

The Authors Corner

by Dutch Rhudy

Welcome to The Authors Corner.

The shortest month of the year is behind us, and we are only one week into March. Seems like winter is never going to end, but I am getting a lot of work done. Almost all of my planned early structure sketches are finished, not well enough to put on-line yet though.

Rewrites including the edits are moving right along. My developmental editor is back home and going through the long slow process of recuperating. My wife and I went to visit a couple of times, but spent most of the time in the living room with his wife to let him sleep.

From what I understand about the changes he made to the story, I should be able to carry on in like manner throughout the first novel. Then present him with the first book, hopefully near completion, when he is again able to review the story.

I previously mentioned how we decided to begin the story, by including a prologue and dedication. However, a few changes in these opening pages has taken place during editing. One of these new features was adding visitor actions in the prologue. Such as giving them something to do at the museum.

Some of the wording was changed in the opening lines, to use softer descriptions. Curator became conservator, after speaking with a person in this capacity at a real museum. We also learned exhibits are usually set up in the foyer regarding the primary topic for the week.

The original storyline quoted journals in real time, as the events were unfolding. The biggest change was moving the story setting to present day, and presenting the story as direct readings of these diaries. This added boredom, something we do not need in a novel.

My critique groups preferred the modern day setting, and we worked through several possible ways to present the story. It was only after I worked with a developmental editor, when I came up with the idea of having a history museum host the story. Everyone loved this idea, but getting it to work out in such a way it would be appealing was another matter.

I cannot count the number of rewrites I went through before we stumbled on a pleasing flow. After that I was on my own, and decided to visit our local museum several times to hear how they showcased historic events. Then my developmental editor expounded on these ideas.

Visitors to a museum love to see the original documents, even if they cannot touch them behind the glass cases. One other thing I found in areas of the local museum were buttons on the wall where a visitor can hear a short audio description.

By combining all of the above features into visitor action scenes, it greatly improved how the story opening will be presented. More importantly, features mentioned in the prologue will be added to the storyline itself, but tapering off the further along in the story.

The whole idea is to not confuse the reader who does not read the prologue. But make a prologue that is interesting to read, should they go back to it for reference. Basically, the prologue covers those things spoken of by the museum host before the actual program begins.

In keeping with the features of a real museum's standard opening, we included a dedication to the story. These two opening remarks set the stage, chapter one gives an overall summary, and chapter two is where the story begins, as told by the conservator of the primary source documents stored by the museum.

The opening went through several rewrites before we hit the right combination of speakers and events to carry the story forward. Only excerpts are quoted from the journals, and the narrator provides those boring parts most folks skip over, truncated to only a line or two.

A one sided dialogue takes place between the narrator and the museum visitors, as he interjects tidbits of history in various places during his monologue. He also addresses topics popular with current day members of the community.

When opening the story, he adds questions the townsfolk have considered for years. Tales thought only to be rumors, not believed by many, are now documented as true. Word got around town of the new Josiah Stren story opening, so the museum was packed.

Documents concerning his early life in Virginia, their families travel west, the loss of his parents, and his rescue, all found their way into the museum archives. Rediscovered, verified, and compiled to add the missing beginning history of their towns founder.

Nearly four chapters of their families trek through the eastern states in a covered wagon was condensed to only a few highlight moments, reducing this long narrative session to less than a normal length chapter.

This quickly brings the story forward, and adds greater emphasis to the serious problems they faced after crossing into the prairie, where his sister and parents died on the trail. Josiah was only ten years old at the time he was orphaned alone on the hot open prairie.

Each rewrite removes a little more unnecessary narration, tightens the storyline, focuses more on action, and draws out emotion. The story has come a long way from the first rough draft, but still has a long way to go before it can be called complete enough for another pro edit.

Respectfully submitted
Dutch Rhudy