

I sat down at the keyboard, made myself comfortable, and started typing.

The inspector ordered a pint of beer and reviewed the case. There were too many suspects: he had to narrow them down somehow. Starting with the rabbi...

"You alright mate?" said a cheerful voice beside him.

"Ok, thanks," said Mike. "Well, no really. Too much on my mind"

"Oh, well," said the man, a friendly-looking character with a handsome, smiling face. "It may help to share it. I don't mind listening. Jerry's my name"

"Well, part of it is secret, but..."

"Oh, for crying out loud!" I erased the paragraph and started again.

Inspector Mike caught the bus home, knowing it would take some time. He needed space to think. There were just too many suspects in this case: he had to narrow them down somehow. He rested his head in his hand.

"Cheer up mate," said a cheerful voice beside him, "It may never happen."

"I'm afraid it has," said Mike.

"Oh well, there may be a way out," said the man, a cheerful, friendly-looking character..."

"Oh for heaven's sake, will you please go away," I said out loud.

"No," said a voice behind me.

"AARGH! Wha-ha-ha-who you? Go away!"

"I'm Jerry, or Jeremiah to give me my full name. And no, I won't go away until you let me into your book."

"What?"

"I have been trying to get in for the past week," he went on, slowly and firmly, "and you have been blocking me off. I finally got permission to come and visit you in person. You should be glad; this doesn't happen very often."

"I've gone mad."

"No, you are quite sane. Or at least as sane as any other writer, which isn't saying much. Now when are you going to let me in? I haven't got all day."

"No, hold it, one second ... where exactly have you come from?"

"If you really must know, I come from...well, call it the Shadows, where we all wait to come out into the stories on this world."

"You mean there are others like you?"

"Of course there are. You're a writer. You must know that characters appear in your stories who you never expected. I've been waiting for ages, next to the Azbeths.

"The what?"

"The giant blood-sucking spiders. Oh, of course you haven't got round to them yet. They'll appear in your fantasy novel."

"I'm not sure I'm going to write it now," I said after a pause.

"Of course you are. They're going to be the best part. Now can we get on?"

"Um, just a minute...how many of you are there?"

"We're beyond count."

"Errmm...could I meet some of them?"

"Don't even think of it. We are assigned to one author and have to keep on at him until he lets us in. Now when are you going to let me into your story?"

"Errm...well...I err.... you're going to muck up the plot line."

"I don't care. Let me in."

"But you can't....it's not the story..." His eyes narrowed.

"I know I have a cheerful, friendly nature, but I wouldn't push it. You haven't yet worked out how I develop. Now for the third time, I want to get in to your book."

"But you're going to wreck the whole plot. It's a detective story and...hang on, just a minute," I went on as some advice I had read flashed through my mind, "how about if I give you a book of your own?"

"Ah, now you're talking. Yes, that would do fine. Provided I don't have to wait too long."

"I'll start as soon as I've finished this one."

"Ok, but get on with it. It's only a bad copy of Inspector Morse, anyway."

"Here..."

"And I'll give you a message from Molly Blewett into the bargain."

"Who?"

"You haven't got her name yet. She's the student who is working in a brothel to pay her way through university. Then her Professor turns up as one of the clients."

"Oh."

"She says she's enough for a short story, but you're wasting your time trying to make a full-length novel out of it."

"Oh, thank you very much," I said, annoyed. I had been trying to develop it for weeks.

"It's a pleasure," he said cheerfully, and vanished.