

ANDY JONES

UNLEASH
YOUR
CREATIVE
MONSTER

A CHILDREN'S GUIDE
TO WRITING

ILLUSTRATED BY

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divides his time between making stuff up for an advertising agency, and making stuff up for the characters in his books. His fifth novel for adults was published in 2020. His first novel for children is released in 2022. Andy lives with his family in London.



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TRAINING YOUR CREATIVE MONSTER

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WHEN YOUR MONSTER GETS STUCK

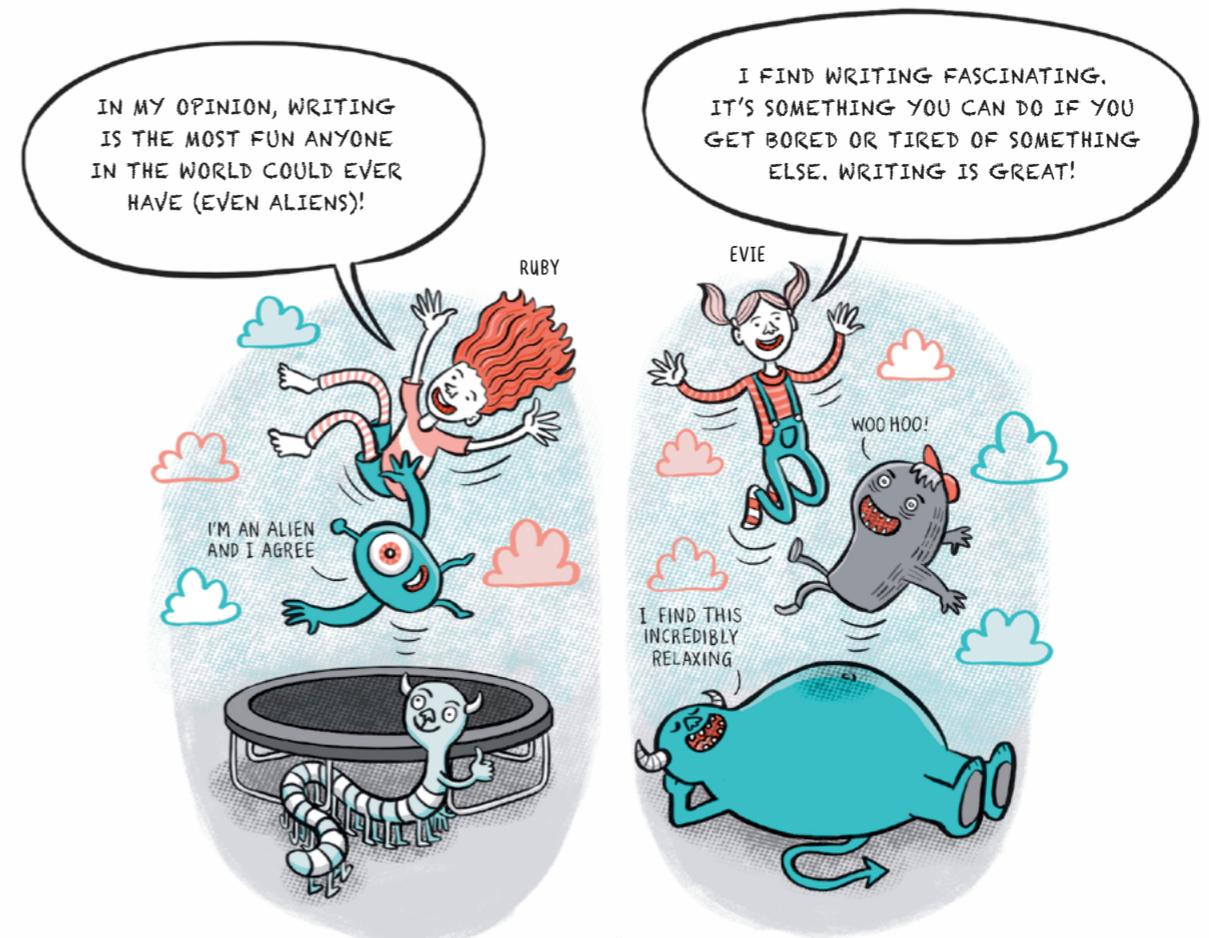
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FEEDING YOUR CREATIVE MONSTER?



SO WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT A CREATIVE MONSTER?

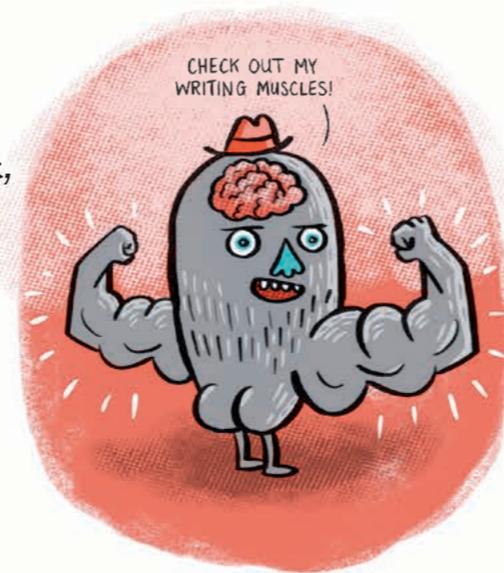
If you ask me, writing is the most fun you can have outside of a trampoline. But I know what you're thinking: *When grown-ups say something is fun, it usually isn't!* So, don't take my word for it, let's ask my daughters, Ruby and Evie.



See, I told you it was fun. And this book, I promise, will be fun too. It contains lots of tips and ideas to inspire you, build your writing muscles and unleash your Creative Monster.

“Whoa whoa whoa!” I hear you cry. “Did you say ‘Monster’? Tell me more about this *monster*.”

To which I say: Sure thing. But first, we need to talk about “The Muse”. In ancient Greece, there were nine Goddesses known as The Muses – they were said to inspire artists, writers and thinkers to produce original and dazzling work. Even now, thousands of years later, writers and artists talk about their “muse”; the mysterious force that brings bright ideas into being. Some people call this force “inspiration”. Others call it our “genius”. I call mine the “Creative Monster”.



So, yeah, my Muse is a monster. If that’s all right by you? And guess what? You have a Creative Monster too. Every single one of us does. It may be that your Creative Monster is sleeping at the moment, or small and timorous*, but don’t worry, we’re going to wake your monster, feed it, exercise it and watch it grow into the big, beautiful, crazy, rampaging creature it is destined to become.

MY MONSTER IS MADE OF JELLY AND COVERED IN LETTERS. IT HAS A BIG BLUE TONGUE TO SLURP UP ALL THE INFORMATION FROM THE BOOKS I READ. WHEN I GET STUCK, MY MONSTER WILL GIVE ME A BIG CUDDLE AND CALM ME DOWN WHILST RESTORING THE INFORMATION IT GOBBLED UP BACK INTO MY BRAIN.

MY CREATIVE MONSTER LOOKS LIKE A PENGUIN AND HAS SEVERAL SPECIAL ABILITIES. IF I GET STUCK IT WHISPERS AN IDEA FROM ITS BEAK STRAIGHT INTO MY BRAIN SO I GET UNSTUCK. ALSO, WHENEVER SHE WANTS, MY PENGUIN CAN CHANGE COLOUR, EVEN INTO COMBINATIONS THAT DON'T GO VERY WELL TOGETHER.



Why a monster? I’m glad you asked. Monsters are exciting, unpredictable, powerful. They can be scary at times, but, if handled with love, surprisingly tender. They are often made of unusual parts from different places, and this is what makes them magnificent, fascinating and irresistible. Monsters, in fact, are a lot like great stories.



*TIMOROUS means nervous and lacking confidence. By the way, there will be a few “tricky” words in this book – after all, we’re training to be writers. If you come across any you don’t know, go and bother a grown-up (that’s what they’re there for), or better still look them up in a dictionary (that’s what they’re for).



MONSTERS NEED LAIRS

Traditionally, monsters live in caves, swamps, under bridges – you know the kinds of places. But Creative Monsters live on paper. If you can, I'd like you to find a notebook to use alongside this book. We're going to fill your notebook with fun exercises and exciting stories – we're going to make it a lair for your Creative Monster.

It doesn't matter what size or shape your notebook is, it doesn't even matter if you use a pile of loose pages in a carrier bag – that works as a lair too. Perhaps your lair is a file on a computer – whatever suits you and your monster. This lair is a place where you can have fun, take chances, make big discoveries and big mistakes. It's a place of freedom and adventure.

When you have a special place for your writing, your writing becomes more special to you. So, before we go any further, go and find somewhere for your Creative Monster to live. If you do use a book, you can decorate the cover in a style that will make your monster comfortable.

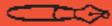
START AT THE BEGINNING AND TAKE THIS BOOK ONE TIP AT A TIME UNTIL YOU REACH THE END. OR OPEN IT AT A RANDOM PAGE AND START THERE. THIS IS YOUR BOOK, SO USE IT HOWEVER FEELS BEST FOR YOU.



EXERCISE

MEET YOUR CREATIVE MONSTER

Now that you have a home for your Creative Monster, write a few lines to explain what your monster looks like and how it will help you in your writing. It might help to draw your monster first. If you get stuck, you can think about the following things:

-  Size and shape
-  Smells and noises
-  Paws, claws and tentacles
-  Fur, hair and scales

You don't need to detail all of these things, they are simply there to inspire you.

One more thing: Your Creative Monster needs a name, but whatever you do, don't tell anyone what it is. This is important, because that mystery – that secret bond between writer and monster – is part of its power. So give your monster a name, but whatever you do, keep it secret.

When you've finished, come and meet me in the section called "Training Your Creative Monster".

HI! WE'D LOVE TO TELL YOU OUR NAMES...

...BUT WE'VE BEEN SWORN TO SECRECY

HELLO! MY NAME'S HOWARD



LEVEL 1 STORY BASICS



We're ready to begin your training, to hone your skills and get your Creative Monster roaring. Your training will be divided into three parts, each focusing on a different aspect of your writing.

First we will cover the basic elements of a great story. We'll learn what makes a narrative move forward and – importantly – what keeps your readers reading.

And we're going to write some stories of our own so, grab your pencil, take your Creative Monster by the paw (or flipper, or whatever) and follow me.

A GREAT STORY IS LIKE A GOOD CAKE

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOALS, PROBLEMS AND STRUGGLES

Before we talk about stories, let's talk about cake. What is a cake? Is it the icing, the chocolate buttons, the candles? No. These things exist to make a cake more interesting, more tempting, more delicious. But without a cake to hold them all together, what you have is a bit of a mess.

Stories are the same. We enjoy clever descriptions, exciting battles, funny moments and interesting characters – but these things work best when they are supported by a great cake. Sorry, I mean a great story.

Stories have three main ingredients – **Goals, Problems and Struggles**. And if you only take one thing away from this book, make it the importance of Goals, Problems and Struggles. Everything else – just like the icing on a cake – is simply an added bonus.



LEVEL 2 ESSENTIAL SKILLS



Congratulations on completing Level 1 of your training. Or, if you jumped straight to this page, welcome to Level 2 of training your Creative Monster.

In Level 1, we looked at the elements that make up a great story: obstacles, goals, struggles and conflict. And we discussed plot, genre and Doctor Frankenstein.

Next, we're going to look at some ideas and tools that will bring your writing to life – ways of making characters real, descriptions vivid and dialogue interesting, and more!

Are you ready for Level 2? Yes?
Good. Let's get to it...

BUILDING HUMANS (AND OTHER CREATURES)

HOW TO CREATE REALISTIC CHARACTERS

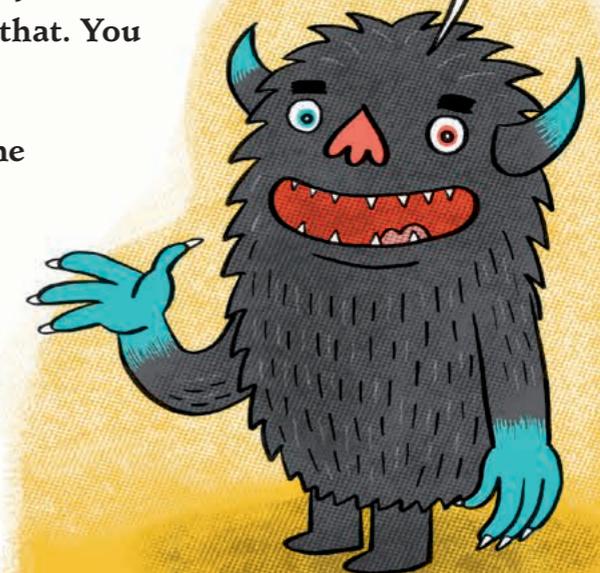
Following on from our discussion about Doctor Frankenstein, let's discuss the process of creating our own characters. Interesting characters – just like interesting people – are defined by more than one thing. More than good or bad, brave or afraid, silly or smart. Interesting characters tend to be more complicated, with several sides – or traits* – to their personality.

A character who is relentlessly bad is fine, for a while, but they can become a bit predictable. A bit boring. But if this thoroughly horrible character is afraid of his mother, or all lovey-dovey with his cat, then we have seen another side to him, and he becomes more realistic and more interesting to the reader.

Or a girl who is shy at school, shy at home, shy at parties but fearless and terrifying when she practises judo. As a writer, you can work with that. You can use it to build a story.

When building a character, the different aspects of their personality don't have to be opposites like shy and fearless. They simply need to be varied and interesting.

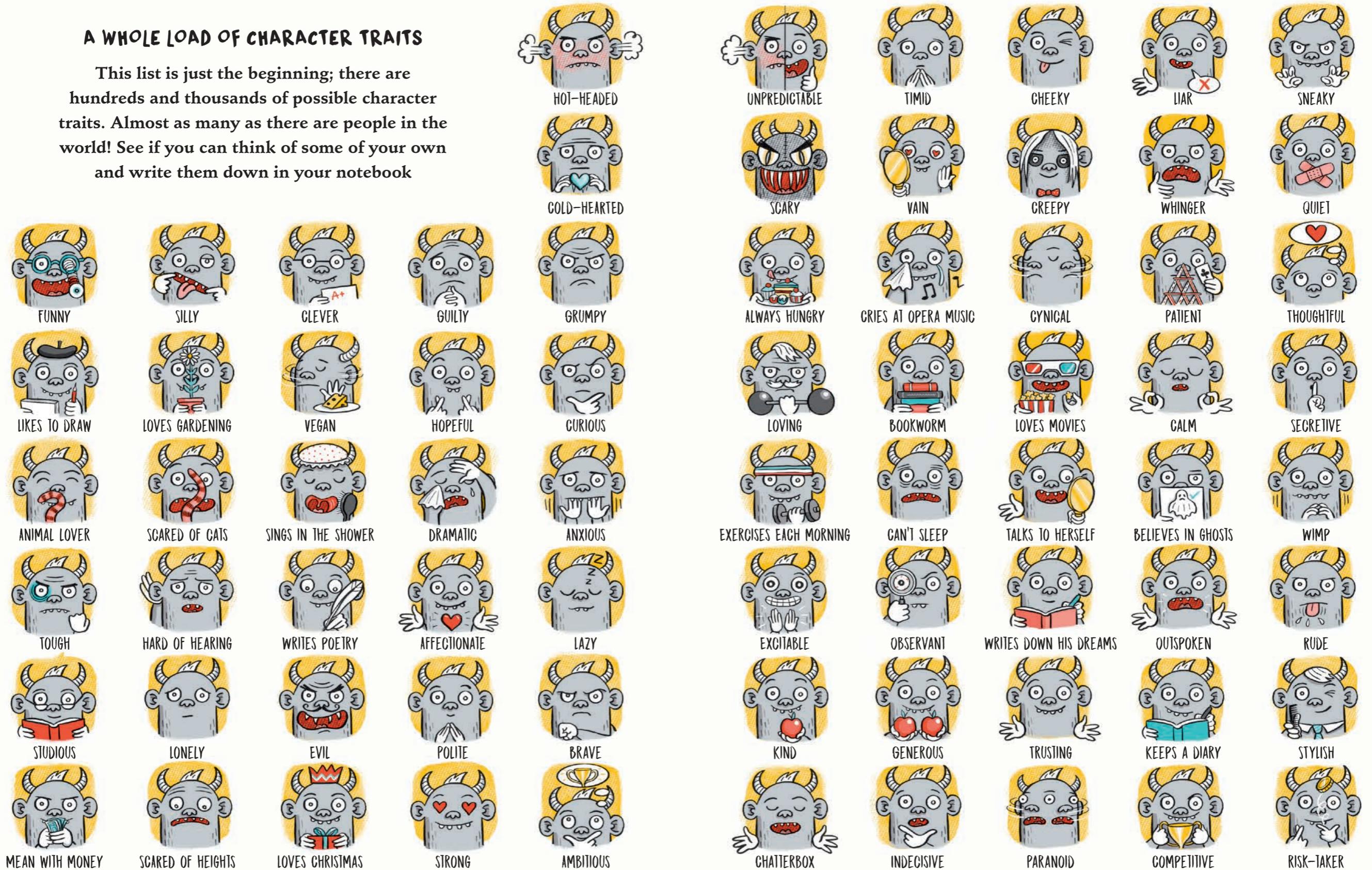
DON'T OVERDO IT!
ONE MAJOR TRAIT, AND ONE OR TWO SUPPORTING TRAITS ARE PLENTY FOR THE AVERAGE SHORT STORY. MORE THAN THIS AND YOUR CHARACTER WILL BE JUMBLED AND HARD TO GET TO KNOW. CONFUSING FOR YOU, YOUR CHARACTER AND YOUR READER.



* For the purpose of writing a story, a TRAIT is part of a character's personality, a thing that they do, or a way they behave. You'll find a long list of character traits on the next page.

A WHOLE LOAD OF CHARACTER TRAITS

This list is just the beginning; there are hundreds and thousands of possible character traits. Almost as many as there are people in the world! See if you can think of some of your own and write them down in your notebook



LEVEL 3 SECRET WEAPONS OF THE WORDSMITH



Just look at you and your Creative Monster!

I can sense the energy and story power crackling through you. This Monster Training is really paying off. But we're not finished yet. Welcome to Level 3.

This is where we take on some advanced writing principles. Think of them as black belt techniques, turning you and your Creative Monster into writing ninjas. Wait, can a monster be a ninja? You know what – with the tips and tricks contained in the following pages – I think it can.

So sharpen your weapon (your pencil)
and leap into Level 3.



CHEKHOV'S GUN & ROWLING'S POTION INTRODUCING IMPORTANT PEOPLE AND ESSENTIAL OBJECTS

Anton Chekhov was a Russian short story writer. He died over 100 years ago, but his stories are still considered to be some of the best ever written. He also left us a pretty cool writing principle: it's called Chekhov's gun.

And it goes like this: if someone places a gun on the table at the start of your story, then that gun had better get fired by the end. In other words, everything (and everyone) in your story should be there for a reason. Either right now, or later on. Otherwise, it's just taking up space.



A good way to appreciate this principle is to consider it in reverse: if a gun is needed to solve (or cause) a problem in your story, you should carefully introduce that gun earlier on. And, of course, the same goes for keys, maps, magic potions, boats, ladders and anything else that your story calls for. Otherwise if you simply have, for example, a key appear precisely when one is needed, then it all seems a bit ... well, lucky. The trick is to sneak the thing into your story at some earlier point. So it doesn't feel like cheating.

This is something JK Rowling does with great skill in the Harry Potter books. A spell or potion will be introduced in a playful way, for something seemingly unimportant. But later, that same piece of magic will be used to major effect. But because you are familiar with the spell, you are excited – rather than frustrated – when it appears at a time of great importance. If you've read the books, go back and look at the way JK Rowling introduces items like Harry's invisibility cloak or polyjuice potion, and how these items become more important later on.

STORY PROMPT: "IT STARTED AS THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE..."

First we need to set up the great day referred to in the title. Is it a party? Does someone win the lottery? What was so good about this day? You can establish all of this in one or two paragraphs.

And then, as the title suggests, something must go wrong. Exactly what that is will depend on how you start the story and just how mean you want to be to your character. (I would suggest very mean.)

Perhaps this is a story where you can practise the lesson from the previous page: hide something in the beginning that will come in useful at the end.



FLOPPY ENDINGS

BUILDING TO A STRONG FINISH

You've worked so hard on your story; you created an exciting start, invented great characters and gave them numerous obstacles to overcome. It's funny, dramatic, terrifying, thrilling! It would be a shame to ruin all that work with a weak, disappointing and generally floppy ending.

So first things first (or should that be last things first?), resist the temptation to rush. Draw out the final battle, make your hero struggle one last time or throw in a last-minute twist. Keep your reader guessing until the very end.

Also – like grabbing your bags before getting off a bus – don't leave any story luggage behind before you get off your writing chair.



If you left a cat stuck up a tree, get it down.



If there is an unexploded bomb anywhere, diffuse it.



If two characters are attracted to each other, allow them to kiss.



If someone made a promise, make sure they keep it.

Or, don't. You don't have to conclude all your story elements in a positive way – by all means, leave the cat up the tree, or stop the couple from having that smooch. But do pay them one last visit before you type "The End". The effect can be funny, or dramatic, or sad – so long as the reader knows you didn't forget about it, they will accept whatever version you write.

FOUR WAYS TO END A STORY:

There are many ways to end a story, an infinite number of ways, but you can usually place the ending into one of four categories. Here they are:

UPBEAT



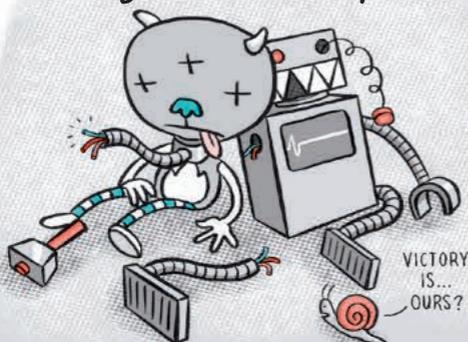
YOU KNOW, THE GOOD GUY WINS, THE WORLD IS SAVED, THE CONTEST WON AND EVERYONE LIVES HAPPILY EVER AFTER.

DOWNBEAT



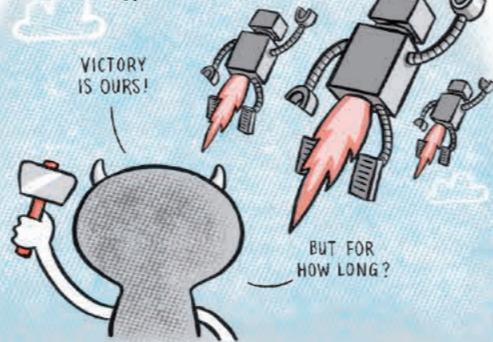
THE HERO DOES NOT WIN, JUSTICE IS NOT SERVED, TRAGEDY HAPPENS, LOVE IS LOST, THE UNTHINKABLE HAPPENS.

BITTERSWEET



AS THE NAME SUGGESTS, THIS ENDING COMBINES GOOD AND BAD. PERHAPS THE WORLD IS SAVED BUT, IN THE PROCESS, THE HERO IS KILLED. OR SOMEONE LOSES ALL THEIR MONEY, BUT FINDS LOVE.

UNRESOLVED



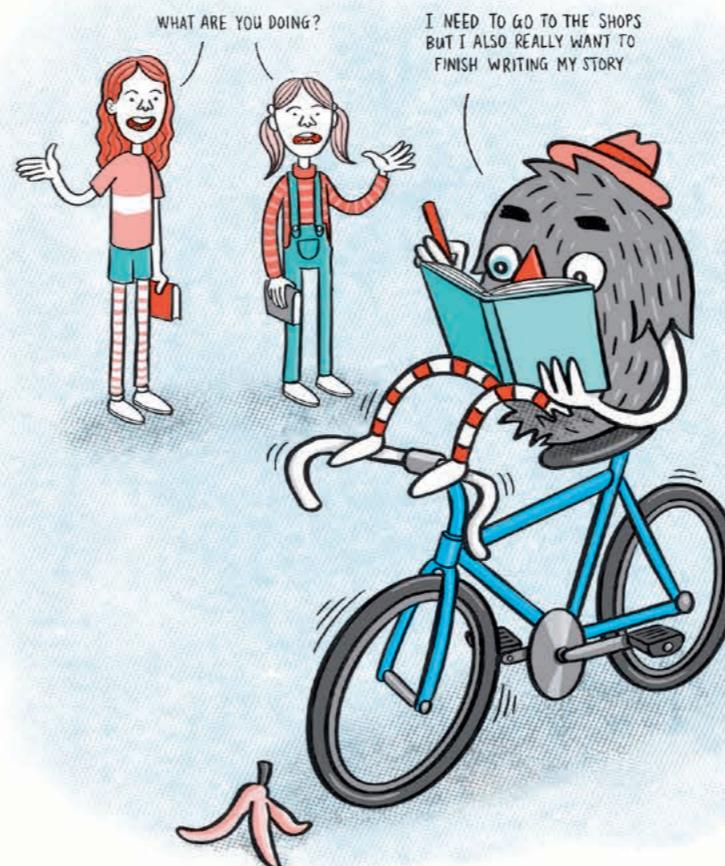
MAYBE THE VILLAIN IS DEFEATED, BUT NOT CAPTURED. PERHAPS THERE IS A HINT THAT THE GOOD GUY HAS A DARK SECRET. THESE ARE THE ENDINGS THAT KEEP YOU GUESSING.

EXERCISE

AN ALTERNATIVE ENDING

I'd like you to revisit one of the stories you have written so far. One you loved. Or maybe one that you weren't so sure about. And then I'd like you to write a different ending – if the original ending was happy, try writing a sad ending, or a bittersweet ending. If the original ending was downbeat, see if you can make it happy, or give it an unresolved ending that keeps the reader guessing.

Read your original story to a friend or someone from your family. And then try the new ending on them and ask which they prefer.



"FINISH WHAT YOU'RE WRITING. WHATEVER YOU HAVE TO DO TO FINISH IT, FINISH IT."

—NEIL GAIMAN

(AUTHOR OF BOOKS FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN. MANY OF WHICH HAVE WON PRIZES AND BEEN TURNED INTO MOVIES.)



**A funny and accessible
guide to creative writing,
packed with practical advice,
exciting story prompts and a
mad cast of creative monsters.**

**A warm and witty text by novelist
Andy Jones, packed with top writing tips**

**Hilarious illustrations and quirky monsters
by comedian, author and illustrator Olaf Falafel**

 **#AllYourMonsters @AndyJonesAuthor @OFalafel @WalkerBooksUK**

For readers aged 7+

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