

I'm Trapped in an Elevator with Space Pirate Jack.

(I, the literfairy bookmother, absolve all responsibility for this title.)

Once upon a time in a galaxy far, far away—

You can't start a story like that.

Who are you?

I'm your literfairy bookmother.

My what?

I come to the aid of fiction pieces in need of help.

But it's my story.

Don't you want to be successful?

But I'm just the narrator.

Then you should narrate something interesting.

Space pirates *are* interesting.

Good heavens! You can't write about space pirates!

I can write whatever I want!

Everyone knows *genre* fiction isn't *real* fiction.

You two do realize you're a couple of talking heads, right? That's bad fiction.

Who are you?

I'm the protagonist.

You're Lettie?

Aren't you going to describe me?

Lettie has blonde hair—

I don't want blonde hair.

What's wrong with blonde hair?

Standard trope says blondes are stupid. I want to be smart.

Then you can have raven black hair.

That's a bit cliché. Couldn't you think of something fresher?

But ravens are black.

Lots of things are black.

Lettie had crayon black ha-

Keep it appropriate! She doesn't have wax hair, does she?

You're making this awfully difficult.

All good stories must be unique, fresh, inspiring, and include only real world events.

Isn't the real world relative?

From the talking head?

Lettie's hair hung in black ringlets.

Black is kind of boring.

Lettie had hot pink ringlets that bounced around her shoulders.

Couldn't you make it a bit more poetic?

Seriously?

You are trying to write *good* fiction, aren't you?

And can I have one of those 1950's cherry dresses? With red spiked heels?

Lettie's hair hung in loose ringlets across straight shoulders. Her black 1950's cherry dress accentuated the hot pink overtones of her hair and matched the red spiked heels that clacked as she entered the elevator. She pushed the button for the thirty-first floor and the doors clicked closed.

Elevator?

The overhead lights flickered, and the elevator rattled before it came to a halt between the eleventh and twelfth floors.

Wh-What?

Lettie's angst reflected off the shiny metallic walls as she gripped the railing.

Show, don't tell.

Not this again.

Guys, this isn't funny.

You need to show us Lettie's angst.

Lettie's cries echoed off the walls.

Hello? You can't just *leave* me here.

That's a good start, now make it a bit fresher.

Lettie gripped the railing, glancing around frantically—

Drop the adverb. And cut the -ing while you're at it.

Lettie pushed the emergency button on the wall. "Hello?" The scratchy sound of static greeted her.

"Hello? Is anyone there?" She mashed the button. "Hello?! Security! Are you there?"

Get me out of here right now!

That's an improvement.

You really think so?

The smaller details can be worked out during edits.

I thought this was edits?

No, this the first draft.

What?!

HELLOOOOOO! GET ME OUT OF HERE!

A loud screech echoed through the elevator chute and the elevator dropped two floors. Lettie cr—

Hold up! There's no way I'm dying in an elevator!

Lettie banged on the door. "Help! Somebody, please!"

This isn't very realistic.

I agree. I'd never bang on the door. What if the vibrations caused the elevator to fall again?

It's fiction. As in fictitious. As in fake on purpose.

Just because it's fake doesn't mean it can't be real.

That doesn't even make sense. Stop interrupting my story.

But this is *my* story!

A good protagonist *never* narrates their own story.

Sometimes I think you make up these rules on the fly.

A loud bang shook the elevator followed by footsteps on the roof.

What the hell is going on?

This story is out of control.

With a loud crash the elevators emergency hatch sprung open and a man dropped down beside Lettie.

Can he be 6'3?

He wore a black leather cloak, and had a large white skull on the front of his shirt.

With wavy black hair and blue eyes?

This isn't a romance novel.

He held a Colt Dragoon in his left hand, and a laser gun strapped to his belt.

Laser guns aren't real.

Don't mind the details.

"Hi," he said. "The names Space Pirate Jack--"

Again with the space pirates?

"--and you're my new captive."

Please.

This story is blasphemy to fiction.

Space Pirate Jack leveled his revolver at Lettie.

Please don't kill me.

"'lotta people'll pay a hefty price to get you back."

I don't know if you've noticed, but we're kind of stuck in an elevator.

Stop. Please. I can't take it anymore.

I really have to hand it to you. This has been the most fun I've ever had narrating.

But this story premise is ludicrous.

If I have to read one more book about cancer—

No, no, John Green killed that topic.

Did you just... make a pun?

I think she did.

Look, the first rule of *good* fiction is to pick a topic people can relate to.

Like cancer.

Like the pain of loss, the buddings of new love, the—

But that's been done a million times! That's so boring!

That's why the task is to reinvent it.

This story is kind of like that.

With space pirates.

But space pirates aren't *real*!

Way to offend the guy with the gun!

"I am deeply offended."

You just made him say that.

Of course I did, I'm the narrator.

Can we get on with my story now?

Preferably back on Earth?

We are on Earth. Well, New Earth, like New New York, except it's more like New New New New New
New New New York.

Oh, a Dr. Who reference!

Make it stop.

Space Pirate Jack holsters his revolver. "My name's actually Tim. I'm cosplaying Captain Harlock at the
convention on the ninth and tenth floors."

"But you can still get us out of here, right?"

Tim examined the doors. "The earthquake knocked the power. The only thing holding us here are the
emergency breaks."

Earthquake?

You wanted real life.

A ghost would have been more interesting.

It's like you're trying to kill the genre on purpose.

Lettie glanced toward the hatch in the ceiling. Cables disappeared into the dark. "And you, what? Jumped
from the floor above?"

Tim worked to pry the doors open to no avail. "I'm a volunteer firefighter."

Isn't this story a bit gender stereotyped?

We can't all be Katniss Everdeen.

You could be Hermione Granger.

Let me just pull out my copy of *How to Escape from Elevators for Dummies*.

Didn't you call things that had been done a million times boring?

"Timothia!" A male voice echoed down the elevator shaft. "We've found some rope if you can get back
on top of the elevator."

“You’re a girl?!”

Timothia pulled the wig of black wavy hair off to reveal blonde hair pulled back into a tight bun. “Male characters are easiest to cosplay when you’re 6’3.” Timothia walked to the hatch. “Come on, I’ll give you a leg up.”

“On top of the elevator?”

“Those doors aren’t opening.”

But my dress! And these heels!

Oh the vanity, etc, etc.

What kind of literfairly bookmother are you, anyway?

A masochistic one, apparently.

Lettie pulled her heels off and attempted to climb onto Timothia’s shoulders.

Have I ever mentioned that I’m afraid of heights?

Timothia leveled herself beneath the elevator hatch. “Just grab the sides and pull yourself up. Stand on my shoulders if you need to.”

Lettie pulled herself up into the darkness, blinking a few times as her eyes adjusted. “How are you getting—”

Timothia grunted as she lifted herself up beside Lettie. “Hey Renaldo, you got that rope secured?”

Renaldo peeked into the chute, and a long coil of rope thumped against the roof of the elevator. “All set.”

Lettie shifted from one foot to another as Timothia secured the rope underneath her arms. “Th-thanks for saving me.”

“Buy me dinner and we’ll call it even.” Timothia tugged the rope. “Bring her up, Ren.”

Timothia can’t be a lesbian.

But you told me to subvert gender roles.

A butch lesbian female is not subversion.

I never said she was butch. I said she was 6'3 and cosplaying as a man.

This is my skeptical face.

Timothia's just hungry.

She did just climb an elevator shaft.

She's also secretly in love with Renaldo, the 6'1 Italian model she met at the convention yesterday.

This is hell.

Actually it's an elevator shaft, but I'm liable to agree with you in this situation.

"Steady on your feet there." Renaldo took Lettie's hand. "I'm Renaldo Bartolli, but please call me Ren."

"It's nice to meet you." Lettie put her shoes back on.

A group of ten people crowding around the elevator erupted into cheers as Timothia climbed out behind Lettie.

Did they become confetti?

Timothia raised her hands. "The proper authorities will be notified, and the elevator should be fixed within a few days."

A scream pierced the air, and a young woman with frizzy auburn hair came running down the hall yelling, "Ghost." She fell to the floor, her face white as a sheet, and a chill settled in the air.

No.

Is there someone blowing a fan at us?

Two young men stepped from the crowd. "This looks like a job for Sam and Dean Winchester."

Murder will be the least of your worries if this becomes a fanfiction.

They're at a convention. Last year they did aliens with Mulder and Scully.

Nerdgasm.

What happened to the earthquake?

It wasn't very strong so they decided to continue with the convention.

Remember that discussion about realism in fiction?

But the story lacks suspense. I mean, in real life an elevator wouldn't fall 9 floors and leave the two characters holding on to an edge where the hero's fingers slowly slip off until you think they're going to fall and then at the last minute someone shows up to save them just in time. So instead I opted to put on a fake event that ends in real murder.

Aren't crime drama's just thrilling?! I've always wanted to be in one.

Yeah, about that, you're one of the victims.

But I'm the main character.

There're no rules against killing the protagonist.

Whose side are you on?

It's okay, because your murder leads the investigators to the killer, potentially saving half a dozen victims from the same fate.

But my character hasn't even been properly developed. I have no backstory, no defining details, no memorable quotes. No reader will ever think "That Lettie, boy did she have some hot pink hair."

Don't worry, your spirit will probably get absorbed into an amulet and show up as a ghost five seasons later on a different show.

We need to address these pop culture references.

Let me guess, they're bad.

It goes back to that relatable topic. They alienate the reader if you do it too often.

What kind of person would read a story titled *The One Manuscript to Rule Them All* and then complain about all the fandom references?

About that title...

What's wrong with my title?!

How do I put this in words you'll understand...

I thought it was clever.

I'm fairly certain it's a plot device to fill word count in this section.

You're just saying that so I'll change my title.

It's the worst title I've ever seen, and I've seen a lot of shitty fanfiction.

Fine.

You're... agreeing with her?

Oh I'll change the title alright...

And you'll tone down the pop culture too?

I don't understand how I'm supposed to place the story in the real world, but not reference anything in it.

All I'm saying is three in the span of one page might be a bit much for the average reader.

I love it!

As a product of the narrator's mind you would inherently understand the comedy of the references by default.

Not true. I dated this guy who didn't know who Ash Ketchum was once.

And the narrator set you up with said person?

Of course.

So said narrator could have purposefully kept that information from your date?

If Lettie has taught us anything it's that I have no control over what a character does.

You wanted to give me blonde hair. *Blonde!* Do you know how insulting that is?!

The actress playing the frightened girl introduced herself as Caroline. She went on to explain that as she washed her hands in the ladies washroom a strange figure appeared in the mirror. Lettie, enthralled by the tale, took a few steps closer to listen.

Isn't Lettie trying to get to the thirty-first floor?

This turn of events is way more interesting than a business meeting though.

A business meeting.

Lettie's been offered a promotion.

Isn't it exciting?

I think I miss the space pirates...

That can be—

"Lettie, it's time for dinner."

Lettie looked up from where she sat on her bedroom floor. A litany of childish drawings covered the bright pink walls, and a Rainbow Bright poster hung above her bed. A woman with short blonde hair and wearing a brown business suit stood in the doorway. Lettie put down the Captain Harlock figure she had been holding. "Mommy, I can't eat now! Space Pirate Jack stole Lettie and won't give her back unless we pay him lots of money."

"Space pirates aren't real sweetheart. Why don't you read the space book Daddy bought you instead?" Lettie's mother grabbed her daughter's hand and pulled her downstairs. "School girls need to focus on their studies."

"But Mom—"

"Not another word, or I'll take those ridiculous dolls away."

Lettie's shoulders slumped, her blonde ringlets bouncing as she hopped onto the dining room chair. "The space book is boring."

Lettie's mother took a seat across from her daughter. "Don't you want to be smart like Mommy and Daddy?"

Of course I want to be smart.

There are many highly respectable professions in the world of Academia.

But I also want to keep my creative freedom.

Creative freedom is an illusion. Success demands standards.

Then you write the story.

Only you can write your own story in the end.

Make it a good one.

“Mommy, I want to write books about space pirates.”

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