

Stories for in the Campfire

by: Ronaldo Siète

I dedicate this book to all the good writers and readers of the Wattpad-community because if they're not going to read it, who will?

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Editorial Perdido

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This is a work of fiction. All events and all characters (except one) are invented products from a dirty literary mind. Who's the exception? Not Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie or Cristiano Ronaldo: they are too good to be true, so they must be fiction. No, President Whatshisname neither, because it is pure fiction to believe that all those intelligent voters can make such a big mistake. The only real character in this story is Santa Claus because we all know that he exists. Who else puts all those presents in your socks at night? The taxman?

1. FOREWORD

Brian: "Please, please, please listen! I've got one or two things to say."

The Crowd: "Tell us! Tell us both of them! "

Brian: "Look, you've got it all wrong! You don't NEED to follow ME, You don't NEED to follow ANYBODY! You've got to think for your selves! You're ALL individuals!"

The Crowd: "Yes! We're all individuals!"

Brian: "You're all different!"

The Crowd: "Yes, we ARE all different!"

Man in crowd: "I'm not..."

(scene from 'Life of Brian' - 1979)

I wrote this collection of short stories for the members of Wattpad.com, as an exercise to improve my English and to experience how it feels to write short stories instead of novels.

Some years ago, I started to write in Spanish, mainly to improve my knowledge of that language. It was tough, but when others read my first novel, I got truly excited because of all the success. The large number of errors in spelling and grammar, the complete failure of structure and plot and style, and the lack of knowledge that I managed to transfer to my readers made me famous as 'the laugh of the day'.

My Spanish improved rapidly, but I felt I needed to practice on writing itself. I started to write in Dutch, my native language. The success story continued: I published and my story was read... My only reader at wattpad.com commented that I was 'the funniest story-writer in Dutch literary history', so the small fortune I paid him for that favour was well spent. He was wrong, of course, because I'm a novel-writer and not a story-writer, but the success was there and... I started to like writing, not because of what others thought about it, but just the process of translating ideas into words, of the challenge to transmit information and emotions from writer to reader.

I felt it was time to make the next step in my writing career. I wanted to leap over the horizon. I wanted to go global. I wanted to learn how to write in English. My first idea was to write a bestseller, but... I was not sure if that would be a bestseller, a best-seller or a best seller because writing in English is far more complicated when you have to do it yourself. I decided to start small: with short stories. The result of that decision (and of the whole week of suffering I went through to produce all this nonsense) can be found here.

In ancient Greek literature, there were only two genres: comedy and tragedy. The difference lies in the ending. In comedy, the main character gets what he wants. In tragedy, the main character gets what he deserves. This bundle is a mix of tragedy and comedy. The tragedies are attempts to share my experiences as a writer with others at Wattpad.com, to give them what they deserve: tips and tricks about writing, to help the writers write better stories so the readers will enjoy it more when they read them. The comedies (each a different genre: try everything is the best way to find out what you like) are the result of a writer who followed those tips and tricks, probably leading to the conclusion: "Don't try this at home, kids."

I have one request to you, the reader. I like to help people. If you follow the clubs at Wattpad.com, you'll notice lots of fellow-wannabe-writers who suffer problems like writer's block or how to plan a story. It would be very easy for me to help them by referring to a story from this bundle, but... I don't have the rights. Big Brother rules Wattpad.com and has declared that nobody is allowed to send the message 'Look at ME! I'm FABULOUS!'. I agree with that rule, but I do hope that you want to help me to

help those writers, by referring to this book with solutions. You'll become popular and will get followers in return, and most of all: being part of a community means that you have to communicate and help each other.

Also, will I make this bundle available at Smashwords.com, for copy and paste, for readers who don't know Wattpad.com yet. The cover text will consist of comments this book gets at Wattpad.com, so... if you comment, I will promote you to readers all over the world.

My writing is limited to only one style: humour. When you write humour, you can get away with everything. Humour is the point where a hopeless situation turns even worse, so the only thing you can do is... laugh about it. Like the lieutenant of the platoon who asks the soldier in front of the firing squad if he has any last words to say. The soldier answers: "The only thing I want to say is that you are by far the most incompetent officer of the whole army, not fit to lead a platoon, not fit to make the right decisions, not even fit to tie your own shoelaces, that's why you wear boots without laces." The officer is furious after all these insults, and the soldier asks: "And what are you going to do about it? Fire me?"

Humour is very personal. Americans like to be perfect, so in sitcoms, actors make fun of the shortcomings of others. British humour is more ironic, making fun of yourself. Dutch humour is sarcastic, hard, brutal, and some consider it to cross lines of good behaviour, like the doctor who tells his patient: "The bad news is that you have a terrible disease and only a few weeks left to live. The good news is that you also have Alzheimer, so tomorrow you've forgotten everything." Spanish humour is generous. Spanish people already start to laugh when you say: "I heard a good joke..." Spanish people don't worry much. They just like to laugh and be happy. You should take life and humour not so serious.

I had fun writing these stories, and I hope that they make you laugh too. If you're not able to laugh at yourself, others will laugh at you.

2. WRITER'S BLOCK [A TRAGEDY]

*"I hated every minute of training. But I said: don't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion."
(Muhammad Ali)*

...

Ehhh...

...

Once upon a time...

...

Pffff...

...

...in a galaxy far, far away...

...

...there was a man who suffered a writer's block...

...

This man wasn't me. I've never suffered a writer's block and I don't think I ever will.

Writing starts with having something to say. The final goal of any writing is to be read. If you don't have anything to say, what's the point of writing about it?

Writer's block for a writer is like a notebook with fines for a police officer. When the policeman starts his working day, he thinks: "Today I'm going to write someone a nice, big parking ticket... Let's see... Who will it be? ... Well... I can't find anyone... Nobody seems to do anything wrong... How disappointing... I fear that I am suffering from Parking-Ticket-Writer's Block today..." The wrong approach for this officer of the law would be to stare at his notepad until inspiration came. Every good policeman knows the solution: he has to find a criminal, he should look for trouble, he should find a problem.

The first thing you need is conflict, a problem, a plot, something you want to write about. You start with answering these three questions:

1. What do I think about war / peace / football / eating chocolate / buying new shoes?
2. Why do I hate/love war / peace / football / eating chocolate / buying new shoes?
3. War / peace / football / eating chocolate / buying new shoes leads to...?

War, peace, football, eating chocolate and buying new shoes are just examples of topics. Of course, you can pick any topic you like. It's best to write about something you know, but it's also a challenge to pick a topic you don't know much about and do the research that is necessary. For inspiration on choosing a topic, you can listen to music, read newspapers or magazines, take a walk and look around or read stories by other writers. Staring at a blank piece of paper is not an option.

Since Aristotle invented it, every story consists of three parts: (1) the beginning, (2) the middle and (3) the end. The beginning defines a problem, the end offers the solution and the middle part describes the actions that are necessary to go from the problem to the solution. The final conclusion might be that there is no solution, or that there is no problem, or whatever, but that's already part of the content and not of the form. To find the content of each part, you use your answers to those three questions.

Let's take this man with the writer's block for an example. His name is Tarzan. He picks the topic 'eating chocolate', thinks about it and writes his ideas down on his notepad:

1. I love eating chocolate
2. I love eating chocolate because it makes me happy.
3. Eating chocolate leads to happy thoughts.

Now Tarzan has his plot. But still he doesn't know how to start. The answer is simple, like our best friend the police officer already knows: he should start to do his work.

Work is a difficult word. Basically 'work' means 'solving problems'. When 10% of the people in a country don't have work, there are no problems in this country. If your problem is that your car doesn't start or you're hungry, you should either solve it yourself or you should find someone who can solve it for you. If you decide to ask someone else, you usually pay him for his work, you give him a salary or you pay his

invoice, so in return for solving your hunger/car problem, you solve (part of) his financial problems. That's social behaviour and economy at the same time. That is how it works with work.

If we talk about writing, the 'work' represents the text that the writer wrote. This 'work' is different from the work of a gardener, a car mechanic or a baker. The writer does not get a fee for the hours he puts into the project. Most writers only receive a letter that starts with "we're very sorry, but..." and if the writer wrote one of the 2% of the manuscripts that get published, he can only look forward to a small percentage of all the money the book-industry earns on the creativity of others. That is probably because the work of most writers doesn't solve any problem. Most writers just write about sex and violence, about unrealistic crimes and unrealistic relationships, and their only message is: "Look at ME! I'm FABULOUS!" If you don't solve problems, you will not get paid (unless you're a President Whatsisname because he gets paid for *creating* problems). And now back to work...

We say: "The book '1984' is a work of George Orwell". Anyone with a typewriter and ten fingers can copy the entire text of the book '1984' in two or three weeks, but we should realise that George Orwell had to do a lot more work to write '1984'. George had to plan the story, write the draft, start all over again, throw chapters away, correct and edit and check every letter in the book. George had to find people who could print and sell his book (which was not easy, because '1984' was critical about communism and in those days, in 1948, communism was very popular) and before George could even start with the first sentence of the draft, he had to learn how to write, which took up all his spare time in Kindergarten and lots of energy in the years that followed, he had to do research, talk to people, read books and newspapers and magazines, and live all those experiences that gave him the ideas that we can find in '1984'. That's a lot of work for one work, but '1984' is a masterpiece, I read it several times and it is one of my favourite books, so thank you, George Orwell, for doing all that work.

So one day George Orwell sat down and wrote the first words of the manuscript that later became the book '1984': "Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away..." What do you say? That was another George? George Lucas? Are you sure? As I remember well, Lucas finished his gospel first and wrote Star Wars later, but perhaps he changed his name to Orwell when he started to write '1984' or there is some other kind of misunderstanding, but I'm sure that George Orwell's first words of '1984' were "Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away..." I know that, because at that time George Orwell didn't want to suffer a writer's block, and therefore he started to write "Once upon a time..."

You don't believe me, do you? Haven't you heard that story about that writer who suffered from writer's block, and solved it by writing down the words 'Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away...', thought about it for about three months, changed the word 'galaxy' for 'kingdom', made one word of 'farfaraway', got so excited about it that he cried out: "Shhh... Heck!", corrected that into 'Shrek' and finished the story? It became a hit in Hollywood with two sequels and a million dollar merchandising industry.

So now we can go back to Tarzan, to George of the Jungle. Tarzan had his plot, his idea that eating chocolate leads to happy thoughts, and he felt that he should share this important information with all the unhappy people in this world, to make their life a little better. But Tarzan was still staring at that blank page in his typewriter. He didn't know how to start. Tarzan remembered the important lesson 1984 of George Orwell and wrote: "Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away... there was a man who was sad. He took a bite of chocolate, chewed, swallowed and noticed that he felt happy. He was surprised and decided to try it again. He thought of his tax declaration: his face turned green, he clinched his fists, and he got angry. Then he took another bite of chocolate and the miracle happened again: the dark clouds of his thoughts disappeared and he felt happy..."

Tarzan felt excited. After a fantastic start like this, it could only become better. He took the paper out of his typewriter and read what he had written. "That part about the dark clouds of his thoughts, I really like that. The idea of the tax declaration is also good: it adds intense horror to the story. I think it's better to change 'a man who was sad' into 'a sad man'. Perhaps I should work a little on that part where his face turns green. And it might also be a good idea if I give this man a name and a little bit of character, to make him a more likeable for my readers..." he thought. Now Tarzan was writing. His writer's block was forgotten. Tarzan just had to DO something.

Of course, this first line 'Once upon a time' will not make it to the final version. It's just a tool, something that helps us to start, like the run-up every athlete will make to jump higher or further. We only have to realise that writing is nothing but work, hit keys on your typewriter so they leave a mark on the paper, produce words. When you have the first version, you can do the rest of the work, like research, character development, creating the environment, planning the story, rewriting the draft, editing and fine tuning.

One more example, just to make sure. Here's your problem: you need money. There are so many solutions for this problem that it might be difficult to start. When you try to start with the question "How do I get money?", it has so much space that you'll get lost. Limit your options. It's better to start like this: "I need money and I will get it by robbing a bank. Not just any bank, but the ABC-bank at the corner of my street." Now you have a story. Now you can start to investigate, open an account there to see where the cameras are, how many security, how to enter in the vault, perhaps someone behind the counter has a crush on you or you can take the job to clean the building before the clients enter or... You have to get a start, so just pick one and see where it ends. The worst thing that can happen is that you spent hours, days, weeks on research to find out that robbing the ABC-bank at the corner is not an option. So you pick another option, counterfeit the winning ticket of the lottery and cash it, and you start again. You have to do the work. And work, my dear reader, is a short synonym for 'solving problems'.

Hemingway told us that sometimes he wrote the same scene 40 times before he was satisfied with it. My opinion about that is: "If you want to be an earnest writer, Ernest, you better do it well the first time, or you'll never win the Nobel Prize.", but Hemingway won the Nobel and I didn't, so Hemingway is right. You can learn from Hemingway that good texts don't come falling out of the sky: you have to work for it.

What does that mean, "work for it"? When I walk the dog or wash the dishes, I think about my novel. When I have to wait for the bus, I think about my novel. When I can't sleep at night, I think about my novel. When I hear a nice dialogue in a movie or a beautiful phrase in the lyric of a song, when I read a nice line in a book or newspaper, I think about my novel. That's how ideas come up, ready to write down and use when it's time to write. I don't start to write until I have ideas about what I want to write. That's why I never have a writer's block, 100% guaranteed.

Writing is translating emotions and information into words so that any reader can understand it. Producing letters on a piece of paper, we call 'typing'. Producing great texts and damn good stories, we call 'writing'. The difference is the thinking and the experience you put into it. Experience you can buy everywhere. It costs energy, time, sweat and suffering. You can also pay for it with mistakes. Thinking is something you can learn. It starts with asking questions, like 'how?' or 'why?' and you'll never know where it ends. The only way a writer can fail is by not trying.

The conclusion is that any writer's block disappears when you have something to say, at the moment when you start to think about how to say it. So now we have our start, our middle part and this here is the end. Aristotle can be proud. George Orwell can be satisfied. Tarzan takes another bite of chocolate

and is happy too. Even I'm happy. And with a happy ending like this, we can only conclude that this story is a masterpiece.

And if you can do it better: feel free to do so.

3. REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS [A COMEDY] (HISTORY)

History (from Greek ἱστορία, historia, meaning "inquiry, knowledge acquired by investigation") is the study of the past, particularly how it relates to humans. (Wikipedia)

"History repeats itself." (Friedrich Nietzsche)

It was a dark night. Not a single light illuminated the deserted streets of the French capital. The year was 1789. The date was the 13th of July. Paris, the city of light, was living his darkest hour.

The only light that shone was the light of King Jerry Lee Louis XVI, the absolute number one of the country, of the world and of the Billboard Hot 100. His family, the House of Bourbon, dominated the whisky market and their greatest hit was their slogan: "Drown your problems in alcohol." The biggest problem was that all the other problems were excellent swimmers, but that information was not included in the commercial campaign with which the Bourbons conquered the world.

The problems had started when the government found out that they had spent too much money on starting wars and ending economic crises. The only solution they could think of was to stop services and to raise taxes. Bread cost a fortune. Wine was only for the rich and noble. The smell of corruption was so awful that prices for French perfumes went up to \$70 for a 100 ml bottle.

But all that would change, thanks to the result of one meeting in a dark, cold and wet basement in a house in the Rue Ful.

"Something has to change.", said Luc le Duc, who sat at the left side of the table.

"Yes. Something has to change.", said Remy Martin, who occupied the right side of the table.

"No. EVERYTHING has to change.", said Marie-Claire, who sat in the middle. She was so poor that she didn't even have a family name.

"We should kill King Louis. He caused all this misery.", suggested Luc le Duc militant.

Remy Martin agreed: "Yes. The world is a jungle and King Louis is the buffoon that's leading it. I know it sounds like fiction, like a novel of Rudyard Kipling, but it is not. This is reality and if we don't do something, we'll never live long enough to see the happy end."

Marie-Claire did not agree. She said: "I don't agree. Killing King Louis will not solve anything. It will only be another example of the saying 'The King is dead, long live the King'. King Jerry Lee Louis will be followed by King Elvis or by Nat King Cole or by Michael King Of Pop and we'll just keep singing the same song over and over again. It can only get worse: we might end up with an emperor. Would you like Bourbon Whisky to be replaced by Cognac Napoleon? No, my friends. We should not focus on who to blame but we should think about how to do it better."

Silence dominated the room. All three were thinking.

“Refreshments?” asked Marie-Claire, holding a jar with muddy water from the river Seine.

“Revenge.”, responded Luc.

“Recovery.”, returned Remy.

“Reformation.”, recommended Luc.

“Resistance.”, referred Remy.

“Rebellion!” , shouted Luc.

“Republic!” , screamed Remy.

“Revolution!!!” , resumed both in unison.

“Relax! Reflection, responsibility, realism, research, reason, respect, redemption, relation, reliability, recycling, results.”, recited Marie-Claire.

All three fell silent.

“We’re not making progress.”, Luc said.

“We should read books. We should learn from the lessons history taught us. As long as we don’t learn, nothing will change...” , Marie-Claire suggested.

“History is the same story all over again. We fight, the winner takes it all and the losers pay the price.”, explained Remy.

“Well, in that case, we should make sure we win. We should kill King Louis. We’re with millions against one.”, Luc added.

“We’ll need the mob.”, Marie-Claire thought.

“The Mob? Do you want to ask Don Corleone and his family to help us out? Sacrifice our beloved French cuisine for pizza and spaghetti? You’ve got to be joking, Marie-Claire.”, Luc replied.

“No. The mob. The masses. The people on the street. We should do this together. We should not look at history. We should think about the future, a world without violence, a world for all the people, not only for the leaders. And there is only one way to do it: we should do it together. To kill a dragon, you stop feeding it. What will happen if we all agree and stop paying taxes? The King would lose his power and instead of bloodshed we would all benefit economically. But we have to do it together...” , Marie-Claire explained.

Now, Remy and Luc understood. But they also saw the problem that rose: “When we want to unite the people, we’ll need to convince them first. We have to promise something they can believe in.”, said Luc.

“Yes. We’ll need some sort of slogan, something that’s easy to remember, something that stands for our philosophy.”, added Remy.

“What a great idea. What do we do first? Do we start with the philosophy or do we start with the slogan?” , Marie-Claire asked.

Remy had an idea: “I have an idea for the slogan: *Liberté*. That’s French and it means Freedom. People like to have freedom: freedom of speech, free trade, and free holidays. It’s the opposite of ‘rights’, all

those limitations of freedom the King and the nobles use to make sure that they are the ones who benefit from everything. Imagine a world with free books, free education for everyone...”

With so much inspiration, Luc could not stay behind: “I have another idea for the slogan: *Egalité*. That’s French and it means equality. When we all have equal rights, it would end the days of difference between rich and poor. Equality is also the opposite of ‘rights’, of all those rules that the elite has invented to make life easier for themselves and worse for us, the workers and consumers. Imagine a world where everybody has the same options, where everybody could go to university...”

Marie-Claire was inspired too: “My idea of a slogan is *Fraternité*. That’s French and it means brotherhood. We have to do this together, like brothers, like one big family. If we do it together, it might work. If we only act for ourselves, it can only lead to another King Louis.”

Remy did not agree with the equality of Luc: “Does your equality also mean that the blacks and the coloured will get the same rights as the whites? Does that include the end of slavery too? Does that include that women have the same rights as men? Can you imagine a world where women go to the university and men stay at home to have babies? Does that mean that women and men will use the same public bathroom in your world? Impossible, Luc. This is no science fiction novel. This is reality.”

Luc was furious: “Do you think your idea of freedom is a better solution? Freedom only leads to the survival of the fittest. The only difference between this world and your world is that your world will be dominated by the Kings of Industry, by the rich elite that benefits from all that freedom. If we want something new, we should avoid that the strong profit from the weak. On the contrary: we should go for equality, so the rich can help the poor, the strong can support the sick and the old, and the wise can teach the stupid. Equality does not mean that everybody is the same, but that everybody has the same rights, and that all have to pay the same price for that right: contribute to society so society can help you when you need it.”

“We already have that, Luc. Take care of the King, so the King can take care of you. What do you suggest? That working people give their income to others who do nothing? Equality will never work!”, Remy shouted.

Marie-Claire stood up, raised her hands and said: “And NOW you both shut up and listen to me. Do you know why history tells the same violent story in every age? That’s because history was written by men. When you ask men for a solution, they can only think of violence for an answer. You should listen to us, the women. We use words. In our world, it’s not the Law of the Jungle and the right of the strongest that counts. We use the truth, words, elections: peaceful and democratic. We use the principle of Brotherhood. I’m not telling you to listen to me, but I’m telling you that I’ve also listened to you. You are both right, and so am I. Therefore, I suggest that we join forces. We should stop fighting ourselves and focus on fighting the real enemy, the King and his system in which the leader takes it all. We should do this together. We should change our slogan. I suggest...”

Marie-Claire dropped a theatrical pause, a small trick to give maximum emphasis to the words she would say now, words that would change the future of mankind, words that would start a new era, a better world, for everyone. She opened her mouth to say the historical words, the slogan that would inspire Paris, France, Europe, the universe...

“I suggest: *Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité*. Freedom, equality and brotherhood. Freedom, with the equal obligation for everyone to take care of those who need help and brotherhood to make sure it works out well. Why do we have to choose between left and right if all we want is to go forward?”

Remy and Luc dropped a jaw, closed their mouths again, looked at each other, looked at Marie-Claire, laughed and danced and slapped each other on the shoulder, excited about this wonderful solution: "Great idea. Join forces. Freedom, equality and brotherhood. That will convince everyone. The right side of Paris will love the Freedom-part. The left side of Paris will be thrilled about the Equality and the centre of Paris will join the others because they are convinced that we should do it together. What a fantastic slogan. And that idea of you about elections, that's great too. We start with storming the Bastille, but when all that is over, we can start thinking about elections and everything that goes with it."

Marie-Claire still had a small doubt: "Storming the Bastille? Back again to that old monkey/caveman-behaviour of violence? Didn't we agree..."

"Yes, woman, yes, you're right. But you have to understand that it takes time to convince the world. We don't have that time. The people of Paris are dying. They have nothing to eat. We should act. The slogan is great, but we're not filling hungry stomachs with words only, my dear. We should also do something. So tomorrow we shout the slogan, then we storm the Bastille and..."

Marie-Claire objected: "No. Tomorrow it's the 14th of July, our national holiday. I promised the children to go to the park, to feed the ducks. If we're lucky, we can catch one or two for dinner..."

Remy and Luc soothed their friend: "Don't you worry, Marie-Claire. You go with the kids to the park, you go home to fix dinner and you wait *sans culotte* until your man returns from work. We take care of the rest. Brotherhood, right? We'll do this together. So you leave it to us and we make sure it will all work out fine..."

Marie-Claire was at ease now, but she forgot one tiny little detail: her contribution to the slogan was Brotherhood. Not Sisterhood or Humanityhood, but Brotherhood. She left it all to the brothers, to the men. Men have fighting in their DNA. Men survived history for being the most aggressive species on the planet. Men spend their time with fighting wars and watching football (which is the modern version of war: you pick sides, you fight the FA-battle of Wembley and the winner takes it all).

The men were not as good with words as the women. The men did not remember the most important word of the slogan *Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité*: the word ET (and). They changed that word into OR. They organised themselves in parties who either thought that Freedom was the only way to rule the world or who were convinced that Equality was the best way to organise society. Brotherhood was forgotten. This little mistake, and to or, gave men the excuse to fight for at least 200 years more.

There is still hope. We never give up. Imagine a woman as the leader of the world. That could make a difference. Or not. It could also mean: Now, the new absolute number one of the country, of the world and of the Billboard Hot 100: QUEEN. Another one bites the dust.

As long as we don't learn, nothing will change.

Who will tell them?

4. TO PLAN OR NOT TO PLAN, THAT'S THE QUESTION [A TRAGEDY]

"I thought art was a verb, rather than a noun." (Yoko Ono)

Critics are unanimous about my work: my characters are flat, my environment is dull, my style is hopeless, my vocabulary has the level of a five-year-old, the tone of my stories urgently needs a tuning fork and as long as I give my books away for free, I will never become a successful full-time professional writer. But there is one thing that makes me proud: I write great plots. That is because I plan my stories.

There are two types of writers: the Planner and the Go-Ahead-With-The-Goat. Writing is like going on a vacation. You can plan to go to Greece, search information about your destiny, book the trip and the hotel, all inclusive, meals and drinks and entertainment and excursions, not one minute left to be bored. Or you can just take your passport and your money, close the door behind you and be on your way, curious where the trip will bring you because the surprise of what you will find is part of the fun.

The planner might end up in Greece, but without the guarantee that the trip will be a success: the pictures of the hotel were taken before the earthquake, the food looks nice but tastes awful, the sea is filled with salt water and it rains the whole week. The goat-writer might think: "I wanted to go to Greece and now I end up in Gibraltar, but Gibraltar is nice too so I don't regret the trip.", but it is also possible that he gets lost on the way or keeps walking around in circles.

We can conclude that there is no difference: both planning and just-go-for-it can lead to success or to disaster. That's why we start with having a look at planning. If you know how it can be done, you can always choose not to do it.

My personal following order of events that lead to a story is this:

1. I have an idea. I think it over and when it's a good idea, more ideas will follow. I heard a businessman once say "Every day I have about 10 good ideas, and I'm successful because I manage to realise 1 idea each year." Not every idea is a good idea and not every good idea leads to a good story. For me, a good idea means that it is followed by a waterfall of other ideas and they make me so enthusiastic that I can't do anything else but start to work on it.
2. I start to make notes, work out some details, do some research and think the story over and over and over. I save these notes and details and ideas for later. This stage of the project might easily take a year, but it's the part of writing that I like best of all. The story starts 'to fall from the sky'. I read a line in a book, see a picture in a magazine or hear a phrase in a movie, and think: "That's something I can use for my story..." Inspiration is everywhere. You just have to recognise it, grab it by the tail and put it in your pocket.
3. The story starts to come alive. I HAVE to write some scenes, work out some plotlines and before I know it I'm writing the draft. Someone once asked Stephen King: "Why do you write the stories you write?" and Stephen answered: "Why do you think that I have a choice?" That's what happens to me all the time...
4. When the draft is finished, I start reading it over and over and over, correcting errors in grammar and typing, editing lines and sometimes whole paragraphs or scenes. This is the most time-consuming part of the story. When writing the draft takes me 3 to 6 weeks, the editing phase usually takes 6 to 10 weeks. This is the moment when I have the whole story in my head, think it over when doing other things, making it complete. At this time, I usually only work on this one story. I limit the work on other stories to writing down ideas and making short notes.
5. When is the story finished? You just know. You've said everything that you wanted to say, you're satisfied with how you said it, you read it one more time from start to finish, just because you like it so much, and you feel happy. This is the best moment ever, the moment when you get this feeling 'Wow, I can't believe I did this. This is the best I've ever written and I

will never write anything better in the rest of my life.’, which lasts until... you have your next idea for a story that will get even better. Writing is simple: once you know how to do it, you can only get better.

6. The last step in the process is when you start to send out the story to your friends, your beta-readers, the people you trust and who'll give you feedback on your work. This is something you have to learn: the story is your baby and others will tell you that its ears are too big and his hair is too short. Criticism is meant to make you better. Criticism is just the opinion of somebody else and... he's always right. This doesn't mean that you have to change everything because of the opinion of others. Of course not. It's your story and you write it the way you want. But you have to try to look at your work through the eyes of your readers: when you feel the need to 'explain why', usually you didn't write it clearly enough. If the readers don't understand, the writer has to write it better.

Every story starts with an idea. Everyone gets hundreds of ideas every day (like that idea I have right now, to make myself a nice cup of coffee.... Ah, that really was a great idea). Some ideas are great, other ideas have potential and some ideas are best forgotten immediately, like that idea that you should vote Whatshisname for President (forget it; his only message is: "Look at ME! I'm FABULOUS!").

For this example of planning, we need a really good idea. How about this: Annie visits the village of her grandmother and gets lost in the woods where the local people accuse her of being a witch. Wow. That is a great idea. It has action, magic, suspense, an interesting environment and even a real hero with the name Annie. Such a great idea will make a great story. Such a great idea produces a waterfall of other ideas, like the name of the grandmother (Grannie) and the fact that Annie is accused of witchcraft because she has a tattoo of a spider web on her arm and...

This is where the first problem comes up: my head is too small for all those ideas. I need to invent something, to avoid that I will forget all those wonderful ideas. I need something that helps me to organise the ideas so they will help me when I start with the writing. As a writer I can only think of one solution: I have to write them down.

Here is the moment when every writer will get his own ideas about what she likes. Some make notes on coloured, sticky papers, others write on whiteboards, you can use apps on your tablet or computer, I know someone who voice-records his ideas with his mobile phone, but my favourite tool for notes is a notebook. A small notebook and a pen are cheap, easy and always available. Keep one close at hand and train yourself to write down every idea you have.

It doesn't really matter how you make your notes, how you save your ideas for later, but it should be clear that the next step will be to organise all these ideas, put them together and in the following order that helps you with the writing. It's okay if you do that 'on paper' if you create a file of every story with some sort of separate-pages-system like those two-hole ring binders and notepads with holes in the margins. If you prefer planning on paper, I advise you to buy nice stationary, notepads and pens that encourage you to work, and that you take the time to organise your notes in your folder in a neat and orderly way. It is much more fun to work with a file that is organised and beautiful.

Lots of writers have good experiences with Scrivener, so perhaps you should try it and find out. I read that Scrivener organises all elements of your novel like I organise it in Word and like others do on paper. The only thing that matters is that it works for you.

There is a technique that is called 'the snowflake-technique', but I live in a tropical country where snowflakes don't survive one minute, so we can't use that. I use something that I call 'the step-sheet'. It

is based on the snowflake technique, it provides space to keep my notes together and it is very easy to organise everything and put it into the right order.

What I do is collect and organise my ideas and notes in the computer. I have a folder on my hard-disc with the name 'Writing-stuff' and in that folder, I create a sub-folder for every story I work on. The name of that sub-folder is the working title of my story, so I decide that this story of Annie will get the working-title 'Witch-hunt', which is not a very good title, but I can always change that later.

From a lady-writer on Wattpad I learned the idea of 'The Book of Thoughts', one file where you can store every idea that is not (yet) connected to a story. I tried it, I liked it, I started to use it and I'm sorry I forgot her name because she deserves all the credit. In the same _general-directory as the Book of Thoughts I created a file 'Write Right.doc', where I keep all the notes about writing, notes I pick up from books and things I learn at the writing-better-club at Wattpad. It inspires to be at Wattpad.

In my Witch-hunt folder, I can save all kinds of documents, photos etc. that I use for the final story, but the two most important files are '_WitchHunt – Stepsheet.doc' and '_WitchHunt – Manuscript.doc', two Word documents. Why two? When I write the manuscript in the Manuscript-doc, I have the Stepsheet-doc open in another window on the side, so I have my notes available when I need them. The _ underscore in the title of the doc file is a little trick so the two files are always the first in the list of files when I open the folder.

The layout of my Stepsheet-doc is always the same. I take a new, blank document, type the working title of the story, hit enter a few times, press Ctrl-Enter to start a new page and type the following:

1. High Concept, cover text and meta-data
2. Step-sheet
3. Characters
4. Background, environment and research
5. Scenes and snippets
6. Ideas

These lines are the six 'chapters' of my step-sheet. I mark the style of each line as 'heading 1'. In each chapter, I can add as many 'sub-chapters' as I need. In chapter 3 – characters I can add sub-chapters like 3.1 Annie / 3.2 Grannie / 3.3 Other people. I mark each sub-chapter as 'heading 2'. With Ctrl-End, I can easily hop to the end of the file to add that idea I just got. The last step is to go back to the first page (with Ctrl-Home) and insert a Table of Contents.

This Table of Contents is your 'navigator', the tool to jump quickly from one item in the step-sheet to another. All you have to do is Ctrl-Home to reach the index and Ctrl-Click on the line that represents the chapter you want to go to. It's easy and very simple to work with, no special software needed, just a little knowledge of Word (or any other program you use to write with).

If these terms like Table of Contents or Header 1 is rocket science to you: please invest time to study the possibilities of your word processor. It pays off. Word is the tool of the writer, like a hammer is the tool of a carpenter. If you work with your tool every day, you should spend time to learn what you can do with it. Investment in knowledge always gives the best interest. You can work efficiently, save time and become a better writer, just by knowing what you can do with your computer. I'm sure you use the tab-button instead of ten times the space bar when you want the text to step away from the left margin, but

I knew at least one professional secretary who never used the tab button, because she didn't know what Tab meant, and she never had the time to look it up because of all those spaces that she had to type...

I use 'codes' between [brackets] in the titles of the sub-chapters, so I can see in my index, my Table of Contents, the status of each item (I do the same in my draft). The # hash tag is a sign that you'll never use, so perfect for reminders. With Ctrl-F, you can find them quickly. Code [###] means 'nothing done yet', while [##] tells me that I've only made a start and [#] that there is something left to finish. Code [OK] stands for 'I did not forget to put a code here'. When I'm writing and I don't remember the name of the dog, I write [#what's the name of the dog?#] in the text. When I have time available to write, but my creativity took a day off, the step-sheet always gives me an excuse to work on the story. There is always some research to do, always some background or environment or character to work out, always some # to search for and follow up.

Now that we have our document, our chapters and our navigator, it is time to start with filling chapter 1 – High Concept, Cover text and Metadata. There is no reason to start with chapter 1 and work out every chapter until chapter 6. On the contrary: you can take every note and put it in the chapter or paragraph where it belongs. The file is just a coat rack, a hat tree, to organise all our ideas and notes together in an easy-reference following order. We only use the following order of the step-sheet here to explain the details of each chapter.

The High Concept of our story is that one sentence, that idea 'Annie visits the village of her grandmother and gets lost in the woods where the local people accuse her of being a witch.' I make a sub-chapter 1.1 High Concept and put that idea there. I can add more basic ideas in the beginning and move them to chapter 2 when the time is ripe.

My sub-chapter 1.2 is called To-Do-list, but I have to confess I'm not good with To-Do-lists. My first point on my To-Do-list is always 'fill this list with things you have to do and will forget if you don't write them down', my second point is 'read and follow-up the points of your To-Do-list frequently', and that's it. I guess I'm more the Have-Done-list type. Looking at all those things to do makes me feel nervous, makes me want to do other things, things that are no obligation because they are not on a To-Do-list. I like to start my day and think 'What am I going to do today?' and I like that to be a surprise, something that I really look forward to, something I just thought of, something really creative like washing the car or killing the weeds in the garden or washing the dishes. I have this bad habit of starting with the work that has to be done but nobody really likes, and I do those things with a happy mind because I know that when it's done, the reward comes: I can spend some time on writing. And most of the time I wash the dishes or clean up the garden, while my head is already working on that story I am writing.

When the story is finished, I fill chapter 1 with subs like 1.3 Metadata (ISBN etc.), 1.4 Cover text, 1.5 List of publishers I have sent the story to, 1.6 List of promotional actions I did for the story etc. There is a lot of info that I want to save and keep together, even when the story is finished, so when I have a step-sheet, it seems a good idea to use it for that info too.

The next chapter, 2 – Step-sheet, is where we work on the plot itself, on the story-line. Here we use the snowflake. We take the idea of our basic plot and start to add chapter titles (or short descriptions about what will happen in each chapter). When that structure is more-or-less clear and complete, we can promote each chapter title to 'heading 2', for our index, and start to add info and ideas about what will happen in that chapter. For our Witch Hunt-story we could do that like this:

- 2.1 Annie visits Grannie.
Describe the village. Add some dialogue to show how nice Annie is and how much Grannie missed her.

- 2.2 Annie goes for a walk in the woods.
She gets lost. Her mood changes from happy to doubtful to worry to panic.
- 2.3 Annie meets the local wood-people.
First, Annie feels happy (safe), but when the local people see that Annie has a tattoo of a spider web on her arm, they accuse her of being a witch and turn hostile.
- 2.4 The people want to burn Annie.
The people tie Annie to a tree and put dry wood under her feet, so they can burn her. Annie tries to convince the people that she's innocent, that they make a mistake, that she tries to give up smoking and burning her will not help. The people don't listen. They want the barbecue. The reader should be biting his nails by now.
- 2.5 Annie escapes
Annie understands that she's the hero of the story, so she should do heroic things if she wants to get out. She says a spell to change herself into a cat, so she can escape from the ropes and the fire. Then she takes her magic wand and turns all the others into frogs. She picks up the frog that before was a cute blond boy with blue eyes, kisses him with the hope that he will turn into a prince, too bad, it doesn't work, this is a horror story, not a fairy tale, so Annie takes one of the cars of the others and drives home.

Now we have the space to add our other ideas and organise our story. As you see the discovery of the spider web in 2.3 is a key moment in the plot. We can go to 2.1 and introduce this tattoo to the reader: Grannie sees the tattoo and tells Annie about the people in the woods, who believe that witches had tattoos of spider webs in the old days. You will never be able to do something like this when you're a Goat-writer because he just writes the first chapter without thinking about the third chapter. Writing good plots is nothing but technique, and planning your story is the way to do it.

Important is that you have the whole story available, compact and in order, and it's hardly any work to add or change or cross out anything. Imagine you had the whole draft written out and at that moment you decide that Annie and the cute boy with the blue eyes meet in the village, that he invites her for a walk in the woods. Changing the draft would be a lot of work, but changing the step-sheet is easy and no work at all.

In general: every story needs a whole lot of thinking. You can do that thinking when the story is finished, or you can start with it. When you write the draft several times because you forgot something, I'm sure it will be a good exercise too and it will make you a better writer.

The use of chapter 3 – Characters is clear: here you make sub-chapters for every important character that plays a part in the story.

One tip is to write a bio about everyone, a list of facts like date of birth (sign of the Zodiac, Chinese horoscope), his height and weight and age, the colour of her hair, the place where he lives, school and education, name of parents, siblings and pets, hobbies, character, customs she has and every other detail you can think of. The story will not tell about the dog that Annie has at home, but you, as a writer, should know the name of that dog. When you work out the bio, your character will come alive in your head and you will write better stories.

As an exercise you can write some scenes with your characters, put them in a traffic jam or lost in Hong Kong or discussing what to have for dinner or who to vote for president, just to find out how they react, to get to know them better. You are the director of a movie, doing the auditions with all those wanna-be

stars who want the main part in your next novel: let them act, see what they can do and get to know them before you give them the role. You'll never use the scenes, but it is a lot of fun to write them.

The other tip about characters is: find yourself a model. When this great story of Annie becomes the next Hollywood blockbuster, we would like to have Angelina Jolie take the role of Annie. In *Maleficent* Angelina was great and in *Tomb Raider* she proved knowing something of woods too. So when we write that Annie says: "Bollocks!", we take a look at the photo of Angelina (that we saved in our *WitchHunt*-folder) and think: "No. She wouldn't say that.", so we change Annie's line into: "Oh, dear..." Of course, you can also take your sister, your grandma or your schoolteacher as a model. Writing great, lovable, believable characters is not just talent; it's also a lot of technique and little tricks that you can learn.

What can be said about characters, can also be said about chapter 4 – Environment and Research. Here you save your map of the village or the woods, the info you found on spider webs and magic and witches, a folder from Marks & Spencer with the latest models of magic wands and everything else that you think is important for your story.

A description of the environment helps you to make the story better, like the bio helps you to create better characters. What time of the year is it? Does it snow or rain? Are there hills or rocks or mountains or lions in the woods? Which year is it? If the story takes place in 1700, you should change that part where Annie goes back in the car. Do the people speak with a strange accent that makes it hard to understand them?

If you find info on the internet: cut and paste the web link to your step-sheet. There is nothing so annoying as to know you read it somewhere, but you forgot where.

Chapter '6 – Ideas' is to collect your notes that you can't use (yet) in the story. Save them to read for inspiration and perhaps you can use them for the next story or for a sequel. You never know what a good idea might bring you or when you can use it.

Imagine you have this idea: "Annie has black hair but she dyed it blond, like Madonna". When your story is still in the early stage of development, you save this note in chapter 6 – Ideas. When you start working on the plot, you start reading your notes and you realise that this note has info that is important for both the bio of Annie and for one or more chapters in the plot. You cut the note from chapter 6, you paste it into chapter 3.1 – Annie, you paste it again in chapter 2.1 Annie meets Grannie (you add the text: 'Grannie sees that Annie has dyed her hair and asks why she did that. Annie replies: Blondes have more fun.') and in chapter 2.3 – The people accuse Annie of being a witch (you add the text: "A cute blond boy with blue eyes notices that Annie has dyed her hair and cries out: "Witches always have black hair.").

The idea is that chapter 6 only contains the ideas you didn't use. When you know how and where you can use an idea, you move it to the chapter where you need it. I use the 'split window'-option from Word when I move notes from one chapter to another. When I have notes that I don't think I will use, I move them to sub-chapter 6.1 – Notes I probably will not use (I also have a sub-chapter 6.2 – Notes, not yet classified). That way I avoid reading notes over and over again without doing anything with them. It's not witchcraft but discipline. The magic word is not 'abracadabra' but 'organise'.

Chapter '5 – Scenes and snippets' is for 'that other writer', the goat-writer, the one that prefers to start with the trip to see where it takes him. If you have this great scene in mind, that scene that you HAVE to write down, although you have no idea about the rest of the story, just write it down in the step-sheet chapter 5 instead of in a blank document. You can do the rest of the planning, the collection of the other ideas, when that great scene is ready. Just bend the whole story around the scenes you wrote.

If you make a 'template' of a blank step-sheet (with the index and the chapters already prepared), you only have to copy the template, rename it and start writing in chapter 5. No extra work, no extra charge and all the organisation for planning is already there. If you only use the tip about the navigator and the [###]-codes, I'm already glad I could help you.

There is a big advantage in writing scenes before you finish the whole planning. If you start with writing the key scenes of your story, you'll read them over and over while you work on the other chapters. When you put more time and effort in a scene, it usually gets better.

There is no rule that says that you should start writing with chapter one and go on until the happy end. I don't like rules in writing. I like finals. Not only the final of the FA-cup and the Champions League, but also stories with a good final chapter. The ending is always the part that the reader will remember best. If the reader likes the end, he'll give more stars to the whole book. If I start with writing the final chapter, I know 'where I go to', so I can make the rest of the story fit better to the end and I can work longer on the final chapter to make it fit better with the rest of the story. That's the secret of writing great plots, a secret that I share with you so you can also become the funniest writer of your country (move to a country that is tiny like mine, where only three writers live and two of them never make jokes).

Our basic question was: to plan or not to plan? The answer is: do both. With a step-sheet it's hardly any work. I hope this final conclusion is a nice surprise. You don't have to choose. You just have to find a way to remember your ideas, collect them in one place, put them in order and use them to write better stories. Readers like it when the end contains a nice surprise. It makes the whole story better. That's why I write great plots.

Every story takes a lot of thinking. You have to do the thinking anyway. Why not start with it?

5. THREE LITTLE PIGS [A COMEDY] (FAIRY TALE)

"Fairy tales are stories that warn us against the dangers of our time." (the Writers Bible of Fiction)

"Fairy tales don't exist." (President Whatshisname after the elections)

Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away, there were three little pigs: the triplets Albert, Bob and Charles. Their father, an old boring boar, was tired of seeing how his sons turned their rooms into a pig sty every day. One day he said: "Boys, you are old and pig big enough to live on your own, to clean up your own shit. Also, it's time for me to retire, but if the King finds out I live together with three young and strong blokes who might contribute to my costs of living, he will cut my pension. So I suggest that you move out before the weekend and I hope to see you on Father's Day when you are welcome to visit me. Don't forget to bring me a crate of Sweineken beer when you come."

Albert, the first born, started to panic: "Oh, dear. How am I going to live on my own? I don't have any savings, no skills, no education, I never learned a profession. All I did was play Angry Birds (losing every time), watch dirty movies and lie in the mud. All this is the fault of my father, who gave me this wonderful childhood without problems..."

His brother Bob had a different opinion. He was the piglet with the initiative. He studied pigmentation and knew you had to work hard if you wanted to achieve something in life. He was the only one in the family who had read THE classical masterpiece in swine literature, 'Animal Farm' by George Orwell, so

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