

A COMIC TUTORIAL

by: KaiJu

Part 2: Writing

Now, you've got a great idea for a comic. You're super excited about the concept, the characters—and you can't wait to write it all down! But wait... how does one write a comic? Well, the short answer is: anyway you like! If you're used to writing in prose, write in prose. If you'd rather start with pictures, draw it out in thumbnails (small, rough pictures). Or, if you wanna go the more traditional script route, that's fine too. Whatever is easiest and facilitates the creative process is the way to go!

We find it easiest to write an informal script that is loosely formatted. Here's an example of what the Novae script looks like:

Raziol leans over the doorway with a startled expression and looks down the hall and sees Huygens talking excitedly with a very pale man in a cloak.

Raziol: What a strange looking man...

Raziol can't help be put off by his otherworldly skin tone and decides not to make himself known, hiding behind a bookshelf and staring though one of the empty spaces. Huygens laughs and pats the pale man on the shoulder.

Huygens: "I trust you had a safe journey... frightful news on the bridge, but no matter, how have you been fairing my friend? Ecstatic about tonight's discoveries?"

Sulvain takes out a small notebook and scribbles in its pages with rough graphite.

Huygens reads the note and smiles.

Huygens: "Excellent. And it's no trouble at all! Just the normal hubbub around the Academy."

Raziol looks at the pair with a furrowed brow, unsure what to make of the situation.

They go into the next room. Sulvain notices Raziol peering at him through the gap in the bookshelf. Raziol panics, closing the gap with nearby books.

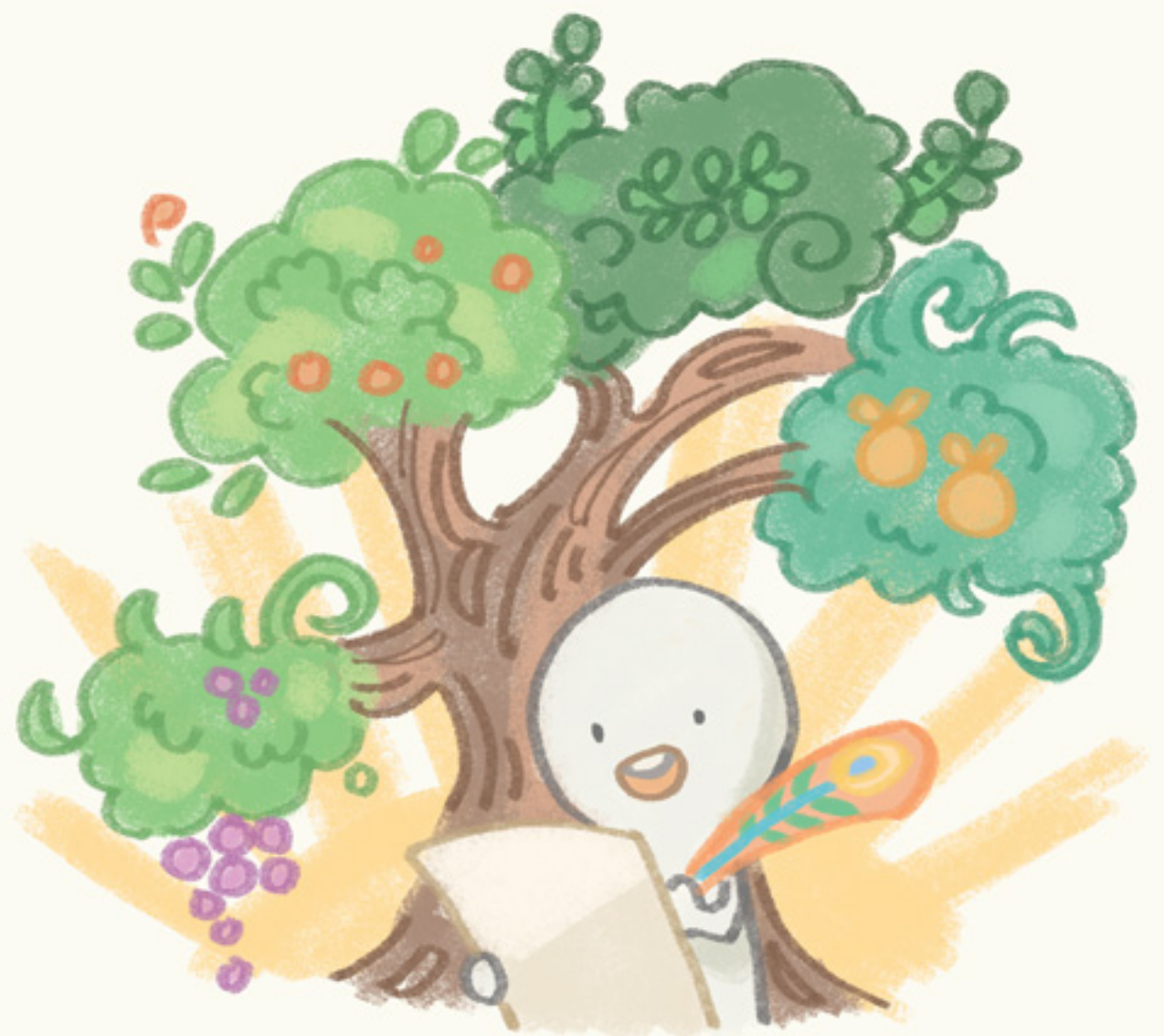
Sulvain smiles.

One of the things that helps us write is writing together! We each choose a set of characters and write back and forth based on how we think the characters would respond. It's more fun for us this way, and it keeps us on our toes not knowing how the other character will respond. If you have a writing friend we highly recommend trying it out.



When you're working on your first draft the most important thing is to have fun! Don't think about what others will think, don't dwell on the rough patches. Just write what you see, and what makes your own fire burn. Creativity comes in bursts, so it's best to try and get everything down while you have that energy. If you feel like it's difficult to turn it into a cohesive narrative, don't fret! Make a document or a sketchbook and just let your ideas loose. When you feel ready to tackle the narrative, you'll have those notes for later.

Writing is a very organic and messy process. Though it must be trimmed and pruned later, first you must let it grow.



Getting stuck...

It happens to everyone. One day you're unstoppable and the story is speeding forward like a locomotive but then... you run into problems. Maybe it's a plot hole, maybe you're out of fuel, or maybe you're finding that you were going the wrong direction the whole time. This can often slow down or halt what you're working on and may make the process grueling if you can't figure out the problem. When this happens it's important to take a deep breath and put the story down for a bit. A short period of distance from the project can help you have a wider perspective.



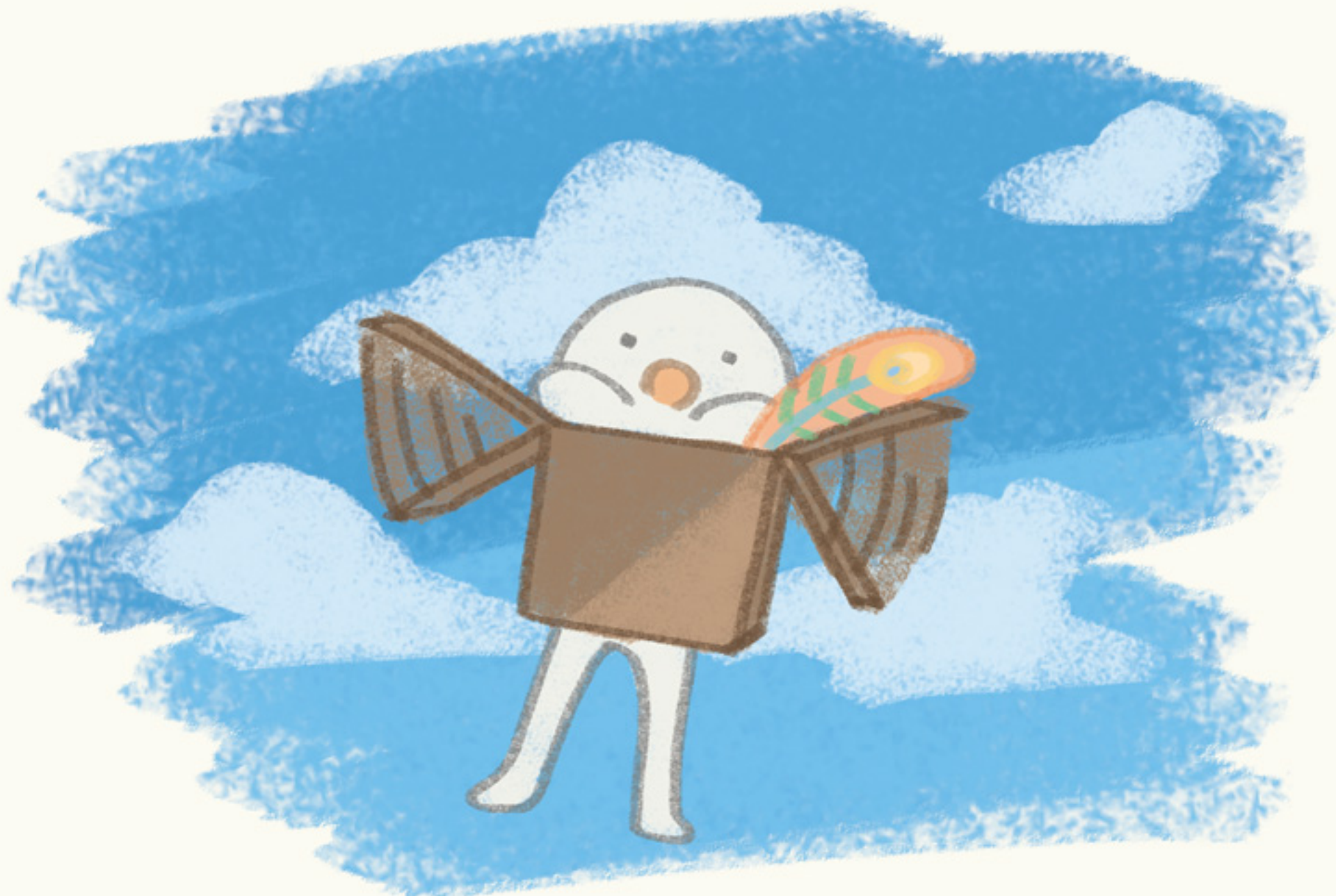
This is when it's important to ask yourself some questions:

“What don't I like about this?”

“Why doesn't this feel right?”

“I'm not excited about this anymore, why did that change?”

“I can't get past this part because I have to fill a plot hole, but what do I fill it with?”



There are hundreds of reasons why the writing train won't budge. Sometimes you gotta plow through and keep writing till you get past the tough part. Sometimes you just need to wait and examine what's blocking you. These roadblocks are going to vary widely from person to person because writing is extremely personal. The important thing is to remain calm and try to figure out what's keeping you from going forward.

Getting a broader perspective

If you do find yourself stuck—and want to find the root of your problem—sometimes it's good to get out of the writer's head and into the reader's. It's a hard thing to do, but try to forget that you're the one writing the story and try to enjoy it as a reader. If you can successfully pull this off, what you may find is that the problems you have as a writer and the problems you have as a reader are different.

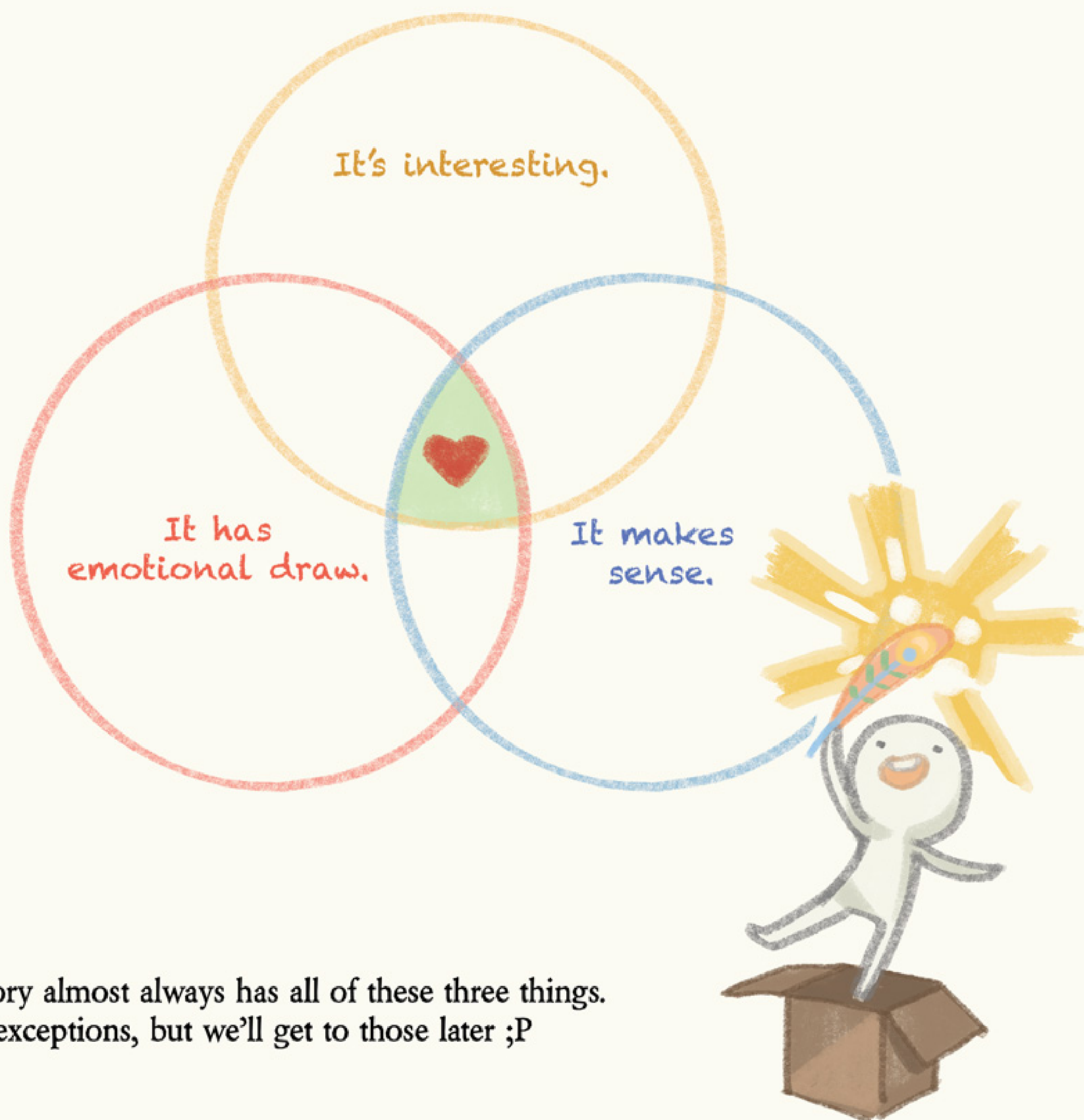


When narrative problems are hard to pinpoint, sometimes it's good to break things down into categories. Here's a few examples to help simplify things.

The 3 major traits to a good story

What makes a story good? What draws you in and makes you want to keep reading with excitement and enthusiasm? What makes you hold it close to your heart and go back to it again and again? In our experience, the stories we love can be described like this:

It's interesting.
It has emotional draw.
It makes sense.



A good story almost always has all of these three things. There are exceptions, but we'll get to those later ;P

First off: It's interesting!

Let's start with the most important and complicated trait of all! When you decide to read something for the first time it's often because of one thought: "This seems interesting!" Now what makes a story interesting can be difficult to pinpoint as everyone finds different things interesting. But the important question to ask yourself is:



"What do I find interesting as a reader?"

Think about what makes you go, "Oh!" or "Cool!" or "Ahhh, I want to know more!" What is it about these parts of the story that keeps you turning the pages?

Second: Emotional draw



Having an interesting idea is all well and good for stimulating the brain, but what about the heart? If the heart has nothing to be invested in, the brain will lose interest as well. Writing through the lenses of characters and their emotions is the best way to draw your audience in and keep them there. The trick is, how do you make others love your characters as much as you do?

Think about the characters you love from the stories you love. What made you care for them? Did you relate to them or how they acted? What made you trust them? After all, as a reader you want to trust the character you are following so that you can feel safe to be emotionally invested in them. Of course there are reasons to write an unlikable or untrustworthy protagonist, but in most cases there needs to be a least one character the audience can attach themselves to.

Just remember: Your audience doesn't know anything except what's shown. How can you make your readers invested in your characters in the time they appear?

Third: It makes sense.

This trait is the bare bones of your story, the ground, the gravity that holds everything together. It's not something most of us think about when we pick up a story, but it's an important factor in how we experience it.



Rules and structure give readers solid ground. If you teach them the rules they will learn them and use them to navigate the story. If the world always follows its own rules readers feel like it is more real and they feel a part of it, which in turn, gives the drama more gravity.

Think about some nicely constructed stories you love. Were they easy to understand? Were the rules fun? Did they make things feel more serious when the characters were faced with obstacles?

Other things to keep in mind: Do the character's actions make sense? Does it fit with their backstory and personality? Will the audience understand this?

When one aspect is missing

Stories that are lacking in one or two of these departments can still be incredible stories! But it's important to keep in mind how this will effect the way your story is experienced.

It's interesting and emotional! But it doesn't make sense...



When it's done well...

These kind of stories can have a very dreamlike quality. They can tackle abstract emotions and situations that would be hard to convey in a structured world. They may be very philosophical, and can feel very raw and unfiltered. They can be artistic and force the reader to think outside the box.

Oh the other hand...

The readers may feel confused or feel like they are floating, unable to grasp onto anything. They may be left in a daze after reading instead of feeling excited to read the next chapter. If it doesn't feel real, important events won't have the same gravitas.

It's interesting and it makes sense! But lacks emotion...



When it's done well...

The best way I can describe these stories is like walking into a museum or watching a documentary. These kind of stories usually flourish when the concept is extremely interesting. They can make the reader feel like an explorer or a scientist and can be extremely inspirational. These stories can have great world building that goes beyond the normal scale, and give the reader a new reality. This kind of storytelling works very well with video games that focus on exploration or mystery.

On the other hand...

If the reader lacks an emotional connection to what they're consuming, they may eventually become less engaged. Characters are usually what keep us on the edge of our seat, emotions are often what leave the strongest impressions. So, if a story lacks these, the audience may lack the motivation to keep reading. These stories usually require a lot of brainpower, and can be exhausting if you don't have this motivation.

It's emotional and it makes sense! But its not interesting...



When it's done well...

These stories can feel safe and familiar. It may be something you read when you just want to let your brain relax. They can be predictable but the characters and emotions draw you in in a satisfying way. They can feel nostalgic or like comfort food.

On the other hand...

If the story is not interesting it may lack a hook, something to grab a potential reader's interest. Predictable narratives sometimes lack excitement. So if the story is long, the reader may lose motivation to find out what happens next.



That extra oomph!

So you've got your story where you want it to be and you feel like it's a satisfying read, but... something's missing. It could be you just need that extra "oomph" to really make it shine. Here's some examples of how you can spice up your story.

Attention in the details

If you feel like a scene is really generic, it might be a good idea to add some details that make it stand out. Maybe it's a mural on the wall, a cool object, a neat building. As long as the additions are not too distracting, it's a good idea to add details that make the scene more memorable.

Atmosphere

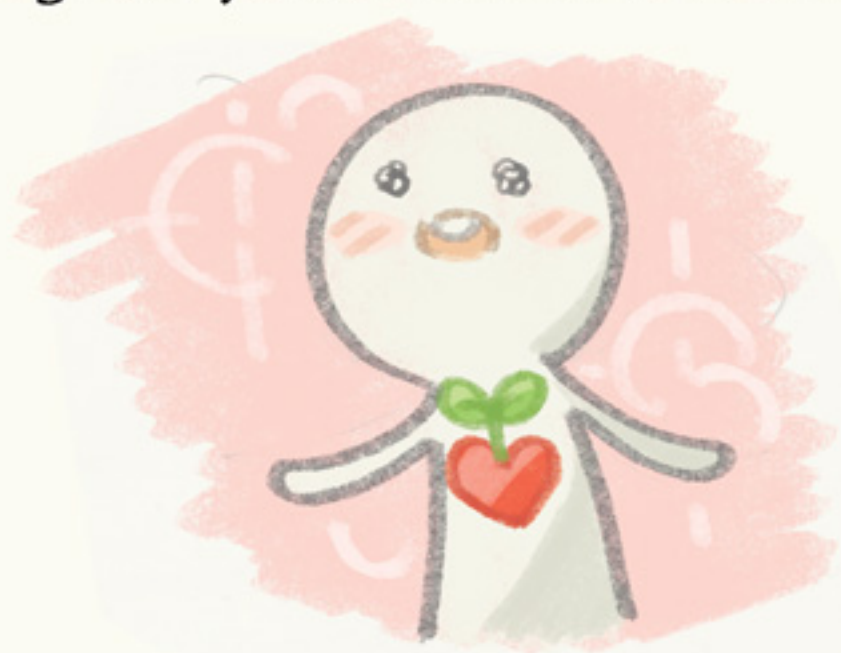
Adding atmosphere is a great way to instantly draw your audience in and make them feel like they are a part of the story. Lighting and atmospheric changes like rain, fog and snow create mood and make your world feel more real and dynamic.

Being Relatable

Do you feel like your characters are interesting and have emotional moments, but that readers may have trouble connecting with them on a personal level? Maybe it's time to show some more relatable moments. It could be a familiar habit (biting pencils?), or the way they act around others (nervous speech patterns?), or maybe they have an experience many people could relate too (a fight with a friend or sibling?). It doesn't really matter what kind of quirk or memory, as long as it feels real to the reader. So be sure to add your own personal details that make it feel real.

Moe factor

Ok this one sounds a little silly, but its actually a very useful tool. When one hears “moe” the first thing they may think of is anime girls with huge eyes, but that’s not really the essence of moe. Moe means a little sprout or fire growing in your soul. In short, it’s what makes readers go “Ooooo!” It’s a difficult thing to pinpoint, but you can see it most clearly in character quirks. Say you have a really muscular and tough character, but they love to cook macarons, or you have a shy character that secretly has an intense side—that’s moe. This can come in character development too, perhaps your character starts out one way but as the story progresses their personality changes or evolves in an unexpected way. It’s simply a way to add intrigue to your characters and make your readers eager to learn more about them.



Still having a tough time getting that story out? Maybe you’ve just been staring at it too long, or maybe it’s time to share it with someone you trust and has similar taste to you. If you know someone who can be an enthusiastic test reader, you may have a huge ally. But don’t get too deep into critiques, save that for the editing process. ;D

KAIJU CORNER!

Only you can do this!

The most important thing to remember is that only you can tell your story. As a famous neurologist once said, every single brain is unique. No one is going to tell your story the same way you will. Nothing is perfect, nor does it need to be, and ultimately putting your unique perspective in your work is going to be what makes it shine.

