

Unremembered Loss

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

Issue 61

September 2014

Character Development of the Narrator

I wanted to write something this month about Unremembered Loss. Earlier this month I ran across a thread on LinkedIn asking if there should be Narrator Development. At first I wanted to just say, “no,” but then I thought about the narrator in my novel. I wrote the forward in the book in the voice of the narrator/researcher and had him talk about how he had grown while writing the book. I commented on the thread, but it got me thinking about how I wrote the book in general.

As it stands now, the narrator has a few lines at the start of each chapter, but doesn’t really say much in his voice while telling the story. I started wondering if I was using him to the best advantage. While telling the story, I’ve worked very hard to tell each chapter from one of the characters point of view. This is good because it helps the reader keep track of what’s going on, however, there are times that it might help the reader understand the importance of

a situation to have some hindsight knowledge.

The question then is how to let the narrator speak without it disturbing the flow of story (causing the reader to lose focus) and without making the prose feel awkward. So here is my attempt to write the same scene with and without a narrator’s voice.

Looking Over His Shoulder

Brian walked down the parkway, the weight of his coin purse pulling on his belt and his thoughts. He stepped to the side to avoid a person who seem to not see him. He didn’t really mind, since today he didn’t want to be noticed. Continuing on, he dodged a woman with a boy in toe, and a man pushing a wagon. The sure tones of a vendor’s call pierced Brian’s concentration and his stomach grumbled in agreement with her assurance of the need to taste her wares.

Brian shook his head to clear it and promised his stomach that he would stop for a sample on the way back. Despite himself, Brian patted the bulge beneath his cloak and breathed a little sigh.

His pace quickened as he reached the end of the parkway along with his eyes’ scanning of the crowd. No one stood out ¹. No one looked like they might be following him or maneuvering to cut him off. In some ways that made Brian even more uncomfortable, remembering Master’s words, “It is easier to avoid the trouble you know than the one you don’t see.”

He wanted to run, but forced himself to slow down. He could see the gate, and the guards. The sight reassured him - even if he was attacked he was probably close enough that he could yell for help. He crossed that last hundred feet and stopped in the safety of the gate’s arched shadow².

The guard looked down at him, his question shown clearly on his face.

“I’m here to see the ex-checker.”

The question remained on the guard’s face.

“On business of Master Gees.”

The guard nodded, the question satisfied, and motioned for Brian to continue, which he did without hesitation.

Looking Over His Shoulder, with Narration

Brian walked down the parkway, the weight of his coin purse pulling on his belt and his thoughts. This was not his first trip through the streets of Maple Grove with coins in his purse, and on two occasions he didn't make it to his destination with his purse still filled.

He stepped to the side to avoid a person who seem to not see him. He didn't really mind, since today he didn't want to be noticed. Continuing on, he dodged a woman with a boy in toe, and a man pushing a wagon. The sure tones of a vendor's call pierced Brian's concentration and his stomach grumbled in agreement with her assurance of the need to taste her wares.

Brian shook his head to clear it and promised his stomach that he would stop for a sample on the way back. His distraction was not missed by the eyes watching him from the crowd or those following him. De-

spite himself, Brian patted the bulge beneath his cloak and breathed a little sigh.

Those stalking him quickened their pace, their information confirmed. Brian's pace quickened as he reached the end of the parkway along with his eyes' scanning of the crowd. No one stood out. No one looked like they might be following him or maneuvering to cut him off. In some ways that made Brian even more uncomfortable, remembering Master's words, "It is easier to avoid the trouble you know than the one you don't see."

He wanted to run, but forced himself to slow down. He could see the gate, and the guards. The sight reassured him - even if he was attacked he was probably close enough that he could yell for help. He crossed that last hundred feet and stopped in the safety of the gate's arched shadow.

It was with mixed feelings that I approached the same gate 50 years later. I felt the safety of its presence, the mastery of its dwarven construction, and awe of the force that had been required to cleave its top away. I can only imagine the courage it must have taken to approach the gate and the armor clad guards who secured it.

The guard looked down at him, his question shown clearly on his face. It could be noted that no ten year old had ever approached the guards before.

"I'm here to see the ex-checker."

The question remain on the guard's face.

"On business of Master Gees."

The guard nodded, the question satisfied, and motioned for Brian to continue, which he did without hesitation.

Analysis

The first version is 292 words long. The second is 430. That's 47% longer. I like the more personal feel of the second version, but I can't image allowing my story to grow by 47%. Right now its 113,000 words. If it grew by 47% is would be 166,100 words.

So what did all those words add. 1) That someone was actually following Brian. 2) That they saw is nervousness. 3) Some historical information and context.

It also added some insight into the narrator, what he thinks is important and his sense of the history in things.

Of the four things it added, the character is the part that interreges me the most.

The fact that he can empathise with the people he is writing about gives his descriptions of what they are going through hold more weight.

In looking at the narrator's comments a thought just popped into my head. What if I wrote the story even more like a historical piece by adding end notes. I could add smaller more focused comments at the end of each chapter.

This way they wouldn't interrupt the flow of the story, but still add the insight of the narrator. At 26% longer it might be a interesting approach. I added two endnotes to the original story.

Let me know what you think.

Looking Over His Shoulder, endnotes.

1. It was later learned that there were three people following Brian that day.
2. It was with mixed feelings that I approached the same gate 50 years later. I felt the safety of its presence, the mastery of its dwarven construction, and awe of the force that had been required to cleave its top away. I can only imagine the courage it must have taken to approach the gate and the armor clad guards who secured it.