

Attila the Bun and the Lost Paradigm

by Samantha Memi

I had a meeting with the editor of a well-known magazine. She said, "I think your paradigm got stuck up your monomyth."

"Oh dear. Is that bad?"

"Bad? You want to be a writer, don't you?"

"Well, I did. I'm not so sure now. I mean, if I get my paradigm stuck up my monomyth, maybe I should find another career."

"Look, you write well. I mean for an amateur your writing is quite good. But..."

I knew there would be a but.

"Let's look at what you've written. You've got a cheese-and-tomato sandwich who wants to fuck a sausage roll." She looked at me over the top of her glasses. "Right?"

"Right."

"Where's your hook?"

"What hook?"

"Your hook? A mechanism to catch the reader."

"I haven't got a hook."

She offered me a cigarette. I refused. She lit hers. Smoke came out of her nose. I thought, Dragon lady, that's a good story, She came in the night, breathing fire.

"You must have a hook. It's imperative. What about your plot point?"

"Plot point?"

"You don't know what a plot point is?"

"Um... no."

"You don't know much about writing, do you."

I agreed I didn't.

"Is the sausage roll vegetarian?"

"Um... I'm not sure."

"If your sausage roll isn't vegetarian what's the attraction for the sandwich?"

"Um..."

She leant over her desk.

"No self-respecting cheese-and-tomato sandwich is going to want to fuck a sausage roll full of meat."

She blew a puff of smoke in my face and leant back in her chair. I had to admit I hadn't thought of that. She smirked.

"You have to define your characters. If you were a cheese-and-tomato sandwich would you fancy a sausage roll, or would you lust after another sandwich?"

That was a conundrum I hadn't envisaged when I came for the meeting.

"You have to know your characters. What kind of cheese is it? Are they cherry tomatoes or plum tomatoes? Organic wholemeal or sliced white?"

This was getting more complicated by the minute. So many decisions.

She brought out a huge hardback book, the size of a small house, and let it fall onto her desk where it shook the room so badly I wobbled on my chair.

"This is your seven point paradigm."

"My what?"

"You must have a paradigm and it must have seven points. Now, who's your main character?"

"Attila the Bun."

"Who?"

"Attila the Bun."

"Where does he come into it?"

"At the end when Claude the sandwich is fucking Harold the sausage roll, Attila the Bun attacks and chops everyone to bits."

"What's the point of that?"

"Um..."

"I mean, does this Attila represent the greed of corporate institutions trying to crush the common man?"

"Um..." Why did she keep asking difficult questions?

I looked out the window at the sunshiny day. Wouldn't I rather be home with my daughter showing her how to make cupcakes? Ms Paradigm caught my disinterest, and squinted.

"Have you layered your plot?"

"What with?"

"Subplots."

"What are they?"

She looked at me as if I were a smudge on her desk and I needed to be wiped off.

She took a deep breath. "Take this book. Read it and learn about writing."

I staggered down the stairs and into the street. The book was so heavy I had to get a taxi home. On the way I wondered whether Attila should have white icing or pink. I didn't like sticky buns. Was my prejudice against cheap cakes corrupting my fiction? Was I biased in my writing? I wanted to be fair to all my characters. I decided to show Attila's good side by making him the adoptive parent of a Danish pastry.

Once home I eagerly levered open the massive tome and marvelled at all the diagrams showing plot points and turning points and arcs. I wondered if the people who wrote this had written any stories, but apparently they hadn't. Such a pity. I'm sure any stories they wrote would be the most paradigmmed, monomythed, plot-pointed stories ever written.

I tried to read the first paragraph but I couldn't understand any of it. I realised I'd have to buy a dictionary. This writing game was going to be a lot more difficult than I'd envisaged. If I couldn't read a book about how to write, how could I learn to write? Worry disturbed my sleep.

I returned the book to its owner. "I can't understand it," I told her.

"What a pity," she said, "I had such hopes for you. What will you do now?"

"I think I'll go back to baking."

"That's nice."

In honour of my literary effort I made sausage rolls and cakes.

“Mm, yummy,” said my daughter as she ate Attila the Bun. Her sticky smile was worth a thousand plot points and a million editor's smirks.

