

Be Your Own Best Editor

I am at the tail end of a One Story course on self-editing your short stories. I've taken the material presented and some items from the discussion threads and turned them into a kind of checklist of things to look for when editing your fictional works.

You can find the link to a PDF of the current checklist on the ["Write Minded" page](#) where it says "Self-editing Checklist". It will likely get updated, so if you find it useful, you might want to check back now and then for a revised edition!

Lost and Found and the Story Spine

Today I started work on the second draft of my first novel. The first task I've decided to undertake is to review and revise the plot structure.

Recently I took a little course offered by the fine folks at [One Story](#). Ann Napolitano did a five day course entitled "Lost and Found: A New Way of Looking at Plot", which I highly recommend, by the way, if she offers it again. In the discussion forum for the course, I learned about [the "Story Spine" concept](#), which Ken Adams invented as a way to assist actors in improvisational theater and Pixar included in its "rules" for story development. I have begun my re-plotting effort by combining the technique Ann introduced with the Story Spine approach.

Lost and Found approaches plot from the perspective of what

the protagonist is “missing” and how the search for it develops and resolves. In a sense, you take the journey of discovery with the characters in the story as they seek to deal with the conflict by examining what it is that has them off-kilter to begin with. The “missing” thing can be a person, a thing, a feeling, ... anything.

The Story Spine goes like this, where you fill in the blanks:

Once upon a time _____,
until one day _____,
because of that _____,
because of that _____,
...
until finally _____,
and ever since that day _____.

I think in a novel you probably get some iterations over the because of that.../until finally sequences, but that's neither here nor there. It's a tool for grasping the bare minimum sequence of cause and effect that make the story.

What I noticed as I thought about Lost and Found and the Story Spine is how the quest for what is missing follows the Spine. So, identify what is missing, put the protagonist's paws on ground at “until one day” – the point at which it goes missing or can't be ignored – and your off and running. I tried it with a couple of short stories and it worked, so I figured I'd give it a go with the novel.

The novel is called “The Last Tanuki”. It takes place on a distant planet called Tereathon where the human/animal genetic hybrid inhabitants live deep beneath the uninhabitable surface in gigantic caverns. The story centers on Aria, a tanuki hybrid. She's a young adult and has been out on her own a few years.

The first thing to do was to identify what was missing. They are several:

- Aria's parents went missing when she was a pup (parents missing)
- Aria's step-parents are killed in the first chapter (step-parents missing)
- An attempt on Aria's life is made in the first chapter (Aria's security/safety is missing)
- Aria's Uncle Cato, who made unwelcome and inappropriate advances toward Aria when she was 13, shows up in league with those who made the attempt on her life, turning Aria's emotional state upside down (Aria's peace of mind is missing)
- Aria pretends to be a cross between two different genetic families of hybrids because tanuki are viewed with superstitious suspicion by others and are sometimes attacked. Crosses, though, are considered inferior, so she faces some kind of discrimination either way. (Aria is missing the acceptance and equality others have. She is also missing companionship)
- Those who made the attempt on her life are apparently looking for a map they think she has through her father (the map is missing)

Those are the main things. The goal of Lost and Found is to narrow that to the most important. I went one step further, though, and asked: what is missing? what does Aria believe is missing?

I have trouble with theme in stories. I could tell throughout the first draft that this book was struggling to find its message ([Dorothy Sayers would have said](#) I was not tuned in with the Idea). Anyway, as I thought about what was missing and why, a theme began to emerge: children suffering for the sins of their parents. This is actually most of the characters' problems, so I used it as a lens to examine what was missing, and one thing popped out above the others: the struggle for acceptance. Aria's situation in that context is nearly a microcosm of the entire world of Tereathon.

So it was pretty clear that the most important missing thing is acceptance of crosses and tanuki. The rest of the missing things just serve to provide events for Aria to deal with the real issue: discrimination and its affect on her. However, Aria only sees that as a fact of life in her world as a whole, and she grew up knowing nothing else, so she can't really see the forest for the trees. To Aria, the most important thing immediately missing is that map: only that can free her from the terror of her life. Minus the immediate threats, Aria would say the most important thing missing is her parents. Their motorcar was found having crashed, and while they are presumed dead, their bodies were never discovered. Aria, however, has always held out an impossible hope they might not be dead, though by the time the book takes place, it has been 16 years and her hope is almost extinguished.

That isn't a perfect analysis, but it's good for now. It provides a backdrop for the Story Spine.

Now in the original sequence of events, the story opens with the threat on Aria's life. The other precursors are revealed in changes in point of view and in flashbacks. I didn't like those very much, and by reaching back into the Story Spine of Aria's life: that is, just by starting off my thinking with "Once upon a time ... until one day ..." a whole world opened up. Another lesson I've heard in numerous places is to start your story deeper in on round two. I think a better way to put that is, consider starting your story some-when else. In this case I looked at it as Aria's story, and since the map and Aria's parents figure so prominently, maybe that is a good place to start. I wrote that, the original, and several other possible starting points down, and it was clear after a short time that the one that offered the most cohesive plot was to start with the events of her parents disappearance, but just as an action sequence that hints at the map and something of life on Tearathon. Given that point in time and space, I now had a "Once upon a time ..." and an "until one day ..." all based

on what Aria is missing and believes is missing:

Once upon a time, there was a tanuki/human genetic hybrid girl named Aria who lived with other animal/human hybrids known as animalians on a distant planet called Tereathon. Tanuki were treated with superstitious suspicion, and sometimes violence, and cross-hybrid family offspring were held in disdain. The surface of Tereathon was uninhabitable and for untold generations animalians had dwelled beneath the surface of the planet in massive underground caverns. The girl's parents went missing, their car found wrecked and abandoned, and were presumed dead. She was raised by step-parents who were not tanuki and thought it safer for her if she hid the patterns in her fur and passed herself off as a cross rather than live as a tanuki. This is how she grew up and the habits she developed.

Every day Aria went about her business, trying to keep a low profile so as not to offend "normal" animalians. She was content to just live quietly and get by in a world that treated her as less than equal and forced her to repress any expression of her true self.

Until one day her step-parents were killed in a suspicious factory fire and her uncle, who had molested her when she was 13, showed up, and she began receiving threats on her life along with demands for a map that had allegedly passed to her through her father.

Because of that, she discovered a connection between her father and an animalian who lived in town. She went to see him (Graowf) and his friend (Prox) to learn if they knew anything about her father and the alleged map.

Because of that, Graowf ...

And I'll stop there so I don't reveal anything. I will probably go back and revise the Spine, cutting it down to its core – it seems to wordy. I'll also construct a detailed

outline that follows and that I'll use for writing the second draft. Regardless of what I do, you see how the process is working for me. Lost and Found and the Story Spine seem to me quite useful tools for working a story plot. I'll post more on my thoughts about them as my novel progresses.

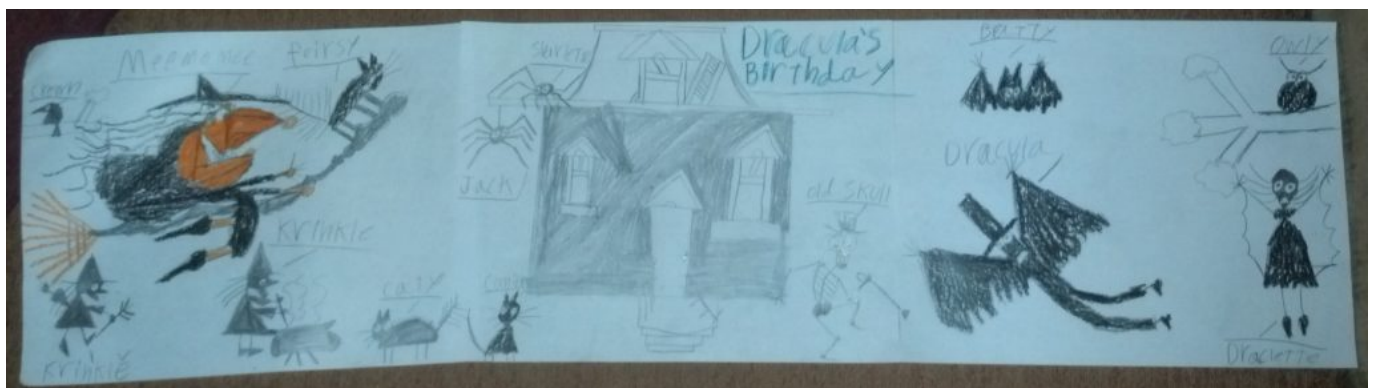
What tools do you use to help you develop story plots?

Comment Subscriptions

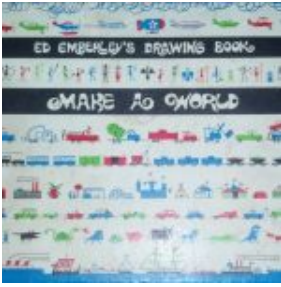
I set up a feature to allow subscriptions to comments. I sure do hope it works! ^v^

Amped Emberley Vignette

On Friday my 8-year-old was doodling out of an Ed Emberley book and having a rollicking good time putting this together:



I ran across it a couple of times over the weekend, and by Sunday noon, looking for something fun and easy to relax with, I could take it no longer. I had to do my own.



Cover of an Ed
Emberley Book

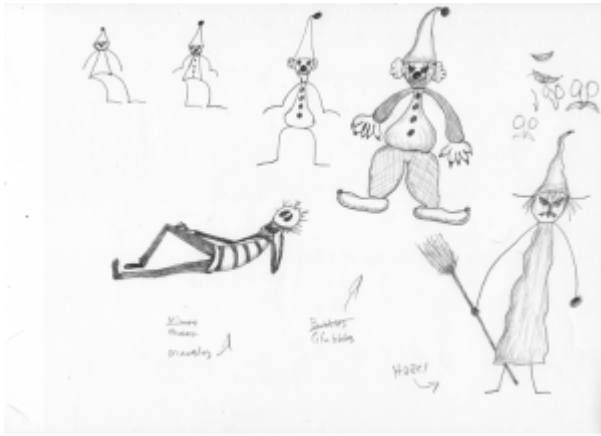


Inside an
Emberley

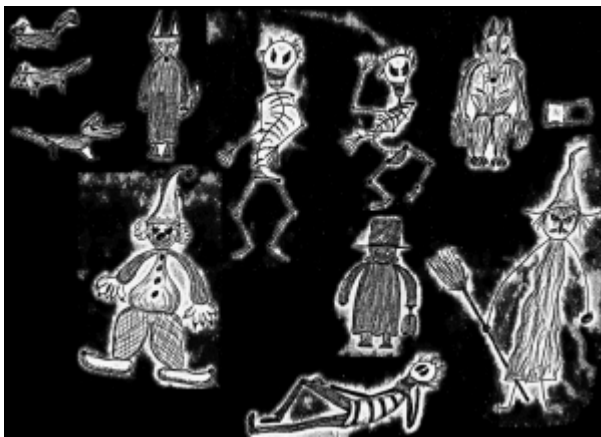
If you don't know about Ed Emberley art books,
they are full of little doodles of things in an step-by-step
instructional format. Each little doodle takes only seconds
to complete.

The real fun comes in the embellishments.

So I sat down and played around with some doodles for an hour
or two:



did a little massaging on the 'puter:



and then went to work on my real goal: an amped up Emberley shadowbox vignette. And here it is!



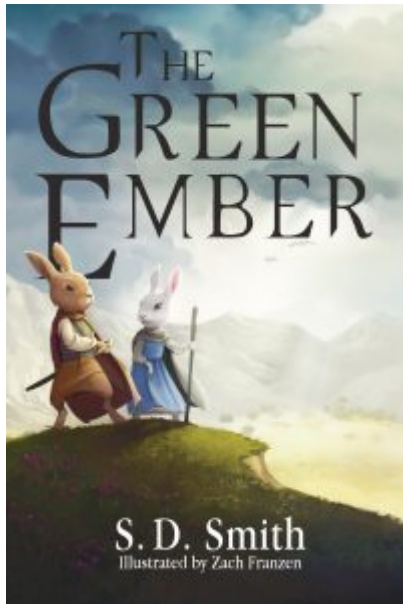
From left to right: Dancer, Gubbles, Uncle Howland, Mumsley, and behind him Doctor, Pippy, Foxy, and Hazel.

By the way, the picture on the wall is a reproduction of a watercolor of a beastly fellow by the name of Uncle Cato. Uncle Cato's portrait was painted by the versatile and multi-talented [Jeanette Andromeda](#), the brilliance behind [HorrorMade.com](#), among other many enterprises.

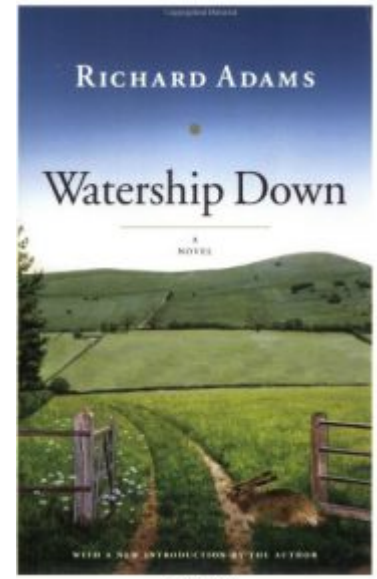
The little vignette is not finished. I'll probably keep it on a corner shelf and keep adding little things – some furniture, more wall-hangings, etc. – when I need a relaxing distraction. But now you know the kind of things that fill a lazy Sunday afternoon around Graowf's den.

A Tale of Two Rabbit Tales

I'm in the midst of reading The Green Ember by S. D. Smith to some of my kids. At the same time, I am reading Watership Down by Richard Adams to myself. I've not read Watership Down before, but you may have. The Green Ember is a very recent book.



Both of these books are novels about anthropomorphic rabbits, but they reflect two contrasting approaches. The Green Ember rabbits are like humans with rabbit bodies. The Watership Down rabbits, on the other hand, are like rabbits with rudimentary human intellect.



Both of these books are very good, and I'm enjoying them a great deal. I may write a quick review of The Green Ember in the future, but for now I just want to share something from Watership Down.

It's a scene where the rabbits are being pursued and must cross a stream, but some are too weak to swim. One amongst them (Blackberry) sometimes demonstrates flashes of imagination, such as only humans have, and this scene is the first where his ability saves them:

Hazel had no idea what he meant. Blackberry's flood of apparent nonsense only seemed to draw tighter the mesh of danger and bewilderment. As though Bigwig's angry impatience, Pipkin's terror and the approaching dog were not

enough to contend with, the cleverest rabbit among them had evidently gone out of his mind. He felt close to despair.

I thought the feeling of despair that Hazel's fear and bewilderment generated out of an idea that he had no capacity to comprehend is a very insightful observation on Adams' part. It's a fear of something that to Hazel is supernatural, pushing him beyond his ability to bear. A few paragraphs later Blackberry has gotten Pipkin and Fiver onto a piece of wood and wants to push him out to float him across, but he isn't strong enough.

No one obeyed him. All squatted, puzzled and uncertain. Blackberry buried his nose in the gravel under the landward edge of the board and raised it, pushing. The board tipped. Pipkin squealed and Fiver lowered his head and splayed his claws. Then the board righted itself and drifted a few feet onto the pool with the two rabbits hunched upon it, rigid and motionless. It rotated slowly and they found themselves staring back at their comrades.

"Frith and Inle!" said Dandelion. "They're sitting on the water! Why don't they sink?"

"They're sitting on the wood and the wood floats, can't you see?" said Blackberry. "Now we swim over ourselves. Can we start, Hazel?"

Even seeing it, Blackberry's comrades can't understand what is happening. They can't make the connection between floating wood and things on top of floating wood not sinking. The situation is further demonstrated by Hazel's response:

During the last few minutes Hazel had been as near to losing his head as he was ever to come. He had been at his wits end ... He still could not understand what had happened ...

I was reminded of Jack London's story, "White Fang", where we are invited to a brilliant insight into the mind of a wolf-dog and the relentless, ruthless law that drives everything in his world: eat or be eaten.

I have often contemplated the possible connection between immortal, spiritual souls, imagination, and rational self-awareness and moral thought. I think more and more that they are inextricably linked. Self-awareness requires the ability to imagine oneself in some other experience. Imagination allows one to envision possible outcomes and other places that may not even exist or that one has never seen. Rational self-awareness allows one to reflect upon thoughts and actions and determine their moral significance. The ultimate destiny of immortal souls is determined by moral choices. The ability to comprehend the concept of life after death requires imagination and self-awareness.

As Watership Down progresses, the rabbits can't help but question instinct and action. Just by granting them the ability to talk and interact in even a rudimentary human fashion, they can't avoid consideration of the significance of their presence and influence on whatever they touch. No matter how feral they remain as characters in a story, the mere presence of rational self-awareness and imagination forces a progression to moral choice.

Apply the thought to your pets or to the squirrels in the yard, or any other animals and consider holistic necessity of their being: material souls and near-absence of rational thought, and then how they can just survive, with no tools, in any natural habitat that can provide for their needs. But mankind? Most of us would die within days in any wild place if dropped there naked and without provisions of any kind. I wonder at times that perhaps this Earth is not our natural habitat at all – that Eden, with its gateway to Heaven and atmosphere of Grace is the only place that man is truly fit to be. But that is another post. For now I'll just say it seems

fitting that our rational minds with their fertile imaginations enabling us to make and use tools is all that seems to enable us to survive here, and that we survive here because we have the capability of tools. There is a holistic necessity to our being to allow us to persevere day in and day out, just as the animals are equipped for their survival.

And all of this returns to stories like "White Fang" and The Green Ember and Watership Down. The species in books must possess all the qualities that are holistically necessary: all the parts that together comprise a creature able to be and survive within the world of the story. There is a challenge in getting that right, and whether the characters are humans in animal bodies or animals with human intellect, the pieces must fit as beautifully and miraculously as they do in the real world or the whole imaginary universe crumbles for the reader.

The Terminal Velocity of Squirrels

Squirrels, it is said, can survive a fall from any height, but I bet no one has thrown a squirrel out of an airplane at 30,000 feet. Clowns, when unconscious, will not survive a fall from 30,000 feet: they'll just mutate into a mess. Coincidentally, an unconscious squirrel would probably not survive a fall from 30,000 feet either. The reason for this similarity between falling clowns and falling squirrels has to do with their mass and the area of the interface between a falling creature and the air. A conscious squirrel will

spread-eagle and will quickly reach a velocity at which the air resistance against his furry silhouette will match the force of gravity tugging at him. This velocity is called the squirrel's "terminal velocity." An unconscious squirrel will tumble and roll and may even end up in a head first nose dive, reducing the interface between his fuzzy body and the air, thus reducing his drag force, and fatally increasing his terminal velocity. A clown, thanks to his hair, big feet and hands, and baggy pants, can deliver an impressive drag coefficient when it has a mind to. It's also why clowns scare people. And that brings us to today's topic: scary choices.

Earlier today, I read a statement by someone in response to an online post about some Christians who vandalized the Darwin fish off the back of someone's car. The commenter said, "Stuff like that is the reason why I'm no longer a Christian. I'm a pagan and a Satanist."

Others might say that the Christians were just demonstrating evolutionary advantage and an actualized self-worship manifested as idealized egoism, but not me. I'd never say that.

If you threw Darwin out of an airplane at 30,000 feet he would not die, because he is already dead. But if he were alive and you threw him out at 30,000 feet he would probably perish, unless he evolved wings or baggy pants on the way down. The Darwin fish, if you don't know, is a bastardization of the Jesus fish. The Jesus fish is an ancient symbol that Christians used as a secret knock to get into one another's houses during persecutions. If you take the Jesus fish, put legs on it, and stick "DARWIN" inside its body like Jonah, you get a Darwin fish. Darwinian evolutionists use it to let Christians know that they can replace the Christian God with science and the result will still stick to the trunk of a car. Christians, such as myself, find this odd because that's common sense: it's still a sticker. So, we just shrug, shake our Rosary beads, and wonder why sticky-backed lungfish named

Darwin are venerated by atheists while a nice, clever, witty guy like Jesus is anathema.

Charles Darwin could not stick a Darwin fish or a Jesus fish to the back of his car because he didn't own a car. The modern car was patented in Germany in 1886, years after Chuck's death in 1882. I suppose he could have surreptitiously stuck a Darwin fish to the back of Gustave Trouvé's electric car in 1881, but by then Charley had been suffering chronic ill-health for about 40 years from overwork and was near to death, so I doubt he'd travel to France. Besides, there was no evolutionary advantage to sticking any kind of fish on Trouvé's car. But you can't blame him for trying. And besides, it'd be a fun and largely harmless prank.

Charles Darwin was neither a pagan nor a Satanist. For most of his life he was some sort of Christian or other. At the end of his life he was a self-proclaimed agnostic. Maybe he evolved further into an atheist near the end, or maybe he turned back, but we'll never know. It doesn't really matter which to this discussion, however, because he was unequivocally not a pagan or a Satanist. Nor was he a clown – though I did once see a picture of him wearing loose-fitting checkered pants. I don't think they were baggy enough to significantly change his drag coefficient.

Darwin's wife, Emma, was also his first cousin. I'm not sure where to go with that, so I'll just say that there is no evolutionary advantage to overworking yourself into chronic illness. Emma's sister's name was Fanny. The name Fanny makes my five-year-old laugh out loud. Emma and Charles had 10 children in 17 years, between 1839 and 1856, and Emma was 48 when she gave birth to their youngest kid. That's a good run for a human – genetically superior, I'd say. A definite evolutionary advantage. Good choice Chuck made there! Charley was a doting dad, I understand.

The formula for terminal velocity is: $V_t = \sqrt{2mg/pAC}$.

For those of you who don't know what those obvious symbols mean, I have a fish for your car. "Vt" means "velocity terminal". "sq. root" means "squirrel root". "mg" means "milligrams" and "pAC" means "political action committee". Thus, we can read the formula as "velocity terminal equals the squirrel root around 2 milligrams per political action committee." The rest should now be obvious if you are properly evolved and enlightened.

Most of the folks I know who have a beef with God have never met Him. They seem to be particularly pissed off at Jesus, because they effectively say, "Jesus seems like he was a really good man and a wise teacher. I don't want to have anything to do with Jesus."

Some of these people claim to have met God, but decided to give him the cold shoulder even though He never did anything to hurt them, all because some self-proclaimed Christians they met were jerks.

I've met a couple of atheists who are jerks. I've met a pagan who was a jerk at times. I met a Muslim who is a jerk toward non-Muslims. I've only met a couple of Satanists, but didn't spend enough time with them to determine whether or not they are jerks. Every group of more than about a 100 humans seems to have at least one jerk in its midst, so I'd be surprised to learn that Satanists don't have their fair share of jerks. Thus, I think it is safe to assume there are at least a couple of Satanists who are jerks.

I don't think Darwin was a jerk. I don't think he'd have stuck a Darwin fish on his car, if he could have owned one of each, or even on Gustave Trouvé's car. I also don't think that Darwin gave up his Christian faith because some Christians he knew were jerks, and I bet he knew some that were. I know I do. Darwin doesn't strike me as the type who would let others control him that way. And even though Darwin and I might disagree on the origin of squirrels, I'm willing to bet we'd

have respected one another as reasonable men even though we disagreed.

Regardless, I know we'd agree on this: it's amazing that squirrels can fall from 30,000 feet and probably survive. It's all part of what makes them perfectly suited for living lives scampering and leaping about in the trees a hundred feet in the air. Whether they are the result of a long evolutionary process or an instantaneous one doesn't change the marvel of squirrels and that every detail of a squirrel and its behavior is perfect for being squirrely. There is nothing else in the universe better suited to being a squirrel than the squirrels we have in our back yards. No matter whether you believe in God or not, you have to admit there is something pretty fantastic and even miraculous about that. I bet if you go out and spend a couple of hours watching squirrels (or any animal) in your yard, you'll come away at least a little bit awed.

And that, my friends, is what humans alone are perfectly suited for doing. That's what makes you and me so deserving of respect, no matter how different we are or what we believe about God or the origin of squirrels. That's what makes us human and demands and enables to embrace rather than punch one another in the face: love.

The Courtship of Little Red

Today I give you a sonnet:

The Courtship of Little Red

=====

a sonnet by the Big Bad Wolf

"My love come to the dark yet sweeter path

there by to lay your scarlet hood and cloak.
For love's embrace to risk eternal wrath
your hands the ripe and tender blossoms pluck."

"Will I your brutish tooth and paw invite?
No! Only dawdle here until the moon,
to lie in shadowed luster 'neath the night
and mistake your arms for flowered promised June."

Oh, sweetly crimson 'tis the flower bloom
that access grants the primal ardor to,
when innocence's sweet seductive plume
enchants the claw and fang with perfumed hue.

Oft lust's sharp tooth draws forth his bitter tears
with promise sweet of love in tender ears.

Animal Livery – Part 2

Here's the second half of a quick story I wrote to the prompt:
"Start a story with: 'The night max wore his wolf suit ...'"
[Part 1 is here:](http://wolf.ishly.me/2016/06/06/animal-livery-part-1/)
<http://wolf.ishly.me/2016/06/06/animal-livery-part-1/>

Animal Livery – Part 2

90 minutes later they were driving back from the hospital.

"And can you believe that doctor's whistling?" Max hissed and gnashed his teeth.

"I think you are over-reacting," Scout replied. "He was clear across the emergency room and not even looking at you."

"Oh, come on, Scout, nobody whistles like that unless they're

calling Rover.”

“I think Max is a much better name for a dog than Rover.”

“I’m not a dog!”

“Right! I’m sorry, wolf.”

Max rolled his yellow suit-eyes. They rode in silence for a couple of minutes.

“You can’t blame them, really. You shouldn’t have sniffed the nurse like that.”

“She smelled nice,” Max said softly. “And anyway, your ear hat didn’t help any. I was sure they thought we are furies or something.”

“I didn’t know you had anything against furies.”

“I don’t. I just don’t want to be mistaken for one.” Scout didn’t see much of a difference, but let it go.

“Is that why you tried to bite the old man?”

“He was petting me, and I clearly told him to stop. Twice. And he didn’t.”

“Yeah, but then, later, the howling.”

“I was mad. The nurses were snickering, and when the intern held up the bed pan and asked me if I wanted a drink, and the whole room started laughing, well, I just lost it.”

“You’re going to have to go back, you know, if you want that suit off.”

“I know,” Max replied despondently. “Just ... let’s wait until the shift changes and that run of patients is gone. I don’t think I could face those people again.” He scratched his chin with his hand paw. “I’m so embarrassed,” he said. “I’m sorry I

put you through that.”

They were quiet again.

“Hey!” Scout spoke up cheerily. “I have an idea! It’s Friday, so Jason is sure to have a party going at his house. They’re always out-of-control, Jason’s parties, you know, so no one will think anything of the suit. They’ll just think your another wild party animal. We’ll hang out there, maybe have some fun with the suit awhile, and then after a few hours head back to the hospital. What do you say?”

Max looked dubious, but could not argue about the infamy of Jason’s parties and there was some appeal to Scout’s plan, so he agreed. Scout changed direction toward Knight’s Wood subdivision at the next intersection, and while he drove Max hung his head out the window and felt the breeze through the fur in the suit. It was exhilarating.

“I never realized how many smells the city has at night,” he commented.

They arrived at Jason’s house and slipped in by the kitchen door with a few stares, appreciative nods, and flattering comments about the suit. A brunette in a green tank top smiled suggestively back over her shoulder as they passed in the hall. “Nice tail,” she said seductively over the rim of a bluish cocktail. Max began to think the suit wasn’t so bad after all.

“This suit is starting to grow on me,” he whispered to Scout.

“I don’t doubt it,” Scout mused. “You have dog breath, by the way. Have a mint.” Scout plucked an after-dinner mint from a bowl on a hall table and popped it in Max’s suit-mouth. “How’s it taste?”

“Minty,” Max replied around the mint.

Scout looked very thoughtful. “Stick out your tongue.”

“What?”

“Stick out your tongue.” Max did. The mint fell on the floor. Scout tried to grab the suit-tongue. It was wet and slipped out of his fingers as Max recoiled.”

“What do you think you’re doing?” Max hissed.

“Testing a theory,” Scout replied and led them to the back deck. The deck was strung with Christmas lights and overlooked Jason’s spacious back yard, which was crawling with all sorts of people. They stood watching the crowd, trying to locate Jason.

“I have to go to the bathroom,” Max said.

“Know where it is?” Scout asked absently.

“Yes, but” Max pleaded. His ears drooped low and his tail hung limp.

“Ohhhh...” Scout said turning his attention back to Max and realizing his friends predicament. He leaned in close to Max’s wolfish head and whispered in his ear, “There’s no ... uh ... fly in that suit?”

“No,” Max replied. “And I’ve had to go for some time now. Since before we left the hospital. I’m either going to die of blood poisoning or whatever you die of when you hold it too long, or I’m going to soon have a very wet wolf suit.”

Scout stared blankly at Max’s wolfish face. Max’s eyes searched him and his ears shifted to follow sounds around the yard. His nostrils flared with the scents of the party wafting around the deck and his mouth hung open, panting softly in the mid-summer heat.

“I think,” Scout started cautiously, “that you should go into the bathroom and just try to go through the suit.”

“No.” Max’s expression indicated that he’d been thinking the same thought. “No way.” Max looked like a man – er, wolf-man – standing at the edge of a cliff staring at the raging river below with a stampede of rhinoceros bearing down on him from behind. “If I go in there,” he continued, “and it works,” he said, “and the suit is still dry after,” he added, “then I won’t be able to deny what you will tell me when I get back,” he announced.

“I know,” Scout said.

Ten minutes later Max returned and stood quietly beside Scout.

“Well?” Scout asked.

“I couldn’t go,” Max replied.

“Nervous, huh.”

“No.”

“Then what?”

“It’s embarrassing.”

“Tell me anyway.”

“Well, you know how wolf parts are ... well ... attached?”

“Yes.”

“So, I can’t ... aim ... down. Only up.”

Scout’s eyes widened. “Oh, I didn’t think of that.”

“So, I tried straddling the ...” Pause. Furtive glance. “... toilet ...” he whispered, and then continued in a normal voice, “... on all fours. You know ... to get it aimed at the bowl. And...”

A look of horror crossed Scout’s face as the scenario unwound in his imagination.

"...it didn't go as I expected," Max continued, "and I made a bit of a mess," and then he added hurriedly, "but I cleaned it up!"

Scout sighed in relief, but Max continued.

"With a bath towel. Which is now in the trash in the cabinet under the bathroom sink."

Scout sighed again. "Good thing this is one of Jason's parties."

"Yeah, but I still have to go. Badly."

Scout looked at the dark copse that divided the back of Jason's property from the street behind it. He nodded in the direction of the thick growth of trees. "I'm sorry to tell you this, Max," he announced quietly, "but you will have to make use of those trees."

Max looked up sharply and his ears fell back. His tail tucked between his calves. "No," he said.

"You keep saying, 'no,' but you know the answer is 'yes.' You must do this or wet your breeches. No one will notice if you go all the way through and crouch down or cock your leg or whatever you have to do. Anyone over there won't know it's a suit – they'll just think you're a Saint Bernard or something.

Max looked at Scout who looked at him. "I hate you," Max said.

"I know," Scout teased back. Max lumbered forlornly across the back yard. Partiers parted for him as though for a king on parade. He entered the treeline and disappeared from Scout's view. Not five minutes later he was back, a lightness in his step as he made his way through the crowd, high-fiving whoever was around and practically scampering.

The evening rolled on and the party wound up into a marvelous wild rumpus. Max had a couple of drinks and loosened up, and

was quite the hit after leading a conga line and howling so that all the neighborhood dogs joined in. Scout didn't drink, as the designated driver, but he didn't have any trouble loosening up anyway, so that was OK. During the course of the night, Max discovered several other feats the suit enabled him to do, including some incredible leaps and a sense of smell that made him impossible to avoid in hide-and-seek. His suit-enhanced night vision saved a mousy but pretty young lady from going home without her rather powerful eyeglasses, about which Scout conjectured, "you can probably see the rover on Mars with these." The girl was indignant, but was as bare footed as Scout, so they found some common ground and hit it off rather well.

About 1 AM, Scout took Max aside and reminded him about the hospital.

"Yeah, I guess we better," he said sadly, looking down at his forepaws. "You know, I'll actually kind of be sad to see this thing go," he added. Scout smiled.

They headed toward the door when mousy girl approached.

"Are you two going?" she asked, looking hurt.

"'Fraid so," Scout said, "Rover here has an appointment with the vet." And then he added, "I had a lovely time, thanks to you."

"Here," the girl said. She pulled a pen from her purse. "Give me your foot." Scout put his foot up on a chair. The girl wrote her phone number on his instep. Scout smiled. Jason noticed the exchange from part way across the yard and surmised their departure.

"You can't go now!" he shouted across the many heads between them. "The party is just getting rolling!" Everyone in earshot turned toward Max.

“No! You must stay!” they shouted. Some looked angry, even, and someone started chanting, “Max! Max! Max!” Soon the whole yard had joined in and all raised their hands, fingers curled to mimic claws, in the air in rhythm to the chanting, “Max! Max! Max!”

The green tank top girl ran up to Max and kissed him on his furry cheek. “I love you,” she said. “I could just eat you up, you’re so cute in that suit.” This didn’t sit well with the fellow that followed her who was apparently her boyfriend. He clenched his jaws, furiously gnashing his teeth.

“Get your filthy paws off my girlfriend!” he threatened.

“Down, down, there, big boy,” Scout pushed between them. “We’re just leaving. She’s all yours. Wrong species anyway.” And then he looked back at Max. “Let’s get out of here.”

They pushed their way through the house, a good portion of the crowd following behind, some still chanting, “Max! Max! Max!” and others begging him to stay.

Scout shoved Max into his massive car and drove them off, up Day Drive, through Knight’s Wood, and out into the city by Weeks Road.

“Do you really think,” Max began about half way to the hospital, “that assistant manager at Sole Man Shoes is a bad job?”

Scout grinned. “I think the shoe business got its start when a stone age con artist convinced people they needed foot coverings to protect their feet even when they didn’t. Within a generation, peoples’ feet were too tender to go without them anymore, and so they believed they had to wear shoes all the time. The shoe cartel is a conspiracy to perpetuate the lie that humans need to wear shoes all the time just to keep the shoe business alive. If the shoe business were not an extortion racket lying to the people, then your job would be

just fine. But since the shoe business is really an organized crime syndicate, your work makes you complicit in lies, fraud, and theft.”

Max was thoughtful. “Do you think,” he said, “I might make it as a performer, if I kept the suit?”

“Yes. Yes, I do,” Scout replied.

“Turn left there, just after you cross over Ayear Avenue, and take me home. I want to keep the suit.”

“I think that’s a smart decision,” Scout said. “I don’t think you’ll be able to get it off anyway, now that you’re so fond of it and it’s grown on you so. I wonder how the previous owner got it off, or who he was...”

“His name was Maurice Cindnack – that’s how the note was signed, anyway.” Max lurched forward and caught himself on the dash as Scout slammed on the brakes and brought the car to a rudely sudden stop.

“Maurice Cindnack? That was my great-great-grandfather! His grand kids called him Pup-pa. Relatives always said he was a strange old dog and could do some amazing tricks. I guess they were being literal. One day, he just up and disappeared, so they say.”

“What? No way! How did his suit get under my floor?”

Scout looked sheepish. “There’s something I need to confess,” he said. “I convinced you to buy that house because it belonged to my family long ago and I didn’t want to see it torn down, but I didn’t have the money to buy it myself. I guess old Pup-pa Cindnack used to live in it. Isn’t that something?” Scout faked a laugh and grinned. “Hope you aren’t mad.”

Max’s eyes flashed and he bared his fangs. He stuck his head out the open window and howled angrily. Scout put the car in

motion quickly and drove them to Max's house. By the time they arrived, Max had calmed down and he invited Scout in for a beer for the road. Someday, Scout promised himself, he would tell Max the rest, and introduce him to the others, but that would be too much for one night.

Inside the front hall Max sniffed the air, the warm scent of simmering chicken and vegetables filling his keen canine nose.

"Mmmm," he purred. "Dinner! And it's still hot!" He turned to Scout. "Glad I forgot to turn that soup off. Want some?"

"Don't mind if I do, Max old boy, don't mind if I do."

END

Animal Livery – Part 1

Here's part 1 of a quick story I wrote to the prompt: "Start a story with: 'The night max wore his wolf suit ...'"

Animal Livery – Part 1

The night Max wore his wolf suit he struggled to dial Scout Masters' phone number three times in a panic because he couldn't get the paws off and claws are clumsy on small keypads.

"Scout, buddy," Max practically squeaked trying to sound calm, "do you think you could swing by my place? There's something I really, really need your help with."

"Uh, oh," Scout's voice came leerily to Max's head through the wolf ears. "You only call me 'buddy' when it's really serious. Are you still upset with me for convincing you to buy that old

fixer-upper you're living in?"

"No. Yes. Not right now. That's not the reason I called."

"Shoo. Good. So, what's wrong?"

"Well ... I can't explain it on the phone. Can you please just come over?"

Scout sighed, "OK, be there in a bit."

Twenty minutes later there was a rapping at Max's door because Scout knocked on it. Max took a deep breath and quickly swung it wide and stood straight and still.

"Dude!" Scout's eyes practically sparkled. "That is the most awesome fursuit I have ever laid eyes on! Even the wolves would be envious!"

"Just get in here," Max replied despondently and turned down the hall. Scout followed, closing the door behind him, shaking his head admiringly at the uncannily natural undulation of flexing muscle beneath the fur and bounce of the tail.

"That suit looks to real!" he commented. Max stopped in the center of his living room and turned around to face his friend. Scout was wearing one of his animal ear hats as usual and standing there, the two of them alone, facing one another, wolf to fox as it were, Max felt suddenly incredibly foolish.

"Where did you get it?" Scout asked, the admiration still thick in his voice.

"Under my floor," Max replied flatly.

Scout was clearly intrigued. "Really?" he whispered.

"Yes, I was working on that room off the kitchen I want to turn into a small study and I took up a floor board that was warped. Underneath was this box, like a trunk, and in it this wolf costume. But the suit isn't the reason I asked you to

come over... I mean it is, but it isn't. Oh, dang..." He cocked his wolfish head toward Scout. "I can't take it off."

"I don't blame you! If I had a suit like that, I'd never take it off!"

"No! I mean I can't take it off, as in, I can't remove it. It's like it's stuck to my skin or something."

"Nnoh! That is so cool!"

"Scout!" Max's shout was almost a growl. "This isn't cool! I can't go around like this! I'll lose my job, and I ... I don't know."

Scout looked sympathetic. "It'll be OK," he said. "Losing your job will be good for you. Selling shoes is a terribly crooked business to be in – it's based on a self-perpetuating lie."

"I don't want to lose my job! I like selling shoes, and I like shoes, even if you don't and never wear them. I need you to help me get out of this suit."

Scout looked a little disappointed. "Oh, all right, if you insist. You said you found it in a trunk under your floor. Was there anything else in the trunk?"

"Well, there was this note, see, and it had my name on it and said I should wear the suit well."

"Ah, the power of the pen! So, you read a mysterious note that said put this suit on and so you, in your wisdom, determined it would be a good idea to just put the suit on because it told you to?"

"Well, what would you do?"

"I'd put it on," Scout said, intensely distracted by Max's snout.

"What?" Max asked.

"The animatronics in that suit... Say something else."

"What should I say?"

"Dude. The lips sync perfectly with the words. That is amazing!"

"I don't care about the lips! Just get this thing off me!"

"OK, OK. There was a note. Did it say anything else?"

"No."

"Was there anything else in the trunk, or maybe under the trunk."

"There was just this pair of pants." Max hooked an old pair of brown knee breeches lumped over the back of his couch with a claw. "But they're old and ripped in the back. I don't think they're important."

Scout looked sheepish. "Actually, I think they are."

"Why? What do you mean?"

"The suit is, well," Scout crossed his arm over his chest and rested his other elbow on it and his chin on his hand. He pointed discretely at Max's mid-section. "detailed."

Max looked down sharply at his groin and then back up at Scout. The ears on his wolf suit seemed to droop with embarrassment, or maybe it was just the light. Scout couldn't tell. "What's that there for?" Max barked.

"Well it's ... never mind. Obviously, since the suit is anatomically correct ... for a wolf," Scout noted, "the crafter thoughtfully provided some pants. I bet that rip in the back of them is intentional – for your tail."

"It's not my tail!" Max retorted indignantly. "I don't have a tail!"

"You do now."

"No. I do not. Now get me out of this thing."

"OK, where's the zipper?"

"No zipper, buttons, but I can't find them now."

"What do you mean?"

"They're here, along the front, but I can't seem to find the seam or the buttons under this fur."

Scout approached him. "Let me see," he said, and started feeling around Max's abdomen under the fur. Max jerked back.

"Hey! Careful! That tickles!"

"Sorry," Scout said, poking more cautiously in the fur on Max's chest this time. "Nope," he said after a bit. "Can't find 'em. Are you sure the seam is on the front? Maybe you're forgetting you put it on backwards and turned around inside it after you had it fastened up or something."

"What are you talking about?" Max bared his suit-fangs in a snarl. "Just get me out of this thing."

"Even the eyes move where you're looking. How do you see anyway?"

"The eyes, I guess, I don't know, I just know I can see just fine. Colors are a little distorted, though."

"Huh, maybe the eyes have retina trackers in them, and little peepholes, like in a door. Or maybe cameras with little displays?"

"Scout!" Max barked. "Focus!"

"Oh, yeah. OK," Scout stepped back and was thoughtful for a moment. "As much as it pains me, I think we'll have to cut you

out.”

“OK,” Max said, calming down. “Yes, that’s good. There’s some scissors in the kitchen. You better get them. You know where?”

“Yep. Be right back.” Scout returned shortly with the scissors. “OK,” he said, “I just need an edge, like where the head attaches, but I don’t see where that is.” And then he added, “Soup simmering on the stove in there smells terrific, by the way.”

“Oh, dinner. I forgot about that. I’ll get it in a bit. Anyway, the head isn’t attached. It’s a separate piece.”

“No, it isn’t.” Scout felt around Max’s suit-scruff. “One continuous piece.”

“That’s strange – I promise you, Scout, I never fastened the head on in any way.”

“Well, there’s a lot strange about this suit. I’ll just poke a hole and cut it that –“

“Oww! Dang! Careful, you jammed the scissors right through it!”

Scout was bewildered. “Ummm. Actually, Max, I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did!” Max shot back, rubbing his side where Scout had poked him.”

“No, I didn’t. You felt it through the suit. It’s such a tight fit, I can’t pull it away from your skin.”

“Oh, swell. Now what.” Max went around and flopped down on the couch.

“I guess we’ll have to take you to the hospital.”

Max looked up sharply. The ears on the suit lay back sharply. “No way! I am not going out in public like this! I’ll be a

laughing stock!"

"Actually you're pretty impressive. But I can't do anything for you in any case. We need doctors with equipment to look at this thing."

Max looked chagrined. He pondered his foot paws for awhile and then looked back up at Scout. "OK," he said. "You better drive."

"That's a good doggy," Scout smiled. "Now go put your pants on." Max growled and stood up.

"Watch it," he warned and hurried out of the room with the pants from the trunk. He came back a couple of minutes later wearing the vintage breeches over the wolf suit, the tail protruding from the slit in the rear.

"You know," Scout said as they walked toward Max's front door. "Before you get that thing off, maybe we should detour around town and make a little mischief of one kind or another."

"No."

Outside at the curb, Scout opened the passenger door of his Cadillac for Max.

"You still driving this old Caddy? This thing is a boat. What kind of mileage do you get?"

"Same kind as everyone else." He closed the door and went around to the driver's side.

"You really need to do something about the smell in this car," Max commented as Scout started the engine.

"What? It's old – so it smells a little musty."

"'A little musty?' Scout, it smells like a gym bag full of sweaty socks forgotten in the trunk for three weeks in August. And how can you stand that horrible whine? What is that?"

“I don’t hear any whine,” Scout mumbled. He sounded perplexed. “And, really, it’s just a little musty in here. It isn’t that bad. Open the window if you want.” Max struggled with the window crank and got some fresh air moving through the car.

[Part 2](http://wolf.ishly.me/2016/06/07/animal-livery-part-2/) is here:

The Last Tanuki

I’m writing a novel. It’s a furry novel. I only have one chapter left to write and the first draft will be done. If you have an account on FurAffinity: <https://www.furaffinity.net/gallery/graowf/folder/106410/The-Last-Tanuki/>