

Top 5 Ways to Beat Crazy-Writer Syndrome by D.V. Berkom *(originally written for Indies Unlimited)*

I've been writing full-time for a while now, and I seem to have fallen into a comfortable routine of home days (two days during the week where I do nothing but stay home and write) and away days, or days that I have other stuff I have to do that takes me away from a full day of writing. I'm still able to make my word count (usually) on those days, but I also get to go out into the real world and pretend I have a life.

At first I looked forward to those two home days, mentally rubbing my hands together in gleeful anticipation of a long, unhurried stretch of time to spend with my work in progress. Uninterrupted hours in which to concentrate on putting words to page, staring out the window and planning the next scene, completely immersing myself in the world of my characters and blowing stuff up with wild abandon.

Um, yeah. Not so much. Funny thing about spending that much time alone. You get a little whacked.

Let me amend that. Spending that much time alone in a writer's brain is a first class ticket to cray-cray town, and seriously, *not* in a good way.

I have noticed myself tossing witty bon mots at the ceramic foo dog in the hall when passing by on my way to the kitchen, as if it could hear me and might respond. A group of squirrels digging up the lawn looking for nuts? I'd talk through the screen, asking them how their day was going and offer to give them all rides to the waterfront park. Once, when caller I.D. showed a call from the local 'No on Initiative WTH', I answered just so I could have a conversation with the robot.

So, so sad.

One day, after writing a particularly complicated scene, my husband came home from work and walked in on me talking to the picture of Dorothy Parker pinned to the wall by my desk. He mistakenly assumed I was on the phone from the animation in my voice. Now he knocks.

It got me thinking. I'm certainly not the only writer in the world that experiences psychotic breaks, right? So, I decided in the spirit of helping others I'd offer a few of the ways that have worked for me to combat those inevitable days when you'd rather dash through the streets like a mad woman looking for an actual human to talk to than spend another minute alone with yourself and your manuscript.

Top 5 ways to Beat Crazy-Writer Syndrome (CWS)

- 1) Go to your local grocery store and chat up the meat guy. I guarantee he's as starved for conversation as you are and just might give you a little extra something with your free-range chicken thighs. And, he might help you figure out an intriguing way to kill that annoying character in chapter four.

- 2) When those religious people on a mission (the ones with razor-creased white shirts, bad acne, and skinny black ties) ring the doorbell invite them in to discuss the latest trend in enhanced interrogation techniques and modified ammunition. Offer tequila.
- 3) Flag down the nearest policeman and ask them what would happen if, *hypothetically*, a person used enhanced interrogation techniques on an unsuspecting visitor as *cough* research for a novel. (Note: This tactic should be reserved for extreme circumstances, as you'll end up with more time on your hands than you might like. Although, it does have the added benefit of three meals a day and TV privileges.)
- 4) Go to your nearest coffee shop and order a drink, snag a table near the front and greet everyone who walks in, engaging them in idle conversation about decapitation. The majority of customers will think you're annoying, if not flat-out bug nuts but eventually someone may take pity on you and sit down. Extra points if they're a serial killer or a hit man for a drug cartel.
- 5) Walk into the nearest FBI field office with what looks like a bomb strapped to your chest holding a dead-man's switch in order to get a good idea of what would happen to your character if she did the same thing in your work in progress. (Note: remember to smile and tell them you're a writer. Granted, a sniper will likely take you down, but if you get shot you can always use that in a book, right?)

And there you have it—my top 5 ways to combat CWS. How about you? How do you keep the crazies at bay?