

Unremembered Loss

For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss

Issue 10

June 2010

It's been a while since I took stock of where I am in the book publishing process, so this month I'm going to look back at the last 18 months as see where I've been and the try to glimpse into the future and see where I might be going. I hope it won't be too depressing and cause me to give up.

Please forward this newsletter on to your friends and sign up at <http://DouglasGClarke.com/lists/>

Douglas G. Clarke

Where I've Been

Looking back at where I've been on this journey, I have to start several years ago when I wrote an outline for a different story. I was trying out a new piece of software - Dramatica - and finished the outline for what felt like an interesting science fiction story.

In December of 2008 I found that old outline, fired up Dramatica, and developed a new outline. I soon was writing and spent many long evenings that winter writing. I stalled in the spring, but picked up steam over the summer.

At the same time I was feeling frustrated because I wasn't able to get any feed back on what I was writing. Out of that frustration I started my web site - more on that later, and then in the fall I started writing my newsletter as a way to get out of the lull I was in. By October I was in the grove again and finished the first draft on New Year's Eve 2009 - 113,000 words.

The last five months have seen me doing revisions. I had hoped to be done with my first pass through the book by the end of this month, but it looks like I will only be half way through.

Revisions

The process of revising has been a hard one for me. Perhaps it is because I'm trying to do too many things at once, or maybe it is a side effect of my dyslexia.

In this pass of revision, I'm trying to fix the grammar, improve the dialog, make sure the point of view stays fixed, make sure every chapter and scene is critical to the story, and about another dozen items on my personal checklist. The task is daunting and I think I'm get lost in the trees sometimes and have a hard time seeing the whole story.

I also know that since my first writing experiences back in grade school that I have not been one to rewrite anything. The physical and mental effort to get the words on the page the first time has always set up a mental barrier to changing anything.

I also think the way my left and right brains work together - or rather don't work together - might be an obstacle to revising. I can read something that I wrote before and I might feel like it could be better, but I have know idea what it needs.

I rewrote the first two chapters of the story after getting them critiqued - more on that later too.

In the second chapter I knew that I needed to fix the point-of-view - which jumped all over the place. As I read the story I could see the places that I need to rewrite, and didn't have any trouble, but when I tried to rewrite the parts that only need little tweaks, I couldn't bring myself to do it. I couldn't spend the time to reinvent it, so I copied one or two paragraphs at a time to a new document and then reworked them.

It was a slow process, but I think I like the results and it was probably faster than starting over. It took a lot of discipline however to delete the bits that weren't needed any more or were from the wrong point-of-view.

Flogging the Quill

One of the other writers I follow recently submitted her work to the web site - FloggingTheQuill.com. The idea is you submit the first 16 lines of you novel to the site and the web master - who is an editor - will critique them. The point is, if the first 16 lines don't cause the reader to turn the page they won't buy the book. The question is, would the editor have turned the page.

As one of my goals for the year I wanted to submit my first 16

lines. In April I finished reworking the first 16 lines and submitted them. I had to wait 5 weeks to see the results. It was a hard five weeks of waiting. I knew that my style of writing was going to be a hard sell - my first 16 lines are a journal entry - but I thought I had done a good job.

When the review final came out my heart sank. He had a couple of good critiques on the 16 lines and said he would not have turned the page. In addition to his, three other people left comments. Their comments were not as obviously correct, but still hard to read.

I had to step back and look at the comments and at my work. I had to find the place in myself that said, "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger." It took about three weeks before I had the courage to face those 16 lines and the second chapter which he also made some helpful comments about.

He suggested that I drop the whole journal entry and start with the second chapter. He may be right, but for now I have a rewritten the first chapter -16 lines - and I think are much more compelling.

At some point I'll have to get up enough courage to submit my new 16 lines and see if I fair better.

Beta Readers

About a year ago I sent out the first quarter of my story to six beta readers. It was a strange experience to say the least. Some of the readers marked up the pages with the typos and grammar problems they saw. Others asked questions like, "What image are you trying to pull up when you say orc?" I also got comments like, "not enough dialog" and "not enough action."

I was glad for the feedback but

I found that it stopped me dead in my tracks. I spent the next two months incorporating the edits and ideas into what I had already written and stopped completely on finishing the story.

When I had finished the updates, I decided that I wouldn't have any more beta readers until I had finished the first draft.

Since finishing the first draft I've had two people start reading the story. My editor - mother - has been going through the story with me chapter by chapter. Mostly we are focusing on spelling and grammar, but we talk about concepts sometimes.

The second beta reader enjoyed the story - the first 50 pages - but I had a hard time getting her feedback. She did give me one really good piece - my character voices need work. They all sound very similar to each other - and after a bit of coaxing she gave me one example. Thinking about what she, said I have to agree with her. I wanted more from her, but she didn't want to put words in my characters mouths so she didn't want to point out specific examples. I respect her for her integrity and am grateful for another way to look at what I've already written.

Character Sites

After the experience with the initial beta readers and my decision not to share the book again until the first draft was done, I needed an outlet where I could get feedback, so was born the web sites.

The web sites have been an interesting experience. I created sites for each of the main characters and started writing their stories. I really came to see the differences between the characters as they each wrote about what was important to

them.

Hector wrote about his life following God - his struggles, insights, lessons and humility. I started taking the sermons I heard in church each week and turning them into short stories of Hector's life.

Julie starting writing about the outdoors - her love for nature and the beauty she saw there. She wrote poems and sat and looked at a tree and tried to see how God was at work. It didn't take long for Julie to become my favorite character.

Annay is complex. She is much more the "girl" that Julie - carrying about what she looks like and loving to shop, but at the same time she is very intellectual and doesn't really understand what Julie see in the "wild."

Samuel is lost in his past. He loves to remember his old adventures and wishes he was young again. I haven't written very many entries for Samuel because he tells stories that are not captured in a few words.

This year I've added two more character blogs. One for Brain, Samuel 11 year old house boy, and one for a tribe of turpis who are keeping a tribal journal.

The thing about all of these web sites is that they take a lot of time and energy to write - time and energy I could be spending on the book. When I stop to think about it, I realize that what I'm doing is not really about getting published - it's about therapy.

Before I started writing this book I had spent a year writing a personal blog about what I was going through having lost Nigel. The book was the next phase of that therapy. Through the course of the book my characters had to work through many of the things I was

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going through. By writing about their struggles, I was able to deal with my own.

Later when I started doing the character blogs, I continued that self searching as I wrote about Red Beard the dwarf's willingness to face his fears to help someone else, and Julie's wondering how a gnarled old tree might be just what God had intended.

I realized that I'm writing for two reasons - I have a story to tell and I need a way to stay in contact with my emotions. If that means writing blog entries instead of making lots of progress on the book, then I guess that's just what I need to do.

Hathrae

Besides the character blogs that I've started, I've been working on a web site for the world of Hathrae. I'm now on the third version and I think this one is headed where I want it to be going.

The challenge here is two fold. First and foremost is the art. To properly do this site I need art. The web is a visual place and without the bits of eye-candy the site will never be good.

The second is the written content. Some of the content comes straight from the characters blogs, but there needs to be much more. It also needs to be in different styles. There need to be stories about people and places, not just people remembering.

The hathrae.com web site is

another potentially huge time-sink. Not only for the sake of the art and stories, but simply from the coding necessary to make it work. I've already put in lots of hours making the pages and the database work, and I've seen how it will not scale and will have to be updated later. Part of me wants to spend the time to integrate it into Wordpress so I won't have to worry about the stuff someone else has already done, but other parts warn me that it could take hundreds of hours. Right now I don't have the time.

So Hathrae is slowly building. I'm trying to get Emma to do some of the art for me and I'm thinking of asking some of the high school kids at church to help, too.

Marketing

Sometime last year I picked up a couple books on getting published. They contained lots of good ideas and I've tried to implement some of them.

I designed business cards for my book - six in fact - that contain my web site information and an introduction to book.

I came up with my catch line - remembering the unremembered.

I created a writes blog site, a book web site, and all of the character blog sites.

I got twitter and facebook accounts. However I have to admit that I still don't really get twitter.

I started a newsletter and mail list. This is the tenth monthly newsletter and I have 30 people on the mail list. The experts say

that 1,000 is the magic number. I haven't figured out how to get my web site and mail list to go viral yet, and I'm not sure what I would do if it did.

I still need to work on my bio and the one minute summary of the book. I have cuts at both but I know I can do better.

One of the things I've only started on is getting myself out there. For the last year I've been sharing my writings and stories once a month with the high school students at church. It has been a good experience and I've cried more than once while telling my tales.

But now it's time for the next step. I need to find other places I can start sharing my stories. There are lots of opportunities, and again it is courage that I must find. I'm sure that my son's teacher would welcome me into her class - 7th grade - and perhaps my daughters - 11th. I can probably arrange something through our public library. We have a local independent book store that has authors in all the time and of course we have the large book stores.

I've also thought about book fairs and conventions. My kids want me to get a booth at comic-con - maybe next year.

Another thing that I've only really been thinking about, is merchandise. As part of the woodworking merit badge I'm running for the boy scouts, I made some wooden medallions. I was trying to think of something that my characters

could wear as their symbol of God. Since my idea is that Hathrae is another solar system in our galaxy and that our God is their God, I wanted something that could be equally valid in both world. At the same time I didn't want something that was just a Christian symbol - a cross or fish.

I decided to try a flame - representing the spirit of God. I cut three out of wood and I liked the way they came out. Emma is wearing one now. She also suggested that I try wrapping it in copper or silver. If I can finalize a design I will have my first piece of merchandise to sell on the site.

I've also looked into shirts and posters. There is that art thing again. A friend of mine makes dolls and I'm thinking about having her create a set of my characters.

Contests & Games

One way to get more people to come to your site is to have contests and games. Setting up a contest can be expensive, especially if you don't have a source of income that is directly enhanced by it.

Many authors have contests and give away copies of their book or a T-shirt. Once I have some stuff for sale, I could run some quick give-a-ways.

I've thought of a few other contests that would take a bit of work but might be fun. I could have a writing contest where people could write short stories based in Hathrae. I would post the stories on the web site and the best one would win the prize. It would have the benefit of creating content for Hathrae and getting people to read about Hathrae so they can know the context for their stories.

I've thought about various kinds of hidden treasure games -

either on my web site or on something like Google Earth. These games are simple to set up, but hard to do well. They could bring in a bunch of people.

I've also thought about a flash based game - I even bought a book on writing one - but I'm not sure what I would base the game on.

Only time will tell if I have the inspiration and determination to do a game.

The Future

What's coming up is always a tough question. Here is what I see.

Finish the first pass of grammar and story edits by the middle of summer.

Do a quick pass of all of the dialog. I know that the dialog in the beginning of the story is not as good as the dialog at the end - I learned a lot writing it all and also read a couple of good books on dialog.

Revamp my checklist and go through the story scene by scene. I also need to take a pass at it while stepping back and looking at the various story arcs to make sure they all work well together.

Then there is the question about hiring one or more professional editors. Did you know there are different kinds of editors?

There is a character editor who focuses just on the characters. They make sure that the characters are three dimensional, consistent, interesting, and have a story to tell.

There is the story editor that makes sure that each story line is compelling, has the right amount of tension, is consistent, and weaves correctly with the other stories.

There is the grammar and style editor that makes sure the story follows the rules, or breaks them in a consistent way.

And lastly there is the copy editor who makes sure the words look good on the pages and that the pages flow well through the book.

How many editors will I use? I don't really know. Will I find an editor that will do both story and character at the same time? That might be better, but maybe it is better to focus on one at a time. I guess it will be a trade off between getting things done quickly and not spending lots of money.

I'm planning on putting effort into the web sites going forward. I want to build a good story base for each of the characters and the world of Hathrae.

Then there is the second book - which may be a prequel. I already have the title and the internet domain name, *Unremembered Love*. It is a story of someone who has grown up and grown away from the love of their youth, and their journey of discovering that love again.

I also have a couple science fiction stories that I want to write and have been thinking about for years.

Conclusions

If you had asked me two years ago if I would ever write a book, I would have look wishfully and said no. This has been an interesting journey for me. I have learned things about myself that have surprised me. I have explored ideas that I would not have chosen. I have found new excitement in the Bible stories I know so well.

I have connected with people and I love the feeling of excitement I get when I explain what I'm doing to them. I think I have found new sources of hope that helps me to keep going through life, and mostly I'm thankful that I can talk about my *unremembered loss* and not become overwhelmed.