

truth be told, there's a big difference between how you look and how you feel. Do you think I dreamed of a life as a blacksmith? Well, you'd be right. I did. I just love bending metal to my will. I love bending anything to my will. But don't let that fool ya... I only do that to make my life genteel. I have iron daisies over my mantle, just above the 12-gauge.

I pretty much keep to myself, aside from clients – 'cept for that new sheriff. He's just so sweet. He sees beyond my looks and can tell that beneath it all, I have a heart of steel.

NOTES – Okay, a potentially comic character here. She needs more development and I can probably write some good material standing in her shoes. But, she doesn't strike me as having the potential to be a major character at all. Nonetheless, I can see calling on her in the plot from time to time, and even perhaps a touching comic scene when she quenches a blade with her tears.

And that is why this exercise of having each character write about their situation in your story in their own words in the first person is so important.

The whole point is to get to know how your characters see themselves, their lives, their role in the story and even how they see each other. Your story will be the richer for it

Melanie Anne Phillips is the co-creator of the Dramatica theory of story. Later, as Director of Research and Development for Write Brothers, she collaborated in the design and development of the Dramatica line of software and accessories. Today, Ms. Phillips develops writing tools for her own company, [Storymind](#) and provides writing tips on Twitter [@WritingTip](#) and on her story structure blog, [Dramaticapedia](#).



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How to write believable characters

By Briget McNulty

Knowing how to write believable characters is vital for any fiction writer. A character that seems like a stock character – the hero, the villain, the orphan, the unwilling saviour – can easily become too predictable. So how do you create a great character? There are several ways to make sure that your fictional characters draw readers into your imaginary world:

Be original and memorable with physical descriptions

Think of some of fiction's best-loved characters. J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter has a bolt-shaped scar on his forehead. The lawyer Jaggers in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* is described as having a 'great forefinger' which he constantly wags and points at people (and even bites frequently before making a point). Details such as these set characters apart from stock character types. Unique body language and gestures as well as physical 'flaws' or distinguishing markers help to create vivid characters that readers are easily able to imagine brought to life.

What physical attributes should you focus on when writing characters? Think about how physical attributes might suggest certain elements of personality:

Describe eyes carefully.

This is one character attribute that often strays into cliché. Rather than describe the colour of characters' eyes in vivid detail, think about other, more distinctive characteristics. Does your character have a nervous temperament? Then perhaps he might blink more than most people. Your characters' eyes can say a lot about them, but body language and posture, gestures and actions are often even better for conveying distinctive, subtler character traits.

Is your character short or tall?

People often infer things about others based on their height. Dwarves in fantasy novels (such as *The Lord of the Rings*) are usually short and swarthy. As they are often miners, this further conveys that they are closer to the earth. It also might suggest that they are prone to short tempers due to widely known stereotypes about short people being feistier. Also consider the possible contradictions within a character's appearance,

Rather than describe the colour of characters' eyes in vivid detail, think about other, more distinctive characteristics.

however. When a 'conventionally 'ugly' character has a seductive or husky voice, for example, this creates a possible contradiction between readers' impressions and

expectations. This creates interest since your characters' contradictory attributes creates a sense of unpredictability.

Posture can say a lot about a character.

Hunched shoulders might suggest anxiety, while a slouched back can suggest a sense of world weariness. This could also convey that a person has led a life of labour. As another example, many wealthy women in Victorian times had lessons in etiquette and good speech ('elocution'), so a Victorian character from a privileged upper class position is likely to have very upright posture. Think about how traits such as this can set characters' backgrounds apart. This will help you to create a fictional world populated with characters who reflect differences in privilege, power, and more, just as these differences manifest in real life.

Make fictional characters' voices real

There are two levels to character voice. If your character is the Point of View character and narrator, the voice of narration should reflect the mind and personality of your character. In James Joyce's short story 'Clay' from the story collection *Dubliners*, the POV character is a cook named Maria. Throughout the story, Maria's thoughts are described in the third-person:

'She hoped they would have a nice evening. She was sure they would but she could not help thinking what a pity it was Alphy and Joe were not speaking.'

Even though Maria is not the narrating character, a sense of her voice is conveyed by the simplicity of words used throughout the story (words such as 'big', 'small', and 'nice'). The effect is that the style of narration conveys Maria's personality: If the character were to speak in dialogue at any point in the story, the reader would most likely expect the character to speak in a similarly simple, unaffected way.

In addition to this technique through which you can use the narrator's voice to mirror individual characters' voices, dialogue helps you create distinctive characters. Here are some pointers on how to write believable characters using dialogue:

Make dialogue mimic real speech.

If you want your characters to feel real and not like stock archetypes, they should talk like real people. Think of how you greet friends and family. You probably use different levels of formality depending on the closeness of your relationship and the degree of respect demanded by the connection in question. A

character might say 'hey' to a friend by way of greeting, while saying 'hello' to an elderly relative. Small variances in speech such as these make fictional characters' dialogue more real.

If your character is the Point of View character and narrator, the voice of narration should reflect the mind and personality of your character.

Make sure characters' styles of speech fit their backstories.

If a character has a troubled past, for example, think how this might have affected the way they express



themselves: Are they sullen and terse? Timid? Belligerent?

Think about colloquialisms (slang):

Does your character use any quirky expressions specific to their age group, geographical location or image? A teenager is likely to have up-to-date slang, while an adult trying to be hip could use slang from a bygone era mistakenly. Think about what the specific types of words characters use suggest about them. Is a character who uses swear words frequently angry? Or are they simply expressive and indifferent to social taboos and ideas of propriety and politeness?

To create individual, distinctive character voices, create a checklist you can go through for each character. Ask yourself:

What is my character's social status?

Is she privileged/underprivileged in relation to other characters? How does she talk to other characters as a result, and what does this say about her personality? (As an example, a character might be from a wealthy family but might speak kindly and unaffectedly to people of less privilege, suggesting that the character is not warped by social position and status).

How old is my character?

Does she speak typically for her age, or are there details about her speech that convey something out of the ordinary about her (for example, a young character who uses bigger words than normal for her age group can seem precocious or pampered).

How does my character develop throughout the story, and what effect does this have on her voice?

For example, in George Bernard Shaw's play, the central storyline is a professor of phonetics' attempt to turn Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney girl, into a 'well-spoken' lady. This change in voice brings about changes in the dynamics between characters and in the trajectory of the character's choices.

Show character development

Even short novels should show character development. Characters should discover new things about themselves, other characters and their world in the course of a story. There are exceptions to this: a character's unchanging stasis can be used to convey a

sense of tragedy and inescapable 'fate', should this be the effect you want to achieve. It is important in this case to make sure there are other sources of story development that create forward momentum. One characterisation mistake beginner writers sometimes make is to focus on plot development to the exclusion of everything else.

Make sure that your character does not speak and behave identically to his or her younger self once grown up.

How do you write character development into your story? There are several ways to make your characters believable by changing

them over time:

Vary your descriptive language to match your POV character's age.

A coming-of-age story provides an in-built structure for showing how your character changes over the course of your book. Make sure that your character does not speak and behave identically to his or her younger self once grown up. As an example, in *Great Expectations*, the book begins with the protagonist Pip as a young boy. By making Pip the Point of View character, Dickens presents his fictional world through a boy's eyes, including larger than life adult figures and a child's naivety. As the novel progresses and Pip grows older, the style of descriptive language shifts subtly as Pip's impressions mature too.

Give your characters core beliefs that are tested and renewed or altered.

Every person has a set of core beliefs and values, and these are subject to change over time. Think about what your character's ethical, moral or general world view might be. Is she or he puritanical? How does this affect how they interact with other characters in your story? Will their principled (but also possibly judgmental) outlook be tested during the course of the

novel? A believable character is just as changeable (and sometimes contradictory) in outlook and opinion as real people are.

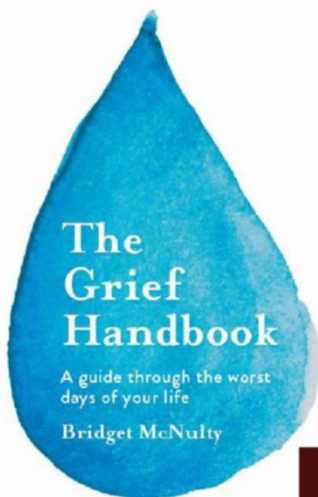
How does your character's environment affect her personality and worldview?

If, for example, your character lives through a war, does this bring out fear or courage, pro- or anti-war sentiment? A character might discover an inner strength she or he never knew existed. This is an example of a momentous, potentially life-changing development. Remember not to neglect the small changes, such as changes in the way your characters

express themselves or interact with those around them. These convey the way little things add up and shift a person's outlook and likely responses to particular situations.

Creating believable characters means considering many aspects of real people and what distinguishes them from each other. Physical attributes provide one way to show your readers what types of people populate your fictional world. A unique character voice can be created by thinking about how a character's backstory and psychology contribute to how they express themselves. Paying attention to lifelike character development also will help you set individual actants of your story apart. While some characters triumph over adversity, others might fail. Including this variety of personality type and character arc in your story will help to convince your reader that your fictional world is just as vivid, varied and interesting as our own.

Bridget McNulty— A writer of *The Grief Handbook*, content strategist and co-founder of Sweet Life, South Africa's largest online diabetes community. She lives in Cape Town, South Africa, with her husband, son and daughter, and loves nothing more than a cup of tea and a good book – preferably somewhere green and lovely.



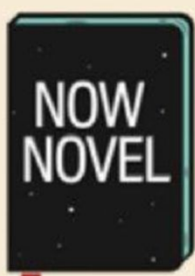
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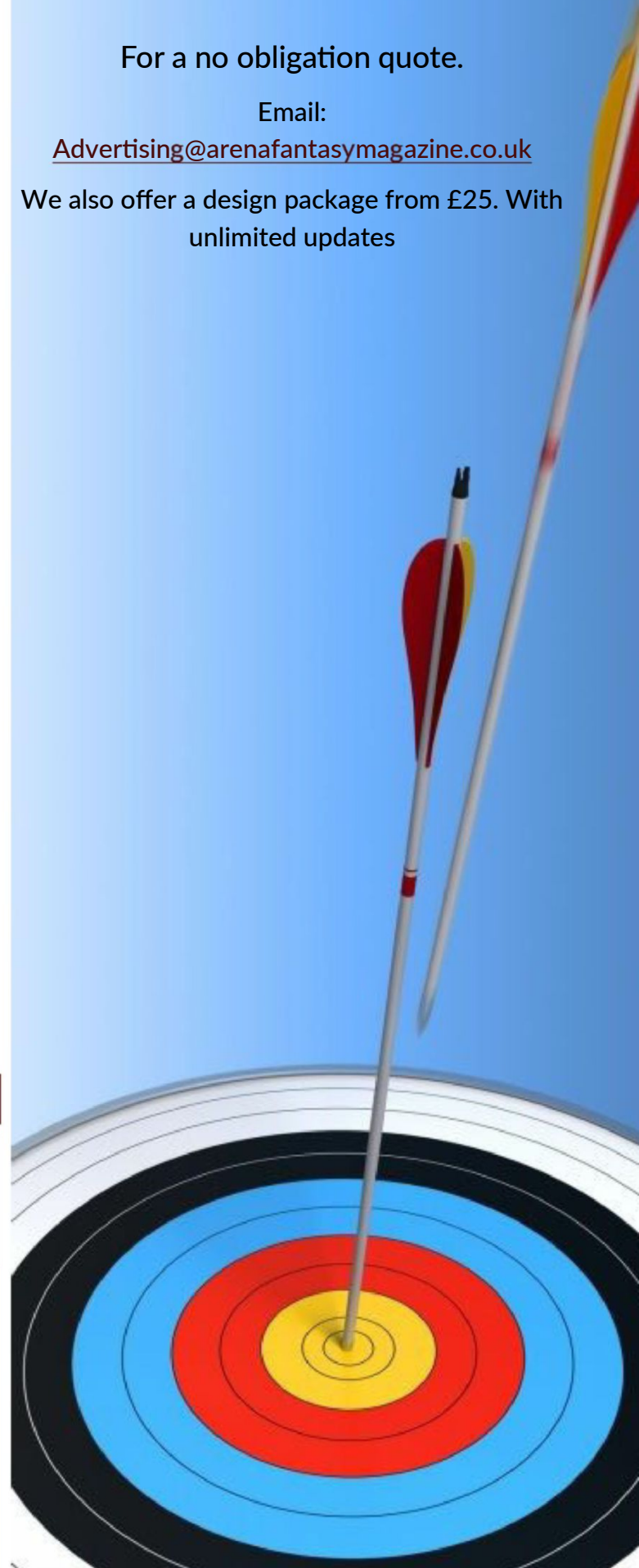
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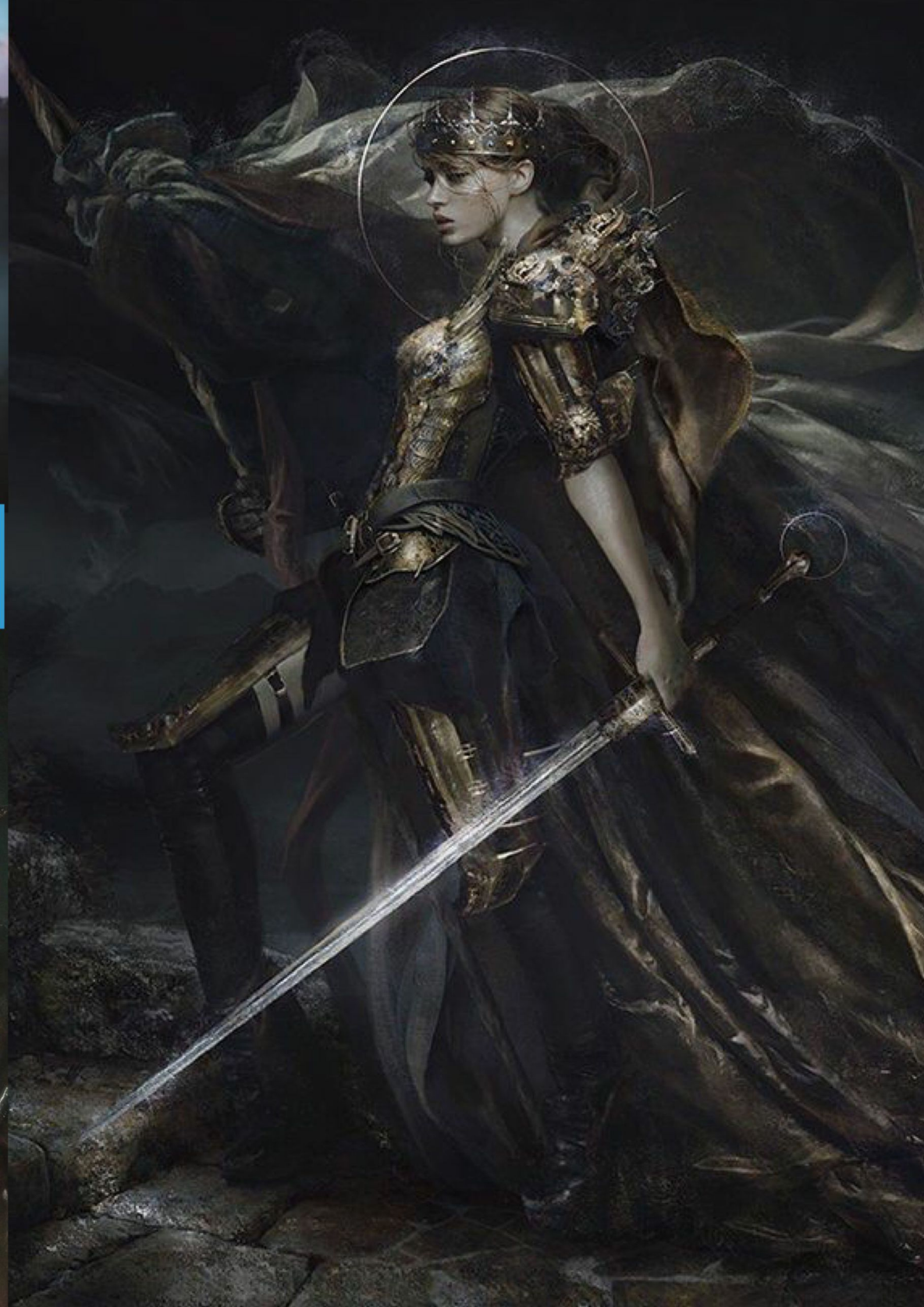


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Spotlight

Here we have a really great story that our readers have submitted.

This issue we have part one of a great two part story by Patrick Lozon. Patrick has made the jump from sci-fi to fantasy and is currently fleshing out an idea to elaborate on The Scarlet King from a short, brilliant story to a novella, with a little help from yours truly.

Do you have a story you would like to tell us? As long as it can be classed as fantasy and no more than 8000 (we may consider up to 15000 words we would take a look at it. Either submit directly to

Submissions@arenafantasymagazine.co.uk or head to

<https://arenafantasymagazine.co.uk/submission-guidelines> for further details. All submissions are considered for publication.

The Scarlet King—Part one

Patrick Lozon

The first sensation that returned to him was the ungodly stench of blood and urine, and then the noise, screeching and cawing, insanely irritating. He opened his eyes to a nightmare he'd thought he'd left behind. He'd rather have rantallion fairies chew off his beard than being back here.

He pushed himself off the ground, sat for a moment to take stock, knees deep in blood-soaked mud. His body was stiff, cold, and sore. He could taste dried blood in the back of his throat and a sharp pain throbbed in his back. He attempted to reach behind but failed to reach the source. His silver-gloved hand came back crimson, covered in fresh blood.

How does a dead man bleed?

His eyes panned across the horizon. Bodies hacked and strewn across the valley as far as he could see. Scavengers tugging at remains, and the damned birds, those noisy bastards, searching out the next set of eyes to pluck out of skulls.

A sudden memory came back to him. In frantic haste, he searched for his neck chain, finding the ring attached.

Still there.

Just holding it calmed him.

Suddenly, his stomach wrenched. He bent over, vomiting blood and ale, muscles tightening in agony. God save him. Only this was no work of God. He knew who did this.

He pulled his blood-covered hands from the mud, splaying his fingers out and making fists time and again. His body seemed to be functioning. He stumbled to his feet and search out his sword, yanking it out of a corpse.

His last kill before...

Wait. If he's back now, that could only mean one thing - they'd lost. By the look of the scene around him, it has been two to three days since the battle.

Days. He'd been dead for days. What the hell kind of black magic bullshit would resurrect him so late?

Arnaturat, that damn hack. Where was he?

He had been up on that knoll to the East, alongside the King.

The King!

He stumbled through the corpses, erratically kicking

and hacking at the scavengers with disgust. Dark shapes on the knoll were images that seemed too familiar. A flag tilted in the mud, a white horse flayed open. He pushed up the hill, breathing fast, reaching the top, lungs afire.

No!

His fears were justified. King Eric Leopold IV was dead. His body lay before him, decapitated, picked clean of valuables. His gold-laden suit of armour stripped away, his infamous decorated longsword nowhere to be seen. To his right, a dark-robed body caught his eye - Anaturat.

Had to give that little weasel credit - Anaturat had predicted their defeat. That's why he'd agreed to this atrocity, but he'd never thought he would have to go through with it...

The mission was clear enough. He knew what he had to do, and that one day would not be enough.

He searched around the magician's corpse and found it - his pouch of ill-begotten surprises. He reached in and rustled through the contents, producing six vials of dark fluid. He recalled the instructions clearly: drink the contents at dawn for another 24 hours. Simple math added to seven days, including this one. That's all he had.

Where he stood, had been their last stand. There's nothing to stop the Scarlet King's horde now. No, what was he thinking? Too much time has already passed. The capital city of Tarcadia must have already fallen by now.

The stench of death swept over him in a gust. It was midday, the sun was high in the sky, and the heat was simmering in waves over the valley.

His mission was simple. He rustled through the bodies, found a cross-bow, arrows, throwing knives, and axes. He tossed them all in a sack and hoisted **the sack** onto his shoulder, ignoring the constant pain it caused each time it jarred against whatever was stuck in his back. Time to move. The city was a two-day march on foot. By the time the sun was setting he had passed three towns, each burned to the ground, bodies left where they had been slain - no survivors. He had made it to the cover of the Killanti woods. Less chance of running into a Scarlett Guard patrol here, and he knew a path that would bring him out to the rear entrance of Tarcadia - and multiple covert ways in.

The insects had already begun to sing in the dying light, and a cool breeze was blowing through the trees, leaves and branches bristling, sounding off like rushing water in the distance. The chill reached to his very bones, and he pulled his cloak tighter, finding little relief under his suit, as his under-armour clothes were damp with sweat.

A branch clicked to his left, possibly ten yards away, maybe closer.

Animal? No, his gut told him differently.

He tossed the sack, grasped the hilt of his sword, pulling it out in one deft, graceful movement.

"Who goes there? Show yourself, before I run you through."

The silhouette of a woman stepped out from behind a tree, sword brandished in her hands.

"Away with you, Demon! Or I will cut your heart out!"

He laughed.

"Demon am I? Did you not see the horde pass through here? I be not the enemy to you."

"So you claim. Step into the light, then."

He moved into a yellow stream of fading sunlight between the trees.

"You are undead, then."

"Aye, some things are unavoidable." He wiped the mud from his chest, revealing the golden lion emblem on his armour, the mark of the high knight.

She noticed it immediately. "I had thought our armies were to the west."

"Aye, we were," he stated wearily. "Now you come closer, let me see you."

She closed the distance between them by half, but then stopped quickly, features pale, arms shaking from the weight of the sword. Her blond hair half-hiding her ashen-covered face, stained with tears. Her dress was torn, and its cuffs were red with dried blood.

"I see you have met with some of the hordes," he commented.

"Yes, they levelled my village, killed everyone, except the children. They took them, including my daughter. I am in chase."

"In chase? Are you daft woman? What could you do against the Scarlett King's horde?"

She glowered at him in defiance, brown eyes dark. "And what of you, skin pale grey, smelling rancid no less? What evil magick do you espouse, Sir Knight?"

"You may address me as, Sir Aldridge."

Her eyes widened in surprise. "So you are Sir Aldridge, the high knight of the Guard of the Golden Seal, nothing less than the personal escort of the King?"

"Ah, not completely ignorant I see. Just mad." He slid his sword into its scabbard, wincing in pain in the process. She did not retire hers, however.

"I am not mad, but I am perceptive. Only the dark magick of the Scarlet King would explain you standing erect with those arrows protruding from your back."

"Arrows? So they are causing this ungodly pain. How many? I cannot reach the blasted things." He tried again to reach around, but his arms fought back, unable to stretch as they did before. "You must pull them out," he ordered.

"I will not. You stink of evil magic."

"Tis only the magic of the half-wit Anaturat, the King's magician," he retorted, fully irritated.

"Then have him pull them out for you," she countered.

"I would, but unlike me he is truly dead, lying in the valley of Trimult, a few miles back."

"And the King's army?"

"Lost."

She took the news hard, pulling her sword in tightly, though trembling, a tear ran down her cheek. "Then we are also lost... and tell me why do you stand here before me?" she questioned, regaining her composure enough to blast out an accusing tone.

"I cannot rest until the Scarlet King is dead."

"An undead assassin is to accomplish what the King's army failed? You have little chance of success."

"I have my ways."

She sheathed her sword. "I hope you have more of that black magick to your avail, as you will need it."

"Stop bantering me with words, woman. I need you to remove these forsaken arrows from my back. They will hinder my agility in the coming battles."

She moved in closer, wearily. "So you will not devour me, Sir undead."

Aldridge broke out in laughter. "No. My appetite has been lost on the battlefield, woman. What I hunger for is revenge."

She was already behind him, yanking.

New waves of pain engulfed him, and he dropped, legs folding, everything fading to black, but his senses came back quickly. He found himself lying flat on his stomach, feeling the pressure of the woman's foot in the middle of his back, as she attempted to wriggle the last arrow free, its metal tip skewering his insides with every movement.

"Just pull it out, woman!" he yelled, teeth clenched.

"Aye, there, got it. Must say, that last one was in deep. Tell me, how is it you can feel? Undead feel no pain."

"Says you. Who's to know what the half-wit magician did to me."

Finding his grip on a small tree trunk with his right hand, he leveraged it to rise back to his feet, then took a moment to take some long, deep, calming breaths. The pain quickly returned to its previous throbbing, with slightly less sharpness.

She jammed the three arrows into her quiver. "I can use these."

"'Twas the barrage that had killed me, no doubt." He stated, as much to himself. "To die through being impaled in the back." He spat on the ground in disgust. "Not a death fitting for a high Knight, Sir Aldridge? Tell me how one should die with honour on the battlefield, perhaps being halved by a broadsword would have been more to your liking?"

"Argh." He growled back. "Just let it be, woman."

She shrugged. "Since you are headed to Tarcadia. I will join you."

He laughed. "You? We will see if you can keep up then." He grabbed his sack and started up the path, the woman in step behind him. Hours passed, and darkness overcame them, broken up by the light of a full moon. It was enough for Aldridge to see by, his eyes seemed much more accustomed to the dark than the light. His companion was having a more difficult time, often tripping and cursing.

"Hold up, Aldridge! I cannot keep up this insane pace. I must rest."

He stopped, letting out a breath. "There is a cabin near a river, we are but a stone's throw away. You can rest there."

"I know of no lodge out here."

"It is. I built it. Come, it is not that far," he coaxed her, noticing she was near exhaustion.

Even in the darkness, Aldridge knew the area well enough. They deviated off the path, moving toward Donatu river, down a steep bluff, and through a thick stand of trees, stopping numerous times to help the woman navigate. The dark shadow of a small cabin appeared across a small clearing.

"Go in, start a fire. I attest this cold."

"And the horde – will they not sense the smoke?" she asked.

"I've little concern of that. Let them come, I will slay them down," he growled out. "I must strip off this armour, and douse myself in these waters."

He waited for her to disappear into the cabin before he stripped down to his skivvies. The night air was cold, and he felt it creep into his very bones, a sharp undeniable burning. The cold, black water engulfed him, washing away the blood and grey, dead skin. He dived under, letting it cleanse him fully, then pulled himself ashore, noting the wisp of smoke flowing from the chimney.

She met him with an appraising glance, the dancing light of the fireplace revealing his injured, scarred body.

"You have regained a tinge of colour, Knight."

He moved quickly to the fire, searching out its warmth.

"The pain has lessened. That is good."

"And the wounds in your back, they're healing already," she announced, somewhat amazed.

"As per the half-wit, I will continue to gain strength with each vial."

"Vial?"

He pulled the small pouch from the sack and handed it to her. She inspected the dark fluid within it carefully.

"No, Anaturat was not a half-wit. This is a very ancient magick. Quite beyond the Scarlet King's power."

"He was a half-wit, nonetheless."

"Here, give me that pouch. I see there are some ingredients within. I should be able to make a paste to hasten your healing."

"That explains it then. You are one of the magick-borne, are you not?"

"I will not deny it. What of it anyway? It was not for a magick-borne you would still be a corpse." She mixed up a foul-smelling paste in the small bowl. "Face the fire, and shut up. This may sting a bit."

Aldridge felt it bite, but it lacked greatly to the pain he had felt. After a moment, the edge dropped off, giving way to a soothing warmth.

"I have given you mine. So, what is your name, woman?"

"Ha. It is customary, as a matter of proper etiquette, to share first names, Sir Aldridge."

He shrugged. "Grayson."

"Now that wasn't that hard, wasn't it? I am Rebecca Gallows."

He chuckled. "That is a fitting name for a magick-borne... Gallows."

"Shush. Do not move. I am almost done."

"I will fetch you a pail of water so you can cleanse yourself," he stated, attempting to return a kindness extended. "In that trunk, you will find women's clothing, something that may fit your bony frame."

"You are too kind," she replied. "String a line and hang a blanket before you go out. I must have my privacy." He grumbled, but complied, relieved to step back out into the cool night air. The cicadas were singing and an owl cooed somewhere in the trees.

Such beauty in this world, and such peace. Enjoy these moments, for they will be lost far too soon.

When he returned, he noticed Rebecca was already sound asleep on a blanket-roll lying before the fire. He stoked the fuel, being careful not to wake her.

In many ways, she reminded him of his wife, Eleanor, strong-willed, vile temperament if you crossed her. Where he was going would be no place for her. Eleanor would have followed him into hell for their child... No, no, they did not have any children. His memory is degrading. And why not? There must be a price to pay for this rancid magick.

Either way, he would need to watch over her as well. Help her find her child. Far too many innocent souls have already perished in this war. But his time was limited, could he afford this diversion? It was too late to fret over such matters. Such things have ways to work themselves out with time.

He was not tired. He dug out and dressed in new attire, tough buckskin which would serve him well. He settled down on one of the rocking chairs and began the long, slow process of repairing and sharpening his battle-gouged weapons. In the early morning hours, he migrated to the outer porch, keen to watch the stars, and witness the sunrise one more time.

Dawn came far too soon.

Rebecca found him outside, a worried look upon her face.

He smiled. "No, I have not left, woman. So bring me a vial, for the morning sun defines my schedule."

She handed him the glass tube, and he doused down the foul-tasting mixture.

"Do you feel any different?"

"Besides the disgusting taste in my mouth, and the pain of stomach cramps? No. Nothing. But I will adhere to my instructions for that was impressed upon me."

"I am hungry. I noticed some pheasants during our walk. No far."

"No time. There are some food supplies in the sack, should be enough to charge you with breakfast."

"And you?"

He shook his head. "Not hungry."

She appeared a short time later dressed in dark pants and smock, her long hair pulled up in a bun, her features clean of the trail's mud. Her attractiveness was unmistakable, so much like Eleanor.

She adjusted her quiver and bow, which lay across her shoulder, and straightened the scabbard around her belt. "I am ready. Perhaps now you can tell me, Sir Knight, how will you kill the unkillable King of Darkness?"

"The Scarlet King may reign over the undead hordes, but they are but stupid hulks, easily bypassed. The true challenge will be getting past his royal guard. That may not be difficult if this King's ego is as large as I believe it

to be. He will have taken the city, but if I am correct, he will also occupy the palace. That will be his downfall."

He rose from his seat, multiple weapons holstered and ready. "By the end of the day, we will reach the city. Once we enter, there will be no departing from its walls until we complete the mission."

"It will be as it will be."

"Perhaps your daughter will wish something more of you, woman – for you to survive this."

"I will. I have my sword, and I know how to land an arrow, but I will not rest until I find her."

"So be it. But once you find her, you must take flight. You shall not wait for me, I need no aid, do you understand?"

She nodded, eyes dark, face placid and pale.

"Let us be off, then," he stated, eager to make up lost time.

They navigated through the woods, avoiding all known paths, taking cover upon the hint of a patrol. The day passed with no conflicts. They moved in stealth through to the late afternoon, ending their journey at the base of a sewer drain near the rear entrance.

"Of course, we infiltrate here despite the stench. What else should one expect?" he commented, partly to his companion, and partly to the universe. "Once we are within the walls, we climb to the top of that sentry tower."

He looked up, absently rubbing the ring hanging from his neck chain. Rebecca followed his eyes up to the shadow of the southern sentinel tower.

"There may be guards."

"Good. I will proceed you and resolve that problem."

"And then what?"

"We determine the state of things, we wait until nightfall, then make our way into the castle under the cover of darkness."

"And the children? Where will he have the children?"

"I don't know, Rebecca. Possibly in the castle dungeons. We will have to determine this."

"Will you help me find them?"

"I have already decided to do what I can to help you, otherwise you would not currently be at my side." He focused his dark grey eyes upon her. "But if it comes to a choice of killing the Scarlett King, or saving your child..."

"Yes, I understand." She looked away for a moment. "It is all I can ask of you."

They started into the putrid tunnel, half-bent, shirts pulled up over their noses and mouths lest the stench affected them.

"There," he pointed to a grate above. We are at the base of the tower. We must move quickly. Kill silently, we must not raise attention."

He pushed on the grate. The metal protested and creaked before giving a pronounced ping, ultimately giving way. The drain was positioned at the base of the tower abutment, facing outward to a large open market area, which was now littered with broken wagons, the carcasses of horses, and all other manners of destruction.

Aldridge grunted with satisfaction. "We've enough cover to make it to the entrance. Wait until I am clear, then follow."

He moved quickly, grateful to have fresher air to breathe. Patrols were scrounging through scattered remains on the far side. In a moment, he was at the large wooden door to the tower. He pressed the lever, but it wouldn't budge. Taking several deep breaths, he focused his body against the door and heaved. Something splintered inside, it gave way, and he slid into the shadows.

Two of the patrol noticed movement and started over, kicking away debris as they came.

Aldridge pulled his sword, readying for a fight. He could see Rebecca's eyes poking up, and he shook his head, warning her to stay put.

The two approaching beings were the King's elite knights, far more dangerous than any swarm of undead, trained in the basic methods of battle magick and lethal combat.

His sword glowed, ever so slightly, a hint of blue, reacting to the presence of magick fields.

A trumpet sounded in the distance, emanating from somewhere near the castle, billowing and wavering in twisted reverberations in a foreboding way. The approaching patrol quickly turned and started back, deciding to heed whatever that beckoning call meant. Aldridge let out a breath, surveyed the area, and waved Rebecca up. She scrambled with the agility of a cat, making it through into the cover of the entrance in a moment.

Above them, a spiralling staircase twisted into the darkness. He sheathed his sword and pulled out his small battle-axe, pointing up as he made eye contact with Rebecca. He started up first, keeping a steady, unrelenting pace. Rebecca soon fell behind, lost in the darkness below. He didn't slow. His heart pounded, albeit at a slow thunderous pace, his lungs pumped, his legs burned. But it was good. For the moment, he was alive.

He broke through the hatch in one deft movement. The two guards scrambled to react, but Grayson was upon the first before he could reach his sword, slicing him in the neck as he palmed a knife and threw it, embedding it to its hilt in the other guard's skull. It was over before it began.

He ducked down, and waited, listening for any sign that someone else noticed his attack. Nothing. Nothing but the steady drum of feet from below.

Rebecca appeared a moment later. He signalled her to stay low as she moved across the floor.

"I see you have dispatched the guards."

"Aye, but that may be a true problem." He pointed to a small mirror on the table. "Enchanted methinks. Seems they have a method to communicate after all."

"Give me your pouch," she demanded.

She scrounged through the contents and in a moment found what she was looking for. Crunching up the substance in her hands into a fine powder, she inched up close to the mirror, then blew the powder onto the

mirror, bathing it in a fine sheen of black.

"Neutralized enough they will think the magick has wound down. Much better than destroying it."

"Let us inspect what remains of this city."

The tower provided an ideal vantage point, but what the view provided was far worse than either could have imagined. Streets were full of bodies, fires were travelling across rooftops, and the sounds of wailings and screams climbed high with the smoke, reaching their ears in an eerie tenor.

"It is hell incarnate. Those poor people."

"There, it is the Scarlett King." He pointed toward the castle, and the grand entrance plateau. A figure robed in a dark red stood in the centre of a wide circle of prisoners. Guards patrolled the outer circle with whips, employing them viciously.

"What is he doing?" she whispered.

Almost as a direct answer, reddish-orange jagged beams, not dissimilar to electricity, emanated out from the red-robed figure, engulfing the victims surrounding him. Screams followed, though quickly muffled. The beam's colours shifted to blues, violets, then finally disintegrated into deep hues of red. The victims crumpled around the central figure, their features mummified, their lives surrendered.

"He's draining them of their life force," Aldridge stated in disgust.

Rebecca scrambled to place an arrow in her bow.

"Stop, woman. You'll not have the range with that.

Worse you may attract unwanted attention."

"How many souls has he drained by now? He needs to die."

"Aye," he nodded. "And he will." He placed his hand on her arm. "Soon."

She lowered her bow. "The sun is setting now anyway."

"Can you enchant your arrows?"

"To what?"

"To break through enchanted shields."

"The guards?"

He nodded. "They have hybrid magick. Nothing you should not be able to conjure against. In the meantime," he leaned up against the wall, "we wait."

Part two will arrive in Decembers issue where Sir Aldred finally meets The Scarlet King and no spoilers a massive twist.



Patrick Mj Lozon is a published Canadian author of two science fiction novels *Of Days Gone By* and *A Bellicose Dance*, with a third novel about to be published. Although his professional career is in the Information Technology field, he enjoys various hobbies, constantly driven by curiosity to understand what makes machines, and people, tick. Feel free to visit his blog at www.patrickmjlozon.com.



Competitions

Here you will find some of our other competitions, these are no less important but the prizes are not as spectacular as our Main seasonal competition Forbidden Friendship, where you can win £100 plus publication (See page 13).

This issues other contents are more for the short fiction writer, we have the 2k Flash and our even shorter The 300, where you have to tell a story in 300 words, are you up for the challenge? These are ongoing competitions.

If you want to be kept up to date with new competitions you can do so by filling out the form on our website head to

<https://arenafantasymagazine.co.uk>

AFM's 2K Flash Fiction

Word count - 2000

Subject - On the edge of town is a giant and fierce-looking beast but is actually quite friendly. When strange occurrences start happening in the town, the beast is a prime suspect. Can you protect the beast and clear its name?

Prize - First place wins *£20.00 and publication and feature, All entries will be considered for publication

Word Count - up to 2000 (not including title)

Closing date - 01 December 2021

Entry price - £2.00 per entry Discounts for multiple entries

Submission guidelines - Please submit your entry with the following in the email body:

Name

Story Title

Word Count



Pseudonym (If Applicable)

Telephone Number

Mob (if applicable)

PayPal Ref

Entry format - dot, doc, docx RTF or .txt format only



AFM's The 300

Subject - We are looking for short flash stories based on anything medieval or fantasy-based. This can be supernatural if you wish.

Prize - First place wins an annual subscription to AFM. The 2nd-5th place will get a free issue. All entries will be considered for publication in an anthology as well as published in the magazine.

Word Count - up to 300 (not including title)

Closing date - 01 December 2021

Entry price - £1.00 per entry Discounts for multiple entries

Entry format (as attachment) - dot, doc, Docx RTF or .txt format only

Submission guidelines - Please submit your entry with the following in the email body (for each entry):

Name

Story Title

Word Count

Pseudonym (If Applicable)

Telephone Number

Mob (if applicable)

PayPal Ref



WANT TO BE A GREAT WRITER? THEN DON'T FOCUS ON WRITING. (DO THIS INSTEAD)

BY SARAH CY

“Work according to Program and not according to mood. Stop at the appointed time!” — Henry Miller

Do you want to be a great writer?

To create stunning works of art that people can't stop reading?

To craft brilliant articles that touch hearts and change lives?

Maybe being a great writer has been your dream since you were barely old enough to scribble on the walls in spaghetti sauce.

Or maybe you've been trying for years to get your writing career to “take off,” with no luck.

If so, you've probably already imbibed lots of writing advice. Everything from “write every day!” to “Sit down at the keyboard and bleed.”

Forget all that.

The key to writing well isn't to focus on writing.

It's to focus on your writing system. Hemingway was an American journalist, novelist, and short story-ist whose brevity and inimitable style influenced an entire generation of fiction writers. Stephen King is a prolific

writer who has sold hundreds of millions of books, many of which have been made into movies and comics.

A.J. Jacobs is a journalist, lecturer, and editor at large for Esquire magazine.

You know what all these successful writers have in common?

A honed writing system.

Hemingway, King, and Jacobs didn't just throw words on paper whenever they felt like it. If they did, they wouldn't have become great writers and we would never have heard of them.

Hemingway always wrote in the morning, as soon as the sun rose. Stephen King writes 2,000 words a day, rain or shine. Jacobs writes ever-more-detailed outlines-that-turn-into-books while walking on a treadmill.

So if you want to be a great writer, don't focus on great writing. Focus on creating and sticking to a great writing system.

The Three Parts of a Writing System

What does a good writing system consist of? Three things:

- Gathering material
- Writing
- Honing your craft

These three are interlinked, but they are also separate, like the three legs of a three-legged stool. You need all three to create a solid system that will propel you to writerly stardom.

Step 1. Gather material

You can't write if you have nothing to write about. All writers need material. And lucky for us, writing material is virtually limitless!

You just need to know where and how to gather it.

Where to gather writing material

Mine your life history for ideas — look through your journal, search your memory banks, etc. (if you don't have a journal, start one now!)

Mine other people's life histories for ideas — talk to your relatives and friends and ask them lots of interesting questions. Then listen. Really listen. Not only will this help you come up with ideas to write about, it can improve your relationship with the person (everyone likes to talk about themselves, and there are definitely not enough listeners around to hear all the stories).

Read books and articles. A lot of them.

Keep an eye out for interesting day-to-day happenings. (Ex: I was blessed to have hilarious teachers back in high school, and I wrote all of their jokes in my notebook. Several of those incidents inspired me to write semi-true stories like this and this)

Follow other writers and see what they are writing about (don't copy their work verbatim, just let their ideas trigger your own).

Hang out with your "ideal audience," ie, the people you want to write to and/or about. You can do this in person, or by checking out forums/threads/online spaces where these people naturally congregate.

Read the comments people leave on your and other writers' works. They will tell you what readers are interested in and what questions they have.

How to gather writing material

Keep a journal and write in it regularly. Ideally at the beginning and end of the day so you can catch all those great ideas that come when you are waking up from your dreams or winding down and relaxing.

Keep a notebook and pencil in your purse/pocket at all times to write down ideas that come to you throughout your day. You can use your phone, of course, but technology can be finnick at times. Use at your own risk.

Keep one or more "swipe files" somewhere in your workspace (virtual or physical) where you organize ideas, quotes, thoughts, articles that resonate with you, or that you want to use.

When you read, take note of interesting quotes and ideas by highlighting, dog-earing, or otherwise marking your book.

Then, transfer those ideas into an organized physical or virtual filing system. For an example on how to do this, you can borrow Ryan Holiday's note card system.

Okay, now you've gathered dozens of journals and God-knows-how-many gigabytes of ideas, information, and data. Now what?

It's time for stool leg #2:

Step 2. Write

It ought to go without saying, but sometimes folks need a reminder:

Writers write. People who don't write aren't writers.

It's that simple.

Once you've gathered ideas to write about, you need to put in the work to turn those ideas into concrete articles, stories, etc.

But how do you write?

Well, aside from literally just sitting down and typing (or writing longhand, if you prefer), here are a few tips to help you create a system and environment that compels you to write, instead of dithering about how to get going:

It doesn't matter how much material you've gathered if you don't actually sit down and WRITE.

Come up with a daily goal:

Stephen King, for instance, makes himself write 2,000 words per day, every day — no ifs, ands, or buts. You may also choose a word count goal

Choose a start time and stick to it:

Hemingway always wrote in the morning, right after first light, because he loved the peace and quiet of the early hours. He would write until 9am or 12pm, at a point where he “still had his juice and knew what would happen next.”

Limit yourself:

Bestselling novelist Jodi Picoult once said, “Writer’s block is having too much time on your hands. If you have a limited amount of time to write, you just sit down and do it.”

These are just suggestions. You may want to imitate one, some, or all of these ideas, but whatever you decide, just pick one and get started. Time’s a-wastin’!

Step 3. Hone your craft

Writing is a craft, and like any other craft, it has rules and recognized levels of proficiency. Not everyone who picks up a pen or types words on a keyboard is a good writer.

You’re probably no Seth Godin at the moment (if you are, Mr. Godin, I’m honoured that you took the time to read this!) but that doesn’t mean you can’t become a great writer as well. You just have to get better at writing.

And there are so many things you can do to get better at writing.

Most people simply use the “read and write a lot” strategy. It’s the automatic, no-brainer, easy-peasy method that all of us resort to when we’re not thinking too hard about it.

And you can just read a lot of good writing and write a lot and become a better writer by osmosis.

But there are problems with this kind of mentality:

The people who think they are reading and writing “a lot” often aren’t. And:

There are faster ways of improving at writing (they’re just harder, which is why most people don’t do them)

If you want to get good at anything, you need to learn how to learn. This is true in writing too.

So how do you do that?

If you prefer to have some guidance, you can hire a writing coach or purchase a writing course, and then DO THE HOMEWORK.

If you’re more of a maverick, you can study writing by:

Reading books on writing:

Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style*, Stephen King’s *On Writing*, and Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird* are well-known writing classics.

Lisa Cron’s *Story Genius* is a must-have for novelists, William Zinsser’s *On Writing Well* is the nonfiction writer’s manual, and many bloggers have written a lot about the craft AND business of writing, like Darren Hardy (*ProBlogger*) and Jeff Goins (*Real Artists Don’t Starve*).

Creating a system to study specific aspects of the writing that you want to do.

Aspiring bloggers, for instance, need to study headline-writing. So a blogger could practice writing 100 headlines a day, like Smart Blogger CEO Jon Morrow did when he was starting out.)

Conducting an in-depth analysis of a book, a blog, or a writer’s portfolio.

You won’t become a good writer if you only “write a lot,” just like a child learning the piano will not get better if s/he mindlessly plays the same piece over and over again.

You need mindful, deliberate practice to improve. But knowing WHAT to practice deliberately depends partly on what you’re writing.

Of course, all writers need to get a few basic things down first: grammar, spelling, and the like.

Another important skill all writers need to hone is the ability to think clearly.

Writers are teachers, which means we need to be able to think logically from point A to point Z, and show others how we came to that conclusion.

But after that, it depends:

If you’re a novelist, you have to figure out the components of novel-writing and work on those (ex: characterization, novel structure, themes, etc.)

If you’re a poet, you need to study writing elements specific to poetry: poem structures, rhyme, meter, etc.

If you’re a blogger, you need to work on headlines, blog structure, formatting, etc.

Learning how to hone your craft is a topic that I could probably write hundreds of articles on, so for now, I will leave it at that.



PLOTTING VS. PANTSING VS. PLANTSING

By Alexa Martin

Have you ever wondered what type of writer you are, Let me ask you a question. Do you plot? Where you know how your protagonist will get the girl down to which steps they take. Or do you write off the cuff? Where you just write and let the characters take you where they want to go. Maybe a little mixture of both. Here is an article by Alexa Martin to help you decide which one you are.

There are three kinds of people in the writing world: The plotters, the pantsers, and the ones who are a little bit of both, the planters. Where you fall and how you write is up to you. There is no right or wrong way, although some ways might prevent heartache down the line. When it comes to plotting vs. pantsing vs. plantsing, I, personally, fall squarely in the planter category.

I used to be a straight pantser. I would sit down at my computer and type whatever came to mind, and I can't quite put into words how satisfying it was. Unfortunately for me and my pantsing creations, I didn't know enough about the romance arc to make it work. Maybe one day I'll have the arc ingrained in my brain enough to be a successful pantser, but until then, give me my beat sheet

Plotting vs. Pantsing vs. Plantsing—Break it Down

If you're just starting out and these terms mystify you, not to worry. Let's take a closer look at plotting vs. pantsing vs. plantsing—we'll even touch on what fun fictional characters fall in line with each type of writer.

Plotter

A plotter is one of those mystical unicorns I aspire to be. They are organized and have the details of their manuscript laid out before they put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard).

The format I've seen most plotters take involves copious amounts of index cards. As a plotter, you will do a lot of work up front. Character development, chapter planning, the meet, the dark moment, all before you've written your first line. This is where I struggle: I

If you are a plotter, the first the first thing you will probably do after finding your story is create your outline.

want to just jump right in. However, when I'm panicking at the fifty-five percent mark that my entire story is trash, I'm sure you plotters are laughing at me while you glide on to the finish line.

You might be a plotter if ...

- You can't conceive of a time when you sat down to write without a scene-by-scene breakdown.
- The concept of "just diving in" leaves you colder than a hairless cat in wintertime.
- Outlining is the first thing you think of doing when creating a new novel ... or a new anything.

- You love planning things, down to the smallest detail.
- Before you start writing, you do the Meyers-Briggs test for all your characters.
- You're detail-oriented and wouldn't have it any other way.

Famous Fictional Plotters:

- Hermione Granger (Harry Potter)
- Sophie Hatter (Howl's Moving Castle)
- Leslie Knope (Parks and Rec)
- Belle (Beauty and the Beast)
- Heathcliff (Wuthering Heights)
- Boris and Natasha (Rocky the Flying Squirrel)

Pantser

A pantser is a free spirit. A sit-at-the-computer-and-go-whenever-the-wind-takes-you kind of writer. There is beauty to be found here, but there is also danger. Sometimes, when you are just going with the flow, you forget about crucial elements of the story.

On the other hand, if it's not your first go, if you are a romance master, you might have writing chops to hit it out of the park this way. And you, my friend, are what I

Pantsing can really affect the pacing of a story, and a slowed pace might cost you readers.

call #Goals.

You might be a pantser if ...

- The concept of outlining makes you panic.
- You prefer writing that matures organically.
- Your characters lead the plot.
- You'd rather scrub the toilet than write your scene maps.
- Write the synopsis or query before the book is done? You've got to be kidding. You're kidding, right?

Famous Fictional Pantsters:

- Ron Weasley (Harry Potter)
- Scarlett O'Hara (Gone With The Wind)
- Ariel (The Little Mermaid)
- Bart Simpson (The Simpsons)
- Thor (The Avengers)
- Jesse Pinkman (Breaking Bad)

Plantser

From the writers I have come across, this seems to be the most common type of writer. We might not have every last detail planned, but we have a general idea of where we want to go.

A beat sheet is a plantser's best friend

As a plantser, you might have your opening scene, your inciting incident, and your midpoint planned out, but you just let the story in between those points flow from your fingertips. Using this method to the madness, your story arc is always in the forefront of your mind as you dance from one pinch point to another.

You might be a plantser if ...

- You go into a story with a vague outline—beginning and end, maybe a middle.
- Although your characters might want to pull a fast one on you, you're able to rein them back into behaving when they try to get out of hand.
- You're okay-ish if your plot takes a turn, because you know how to work that back into the greater story.
- Beat sheets are your best friend OR you have an innate sense of pacing so you can hit the beats automatically.
- You like doing a little bit of prep work. You have fun knowing your character backgrounds and have scene/setting visuals in your mind, but nowhere else when you start your novel.

Famous Fictional Plantsters:

- Harry Potter (Harry Potter)
- Mulan (Mulan)
- Cinderella (Cinderella)
- Anne Shirley (Anne of Green Gables)
- Jon Snow (Game of Thrones)
- Vincent Vega (Pulp Fiction)

Work Your Method

Whether you're a pantser, a plotter, or a plantser—no matter your method—the finished product is always what's most important. The way you get there is strictly up to you. And even though they're nobody's favorite, revisions are waiting just around the corner to help us all.

Disclaimer: We realize arguments can be made for and against any of these characters falling into a specific category. They're intended as illustrations only; you might see any or all of these characters differently.



Alexa Martin is a writer and stay at home mom. A Nashville transplant, she's intent on instilling a deep love and respect for the great Dolly Parton in her four children and husband. The Playbook Series was inspired by the eight years she spent as a NFL wife and her deep love of all things pop culture, sparkles, leggings, and wine. When she's not repeating herself to her kids, you can find her catching up on whatever Real Housewives franchise is currently airing or filling up her Etsy cart with items she doesn't need.



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Nagash's Folly

Nagash sat in his chambers in a cold sweat, the voices spoke to him constantly, calling him to touch the stone, he fondled a smooth gem in his pocket, and he sighed it was more a sigh of relief than anything else, it was almost ecstatic,

'Nagash...' A warm, like honey voice, called to him, he looked around then he realised it was an internal voice.

'Nagash.' The voice was teasing him 'what do you want, leave me alone. He felt almost stupid answering.

'Nagash I know what you seek.'

'Leave me alone'

The voice chuckled 'Oh Nagash give in I will have you in the end. Give in.' He shook his head as if that action would make the voice stop.

Nagash downed his mead and took the leaves that the

Show us your Shorts



healer had given him and went to lay on his bed. The voice kept calling to him the voice was almost angelic but with a demented twist.

'Go to the library of the lost. The stone is there, set me free and the pain will stop'

Nagash was best by nightmares there was a burning being he felt like this was the voice calling to him, he saw his essence physically leave his body and was dragged to a library it was old. He saw other essences they seemed as tortured as he was, then he was blinded by a bright light and there was a large orb in the centre of it. It was drawing his essence to it he had to touch it, but part of him did not want to but he was compelled he felt as though touching it would be endless peace. As soon as he touched it he awoke. A smile came over him he knew what he had to do.

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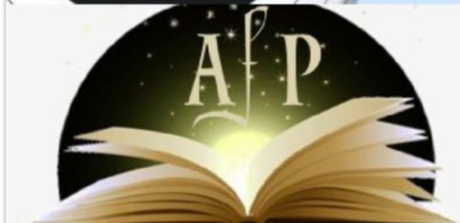
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