

LOCKDOWN VOL 3: WRITERS ROOM

Version 2

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FADE IN

JENNIFER (mid 40s) is alone on the Zoom call. She is well organised, authoritative, and be a bit of a Mum figure. She's sat in her individual video box thinking while she waits for the others to join the call. She has a notebook and pen to hand and is writing.

ROBERT (mid 40s) now pops up on the video screen. He can be a bit over energised and speaks quite quickly.

ROBERT

Hi Jen. Sorry I'm late. Had to feed the kids. Muriel's on lates. Hold on, I'll just get my notebook.

Rob pops out of view.

PHIL (mid 40s) pops up on the video screen. Phil is quite thoughtful, a little slow speaking, people cut in when he speaks as they can't wait for him to get to the end of his sentence. He too has his notebook and a pen.

Phil waves to the camera.

PHIL

Hi Jen.

JEN

Hello Phil. How've you been this week?

PHIL

(slow and steady)

Not so bad. Trying to stop the cat walking across the keyboard.

Rob returns with his notebook and pen.

ROBERT

(cutting in)

All set. Hi Phil

PHIL

Hi Robert.

Phil carefully opens his notebook

Jen is raring to go. She is the group leader. She can be animated and slightly overenthusiastic as she talks.

JEN
 (taking control)
 So shall we make a start?

The two men nod in their own unique ways.

As Jen speaks Rob opens his notebook. Both men fiddle with their pens in anticipation of sharing with the room.

JEN (CONT'D)
 (enthusiastic)
 So this week the task was folk stories. We want to drill in to those round-the-campfire tales, those narratives handed down through the generations, mother to daughter, father to son, often medieval in origin, local, localised, intriguing characters that are allegory to a wider understanding of human nature. Phil would you like to start?

Phil is a little nervous. He's a nervous man by nature but he's also not entirely sure he's hit the mark.

PHIL
 (slow and steady)
 Em, yes, well I came across a lovely little tale about, well about a vole...

JEN
 (surprised)
 A vole?

PHIL
 Yes a vole. See he wants to get married but wants the best, no I mean, the *greatest* wife he can find...

Rob jumps in.

ROBERT
 (taking over)
 It's a little possessive. A bit patriarchal perhaps? Might it play better if it came from a place of mutual love?

JEN
 (cuts in)
 A love-conquers-all story?

PHIL

Well perhaps but you see the first person, well I say person, he...

JEN

Is this a cross species chronicle?

ROBERT

(shudders)

Oh.

PHIL

(acting out)

No, nothing like that. The vole, he calls up to the Sun, you see, and thinks to himself, well the Sun is powerful, giver of light and warmth, I'll marry the Sun...

JEN

You've lost me. Sorry, he wants to...

ROBERT

...to marry the Sun?

PHIL

Yes but then you see the clouds come by and block out the sun. So the little vole...

Phil is interrupted by a child.

PHIL (CONT'D)

I'll be with you in moment George... So the little vole thinks well hold on, the clouds are more powerful than the sun because they can block it out, so I should marry the clouds.

JEN

Oh I see the metaphor now.

ROBERT

(quips)

A meteorological metaphor!

JEN

(brownie points)

Very good Robert.

PHIL

But then you see, the clouds get blown away by the wind, and so the little vole thinks...

Robert jumps in, again.

ROBERT

...The wind is more powerful than the clouds. Gotcha.

JEN

(very positive)

Can I just interject here Phil. I'm loving the spine of this wonderful piece of writing but won't it be better suited to our writers room on animal tales?

Jen is already checking her diary

JEN (CONT'D)

That's in the diary for the 28th.

PHIL

Well yes, of course but the story does have wider symbolism and...

JEN

I think we should hold fire on the voles nuptials for the moment Phil. I'd like to throw the floor open to Robert if that's ok.

ROBERT

Thanks Jen. Now you know I like to dabble with darker narratives. I rummaged around in the shadows and unearthed a devious fable about 3 farmers...and the devil.

Phil puts up his hand.

JEN

Yes Phil?

PHIL

Didn't we cover biblical driven narratives a couple of months ago?

Jen looks up the date in her diary

JEN

(reading from her diary)
Yes, yes. Biblical narratives and
how they relate to the 20th
century. Feb 10th.

ROBERT

I would say this is not the
biblical Devil per se, as in
Lucifer, fallen Angel etc, it's the
devil as instigator for man's
greed.

PHIL

So *not* good versus evil? Or *is it*
good versus evil?

ROBERT

Well yes, both, but flipped a full
360 degrees.

JEN

Intriguing. Go on.

ROBERT

So 3 farmers meet the devil and
strike a deal. For 10 years they
can have anything they want. But in
10 years time...

JEN

(confused)
Sorry is that 10 years from when
they meet the devil?

ROBERT

(building theatrically)
Spot on. So 10 years after he meets
the farmers, the Devil says...

Robert is interrupted by a phone call

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Apologies. I'll juts get rid of
this. So then the Devil says he
will return, but here's the flip
side...the devil says they can test
him to summon anything they like,
and if he *can* summon it, you know,
whatever they ask him to, he can
have their soul.

The room falls quiet. Jen and Phil are a bit confused.

JEN
 (struggling)
 So...so...the Metaphor of greed in
 this fable is the devil?

PHIL
 No jen if I may, I believe greed is
 the farmers...are the
 farmers...apologies Jen.

Jen winces. Phil is embarrassed by his syntactical foopah.
 His apology is directed to Jen.

ROBERT
 Dead right Phil. Greed is the
 farmers...are the farmers...sorry
 Jen.

Jen winces again.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
 So the first farmer has a plan to
 thwart the devil...

PHIL
 ...And the Farmer, *not* the devil is
 the modern encapsulation of greed?

ROBERT
 (no longer sure himself)
 Correct. So the first farmer spends
 10 years breaking up rocks of a
 nearby mountain.

JEN
 (very confused)
 He can have anything he wants and
 he's breaking up a mountain?

ROBERT
 Yes, you see the farmer has a
 devious plan. He smashes the rocks
 and spreads the dust and pebbles
 far and wide in the sure belief
 that the Devil, when he sees him in
 10 years time, won't be able to
 summon all the tiny bits of rock
 back together to reform the
 mountain. See?

Robert gives a knowing nod.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
(slowly explaining)
So the Devil will fail, and not
take the farmers soul. So the
farmer won't go to Hell.

Jen and Phil are confused again.

JEN
I'm loving the symbolism here but I
think we might have veered away
from your introductory gambit.

PHIL
I agree, has the central tenet of
the story strayed away from
explorations of greed and power to
a more investigative narrative of
the price of one's soul?

Robert sees where they are coming from.

ROBERT
(bit lost himself)
Yes, yes, I see what you're saying.
You're right. I think I need to
look at reshaping the longitudinal
arc. Great feedback guys. Much
appreciated.

PHIL
Right then, so that leaves your
inkilings Jen.

JEN
I've drawn direct from tales told
by Medieval minstrels.

PHIL
(laughs)
Those minstrels are a deep well for
you Jen.

JEN
So this is a tale about a king
and...

ROBERT
(cuts in)
Are we talking Arthurian legend
type kings? Or staying with
chronicled English kings?

PHIL

Don't forget the French kings. They played a significant role in Medieval history.

JEN

(thinking on her feet)
No this is just a King of fable. But now you've made that distinction, it could simply be a rich man.

ROBERT

Not a king at all?

PHIL

That changes the dynamic slightly.

JEN

(he's got a point)
You're right Phil.

Jen scribbles out a note in her book and writes over it.

JEN (CONT'D)

Lets just call him a rich man and then we lose all the constrictions of English pageantry which I must admit would have got in the way of the overriding message.

ROBERT

So a story with a moral?

JEN

Very much so. So this Kin...I mean *rich man* offers a meal to a poor man once a year.

PHIL

Might I ask, how is the poor man chosen?

ROBERT

Is it, like a lottery, or is he part of the rich man's staff? Is he known locally?

PHIL

Or is he just passing through? A vagabond if you were?

JEN

All good points. He's a vagabond.

Phil smiles. He's made a sensible suggestion.

JEN (CONT'D)

So the rich man provides the poor vagabond with a meal.

ROBERT

Is the type of meal important? Does he, and I'm thinking cultural layering here, does he invite the vagabond to his own table?

JEN

No, I can see your thought process Robert, and I like it, but at the story's heart is the converse of that notion. You see its more about cultural *separation*.

PHIL

That which lies betwixt rich and poor?

JEN

Exactly. And lying at the heart of this chasm, as you so eloquently put it Phil, betwixt rich and poor, are table manners.

ROBERT

That's a rich vein you've struck there Jen. We often see this as a mechanism dividing the classes, you know aristocrat and commoner...

PHIL

But by removing the notion of a king, you've dismissed the effigy of class, and made it all about wealth. Love it.

ROBERT

And for all we know, the rich man was a self made rich man, a merchant perhaps?

JEN

Yes yes, great notes.

PHIL

So we see the world through the prism of the vagabond's table manners?

JEN
(a little unstuck)
Yes...I can see there's more to
this vagabond character than I
first thought. I think I'd like to
press pause on him if I may for a
moment.

Phil presses an imaginary button in the air

PHIL
Paused.

JEN
(back in control)
I think that's been a really
productive writers room this week.

Phil and Robert nod in agreement and close their notebooks.

ROBERT
(self congratulatory)
Three cracking folk stories there
Jen.

As she speaks, Jen looks up in her diary.

JEN
Our next Zoom writers room is on
the 15th.

PHIL
And the theme is?

JEN
Getting to the end of your story.

FADE OUT.