

The tail of Pan narrans

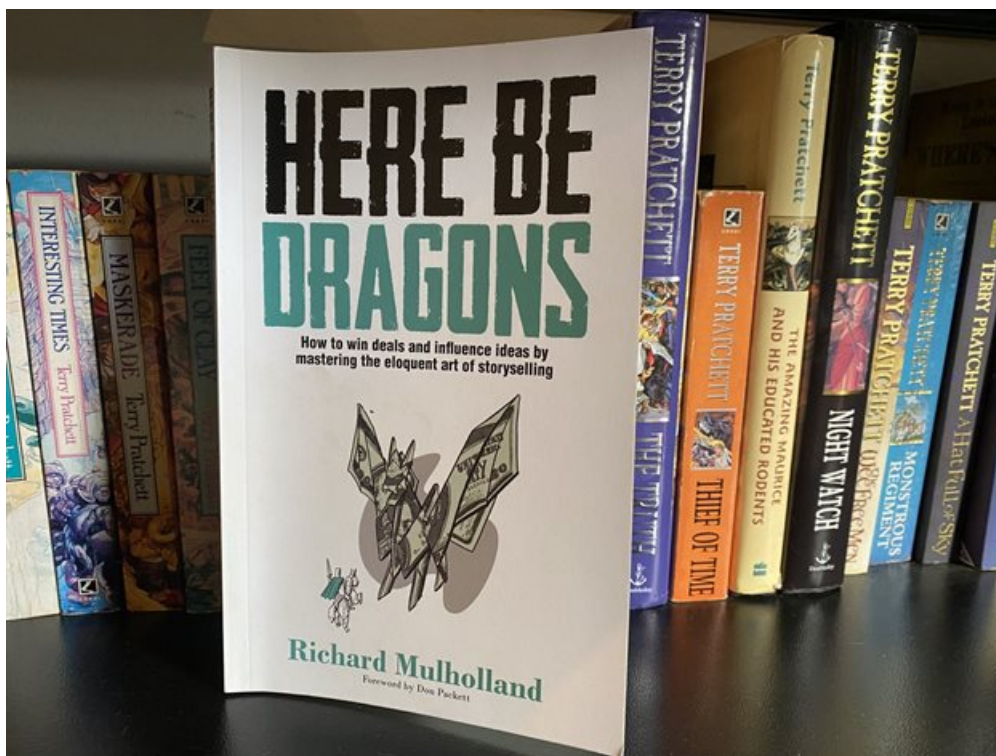
By  Bronwyn Williams

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“ Stories outperform data all the time, for all of us... It's a survival tactic, and it works. ~ Richard Mulholland ”

When Richard Mulholland asked me to review his latest book, *Here There Be Dragons*, I was delighted.

While Rich does have some questionable ideas (He prefers reading ebooks to paperbacks, for example. Extraordinary, I know!), he's also very, very good at what he does for a living: storytelling.



Here There Be Dragons is a book about using stories to sell; which is an essential skill for doing business with human beings. As my all-time favourite author Sir Terry Pratchett put it:

“ *The anthropologists got it wrong when they named our species *Homo sapiens* ('wise man'). In any case it's an arrogant and bigheaded thing to say, wisdom being one of our least evident features. In reality, we are *Pan narrans*, the storytelling chimpanzee.* ”

Our minds are primed to latch onto and respond to tails that capture the essence of the human experience and touch our hearts as well as our heads, far more readily than cold facts that merely describe it. This is why, to shamelessly quote Sir Terry again, “A lie can run round the world before the truth has got its boots on.”

It is also why a single anecdotal story can persuade us to join a revolution (or purchase a particular brand of toothpaste), while heaps of statistics leave us unmoved. As Kurt Tucholsky's fictional French diplomat said:

“ *The war, I cannot find it to be so bad! The death of one man: this is a catastrophe. Hundreds of thousands of deaths: that is a statistic!* ”

Which means, whether data is or is not the plural of anecdote, anecdote, not data is what inspires Pan narrans to action. Stories, and how they made us feel, are also what we remember after we've put down the book or walked away from the conversation.

Here There Be Dragons teaches the art of storytelling through doing just that. From real life high-stakes potato crimes with capital punishment, through to the number of CEOs named “Mike”; it's the stories that stick with us, change us, and, in turn, change the world.

ABOUT BRONWYN WILLIAMS

Futurist, economist and trend analyst. Partner at Flux Trends.

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