

# TO FANTASIZE

Once upon a time there was a young man that was trapped in a land of fantasy. His name was Alfred, and this fantasy land did not exist somewhere in his dreams like it does for most of the rest of you. No, this fantasy was very real for him, and he didn't much enjoy it because it consisted of nearly every fantastical cliché ever written on paper. Like I said, Alfred was trapped, and if any of you have ever felt trapped somewhere, you know it's a very unpleasant, hopeless feeling that tends to kill any glint of fun you might be able to have. Sure, it was fun at first, but it wasn't long before Alfred realized how shallow and monotonous everything was.

He had been traversing the world for what seemed like ages, and it was so long ago that he came to the world that he could no longer even remember how he got there. He knew that he could make it to wherever he was going. In any fantastical world that the protagonist found his or herself trapped in, there was always an exit back to their home-world. That's what Alfred hoped to find someday. He knew he could make it because he also knew that he was invincible. He couldn't be killed. He couldn't die if he wanted to. In fact, he attempted to commit suicide more times than once, and every time he was about to receive a death blow or burn in some boiling lake of magma, a wizard would cast a magical spell or a huge, friendly bird would swoop down from the heavens and rescue him. Out of all the clichés, *deus ex machina* was the one he had grown to hate the most.

There were plenty of others he disliked almost nearly as much. Alfred would have given anything if, for just once perhaps, the candy people would stop singing for more than two moments any time he had the misfortune of running into them. The candy people were feisty little devils, small animated creatures with a passion for singing about candy. Most of us can agree that candy is delicious, but the lengths the candy people would go to pay homage to it! They sang and sang, and their squealing, high-pitched voices would claw at Alfred's soul. They were always present in the snow-like regions. What looked like snow on the ground was actually layers upon layers of sugar, and what may have looked like odd, striped trees were actually candy canes. It wouldn't have been much of a surprise to Alfred to learn that the candy people themselves were made of candy. After one of them hit him square in the face with a sugar snowball, an attempt was made to prove his theory by cracking one of them open against a hard candy cane tree. The experiment did not yield any results.

Alfred also wanted very much to sleep in peace. That could never happen though, not with the beautiful angels that would bring him up, set him on the softest cloud in the night sky, and endlessly pluck at their harps until he fell asleep. Their harps were oh so loud, and the cloud didn't provide much in the way of something to stuff deep into his ears. Alfred would plead with them, "No! Let me be! I want to sleep on the ground tonight!" But they would never listen. They would never speak. They would just play, and play, and when they

were done, they would begin all over again. When Alfred was finally fed up with their complacent attitude, he jumped on one of them and attempted to rip off her wings. It snapped off with a quick thrust, but as soon as he hit the ground, two more angels came down to bring him back up to his bed of clouds.

Even worse, nearly every night before the angels insisted he go to bed, Alfred seemed to run into a very dark, evil area. It was always before dusk, and it always began the same. Evil critters, goblins, orcs, monsters of all sorts, would come out of the ground or some cave or some crooked, dead trees and begin boasting about how strong they are and how they're going to take over the world. Every time, without a moment's notice, a large army of knights would rush in and begin slaughtering everything that moved. After their victory, the knights would build a bonfire and bring out ale. They would dance around the fire, arms around each others' shoulders, laughing and singing obscure songs that Alfred could never quite understand. The stench of the nights was almost nearly as bad as that of the goblins'. At least the goblins intended to kill Alfred nearly every time they saw him. If he was lucky, they would put him in some unmentionable torture device and ask him ridiculous, unimportant questions. It would do him best not to answer the questions, because every time he attempted to mislead him, he would get one step closer to getting killed. The goblin would crank the tension lever, but just as the goblin did that, an army of knights would burst in the door, slaughtering everything except for Alfred, insisting that they were there to rescue him.

Every once in a while, the army of knights would consist of more than just

humans. Sometimes there would be elves and dwarves in the mix. The dwarves and elves were even more annoying than the humans. The elves were always silent and stoic, and when they did say anything they had to speak in a made-up language that sounded not quite like French. The dwarves were not any more amusing. They would sit themselves down on broken-down trees and other debris that's just a bit too large for them so they can swing their legs out and in while they laugh and guzzle their ale. They were always drunk, even when they weren't drinking, and not a one of them was smart enough to carry even a mildly mature conversation. Just before the night was over, it never failed—there was always a scuffle over who belonged to the better of the three species or who wielded the better weapon. The fights never led to a reasonable conclusion.

At one point, Alfred reached a land of floating isles. These isles were floating in the air rather than in the water, and they were connected to the ground by large chains; this is, of course, because normal islands would just be absurdly ridiculous for a fantasy land. Perhaps this exit he was looking for was on top of one of these isles? he thought. He made a strenuous effort to climb from floating island to floating island, but when he reached the pinnacle of the group of them, he was extremely disappointed to find a magic lamp.

Alfred stared at the lamp for a long while, not wanting to do anything with it. He knew that it needed to be rubbed, but whatever came out of it, it wasn't going to be anything useful. He reluctantly rubbed the lamp, and just as surprising as it is to find out that when you're tired you should probably sleep, a genie appeared and offered to grant Alfred three wishes. In a

poor attempt to demonstrate that Alfred doesn't really know what he wants, because really Alfred knows *exactly* what he wants, the genie made Alfred's wishes come true, but only to a certain extent. Each wish, which involved Alfred wanting to go home, contained one discrepancy which completely ruined the wish. First, the genie sent him home but to the wrong time period. Second, the genie sent him home to the right time period but put him in the body of a brutal dictator about to be overthrown. Third, Alfred wished that the genie would go to hell and put everything back to the way it was, and in a boring puff of smoke, everything disappeared and Alfred was once again resting on a cloud while angels plucked their harps extremely close to his ears.

Never far from the angels, there were always other religious icons sprinkled throughout any land that Alfred traveled. Most apparent of these were allegories of Jesus. At nearly every turn, there was a good soul, a leader, insisting that people do good things and be nice to each other, and just when everyone was really starting to like the character, some evil bastards would snatch him up and kill him. You might think that Alfred would be pleased with the death of an overused, cookie-cutter character, but Alfred knew better. The character was always resurrected, and he would usually be the one that lead the knights into the caves to rescue Alfred from the goblins.

Another character Alfred grew sick of rather quickly was his innocent little brother, a dependent character that followed and attempted to learn everything Alfred knew. Oh the questions his little brother would ask!

"Why do the goblins hate us?"

"They're evil," Alfred would reply.

"Why?"

"Because they're ugly... I don't know, kid."

"When are we going to get to the castle?" his little brother would ask.

"What castle? What the hell are you talking about?"

"*The* castle! The queen's castle! I want to meet the queen!"

"You're out of your mind, kid. Quit following me."

The biggest problem with the innocent, dependant character was that Alfred had absolutely no affection for him because Alfred didn't actually have a little brother. This boy, Timmy, Tommy, Johnny, whatever his name was, was apparently some farce that, as usual, Alfred wouldn't buy into.

Eddy (or whatever his name was) asked the most interesting question when the two of them approached the top of a large cliff that seemed to drop off into nothingness. "Wow! This cliff is huge!" the boy said with glee. "How far down does it go?"

With that, Alfred kicked the boy as hard as he could and looked over the edge as the boy plummeted down the cliff face, banging his head on every rock possible. The boy screamed and screamed and eventually there was a point when the boy's cries faded away. Alfred enjoyed that moment. Of course, the boy didn't die, since innocent, dependant characters never die, but they do occasionally get separated from their protectors/mentors to face the world alone. Eventually the boy might have met with Alfred again. Alfred would have just preferred the boy to be dead.

The boy wasn't the only one to vie for Alfred's affection during Alfred's time.

When he first came to this world, he met a beautiful young lady. She was a princess, and she apparently loved Alfred, but since Alfred was not a prince, she could not marry him. In a poor attempt to convey that money, wealth, and power is not everything, she became a commoner so that they could share their love together. Unfortunately, she was incredibly shallow and totally underdeveloped. She had no credible wants or desires other than to be with Alfred, and that bothered Alfred a great deal. She was soulless. When Alfred told her that they couldn't be together if she were to remain so shallow, she committed suicide in front of him, proving Alfred's suspicion that she was a terribly underdeveloped character that the writer of the story no longer cared to write about.

Since this story is a comedy, a satire of sorts, you shouldn't be in the least bit surprised that this story, and this world for that matter, was written by me, Mr. Tubbs, a giant rodent who recently got the chance to meet with Alfred personally.

Just as Alfred's day was approaching twilight, he came upon my small hut with a window dimly lit and the chimney still smoking. It couldn't have been any other season but winter, because my hut was clearly more appealing during that time and it offered Alfred a comfortable shelter from the harsh elements. As he approached the door, I opened it and beckoned him to come in. Normally the protagonist would insist that a talking rodent was well beyond the realm of possibility, but Alfred didn't bother to question that. He was much more concerned with my name.

"Mr. Tubbs?" he asked. "You've got to be kidding me."

"I'm afraid not," I replied.

"You don't have a first name?"

"Nope."

"Then why do you expect me to address you as 'mister'?"

He had me there. I didn't rightfully know why I am known only by Mr. Tubbs and not just Tubbs. That wasn't really much of my concern, though. I changed the subject by offering him some tea and crumpets, which I always had ready no matter what hour it was. At that, he couldn't take my fantasy world any longer, and he threw the table across my hut, spilling tea all over my nicely stuccoed walls. How the walls of my hut ever came to be stuccoed is beyond me, considering I would probably need opposable thumbs to participate in the process.

I was left with no choice but to send him back to where he came from.

Alfred, who appeared on the sidewalk in a busy city during rush hour, breathed out an immense sigh of relief. He then immediately breathed in the his surroundings. Cars were honking, people were shoving, smog was rushing into his lungs and it never smelled so good. His world, his beautiful world, filled with its beautiful, random monotony was all he needed. At night he would dream of my world, but during the day, he would thank God for every moment he spent in his own. To fantasize is one thing, but hopefully we all realize that our fantasies would never make good realities.

Meanwhile, as I picked up the mess he left of my hut, a hundred or so knights stormed across the wintry land in search of goblins, stamping my hut to bits and leaving me cursing them in their wake. It was a little poetic justice for what I had put Alfred through.

How original.

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