



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Weaving Journalistic Detail into Descriptions of People

Today we're gonna continue our series on journalistic detail that we began a couple of weeks back. And we've looked so far at what journalistic detail is and what it means for you, and I'm gonna recap that for those of you who are joining us for this webinar as your first foray into the series. But we're also going to...we also have, rather, looked at how to incorporate journalistic detail into short articles. Right now we're starting to move into how to use journalistic detail into different types of descriptions. We're gonna look this week at descriptions of people, and next week get descriptions of places and then how to specifically create a sense of ambiance or place through the details that you're choosing to share, whether that's in descriptions of people or just kind of in the pervasive tone and word choice within your piece.

In particular today, we're gonna follow a format that we started with a little bit last week and that we've also done in the past with our article nuts and bolts series, which is that I'm gonna go back and look again, like I said, for those of you who are just joining us for this webinar first in this year in journalistic detail, and what that is and also particularly why it matters to you. And there's a lot of really big benefits to boning up on this as a writer and especially as a writer who wants to work in an editorial setting, but also if you wanna work in a content marketing setting, it's really gonna set you apart to have these skills. And then we're gonna look at kind of what are some of the challenges specific to this space. Last week for instance, we talked about how with shorter articles there's more difficulty because you really don't have a lot of options. You have to be very, very scarce in where you choose to incorporate details, but there's also some interesting pitfalls about doing it with people which we'll look into.

And then I've queued up a bunch of examples for us from a few different areas. I've queued some that are more in the vein of a straight profile piece where we're looking at an individual person. I've pulled some things out of settings like "Afar" or "National Geographic." I have to say I was really shocked when I was on "National Geographic's" website today. The "National Geographic" travel website is so full of partner content, I couldn't believe it. I wanna know who writes those partner content pieces and how more of you can be getting your words up on "National Geographic." Anyway, so we're gonna look at "National Geographic." We've also got some... I pulled up some things from "Afar" for you as well and a piece from "Outside" and something from "The New York Times." They tend to be a good example for this kind of stuff, so that's what we'll look at when we do our examples as well.

Today, like I said, we're gonna continue this discussion of journalistic detail. But for those of you who are new to this topic and new to this series, I wanna take a minute to talk about what I mean and then why you really need to know this because when I do our live week long events, this is a really big topic for us as we do our travel writing boot camp. Even though we



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talk a lot about getting ideas, getting ideas out in the field, we're really working on how do you turn those into pitches and pieces and part of that circles down to what details have you even caught when you're out in the field in the first place. Because you can't include detail when you don't have it, and that I find is often a big issue when I'm looking at people's pitches or pieces or whatnot. That something is vague and then I say, "Okay, well, you know, we can't say several or we can't say something like that." We can't say something that kind of refers to something without being more specific. That'll be a red flag for the editor. It'll look like you don't know what you're talking about. And the person says, "Well, I don't know." And so I say, "Well, why is that sentence even there?"

If you don't know how many steps it takes to get up to the temple in Kyoto, do we need to say there's many steps. Do you wanna say how long it took you? Do you wanna say how many landings you had to go through? Do you have a sense of what the elevation that you traveled was? Because otherwise if we just say it was a long slog up the steps to the temple, what does that mean that's different to everybody? You know, slog is a little bit of description, but what about that long? Like what does that really mean though? If somebody has, you know, a young child, that might be different than if they're elderly or if they're young and fit or if they're perhaps, you know, middle age and slightly out of weight, all these things are gonna be different.

So we want to think about using details, not just later when we write them, but we wanna also, when you're out traveling, think about details, about capturing these details. And part of capturing those details also goes back to taking notes, of course, but also taking notes with your camera. I take a lot of random photos of things just to remind myself later. So for instance, I am not there anymore but it was in Kansas City over the weekend and I went to this quite well known barbecue place. I guess it's kind of famous, but it's newer and I was chatting with some people who are next to me. There were some people at another table next to me that I wasn't talking to. But I wanted to, as I was jotting down what they had said to me and sort of things I was overhearing from their conversation, I wanted to be able to have some details of how to describe them later on. Now I could have sat there and taken notes on what this guy was wearing and, you know, what he looked like and what he did and I did take a couple notes on that, but I also took some covert photos because I can go back and look in those photos once I know what I wanna write, once I know what the point of my eventual article is, and then I can pull out the details that I actually need. Because if you only take notes on details while you're there, you don't know exactly what details you're gonna need later. And that's because the thing about journalistic detail is that it's not just about descriptive detail. It's not just about details that illustrate something. It's details that illustrate to the end that you are trying to accomplish with your piece.



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And this in and of itself is something that I often see when...especially when I'm looking at pitches, is that there's a lack of clarity that comes out on the page, as editors like to say, even though it's really the screen, right, these days, but there's a lack of clarity in terms of what your point is, and what I mean by that is what you're trying to get across to the reader. For instance, a piece that we're gonna look at later, and I'll drop it here in the chat box now, in case you wanna have a scroll through, but also in case you wanna see it for later, is a really interesting profile in "Outside" actually of the writer's uncle. But forgetting that he's the writer's uncle, he is a profile of a monk and a cleric who renounced his vows and his life in America and moved to a village in the Pyrenees and just studied the classics, and he just lived this small life in this village in France not helping anybody, unlike he had done up until this point for the rest of his life.

And this profile that we're gonna look at later is a beautiful picture of this. But what I just told you was kind of the person I told you, kind of who the piece is about, but I didn't tell you what the point of the piece is. Now in this piece, the gentleman that the profile is about has passed away and it's almost in a way a memorial to him, but it's also this picture of what would it be like, what is it like to just leave it all behind and go live in a beautiful village in France? What, you know, what does that do to a person? Right? And even as I say that to you, these are all esoteric kind of points, right? And this is a long piece. You can have a couple of things that you're trying to accomplish. But at the end of the piece, the very last sentence is a quote, which is always a great way to end, as you've learned when I did the article nuts and bolts.

It's a quote from a woman and she said, "He was interested in the village and everyone in it. He was a good person. He was esteemed." And this is really the point of the piece and that's where the first thing that I said was that it's almost a memorial to this man. But, so if all of this piece is to say that even though he gave up on his calling or he gave up on his family to move to this place, even though it seems like he wasn't doing very much with his life, in a certain way he was, but in this small scale, in this small life. So that means that all of the details in this piece need to serve that purpose. They need to show how he was supporting this village and the people in it, okay? And any other details that might be in there are only maybe set up for contradiction, right? So to contrast this sense of, well, he was there by himself working for days at a time translating this ancient Greek author, da, da, da. But then that's a counterpoint to his care of the village to show that it was more than that.

So what I mean to say here is that there's detail, there's description, but journalistic detail is detail that tells a story, the story that we're trying to tell them, the specific piece and that each detail that we choose needs to tie specifically into this one piece, this one slant of this one version of this story for one audience, as I talk about when I talk about that idea triangle where you've got the content as the base, but the other two sides of the triangle are the



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format and the audience, right? So this is a profile of him, kind of a profile in retrospect, that is about him as a person.

If it was different, if it was a round-up of his favorite places in the south of France, you know, not that this writer would necessarily write that, but just for instance, there's a change to the format side of it, then the details that we would use would be different because the point of that story would be different. So the things that you can use for journalistic detail, often people rely on numbers or adjectives or examples. And when I say examples here, I mean the kind of thing that we might think of as fact or description. It might really be metaphor or simile. It might even be a small anecdote that illustrates something larger.

Now when we get into people though, these things seem a lot more difficult. At least I think so. I see that happening. And I think that's because, you know, even when we watch, whether we're reading novels or we're watching TV shows that are works of fiction, some part of us knows that the characters are important, that that's what we connect with... So for some reason coming to mind right now is this television show which has, you know, interesting mysteries that are slightly more interesting than your average, let's call it, you know, like police prime time kind of cop drama formula. But it's the characters that really attach you to it. And the show that I was thinking of is "Castle," which isn't on anymore, but it starred Nathan Fillion as a famous Mr. Novelist, perhaps the writer...and that appeals to the writer in me. But then his counterpoint is this female detective who's really closed off. She really has a lot of trust issues. She's very sarcastic. She seems to have like a very interesting backstory because her mother was killed and she has been trying to investigate it all her life and that drove her to be a cop.

But it's those characters that make all of the scenes interesting. And yet even though we know particularly in film and television, that it's that acting, that portrayal of character that can make a huge difference in whether we're interested in something or not, I see characters so often lacking from pieces and I hear this complaint from editors a lot to the point where if you're able to include a tiny, interesting character sketch in your pitch, I think that that will immediately put you on many big, high level editors' happy lists because they crave that. They say that they get these pitches that don't have story, but the thing that they really say they want the most is pitches that have characters. But the problem is that pitching is a very narrow format in terms of your word count, right? It's as bad if not worse than some of those short articles we were looking at last week. So the key is to be able to do a character sketch to draw out a character in very, very few words and words that are very descriptive. And actually on that note, I have a little character sketch that I wrote in a workshop on this that I can share with you guys as well that I think is kind of interesting.



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But what I wanna just finish up here before I share that, which I think could be highly amusing to some of you because it is about...it's about travel bloggers. So I'll look that up so that I can show that to you as well. But the idea here is, like I said, that we can really do so much in a small space or a large space, whatever size space that we have by using journalistic details. When they serve the purpose, that means that no matter how small the space you have available or how ample, every word that you choose becomes charged with this mission of convincing, of influencing the reader to your point.

But there's a bigger thing there past what you're writing. Actually two important things about how this benefits you, and the first one I already shared, which is that it makes editors love you. If you get these into your pitches, they will just be bowled over by what sounds like by what people say is your writing, but it's not your writing exactly. It's your thinking. It's your ability to observe and put down the things that are important to notice. That's what's really standing out to them.

It's not that you've been crafty. It's not that you've used these particularly amazing, you know, they call them like one dollar words or one cent words or whatever, right? It's not that you've gone through the thesaurus, and we'll talk about that later though, but it's not that you've gone through the thesaurus and found the absolutely perfect, complex, intriguing adjective for this person. It's that you've painted a picture that leaps off the page and that stemmed by what you notice and what you choose to include and what you choose to exclude as well. But secondly, and what's really important here is that that helps with that choosing to include and exclude is that when you're really clear on what journalistic detail is and what it does, you don't have to wonder what to include because as soon as you become really clear on what you're trying to say, the right details leap to mind.

And it was really interesting because also at the Book Passage Conference, there was a gentleman who is a novelist and he also teaches, I suppose literature, maybe creative writing somewhere in California, I think at Berkeley, and he came to do like an author Q&A panel, and I had read some of his books before. And his first book, I was even thinking of using it as an example today, but I wanted to stick to some more travel specific examples, but his first book is just beautiful, stunning in the descriptions that he uses. The words are so wonderfully-crafted. As a writer, like my immediate thought was, oh my God, I wanna use all of these as examples when I teach. But the thing is he said that after that, working on his subsequent books, he's trying to write on paper and then write an entirely new draft on paper, and then write an entirely new draft on paper. And he's not interested at all and hanging on the beautiful words because what he said was that as he moves from draft to draft to draft, the things that are important, the things that need to be said, that need to remain stick with him and they appear in every draft regardless.



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So I like that idea also with your pitches, with any of your writing is that as you're writing a version of it, you're finding out internally in your subconscious the words that need to come out or working their way out and then you see what's important and then you write it fresh again. And often when I'm chatting with you guys, you know, it's a conversation of here's something we need to work on, or what's the point of this piece really. And then we come back around to, okay, well, should I put that in here after this part, or where should I move this sentence to. But we should start again with new sentences that are fully charged in every word with this new purpose that we have. So that's why I really, as we've discussed in the last couple of weeks, it all really in fact hinges on everything tying back to that story concept

And because we are travel writers... I talked to... I sort of lamented how editors really want a lot of characters and we're gonna talk more about characters this week, I promise. But people and place descriptions, I see a lot of difficulty on in terms of really getting what you wanna communicate across on the page as opposed to just when you're talking to me about it. And so that's where this journalistic detail thing starts to deliver really, really, really clear benefits. I mean, it helps you in terms of when you have a really short piece, kind of seeing where it makes sense to expand and what you need to cut, but it's when we are trying to get that sense of what is this place? Who really is this person, that really honing this skill starts to really deliver?

So when you think about describing people, there's really four main tools that you have at your disposal, and I've tried to use synonyms but to make it so that it's ABC, but I couldn't quite get it to D. So we've got two As, so we've got AABC or your As and BC. Okay? So the first one is action or mannerisms. Now this is where you choose to describe somebody through what they do rather than their visual. So that means if there's a potter or somebody who makes ceramics, you might describe how rhythmically her foot moves on the pedal. But at the same time it seems to be almost a separate person from the hands that are deftly guiding the clay as it spins in a completely separate motion from her leg, and her hands slowly shape it into this towering vase and then quickly change the curve of it from one moment to the next without a moment's hesitation.

Right. So that's how you might describe her mannerisms. And the point there is, I did use the word "deftly" and things like that. But the point is to show that this woman is... this potter, ceramicist, is incredibly experienced and elegant and calm and centered in her work, and to also instill like a lack of confidence in her craft, okay? But I think what we more commonly go to is this idea of appearance. And then I put a couple of different ways that you can... a couple of different sort of outlets of appearance to kind of encourage you past what you might already be thinking about. So you can describe the shape of one's face, eyes or mouth, you can describe their complexion, their clothing of course, but their body shape, the shape



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of their hands, the shape of their...you know, maybe how do they change their posture as they sit or stand or as they become excited about something or laughs.

And that brings us into this behavior B or feelings. So it says as much as you can say about somebody with their actions because that can paint a picture for them. Showing how they stand in relation to other things through their feelings can help triangulate this person in the world and in your story specifically. And then their character. And I like to think about, the same way I talked about people's feelings, triangulate them against things, you can also think about their character as triangulating them against other people. So here we're kind of taking actions or mannerisms and we're putting how people act to other people to show who they are through that sense.

So these are kind of the four main areas. And I wanted to give those out so that if you find yourself overly relying on one rather than others or rather so that you can be cognizant of whether you should find that you're relying on one more than others, so that you can mix it up because it's not just that, you know, relying entirely on appearance is kind of lazy writing. An editor will get the sense of that as lazy writing, but you're also potentially losing out on some really beautiful writing that you could do that could really create this wonderful sense for your reader if you just reminded yourself, oh, I could use this. Oh, I could use that. And so you can do an exercise where you have somebody and you try to describe them in each of these different ways and then pick what speaks to you.

So I mentioned we had done an exercise around this and I think we only had one minute, right? This description, maybe it was five, but we had not a lot of time. So I wanna drop this in here just to show you guys...I have just put it in the chat box, but I'm gonna read it as well for those who are more listening, I wanna just kind of show you guys what you can do when you combine these different things, when you combine behavior, feeling, character, appearance, actions, when you combine those to create a sketch of a person. Now this sketch is about three...well, there's a fourth short sentence at the end. But this is really like a paragraph about one person and you're not always gonna have time for that, but you could take several of these sentences separately even if you needed to only have a short space and use that to describe somebody. So let me read this for you. Just let me have one sip of water first.

Like a sixth sense, whenever a camera passed her by, she'd tuck her neck, quick as a turtle, migrated her eyebrows just so to smooth her forehead and flashed a mischievous smile. With her eyes alone, of course, Hollywood red carpet style. Even when there were no noticeable selfie sticks in sight, her fingers tousled her wavy hair every few minutes just in case. And when the opportunity arose, and especially when it did not, she took great care to explain that she had had her 23-year-old son very young. This is the middle-aged influencer. So some of



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you guys may have met this kind of person before, but I had just come back from a press trip where I was around this particular person every day and couldn't help but notice these mannerisms or behaviors or feelings or kind of know constant reiterations of hers.

So I was able to write this because I spent about five or six days with the person. So I didn't have to take notes on her. I was able to just write this from memory when I was faced with doing this exercise. But that's not always gonna be the case, that you've spent a lot of minutes over five days with the person that you need to write this kind of sentence about. So that's why, like I said, you want to be able to take those pictures, take those notes so that when you want to... Let's say you edit a piece a few years ago on a fishing village in Portugal where the main... where they're really known for octopus. So let's say that I wanted to describe what a fisherman was like, but I didn't really think about it at the time. I only thought about, oh, I need to find out how they do this. I need to figure out where to eat and then think about all that. I could look back at some pictures. I could describe how they were dressed, but I could also look at what they're doing and I could describe the actions they take. I could describe, you know, how they stand, how they look like they're relating to one another and I can do some things with that even just from pictures, okay?

So if you guys have questions on this, just drop them in the chat box as I'm going along. I've got one more thing here to talk about how to put this together specifically with people. And then I'm gonna jump over in the descriptions or sorry, the examples and I'll drop those in the chat box as we're going along. So everything we've been talking about with journalistic detail is really about being specific and if you can, being specific using facts rather than just adjectives. So you can see for instance, when I was talking about this woman, that I've described her action and I've got a little bit of a metaphor, like I said, "quick as a turtle," and I've used a powerful verb here, "she migrated her eyebrows just so," rather than "moved." And then I do have some adjectives, right? That like, "she flashed a mischievous smile" and then "Hollywood red carpet style" is another modifier there. But I try to focus more on actions like she tousled her wavy hair.

And the thing here is that you're often gonna find when you do, unless you're just in a really great writing place, you're often gonna when you sit down and write a description of a person that the first version of it is more bland. It's more they did this, this and this, or they, you know, they look askance, or they're gonna be some sort of trite words in there or some not so active verbs or not so evocative verbs. And that's what editing is for. And so especially when you're doing this kind of thing, it's really useful to just get down, like I said, use that AABC, get down as many things as you can, and then pull the ones that seem most powerful and get onto thesaurus.com or whatever people use these days and look at some words to make it more specific. So don't just think about being specific in the details in terms of capturing them when you're out, but also about using words that really say exactly what you





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wanna say. I could have said she fixed her hair, or she adjusted her hair, but her hair was wavy and she tousled it. She kind of scrunched it with her fingers and, like, gave it a little more volume and a little more curl, you know. And I could have said that whole thing that she scrunched it with her fingers, but it's getting long and I don't need to spend that many words on it. So I just said she tousled wavy hair, okay?

So doing that, having more words to choose from at the beginning, more descriptions, more journalistic details. And then being able to juice them up with some thesaurus, fancier words, or more specific words, rather. And then pick what's great and only use that is how you get great descriptions. So that's being said...that being said, let's go over and hit some of these examples. So I just sent the link and I'll put it in again of this article about the monk. Now, one of the reasons that I like this is that, well, it is about the monk. I'm just gonna switch my screen as well. Well, it is about the monk, it's really he's passed away at this point. So there are some times where he's being described, but he's being described more through the people who are still in this town. Now, I've made it bigger. I hope you guys can see it pretty well. Now let me just get back to where I was.

So this piece, like I said, is a little bit of eulogy or a memoranda, or sorry, I'm not saying the right word, but a memory, memorial to this uncle, but it's also kind of about this idea. And so it doesn't start out describing the uncle, okay? It starts out talking about the idea of leaving your life and going to a secluded village. So they don't really get to describe the uncle until quite a bit further down because they've started by describing him with what he did, okay? So when we first hear about the uncle, this is all we get, "He was a slight man, five foot seven and 140 pounds, and all his life he retained the buoyant, playful spirit of a boy. I loved him. That never wavered."

So we really only get like a little bit of a picture of what he looks like and of his character here, but there's snippets of it all throughout. He doesn't go into tons of detail on that physical description here. So he was talking like here, he's talking about Uncle Bill and he's saying, I think I knew this even when I was three years old. And he showed up at my family's house in Connecticut on a hot summer day, mischievously smirking and light on his feet when he grabbed the hose and doused me with cold water as I ran all over the yard squealing with glee. So you know, this isn't a little detail here, one long sentence that shows the man's sort of joie de vivre. Okay?

But as I mentioned there, even though this piece is about this man, that's kind of the point of the piece, but it's really told a lot through the people that he touched. Okay? So I wanna go down and show you how in a very small amount of time, like a single sentence, sometimes the whole paragraph, he's creating these pictures of these other characters in the piece because this is what's gonna happen to you guys a lot when you're writing a narrative type



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piece and need to really quickly create characters of the people that you meet, okay? ‘So here he found the mayor, 57-year-old Bertrand Lacarrere, is slim and dapper and readying for a backcountry ski trip in Spain.’

No, I’m sure I’m butchering his last name, but I just wanted to pause also. He’s saying that the man is slim and dapper. He doesn’t necessarily say that he’s outdoorsy or adventurous or that he’s very fit. He uses this action, the man is in the middle of readying for a backcountry ski trip in Spain, okay? And then he goes on. I’m just gonna say Lacarrere. Okay. I’m not quite sure how to say it. “Lacarrere, who also plays guitar in a rock band, is a socialist and a Paris native whose family roots in Montastruc date back to the 17th-century reign of Louis XIV. As a child, he spent summers roaming the countryside here, ‘like Tom Sawyer,’ he tells me.” I caught trout in the river with my hands. I went hunting. I climbed into caves with other kids and I met up with girls. I always knew I wanted to do something for this village.

So this right here is like a one paragraph profile of this mayor. All right? And what have they done here? As I told you, they used showing through his actions to show a bit about what he’s like, but then they also move into one more action, playing the guitar, followed by some descriptors and also rooting him, like literally they say his family roots, right? So it’s a mix here of actions plus some words that are more quick than actions, like socialist and Paris native. They get those things across more quickly. And then back to actions, as a child, he spent the summers roaming the countryside like Tom Sawyer.

This one is really more straight travel piece, okay? And this is from “National Geographic,” not “National Geographic Traveller” but “National Geographic” itself.

So I’m gonna can make a note of where we are. So this is a piece about nomadic tribes or nomadic peoples in the Amazonian jungle, okay? And there’s another interesting piece that I just wanted to share with you, which is from the photographer about spending time with these individuals and how to tell their stories. And I think this is also really appropriate to the discussion that we’re having today because it talks about how in his photos he needs to go beyond the preconceptions. And I really love this photo that begins this piece because I think you often see these interestingly kind of posed photos of tribespeople or perhaps they’re in the middle of a ritual, people are trying to show them...you know, show what’s unique about them through showing these rituals. But this is one of these women in a bath with their turtles, and then very interestingly below, it says that the red and yellow footed tortoises they’re holding will probably eventually be eaten, okay?

So it gives...just this photo gives you so much about these people. It gives you their...you can see their smiles, you can see their laughter. You can see their sense of who they spend



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time with. You can see their relationship between nature and themselves and food and themselves. You can see their adornments. You can see many, many different things here. And this is something that he addresses in this piece that I also sent you the link for and I think that it's what's...part of what's so useful for that is that what...this quote right here, but the whole piece goes into that about stripping away your preconceptions. It's far more honest way of conveying what people are actually like.

And so the reason I think that's really important is that I often see when descriptions of people, especially peoples who are more distant from us, that we do often tend to fall back on trying to explain that difference rather than trying to explain them as a person, as a being, as a unique being. We're trying to kind of paint them in opposition to where we're coming from. But our readers are often coming from a different place. And I see this quite frequently as well with places, that when people send me pitches to review that are about a city or maybe it's a city guide or a trending piece or something, it begins with something like, you know, you may not think about this, this, this, this and that when you think of Houston, but, but the thing is that you're assuming what your reader is gonna think. You're assuming that they have the same conceptions as you do, which is really not so frequently the case. And that's why I wanted to send this particular interview as well, but I think it's very kind of appropriate to also see the method of how the gentleman went across getting these photos for this piece that we're also gonna look at today.

So for instance, you know, here's one of a man hunting and he's got the dog behind him, right? He's not queued up for the hunt. He's on his way back. It's very different here than what you would usually see. So let's look at a description in this piece. So, Tainaky, who also goes by his Portuguese name, Laercio Souza Silva Guajarara, turns to his four companions, four other Guajarara tribesmen, as they dismount road-beaten motorbikes. The patrol forms a motley crew, patched jeans and camouflage and aviator shades and bandanas to shield their faces from the ubiquitous dry season dust. Bearing an equally modest array of weapons, a single-shot hunting rifle, a homemade pistol, a few machetes dangling from cinched waistbands, they call to mind a strange, cross-genre film. Think "Mad Max" meets "The Last of the Mohicans."

Now so in this case, you know, we lead with these villagers, but the issue is actually that these people are being threatened by the outsiders. So what they start with here is talking about these people who are on the lookout for loggers. Okay? So these folks that we're talking about, these aren't yet the tribespeople. Those come in further on. But when you hear this, it's interesting because he's painted a counterpoint to what you're expecting in the piece by starting with these people who are not the tribespeople. And by giving this picture of them, especially of "Mad Max" meets "The Last of the Mohicans," right? So this is kind of a metaphor that he's using here by contrasting these two films.



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But what else do we have? We've got this more appearance-related description. Again, this is more appearance-related description, but you can also think about... And they have more where they go into kind of their mannerisms and their actions as well. But they even go into it a little bit here, right? Where he says, "who also goes by his Portuguese name," and he turns to, "as they dismount their road-beaten motorbikes." So there's just a little bit of action in here. It's hidden, but it's telling us things about these folks. It's saying that they walk these two lines and that comes in here in the bottom as well, where he says think about "Mad Max" meets "The Last of the Mohicans," okay?

And he goes on to have a little bit more talking about them, but that's a little bit more about these loggers. So I'm gonna skip along from there. But the idea is that the people that they've introduced in the beginning are homegrown force of indigenous volunteers who are guarding the forest. So let's go down and see who it is that they're guarding, the Awa are their...or however you...it's correctly pronounced that...are those people that we saw earlier on. These are the uncontacted people. So I wanna get down into here where he's talking, where the author is talking more about these people that he's met because there's a good bit of background before we get there. But you can see a lot of, like I said, these photos that are very, very interesting depictions. And again it's "National Geographic" so I think that that other piece that I sent to you guys or that I put in the chat box, the second one, is also useful in seeing, like I said, how somebody who does this kind of work for "National Geographic" in particular is coming up with those sort of things.

Now I'm actually gonna use this caption here because I found the captions in this piece are really great. So you'll see here the baby monkey, which has a very interesting haircut itself, and the young gentleman here. "Five-year-old Kaiiau carries a baby black-bearded saki monkey on his head. The Awa hunt monkeys for their meat. And when a mother with a baby is killed, they may raise the orphan as a pet, carrying the animal around with them." So this has got some action, a little bit of description, right? But it also speaks to character. They eat these animals, but they also sometimes raise the babies as a pet. And that's a kind of action-oriented description that creates just a huge sense of whether its paradox or whatever you wanna call it, but a sense of character, a sense of conflict, a sense of personhood. Just in the description of this picture here, you know.

So let me go down and find another one for you. Like I said, a lot of this piece itself is talking about this territory and the poaching and whatnot. So here we're getting into some more description of these Awa people. In the shadows of a porch, women pasted tufts of harpy eagle and king vulture feathers to their heads, limbs...or to the heads, limbs and chests of a half dozen otherwise naked men, all of them village elders. The patterns of the white feathers seemed to throb in the darkness, giving the men a spectral, otherworldly appearance. They wear the feathers so the karawara will recognize them as real people, as Awa, Tatuxa



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explained, referring to the ancestors who watch over the forest and protect the earthbound Awa. Otherwise they might mistake them for white men and kill them.

“Amid eerie, ululating chants, the men danced around an enclosed hut as if in a trance. One by one, they entered and exited the huts, stamping their feet as if to launch themselves into the spirit world overhead. Still dancing and singing, they returned to their women and children, cupping their mouths to blow blessings on their loved ones from the spirits they’d just encountered on their journey to the heavens.” So you can see in here that we’re going back and forth. We’ve got some more physical description and then we’ve got some dialogue or rather, you know, a quote, but dialogue here, that’s talking about the actions that’s kind of explaining the actions and also talking a little bit more of the behavior. And then we really go more here into actions. And then the behavior part here I really like in terms of the feelings, that part of the person in counterpoint to the person and what that shows is that here they are on their own in a hut, but then as they come out they blow blessings on their loved ones, okay?

So this “National Geographic” piece is quite long and I’ll let you guys also check it out on your own. I think it’s very rich. There’s a lot of things going on in here as well, so it kind of goes on and on forever and ever. So I’ll let you guys have a look at that. And like I said as well, that other piece where he went through kind of what he did to get those shots. But there’s a very, very interesting profile that I read recently that I wanted us to look at during this webinar because this guy...well, the person being profiled wanted to have a very active kind of involvement in how he was depicted, which adds a whole new layer to this, but also the descriptions are very much charged with the energy of the person being profiled as well, which is almost an even more meta level of journalistic detail.

So I wanna read from...read to you a description of this actor, it was a man who’s being profiled, but also a description of a very interesting person that they encountered along the way, and we can look at what’s being done here. When I let it slip that the press kit I’d been given had referred to him as a ‘Renaissance man,” Riz Ahmed looked angrily down into his breakfast, a chicken-quinoa bowl with extra chicken. It lasted for only a minute, but the image stayed with me because it was the only time during our approximately 10 hours together, breakfast in Brooklyn, private sessions with the Islamic art collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, YouTube sessions listening to 1970s Qawwai-inspired Iraqi disco, talks on park benches in Fort Greene, tea on the sidewalk of Fulton Avenue and even dinner in Boston, where Ahmed was filming an independent feature about a heavy metal drummer who’s losing his hearing, the 35-year-old actor seemed to be truly, genuinely upset. So very much like I write.



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You'll see that this entire thing here is just one sentence. It goes on. "It's not that he doesn't get animated. He does. Talking with Ahmed can be a bit like sparring, a little like co-writing a constitution, a little like saving the world in an 11th-hour meeting. He interrupts, then apologizes for interrupting, then interrupts again. He can deliver entirely publishable essays off the top of his head. He pounds the table when talking about global injustices, goes back to edit his sentences minutes after they were spoken, challenges the premises of your sentences before you're halfway through speaking. This is what happens when you cut your teeth on both prep-school debate teams and late-night freestyle rap battles, as Ahmed has. He is like someone who wants to speak truth to power but now is power, famous enough, at least, to have people listen to his ideas. He is like someone very smart who also cares a lot. He is like someone who doesn't want to be misunderstood."

So like I mentioned, I really love this profile and it keep sending it around to people to read. But there's some really great little details in here as well and that's why I wanted us to look at that today. So I just love the absolute first sentence of this piece, we've got his breakfast, a chicken-quinoa bowl with extra chicken. Like what a detail to decide to include in the very first sentence of this. And they're talking all about how he's almost like historical. He's interested in so many other things. He's almost divorced from this time and then this chicken-quinoa bowl from extra chicken. He's like, he's a dude who doesn't eat carbs and has lots of protein and it's like he's on the paleo diet, right? So it's creating this counterpoint already between him as being almost a figment of history and his eloquence and all the different things that he's interested and all that against being a guy in Brooklyn, eating a chicken-quinoa bowl with extra chicken. That's one of my favorite details in this piece right here off the bat. But also, as I was talking about the pace of the piece, is also a detail that speaks to the person being interviewed here, this super long da, da, da, da, da, da, da, of all the things that they did goes to then how the author talks about how Ahmed speaks as well.

And so here, there's a lot of talking about his behavior and using his actions to show what he's like, right? Talking to him is like sparring, like co-writing a constitution, like saving the world in an 11th-hour meeting. He didn't just say that it's a debate. He said later on that it's been honed through debating, but it's not just about debating, it's that he's talking about these huge ideals and that he talks about with an urgency that we have to fix this right now. And that's all shown just through these two last little clauses here in this sentence.

Now there's another really interesting part further down in this piece where they encounter, I'm gonna have to find it, it's a little further down, where they encounter... Okay, they're in an Uber driving to the museum. All right? Now this little bit here is just amazing, so I wanna read this part to you as well because it was just an absolutely unscripted, really interesting thing and I find the way that the author uses his details in describing this other person is really great as well.



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So it happened before this was the actor, who was Ahmed, was kind of interviewing the taxi driver about all sorts of things and he was the author of this piece who was trying to get the interview back on track. He says, “Instead, we were interrupted by something else. Beside us on the road there appeared a batter black jeep, on monster tires, with huge steer horns glued to either side of the hood. And a shark’s fin coming from the roof. And radioactivity stickers. And what seemed like a thousand headlights. And a personalized license plate that read ‘Move Away.’ And while I was thinking, LOL, New York, amirite? Back to my interview,” Ahmed was saying, ‘Pete,’ our driver’s name, which he had clearly made a point of remembering, ‘pull up next to him, and let’s see who exactly this is. Let’s have a little chat quickly.’ Pete obliged.” We pulled up, only to find that the vehicle was being driven by an Orthodox Jew.

I’m just gonna scroll down a little bit for a second so you can get back to the description. More was revealed. The man was French. He’d been in the States for five years, along with his brother. They were children’s entertainers, performers and low-key stuntmen who were in the process of making a kids’ DVD that was based somehow on this Zombie Proof jeep. In parentheses, “Their act is called ‘The Twins From France’ and they are available for bar mitzvahs.”

So this, it’s just amazing this thing that happened to them, but I think equally it’s really important to look at why this was included and how it relates in terms of journalistic detail to the bigger piece. So I just wanna scroll back up. This is the title, how he’s acted his way out of every cultural pigeonhole. And they speak a lot in this piece about how he is from a former colony, but he grew up in the UK and going to the best schools and he both is the colonizer and the colonized and about how he embodies these things and tries to figure that out.

And so when they pulled up next to the sky and when the author decided to include this in the piece, it wasn’t just because it was a weird, interesting, like really fascinating thing that happened. It’s because this depicted exactly what Riz Ahmed who was being profiled here, exactly what he’s trying to stand for, is that all of these things can exist in one place. Orthodox Jews who perform at bar mitzvahs who are from France, who drive around in zombie proof trucks, with radioactivity stickers, horns, and I think Confederate flags, okay? This is what the piece is about. So when this thing happened to them, it was a clear choice to include this here and also it’s a clear choice of what to do in this description. They have to set the description up for maximum contrast. They have to show this in a way where it seems to you that the furthest possible thing from your mind would be Orthodox Jews or twins from France or whatever.

So he sets it up with every...he just throws on every single thing that could possibly make this seem more surprising when that reveal comes in. And he does it in a way of exactly that,



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exactly of throwing more things on the pile. They are literally all sentences that begin with “... And...” He doesn’t say... He begins with a few in a row, a battered black jeep on monster tires with huge steer horns glued to either side. He doesn’t say a shark’s fin coming from the roof, radioactivity stickers, a thousand headlights and a personal license plate that read “Move Away.” The way he’s put these details in, period, “And the shark’s fin.” period, “And radioactivity stickers.” period, “And what seemed like a thousand headlights.” Even more. Period. “And a personalized license plate that read ‘Move Away.’” okay? So even the way that those details are presented is to give you that sense of movement, of motion, of and, and, and. Okay?

So I’ve got a couple other examples that aren’t as good as some of the ones that we looked at. So I’ll stop there with examples and come back over and wrap up. if you have any questions on this, drop those in the chat box. And for these people description ones that I pulled today, I tried to pull sort of just for your knowledge, a few different things and some were pieces that I had read previously, that I knew that I wanted to use when we talked about this. Like I said, some are specifically profiles of people, but also that “National Geographic” one is more of kind of a feature in which they’re doing other things. But what I really wanna say is that you have to use these everywhere. You have to use these. Any time you’re doing a narrative piece of any kind where you have to introduce characters, you should be doing it in your pitches. Any time you’re talking about somebody that you’ve interviewed, whether it’s a business owner or whatnot, as long as it serves the greater point of the piece.

And I look forward to seeing you guys next week. Bye.