

All That Is Missing Is a Laugh Track

By E. Leventhal

Author's Perspective:

I surveyed my audience from behind my desk: a teenage kid, a three-toed sloth and, of course, a seven-headed dragon. A pure display of my overwhelming writing abilities. The human, who had strategically sat in the seat farthest away from the dragon, spoke up first. "So, what's it going to be this time?" I smiled. It seemed he had gotten used to me periodically summoning him to go on dangerous adventures whenever I wanted to write a story. The boy's name was Jordan, and he was my favorite character to write with and when I saw a contest for fiction writing, I knew who my main character would be. "I'm going to write a story for a fiction writing contest. I want to win so that I can spread the joy of writing with all the world." He smirked. "You sure? Because last time I remember you wanted to win for bragging rights and glory."

"Shhh," I hissed at him. "So maybe I do, but we can't exactly say that in front of our editors, can we? This is all going into the story. Anyway, in this story all the characters are going to be completely aware that they're in a story, causing an uproarious comedy." Jordan shrugged. "You can do whatever you want, but isn't that a bit of a cliché?" "Of course not! I'm the only writer ever to have thought of that idea. Anyway, you're going to fight that seven-headed dragon over there to the death with your bare hands. Oh, and while you're at it, try to keep a likeable persona. Readers love that. And, for extra excitement, you're going to fight the dragon in its pitch-black cave. Have fun and try to stay alive!" Thus followed a string of commentary from the boy that I have decided to delete to maintain a PG rating and his likeable persona. "Now, now, try to stay polite. Impolite characters often end up being eaten by a seven-headed dragon." He tried one last time: "I don't have anything to help me fight the dragon?" "You've got a three-toed sloth," I encouragingly reminded him.

"No, I mean a magic weapon or something." "Don't be silly! Magic isn't real! This story is going to be purely realistic fiction!" "But there's a seven-headed dragon sitting right—" His persnickety outburst was cut short by me banging my hand on the table. "Look, I'm only getting 2,000 words here, and I don't intend to spend it all on boring conversation." "Rawwg!" the dragon agreed. I pressed the START STORY button on my desk and the three assembled characters disappeared in a burst of white light.

Jordan's perspective:

I took in my surroundings: I was on a beach, which stretched far to the horizon. To the left of me was a rocky mountain with a gaping cavern near the top in which I assumed dwelled the seven-headed dragon. On the other side was a giant ocean. I went through my options: I could try to swim away (I don't know how to swim), I could go into the cavern and try to fight the dragon (turning me into a well done steak), I could try to escape down the beach (knowing the personality of my writer it seemed unlikely that it would lead to an anti-dragon fortress), or I could sit in the sand being inactive and wondering what to do (wonderful!). I finally decided

that my best option remaining was to try and fight the dragon. I sighed. I was pitting myself, a 13-year-old boy against three tons of muscle and scales. Oh, yeah, and I had a sloth. At risk of losing my likeable persona, I decided I might leave the sloth behind as I had once read that their top speed was a foot per minute. So, you can imagine how surprised I was when it tapped me on the back.

“Hey,” it said. I quickly got over my shock. When your adventures are written by a writer as maniacal as mine, you get used to this sort of thing. “Hey,” I replied. “Aren’t sloths supposed to be slow?” I knew the answer would be dumb, but I couldn’t help but be curious about how my writer had made his sloth fast. The sloth bristled in anger. “Oh, humans always think we’re slow, but really we’re really quite fast. It’s just that humans always say things like ‘oh, sloths are so slow’ and ‘I’m glad that I’m not a sluggish sloth’. Because of all this abuse, whenever an adult human comes into our prescience we start feeling really down, making us slow.” The sloth smiled. “But now that my speed’s back, I can run away and never deal with burdensome humans again!” The sloth sprinted away, leaving me only a seven-headed dragon for company. I sank to my knees and shouted at the sky, towards my writer: “You think that you’re so funny, but you’re not!” There was no response. Nevertheless, I thought that the seven-headed dragon was probably growing bigger as punishment for my remark, then decided that any size of seven-headed dragon would leave me equally dead. I knew that as the main character in this story, it was my own responsibility to think of a brilliant plan to defeat the dragon. Nothing came to me, so I lay back in the hot sand to relax.

Then it struck me. Hot sand... glass! Glass was made by putting sand in extreme heat, and I had exactly seven sources of extreme heat in the mountain above me and an entire beach full of sand! Scooping up a huge handful of sand, I started up the mountain towards my scaly glassblower. I was hoping to shape the molten glass quickly into a sword, then dunk it in the ocean so that it could solidify. Once I had my new glass weapon, I could quickly slay the dragon and end the story. My writer, as perfectionistic as he was, couldn’t possibly want more than that! I got to the entrance of the cave, took a deep breath, and walked in.

A deep rumbling filled the cavern. Trying to mask my abject terror by playing ‘fearless hero’ I did my best attempt to come up with an improvised poem.

“Hey, draggy draggy! Your tail is very waggy! And the floor is very saggy/
under your enormous weight.

“You go roar. Is that all you’re good for? We’re gonna go head-to-head in a war/
and I’m going to do great!

Finishing, I made a bitter mental note to never try a rhyming verse again, *especially* when every word I said was being written down. I had more to worry about than future embarrassing memories, though, as I saw a dark shape come toward me with a sinister hiss. I threw all the sand I was holding at the dragon and ran out of the cave in panic. So much for ‘fearless hero’. Getting to the edge of the beach, I pressed myself backwards into the sand. Before my terrified

eyes, the dragon that had just nearly turned me into a meat loaf stumbled out, saying “Oh, dear, I’m allergic to sand,” and collapsing.

I was shocked. Sure, it was the stupid unfunny ending I would have expected from my writer, but it wasn’t like him to go easy on me. I decided I would wait for the life-threatening part of my situation. Sure enough, a few minutes later, there was a low rumbling sound and the previously-dragon-occupied mountain started to rise up. “We’ve done this before,” I yelled at the sky. “There’s going to be an evil scientist under the mountain who I have to outwit. Remember? It happened in the Tale of the Chess Board and the Platypus,” (Note to reader: do not *ever* read the Tale of the Chess Board and the Platypus. It puts a whole new meaning to the term ‘bad writing’). Eventually, the mountain stopped rising and two crevasses above the cavern started to glow. It was then that I realized the mountain was alive and was now going to proceed to try and kill me. The story of my life. The rock giant, proving that mountains without brains don’t have to be illiterate, spoke up: “I like to eat tacos. Will you be my taco?” I shook my head in pity and yelled to my writer: “This is officially the *least* funny thing you have ever written. Please stop now.” The big rock creature roared and loudly proclaimed, “You *will* be my taco!” then swung its rocky fist at me. I prepared myself for the impact, but I vaporized into white light instead.

I was standing in my writer’s room again. It appeared he had summoned me here in the nick of time. I was shocked. “Did you just... save me?” I asked incredulously. “No, I realized I didn’t have enough words, being limited to 2,000, left to do a funeral scene so I rescued you instead.” “How considerate.” Really, I was relieved. For a second my writer had begun to show signs of compassion. “Anyway, what are we supposed to do now?” “Have pointless conversations like this one and pretend that this isn’t all filler,” he said. “A classic,” I agreed. “But we need at least one funny part.” “So that’s why I’m going to have you play Monopoly against a three-toed sloth. Tell me when it’s over.” With that, he produced a Monopoly board from his desk and the three-toed sloth appeared as well. He exited the room, leaving me to my game. It appeared that, disappointed with me not dying from a living mountain he had decided to kill me off from boredom (or, perhaps, old age). It also appeared, however, that as we were still in his story he had forgotten that as soon as he left the room, his sloth would become fast again – and vindictive for being sucked out of its human-free paradise.

And, the sloth was already gone. A few minutes later, I heard a string of muffled curses coming from behind the door and the sloth re-entered, dragging my writer behind it. It smiled and nodded at me, then gestured towards my writer’s chair. “Take your new seat.” I grinned and sat down, then peered at my writer. “What’s your name?” I asked. He had never told me and I was suddenly very curious. He turned red and looked at the floor. “Lester. Lester Washapada.” I nearly fell out of my chair laughing. “All right, Lester, then, it seems the comedy part of this writing may be done for us. However, that doesn’t mean that I don’t want you to tap dance while wearing this hat now.” I held up a red cap with the head of a rubber chicken protruding from the top.

“What!?” he asked meekly. “But that’s just... random! Randomness never contributes to reader satisfaction!” “This is less about reader satisfaction than *my* satisfaction,” I replied. I’m the boss here now, and I have officially decided that the first order of business should be for you to tap dance in a chicken hat.” “Nobody needs to know about this, right?” he asked. “Nobody,” I agreed, then held up a phone. “Except for everyone who reads my Facebook page. Now start dancing.” He fell to the floor moaning, then got up and, with much hesitation, started to dance. Thirty glorious, recorded minutes later, I was ready to send him on his first mission. “You’re going to have to fight an eight-headed dragon. Don’t worry, though, you’ll have a four-toed sloth. Let’s get on with the adventure!” I pressed the START STORY button on my new desk and relaxed. I loved this job.