

# Pamela Taylor

I don't make New Year's Resolutions – never have, doubt if I ever will. Neither have I ever been inclined to make a detailed plan for my life. Don't get me wrong – I'm not criticizing those who do. If it works for them, then it's exactly the approach they should take.

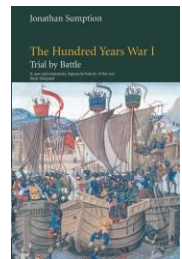
That doesn't mean I don't have broad goals and ideas of what I'd like to do. All it means is that my preference is to be open to opportunities, available to grasp something new and promising when it comes along rather than feeling locked into the outline I've already written and the precise target I've already set.

In truth, it's a personality style. And I have absolutely no doubt that it shapes my writing style . . . about which you will find more in a later section of this newsletter.

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## READING

For the last couple of months, my personal reading has all been in service of the next book. The heaviest, by far, is Volume 1 of Jonathan Sumption's epic history of The Hundred Years War. And I mean "heavy" quite literally – even the paperback weighs over two pounds! Yes, I do some of my research online. And I do like e-books for their ability to do searches. But sometimes a girl's just gotta have a book and turn the pages.



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## WRITING

Rather than talk about exactly what I'm writing at the moment, I thought it might be fun to explore the writing process. There are fundamentally two styles of writer: the plotter and the pantsier. (Yes, there's a continuum, but every continuum has to range from A to B, right?) The plotter is like the planner personality. The pantsier takes a seat-of-the-pants approach. Interestingly, two of my favorite historical fiction authors are on opposite ends of the continuum.

Ken Follett is a plotter. In all his advice-to-writers interviews that I've heard and in his BBC Maestro master class for writers, he emphasizes the importance of planning the novel from start to finish. I've even heard him say that before he ever writes the first word of the first chapter, he has a complete outline of everything that's going to happen in the book.

Bernard Cornwell, on the other hand, lets the story take its own shape. When I interviewed him for DIY MFA a couple of years ago, I asked him, "Do you plan the story arc of an entire series

from beginning to end or does one book inspire the next? And how often do your characters or the setting alter the story's trajectory during the writing process?"

Here's what he said:

*"Oh, my Lord, I wish I could plan! I envy those authors who can plot their whole story before they begin, but I just can't do it. I think it was E.L. Doctorow who said that writing a novel was like driving a car at night with feeble headlights down an unfamiliar winding country road, and you can only see as far ahead as those feeble lights allow. I find exactly the same. I start a book not knowing how it will end – indeed, I start a chapter without knowing how it will end. The story reveals itself as you write it, and for me, 95% of the work is the process of discovering the story. I know that sounds daft, but it does work. I suppose it's the subconscious? But characters always say things and do things that surprise me, and there's little choice except to go where they seem to want to go. If they don't surprise me then I suspect the writing is dull, which is the cardinal sin. That does lead to wasted time . . . you find that a choice you (they) made in Chapter Three leads nowhere by Chapter Seven and then you have to go back and change the whole thing. So how often do the characters change the story? All the time!"*

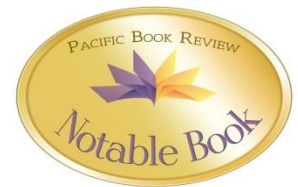
Me? I lean more toward Cornwell than Follett. And we'll talk more about that in the next issue.

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## *THE REST OF HIS DAYS*

Reviews are beginning to come in. Pacific Book Review declares it a gold-seal Notable Book and says:

*" . . . a fresh new perspective on the mystery surrounding the fate of Edward II of England . . . a potent and atmospheric plot bound to have a place in the shelves of historical fiction enthusiasts."*



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## MAGGI SAYS



Sometimes Mom cooks for us. We really like it when she does. Just last week, she made some doggie din-din for us. Doesn't that bowl of food look yummy? It's got ground beef and barley and spinach and carrots. Tay and I both think it's splendiferous. Mom says we eat it so fast we don't have time to taste it. But really, we eat so fast 'cause we hope maybe if our dishes are empty she'll give us some more.

Mom's note: *I have no idea where they get words like "splendiferous." You think they've been hanging around me too long? LOL!*

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## CONTINUING THE PREQUEL – SUBSCRIBER EXCLUSIVE

When we left off at the end of last year, young Sir Cedric had just loosed his arrow, hoping to bring down the magnificent stag in the clearing in the woods. Find out if the arrow found its mark in the [next installment here](#). If you're new to the newsletter or haven't read previous installments, you can catch up [here](#).

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## THIS MONTH'S CONTEST

Would you like the chance to name a character in my next book and get a mention in the "Acknowledgments" section?

The captain of a group of men-at-arms needs a surname, and I can't decide what to call him. No quiz this time – just a vote. I'll give you a list of period- and location-appropriate surnames to choose from. The name I use will be the one that gets the most votes. And the winner will be chosen at random from among all those who voted for that name. [Click here to enter](#).

I'll announce the character's name in the next issue of the newsletter. The winner's name too, if they give their permission.

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## EVENT CALENDAR

24 February 2024      Amelia Island Book Festival Author Expo, Fernandina Beach, FL

7-11 June 2024      SWA 2024 Writers Conference, St. Simon's Island, GA, Historical Fiction Faculty

I'm sure there'll be more events as the year goes on – just don't have the details yet. And I always enjoy meeting and chatting with readers.

For now, wishing you happy reading!

*Pamela*

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