Chapter 20 Show-bis

The Interview

Why here and not somewhere else? Why? Eh, why?

Gianni Rodari — The Grammar of Fantasy[1]
All it takes is one word put away in the wrong place for a story to start growing.

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1 Gianni Rodari, The Grammar of Fantasy (Rue du Monde, in French).

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Dearest gentle readers[2]*, in view of the length of chapter 20, the author has decided unilaterally, against all editorial logic and all reader expectations, to move the interview to chapter 20 Show-bis. She acknowledges her incompetence and, to apologise for any inconvenience caused, claims to have acted in everyone's interest, for your greater visual comfort. She is reported to have said, and I quote:*

— After all, it's my book, I'll do as I please, I'm free!

The Viking — *Especially if nobody reads it!*

The author — *Quite. If you've got a bone to pick, pick up the pen!*

2 As Lady Whistledown would say in Bridgerton.

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Sunday Is Showtime!

The journalist — It's a bit like the spa versus the Swiss Army knife.

The Viking — For me, it's just a life-size role-playing game. I was trained to the hilt with the berserkers. I'm used to surviving in extreme conditions.

The author — Yes, you love a challenge, you run on bravado. But I'd rather have an ice cube in my rosé than turn into an ice cube in your cocktail. A bit of comfort doesn't mean *being weak*. What's weak is your vision. Take that! (Thanks, Mum.)

The journalist — The two of you are a bit like yin and yang.

The Viking — Oh, I was just testing her limits, to see if she'd stay with me despite the discomfort.

The author — You were putting me through your berserker rites, just to reassure yourself about your manhood? I don't believe it! Too naive, I always fell for your games! Normally, I'd have done anything to prove I loved you, but not this time, sorry. Too cold for me.

The Viking — I simply wanted to share my grand vision of nature with you!

The author — Your nature is an ice field at -30 °C! My name's not *Guillaumet*[3]. But I'd have loved to travel with you, while avoiding extreme temperatures. I prefer body temperature: 37 °C in the shade suits me fine. Just a

3 Guillaumet in Wind, Sand and Stars, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

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simple little trip for two, nice and easy, no frills, no fuss. Shared pleasure, mutual respect on the menu. Delicious!

The journalist laughs — He's a bit short on empathy, isn't he?

The author — Let's just say he's the type to decide without asking me, and to mistake his wishes for mine. Just my cup of tea!

The Viking — You're weak, you don't love me!

The author — Well, we're not out of the sandpit yet! as *Guinevere*[4] would say. But I'm no princess: I'm non-violent towards myself, and I own it for both of us. I could easily follow you on your frozen project, with heated lodgings, a hot shower and a duvet at every stop, ideally close to other humans, in case of retreat. That's non-negotiable.

The Viking — I said no!

The author — So I said: OK, no problem, off you go, I'll be waiting when you get back. In fact, I turned it into a game for the reader: if someone wants to drag you off to freeze in their script, flip it round, answer back with humour and bring them into your world.

The Viking — -30 °C is ideal for keeping meat fresh.

The journalist — Speaking of which, as a self-respecting Frenchman, I'd like to ask you: in the North v South good-grub match, did you enjoy Viking cooking?

4 Alexandre Astier, Kaamelott (YouTube).

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The author — In the interests of full transparency, I wish to reveal that in the South, we support good grub too, but we don't support the same team. Even if we love swapping recipes.

The Viking — It's true that Viking cooking may offend frog-eaters, vegetarians, sea-monster defenders and delicate stomachs. For your health, avoid reading anything too fatty, too fermented or too salty: skip straight to pudding.

The author — On the shore, you only have to bend down to pick up sea urchins. And yet giants don't eat them. The ground must be too low!

The Viking — Course not, we use them as missiles against sea monsters: hit the eye and you win! The thing with the giant cubo-jellyfish[5] is that it's got 24 eyes! It's extremely venomous. We call it the box jellyfish. If it touches you, you go home in a box. The only way to get it is to throw sea urchins in its eyes! You need an army of longships to surround it. We slide a net under its giant tentacles and, on the signal, we pull it tight. Once it's out of the water, we pelt it with our cargoes of sea urchins!

Since it's not a fan of acupuncture sessions, it gets a bit narked and swallows us whole, raw. Luckily, it hates the smell of Viking: it makes it throw up. So we come to the rescue of our mates. That's how it is with sea monsters: it's fight or die! We've been hunting it for generations, so it fights back, fair game. But it's a home-grown monster, one that made us brave. We honour it on our coat of arms. Nothing like those nuclear octopuses of the

5 Cubo-jellyfish: aka the box jellyfish. Also known as the one you can't look in the eye. Periculum mortis

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Scorched Lands. We call them the NHNMs: No Heart, No Mercy. With them, you either die or come back singed-toasted!

The journalist — I don't know which is worse! Anyway, back to business… fishy business!

The author — Exactly: with all the lovely fresh fish they've got, they ferment it, go figure! *Yuck!*

The Viking — Yes, *haring* really is terrible, I admit! An abomination. My father eats it holding it by the tail and gulping it down head first, like a seal! It keeps you going during the siege of the box jellyfish: no time to cook, we take it in turns.

The author — All that Viking know-how, such refined cuisine, so full of delicacy! Now I see how he can hold a 6-month siege without flagging!

The journalist — Sounds delicious! By the way, you invite the reader to invent their favourite Viking recipe, I believe?

The author — Yes! *Blinking squid*, *electric jellyfish*… We're in for a feast![6]

The journalist — You say you're never too old to create?

The author — Indeed, we're all big kids when we make up a story. We're just playing pretend: *let's say we were*, *what if we were*, *what if we did*, and the imagination gets going. It reminds me of Robert-Houdin[7], that great

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6 Fancy creating something? Drop your creation in the Gallery of Imperfect Gems: lehamacetlescolibris.com/deposer-en.html

7 Robert-Houdin, The Secrets of Conjuring and Magic (Gallica, BnF, in French).

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magician who turned the laws of physics into magic tricks for curious children.

The Viking — We make aquavit disappear too. Nobody's ever found it again!

The journalist — What do you enjoy when you create?

The author — First, I love the friction between two worlds that should never have met[8], like the Viking and me! You find it everywhere: in *Monty Python*[9], *Moonlighting*[10], *A Knight's Tale*[11] or *Kaamelott*[12]. I adore the absurd humour this anachronism creates; it's the surprise that makes me laugh!

The journalist — Is that why you created sung chapters?

The author — Yes, but what I like best is sharing a collective experience. Like when I watch Jacob Collier[13] getting the crowd to sing, that's what moves me most. That's why I suggest the reader creates their own music. There too, they can mix genres, a bit like when Queen and Bowie turn up in the Middle Ages[14]. We could make a whole album together, it'd be fabulous!

The Viking — Oh, this'll be good!

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8 Gianni Rodari, The Grammar of Fantasy (the fantastic binomial).

9 Monty Python, Always Look on the Bright Side of Life (YouTube).

10 Glenn Gordon Caron, Moonlighting, “The Dream Sequence Always Rings Twice”, 1985 (YouTube).

11 Brian Helgeland, A Knight's Tale, 2001 (YouTube).

12 Alexandre Astier, Kaamelott (YouTube).

13 Jacob Collier & Chris Martin, Fix You (YouTube).

14 Brian Helgeland, A Knight's Tale, trailer (YouTube).

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The journalist — I can't wait to see that! Let's move on to your writing. How do you go about it?

The author — Well, first I let the emotions out and I laugh about them. I write whatever comes, I let myself go, I improvise. Then I analyse...

The Viking — Oh, so you're going to give us the whole back story now? It was just a polite question! But fine, carry on... or they'll accuse me of cutting you off!

The author — But analysing bores me stiff. Anyway, all this to say that actually... I had absolutely no idea how to write this novel.

The Viking — Yes, we'd noticed!

The author — And that's exactly what made it exciting! So I followed my gut.

The Viking — But that's what you've always done!

The author — Oh, really? Could be! I must have forgotten it in *the great reset*.

The journalist — So your creative process evolved as you wrote your book?

The author — Er... if you say so... I went back to my raw feelings, it was simpler, no need to explain why. Who gives a monkey's!

The Viking — That's the big difference with me. I plan everything in advance.

The author — Good for you, but I prefer to go with the flow, follow my inspiration. That's how I express myself best. Give me an idea, let me improvise, go off in all

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directions, one idea leads to another, that's my thing! I branch out, like synaptic connections.

The Viking — You don't say! That explains everything!

The journalist — So how do you do your character analysis?

The author — Oh dear, I'm afraid of boring everyone. That bit's perfect if you want to nod off fast. Let's say that, for me, character analysis is like a little chick... full of crap! The big fear hiding underneath is often buried under layers of poo that need cleaning off, and it doesn't smell great!

The journalist — You like trying to understand?

The author — Yes, but to laugh about it, not to cry about it!

The Viking — But without the comedians' talent!

The author — Yeah, it's a bit like doing a balancing act, with a Viking swinging the rope every which way. So sometimes I fall flat on my face. And it's very embarrassing, especially for me. A bit like the Gibis on their totally flat planet[15]. Luckily, I've still got my little voice in my head. I hear La Linea[16], who sees how absurd it all is and pulls the alarm cord:

La Linea — *Look at me! If I fall, I get back up! Analysis is fine if you like being told how to breathe; otherwise, run! Make us laugh, that's what matters!*

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15 The Shadoks, the episode where the Gibis fall off their totally flat planet.

16 Osvaldo Cavandoli, La Linea, 1971 (YouTube).

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The author — I answered: *“OK! Adios, my binders!” Ding!* Light-bulb moment! I'll do three-voice interviews! It's much funnier, especially when you lie to yourself. Which only ever happens to other people, of course.

La Linea — *... And so modest with it!*

The author — So I got back on my axis!

The Viking — Oh, so you've got an axis now, have you?

The author — Yes, I've got an axis! ... a paradoxical one... I go straight ahead... in zigzags. Basically, I move forward lying down. I move while standing still. I beat about the bush, it keeps me steady.

The Viking — You're getting clearer and clearer, it's scary!

The author — And I loved the idea of blurring the lines, by inviting the fictional character to save his bacon in front of the author. In fact, I'll take this chance to thank you for being kind enough to accept, despite our differences.

The Viking — Yes, it's nicer than talking for 3 seconds on the phone and hanging up on each other, when we actually like each other after all!

The author — It's true there were sparks between us, a touch of enchantment! Mind you, you're so charming... Unforgettable!

The Viking — I'm glad to know we were simply jealous of each other. But I admit your idea of inviting a demigod on stage was pure genius. With me as the hero, your book can't fail!

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The author — Yes, well, that's what you say... Back home, we say *maktub*.

The Viking — Mac Tub? Who's he when he's at home? Don't worry, I know what I'm talking about. Vikings are traders, it's in our blood!

The author — Maybe it works for you, but in my experience, following your advice mostly got me fleeced!

The journalist — Back to your novel. What do you do once you've written your scenes?

The author — Oh, I try to find links I hadn't made before, to turn it into a coherent story. But after the fact. Yes, I know, that's not how it's done.

The Viking — Coherent? But you go off in all directions!

The author — Fair point, and then I add the meta level...

The Viking — Beta? What's that? Even dafter than the alpha version?

The author — To put it more simply, I encourage the reader to create too.

The Viking — I don't believe it! You're making your readers do your work for you! Now I've seen everything! And why not ask them to translate your book into Viking, while you're at it?

The author — Great idea! I'll make it a game: translate a sentence into Viking!

The Viking — You're as dotty as ever! I see it's not getting any better with age!

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The journalist — Do you follow Vogler's structure[17], like Alexandre Astier[18]?

The author — I'll be honest, I tried to read *The Writer's Journey* and fell asleep. Luckily, I think he said something reassuring: *"Just be charming!"* Or not? Maybe I made that up? But in the end, I followed the heroine's journey in spite of myself...

The journalist — Do you ever get interrupted when you write?

The author — Often. As I'm not linear, sometimes I get flashes, I think: hey, what if I tried to find some British publishers, because I adore their humour! So I jot down my ideas as they come to me, so as not to lose them.

The Viking — So as not to lose them? Well, you've lost me, anyway! Why keep it simple when you can make it complicated? Can't you get straight to the point? One order, one action!

The author — But the idea is to use my novel as a laboratory for creating.

The Viking — A laboratory? That explains the explosions! *BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!* Ever tried taking action to make your ideas happen? It's a lot quicker than writing!

The journalist — And you, have you made your dreams come true?

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17 Christopher Vogler, The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers (livres-cinema.info, in French).

18 Alexandre Astier: why Vogler? Christopher Vogler masterclass (Acting Studio France, YouTube, in French).

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The Viking smiles, his eyes twinkling — Lots of them. I've always got several projects on the go.

The author — Don't say a word. Let the readers guess.[19]

19 Reader challenge: come up with the Viking's crazy projects.

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