

# Once Upon a Time



Writer's handbook

# Credits

**Author:** Kelly Olmstead

**Editor, Graphic Designer, and Layout:** Michelle Nephew

**Artwork:** Omar Rayyan

**Proofreader:** Roberta Olson

**Publisher:** John Nephew

**Once Upon a Time Card Game Creators:** Richard Lambert,

Andrew Rilstone, & James Wallis

**Publisher's Thanks:** To Jerry Corrick and the gang at the Source.

**Author's Dedication:** In memory of Mrs. Marty Rice. You always knew I'd get here someday. You are missed.

# Acknowledgements

An author is always in debt to many people by the end of a book — this case is no exception. I give great thanks to the following people, without whom this book couldn't have been completed:

Dr. Tim Lloyd and the American Folklore Society for their kind permission to use Vladimir Propp's Functions of the Folktale.

Richard Lambert, Andrew Rilstone, and James Wallis, the creators of the *Once Upon A Time* card game, for letting me put their game to a new use and for sharing its history with me.

Michelle Nephew of Atlas Games for all her efforts in organizing permissions for this project, and John Nephew of Atlas Games for publishing it. I just wrote this thing — they did the rest.

Bill Bodden, for all the wonderful help and advice on what to do with this crazy idea of mine.

Erik Carlson, for many years of writing support as well as comments on this project.

Kaci Koltz, for her valuable critique despite our stylistic differences.

Alex Hogg, for taking the time between work, grad school, and pampering his pregnant wife to read the manuscript.

And most of all, my husband Russ, for the support, the milk baths, and banishing me to my writing desk when I slacked off. I love you.



© 2012-2013 Trident, Inc. d/b/a Atlas Games.

All rights reserved. *Once Upon a Time* is a trademark of John Nephew, used under license.


Digital Version 1.0

[www.Atlas-Games.com](http://www.Atlas-Games.com)

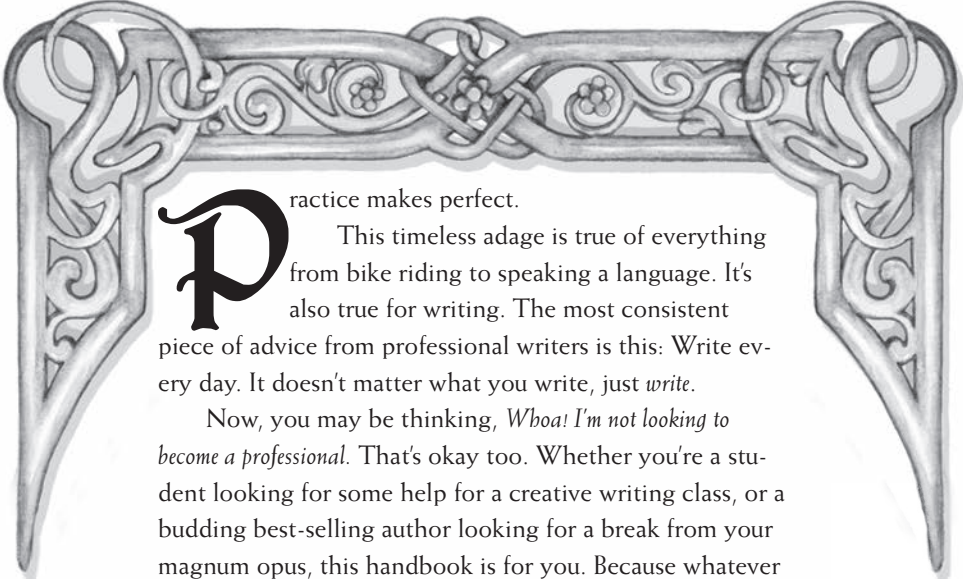


# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
Chapter One: How to Use This Writer's Handbook .....	6
Chapter Two: Story Ideas .....	12
Chapter Three: Structure, Plot, & Style .....	30
Chapter Four: Putting it All Together .....	59
Chapter Five: Ever After .....	92
Afterward .....	101
Appendix A: List of Recommended Reading .....	109
Appendix B: Revised Sample Story .....	112
Appendix C: Vladimir Propp's Functions of the Folktale .....	122

A decorative border surrounds the page. The top left features a vine with leaves and small flowers. The right side is a vertical Celtic knotwork pattern. The bottom left corner has a circular element containing the page number. The background is a textured, parchment-like surface.

# Introduction



**P**ractice makes perfect. This timeless adage is true of everything from bike riding to speaking a language. It's also true for writing. The most consistent piece of advice from professional writers is this: Write every day. It doesn't matter what you write, just *write*.

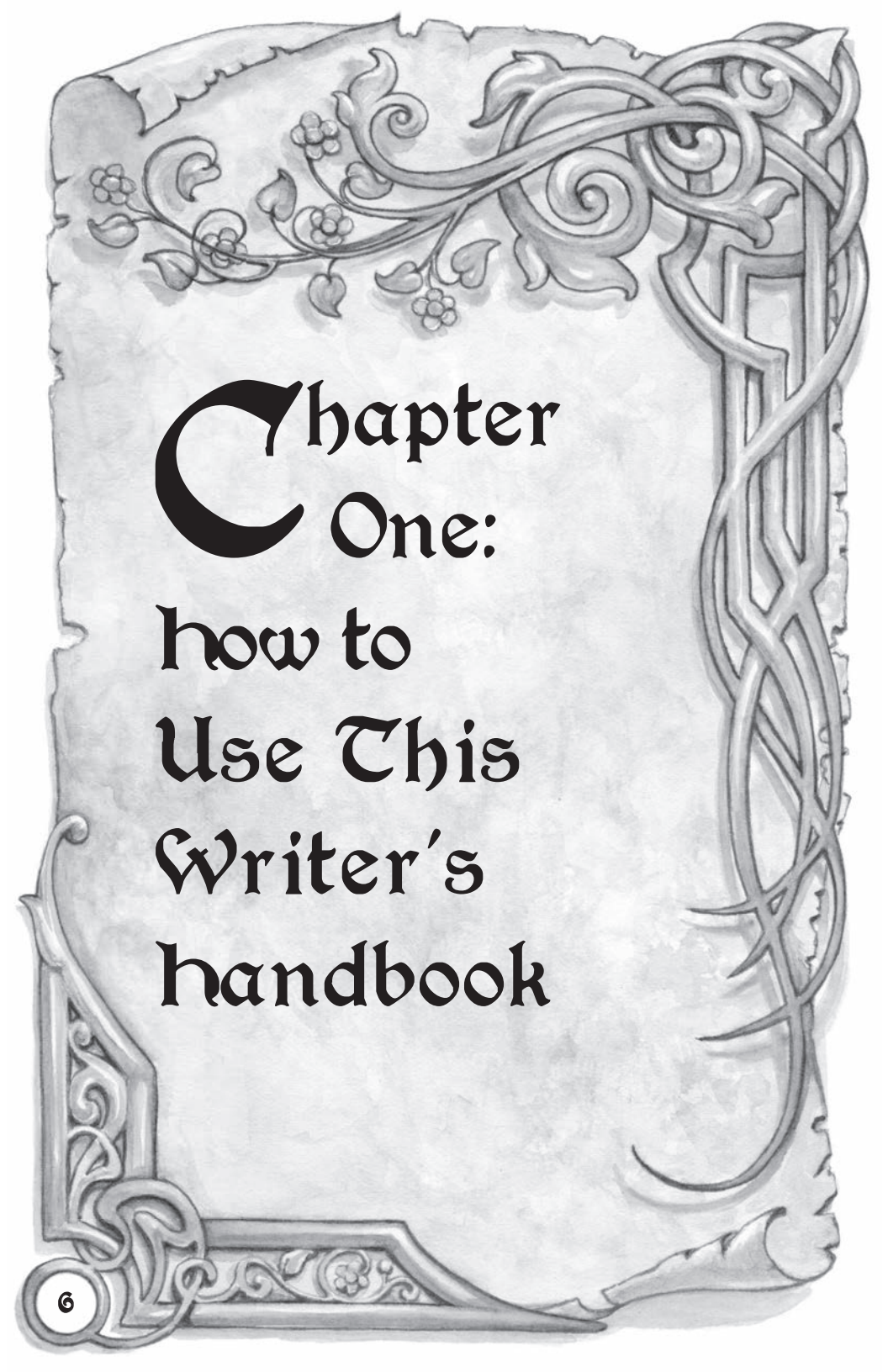
Now, you may be thinking, *Whoa! I'm not looking to become a professional*. That's okay too. Whether you're a student looking for some help for a creative writing class, or a budding best-selling author looking for a break from your magnum opus, this handbook is for you. Because whatever your motivation to write, you'll probably at some point run into every writer's bane.

Writer's block.

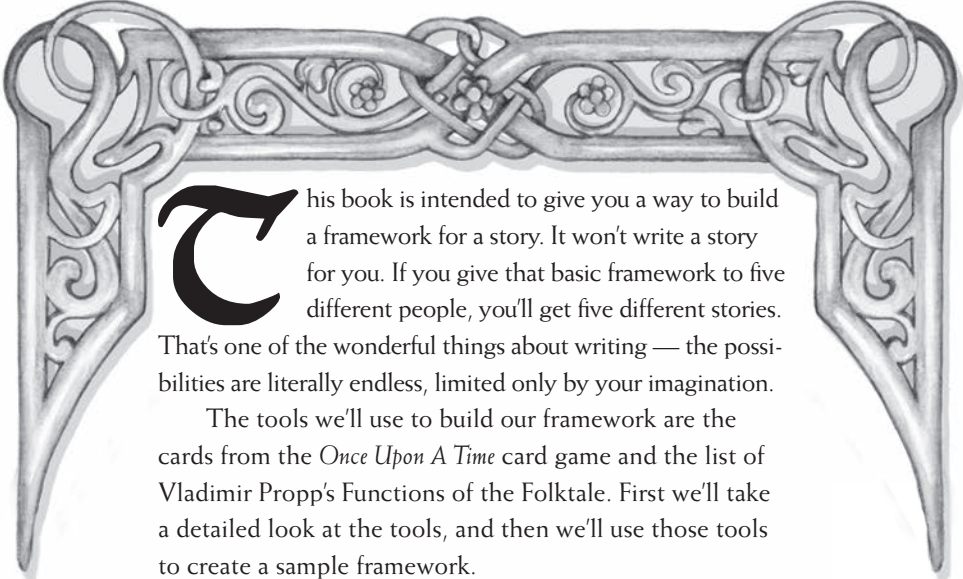
It's great to say "write every day," but when you're staring at your blank monitor that empty white page can seem to go on forever.

"Just write." Great. Write *what*?

Welcome to the *Once Upon A Time Writer's Handbook*.



Chapter  
One:  
how to  
Use This  
Writer's  
handbook



This book is intended to give you a way to build a framework for a story. It won't write a story for you. If you give that basic framework to five different people, you'll get five different stories.

That's one of the wonderful things about writing — the possibilities are literally endless, limited only by your imagination.

The tools we'll use to build our framework are the cards from the *Once Upon A Time* card game and the list of Vladimir Propp's Functions of the Folktale. First we'll take a detailed look at the tools, and then we'll use those tools to create a sample framework.

## Once Upon a Time

*Once Upon A Time* is a storytelling card game published by Atlas Games and designed by Richard Lambert, Andrew Rilstone, and James Wallis, in which a group of players create a story using different cards. The game consists of two groups of cards: 110 Story cards, and 55 Ending cards. For the purposes of this book, I'll refer to these as *Once Upon A Time* cards if I'm referring to all of them at once. In the game one player at a time is the Storyteller, who tells the story in such a way as to try to use all the cards in his hand and work the story around to the ending on his Ending card. The other players will try to interrupt the Storyteller and take over the story so that they can use up the cards in their hands and steer the story toward their own endings. The first player to empty his hand of Story cards and fulfill his Ending card wins the game, but the greater goal of the game is to have fun telling a satisfying story.

The *Once Upon A Time* cards are aimed at fairy tales or folktales, but with a little thought these can be used for any genre. Blank cards can be purchased separately, too, so you can add your own Ending and Story cards. You

can also add the cards from the expansions to give your stories new twists and turns. And for an interesting look at the origins of the card game and some insight into how a game is made, check out the *Afterward* by game designers Andrew Rilstone and James Wallis.

## The Cards

The Ending cards are just that — endings for a story. An example Ending card is: “So he told her he was the prince and they lived happily ever after.” The Story cards come in five categories: Characters, Things, Places, Aspects, and Events. Characters are the people and animals that populate your story: the heroes, the villains, and the innocent bystanders. Things are objects that have some function in the story — maybe as the object of a quest, or a prized possession, or an obstacle between one of your characters and his goal. Places are settings mentioned in the story as locations where the characters are, have been, or are going. Aspects are descriptive words like “hidden,” “cursed,” or “wicked.” Events are things that happen in the story, or perhaps before the story, and affect the plot.



**Character    Thing    Place    Aspect    Event**

Separate your cards into six decks, one for the Ending cards and one each for the five Story card categories. You'll notice some of the Story cards say “Interrupt” on them at the bottom. We'll be using them for something else; the Interrupt is a function in the game play that we won't use in crafting a story with them.





# Functions of the Folktale

The second thing you need, after your *Once Upon A Time* cards, is a list of Vladimir Propp's Functions of the Folktale.

Vladimir Propp (1895-1970) was a Russian folklorist. He was concerned that the study of folklore could not go forward scientifically without a proper system of classification, and the systems of classification in use at the time seemed flawed to him. Previous classifications had been based on content or motif, but Propp noted that (as an example) a story involving a bear tricking someone was apt to get classified differently than a story about the devil tricking someone in the exact same way. What he proposed to study, and published in his book *Morphology of the Folktale*, was what he called the "functions" of the story. These were specific plot points involving the characters that were used over and over again in Russian fairy tales. A tale didn't have to have all thirty-one functions, but they all had some, and regardless of which ones and how many, they always appeared in the same order.

Propp also defined a number of different roles within the tale, which he called the "dramatis personae." (You may also see this term applied to the list of characters in a play.) Before looking at the functions it's important to note that Propp believed that one character could fulfill several dramatis personae roles, so that if Adam were tricked by Paul into going on a quest, Adam is all at once the hero, the victim, and the seeker, for example.

## The 31 Functions

You'll find a list of Propp's Functions of the Folktale at the back of this handbook in Appendix C, with a brief discussion of each. They're also readily available online.

## Building the Framework

Once you have your *Once Upon a Time* cards separated, shuffle the decks and choose one card from each. I've drawn the following cards to use as our example:

Character: Guard

Thing: Food

Event: Planning

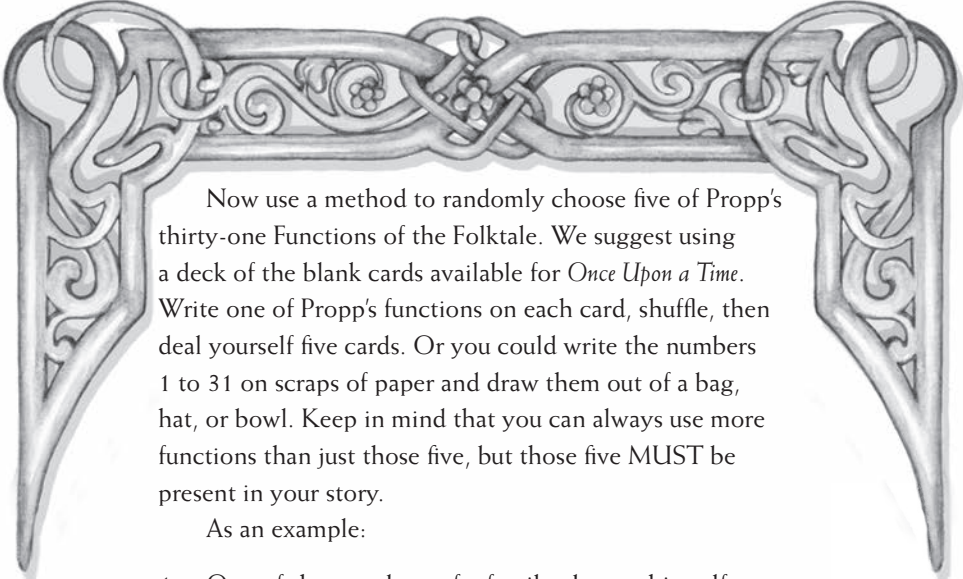
Place: Cottage

Aspect: Sad

Ending: His wound was healed but his heart remained broken forever.

Once Upon a Time





Now use a method to randomly choose five of Propp's thirty-one Functions of the Folktale. We suggest using a deck of the blank cards available for *Once Upon a Time*. Write one of Propp's functions on each card, shuffle, then deal yourself five cards. Or you could write the numbers 1 to 31 on scraps of paper and draw them out of a bag, hat, or bowl. Keep in mind that you can always use more functions than just those five, but those five **MUST** be present in your story.

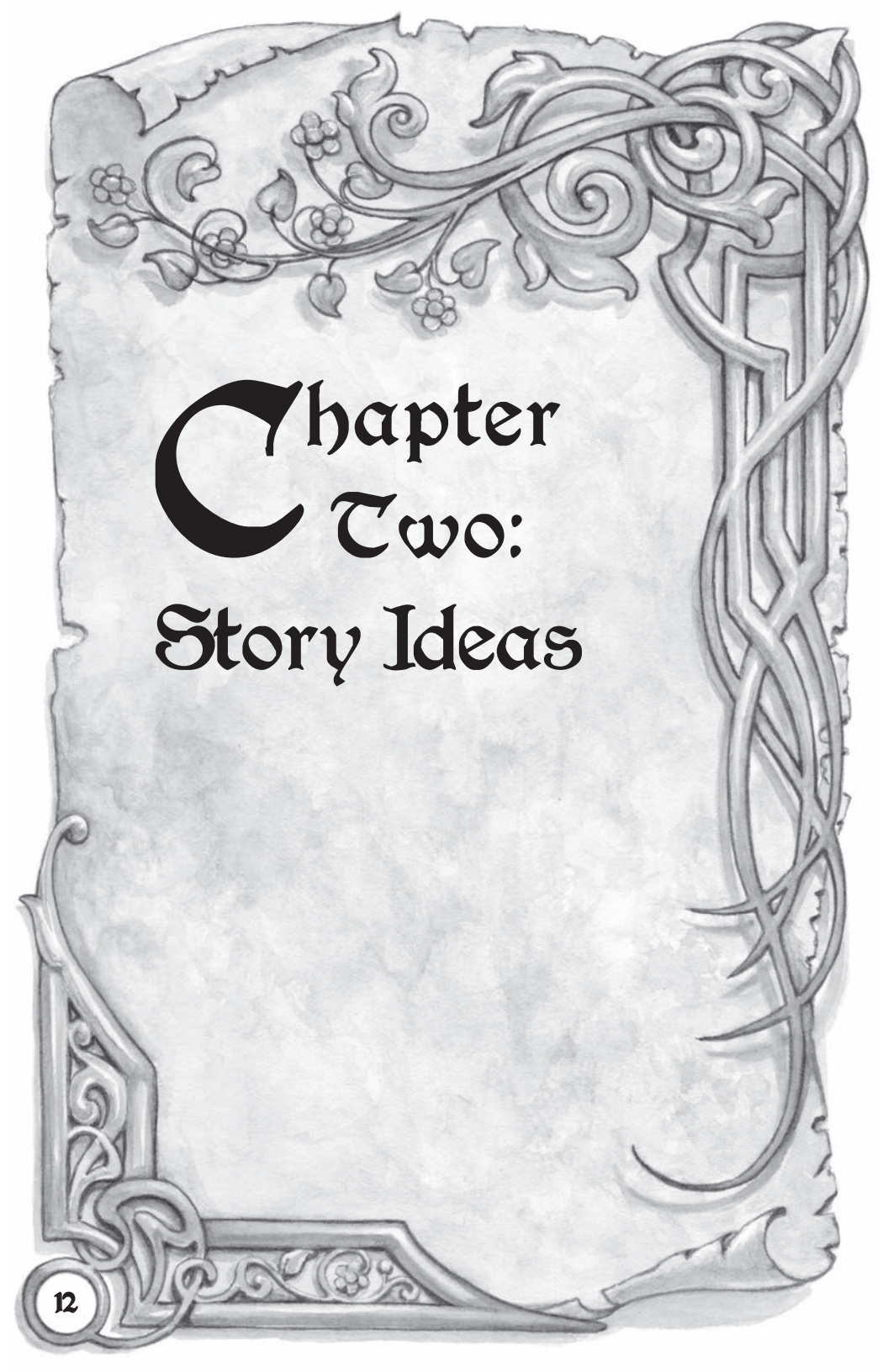
As an example:

- 1: One of the members of a family absents himself from home.
- 6: The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings.
- 15: The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search.
- 24: A false hero presents unfounded claims.
- 29: The hero is given a new appearance.

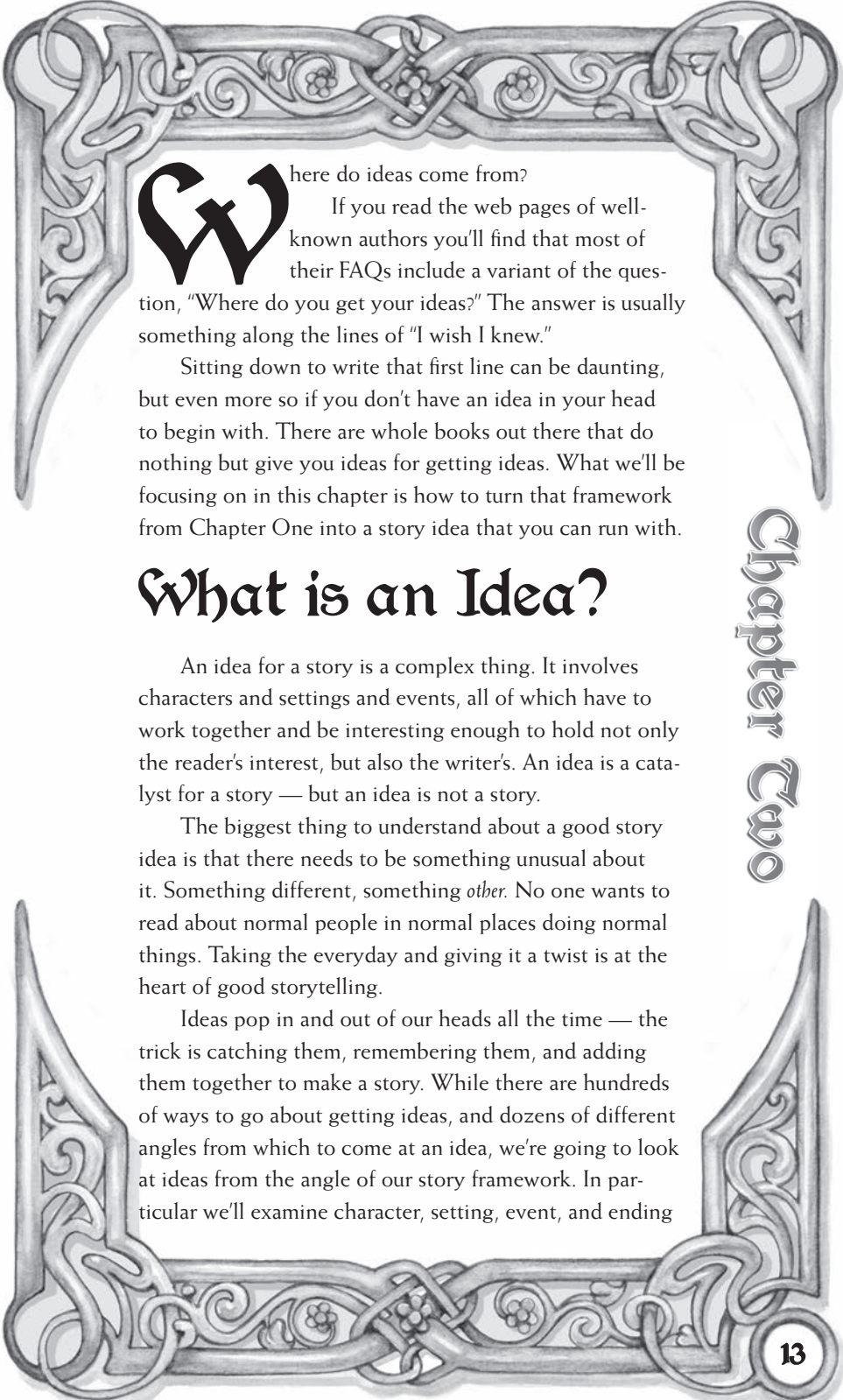
Now we have a framework for a story.

So ... now what?

# Chapter One

A decorative border surrounds the page, featuring intricate Celtic knotwork on the right and bottom edges, and floral motifs with small flowers and leaves on the top and bottom left corners. The background has a parchment-like texture.

# Chapter Two: Story Ideas



**W**here do ideas come from? If you read the web pages of well-known authors you'll find that most of their FAQs include a variant of the question, "Where do you get your ideas?" The answer is usually something along the lines of "I wish I knew."

Sitting down to write that first line can be daunting, but even more so if you don't have an idea in your head to begin with. There are whole books out there that do nothing but give you ideas for getting ideas. What we'll be focusing on in this chapter is how to turn that framework from Chapter One into a story idea that you can run with.

## What is an Idea?

An idea for a story is a complex thing. It involves characters and settings and events, all of which have to work together and be interesting enough to hold not only the reader's interest, but also the writer's. An idea is a catalyst for a story — but an idea is not a story.

The biggest thing to understand about a good story idea is that there needs to be something unusual about it. Something different, something *other*. No one wants to read about normal people in normal places doing normal things. Taking the everyday and giving it a twist is at the heart of good storytelling.

Ideas pop in and out of our heads all the time — the trick is catching them, remembering them, and adding them together to make a story. While there are hundreds of ways to go about getting ideas, and dozens of different angles from which to come at an idea, we're going to look at ideas from the angle of our story framework. In particular we'll examine character, setting, event, and ending

ideas, using the other *Once Upon a Time* cards and Propp's Functions of the Folktale to help add flavor.

Two phrases will help you make and grow ideas. You'll see them a lot in this chapter. They are, "what if?" and "maybe."

## Characters and Character Ideas

Characters are extremely important to your story. A story can have fabulous prose, incredible settings, and a gripping plot, but if the characters are flat, uninteresting, and unlikable you won't be able to hold the interest of your reader. We're going to spend a good portion of this chapter talking about character, as well as how to generate and refine ideas for characters.

### The Lead: Your Story's Lens

The main character or characters, also known as the lead or leads, are the lens through which your reader watches the story unfold. They are why your reader cares about the plot. You need to create sympathy between your reader and your lead so that the reader keeps reading. If your reader cares about your lead, the reader will want to find out what happens to him.

Most often a story's main character is a positive lead — a hero — but not all leads are heroes. A hero cares about his community and represents the values and morality of that community. The anti-hero is his opposite. The anti-hero believes that no one is on his side, so he is on no one's side but

his own. He is a loner, and he follows his own moral code. You can still use the same tools to create sympathy with your anti-hero as with a hero, but you'll be fighting against flaws that will encourage the reader to lose sympathy.

Below are four ways of creating sympathy between character and reader.

## Imminent Danger

This is one of the easiest, because your plot should involve conflict anyway. Your character should be in imminent danger of losing something of importance, whether it be a job, a friend, a home, a way of life, a set of values, or his own life. One important note: *your character cannot be weak*. No matter how big or small the conflict, your character must be strong and actively working against adversity. It's okay if your character isn't strong *enough* — in fact, it's preferable. This should be a real struggle, where the reader truly doesn't know if the character is going to be able to succeed.

## Hardship

Things haven't been easy for your character. He's had to struggle to get to where he is now. Characters that have already had to overcome adversity are inherently interesting, as long as they don't feel sorry for themselves. "Walking uphill both ways" is a cliché for a reason. Showing that your character has had or is still working to get past some hard knocks — particularly ones not of his own making — will generate sympathy as well as admiration.

## Identification

Like calls to like, as the saying goes. We tend to like things that we identify with ourselves — or at least the parts

of ourselves that we like. You can use this in a lot of ways. Your character can be an everyman thrown into extraordinary circumstance, or your character can be an extraordinary person having to deal with the same issues and problems that we all face. Either way, your reader will be able to say, "That's just like me." Two quick examples: Peter Parker — an everyday kid — suddenly gains possession of super powers; now he's Spider Man! And Superman, who has been an extraordinary person all his life, still falters trying to deal with love and relationships, and the awkwardness of dating.

## Virtue

We like people that have virtues we admire. Generosity. Honor. Humility. Compassion. Selflessness. Cleverness. These are all character traits that create sympathy — just don't overdo it. No one is perfect, and if your character is too saintly then your reader won't be able to identify with him. Give your character some faults to balance him out and make him believable.

## Villains: Characters We Love to hate

Your story may not have a villain or antagonist. The opposition your character faces may come from a force of nature or a looming disaster. But even in these types of stories, there's usually at least one other character who opposes the lead. Here are tools for making strong, believable opposition.

## Threat

If your villain is the one causing your lead to be in imminent danger, then the reader, if she has sufficient



sympathy for the lead, will already be predisposed to not like the villain. The more desperate the threat, the more she'll hate the villain.

While villains often can get away with being less believable than the lead, that's no excuse for a cardboard cutout "evil" villain. You should know why your villain is acting the way he is, and what he's trying to accomplish.

Keep in mind that, outside of the occasional crazy person, no one thinks of himself as "evil." They may not care about being good, but most antagonists are acting out of their own self-interest, or out of misguided belief. You may not like putting yourself in your villain's shoes, but understanding your antagonist's motivation will make for a believable, and ultimately more threatening, opposition.

## Unscrupulous

If your villain lies, cheats, or otherwise acts dishonorably, your reader will like him less — particularly if the act is completely selfishly motivated and/or it hurts someone else.

## Insane

Read up on this before you try it, but characters that are insane make easy villains. Look at the Joker as an example. He's certifiably nuts — and because of that, completely unpredictable. The reader fully believes the Joker is capable of *anything*, and that kind of irrational behavior scares the pants off of most folks. Because he's insane, he doesn't have to make sense. Now, depending on what kind of insanity your villain is afflicted with, you don't have to have him be quite as unredeemable as the Joker. You can even create some sympathy by having your character know he's got problems and trying to fight against it — but you'll never get the reader's full sympathy.

## Minor Characters

Your lead and your villain don't exist in a vacuum. There are other characters in the world around them, and in their past, who have a part to play in the story. These are the minor characters.

Some minor characters are with us so briefly they don't even need names. Crowds on streets. Store clerks. Taxi drivers. Waiters. These characters are almost more setting than character — and that's okay. These characters not only can be stereotypical, they probably should be. There's no need to distract the reader from the action by spending more time describing a character than it will take to describe what it is they're there to do. If all you need a waitress for is to drop off the bill and walk away, then you can leave it at that.

Other minor characters will have bigger roles to play. They'll need names, descriptions, and some background. These characters may only be in your story briefly, but they fill some need in the story. These characters can be a bit stereotypical, but the more important the minor character and the more "face time" they have in your story, the more fleshed out they should be.

## Character Ideas

Many people find it easiest to start with a character idea. There's something about this character that makes him special — there has to be, or why would anyone care to read about him? Even if what makes the character special is something outside of the character himself — a special item, or a strange event, or a unique place — often writers come at the story from the character

point of view. For example, let's say you have a character who is pyrokinetic — she can set things on fire just by thinking about it. That's a character idea, but not a story idea. To make it a story idea, you have to ask questions: What happens to this character? Where and when does she live? Who are this character's friends? Does she have any enemies?

By answering some or all of those questions, you'll begin to make a story. By asking more questions, you'll clarify the story, as well as the character, the setting, and the events.

If you have a hard time coming up with characters, there are a number of exercises to help you. Two easy ones are below. Then, once you have the start of a character, flesh it out. Particularly with main characters it's important to know a lot more about them than will ever be put in the story. The more you know about your character, the more real he'll be to you, and the more real he'll seem to your reader. You'll find that your characters will be more believable and more consistent.

### People-Watching

Go to a crowded place, like a mall or a park, where you can sit and observe people. Pick a person and start making up things about her. What's her name? Why is she here? What does she do for a living, or what does she want to do when she's older? What was her childhood like? Don't pick the first thing that pops into your head — it's probably something fairly boring. Exaggerate. Make up something really outlandish. No matter how bizarre you get, you can always pick out one really unique characteristic if it strikes your fancy, and build a more believable character around that trait later.

## Familiar Inspiration

Pick a friend, relative, or acquaintance. What two or three characteristics define him the most? Is he lazy, generous, forgetful, delicate, rowdy? Take those few defining traits, exaggerate them, and then change everything else.

You don't want to write about characters who too closely resemble real people, though. No matter how true-to-life you start out writing the character, inevitably he'll think thoughts or take actions that your friend would not. If your character is too recognizable, then your friend is very likely to be insulted or hurt, or even angry that "you got me wrong."

## Characters in 3D

Your characters should be three-dimensional. Those three dimensions are past, present, and future. Your characters should have a past, which shaped them into who they are now. Your characters should have a present — a social circle, a home, an occupation, hobbies, and so on. And your characters should have a future that they're working toward. They need to have wants and goals, dreams and ambitions.

## The Past

When was your character born, and where did he grow up? Although these might just as well be setting questions, they will also have a huge impact on your character's beliefs and experiences.

How does your character feel about his past? Has his life been happy, sad, tragic, indifferent? What events have shaped your character's beliefs and personality?

## The Present

What does your character look like? Note that *this doesn't necessarily need to be included in your story*, particularly in short stories. Unless a character's physical description has an impact on the story or otherwise adds to the narrative, skip it. That's no excuse for you to not have a good idea of what your character looks like, though. After all, you don't want to make the mistake of calling his eyes blue in one paragraph, and green in a later one. If it's important to describe your character, try to work it in a little at a time. Avoid having your characters describe themselves all at once by looking at their own image, as well.

Where and when does your character live at the time the story takes place?

What does your character do for a living? If your character is a student, what kind of student is he? How does your character feel about his job/school?

What is your character's greatest virtue, and what is his worst flaw?

What are your character's hobbies? How did he get started with those hobbies?

How would your character respond to the question, "What is the meaning of life?"

## The Future

What is your character's driving goal? What obstacles must the character overcome to achieve this goal? How likely is he to succeed?

Where does your character see himself in five years? Ten years? Twenty?

## Brainstorming: Characters

Let's start building some characters based on the *Once Upon a Time* cards we drew in the last chapter. Our Character card was a guard. Well, what does he guard? Is he a guard in a dungeon? Maybe he's a guard on a prison planet. Or perhaps guard is not his profession — maybe he's the guardian of someone or something. How does the character change if she is female instead of male?

Now let's consider some of the other cards we have.

*Thing: Food.* Why would someone guard food? Maybe the prison planet guard mentioned above has to keep the inmates from getting into the supplies. Or maybe our character is the guardian some sort of extraordinary food, like a tree with magical fruit, and now some Indiana Jones type of character has come to try and steal the fruit. *That's* a story idea. Flesh out the idea by asking yourself what the magical fruit does, why someone would want it, when and where your story takes place, etc. This could be a serious story, or a complete parody told from the point of view of the natives from whom the treasure hunter is stealing.

*Place: Cottage.* A guard at a cottage? What would need guarding at a cottage? If the cottage was part of a farm, then animals, I suppose. That's kind of boring though. Maybe our character is a guard on a merchant caravan come to trade with the farmers. Or perhaps the character lived in the cottage, but ran away with the merchant caravan. Or let's go back to the prison planet guard. Maybe the guard works on a farm. Maybe the prison planet is self-sufficient, and so of course would need farms or some other food source, and those resources would certainly be guarded.



# Setting Ideas

Sometimes an idea for a particular setting will strike you. Imagine a castle in the mountains, or a lush forest filled with strange creatures, or a building with a mind of its own. Your setting can be as prosaic as your own back yard — but if it is, something really interesting had better happen there.

Settings often get skimmed on, especially in short stories. While there are some stories that focus more on the setting than any other single aspect — what Orson Scott Card calls “milieu” stories in his book *Characters & Viewpoint* — for the most part, settings tend to, well, fade into the background.

If your story is only a few pages long, spending a lot of time on the setting is probably not your best option unless you’re writing a milieu story, wherein the whole point is to explore some strange or new setting. You still have to have characters and plot, but the setting is the star of the show. If you’re not writing a milieu story, then you need to let the audience know what the setting is, but you don’t have to spend a lot of time on it unless it’s pertinent to your story.

Some story settings are archetypal, and so need very little explanation. Myths and fairy tales embody a lot of those archetypes. Castles, dark forests, caves, long winding roads — we don’t really need more of an explanation than that. We’re already primed for that setting. Unless there’s something particularly special about the setting (and putting a new twist on the familiar is part of what fiction is all about), we don’t need a lot of detail because we already know it. The longer your story is, though, the less

this is true, and the more detail you should try to work in.

Stories set in the modern day tend to skim on setting. Everyone knows what small town America looks like, right? Well, no — only people who have ever been in small town America know that, which leaves out a huge chunk of the English-reading population on this planet, and that's assuming that your story isn't translated into another language. Does someone in Barcelona know what small town America is like? What about someone in Argentina, or New Zealand? Is your small town on the East Coast, or in the South, or maybe the Midwest? All of these places have their own flavor and cultural idiosyncrasies. Work those in where you can. Your setting will seem a lot more believable — and a whole lot richer.

Which of the following two sentences is more appealing to you?

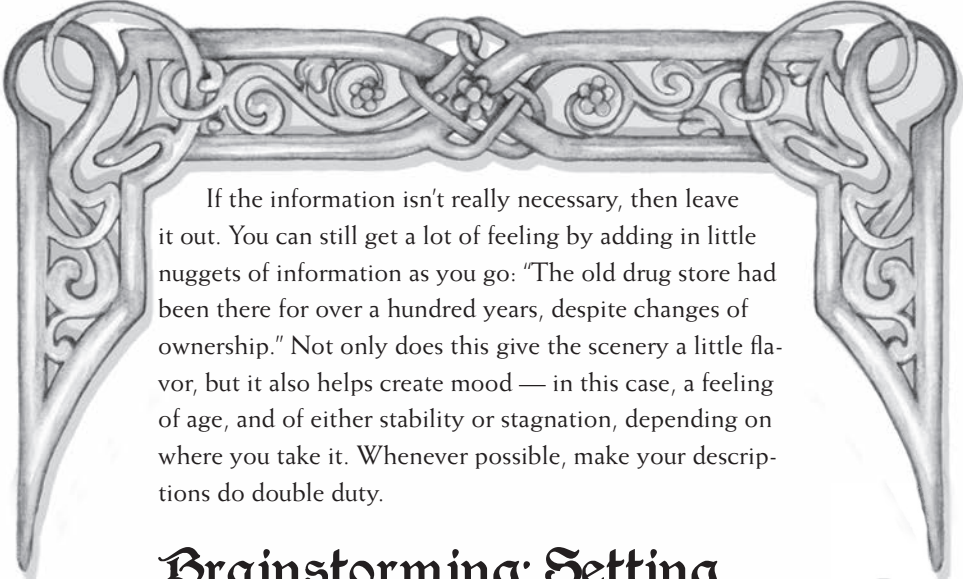
**Example A:** "She walked down the street and went into the store."

**Example B:** "She walked past the old Post Office, which was now a beauty salon for dogs, and went into Miller's Grocery."

With just a few words, the audience gets a setting that feels more real and vibrant. And now that I've said that, I'll tell you this: Don't overdo it.

It can be a tough balancing act, and it takes practice to master, but while you don't want your story floating in a bland settingless void, you also don't want to spend a lot of time describing the scenery either. If it's important to the story to explain that the town was founded in 1847 by tobacco farmers, great. Make it interesting and try to drop in the information a piece at a time. Stopping to describe something is just that — stopping. You want to keep your story moving as much as possible. More on that in the next chapter.





If the information isn't really necessary, then leave it out. You can still get a lot of feeling by adding in little nuggets of information as you go: "The old drug store had been there for over a hundred years, despite changes of ownership." Not only does this give the scenery a little flavor, but it also helps create mood — in this case, a feeling of age, and of either stability or stagnation, depending on where you take it. Whenever possible, make your descriptions do double duty.

## Brainstorming: Setting

Now let's try and come up with some story ideas by thinking about our Setting card from *Once Upon a Time*: a cottage. First, where is this cottage? Is it on Earth? Is it on another planet? Let's say Mars. What might a cottage on Mars be like, and who would live there? Now let's say the cottage is on Earth — but when? Is this a cottage from the dark ages? Ancient times? Modern? Where on Earth is the cottage located? Is this a cottage in medieval Ireland, or in ancient Rome?

With the idea pump primed, let's look at some of our other cards.

*Thing: Food.* A cottage combined with food immediately makes me think of a farm. Maybe the inmates on the prison planet work on a farm, and the guard character is employed by the prison. The guards would, of course, have their own cottages separate from the prison. One imagines that there would be at least a small colony of non-inmates to staff the place, with their families and such. Perhaps the inmates grow the food that sustains the colony.

*Event: Planning.* The first things that come to mind are fairly mundane. But then, you could look at John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* as a story about a farm and a plan — two men with a plan, a dream really, of their own

farm someday. The story is in how they have this goal — there's one dimension of your characters, the future — but they keep getting hung up in the present, and the goal moves further and further out of reach.

## Event Ideas

Events. Happenings. Action!

Events can be great catalysts for story ideas. You can come up with hundreds of ideas by just going through your normal day and thinking, "What if things happened differently?"

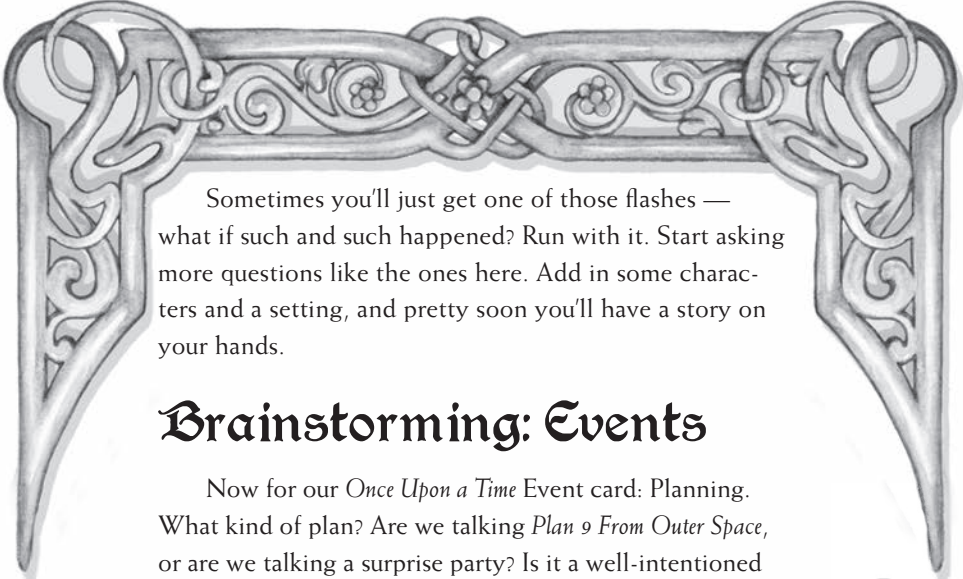
What if the guy ahead of you in line tripped and fell face first in his lunch tray?

What if the car driving ahead of you suddenly stopped and the people all opened their doors and ran?

What if you saw shadows moving through that old abandoned house?

Write the questions down, each on their own sheet of paper. Then just keep asking questions until you find conflict. Once you find a conflict, you're on your way to a scene. Ask questions like: If this happened another way, why did it happen that way? What has to be different in order for that to happen? What other things would change because of this event? How would people react to the event? What will be the lasting consequences of the new event? What conflict does this event create, and between whom?

As an example, you see the people go running from their car. Why did they do that? Will you, driving behind them, be able to stop in time? Will you smash into their car, or one of them? Either way, will you stop, or will you keep driving? Or were you standing on the street instead? Will you approach the car, or try to talk to one of the people?



Sometimes you'll just get one of those flashes — what if such and such happened? Run with it. Start asking more questions like the ones here. Add in some characters and a setting, and pretty soon you'll have a story on your hands.

## Brainstorming: Events

Now for our *Once Upon a Time* Event card: Planning. What kind of plan? Are we talking *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, or are we talking a surprise party? Is it a well-intentioned plan that goes awry (and can be saved in the nick of time), or an evil plot that needs to be foiled?

If we pair up the plan with our Thing card, a food, and our Character card, a guard, we can still work with the magical fruit tree storyline — surely our intrepid treasure hunter has a plan to get past the guardians of the tree. Or maybe they have a clever plan to thwart his attempts.

We can also work the plan into our prison planet story. Surely the prisoners, kept weak and controllable by being underfed, would come up with a plan to steal food from the highly guarded farms? Or maybe one of the guards, tired of seeing these people reduced to slave labor on the farm, plans to sabotage the perimeter so the resistance leaders can sneak in?

Or let's try something we haven't done yet — matching up a card to one of Propp's Functions of the Folktale. 6: The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings. That sounds like a plan to me. Say our guard is taking the role of the victim in this case, and the possession at stake is a cottage. Who is the villain? Why does he want the cottage? What is his plan — how does he attempt to deceive the guard, and how does deceiving the guard help the villain toward his goal?

## Ending Ideas

For some writers, the easiest way to come up with a story idea is to work backwards from the ending. You have a vague idea about how the story should end, but you're not sure how to get there.

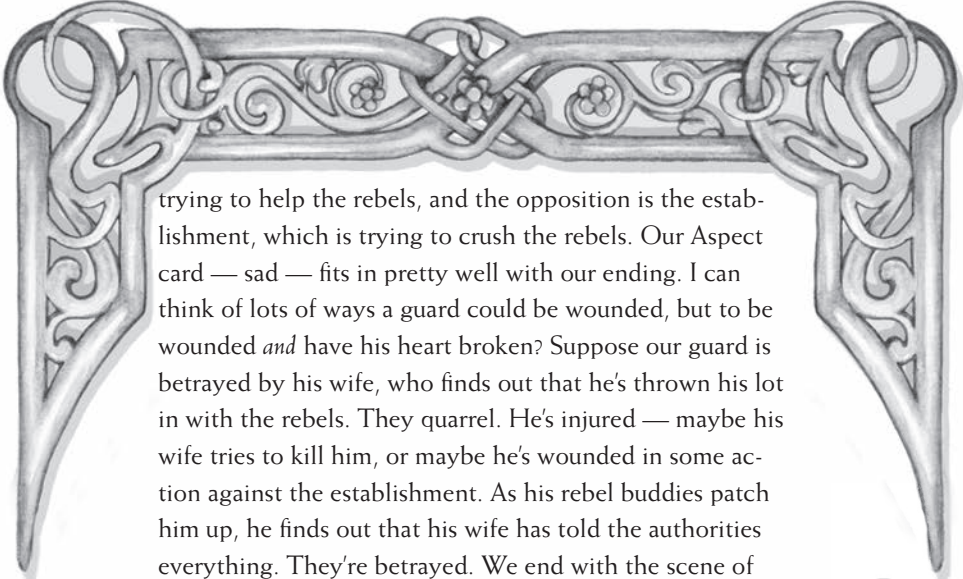
Let's say you want to write the prison planet story. You have some idea of a setting, but what really grips you is the idea of the ending — the main character looking up as the intergalactic police ships descend, knowing that he's thrown away his career and probably his life in joining the rebellious underground, because they can't possibly stand against the forces now arrayed against them.

Great! You have a gut-wrenching ending. Now you need to figure out what happened before all that. You do that by — you guessed it — asking questions. Who is your lead, and what is his objective? Who is the opposition, and what is their objective? What other characters are needed? What is the conflict? What stands between each character and his or her objective?

## Brainstorming: The Ending

We'll use our Ending card from *Once Upon a Time* as an example: His wound was healed but his heart remained broken forever.

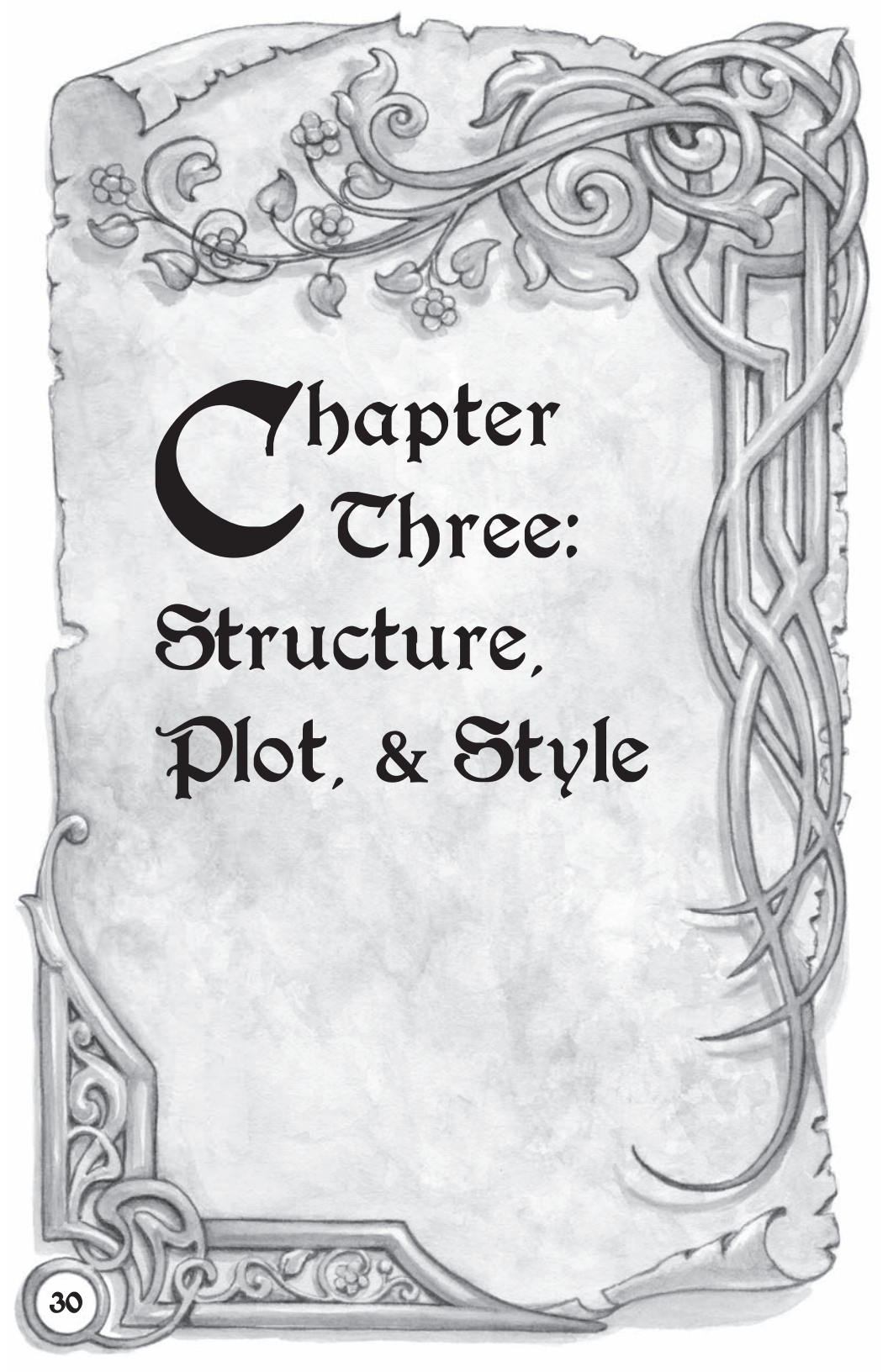
Well, we've got a lead character already — "he." Who is he? Why is his heart so irreparably broken? What kind of wound did he receive, and how? We can start working in the other cards and Propp's Functions of the Folktale as we brainstorm. We'll say "he" is our guard character who is



trying to help the rebels, and the opposition is the establishment, which is trying to crush the rebels. Our Aspect card — sad — fits in pretty well with our ending. I can think of lots of ways a guard could be wounded, but to be wounded *and* have his heart broken? Suppose our guard is betrayed by his wife, who finds out that he's thrown his lot in with the rebels. They quarrel. He's injured — maybe his wife tries to kill him, or maybe he's wounded in some action against the establishment. As his rebel buddies patch him up, he finds out that his wife has told the authorities everything. They're betrayed. We end with the scene of the "peace-keeping" invasion force beginning to land, and our lead knowing that he will never see his wife again.

Or let's take another tack, and jump back to what we were doing earlier with function 6. We have a guard and a villain, and the villain is attempting to deceive our lead in order to get possession of the farm that the cottage is a part of. Now, how can we work the ending in? If our lead, the guard, has his heart broken, how likely is it that he succeeded in stopping the villain? How does one get possession of a farm? Inheritance? That's not usually something you can deceive someone about — although there are certainly possibilities there. What about inheritance via marriage? Maybe the guard and the villain are both wooing the daughter — and only child — of the farm's owner. The guard and the villain fight, and the guard is wounded, but the villain still gets the girl in the end.

There's still refining to be done, and we have to work in the rest of the functions. But with either of these examples we'd be on our way to turning an idea into a story.



Chapter  
Three:  
Structure,  
Plot, & Style

**A**n idea is not a story. You can have the most wonderful idea on the planet, but it won't be a story until you've worked out three important things: the beginning, the middle, and the end. That is the story's *structure*. Once you have the broad structure in place, you fill in what actually happens in the story. Those events, combined, are the *plot*. The way you tell the story — what you choose to include, the voice you write with, the view-point, the mood — is the *style*. In this chapter we'll look at all of these aspects of writing, and we'll use these tools to turn our story ideas into plots.

## Structure

The structure is the very basic bones of your story. You should be able to sum up your main storyline in three sentences covering the beginning, the middle, and the end. This doesn't have to be pretty, because odds are no one is going to see this but you. Set the stage, explain the conflict, and give the resolution.

I'll start with our examples from the end of the last chapter:

*Guard is working on a farm on a prison planet. Guard joins secret rebellion against authority. Guard is betrayed by Wife and rebellion is crushed.*

*Guard and Villain both want to marry farmer's daughter. Villain attempts to trick Guard so that Villain succeeds. Villain gets the girl and Guard's heart is broken.*

You may be thinking, I just figured all that out in the last chapter, why do I need to do it again? The reason is that often when you're kicking ideas around, you aren't

writing them down. Depending on the length and complexity of your story, it can be easy to lose sight of what the main plotline is. Maybe you've gotten so caught up with the relationship between the prison guard and the charismatic leader of the rebellion that you've totally lost track of what's supposed to be happening. Going back to those initial three sentences can help clarify things. That's not to say you can't have side plots and character development and other things — but all of that needs to be secondary to your main storyline.

## Beginnings

The beginning is where you let the reader know who the story is about and what the setting is. Start off your story with one of your main characters. Place him in time and space. Show the beginning of the conflict that's central to your story.

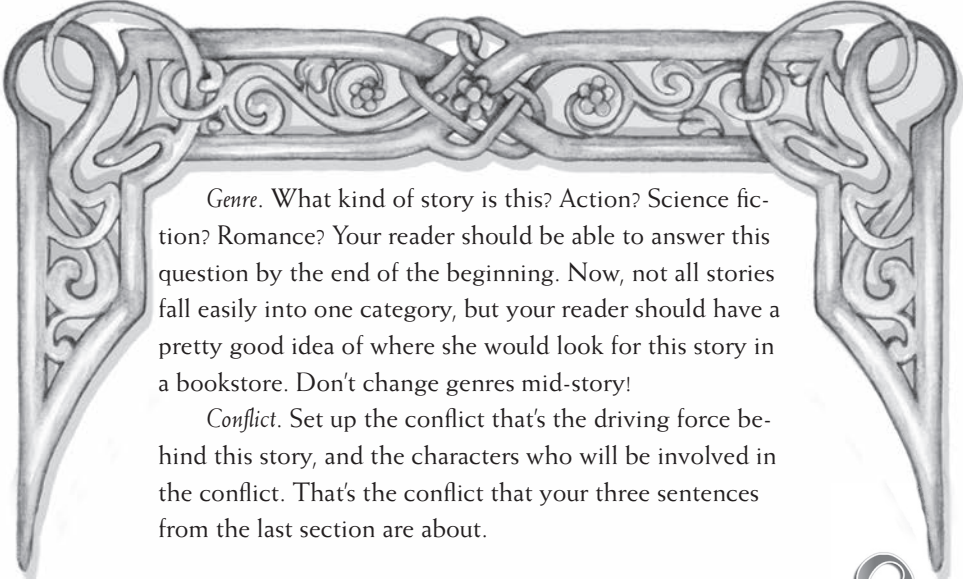
## Expectations

What you're doing here is what's sometimes called the promise or the contract. You're making a contract between yourself and the reader for, or you're promising her, a certain kind of story. You're setting the reader's expectations. These expectations are set at the very beginning of the story and must be adhered to throughout, or your reader will feel you pulled a fast one on her.

Expectations you need to set for your reader at the beginning include:

*Tone.* You need to set the overall tone and stick to it. That doesn't mean you can't have lighthearted moments in a dark story or vice versa, but it means that *overall* your story maintains one mood.





*Genre.* What kind of story is this? Action? Science fiction? Romance? Your reader should be able to answer this question by the end of the beginning. Now, not all stories fall easily into one category, but your reader should have a pretty good idea of where she would look for this story in a bookstore. Don't change genres mid-story!

*Conflict.* Set up the conflict that's the driving force behind this story, and the characters who will be involved in the conflict. That's the conflict that your three sentences from the last section are about.

## Hooks

A common belief among novice writers is that you have to spend a good chunk of time on the characters and setting before getting to the conflict. This is completely untrue. The sooner you can get to conflict — maybe not *the* conflict, but conflict — the more interested your readers will be. Start your story at an action point. Introduce us to your character while the character is in action.

Arguably one of the most important parts of your story is the very first part. This is called the "hook." The hook does to your readers exactly what it does to fish — catches them so you, the writer, can reel them in.

Hone your first paragraph. Read it to yourself and think, if I were in a bookstore and I picked up this story and read the first paragraph, would I be interested enough to keep on reading? If the answer is no or maybe, keep working on that paragraph.

Here are some tips for great hooks:

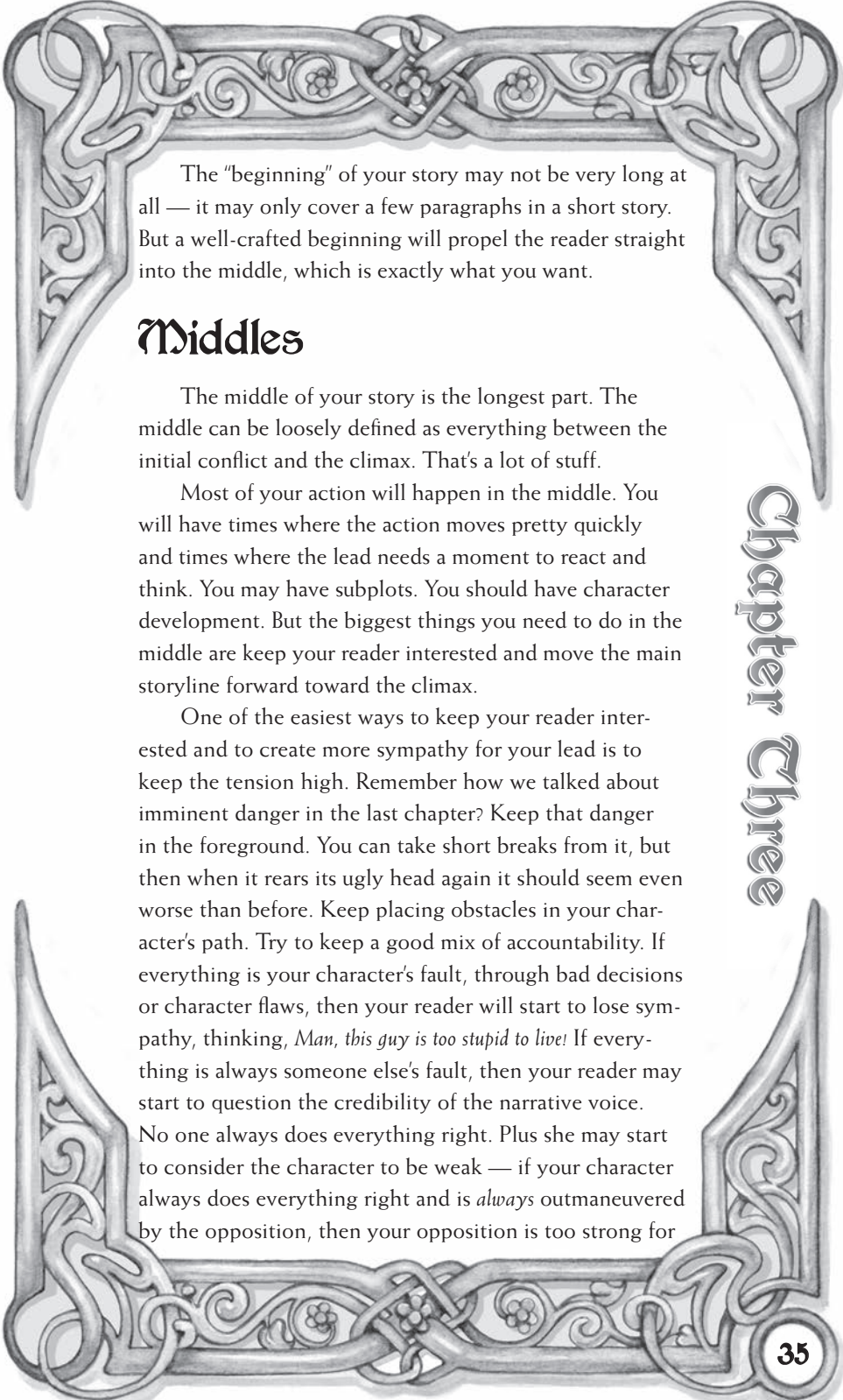
*Create human interest.* Start with a character, preferably a main character unless you're using a prologue. (Prologues can get away with using characters and settings quite different from the rest of the story, as long as it's worked in at

some point.) Use the tools we discussed in the last chapter to start building sympathy between your character and your reader right away.

*Set the mood.* You don't *have* to start with a character, although that can be a very effective hook. Another way is to use description (briefly!) to set the mood. If you start out with a paragraph describing a dusty street, with nary a breeze to ruffle the stagnant water in the rotting flower boxes, before moving on to a paragraph about what the importance of this place is, you have immediately set the tone of your story as a possibly hopeless struggle for change or growth against stasis and death.

*Start in medias res.* The term *in medias res* is Latin for "in the middle of things." It's a literary concept used to describe when a story or story section starts in the middle of the action, with no explanation. Work in the explanation as you go. You can also flash back to the beginning of the conflict after hooking your reader with the immediate action, but be aware that flashbacks have a cost — they stop the current action. As much as possible, you want to keep the action moving. For examples of how flashbacks can be used effectively in very different ways, read Robin McKinley's *The Hero and the Crown* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*.

*Introduce a disturbance.* Even for stories about extraordinary characters, your story should be about an extraordinary time for them. Start off your story with a disturbance in the normal routine. Things may have been building for a while, but the moment when the normal routine is shattered is the moment when the conflict *really* begins. That disturbance can be as small as a letter in the mail or a knock at the door, or it can be as unexpected as a car accident. The point is that something has changed, and your character has to react.



The “beginning” of your story may not be very long at all — it may only cover a few paragraphs in a short story. But a well-crafted beginning will propel the reader straight into the middle, which is exactly what you want.

## Middles

The middle of your story is the longest part. The middle can be loosely defined as everything between the initial conflict and the climax. That’s a lot of stuff.

Most of your action will happen in the middle. You will have times where the action moves pretty quickly and times where the lead needs a moment to react and think. You may have subplots. You should have character development. But the biggest things you need to do in the middle are keep your reader interested and move the main storyline forward toward the climax.

One of the easiest ways to keep your reader interested and to create more sympathy for your lead is to keep the tension high. Remember how we talked about imminent danger in the last chapter? Keep that danger in the foreground. You can take short breaks from it, but then when it rears its ugly head again it should seem even worse than before. Keep placing obstacles in your character’s path. Try to keep a good mix of accountability. If everything is your character’s fault, through bad decisions or character flaws, then your reader will start to lose sympathy, thinking, *Man, this guy is too stupid to live!* If everything is always someone else’s fault, then your reader may start to question the credibility of the narrative voice. No one always does everything right. Plus she may start to consider the character to be weak — if your character always does everything right and is *always* outmaneuvered by the opposition, then your opposition is too strong for

your character. This also has implications for the ending; more on that in a minute. Your lead should make progress and have setbacks. Some of that movement should be because of the lead's efforts, and some should be due to the opposition, and a little (but only a little!) should be just plain chance.

You can also create sympathy and develop your character by having your character, who is dealing with this extraordinary circumstance, have to deal with normal life as well. Life doesn't stop so you can have a crisis — you still have to make rent, as it were. A little bit of the mundane can be a nice juxtaposition, as well as an opportunity to drop in some more information.

Things to keep in mind as you work through the middle:

What's the objective of your lead? What's the objective of your opposition?

What's keeping your lead or your opposition from abandoning the conflict? How can you show the reader how important this is to your characters?

How can you make things more difficult for the lead?

Throughout the middle of your story, you need to be working toward the climax, which is where the lead confronts the opposition.

## Endings

This is it. The big showdown.

A great ending can save a weak story, but a good beginning and middle can be completely ruined by a bad ending.

The ending is, of course, the reader's last impression of your story. If your reader is satisfied by the ending, she'll probably feel satisfied by the story as a whole. The same is true if she's dissatisfied.

Endings have two parts — the climax and the wrap-up.

## The Climax

The climax is what you've been working toward since you started this story. This is where you fulfill that conflict expectation set way back at the beginning. We've been watching these opposing forces maneuvering and struggling against each other for the whole story. The tension should be at its highest point now!

If you've set up a big explosive confrontation, *you must deliver a big explosive confrontation*. You can't have the hero and the villain get drunk and maudlin and make up their differences, and now they're best friends. You set the expectation, made the promise, agreed to the contract — now you have to fulfill it. Fulfilling expectations is the biggest step toward a good ending and a happy reader.

Now, that does *not* mean you have to be cliché, or obvious, or that you're stuck with just one ending. Sure, you figured out your ending back before you started writing — but that doesn't mean you can't change your mind if something better presents itself. You just have to make sure that it fits your story, or you have to make your story fit it during revision. By this point, your audience should be rooting for your lead, they should be hoping your lead will succeed in achieving his goal, and they should be uncertain as to whether your lead will succeed.

Also keep in mind that just because your lead achieves his goal doesn't mean that the eventual outcome is positive, just as failing in a goal doesn't always turn out badly.

## The Wrap-Up

Most stories end just after the climax, although some may continue on for a while. After the climax comes the wrap-up. This is where the immediate aftereffects of the

climax are felt and reacted to by the characters. This is also where you tie up all the remaining loose ends in your story, such as subplots and personal revelations.

That means that the wrap-up is the true end of your story, unless you have an epilogue. And as the true end, it needs to give a sense of closure. Your ending should give your reader a feeling of completeness and satisfaction, even if the future of the main characters is uncertain.

Unfortunately, good endings can be really hard to write. You want your ending to be a surprise — or at least, your reader should have some serious doubt about how this is going to end up — but how do you do that when it seems like everything you think of has already been done a hundred times?

Here's some advice for great endings.

*Keep the tension and uncertainty high throughout the middle and into the climax.* There needs to be a very real chance that your lead will fail in achieving his goal — but there also needs to be a realistic hope of succeeding. If your lead has been beaten down and defeated at every turn, but then wins the final battle, you risk your reader's disbelief.

*Beware of convenience.* If something is convenient for you, it's probably bad for your story. Challenge yourself. Just because something "could" happen that way doesn't make it believable. Even if it really happened to you that way, it doesn't matter. Truth is sometimes stranger than fiction, because no one reading it as fiction would believe it.

*Don't leave your readers in the dark about crucial details.* Readers hate nothing more than reading a good mystery story, only to have the reveal at the end involve either a character or a piece of evidence that had never been previously introduced. Find a way to work that information into the beginning or the middle. Challenge yourself to find a way to do it that is unobtrusive enough that it doesn't scream, "Big clue here!"

*Resolve both the action and the emotion.* Odds are your reader has come to care for your characters. You need to resolve the climax of the story emotionally as well as structurally. Even if your lead failed in his goal, if we see how he has changed in the course of pursuing that goal then we can be satisfied, as long as the change resonates with the rest of the story. If your character achieved his goal, we need to see how this affects him emotionally as well as within the storyline.

*Your ending doesn't have to be fluffy bunnies and sunshine.* If the tone of your book is dark and foreboding, then the ending should also have dark and foreboding elements. Don't suddenly change to, "And then everything was right with the world." It will derail your reader. Maybe everything isn't all okay yet, but there is hope, and the way is clear for your characters to move toward that better future.

## Plot

Developing your plot involves decisions about outlining, theme, and scenes, which are discussed here.

## Outlining and You

Some writers are very much proponents of using outlines. They feel you absolutely cannot put together a coherent narrative without first plotting things out on paper. They want to know exactly who did what and when before they sit down to start writing the story.

Other writers are just as firmly in the no-outline camp. They believe that the story has to grow organically as you write, that writing is a process of discovery and the plot is just the trail you leave behind you as you go. They

wouldn't dream of constraining their creativity by making decisions beforehand.

Depending on the individual, both strategies are valid. And then, there are the people in the middle.

One imagines that the majority of writers would fall somewhere in the middle, on a bell curve with "Outline" at one end and "No Outline" at the other. You might just write out the three sentences of the basic structure, or you might go so far as to write out a detailed outline, covering not only the main storyline but all the subplots as well. Figure out what works best for you. The only way to do that is to write, write, write.

### Spontaneity ...

For those of you to whom outlining comes naturally, try taking a walk on the wild side as a creative writing practice. Start off with an interesting hook and just run with it without planning anything. It may be rambling, but it may turn in a direction you never would have expected.

The advantage of working with no outline is the complete freedom to let the story grow in the way that feels most natural at the time. The disadvantage is that oftentimes you write for hours only to finally decide that the direction you're going in just isn't working. It can be heartbreaking to lose several hours' worth of work, but in the process you may open up ideas and directions you wouldn't have thought of otherwise.

### ... Versus Security

The advantage of working with an outline is security. You've figured this all out ahead of time, and there should be no surprises or wasted prose. You'll know that your plot is solid, using all the tools we'll be covering in the



rest of this section. The disadvantage is the very lack of spontaneity that can create wonderful plotting surprises. Sometimes as you write you get an idea that would never have presented itself to you as you carefully drew up your outline. Many outline people will discard this new idea if it doesn't fit into their existing outline. Instead, try stopping and making a new outline. What would change if you went down this new road? Would it make your overall story stronger, or weaker? Which of the two outlines sounds more interesting and innovative? Or, rather than stopping to outline, run with the new idea and see where it takes you, and then see if a new outline presents itself, or if you can work this new angle into your original plan. Worst case, you can always go back, cut and paste the experiment into a new document, and continue the story with the outline you had already worked out.

Don't just delete that experimental text, though. Save it. Time spent writing is never wasted. You may decide later that this would make an interesting story on its own, and if nothing else you'll find it useful to go back and review the work you did. What worked with the section, and what didn't? How could you have used that idea in another way in your story and made it work? How could you take that idea and make a new story out of it?

## Theme

The first step to outlining your plot is to figure out what happens. That sounds straightforward, but it can be harder than you think.

We'll use the prison planet idea as an example.

We have our three-sentence structure: Guard works on farm on prison planet. Guard joins rebellion. Guard is betrayed.

What's the conflict? There are actually several: the conflict between the rebellion and the establishment, the conflict between the guard and his wife, and the inner conflict between duty and desire. Which one of these is the *main* conflict? Since the story is about the guard, and not about the rebellion as a whole, the conflict between the rebellion and the establishment is actually a subplot. Either of the other two conflicts could be the main conflict, depending on how you want the story to go.

We've come to the point now where we have to choose our theme. Regardless of whether you're an outline person or a no-outline person, your story has a theme. You may not know what your theme is until you finish the story, but you'll find once you go back and read it that the theme has been there all along.

In this example, two obvious theme choices are:

**Theme A:** Love does not conquer all.

**Theme B:** Morality versus security.

If you wanted to use theme A, you could spend time in scenes between the guard and his wife, focusing on their relationship. Do they both really love each other, or is this relationship one sided? If they do love each other, how can you show that the rebellion versus establishment conflict is more important to them than their relationship? If you use theme B, you could develop scenes where the guard shows how strong his commitment to the rebellion is, or how much he's come to despise or distrust the establishment and why. Build a sense of tragedy by having the guard consider all he has to lose. Why risk his life and all he's worked for? And for both themes, will the risk be worth it in the end, even though he fails?

Once you've picked a theme, consciously or unconsciously, you can start planning your scenes.

## Scenes

A scene is where we're either shown or told about the characters and what they're doing. This is because scenes are where the bulk of your story happens. Your scenes are either going to be about action, or about reaction.

### Showing Versus Telling

Often scenes happen in real time, where the reader gets to see everything "as it happens." This is called "showing." At other times you'll want to convey information through exposition, in which the writer summarizes what happened. This is called "telling."

You'll hear the advice, "Show, don't tell," often in writing books and classes. That's because showing is much more interesting and engaging for the reader, and also because novice writers tend to tell more than they show. Showing is harder and takes time and more words.

**Telling:** "She was scared."

**Showing:** "Her knees were trembling so badly she didn't dare take a step. Cold sweat dotted her brow, and she swallowed audibly."

Whenever there's good tension and action, show.  
Whenever there's not, tell.

If your character is driving cross country, the reader doesn't need to be "shown" hours and hours of road going by when nothing more important is happening than the character getting from point A to point B. That kind of showing is deadly for your story. Instead, summarize the boring parts and move on to the next scene.

There will be a certain amount of telling in your scenes. That's okay — in fact, it's unavoidable. The

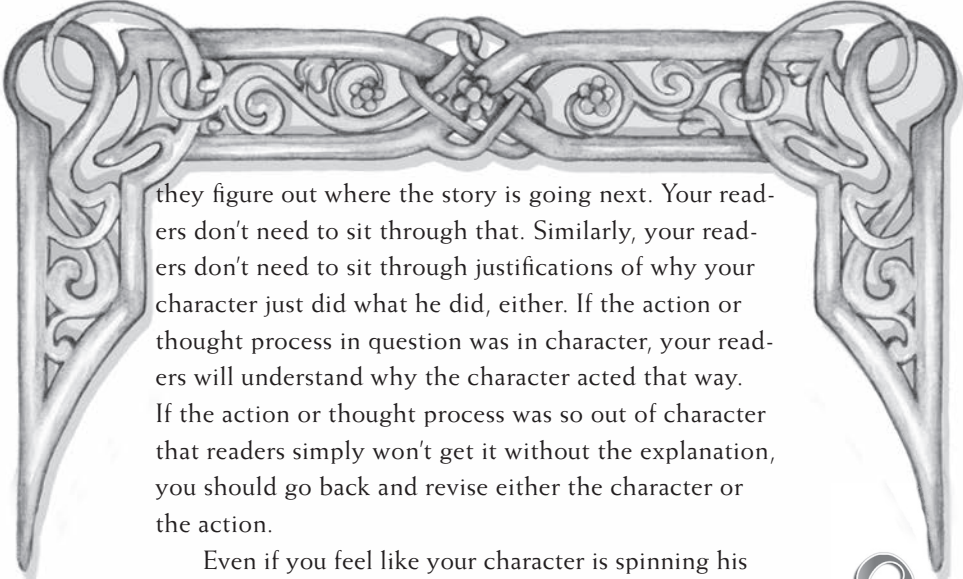
trick is using exposition wisely. If there is no forward momentum, go ahead and summarize: "They searched the whole house for three hours. Marion was going over the living room for the fifth time when she heard Rod's triumphant yell from the second bedroom." Then move back into the action, and back into real time: "Marion dropped the pillow onto the couch and ran into the other room."

## Action Versus Reaction

Action scenes are where things happen. Your character is out doing something, or something happens to him that has to be dealt with right here and now. The action should be relevant to your storyline — your character is taking action to move toward his goal. If your character is not attempting to move toward his goal, ask yourself if the scene is really necessary. Is this part of a subplot that will become relevant later? Does this scene give the character a tool or piece of information that's relevant? Does this scene give the reader some information that's relevant *and* necessary? If you didn't answer "yes" to at least one of those questions, you might want to consider removing that scene.

Reaction scenes are usually internal and emotional. Your character needs time to assimilate information and plan his next move. He needs to figure out how he feels about what's happening.

It's easy to get bogged down in reaction scenes. In fact, it's a good idea for you as the writer to figure out what your character's reaction and eventual plan will be before you start writing the scene, unless you really like revising. It's a very common habit for writers to use the reaction scene as a running interior dialogue where



they figure out where the story is going next. Your readers don't need to sit through that. Similarly, your readers don't need to sit through justifications of why your character just did what he did, either. If the action or thought process in question was in character, your readers will understand why the character acted that way. If the action or thought process was so out of character that readers simply won't get it without the explanation, you should go back and revise either the character or the action.

Even if you feel like your character is spinning his wheels and getting nowhere, don't have him make up plan after plan after plan, only to discard them all without any action happening. Keep things moving forward as much as possible, and keep downtime brief. You can throw in little pieces of action into reaction scenes, and little pieces of reaction into action scenes.

For example, in one scene our guard is ambushed, trussed up, and taken to see the rebellion's charismatic leader. In the midst of being hauled, blindfolded and tied, through the tunnels under the farm, the guard takes a moment to reflect on his situation. That's a reaction beat in an action scene. Later, in a scene where the guard and the rebel leader are having a conversation about their plans for the next move against the establishment, a message arrives from one of the spies with news that a convoy of supplies has just left the prison farm's guarded perimeter. The arrival of the message is an action beat in a reaction scene. In fact, that's a great way to end a reaction scene — with a call to action or an imminent threat.

Regardless of whether it's an action or a reaction scene, keep the tension going. Never let your characters — or the reader! — get too comfortable.

## Building Your Plot

Figuring out what happens can be the hardest part of writing a story. That's where Propp's Functions of the Folktale and our *Once Upon a Time* Ending card come in. We'll use these as ready-made plot points for our story.

So far we've used one or two of the functions we drew to get ideas. Now let's try fitting one of those ideas to the functions and turn it into a plot. We'll write this one up as a brief outline. We have:

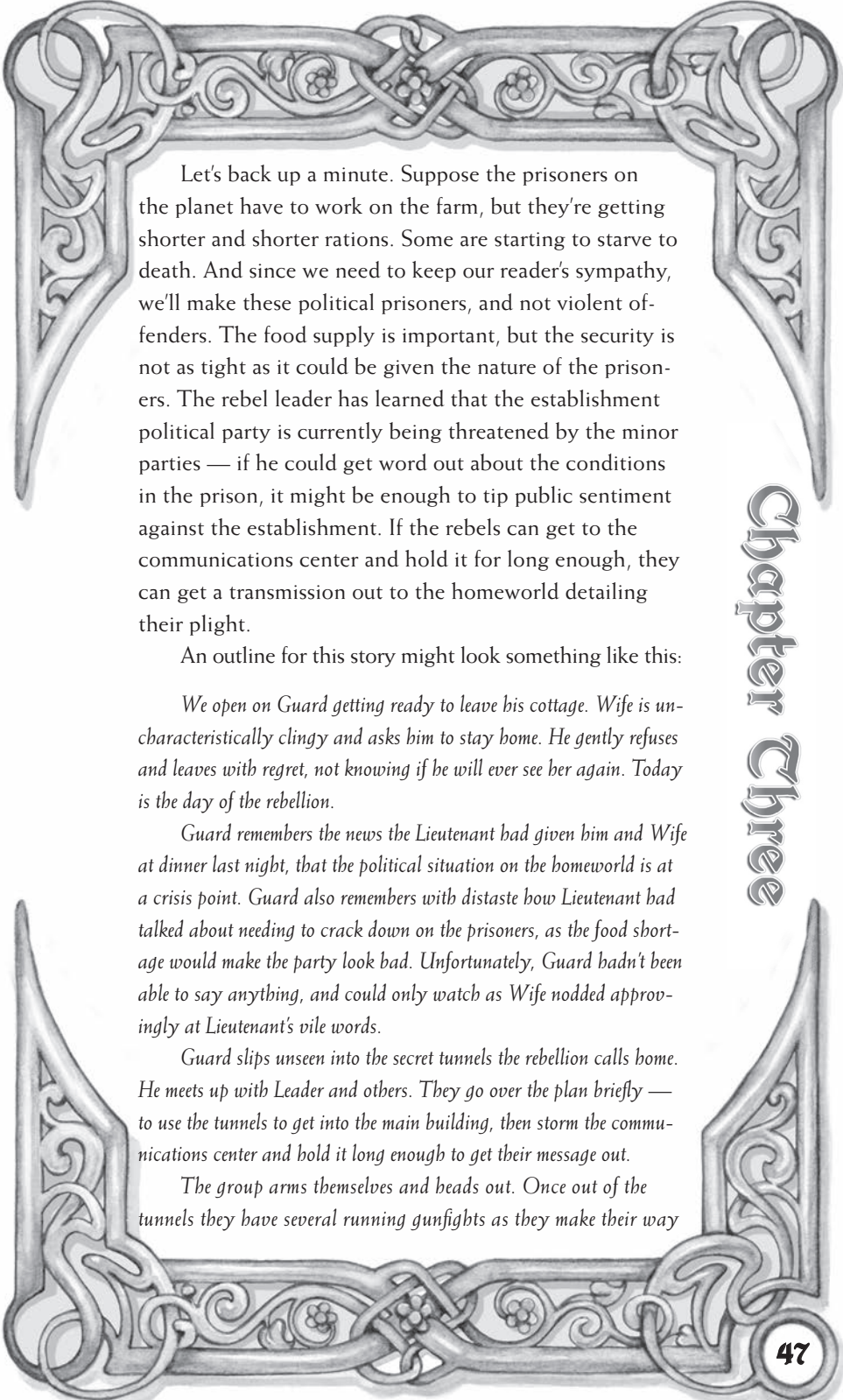
- 1: One of the members of a family absents himself from home.
- 6: The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings.
- 15: The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search.
- 24: A false hero presents unfounded claims.
- 29: The hero is given a new appearance.

**Ending:** His wound was healed but his heart remained broken forever.

Let's use the prison planet story. How can we fit that story idea onto these plot points?

We need a hero — that's our guard. We also need a villain, a false hero, and a victim. And we have a wife character and a rebel leader who we came up with previously.

What if we combined the false hero and the victim, and made that the wife? Say she's told by the guard's boss — the villain — that the rebellion is stealing food, and that's why the prisoners keep getting short rations. In reality the boss is selling the stolen food to third-party suppliers under the table, and maybe he's got the hots for the guard's wife.



Let's back up a minute. Suppose the prisoners on the planet have to work on the farm, but they're getting shorter and shorter rations. Some are starting to starve to death. And since we need to keep our reader's sympathy, we'll make these political prisoners, and not violent offenders. The food supply is important, but the security is not as tight as it could be given the nature of the prisoners. The rebel leader has learned that the establishment political party is currently being threatened by the minor parties — if he could get word out about the conditions in the prison, it might be enough to tip public sentiment against the establishment. If the rebels can get to the communications center and hold it for long enough, they can get a transmission out to the homeworld detailing their plight.

An outline for this story might look something like this:

*We open on Guard getting ready to leave his cottage. Wife is uncharacteristically clingy and asks him to stay home. He gently refuses and leaves with regret, not knowing if he will ever see her again. Today is the day of the rebellion.*

*Guard remembers the news the Lieutenant had given him and Wife at dinner last night, that the political situation on the homeworld is at a crisis point. Guard also remembers with distaste how Lieutenant had talked about needing to crack down on the prisoners, as the food shortage would make the party look bad. Unfortunately, Guard hadn't been able to say anything, and could only watch as Wife nodded approvingly at Lieutenant's vile words.*

*Guard slips unseen into the secret tunnels the rebellion calls home. He meets up with Leader and others. They go over the plan briefly — to use the tunnels to get into the main building, then storm the communications center and hold it long enough to get their message out.*

*The group arms themselves and heads out. Once out of the tunnels they have several running gunfights as they make their way*

to the communications center. They round the last corner, only to see Wife standing before the door with a gun in her hand. Tearfully she says, "You're the ones behind all the shortages. I can't let you destroy everything the party has worked for these last fifty years for a handful of lying traitors!" Guard is stunned emotionally and freezes, but Leader knocks him down as Wife shoots, so Guard is only hit in the shoulder. Leader fires back, killing Wife, but the delay has cost them. Reinforcements are heard running through the halls. Numbly, at Leader's urging, Guard stumbles to the door and tries to open it, but Wife must have betrayed him because he no longer has access. The reinforcements pour into the hallway, surrounding the group of rebels.

The Lieutenant, smiling, orders Guard stripped of his uniform. "Oh, and I have some good news! Those reports of unrest back at home were . . . greatly exaggerated. The party just won the new elections in a landslide. Cleaning up this little incident will be a great public relations boost for them."

As Guard is led away with the rest of the prisoners, he knows that life for the inmates is about to get even harder. He catches Leader's eye, and the two exchange a grim look.

Somehow they'll find a way to get the truth out.

Somehow.

Once you have your outline, take a few minutes to look it over. Does it sound like it will keep the tension as high as you want it? Do the actions of the characters make sense? Can you think of any ways of improving it? Do you see any weak points?

This brief summary gives you a good roadmap to start writing out a full short story. Add in a few more plot points and this could be a novel. Before you start writing though, we need to look at the other major building block of your writing — style.



## Style

So what is style? It's how a writer uses pace, voice, grammar, vocabulary, tense, point of view, and plot choices.

Style makes the difference between bad writing and great writing. Each writer makes many choices regarding style, giving every writer a different voice. Even if you tried imitating another writer's style of writing, you'd still end up differing in vocabulary or pace or tone. (Trying to write in another writer's style can be a great exercise to stretch your own stylistic boundaries, though.)

## Pace

The pace of a story is how fast it moves from one plot point to another. Some stories zip along, with lots of action and not a lot of reaction. You may have heard novels referred to as "fast paced." You may also have read stories where things seem to "bog down" and nothing much is actually *happening*. (This usually happens in the middle.) Those stories had a pacing problem. A good story keeps moving forward and keeps conflict in the scenes.

Like so many things, pacing is something that takes practice to master, and it will be different in every story you write. The pace in a short story will probably be faster than the pace in a novel. The pace of a historical romance will likely be slower than the pace of a modern thriller.

The key to good pacing is consistency. Get your rhythm going early on, and keep it going throughout the story. Your pace will probably pick up right before the climax, and then slow down a little for the wrap-up. There will be times when the story moves a little faster or slower,

and that's okay, but don't let a moderately paced novel suddenly drop into a long section with slow pacing.

Think of books or stories you've read where you just couldn't put the book down. Read those again and pay attention to how the author manages the pacing. How high was the tension? Was there a lot of downtime? How worried were you about the lead? Which of these techniques feel the most natural for you? Think about how you can apply that to your own writing.

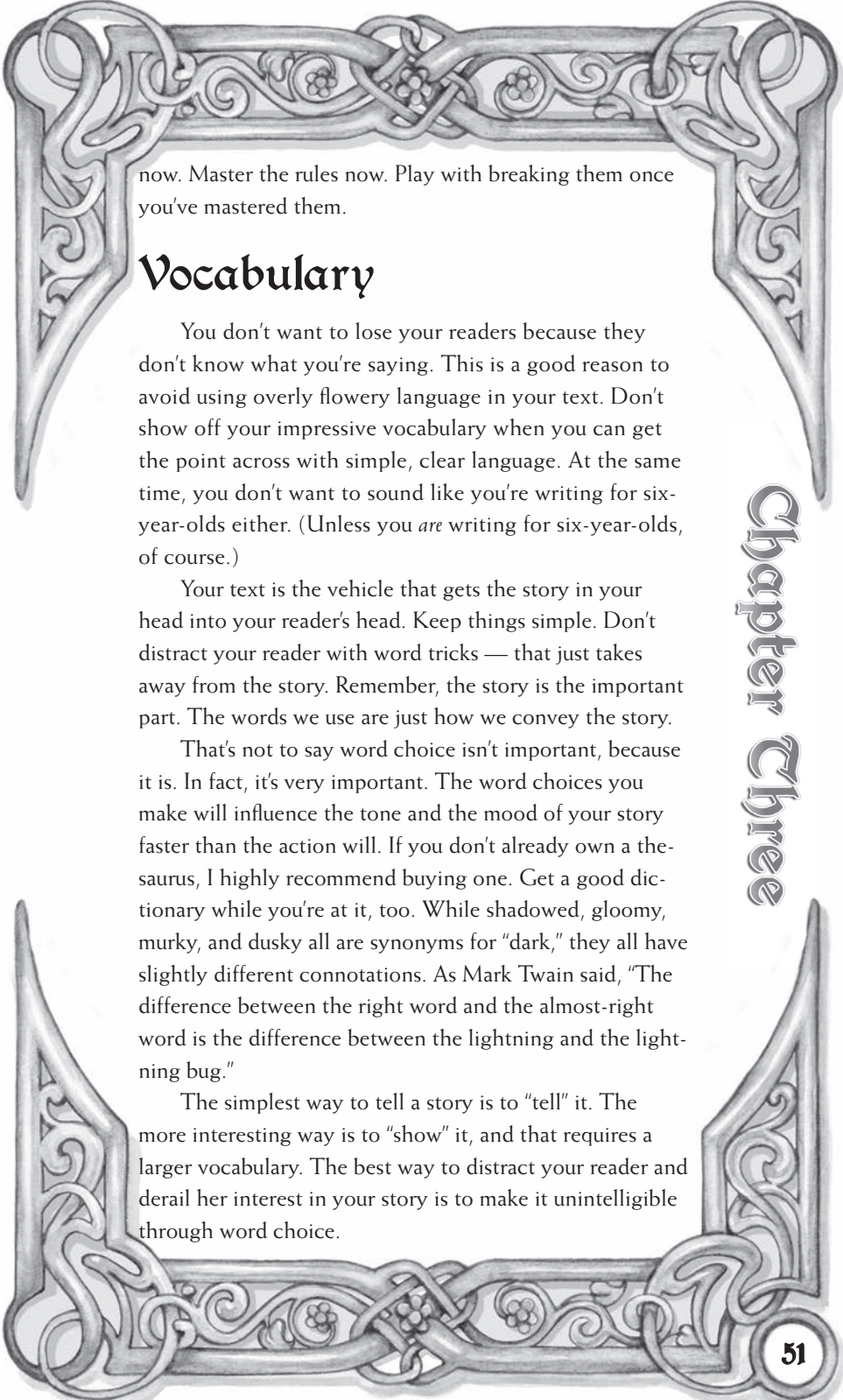
## Grammar

Certain rules of grammar have rather gone out the window as far as literary style is concerned. But before you follow suit, it's important to *know* the rules in the first place, because some of those rules shouldn't be thrown out, ever.

Most of us learn basic grammar in elementary school. The problem is, for the most part we promptly forget it right up until we start trying to learn a second language. Then we're frantically looking up "participle" in the dictionary.

Read *The Elements of Style* by Strunk & White, or *The Chicago Manual of Style*, published by the University of Chicago Press. You can also find *The Chicago Manual of Style* online at [www.chicagomanualofstyle.org](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org). As well as teaching you the grammar rules that you really need to know as a writer, these books also have lots of good advice on style in general. I recommend owning one or both of these fine books so you can look it up when you have a question. Writing is an open-book test. You only lose points if you get it wrong, so do your research!

Save the leetspeak, run-on sentences, and lack of punctuation for emails to your friends. Learn the rules



now. Master the rules now. Play with breaking them once you've mastered them.

## Vocabulary

You don't want to lose your readers because they don't know what you're saying. This is a good reason to avoid using overly flowery language in your text. Don't show off your impressive vocabulary when you can get the point across with simple, clear language. At the same time, you don't want to sound like you're writing for six-year-olds either. (Unless you *are* writing for six-year-olds, of course.)

Your text is the vehicle that gets the story in your head into your reader's head. Keep things simple. Don't distract your reader with word tricks — that just takes away from the story. Remember, the story is the important part. The words we use are just how we convey the story.

That's not to say word choice isn't important, because it is. In fact, it's very important. The word choices you make will influence the tone and the mood of your story faster than the action will. If you don't already own a thesaurus, I highly recommend buying one. Get a good dictionary while you're at it, too. While shadowed, gloomy, murky, and dusky all are synonyms for "dark," they all have slightly different connotations. As Mark Twain said, "The difference between the right word and the almost-right word is the difference between the lightning and the lightning bug."

The simplest way to tell a story is to "tell" it. The more interesting way is to "show" it, and that requires a larger vocabulary. The best way to distract your reader and derail her interest in your story is to make it unintelligible through word choice.

For an excellent illustration of how word choice can be aggravating and fascinating at the same time, read *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess. The novel is told in the first person using a made-up futuristic slang that takes several pages to get used to. Another interesting example is the classic *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. These are both exceptions to the usual rules, and you should study them and similar novels before trying it yourself. Was the work of figuring out the language worth it? Was it too annoying, or did it add to the book's style in a positive way?

When in doubt about what word to use, ask yourself: Is this the best possible word I could use to get across the idea I'm trying to convey? Is there another word that would make things clearer to my readers without losing tone or connotation?

Along with choosing your words carefully, beware of clichés. Avoid them whenever possible. Exclamation points should also be used sparingly, and only in dialogue.

Dialogue can be especially tricky. We don't write the way we speak. Feel free to make your dialogue modern and colloquial, but only to a point. If you use terms or acronyms that aren't part of everyday speech, keep it to a minimum. A little bit of flavor adds interest, but if your reader puts down your story to go look up a word or phrase, that's just one more opportunity for her to not pick the story back up again. And if you do use an uncommon word or phrase, make sure you know what it means! Never be too cocky to look it up. And don't try to imitate an accent by using odd spellings and apostrophes — it just distracts your reader from the story as they try to translate into reasonable English. Use vocabulary and description instead to indicate an accent. Also, avoid long stretches of foreign languages in your text. Either you

have to translate it for the readers who don't speak the language, which is repetitive for the readers who do, or if you don't translate it you annoy the readers who don't know what was just said.

Don't be afraid of the word "said." Many writers hesitate to use the same word too often, but "said" is one of the few words in the English language that's nearly invisible. What you don't want to do is use too many flowery speech tags. A speech tag is added onto the end or beginning of a piece of dialogue to identify who said it, such as "he said." Certainly words like asked, shouted, whispered, hissed, cried, and whimpered have their use when appropriate, but you don't need to switch up every speech tag in your dialogue to avoid the word said. Nor do you need speech tags for every piece of dialogue, particularly when there are only two speakers. You should identify the speaker in a two-person conversation every two or three voice switches. And you can often imply the speaker by adding an action or reaction beat before or after the dialogue. For example:

Justin shook his head. "I don't think it will work."

"Of course it will work!" Ginny glared at him and snatched the notebook back.

While we're on the subject, a note about adverbs in speech tags. Adverbs are descriptive words that follow verbs, and you often see them in speech tags, such as "she said hotly," or "he yelled loudly." Very often those adverbs are unnecessary — your reader should be able to tell from the dialogue whether her words are "hot," just as she can safely assume that if he's yelling, it's loud. Save the adverbs for when they convey a tone or inflection that's not readily apparent from the dialogue.

## Tense

There are three basic “tenses”: past tense, present tense, and future tense.

**Past:** She wrote the sentence.

**Present:** She writes the sentence.

**Future:** She will write the sentence.

This is a rather gross oversimplification of tense in the English language, but for the purposes of choosing what tense you want to use in your writing, it’s sufficient.

Most fiction is written in past tense. Screenplays, some short stories, and non-fiction (with the exception of history) tend to be written in present tense. Very few things are written in future tense.

We’re used to seeing past tense in fiction, and for that reason it’s completely unobtrusive. That’s not to say you can’t write in present tense — it certainly adds an extra bit of tension and immediacy — but have a good reason for it. Don’t just write in present tense to be different, but do it because it’s the best tense for your story.

## Point of View

The point of view is quite literally the view from which the story is experienced. Different writers describe these a little differently, but basically point of view is made up of the person (first, second, or third) and the scope (limited or omniscient).

### First, Second, or Third Person

It’s highly advisable to pick a “person” and stick with it. Flipping between first and third person is at least very

distracting, when not downright aggravating. If you want to experiment with this, at least keep one point of view for the whole chapter.

*First person point of view is where there is one character who narrates the whole story.* An example of first person: "It had been a long time, but I discovered that I still knew the old hometown like the back of my hand." First person is limited in scope — since the narrator is one of the characters, the narrator only knows what that character knows and can only relate things that the narrator has experienced. For some writers this is a frustrating limitation, and for others it helps them stay focused.

*Second person point of view is where "you" do everything.* For example: "You open the door and walk into the room." Like first person, second person is limited in scope. For the most part, second person is more distracting than it's worth, and should be avoided in fiction outside of "choose your own ending" types of stories. As always, feel free to experiment, but remember to ask yourself: Is this the best way to get my story across?

*Third person point of view is where the narrator is not a character in the story.* This can be a Dickens-like narrator ("I assure you, dear reader, that the story I'm about to tell you ..."), but more common these days is the invisible narrator ("Bob walked up the stairs, thinking about dinner."). Third person point of view can be limited or omniscient. The point of view can follow one particular character, or it can show what all the characters are doing.

## Limited or Omniscient

The big difference between the limited and omniscient points of view is how deeply the narrator can get into a character's thoughts. Since third person is more flex-

ible than first or second, let's look at the two types of third person point of view in more detail.

*In the limited third person point of view, the reader watches the story unfold through the eyes of one character at a time.* You'll hear this described by the phrase, "being in a character's head." Even though the story isn't being told in the first person, if we're in Bob's head, we won't know what's going on in the heads of the people with whom Bob is talking. We're limited to Bob's point of view. Although unlike the first person point of view, the writer can switch from Bob's point of view to Susan's point of view without distracting the reader.

Conventional wisdom advises against switching point of view within a scene without using some sort of narrative break, such as a text break or a chapter break. Your reader can get much more deeply engrossed into the point of view character's experience if she isn't constantly being moved from one character's head to another's. Even though the reader may get a better understanding of what's going on in the scene, she'll probably feel jarred and off balance by all the moving around. Instead, find ways to get the important information across through the action and dialogue — and if it never comes up in the action or the dialogue, it was probably not important enough to justify the point of view switch in the first place. Remember, you can always switch point of view at a break point and have the new character react to whatever scene you just described, too.

Beware of the subtle point of view anomalies, where the narrator speaks in ways that the point of view character would not. For example, a conceited character is very unlikely to describe himself as conceited, so the narrator shouldn't either when the narrator is in that character's head.



Conventional or not, head-jumping is becoming more and more common. While editors and writing workshops will consider it sloppy, if enough people keep doing it eventually it'll become the convention. (If you don't believe me, look up the word "ironic" and the phrase "begging the question," and compare what they originally meant with the way they're used in common speech now.) So, as with everything else, feel free to experiment — but always ask the following questions before jumping heads:

Is the information gained by changing point of view at this moment important enough to risk jarring the reader?

Is there a better way I can include this information? Can I use action, dialogue, body posture, facial expression, or a later reaction to this scene instead of changing point of view?

Is the information necessary?

Is this the best choice for the flow of the narrative?

*In contrast, the third person omniscient point of view is a more cinematic approach to telling the story.* Again, the narrator isn't a character in the story, but now the narrator isn't tied to what *any* of the characters know. A great example of third person omniscient is J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The reader is given information by the narrator that's outside of any of the characters' experience, such as when Aragorn leaves Lothlorien and the narrator mentions that he never returns there. No one in the story at the time could possibly know that Aragorn would never return to Lothlorien — especially not Aragorn.

The omniscient point of view is a little more flexible than the limited, but the limited point of view is much more intimate. In the omniscient, since we aren't tied to any one character's viewpoint at any time, we never connect quite as deeply as we do when we're always inside a character's head. In the limited, however, there are times

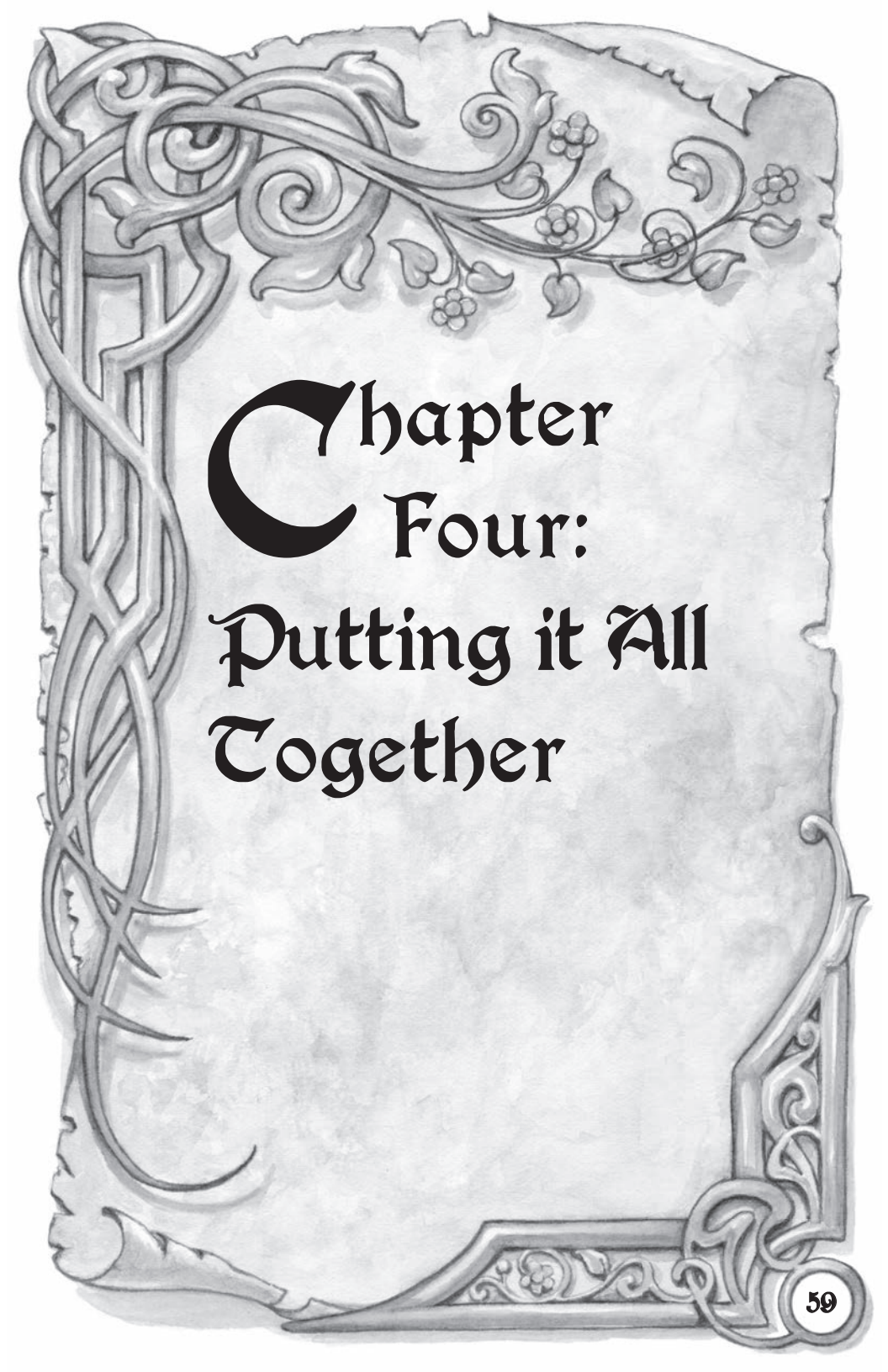
when the author has to make some very difficult choices about what can and cannot be included in a particular scene. Often what's sacrificed are our favorite one-liners and reaction beats that are outside of the point of view. No matter how great the line is, odds are it isn't in and of itself worth the change in point of view. If it really is that good, consider rewriting the scene from that character's point of view.

## Plot Choices

The plot choices you make are also a significant part of your overall style. Do you hate tragedy? Do you love ambiguous endings? Does the hero always get the girl in your stories — or does the villain usually win? These kinds of decisions are as much a part of your style as your vocabulary. Be aware of them, and beware of becoming predictable.

## Ready, Set, Go!

When you're ready to write your first draft, just sit down and let the words go. Put your inner editor on mute. This is where you get the story down — you can revise awkward phrases and unwieldy prose later. No matter how bad you think it is while you're writing it, it's never actually that bad, and most importantly of all, it can be fixed. But before you can worry about fixing it, you have to get it written!



**C**hapter  
Four:  
Putting it All  
Together

**I**n the last chapter we made an outline of a story based on the *Once Upon a Time* cards and Propp's Functions of the Folktale that we drew in Chapter One. Feel free to write a story based on that outline just for practice in writing from an outline. In this chapter, we'll examine a story based on those same cards and functions, using a different idea — the contest over the farmer's daughter. We'll consider how the tools we've already talked about are put to use in the story, and how we can use revision to improve it.

Here again is the structure of the farmer's daughter story: Guard and Villain both want to marry the farmer's daughter. Villain attempts to trick Guard so that Villain succeeds. Villain gets the girl and Guard's heart is broken.

An example of the no-outline thought process might look like this:

*We know from the functions we drew that the villain deceives the hero in order to get what the hero has — the love of the daughter. Since the hero's heart is broken in the ending, the hero has to lose that love. How? Well, someone presents unfounded claims, so let's make the villain also the false hero, and by his claims he wins the love of the daughter away from the hero. Those have got to be some pretty impressive claims if they're supposed to sunder true love. What's the villain ultimately after again? The cottage and its attached farm. Well, since we're talking inheritance, it would be most inconvenient for the villain if the daughter had a brother. So if the villain had brought about the brother's death, and then convincingly blamed it on the hero, that could be enough to turn the daughter's heart away from the hero. How did the brother die in such a way that the hero can be blamed for it? And how is the hero healed? What if we threw a werewolf into the mix?*

What follows is the first draft of a story based on this thought process.



# First Draft

<sup>1</sup> Tristan checked his pockets absently while he scanned the edge of the forest. He had a fair number of good round stones tucked away, and kept one in the sling, ready to be hurled at the merest sign of a pheasant or rabbit. *Or a wolf*, he thought dryly, although in the few months he'd been at the farm he had neither seen nor heard any evidence of wolves. Still, he supposed the entire family wouldn't be so adamant without some reason. He kept his eyes moving. He'd already brought down two rabbits with his sling, since he felt like any contribution he could make, other than simply standing on the edge of the sheep pasture, might help make up for the fact of his presence. While the Finches were kind, and had actively asked for another hand on their small farm, none of them could look at him without remembering that he was there because Beau was not.

<sup>2</sup> Across the pasture, Phillip was taking a long drink from the water bag. Tristan resisted the urge to brood, trying to keep his mind on business. Phillip had been fostered at the farm's cottage — he was practically one of the family. Everyone seemed to assume that he and Christina, Master Finch's daughter, would marry one day. Tristan gritted his teeth and tried not to brood over Christina either, but that was much harder. Lovely Christina, with hair like spun gold and eyes like periwinkles, and lips soft as goose down. He hadn't meant to fall in love with her, nor she with him, but it had happened nonetheless. As much as they tried to hide their feelings for one another, Tristan supposed with chagrin that everyone must know by now. Certainly Phillip did. The tall youth hadn't been in any way discourteous to Tristan, but there was such a

smoldering hate in Phillip's eyes that Tristan was surprised he couldn't smell smoke.

<sup>3</sup> Tristan turned away, glaring at the forest border to avoid looking at his rival. He missed his own family and their small farm in the river valley two days to the south. The Finches' farm skirted the foothills of the mountains, and the land was too steep and too rocky for much besides pasture. Tristan was unused to such husbandry, but he thought it odd that the sheep were taken to pasture every morning at first light, and brought home again every evening. He was quite sure that wasn't the usual way of pasturing animals, but he dared not bring it up again. You'd think he'd been raised in a city for the looks they gave him — looks that said he'd best keep his mouth shut until his ears dried out, because he obviously didn't know the first thing about anything. Not around this place.

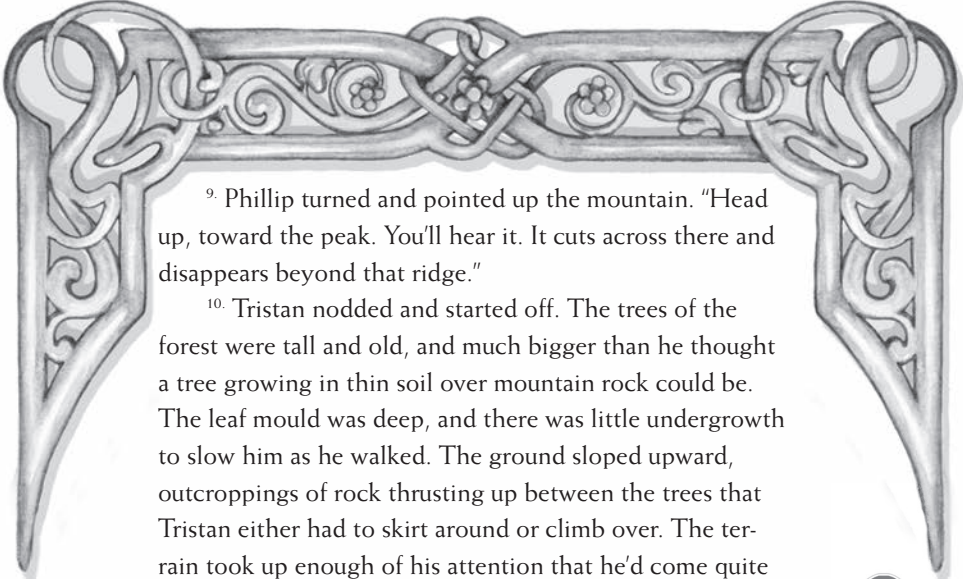
<sup>4</sup> A sound behind him caused Tristan to turn. Phillip was approaching him, water bag in hand. From the way it swung, flopping and loose, Tristan knew it was empty. He repressed a sigh of disappointment, and met Phillip's stare of badly masked challenge with a (he hoped) empty expression of patience.

<sup>5</sup> "Bag's empty," Phillip said shortly. "I think it has a leak. Go fill it at the creek so we don't parch before we get back."

<sup>6</sup> Tristan glanced up at the sun. An hour and a half, give or take, before the sun slid behind the mountain. Darkness fell swiftly in its shadow. The creek couldn't be far, or Phillip would not have bothered. "Where's the creek?" Tristan asked, taking the bag.

<sup>7</sup> Phillip gave him an irritated look. "You've been here this long and you don't know where the creek is?"

<sup>8</sup> "You've never mentioned it before now. How would I?"



<sup>9</sup>. Phillip turned and pointed up the mountain. "Head up, toward the peak. You'll hear it. It cuts across there and disappears beyond that ridge."

<sup>10</sup>. Tristan nodded and started off. The trees of the forest were tall and old, and much bigger than he thought a tree growing in thin soil over mountain rock could be. The leaf mould was deep, and there was little undergrowth to slow him as he walked. The ground sloped upward, outcroppings of rock thrusting up between the trees that Tristan either had to skirt around or climb over. The terrain took up enough of his attention that he'd come quite a ways before he realized that he had still not heard any sounds of water. He paused, and looked about himself doubtfully. Here under the dense foliage he couldn't see the sun, and had no idea how long he had been tramping through the woods. If he didn't find the creek soon he would be forced to turn back empty handed. He didn't relish the thought of Phillip's scorn, or of the tales the youth would tell of Tristan's failure. Grimacing, he pressed onward. If he couldn't hear the creek by the time he reached that outcropping ahead, he decided, he would turn back. There was a shaft of sunlight where the ridge of rock had forced the trees apart. Perhaps he'd be able to get a glimpse of the sun.

<sup>11</sup>. There was still no sound of water when Tristan reached the outcrop. Disappointed, Tristan scrambled up the rocky face of the ridge, his eyes straining upward as he climbed, watching the small patch of sky above him. He heaved himself over the edge, and came face to muzzle with the largest wolf he'd ever seen. It was nearly the size of a small pony, with thick black fur and eyes that gleamed yellow. The wolf lay relaxing in the sun, and it lifted its head with interest as Tristan froze, crouched on the edge of the ridge. Hardly daring to breathe, he reached slowly

into a pocket and brought out one of his sling stones.

<sup>12</sup> The wolf clicked its tongue. "And what, pray, are you planning on doing with that?" it asked.

<sup>13</sup> Tristan dropped the stone from nerveless fingers. He gulped.

<sup>14</sup> "That's better." The wolf shook its shaggy head like a dog would, then blinked at him. "There's not much you could do with that pebble except annoy me. Let's have a look at you. Well? Stand up straight, lad."

<sup>15</sup> Tristan slowly rose to his full height. He wet his lips, but could think of nothing to say.

<sup>16</sup> The wolf eyed him up and down. "My, you are a nice, healthy fellow, aren't you? A little on the lean side, but beggars can't be choosers." The wolf got lazily to its feet.

<sup>17</sup> "You ... you aren't going to eat me, are you? Sir?" Tristan asked, dismayed.

<sup>18</sup> "Sir!" The wolf barked a laugh and sat back on its haunches. "How polite you are! Yes, young man, I am planning on eating you as it happens. You are here, and I'm hungry after my nap." The wolf paused, watching him thoughtfully. "You're one of the shepherds from down below, are you not?"

<sup>19</sup> "Yes, sir," Tristan answered faintly.

<sup>20</sup> "Hmm. Suppose you bring me one of your sheep, and I'll let you live. You are rather on the lean side, and I have a taste for mutton." The wolf smacked its lips.

<sup>21</sup> Tristan swallowed hard. "I'm afraid ... I'm afraid they are not my sheep," he said, his voice cracking. "But I do have two nice fat rabbits, if you like."

<sup>22</sup> "Rabbits?" The wolf considered. "I don't eat much rabbit. The little devils are too quick. Yes, I would like your rabbits."

<sup>23</sup> "And you won't eat me? Sir?"

<sup>24</sup> "I will not eat you. Today. And be quick." The wolf



lay down again, watching Tristan expectantly.

<sup>25.</sup> He reached into the game bag and produced the two hares, already field dressed and skinned. He laid them, trembling a little, before the wolf's paws, well within reach of the long yellow teeth. The wolf waited until he moved back — Tristan would have sworn it was smiling, except it wasn't, of course — before he daintily picked up the first and crunched it, slowly, as if savoring it. After a moment the wolf ate the second.

<sup>26.</sup> "Ah, yes," it said when it was done, smacking its lips. "Rabbit. Tasty creatures."

<sup>27.</sup> "I'm glad you, er, enjoyed them." Tristan glanced up at the sky. The light was definitely beginning to dim. "But I'm afraid I need to get back now. Phillip will be needing my help getting the sheep back."

<sup>28.</sup> The wolf's ears pricked. "Phillip, you say? Indeed? Well. How interesting. And what is your name, lad?"

<sup>29.</sup> Tristan blinked at the wolf in surprise. "My name is Tristan, sir. Do you know Phillip?"

<sup>30.</sup> The wolf ignored his question. "And what brought you into my home so close to dark, Tristan? Surely if you need to be getting back already, you couldn't have been going much farther?"

<sup>31.</sup> "I was looking for the creek," Tristan admitted, with a flush of irritation for Phillip. He held up his empty water bag.

<sup>32.</sup> "Is that so? Indeed. Well, young Tristan, since you brought me two rabbits, I suppose I can show you the creek. You're heading in the wrong direction completely." The wolf rose and padded away toward the foot of the mountain. "Well? Come along boy, don't dawdle."

<sup>33.</sup> With a start, Tristan followed. The light continued to fail, and Tristan had to stay close or risk losing sight of the dark shaggy form altogether. They worked their way steadily downhill, and the light was all but gone when

Tristan finally heard the gurgle and splash of a stream. Moments later the trees thinned, and ahead of them was the glint of moonlight on running water.

<sup>34</sup> "Ah, here we are," said the wolf. It lowered its head to drink, and Tristan knelt uneasily by its side and filled his bag.

<sup>35</sup> "Thank you, sir, for showing me to the creek. And for not eating me," Tristan said humbly.

<sup>36</sup> The wolf sat down on its haunches and regarded him thoughtfully. "A very polite lad, indeed. I do believe I like you, young Tristan. You should take care not to find yourself in my woods again, at least without more rabbits." It wuffed through its nose, and then looked downstream. "Follow the creek until it turns, and then continue along the forest. You will come to your dwelling in short order."

<sup>37</sup> Tristan frowned. "Does the creek run closer to the pasture where we take the sheep?"

<sup>38</sup> The wolf blinked slowly. "No, it does not," it said. It gave him a pointed look, and turned to head back into the trees.

<sup>39</sup> "Do you know Phillip?" Tristan called after it, almost not wanting to know.

<sup>40</sup> The wolf stopped. It did not turn, but spoke over its shoulder. "I don't *know* him, precisely. There was another young man in my woods, a few months back. One who did not have any rabbits." The wolf licked its lips. "He yelled for a Phillip. Cursed him, too, at the end." It started walking again. "I'd be careful of Phillips, if I were you."

<sup>41</sup> Tristan clenched his hands on the water bag to keep them from shaking. He took a deep breath, and then another. Then he called after the wolf, "If I were to fetch an extra rabbit, or two, and leave them up in the pasture, do you prefer them dressed, or no?"

<sup>42</sup> The wolf vanished into the dark woods, but its voice drifted in its wake. "Leave the innards in, but feel

free to skin them. The fur tickles, going down."

<sup>43.</sup> Tristan stared after it, but there was nothing to see. Even the light of the full moon didn't penetrate the tangle of leaves. He turned and followed the creek.

<sup>44.</sup> *He must want the farm for himself*, he thought as he made his way along the bank. *He sent Beau, the only son, to the wolf, and then me. Then he'll marry the only daughter and inherit the farm when Master Finch passes. If he doesn't send Master Finch to the wolf, too!* Tristan broke into a trot. Sweat beaded on his face. The thought of his sweet, gentle Christina in the arms of a murderer was too much for him. His heart leapt into his throat, and he began to run. He sped down the length of the creek, and followed the edge of the woods as the wolf had told him, until the farm came into view out of the darkness. The sheep milled about in their pen as he flew past them. He was nearly to the cottage when a tall form rose up from the far side of the sheep pen and hurled itself at him. Phillip crashed into him and sent him sprawling. Tristan's breath left him in a whoosh, but he shook the lighter man off and rolled to his feet.

<sup>45.</sup> "Stupid bumpkin," Phillip hissed. Steel glinted in the moonlight. "Can't even die right."

<sup>46.</sup> Before Tristan could gather his breath to call out, Phillip jumped on him again. Tristan was tired from running and it was all he could do to keep the knife away from him. Their thrashing panicked the sheep, who started bleating and running into each other in the tight confines of their pen. The cottage door flew open, light spilling across the yard. Tristan looked up involuntarily, and Phillip managed to wrest the blade free. It slashed up the right side of Tristan's face, laying his cheek open to the bone and slicing through his eye. Tristan screamed, clutching uselessly at his face, unable to think through the burning pain. But shadows were boiling out of the door-

way, and Phillip could not strike the final blow.

47. "He attacked me!" Phillip cried. "He's in league with it! I told you so!"

48. Tristan heard that horrifying lie, but he couldn't stop screaming. The pain ... his eye ... "No!" he managed, changing the scream into a word. "No!" As if from far away he heard Christina scream his name, and he rolled away. *She shouldn't see this. Dear God, my eye!*

49. Between him and the cottage, Phillip was still yelling. "I told you how he would vanish, up in the woods where Beau died. I told you how I would hear him laughing, and wolves howling! But you didn't believe me! Now, when I decided to come back without him, he attacks me! Thank God I had my knife!"

50. "No!" Tristan answered back. The pain roared, but it was farther away now, too. "Murderer!"

51. "Filthy lying wolf-spawn!" Phillip kicked him in the face, and the pain came crashing back on him. Spots danced in front of his good eye. *If I pass out now, I'll never wake up!* he thought frantically. Phillip continued spitting venom. "You sent it here, didn't you! You sent it to kill Beau so you could come here and court Christina! And then you tried to kill me when I saw through your foul scheme!"

52. In the distance, a wolf howled.

53. *You're not helping,* Tristan thought absurdly.

54. Christina was sobbing. "Say it's not true, Tristan!"

55. "It's ... not ..." Tristan gasped out.

56. "Then why do you have tangleburrs on your clothes?" Phillip challenged triumphantly. "They only grow in the deep woods. What were you doing in there, sorcerer?"

57. "You ... sent me ... the creek ..." Tristan tried to explain through the pain.

58. Christina wailed in denial. "No, no! The creek's no-

where near the deep woods, Tristan! How could you? How could you do this?"

59. "No, Christina, no!" Tristan started to crawl toward her, but he heard movement above him.

60. "Stay away her!"

61. Tristan twisted away, and the knife pierced his lung instead of his heart. He felt it ripped free, but he suddenly didn't care. His heart had already torn in two as he watched his beloved's face turn from shock and denial to rage. She spat at him, and that blow hurt worse than anything else. He stretched out his hand to her, but she turned away. "Christina!"

62. Another howl rose. This one was right behind them, and ended in a growl. Phillip and the Finches cried out in fear as the giant black wolf strode into the farmyard, and then the humans bolted for the cottage.

63. Just before the door slammed shut, Christina spun around. She shook an angry fist at the wolf. "Take him!" she shrieked. "Take him and yourself away and leave us alone, you filthy beast!" Then Phillip pulled Christina inside, and Master Finch yanked the door closed.

64. Tristan stared at the door, wincing at the heavy *thump* of the bar being dropped. It was getting hard to breathe. Blood dripped out of his mouth, and it wasn't coming from the cut on his face. The wolf padded into view, and he looked up at it.

65. "Guess ... you eat ... after all," Tristan whispered.

66. The wolf gave a particularly human-sounding sigh. "You're all dirty," it said. Then it lowered its head and bit him hard on the shoulder. Fangs scraped against his shoulder bone, and Tristan whimpered. But to his confusion, the wolf only shook him a little, and then let go. It stepped back and sat, watching.

67. Warmth spread from the punctures on his shoul-

der, warmth like blistering sun in summer, when the rains are late and the earth is dead and crumbly and throws the heat back at you like it doesn't want it either. Slowly at first, and then faster it spread out, spreading through him, flowing through his veins, crawling across his skin. He twitched, then writhed as the heat coursed up his neck to his ravaged face. He screamed, his flesh contorting, rippling and twisting over the bones in ways it was never meant to. Then it was as if his bones all shattered, and they twisted and rippled along with his flesh. Tristan screamed until he had no breath left.

<sup>68</sup> Then it was over. Like a door had been shut on his pain, it was simply gone. Tristan sat up, shaking from head to foot. He could see out of both eyes! He touched his face in wonder. It was healed. He looked a question at the wolf, too stunned for speech.

<sup>69</sup> "I suppose I do like you, at that," the wolf said, sounding satisfied. "Come along then. There's no staying here for you, not now." It heaved itself to its feet and began to trot toward the mountain. After a few paces it stopped and looked back.

<sup>70</sup> Tristan still sat staring at the cottage. Tears coursed down his cheeks.

<sup>71</sup> "Come along, cub. And leave those clothes behind, they stink of human." The wolf waited a moment, then added wistfully, "But bring the sling, if you please. I do like rabbit."

<sup>72</sup> Moments later, two wolves loped out of the farmyard. One glanced back, eyes shining yellow. Though his wounds had been healed, the wolf that had once been named Tristan knew that the rift in his heart would never be mended. His human heart was broken forever. He embraced his new wolf heart, and ran.

# Editing and Revision

Part of the editing process is quantifiable, using the tools we've already discussed, but part of it is more qualitative. Sometimes something just doesn't sound right, even though on a technical level it works. Listen to that instinct even when you can't figure out what's wrong.

What follows is how I look at a first draft revision, starting with the basic structure and then getting into details. Just as each writer has his own writing style, each writer looks at different things first during revision. We'll cover a lot of the basic mistakes, but there are always more things that could stand revision than you'll catch the first time through. As we go, ask yourself if you agree or disagree with me, and what you would or wouldn't change.

## The Beginning

The first three paragraphs of the story are the beginning, and they mostly function as setup. By the end of those three paragraphs we know everything we need to about the current situation and have been introduced to the conflict between Tristan and Phillip.

## The Middle

Paragraph 4 is the start of this particular episode within the greater conflict outlined in the beginning, and so paragraph 4 also starts the middle of the story.

In the middle, Tristan is tricked into walking into a dangerous situation, but by his virtues (politeness, honesty) he saves himself from the fate Phillip had planned for him. As he heads homeward, he realizes Phillip's plan, and that Phil-

lip is the true villain, not the wolf. He rushes home — haste builds tension, even if nothing is actually happening — and runs headlong into the final confrontation with Phillip.

## The Ending

The ending starts toward the end of paragraph 44, when Phillip attacks Tristan. The two fight. Tristan is in grave peril — though he has the weight advantage, he is tired and unarmed, whereas Phillip is rested and has a knife. Then Tristan is seriously wounded. The fight moves from physical to verbal with the arrival of the rest of the family, but our honest, trusting, pain-wracked Tristan is no match for Phillip's quick cunning. The climax ends not with the wolf's arrival, but when Christina ultimately rejects Tristan at the end of paragraph 63. The remaining paragraphs (64 through 72) are the wrap-up.

## Specific Changes

Let's look at specific editing changes for this story.

### Paragraph 1

Starting off with Tristan's name firmly sets the point of view. He's in a state of readiness, though not actually in action. I'm not happy with the second sentence — it's too long, with too many commas. (I have a tendency to use too many commas, as well as using the word "and" more than I should. It's good to know your bad habits so you can watch out for them.) The tone suggests that Tristan is skeptical about what actually happened to Beau, although we never find out what Tristan was told about Beau. I'm not sure that's the tone I want for him.



*First Draft:* Tristan checked his pockets absently while he scanned the edge of the forest. He had a fair number of good round stones tucked away, and kept one in the sling, ready to be hurled at the merest sign of a pheasant or rabbit. *Or a wolf*, he thought dryly, although in the few months he'd been at the farm he had neither seen nor heard any evidence of wolves. Still, he supposed the entire family wouldn't be so adamant without some reason. He kept his eyes moving.

*Revised:* Tristan checked his pockets absently while he scanned the edge of the forest. He had a number of good round stones tucked away, and kept one in the sling ready to be hurled at the merest sign of a pheasant or rabbit. *Or a wolf*, he thought dryly, although in the few months he'd been at the farm he had neither seen nor heard any evidence of wolves. Still, wolves came and went as they would, and he had no reason to doubt the story. He kept his eyes moving.

## Paragraph 2

Tristan waxes a little poetical, but he's not much for imagination. On one hand, it certainly does make him sound lovesick — on the other hand, I'm not sure that's worth the clichés. When in doubt, ask if you could cut out the offending words without losing anything. In this case, the whole sentence beginning with "Lovely Christina" could be lopped off without changing the information in the paragraph.

*First Draft:* Tristan gritted his teeth and tried not to brood over Christina either, but that was much harder. Lovely Christina, with hair like spun gold and eyes like periwinkles, and lips soft as goose down. He hadn't meant to fall in love with her, nor she with him, but it had happened nonetheless.

*Revised:* Tristan gritted his teeth and tried not to brood over Christina either, but that was much harder. He hadn't meant to fall in love with her, nor she with him, but it had happened nonetheless.

### Paragraph 3

This paragraph is designed to show the setting in a little more detail, as well as to heighten the sense that something is amiss on the farm. Again, I'm not entirely happy with the wording here; everything after "too rocky for much besides pasture" sounds awkward to me. And the phrase "until his ears dried out" has to go, since it doesn't add anything and it's vaguely distracting as you translate "ears dried out" into "wet behind the ears."

*First Draft:* The Finches' farm skirted the foothills of the mountains, and the land was too steep and too rocky for much besides pasture. Tristan was unused to such husbandry, but he thought it odd that the sheep were taken to pasture every morning at first light, and brought home again every evening. He was quite sure that wasn't the usual way of pasturing animals, but he dared not bring it up again. You'd think he'd been raised in a city for the looks they gave him — looks that said he'd best keep his mouth shut until his ears dried out, because he obviously didn't know the first thing about anything. Not around this place.

*Revised:* The Finches' farm skirted the foothills of the mountains, and the land was too steep and too rocky for much besides pasture. It was true that the farm he'd grown up on had kept few animals, but he thought it odd that the sheep here were taken to pasture every morning at first light, and brought home again every evening. He was quite sure that wasn't the usual way of pasturing animals,

but he dared not bring it up again. You'd think he'd been raised in a city for the looks they gave him.

#### Paragraph 4

Getting rid of the parentheses around "he hoped" will read better.

*First Draft:* He repressed a sigh of disappointment, and met Phillip's stare of badly masked challenge with a (he hoped) empty expression of patience.

*Revised:* He repressed a sigh of disappointment, and met Phillip's stare of badly masked challenge with what he hoped was an empty expression of patience.

#### Paragraphs 5 to 9

I'm happy with the dialogue. Short, to the point, and well within character for both of them. I'll skip over the paragraphs that I don't see problems with from here on.

#### Paragraph 10

As I wrote the first draft, I suddenly realized I needed a reason for Christina to believe Phillip over Tristan. Hence the sudden introduction of "tangleburrs" in paragraph 56. This sort of mistake — a previously unmentioned element thrust into the story to fix a plot hole — is often called a *deus ex machina*. That's Latin for "God in the box." More often applied to surprisingly fortuitous solutions to the lead's problems, the term basically means the author pulled something out of nowhere. This is a perfect example of why revision is important, and also why you should just let the first draft flow without worrying about fixing the details as you go. In revision I'll add tangleburrs into paragraph 10. When you fix problems like this during

revision it's called revising. When you do this later, say in a subsequent story, it's called "retroactive continuity." Ret-con for short. Avoid the need for ret-con by figuring out the details before you publish. Also to fix in this paragraph: "the trees of the forest ... much bigger than he thought a tree ... " I need to keep the plural. The phrase "quite a ways" is annoying me too.

*First Draft:* The trees of the forest were tall and old, and much bigger than he thought a tree growing in thin soil over mountain rock could be. The leaf mould was deep, and there was little undergrowth to slow him as he walked. The ground sloped upward, outcroppings of rock thrusting up between the trees that Tristan either had to skirt around or climb over. The terrain took up enough of his attention that he'd come quite a ways before he realized that he had still not heard any sounds of water. He paused, and looked about himself doubtfully.

*Revised:* The trees of the forest were tall and old, and much bigger than he thought trees growing in thin soil over mountain rock could be. The leaf mould was deep and wet. Save for sprawling clumps of burr-covered vines there was little undergrowth to slow him as he walked. The ground sloped upward, outcroppings of rock thrusting up between the trees that Tristan either had to skirt around or climb over. The terrain took up enough of his attention that he'd come quite a distance before he realized that he had still not heard any sounds of water. He paused, looking about himself doubtfully.

### Paragraph 11

The comma after "he heaved himself over the edge" doesn't convey enough suspense, and the unnecessary "Tristan" in the second sentence can be replaced with "he."

*First Draft:* There was still no sound of water when Tristan reached the outcrop. Disappointed, Tristan scrambled up the rocky face of the ridge, his eyes straining upward as he climbed, watching the small patch of sky above him. He heaved himself over the edge, and came face to muzzle with the largest wolf he'd ever seen.

*Revised:* There was still no sound of water when Tristan reached the outcrop. Disappointed, he scrambled up the rocky face of the ridge, his eyes straining upward as he climbed, watching the small patch of sky above him. He heaved himself over the edge — and came face to muzzle with the largest wolf he'd ever seen.

### Paragraph 18

"As it happens" is unnecessary and a little awkward.

*First Draft:* "How polite you are! Yes, young man, I am planning on eating you as it happens. You are here, and I'm hungry after my nap."

*Revised:* "How polite you are! Yes, young man, I am planning on eating you. You are here, and I'm hungry after my nap."

### Paragraph 22

Typo. Should be "too," not "to."

*First Draft:* "I don't eat much rabbit. The little devils are to quick."

*Revised:* "I don't eat much rabbit. The little devils are too quick."

### Paragraph 25

"He laid them, trembling a little ..." makes it sound like they (the dead rabbits) are doing the trembling. I'll revise

this to make it clear that Tristan is trembling. Is "laid" or "lay" correct here? Looking it up in my dictionary, I see that I had it right. Lay is the past tense of "lie," and I need the past tense of "lay," which is laid. Also, I refer to the wolf in this paragraph as "he," but in all other paragraphs I refer to the wolf as "it." Consistency is key, so that needs to be changed.

*First Draft:* He laid them, trembling a little, before the wolf's paws, well within reach of the long yellow teeth. The wolf waited until he moved back — Tristan would have sworn it was smiling, except it wasn't, of course — before he daintily picked up the first and crunched it, slowly, as if savoring it.

*Revised:* Trembling a little, he laid them before the wolf's paws, well within reach of the long yellow teeth. The wolf waited until he moved back — Tristan would have sworn it was smiling, except it wasn't, of course — before it daintily picked up the first and crunched it, slowly, as if savoring it.

## Paragraph 26

I just used the phrase "smacking its lips" in paragraph 20. I need to find a different phrase.

*First Draft:* "Ah, yes," it said when it was done, smacking its lips.

*Revised:* "Ah, yes," it said when it was done, the long pink tongue flicking over its teeth.

## Paragraph 27

This is nit-picky, but I dislike using the same words too closely together, and I have "back" two sentences in a row. I can either change the first to "home" or the second sentence to "needing my help with the sheep." And I repeat the word "need," as well.

*First Draft:* "But I'm afraid I need to get back now. Phillip will be needing my help getting the sheep back."

*Revised:* "But I'm afraid I have to get back now. Phillip will be needing my help with the sheep."

### Paragraph 30

That "And" at the beginning of the dialogue is unnecessary. I'm starting too many sentences with "and" again.

*First Draft:* The wolf ignored his question. "And what brought you into my home so close to dark, Tristan? Surely if you need to be getting back already, you couldn't have been going much farther?"

*Revised:* The wolf ignored his question. "What brought you into my home so close to dark, Tristan? Surely if you need to be getting back already, you couldn't have been going much farther?"

### Paragraph 36

Another extraneous "and." "And then looked downstream" is followed immediately with "and then continue along." I can drop the first "and" without losing anything, but leaving two "and then's" makes a sort of stutter in the rhythm of the text.

*First Draft:* It wuffed through its nose, and then looked downstream. "Follow the creek until it turns, and then continue along the forest."

*Revised:* It wuffed through its nose, then looked downstream. "Follow the creek until it turns, and then continue along the forest."

### Paragraph 41

There are way too many commas in the dialogue.

*First Draft:* Then he called after the wolf, "If I were to fetch an extra rabbit, or two, and leave them up in the pasture, do you prefer them dressed, or no?"

*Revised:* Then he called after the wolf, "If I were to fetch an extra rabbit or two and leave them up in the pasture, do you prefer them dressed or not?"

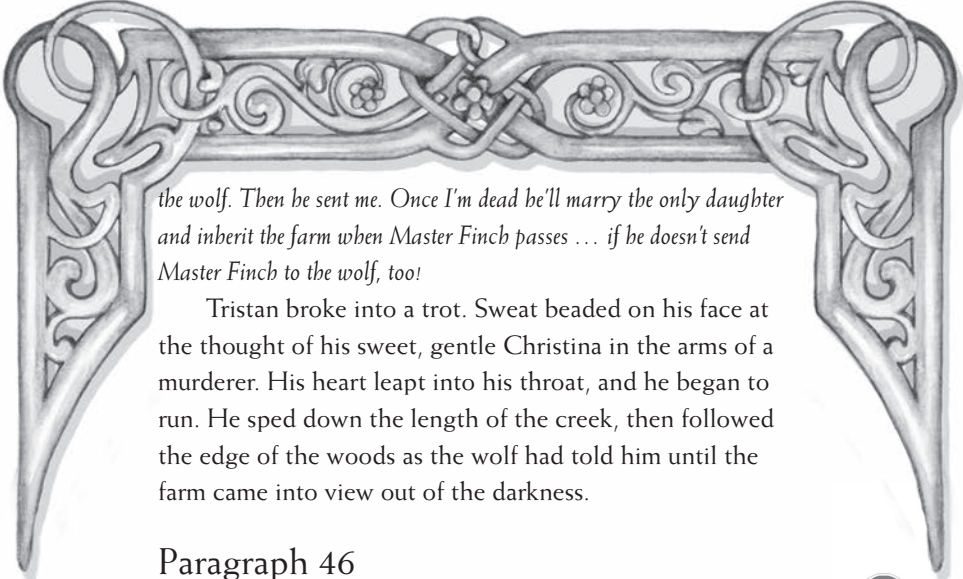
## Paragraph 44

"He" has meant Tristan for so long that I need to change the first word of this paragraph to "Phillip." There are, again, too many commas in the second sentence. "If he doesn't send Master Finch to the wolf too!" is a fragment and would sound better attached to the end of the preceding sentence. There should be a paragraph break after the interior monologue, since it's a form of dialogue and the action shifts afterwards. "The thought of his sweet, gentle Christina in the arms of a murderer was too much for him" is bothering me, although I can't quite pin down what I don't like about the sentence. I'll change it anyway. The sentence starting with "he sped down the length of the creek" has yet another comma and "and" that I could do without.

*First Draft:* He must want the farm for himself, he thought as he made his way along the bank. He sent Beau, the only son, to the wolf, and then me. Then he'll marry the only daughter and inherit the farm when Master Finch passes. If he doesn't send Master Finch to the wolf, too! Tristan broke into a trot. Sweat beaded on his face. The thought of his sweet, gentle Christina in the arms of a murderer was too much for him. His heart leapt into his throat, and he began to run. He sped down the length of the creek, and followed the edge of the woods as the wolf had told him, until the farm came into view out of the darkness.

*Revised:* Phillip must want the farm for himself, he thought as he made his way along the bank. He sent Beau, the only son, to





*the wolf. Then he sent me. Once I'm dead he'll marry the only daughter and inherit the farm when Master Finch passes . . . if he doesn't send Master Finch to the wolf, too!*

Tristan broke into a trot. Sweat beaded on his face at the thought of his sweet, gentle Christina in the arms of a murderer. His heart leapt into his throat, and he began to run. He sped down the length of the creek, then followed the edge of the woods as the wolf had told him until the farm came into view out of the darkness.

## Paragraph 46

Less telling, more showing. This is the climax! Show, show, show! Also, "the sheep, who started . . ." should be "the sheep, which started . . ."

*First Draft:* Before Tristan could gather his breath to call out, Phillip jumped on him again. Tristan was tired from running and it was all he could do to keep the knife away from him. Their thrashing panicked the sheep, who started bleating and running into each other in the tight confines of their pen. The cottage door flew open, light spilling across the yard. Tristan looked up involuntarily, and Phillip managed to wrest the blade free. It slashed up the right side of Tristan's face, laying his cheek open to the bone and slicing through his eye. Tristan screamed, clutching uselessly at his face, unable to think through the burning pain.

*Revised:* Before Tristan could gather his breath to call out, Phillip jumped on him again. Desperately, Tristan clung to Phillip's wrist with both hands. He was already exhausted from running and barely able to keep the knife away as Phillip bowled them both over. The smaller man snarled at him and dug the fingers of his free hand into Tristan's throat. Their thrashing panicked the sheep, which started bleating and running into each other in the tight

confines of their pen. The cottage door flew open, light spilling across the yard. Tristan looked up involuntarily, and Phillip managed to wrest the blade free. It slashed up the right side of Tristan's face, laying his cheek open to the bone and slicing through his eye. Tristan screamed. He let go of Phillip reflexively, clutching uselessly at his face, unable to think through the burning pain.

### Paragraph 50

"The pain roared, but it was farther away now, too." I can do better than that.

*First Draft:* "No!" Tristan answered back. The pain roared, but it was farther away now, too. "Murderer!"

*Revised:* "No!" Tristan shouted. The pain still roared, but he fought past it. "Murderer!"

### Paragraph 60

"Stay away her!" Oops, I forgot the "from." This kind of mistake is common and can be aggravatingly hard for the author to catch, because the author knows what word should be there and fills it in unconsciously. When possible, have someone else give your story a once-over to catch this kind of thing.

### Paragraph 61

"He felt it ripped free ..." Here I'm talking about the knife, but the last object in the paragraph was Tristan's heart. Best to change "it" to something a little more concrete. Also, I'm not satisfied with "hurt worse than anything else."

*First Draft:* Tristan twisted away, and the knife pierced his lung instead of his heart. He felt it ripped free, but he suddenly didn't care. His heart had already torn in two as he watched his beloved's face turn from shock and denial

to rage. She spat at him, and that blow hurt worse than anything else.

*Revised:* Tristan twisted away, and the knife pierced his lung instead of his heart. He felt the blade ripped free, but he suddenly didn't care. His heart had already torn in two as he watched his beloved's face turn from shock and denial to rage. She spat at him, and that blow hurt worse than any wound steel could inflict.

### Paragraph 62

"... the humans bolted for the cottage." I'm a little ahead of myself here. Tristan is still human, and certainly in no condition to bolt anywhere. Since the paragraph specifically mentions the reactions of Phillip and the Finches, I can safely change "the humans" to "they."

*First Draft:* Phillip and the Finches cried out in fear as the giant black wolf strode into the farmyard, and then the humans bolted for the cottage.

*Revised:* Phillip and the Finches cried out in fear as the giant black wolf strode into the farmyard, and then they bolted for the cottage.

### Paragraph 66

Yet another extra comma, right before "and then let go."

*First Draft:* But to his confusion, the wolf only shook him a little, and then let go. It stepped back and sat, watching.

*Revised:* But to his confusion, the wolf only shook him a little and then let go. It stepped back and sat, watching.

### Paragraph 67

As much as I like that first sentence, it's just too long for comfort. I do like a little stream of consciousness once in a while though. This whole paragraph will need a little

tweaking to get the rhythm just right.

*First Draft:* Warmth spread from the punctures on his shoulder, warmth like blistering sun in summer, when the rains are late and the earth is dead and crumbly and throws the heat back at you like it doesn't want it either. Slowly at first, and then faster it spread out, spreading through him, flowing through his veins, crawling across his skin. He twitched, then writhed as the heat coursed up his neck to his ravaged face. He screamed, his flesh contorting, rippling and twisting over the bones in ways it was never meant to.


*Revised:* Warmth spread from the punctures on his shoulder, warmth like blistering sun in summer, when the rains are late and the earth is dead and crumbly and throws the detested heat right back at you. Slowly at first and then faster it spread out, flowing through his veins, crawling across his skin. He twitched, then the heat coursed up his neck to his ravaged face and he writhed, screaming, his flesh contorting, rippling and twisting over the bones in ways it was never meant to.

## Paragraph 68

Simple and clear is a virtue, but that "It was healed" is a bit too much so for my taste. Something like "The wound was healed as if it had never been" is more my style.

*First Draft:* Like a door had been shut on his pain, it was simply gone. Tristan sat up, shaking from head to foot. He could see out of both eyes! He touched his face in wonder. It was healed.

*Revised:* Like a door had been shut on his pain, it simply vanished. Tristan sat up, shaking from head to foot. He could see out of both eyes! He touched his face in wonder. The wound was gone as if it had never been.



Appendix B contains the full text of the revised second draft of the sample story.

## Tips for Revision

Here are some ideas to help in revising your stories.

### Enjoy the Accomplishment

Every completed first draft is a little victory. Enjoy it!

### Take a Break

If you have the time, take a break between writing your first draft and starting the revision. Leave it for at least a day, but a week or two is not out of the question. Try not to think about the story at all. In fact, the more you can forget it, the better.

### Print Out the First Draft

Don't do your first read-through on the computer, if that's where you wrote it. Print it out and read it where you tend to do your recreational reading. If you're reading it at the computer you'll probably be tempted to jump in and make corrections as you go.

### Re-Read the First Draft

Re-read it as quickly as possible. Don't stop to analyze the first time through. Instead, get the overall sense of the story. Does it flow well? Does it make sense? Does the ending leave you satisfied? If you really feel that you must, make little notes on the print-out as you read, but nothing longer

than one word. Preferably, just circle the offending word or phrase and keep going. After you have a good sense of how the whole story feels and fits together, you can go back over it at your leisure and mark it up to your heart's content.

## Have Someone Else Read it

This is invaluable for finding mistakes such as omitted words, as well as for making sure that you said what you meant. *You* know what you meant, of course — but sometimes a phrase can be ambiguous in a way you didn't even realize. Ask your proofreader questions, such as: Did it seem slow or boring at any point? Did you ever feel lost or confused? Did the ending satisfy you? Did the beginning grab your interest? What do you think could make this story stronger?

Nothing says you have to take her advice, but it's always good to know how it reads to someone else.

## Read it Out Loud

Do this somewhere where no one will hear you. If you're feeling self-conscious you'll likely be paying more attention to your nerves than your words, and huge mistakes can slip right past you without you even noticing. Sometimes something will seem fine written down, but when you read it aloud it sounds awkward or worse. Your prose will never suffer for being edited to sound good when spoken as well as read.

## Revise in Small Chunks

Particularly with a longer story, the idea of revision can be overwhelming. Set small goals. Just revise

the first page, or the first three paragraphs. Then do the same amount the next day. By setting small achievable goals and sticking to them, you can get through even the toughest revision.

## Read it Again

Sometimes if you look at a sentence and just fix that sentence, you create a new problem with a sentence before or after the one you fixed. Remember to read the draft again after making changes.

You may have noticed in my second draft that I changed "It was healed" to "The wound was gone as if it had never been," instead of "The wound was healed ..." like I said I was going to. Since I use "his wounds had been healed" in the last paragraph, I decided to change "healed" to "gone," and then had to change "Like a door had been shut on his pain, it was simply gone" to "... it simply vanished" to avoid repetition.

## Revise for Issues

The first time through you might just be looking for grammar mistakes and typos. Then you might read through looking for issues with character and dialogue. Another time through you might look for places where you're telling instead of showing. Learn about what parts of writing are hard for you, so that you can look for them during revision. By focusing on different aspects of writing you can not only find ways to improve your manuscript, but you'll also hone those skills and come up with new ideas and techniques to try.

## Remember Who You're Writing For

On one hand, this means remember who your target audience is and write appropriately.

On the other hand, and I think this is even more important, remember that you're writing this story for *you*. Make this the best it can be in *your* eyes. No one else really matters in the end. This is your story, not theirs.

At the end of the day, they're going to set it aside and be done with it. A story you've written is always there in the back of your mind, even when you've stopped working on it. If it's going to be there taking up space anyway, make it something you're proud of, something that you look back on with a little pleased smile as you think, "that was good."

Be honest with yourself and your readers. You'll all be happier for it.

## Stop Revising

To never revise is to be egotistical. To never stop revising is to be neurotic. Eventually you must finish the story. Just because you can't bear to look at it again doesn't mean it's done — but it does mean you at least need to take a break. Stop when you're satisfied with it, not when you're sick of it. (Although you may be sick of it as well as satisfied.)

Then start a new story. You don't get to be a better writer by endlessly revising. You get to be a better writer by *writing*.





# Writer's Block

This handbook is supposed to help you get over one kind of writer's block — the kind that happens in the beginning, when you don't know where to start. There are several kinds of writer's block, though, and we'll discuss some of them below. What you'll need to do when you're feeling stuck is to figure out what kind of writer's block you have. See if any of the headers below sound like you.

## What happens Next?

This problem is common in the middle, right after the inspiration runs out, and is more common for No Outline people than it is for Outline people. You literally don't know what comes next.

What you need to do is stop and brainstorm. Start asking questions just like we did in the chapter on ideas. Where is the story supposed to be going? What would increase the tension? How can things get even worse for the characters? Write out flowcharts of possibilities. Eventually you should hit on something that sounds right. If not, pick one anyway and go with it. Just the act of writing *something* in your story may jog a better idea out of hiding.

For example, I was once writing a story where my antagonists were planning something nefarious in the background. I became uncertain if the plan of action I had for them made sense, but when I tried to sit and think it out, I just kept spinning my wheels. Finally I started a new file where I had the antagonists start going through their options in a dialogue. This wasn't something I ever planned on including in the story itself, but by working with those

characters I was able to have them come up with a plan that made sense for the story.

## How Do I Get to the End?

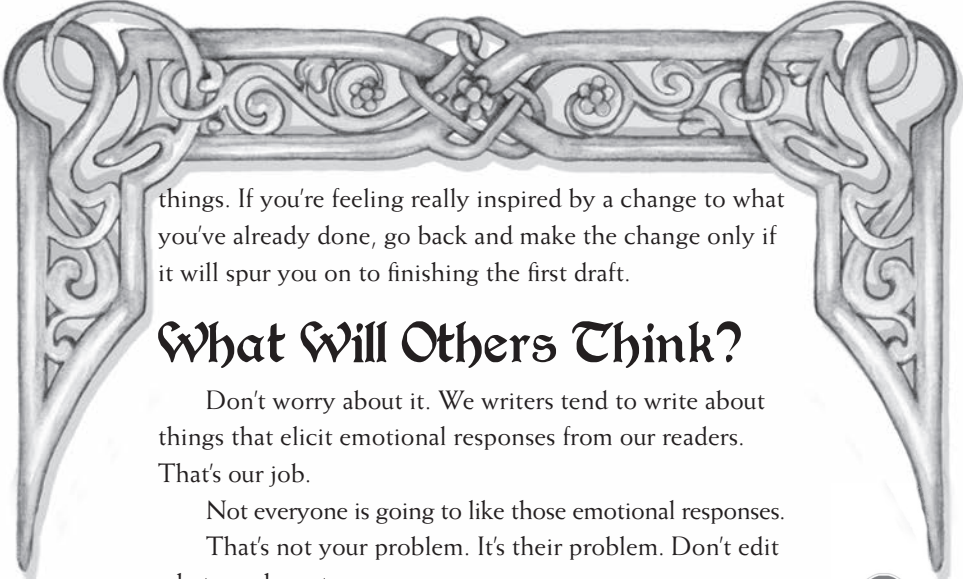
Related to the previous block, this block happens when you've written yourself into a corner. You know where you're going, but you have no idea how to get there from here. You've gone down a dead-end alley and the only way out is to go back the way you came.

Unfortunately, what you're probably going to have to do is scrap a portion of what you've just written. Cut and paste it into a new file and save it somewhere to look at later. (Remember, no writing is ever wasted!) Just how much do you have to cut? That depends. Go back to the last major plot point in the story. How can you change direction from there to get to the next plot point? How can you get to the ending from here? Maybe there's a flaw in your original outline, or the story has shifted a little (or a lot) from the one you originally outlined. That happens. You may just need to adjust the path to your ending, or the ending itself, to accommodate the change in the story.

## My Writing is Horrible!

Of course it is, it's the first draft. Don't worry about being as good as your favorite authors. Their first drafts were probably just as horrible as yours. A horrible beginning is no excuse to stop. Fix it later. Get the story down now.

Some people prefer to revise as they write. I advise against this unless you really, really can't help it. The fastest way to get frustrated with your work is to keep revising it before it's done. Wait until you can look at the finished draft — the big picture — before you try to start fixing



things. If you're feeling really inspired by a change to what you've already done, go back and make the change only if it will spur you on to finishing the first draft.

## What Will Others Think?

Don't worry about it. We writers tend to write about things that elicit emotional responses from our readers. That's our job.

Not everyone is going to like those emotional responses.

That's not your problem. It's their problem. Don't edit what you have to say.

## I'm Afraid to Move On

Sometimes the idea of being done is scarier than you're prepared for.

If you finish this story, then you have to start a new one, and you don't have an idea. Maybe you've been working on this story for so long, you don't know what you would write about.

That's what this book is for, to give you more ideas and to help you build frameworks for more stories.

What if your next story isn't as good as this one?


So what? If nothing else, it's good practice!

What if you're afraid to turn it in or send it out?

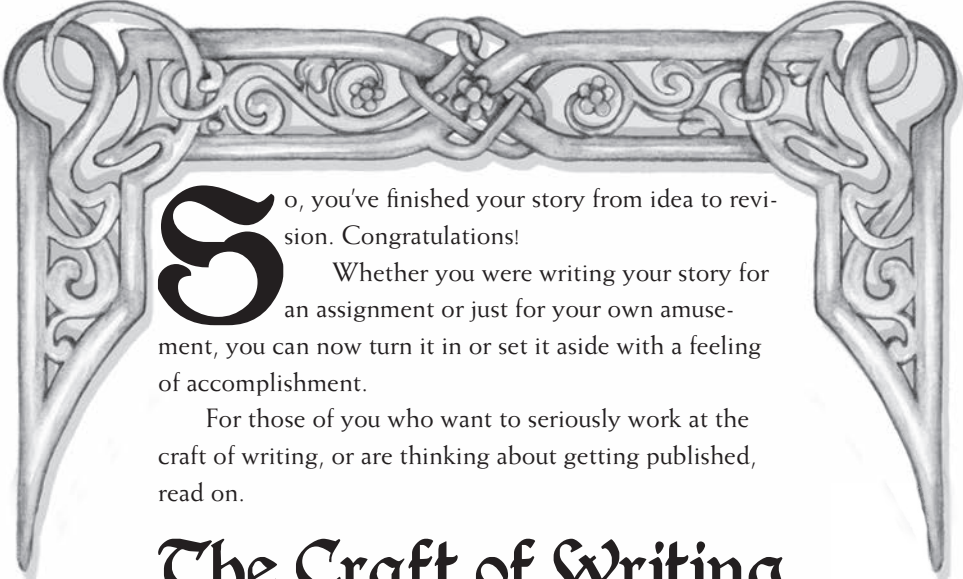
If you've done your revision to the best of your ability, then don't worry about what other people think. Ask yourself, If I were never going to show this to another living soul, would I be satisfied with the story as it is now? Have I said what I meant to say in a way that's as engaging as I'm capable of right now?

If the answer is yes, you're done. Turn it in. Send it out. Stop thinking about it, and start something new.

Keep writing.



Chapter  
Five:  
Ever After



So, you've finished your story from idea to revision. Congratulations!

Whether you were writing your story for an assignment or just for your own amusement, you can now turn it in or set it aside with a feeling of accomplishment.

For those of you who want to seriously work at the craft of writing, or are thinking about getting published, read on.

## The Craft of Writing

Lots of people think that writing can't be taught. They think that you have to have some sort of inborn talent to be a writer, and if you aren't a genius out of the gate then you were never meant to be a writer.

Lots of people are also wrong.

Good writing can be taught. Just like in art class, you learn how to look at things and to translate that onto your medium. A sculptor uses clay, and a writer uses words. (Anyone who also thinks that art cannot be taught has never taken a really good drawing class.)

Writing is like carpentry. Maybe your first wood-working project is a little crude, but if you have a decent teacher and a little drive it will be sturdy and serviceable, and your next project will fit together a little better, and maybe have more elegant lines. Eventually you'll be doing scrollwork on cabinet doors. You're not only learning by instruction, but you're learning by experience, by doing it.

Just like an apprentice carpenter, a novice writer's early works may lack sophistication. They may fit together a little awkwardly. But with study, practice, and persistence, you *can* learn to be a better writer.



## Tips and Truths for Writers

Some of this has been touched on in the previous chapters, but it's worth going over again. The tips that follow are guaranteed to help you improve your craft — but only if you're also willing to put in the time and effort yourself.

### Tip: Write Every Day

It sounds so simple, but it takes a lot of discipline. Read the blogs, FAQs, and autobiographies of your favorite writers. They all talk about how much time they put in at the keyboard. Those who are able to make a living by writing work eight hours a day — or more! Those that have day jobs also have a schedule that they rigorously stick to in order to meet their deadlines.

Set goals for yourself. What are you looking to achieve? When at all possible, make concrete goals. Saying that you “want to be a writer” is like saying you want to breathe. You write, therefore you are a writer. Saying that you want to be a published author isn't clear enough either. What do you want to have published? An article? A novel? A non-fiction book? A screenplay? When do you want to have said piece written by? By what age do you want to be a published author in the area you've chosen? Make your goals difficult, but within reason. If you set goals that are too easy, you won't develop the discipline needed to be a successful writer. If you set goals that are too hard, you'll likely give up because you can never reach them. A good long-term time frame is five years. That gives you a lot of wiggle room — room to learn, room to make mistakes, and room to correct them.

Once you have a long-term goal, figure out how to achieve it. Set smaller goals. Have the first so many chapters written by Christmas. Have three short stories submitted to magazines by your next birthday.

Now set your daily writing goal. This is where the real discipline comes in.

Some people recommend setting a time goal, and others a word count goal. I prefer the word count goal. I've spent way too much time sitting in front of the screen thinking instead of writing for the time-spent-writing goals to work for me. But if I can't leave my desk until I have five hundred words done, then I know that letting my mind wander is only taking time away from the stuff I want to do once my daily quota is done.

If you're really afraid of the time commitment, start with something easy. One hundred words. *Anyone* can write one hundred words a day. The previous paragraph was eighty-four words, just to give you an idea of how short that really is. It can be hard to write in such short bursts though, so five hundred words may be easier to start out with. That's about half of a standard sheet of paper, which is enough for you to really start getting into what you're saying. Feel free to keep going past your goal, though! If the muse strikes you, run with it as long as you can — it's rare enough.

You may have heard this before, but there's a reason it keeps being said: If you were able to write just one full page a day, in one year you would have a book 365 pages long, which is a perfectly publishable size for a novel. Spend the following year revising it at that same slow but steady pace and you'll have a novel ready to be submitted in two years. That's about as long as a lot of professional authors take.

You *can* do this.

Write every day.

## Truth: Writing is Hard Work

A lot of people — novice writers and non-writers both — have a vision of a writer sitting comfortably at his or her desk, typing away with gusto. That writer is inspired! The words flow from his fingertips in an unending stream of prose. It's easy, effortless, and fun.

Remember what I said about a lot of people being wrong?

Sometimes it really is like that. Those are the great days, and they should be treasured.

Most of the time, however, writing is hard work.

Often the beginning is where you feel the pull of inspiration. You have this great idea, and the words come easily as you set up the first pages of your conflict. Then, sooner or later, the inspiration fades. You start to wonder if your idea really was all that good. Your characters seem insipid, your plot seems lame, and your conflict no longer holds your interest. You start to dread looking at your desk.

The honeymoon is over. Now the work begins.

Just about everyone goes through this. Keep going. Your first draft is always going to need revision, but it's never as bad as you think it is while you're in the middle of it. Even if you think it's terrible, *keep going!* Make a concerted effort to do better every day — you can always fix the bad parts in revision.

The inspiration is the fun part. That's what gets you started. But a lot of the time writing isn't fun. You agonize over the right word. You have no idea what happens next (although outlines do help with this issue). Every word seems to take an incredible effort. It seems like you'll never get to the end.

If you're well and truly stuck, take a day off. Do something fun. Don't think about your project at all if you can



help it. Then, when you sit down at your desk the next day, before you start typing, remind yourself why you're doing this.

Remind yourself that you *can* do this. Trust me, you can. Then do it.

## Tip: Read a Lot

Don't just read the particular genre you want to write in. Read *everything*.

Read news articles. Read poetry. Read history. Read the current bestsellers. Read your favorite books. Read genres you hate.

Everything you read helps you learn more about the craft of writing. Even reading passively, for pure fun, gets the words in front of your brain and gets the rhythm of conflict and resolution, action and reaction, into your unconscious mind.

Read actively. Pay attention to how the author uses all the tools we've talked about in the previous chapters. What works? What doesn't? Where does the author break the rules and get away with it? Where does the author not get away with it? How could you improve that sentence? How can you apply that technique?

Even time "wasted" on a book you hate is not wasted if you can discover what made you hate the book — and then avoid making those same mistakes!

Make sure you do read the genre you want to write in, as well. Don't be so cocky that you think that you know what people will want in a romance if you've never read a romance. Odds are you're thinking in stereotypes, and frankly the stereotypes have been done already, thank you. You need to bring something fresh and new to the readers, and you can't do that if you don't know what they've already read.

## Truth: This Probably Won't Make You Rich

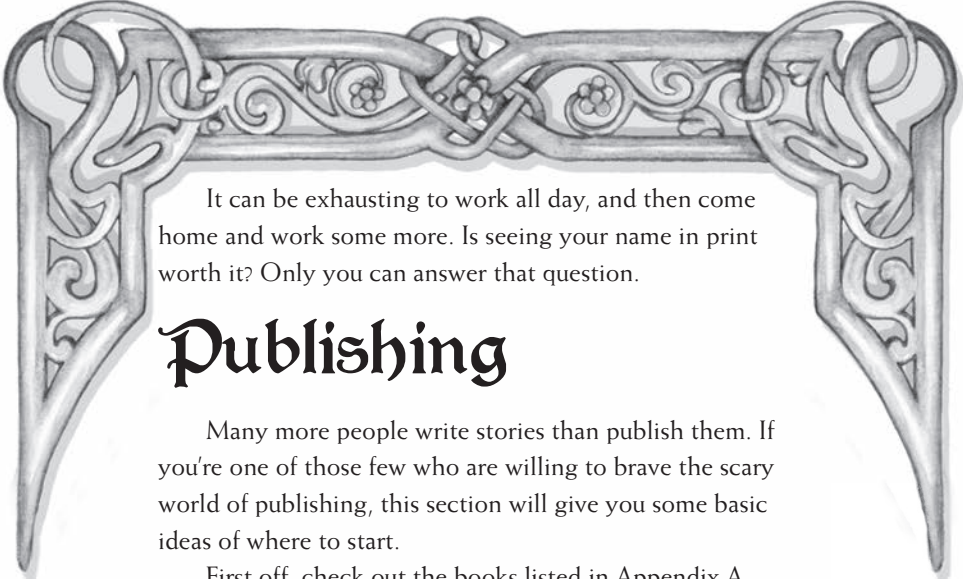
Now, you could be the next Stephen King or James Patterson, in which case this could very well make you rich. The majority of published writers don't become the next big thing, though. That doesn't mean you aren't successful, or that you can't make a living at writing. It does mean that you need to plan your future carefully.

In an interview in 2000, author Piers Anthony was asked what advice he had for aspiring writers. The first part of his response was, "have a working spouse." Full-time writers don't get health benefits. Or vacation pay. Or employer-matched pre-tax retirement contributions.

In short, an awful lot of writers have a day job.

There's nothing wrong with having a day job. It doesn't make you any less of a writer. Writing makes you a writer. Being published makes you a successful writer. Working a full time job *and* being a writer means you are a disciplined, realistic, goal-oriented individual. People who say they "don't have time to write" are just making excuses. Those who honestly have higher priorities than writing don't *make* time to write. (There are certainly priorities that should be higher than writing. Paying rent and putting food on the table are just two of them.) Those who want to write and have at least an hour of free time a day but don't write are not making writing a high enough priority — usually because writing is hard work, and that's not much fun.

Work your writing time into your schedule. Get up early, or stay up a little late. Bring your laptop to your day job and write over your lunch break. (Never write while you're on the clock. This is for legal reasons. If you're getting paid by your employer while you're writing, they may be able to make a claim on your finished manuscript.)



It can be exhausting to work all day, and then come home and work some more. Is seeing your name in print worth it? Only you can answer that question.

## Publishing

Many more people write stories than publish them. If you're one of those few who are willing to brave the scary world of publishing, this section will give you some basic ideas of where to start.

First off, check out the books listed in Appendix A, particularly *The Insider's Guide to Getting an Agent* and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Getting Published*. These books will give you a wealth of information on the publishing industry as a whole, as well as specific dos and don'ts for getting published. Also check out your library's copy of *The Writer's Market*. A new edition is put out each year, and usually contains several articles as well as more names and addresses than you care to think about. This should be your first source for finding magazines for short stories, or agents or publishing houses for longer works. You can also usually find the current year's edition for sale very cheap at the end of December in your local book store.

Read the guidelines for the person or agency you're submitting to. Check out their websites. Call and make sure the person you're sending your submission to still works there and double-check the spelling of his or her name. There's a lot of turnover in this industry and you don't want your submission getting lost or rejected out of hand because the wrong name is on it.

Always send a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE).

Type everything except your signature, including the address on the envelope. Consult a book such as *Formatting*

& *Submitting Your Manuscript* (also listed in Appendix A) to find out what your letter and manuscript should look like. Be as professional as possible.

Be prepared for rejection. It happens. If the person sending you the rejection is kind enough to tell you why they're rejecting it or gives you advice on your manuscript, be grateful. You don't have to take their advice, but these are very busy people and odds are they're honestly trying to be helpful.

Don't get discouraged. Publishing is a tough field to break into — there's a lot of competition out there. Keep sending your work out, but keep writing too. Just because you finished something doesn't mean you get to rest on your laurels. Even your first sale doesn't mean you get to stop working, although a little celebration would certainly be in order. (The check from my first writing sale wouldn't have even covered pizza, but hey, that's not the point!) If you're serious about getting published, you need to keep writing new projects and sending them out. Eventually one of them will get published. Maybe more than one.

Wouldn't that be something?

Keep writing.

A decorative border surrounds the page, featuring intricate Celtic knotwork on the left and bottom edges, and a floral vine with leaves and small flowers on the top right. The background has a textured, parchment-like appearance.

# Afterward

Once upon a time, Andrew Rilstone and Richard Lambert were living, with half a dozen other members of the York University Science Fiction and Fantasy Society, in a rambling rented house known as "Minas Tirith."

They'd been experimenting with a lot of rules-light, story-heavy role-playing games (RPGs). One idea which they kept coming back to was: "Would it be possible to create an RPG that could be played straight out of the box, with no need to either design a scenario module or go through a character generation process?" They thought that in order to achieve this, it would probably be necessary to put characters, motifs, and events on a set of cards. This was around 1990, and no-one had even heard of *Magic The Gathering* yet.

A number of board games influenced and inspired them. One of them was the old Avalon Hill game *Mystic Wood*. (This was a game in which players, as medieval knights, explored a modular board representing a magical forest, turning up cards to determine which monsters and treasures they encountered along the way.) They liked the way the very simple mechanics tended to produce events which were quite like the kinds of things that happened in Medieval romances. When they played it, they tended to "narrate" stories based on the cards that came up. (The rules said you had to roll a 6 to get out of the prison tower, but they added that you had to propose an amusing escape plan as well.) They discussed the idea of a game which was actually designed to encourage this "narrating" element.

They also enjoyed West End Games' *Tales of the Arabian Nights*, which included elements of board gaming and "choose your own ending" paragraph books. It explicitly encouraged players to extemporize a story based on the events generated by the "paragraph book," but they felt



the game itself was too complicated to really facilitate this kind of play.

They tried a card game called *Dark Cults*, in which two players competed to tell horror stories, with one player representing “death” trying to put the protagonist into dangerous situations, and the other representing “life” trying to get him out of them. They liked the idea behind this game a lot more than they liked the game itself.

One day, they happened to see a production of the ballet “Sleeping Beauty.” (They were very eclectic gamer geeks!) After the show, Richard said that since fairy tales had a very stereotyped structure, they could form the basis for the “out of the box” RPG card game they’d been thinking about.

Andrew was an English graduate, and had lots of ideas about “structuralism” in his head. Like every other gamer, he’d read Joseph Campbell’s theories about the journey of the hero and the monomyth, and was convinced that this idea should be usable in a game. He’d also read Lord Raglan, an early 20th-century writer who actually provided a checklist of 20 motifs that hero-stories were supposed to have, and more heavy-going literary criticism theorists like Northrop Frye. Andrew had also encountered Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale*, and thought that it felt like the rules for a card game that no-one had actually written. His idea at this point was to come up with a card game in which stories literally wrote themselves.

The first, very primitive, *Once Upon a Time* decks involved phrases from the Brothers Grimm stories, and rules about which phrases could follow each other. For example, a red card that might say “and in the forest he discovered a ...,” would have to be followed by a green card which would say “sword,” “mushroom,” or “gingerbread house,” which would in turn be followed by a blue one that said “in which there lived a ...” or “which was guarded by a ...” Needless to say,

this was far too complicated and didn't even get as far as a prototype deck.

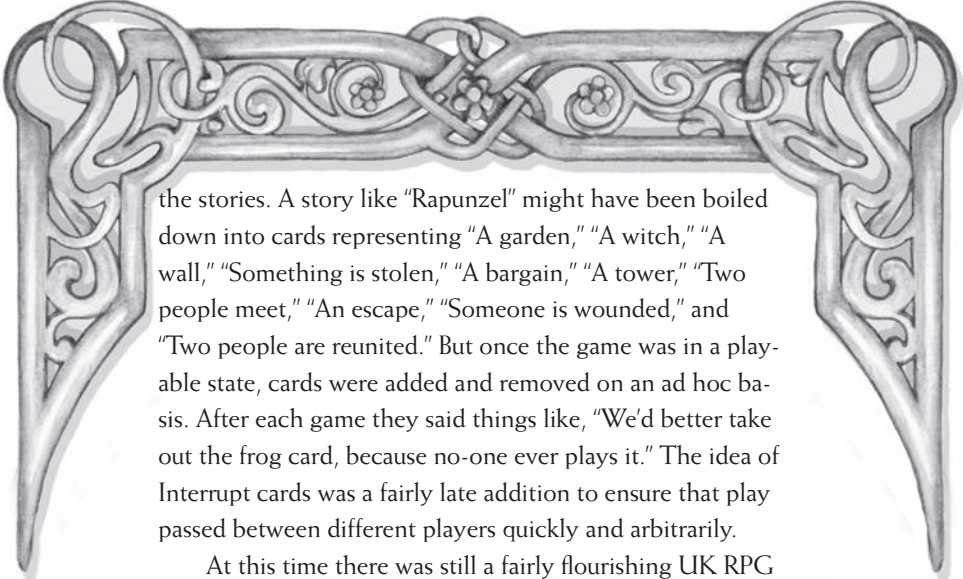
Another early version involved lots of fairy tale phrases, with the single rule that any card could be played after any other card, provided it made sense in terms of the rules of English grammar. (There was, believe it or not, a published card game based on the TV soap *Neighbours* which did quite a good job generating comedy soap opera plots according to precisely these rules.) The idea of cards with phrases on them survives in *Once Upon a Time's* Ending cards.

In the end, they decided that this was far too complex, and what was needed was a game in which the cards represented very simple motifs — “a tree,” “a dragon,” “a cave,” etc. — and that the linking material should come out of the players' imaginations in a free form, unstructured way. (After all, this was how the role-playing games they most enjoyed worked.) This made them think of the kind of exercise which is sometimes set at writers' workshops, where one is given five random objects and asked to invent a character or a story that utilizes them all. Once they'd had that idea, the basic system of “whoever gets rid of all their cards first wins” followed rather naturally.

This got them thinking less and less in terms of traditional board game rules and literary theory, and more and more in terms of parlor games; *Once Upon a Time* has quite a lot in common with games like *Consequences* and *Fortunately/Unfortunately*. It also has more than a whiff of various BBC Radio 4 panel games. The rule that you lose control of the story if you hesitate or contradict what's already been said is straight out of *Just a Minute*; and there's an item on *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue* in which panelists have to narrate alternate sentences of a story, trying to drive it towards different endings.

There followed a rather haphazard process of reading the Brothers Grimm and harvesting a mix of motifs from





the stories. A story like "Rapunzel" might have been boiled down into cards representing "A garden," "A witch," "A wall," "Something is stolen," "A bargain," "A tower," "Two people meet," "An escape," "Someone is wounded," and "Two people are reunited." But once the game was in a playable state, cards were added and removed on an ad hoc basis. After each game they said things like, "We'd better take out the frog card, because no-one ever plays it." The idea of Interrupt cards was a fairly late addition to ensure that play passed between different players quickly and arbitrarily.

At this time there was still a fairly flourishing UK RPG fanzine scene. Fellow fanzine editor Steve Blincoe invited Andrew to attend a "house con." (At the beginning of the party, Steve handed Andrew a copy of his fanzine *Fat Knite*, which included an eight-page parody of Andrew's 'zine *Aslan*. Andrew spent the weekend pretending he had found it funny.) James Wallis also attended the party. At this point, *Once Upon a Time* had reached a fairly stable form, although it still consisted of typed labels stuck onto old playing cards.

Andrew and Richard didn't really have any notion of *Once Upon a Time* being a viable publishable game — it was just one of a number of kind of cool ideas that the York gaming group had come up with. Andrew demonstrated the game several times at the party, and it seemed to go down quite well. James thought that it had commercial potential. He took the dog-eared pile of cards and produced a decent working prototype using copyright-free artwork; he also started to systematically playtest the game, keeping track of which cards were frequently used, which cards people got stuck with, which ones fitted into stories, which ones were useful for interruptions, etc. He also refined the functionality of the Interrupt cards. *Once Upon a Time* took about five years to gestate from idea to publication, and this is probably quite important to its success: there was

time for a playable, balanced deck to evolve or emerge.

... and so James took the final prototype deck to America where John Nephew offered to publish it, and they all lived happily ever after.

— Andrew Rilstone  
Bristol, England

**M**y first meeting with *Once Upon a Time* came at a house con — half-way between a weekend house party and a games convention — in Glasgow in the cold early spring of 1990. I'd known Andrew Rilstone for some years, he and I were both veterans of the UK games fanzine scene, but when he produced a deck of misshapen cards from his pack and suggested we try this new game, I had no idea what to expect. I have no idea what other games we played that weekend: For me it was all about Andrew's game. I don't remember if it had a name back then.

Back in London, I couldn't get it out of my mind. I contacted Andrew and we agreed to work on it together. This early draft of the game was a recognisable forebear of today's *Once Upon a Time*. It was more rules-light and less structured, and the cards were based much more faithfully on traditional folktales and morality stories; there was a heavier Aesop influence, as I recall, and some cards like "sausage" from specific fairy tales that were nigh-impossible to interrupt with.

As a team, we set to work refining and revising. The different types of card were introduced, the Interrupt card mechanism was clarified, and the cardlist and Ending cards both went through multiple revisions. I had still not met Richard in person — that took another couple of years. Since it was 1990 all our communication was by post, but the multi-day delays in the process gave each of us time to reflect on new changes, rather than encouraging us to bang



out a reply in a few minutes, as one would with email.

After several more scratch decks dreated on bits of paper or the backs of old business cards, in the spring of 1991 I produced a prototype, simply laid out with nineteenth-century woodcut illustrations on the cards. Twenty copies were photocopied onto white cardstock (it's known as the "White Card" edition and copies have sold for hundreds of dollars) and sent out to willing playtesters with our draft rules and earnest wishes that people enjoy it and not slice their fingers to ribbons while cutting out the cards. Meanwhile Richard, Andrew, and I set about playtesting the game around British games conventions, where it was an instant hit.

I was already embarking on a career as a games designer, so when I decided to travel to Gen Con in the US in the summer of 1991, taking the remaining copies of the White Card edition was a no-brainer. I touted it around various publishers with whom I was friends, but there was no interest — the late Erick Wujcik of Phage Press was particularly dismissive, I recall — though almost everyone I played the game with loved it, and I played it a lot. One of those players was a games writer and journalist, Spike Y. Jones, who had written for an obscure games fanzine I had edited in the mid-80s. Spike knew Nicole Lindroos Frein, who had just left the publisher White Wolf after helping to create the first edition of the Vampire RPG. Nicole liked *Once Upon a Time* enormously, and promised to recommend it to an old friend of hers who, despite being a games publisher, wasn't at the show — John Nephew of Atlas Games.

A month later I took a bus out to Northfield, Minnesota, and John and I sat in a coffee shop and hammered out a handwritten contract for the publishing of *Once Upon a Time*. Andrew, Richard, and I went back to revising the game, creating a second playtest deck on blue and yellow cardstock. And two years later, at Gen Con 1993, the game

was launched. It was a good year for card games: *Magic the Gathering* made its first public appearance at the same show, and that rather overshadowed the release of our small, oddly formatted game that didn't fit in any existing niches. We quickly learned that it was hard to describe what *Once Upon a Time* was — it was much easier to grab someone, deal them six cards and start an impromptu game.

The first edition of *Once Upon a Time* came in a large but thin letter-sized box and the cards themselves were un laminated, green on one side and brown on the other, with woodcut-style art by Eric Hotz. I believe Atlas printed around 3,000 copies. And ... it wasn't a smash hit. It did okay, and quickly gained fans and evangelists, notably Steffan O'Sullivan. But I honestly thought those 3,000 copies would be it, and I was just glad to have had my first card game printed.

When John Nephew decided to take the game to a second edition in 1995, we were surprised and delighted. It gave us the chance to fix some small problems we'd noticed with the first edition — games design is an ongoing process and often based on hindsight — and the new art by Sophie Mounier was glorious. John's confidence in the game was rewarded: it sold considerably more than 3,000 copies. And then 2012 brought the third edition with art by Omar Rayyan, which surpassed even the second edition.

*Once Upon a Time* is coming up for its twentieth anniversary in a year or so, and we're still all very proud of it, very pleased with the way it came out and continues to evolve and develop, very gratified that people play it and enjoy it and are inspired by it, and we still love playing it when we get the chance.

And the rest, as they say, is stories.

— James Wallis  
London, England



**A**ppendix A:  
List of  
Recommended  
Reading

**A** lot of these books can be found in your local library. All of them are worth reading several times. It's important to read more than one author on writing, as they all have different ideas and different ways of thinking about their subjects. By reading several authors on a particular subject you'll be able to find the tools and techniques that work best for you and your writing style.

Note that all of these books have their own recommended reading lists. They're a great place to find even more wonderful books on writing!

*Beginnings, Middles & Ends* by Nancy Kress. Everyone runs into trouble with their stories at some point. Kress gives tips and tools for working through problems with your beginnings, middles, and ends.

*Characters and Viewpoint* by Orson Scott Card. Card is an incredible writer and teacher. This book covers a lot of topics relating to building solid, interesting characters and consistent viewpoints.

*Formatting & Submitting Your Manuscript* by Cynthia Laufenberg and the Editors of Writer's Digest Books. Tips, specs, and dos and don'ts for writing queries, submissions letters, and formatting your manuscript. You *must* read this book or another like it before submitting *anything*!

*How Not to Write a Novel* by Howard Mittelmark and Sandra Newman. This book takes you through 200 classic writing mistakes, with tongue-in-cheek examples. Roaringly funny and occasionally bawdy, it can save you hours and hours of revision by teaching you what *not* to do.

*Plot & Structure* by James Scott Bell. Everything you need to know about crafting gripping, solid plots. Bell's style is fun and easy to read, as well as incredibly informative.

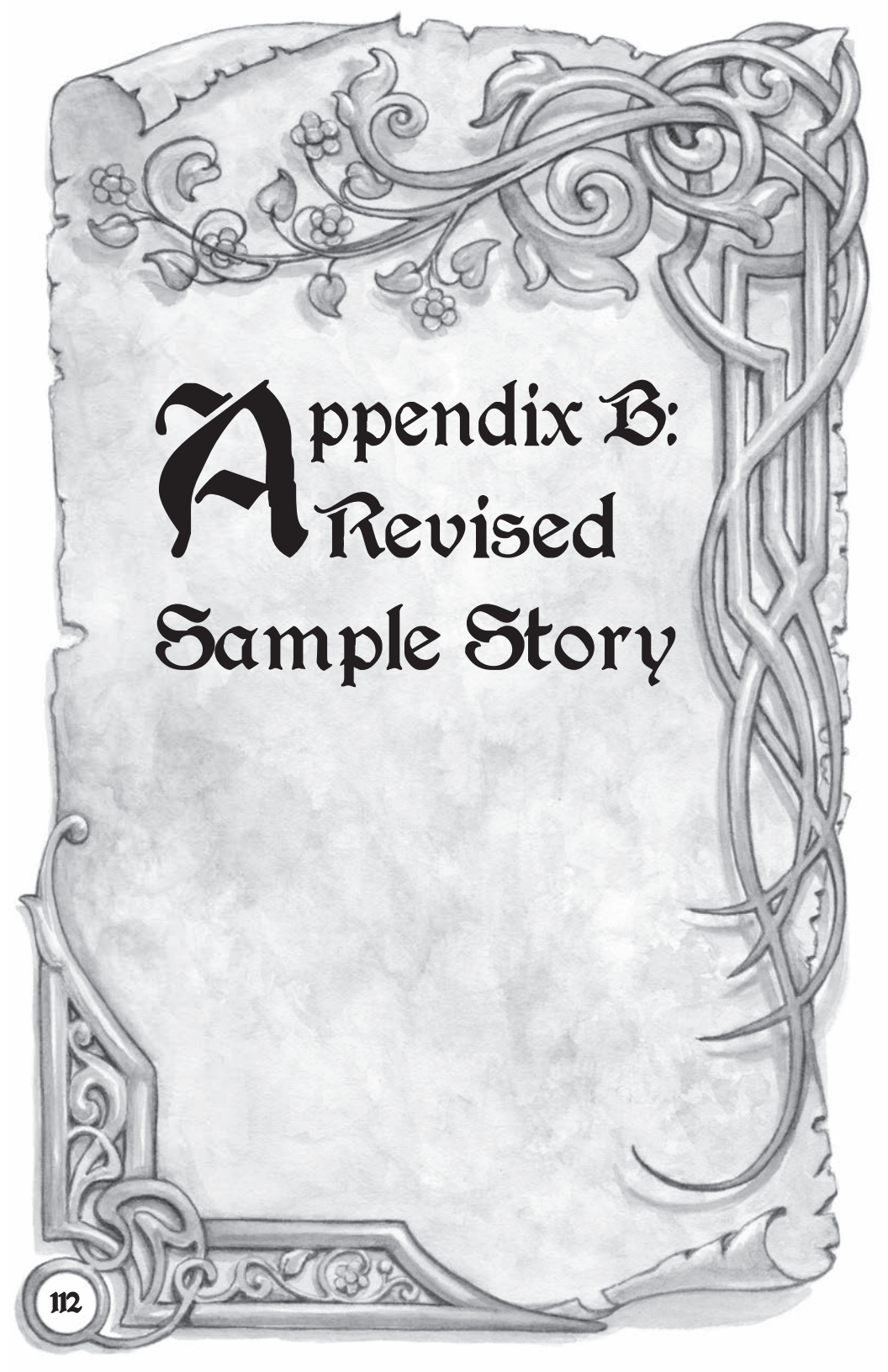
*Revision & Self-Editing* by James Scott Bell. This book covers everything from character to plot to style, all interspersed with valuable tips on how to improve your writing and get through tough revisions. Own this. Read it often.

*The 38 Most Common Fiction Writing Mistakes (And How to Avoid Them)* by Jack M. Bickham. Often it's more useful to tell you what not to do than to try and tell you what you should do. That's definitely the case in writing, where so many things are a matter of style and individual voice. This book takes you through 38 common mistakes and gives you advice on how to avoid those mistakes, and things to do instead that will make your writing stronger.

*The Complete Idiot's Guide to Getting Published* by Sheree Bykofsky and Jennifer Basye Sander. This book covers your whole writing career, from writing to publishing to marketing, and includes sample proposals and contracts. It's everything you ever needed to know about the business of writing.

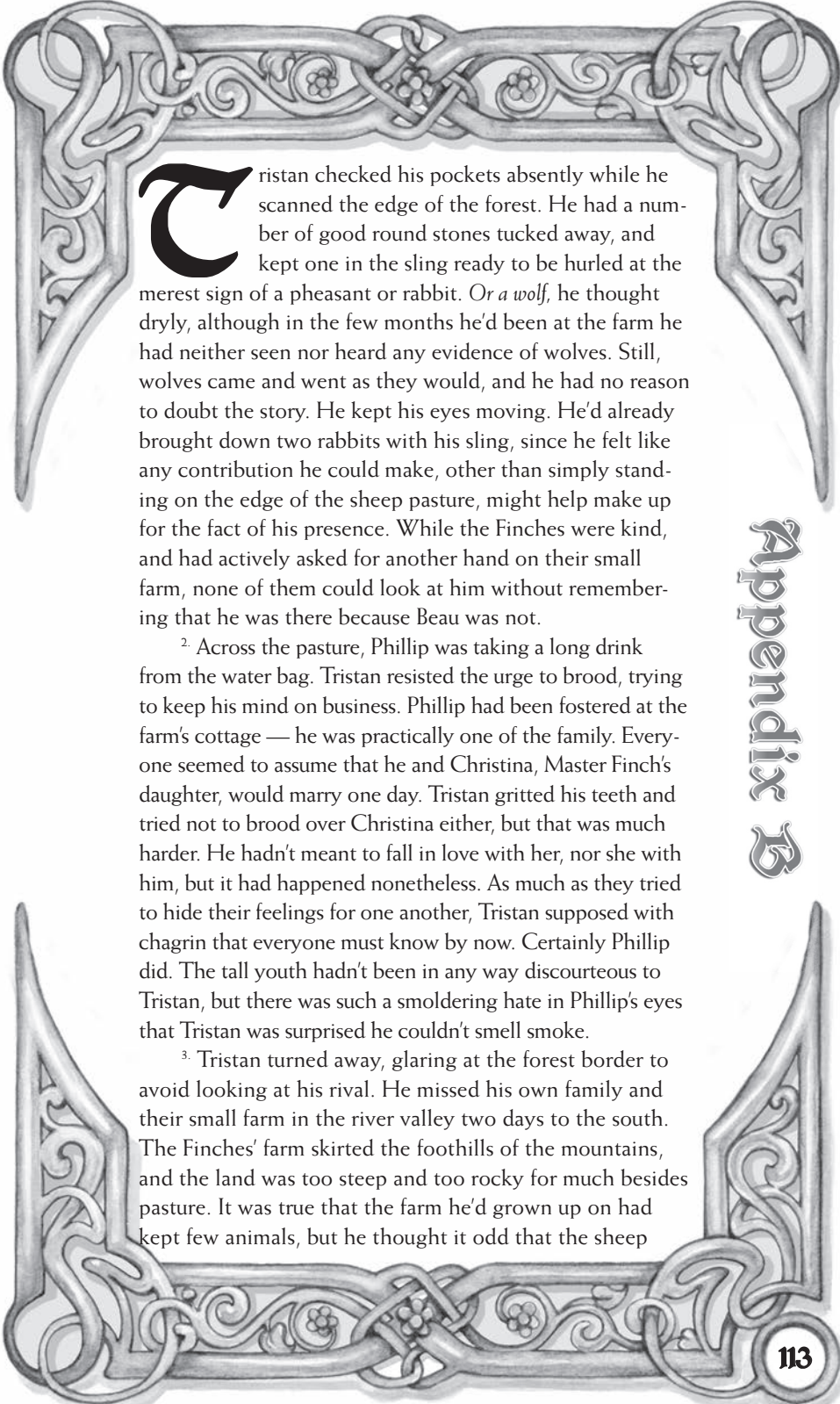
*The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White. It starts out a little thick, but trust me. Read the whole book. It's short, and it's one of the best books you can read to improve your writing. Another book I highly recommend owning.

*The Insider's Guide to Getting an Agent* by Lori Perkins. Perkins is a literary agent. Her book is full of valuable information on writing, the publishing industry as a whole, working with editors and literary agents, and dos and don'ts for submitting your manuscript for publication. It includes examples of submission proposals for fiction and non-fiction books — real ones that you can go and read and then compare to the proposals — as well as sample contracts.



**A**ppendix B:  
Revised  
Sample Story





**T**ristan checked his pockets absently while he scanned the edge of the forest. He had a number of good round stones tucked away, and kept one in the sling ready to be hurled at the merest sign of a pheasant or rabbit. *Or a wolf*, he thought dryly, although in the few months he'd been at the farm he had neither seen nor heard any evidence of wolves. Still, wolves came and went as they would, and he had no reason to doubt the story. He kept his eyes moving. He'd already brought down two rabbits with his sling, since he felt like any contribution he could make, other than simply standing on the edge of the sheep pasture, might help make up for the fact of his presence. While the Finches were kind, and had actively asked for another hand on their small farm, none of them could look at him without remembering that he was there because Beau was not.

<sup>2</sup>. Across the pasture, Phillip was taking a long drink from the water bag. Tristan resisted the urge to brood, trying to keep his mind on business. Phillip had been fostered at the farm's cottage — he was practically one of the family. Everyone seemed to assume that he and Christina, Master Finch's daughter, would marry one day. Tristan gritted his teeth and tried not to brood over Christina either, but that was much harder. He hadn't meant to fall in love with her, nor she with him, but it had happened nonetheless. As much as they tried to hide their feelings for one another, Tristan supposed with chagrin that everyone must know by now. Certainly Phillip did. The tall youth hadn't been in any way discourteous to Tristan, but there was such a smoldering hate in Phillip's eyes that Tristan was surprised he couldn't smell smoke.

<sup>3</sup>. Tristan turned away, glaring at the forest border to avoid looking at his rival. He missed his own family and their small farm in the river valley two days to the south. The Finches' farm skirted the foothills of the mountains, and the land was too steep and too rocky for much besides pasture. It was true that the farm he'd grown up on had kept few animals, but he thought it odd that the sheep

here were taken to pasture every morning at first light, and brought home again every evening. He was quite sure that wasn't the usual way of pasturing animals, but he dared not bring it up again. You'd think he'd been raised in a city for the looks they gave him.

<sup>4</sup> A sound behind him caused Tristan to turn. Phillip was approaching him, water bag in hand. From the way it swung, flopping and loose, Tristan knew it was empty. He repressed a sigh of disappointment, and met Phillip's stare of badly masked challenge with what he hoped was an empty expression of patience.

<sup>5</sup> "Bag's empty," Phillip said shortly. "I think it has a leak. Go fill it at the creek so we don't parch before we get back."

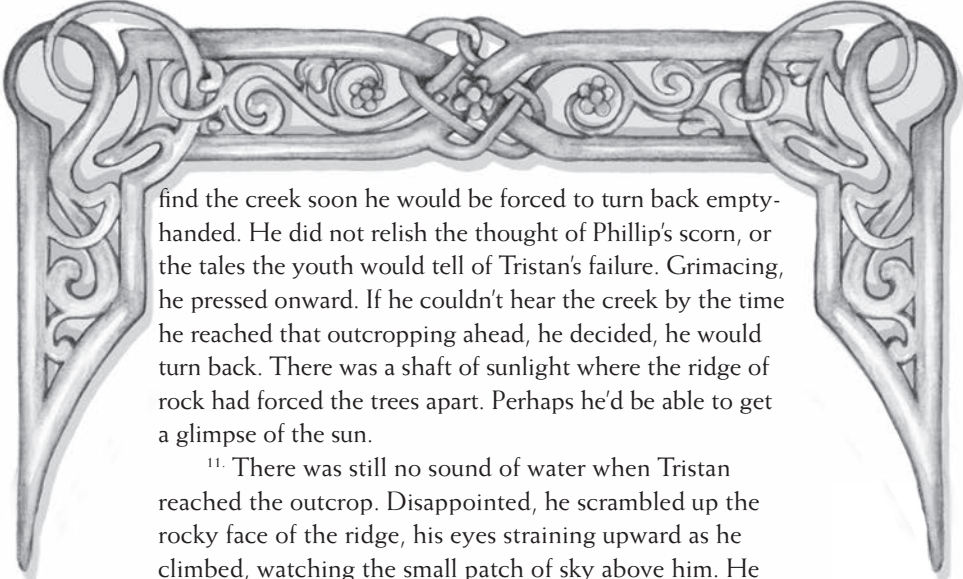
<sup>6</sup> Tristan glanced up at the sun. An hour and a half, give or take, before the sun slid behind the mountain. Darkness fell swiftly in its shadow. The creek couldn't be far, or Phillip would not have bothered. "Where's the creek?" Tristan asked, taking the bag.

<sup>7</sup> Phillip gave him an irritated look. "You've been here this long and you don't know where the creek is?"

<sup>8</sup> "You've never mentioned it before now. How would I?"

<sup>9</sup> Phillip turned and pointed up the mountain. "Head up, toward the peak. You'll hear it. It cuts across there and disappears beyond that ridge."

<sup>10</sup> Tristan nodded and started off. The trees of the forest were tall and old, and much bigger than he thought trees growing in thin soil over mountain rock could be. The leaf mould was deep and wet. Save for sprawling clumps of burr-covered vines there was little undergrowth to slow him as he walked. The ground sloped upward, outcroppings of rock thrusting up between the trees that Tristan either had to skirt around or climb over. The terrain took up enough of his attention that he'd come quite a distance before he realized that he had still not heard any sounds of water. He paused, looking about himself doubtfully. Here under the dense foliage he couldn't see the sun, and had no idea how long he had been tramping through the woods. If he didn't



find the creek soon he would be forced to turn back empty-handed. He did not relish the thought of Phillip's scorn, or the tales the youth would tell of Tristan's failure. Grimacing, he pressed onward. If he couldn't hear the creek by the time he reached that outcropping ahead, he decided, he would turn back. There was a shaft of sunlight where the ridge of rock had forced the trees apart. Perhaps he'd be able to get a glimpse of the sun.

<sup>11</sup>. There was still no sound of water when Tristan reached the outcrop. Disappointed, he scrambled up the rocky face of the ridge, his eyes straining upward as he climbed, watching the small patch of sky above him. He heaved himself over the edge — and came face to muzzle with the largest wolf he'd ever seen. It was nearly the size of a small pony, with thick black fur and eyes that gleamed yellow. The wolf lay relaxing in the sun, and it lifted its head with interest as Tristan froze, crouched on the edge of the ridge. Hardly daring to breathe, he reached slowly into a pocket and brought out one of his sling stones.

<sup>12</sup>. The wolf clicked its tongue. "And what, pray, are you planning on doing with that?" it asked.

<sup>13</sup>. Tristan dropped the stone from nerveless fingers. He gulped.

<sup>14</sup>. "That's better." The wolf shook its shaggy head like a dog would, then blinked at him. "There's not much you could do with that pebble except annoy me. Let's have a look at you. Well? Stand up straight, lad."

<sup>15</sup>. Tristan slowly rose to his full height. He wet his lips, but could think of nothing to say.

<sup>16</sup>. The wolf eyed him up and down. "My, you are a nice, healthy fellow, aren't you? A little on the lean side, but beggars can't be choosers." The wolf got lazily to its feet.

<sup>17</sup>. "You ... you aren't going to eat me, are you? Sir?" Tristan asked, dismayed.

<sup>18</sup>. "Sir!" The wolf barked a laugh and sat back on its haunches. "How polite you are! Yes, young man, I am planning on eating you. You are here, and I'm hungry after my

nap." The wolf paused, watching him thoughtfully. "You're one of the shepherds from down below, are you not?"

19. "Yes, sir," Tristan answered faintly.

20. "Hmm. Suppose you bring me one of your sheep, and I'll let you live. You are rather on the lean side, and I have a taste for mutton." The wolf smacked its lips.

21. Tristan swallowed hard. "I'm afraid ... I'm afraid they are not my sheep," he said, his voice cracking. "But I do have two nice fat rabbits, if you like."

22. "Rabbits?" The wolf considered. "I don't eat much rabbit. The little devils are too quick. Yes, I would like your rabbits."

23. "And you won't eat me? Sir?"

24. "I will not eat you. Today. And be quick." The wolf lay down again, watching Tristan expectantly.

25. He reached into the game bag and produced the two hares, already field dressed and skinned. Trembling a little, he laid them before the wolf's paws, well within reach of the long yellow teeth. The wolf waited until he moved back — Tristan would have sworn it was smiling, except it wasn't, of course — before it daintily picked up the first and crunched it, slowly, as if savoring it. After a moment the wolf ate the second.

26. "Ah, yes," it said when it was done, the long pink tongue flicking over its teeth. "Rabbit. Tasty creatures."

27. "I'm glad you, er, enjoyed them." Tristan glanced up at the sky. The light was definitely beginning to dim. "But I'm afraid I have to get back now. Phillip will be needing my help with the sheep."

28. The wolf's ears pricked. "Phillip, you say? Indeed? Well. How interesting. And what is your name, lad?"

29. Tristan blinked at the wolf in surprise. "My name is Tristan, sir. Do you know Phillip?"

30. The wolf ignored his question. "What brought you into my home so close to dark, Tristan? Surely if you need to be getting back already, you couldn't have been going much farther?"

31. "I was looking for the creek," Tristan admitted, with a flush of irritation for Phillip. He held up his empty water bag.

32. "Is that so? Indeed. Well, young Tristan, since you brought me two rabbits, I suppose I can show you the creek. You're heading in the wrong direction completely." The wolf rose and padded away toward the foot of the mountain. "Well? Come along boy, don't dawdle."

33. With a start, Tristan followed. The light continued to fail, and Tristan had to stay close or risk losing sight of the dark shaggy form altogether. They worked their way steadily downhill, and the light was all but gone when Tristan finally heard the gurgle and splash of a stream. Moments later the trees thinned, and ahead of them was the glint of moonlight on running water.

34. "Ah, here we are," said the wolf. It lowered its head to drink, and Tristan knelt uneasily by its side and filled his bag.

35. "Thank you, sir, for showing me to the creek. And for not eating me," Tristan said humbly.

36. The wolf sat down on its haunches and regarded him thoughtfully. "A very polite lad, indeed. I do believe I like you, young Tristan. You should take care not to find yourself in my woods again, at least without more rabbits." It wuffed through its nose, then looked downstream. "Follow the creek until it turns, and then continue along the forest. You will come to your dwelling in short order."

37. Tristan frowned. "Does the creek run closer to the pasture where we take the sheep?"

38. The wolf blinked slowly. "No, it does not," it said. It gave him a pointed look, and turned to head back into the trees.

39. "Do you know Phillip?" Tristan called after it, almost not wanting to know.

40. The wolf stopped. It did not turn, but spoke over its shoulder. "I don't *know* him, precisely. There was another young man in my woods, a few months back. One who did not have any rabbits." The wolf licked its lips. "He yelled for a Phillip. Cursed him, too, at the end." It started

walking again. "I'd be careful of Phillips, if I were you."

<sup>41</sup> Tristan clenched his hands on the water bag to keep them from shaking. He took a deep breath, and then another. Then he called after the wolf, "If I were to fetch an extra rabbit or two and leave them up in the pasture, do you prefer them dressed or not?"

<sup>42</sup> The wolf vanished into the dark woods, but its voice drifted in its wake. "Leave the innards in, but feel free to skin them. The fur tickles, going down."

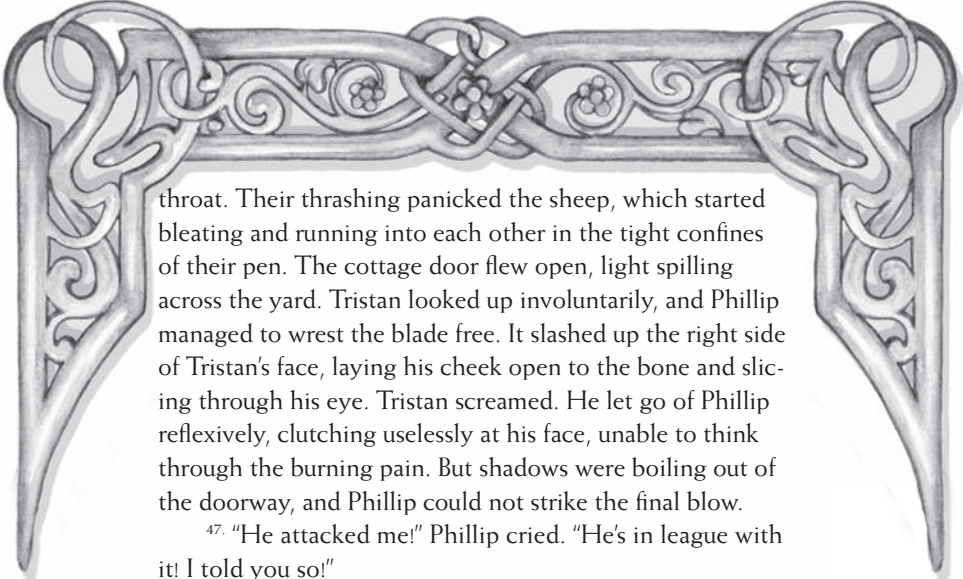
<sup>43</sup> Tristan stared after it, but there was nothing to see. Even the light of the full moon didn't penetrate the tangle of leaves. He turned and followed the creek.

<sup>44a</sup> *Phillip must want the farm for himself, he thought as he made his way along the bank. He sent Beau, the only son, to the wolf. Then he sent me. Once I'm dead he'll marry the only daughter and inherit the farm when Master Finch passes... if he doesn't send Master Finch to the wolf, too!*

<sup>44b</sup> Tristan broke into a trot. Sweat beaded on his face at the thought of his sweet, gentle Christina in the arms of a murderer. His heart leapt into his throat, and he began to run. He sped down the length of the creek, then followed the edge of the woods as the wolf had told him until the farm came into view out of the darkness. The sheep milled about in their pen as he flew past them. He was nearly to the cottage when a tall form rose up from the far side of the sheep pen and hurled itself at him. Phillip crashed into him and sent him sprawling. Tristan's breath left him in a whoosh, but he shook the lighter man off and rolled to his feet.

<sup>45</sup> "Stupid bumpkin," Phillip hissed. Steel glinted in the moonlight. "Can't even die right."

<sup>46</sup> Before Tristan could gather his breath to call out, Phillip jumped on him again. Desperately, Tristan clung to Phillip's wrist with both hands. He was already exhausted from running and barely able to keep the knife away as Phillip bowled them both over. The smaller man snarled at him and dug the fingers of his free hand into Tristan's



throat. Their thrashing panicked the sheep, which started bleating and running into each other in the tight confines of their pen. The cottage door flew open, light spilling across the yard. Tristan looked up involuntarily, and Phillip managed to wrest the blade free. It slashed up the right side of Tristan's face, laying his cheek open to the bone and slicing through his eye. Tristan screamed. He let go of Phillip reflexively, clutching uselessly at his face, unable to think through the burning pain. But shadows were boiling out of the doorway, and Phillip could not strike the final blow.

47. "He attacked me!" Phillip cried. "He's in league with it! I told you so!"

48. Tristan heard that horrifying lie, but he couldn't stop screaming. The pain ... his eye ... "No!" he managed, changing the scream into a word. "No!" As if from far away he heard Christina call out his name, and he rolled away. *She shouldn't see this. Dear God, my eye!*

49. Between him and the cottage, Phillip was still yelling. "I told you how he would vanish, up in the woods where Beau died. I told you how I would hear him laughing, and wolves howling! But you didn't believe me! Now, when I decided to come back without him, he attacks me! Thank God I had my knife!"

50. "No!" Tristan shouted. The pain still roared, but he fought past it. "Murderer!"

51. "Filthy lying wolf-spawn!" Phillip kicked him in the face, and the pain came crashing back down on him. Spots danced in front of his good eye. *If I pass out now, I'll never wake up!* he thought frantically. Phillip continued spitting venom. "You sent it here, didn't you! You sent it to kill Beau so you could come here and court Christina! And then you tried to kill me when I saw through your foul scheme!"

52. In the distance, a wolf howled.

53. *You're not helping*, Tristan thought absurdly.

54. Christina was sobbing. "Say it's not true, Tristan!"

55. "It's ... not ..." Tristan gasped out. The searing pain settled into a throb that he thought might split his head

in two.

<sup>56.</sup> "Then why do you have tangleburrs on your clothes?" Phillip challenged triumphantly. "They only grow in the deep woods. What were you doing in there, sorcerer?"

<sup>57.</sup> "You ... sent me ... the creek ..." Tristan tried to explain through the pain.

<sup>58.</sup> Christina wailed in denial. "No, no! The creek's nowhere near the deep woods, Tristan! How could you? How could you do this?"

<sup>59.</sup> "No, Christina, no!" Tristan started to crawl toward her, but he heard movement above him.

<sup>60.</sup> "Stay away from her!"

<sup>61.</sup> Tristan twisted away, and the knife pierced his lung instead of his heart. He felt the blade ripped free, but he suddenly didn't care. His heart had already torn in two as he watched his beloved's face turn from shock and denial to rage. She spat at him, and that blow hurt worse than any wound steel could inflict. He stretched out his hand to her, but she turned away. "Christina!"

<sup>62.</sup> Another howl rose. This one was right behind them, and ended in a growl. Phillip and the Finches cried out in fear as the giant black wolf strode into the farmyard, and then they bolted for the cottage.

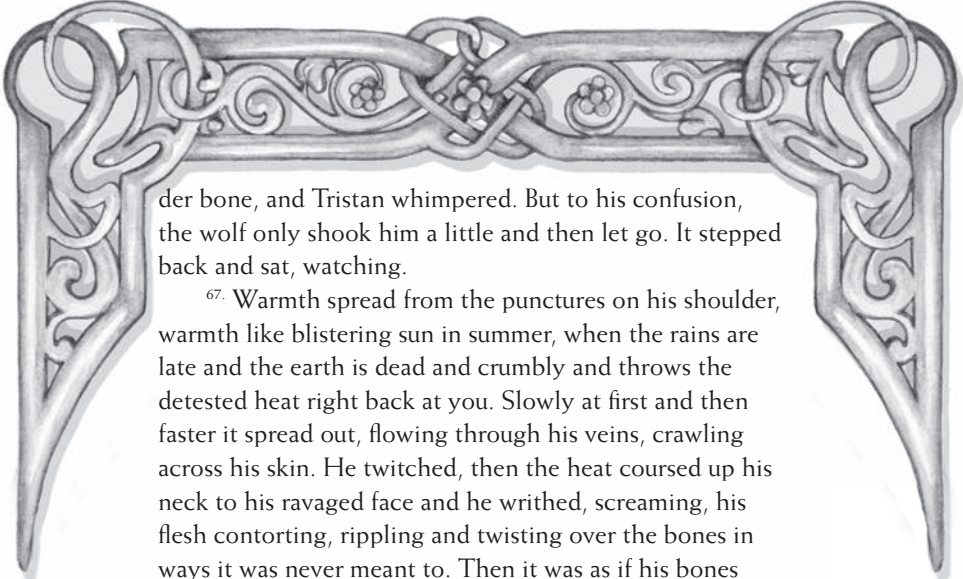
<sup>63.</sup> Just before the door slammed shut, Christina spun around. She shook an angry fist at the wolf. "Take him!" she shrieked. "Take him and yourself away and leave us alone, you filthy beast!" Then Phillip pulled Christina inside, and Master Finch yanked the door closed.

<sup>64.</sup> Tristan stared at the door, wincing at the heavy *thump* of the bar being dropped. It was getting hard to breathe. Blood dripped out of his mouth, and it wasn't coming from the cut on his face. The wolf padded into view, and he looked up at it.

<sup>65.</sup> "Guess ... you eat ... after all," Tristan whispered.

<sup>66.</sup> The wolf gave a particularly human-sounding sigh. "You're all dirty," it said. Then it lowered its head and bit him hard on the shoulder. Fangs scraped against his shoul-





der bone, and Tristan whimpered. But to his confusion, the wolf only shook him a little and then let go. It stepped back and sat, watching.

67. Warmth spread from the punctures on his shoulder, warmth like blistering sun in summer, when the rains are late and the earth is dead and crumbly and throws the detested heat right back at you. Slowly at first and then faster it spread out, flowing through his veins, crawling across his skin. He twitched, then the heat coursed up his neck to his ravaged face and he writhed, screaming, his flesh contorting, rippling and twisting over the bones in ways it was never meant to. Then it was as if his bones all shattered, and they twisted and rippled along with his flesh. Tristan screamed until he had no breath left.

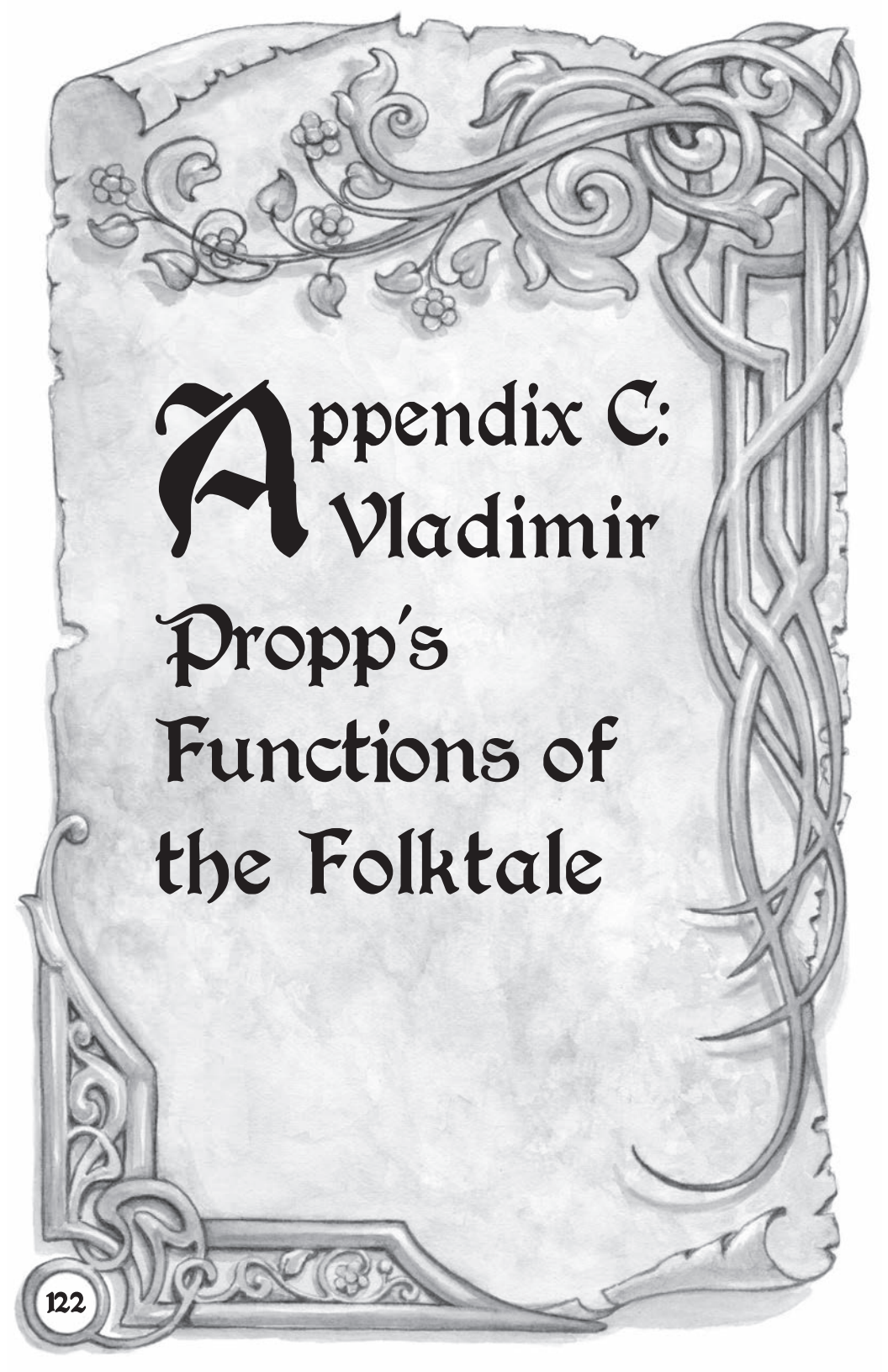
68. Then it was over. Like a door had been shut on his pain, it simply vanished. Tristan sat up, shaking from head to foot. He could see out of both eyes! He touched his face in wonder. The wound was gone as if it had never been. He looked a question at the wolf, too stunned for speech.

69. "I suppose I do like you, at that," the wolf said, sounding satisfied. "Come along then. There's no staying here for you, not now." It heaved itself to its feet and began to trot toward the mountain. After a few paces it stopped and looked back.

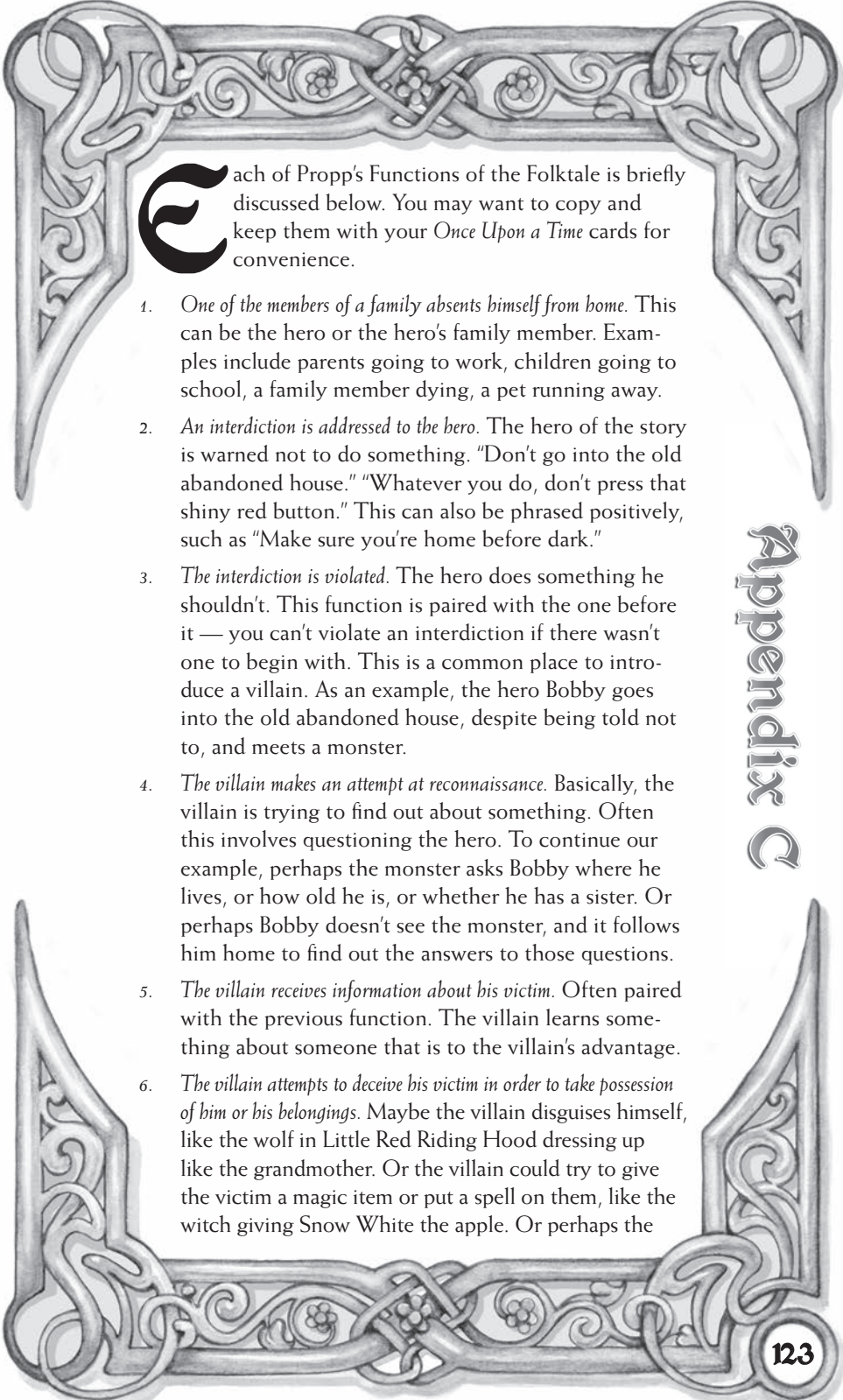
70. Tristan still sat staring at the cottage. Tears coursed down his cheeks.

71. "Come along, cub. And leave those clothes behind, they stink of human." The wolf waited a moment, then added wistfully, "But bring the sling, if you please. I do like rabbit."

72. Moments later, two wolves loped out of the farmyard. One glanced back, eyes shining yellow. Though his wounds had been healed, the wolf that had once been named Tristan knew that the rift in his heart would never be mended. His human heart was broken forever. He embraced his new wolf heart, and ran.



**A**ppendix C:  
Vladimir  
Propp's  
Functions of  
the Folktale

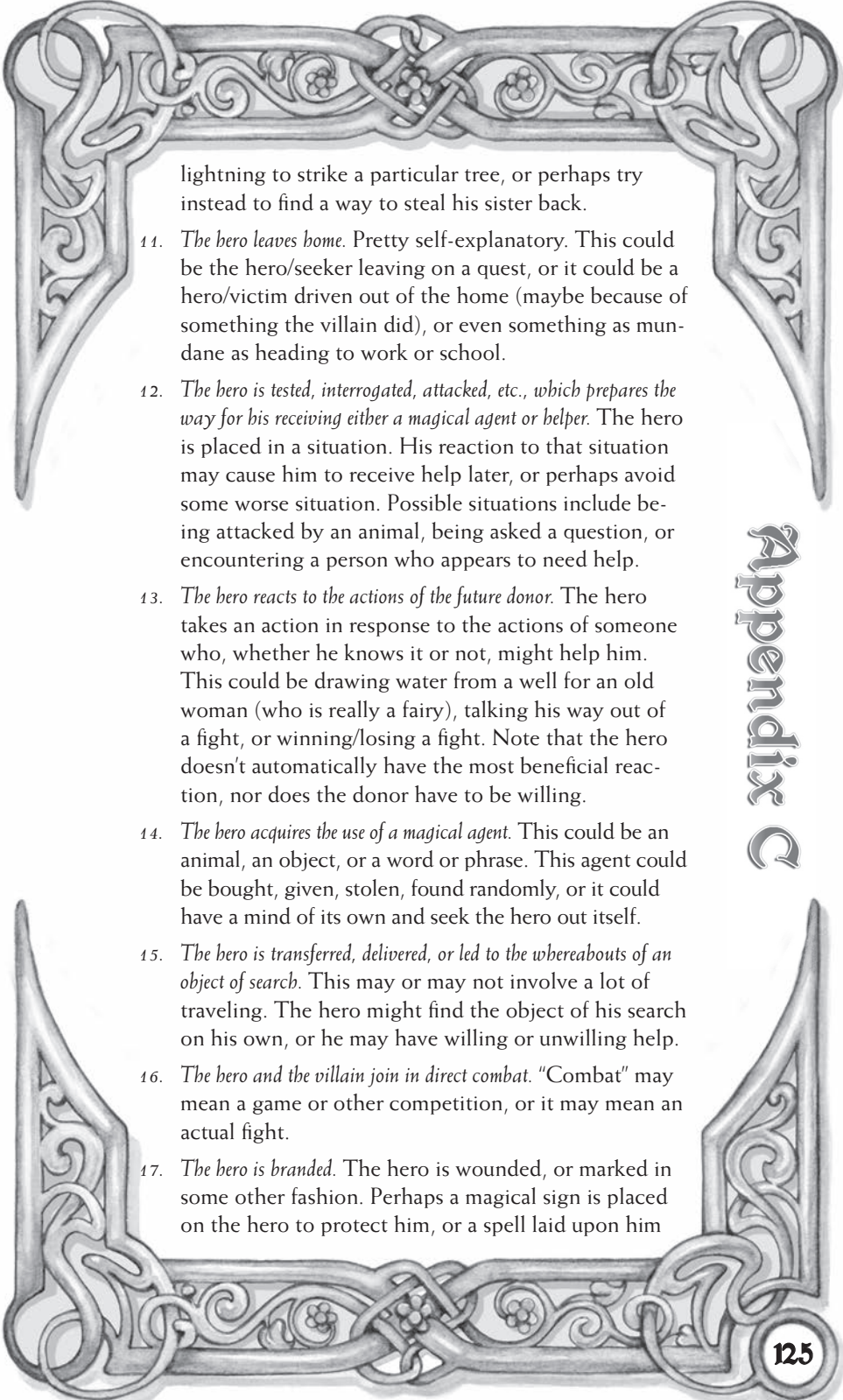


Each of Propp's Functions of the Folktale is briefly discussed below. You may want to copy and keep them with your *Once Upon a Time* cards for convenience.

1. *One of the members of a family absents himself from home.* This can be the hero or the hero's family member. Examples include parents going to work, children going to school, a family member dying, a pet running away.
2. *An interdiction is addressed to the hero.* The hero of the story is warned not to do something. "Don't go into the old abandoned house." "Whatever you do, don't press that shiny red button." This can also be phrased positively, such as "Make sure you're home before dark."
3. *The interdiction is violated.* The hero does something he shouldn't. This function is paired with the one before it — you can't violate an interdiction if there wasn't one to begin with. This is a common place to introduce a villain. As an example, the hero Bobby goes into the old abandoned house, despite being told not to, and meets a monster.
4. *The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance.* Basically, the villain is trying to find out about something. Often this involves questioning the hero. To continue our example, perhaps the monster asks Bobby where he lives, or how old he is, or whether he has a sister. Or perhaps Bobby doesn't see the monster, and it follows him home to find out the answers to those questions.
5. *The villain receives information about his victim.* Often paired with the previous function. The villain learns something about someone that is to the villain's advantage.
6. *The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings.* Maybe the villain disguises himself, like the wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood* dressing up like the grandmother. Or the villain could try to give the victim a magic item or put a spell on them, like the witch giving *Snow White* the apple. Or perhaps the

villain attempts to persuade the victim to do something: "Bring your sister to visit me," the monster tells Bobby.

7. *The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy.* Little Red comes closer to the bed. Snow White eats the apple. Bobby brings his sister to meet the monster. Propp notes here that in the folktales he studied, interdiction is always violated and the victim always falls for the deception. While you don't have to do that in your stories, audiences have been conditioned to expect it. If your characters don't do so, you'll have to have some other consequence, some other conflict, arise from their decision to make the story interesting.
8. *The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family, OR one member of a family lacks something or desires to have something.* The villain, perhaps empowered by the knowledge about, or unwitting help of, the victim, does something sinister. The sister is abducted, a murder is committed, something of value is stolen or possibly switched with a fake. Alternatively, and particularly if the story is just beginning, a family member needs or wants something — a son needs a bride, an ailing parent needs a cure, the king needs a special gift for his queen.
9. *Misfortune or lack is made known: the hero is approached with a request or command, he is allowed to go or he is dispatched.* The beginning of a quest! The hero is told of either the injury done by the villain, or of the lack felt by the family member, or of some other misfortune like a plague or a famine. The hero is faced with the choice of whether or not to try to fix the problem, or he's tasked with trying to do so by someone else.
10. *The seeker agrees to or decides upon counteraction.* The hero either agrees to take up the quest (and hence becomes the seeker as well) or comes up with an alternative plan. If Bobby has found out that the monster that stole his sister can only be killed by an arrow made from a tree that was struck by lightning, he can attempt to find such a tree, or maybe try to induce



lightning to strike a particular tree, or perhaps try instead to find a way to steal his sister back.

11. *The hero leaves home.* Pretty self-explanatory. This could be the hero/seeker leaving on a quest, or it could be a hero/victim driven out of the home (maybe because of something the villain did), or even something as mundane as heading to work or school.
12. *The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or helper.* The hero is placed in a situation. His reaction to that situation may cause him to receive help later, or perhaps avoid some worse situation. Possible situations include being attacked by an animal, being asked a question, or encountering a person who appears to need help.
13. *The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor.* The hero takes an action in response to the actions of someone who, whether he knows it or not, might help him. This could be drawing water from a well for an old woman (who is really a fairy), talking his way out of a fight, or winning/losing a fight. Note that the hero doesn't automatically have the most beneficial reaction, nor does the donor have to be willing.
14. *The hero acquires the use of a magical agent.* This could be an animal, an object, or a word or phrase. This agent could be bought, given, stolen, found randomly, or it could have a mind of its own and seek the hero out itself.
15. *The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search.* This may or may not involve a lot of traveling. The hero might find the object of his search on his own, or he may have willing or unwilling help.
16. *The hero and the villain join in direct combat.* "Combat" may mean a game or other competition, or it may mean an actual fight.
17. *The hero is branded.* The hero is wounded, or marked in some other fashion. Perhaps a magical sign is placed on the hero to protect him, or a spell laid upon him

leaves a visible mark.

18. *The villain is defeated.* The villain loses the contest with the hero, is captured by the townsfolk, or is otherwise thwarted.
19. *The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.* Whatever was wrong can now be made right. A malignant spell is broken, or a lost family member is found. Perhaps the hero makes use of a magical agent, the change takes place because of the villain's defeat, or the hero obtains/uses the object of his quest.
20. *The hero returns.* This function requires the hero to have left some location in the first place. The return can take as long or longer than the initial trip.
21. *The hero is pursued.* The hero could be pursued by the villain (perhaps beaten but seeking revenge), or by a previous unwilling donor looking for his property back. Alternatively, the "pursuit" can take the form of obstacles or delays placed in the hero's path.
22. *Rescue of the hero from pursuit.* The hero is preserved either by his own actions, by chance, or by the intervention of others. The hero could hide from his pursuer, or he could place obstacles behind him. The pursuer could get lost, or be deliberately led astray by an ally of the hero.
23. *The hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country.* The hero arrives somewhere, and for whatever reason hides his identity or is not recognized for who he is. An example is Odysseus being disguised as a beggar when he returns home to Ithaca.
24. *A false hero presents unfounded claims.* The unfounded claims can be malicious in nature, as in lies to discredit the true hero, or they can be motivated by greed, ambition, or simple ignorance. The false hero may or may not also be a villain.
25. *A difficult task is proposed to the hero.* Many kinds of tasks are possible: eating or drinking in large quantities, an-

swering riddles or solving puzzles, feats of strength or speed or endurance, and having to pick one particular item out of a group of identical ones are all traditional difficult tasks.

26. *The task is resolved.* This varies depending on the task involved — often a portion of the story leading up to the task deals with the hero preparing to meet the task.
27. *The hero is recognized.* While the hero may simply be recognized by a friend or family member after being absent (particularly if function 23 is missing), the hero can also be recognized because of an item or companion that he has with him, or by a wound, brand, or other marking. Or the hero could be recognized by his actions, such as Arthur being recognized as the rightful king by the act of pulling the sword from the stone.
28. *The false hero or villain is exposed.* If unfounded claims have been presented, they are proven false now. Also, if the villain has not yet been unmasked, that also can happen now. This is sometimes referred to as “the Scooby Doo moment.”
29. *The hero is given a new appearance.* This can be something as simple as new clothing, or as complicated as transformative surgery. Examples include Odysseus being made more handsome by the goddess Athena, or the little mermaid turning into sea foam.
30. *The villain is punished.* The dragon is slain, the witch melts into a puddle of water, the giant falls to his death. Or maybe the villain just pays a fine and does some community service.
31. *The hero is married and/or ascends the throne.* Sometimes the hero is awarded half the kingdom and the princess’ hand in marriage — sometimes the hero marries the milkmaid. Or maybe the hero overthrew the tyrannical monarch and the people have proclaimed him their king. Regardless, it’s all just “happily ever after” from here on ... or is it?

# Once Upon a Time™

The Storytelling Card Game



Tell your own fantastic tales of  
brave heroes and daring adventure!

Get your copy of the award-winning storytelling card  
game today, and start telling your own fairytale stories!

Find it at your friendly local game store, or online:



[www.Atlas-Games.com/ouat3](http://www.Atlas-Games.com/ouat3)

Stock #AG1030 • ISBN 1-58978-131-7

©2012 Trident, Inc. d/b/a Atlas Games. Once Upon a Time is a trademark  
of John Nephew, used under license. All rights reserved.