

Writing Ruminations of Yore

22/02/25

Editorial Report of Punch the Devil ...

Recently, I sent my novel, *Punch the Devil*, to Jericho Writers for a developmental edit. A developmental edit is when a writer/editor takes a look at a manuscript and gives his two cents on how I can make it better and more marketable. I found it a very good experience, if a little pricey. But when I broke down the cost over a four-week period (the time it takes for the editor to produce a critique) it actually didn't work out too expensive. And to actually get a story in front of someone with a history of editing and publishing who wants to make my story better and sellable was a valuable endeavour.

I wrote a Ruminations a while back about how I had a lot of plates spinning with this one because I didn't know if I could even write a novel. Unfortunately, all those plates were too distracting to the overall backbone of the story. I did write the novel with the thought that I would be chopping a bunch of it, so that's why the word count was high. I believe there are a lot of scenes that will end up on the chopping block, but it's not ready for publishers.

He made some very interesting suggestions that never occurred to me. One was that I had spotlighted the wrong character. Leon Jones was my main and Jose Hernandez was my second. But Jose has the more powerful emotional arc, so why was I spotlighting Leon? Very good point! And he suggested I could get a more powerful story by gender swapping Jose for Juanita. Also, good point! He said that might help to bring in female readers, as well. Women tend to read more than men and quite enjoy cozying up with crime stories. And another standout in the 20-page critique was that I should chop my antagonist's POV altogether, making him a villain creeping around in the shadows. If we don't know what's going on in his head, he will be scarier. This one was tough to swallow, but the more I think about it, the more I'm coming around. One other was to add Felix, Jose's son, as a lead POV to show initiation into the cult.

These were all very good suggestions. However, that all entails a significant rewrite. I'm not opposed to it; in fact I intend to do it. It all makes sense. It would definitely make the story stronger and more focused. It is something, though, that won't see the light of day for a while. I'm cranking out a few short stories right now and have another book idea, so unless I want to double-down on how much I write throughout the week, PTD will be in limbo for the foreseeable future. Not dead, not forgotten. Shelved, though.

I'll let you know. ...

04/01/25: (From 'Published')

Punch The Devil

Crime - Novel ~> Jericho Writers

A couple quick rejections from agents stoked my anxiety. When my short stories get rejected by every magazine I turf it and move on to the next story. 117,000 words is difficult to turf. So, I've

sent my complete manuscript to a professional editing company who will provide me with some grammar tips, as well as structure and character advice. They even go so far as to comment on the marketability of the story. As you might imagine, I had to pay for this service. It will be nice to hear a thorough breakdown instead of a form rejection. Four weeks away.

08/09/24: (From 'Completed')

Punch the Devil ~ 2nd Draft

The second draft is polished and ready for publishers' eyes. This polish ended up taking me a total of four days. All I had to do was fix a word here, remove a word there, make sure the prose is clear. The novel reads pretty good---especially the last 30 pages or so. I'm quite proud of how exciting that climax reads.

20/07/24

Completing the 1st Draft of Star Treasure ...

There was something about my second novel that felt very overwhelming compared to my first. While the differences between my rough draft and first draft of *Punch the Devil* felt like it needed more of a language correction than a substance correction, *Star Treasure* felt like there was more substance to correct. Since I didn't have much of a plan for *Star Treasure*, I decided to create mysteries for myself to figure out later throughout the story. With *Punch the Devil*, I had a bunch of plates spinning that I figured could be handed off along the way. The plate spinning worked much better than the mystery generator. The plates of the first novel were relayed to the next chapters to become new parts of the story, while the random mysteries of the second novel kept getting cut during the first drafting. I've still retained interesting mysteries here and there, completing them to my satisfaction but maybe I just inserted too many.

Star Treasure needed some serious help, is what I'm saying. Between rough to first draft, 10,000 words were added. When I first saw that number, I thought I really dropped a steamer, but then I looked at the numbers between my first novel's revisions, which I tend to think of as a more successful creation. *Punch the Devil* received an additional 8,000 words between drafts. I felt much better about *Star Treasure*'s numbers after seeing that. Perhaps if I created a proper outline (which I still find at best daunting, at worst impossible) I wouldn't need revisions in the many thousands of words. A lot of those numbers were early insertions of ideas that present themselves in the later chapters to achieve a more cohesive story, so if I knew how it all ended ahead of time perhaps that revision number would be lower. Then again, I had a plan for *Punch the Devil*'s ending that I threw out the window and in so doing achieved a better story.

What makes novel writing so fun for me is that I don't know what's going to happen. I'm worried that if I map it all out ahead of time, the reader may find it predictable. However, if my imagination is just out on a stroll through the park, who knows what we will see? Once again, when I put some real thought into the events of the new novel it almost seemed as though I had

placed the breadcrumbs of the plot right there for Future Clint to gobble up. Today, as a matter of fact, I said aloud: "It was all right there!" in regard to giving a two-dimensional bad guy a little extra life and giving the whole story a little better ending as a result. Maybe this isn't the best way to write a novel, but maybe it's the best way for me to write a novel.

I'll let you know. ...

12/07/24

The First Day of Reckoning ...

Wow. It has been 3 years since I finished *Punch the Devil*. I mean, I knew that but actually seeing that date on my Published page really drove it home.

I polished my first 3 chapters for PTD again today, polished my query letter and synopsis, and finally sent the query to a publisher. I have no idea what to expect. With a short story, you send the whole story and wait anywhere from 2 days to six months to hear whether it is or is not acceptable to be printed in a magazine. You cannot send it anywhere else as they do not want to be in a bidding war with another magazine, or so I assume. With my novel query ... I guess they could say no right away. Or even worse, they could want to see my synopsis and writing sample and then reject my story. That would definitely be worse. Glimmer of hope, shattered like a dropped mug that doesn't break on the first hop.

I am determined to remain positive, though. If I wasn't positive that one day I could get published, then what would be the point of continuing to try? I even told them flat out that I have no experience submitting novels, but if I don't hear back within a month, I will be moving on. It wasn't an ultimatum, just gave us both a date to consider. I also said it a little more gently than that.

Hard Case Crime is the publication where I sent PTD. I am a huge admirer of their publication and if any one was going to publish a crime novel that may offend people, it would be the publication whose business it is to resurrect lost crime novels from the heyday of crime writing fiction. Now, I don't know if you've heard, but crime fiction from around the '50s wasn't exactly P.C. Neither am I. While I was doing my polish, I decided to turn on the Grammar Check in Word to make sure I was on the up-and-up. I had a few choice words to say to my computer machine when it suggested I use gender neutral terms. And, when it suggested the word 'ghetto' in 'ghettoblaster' might be problematic, the monitor almost took a direct flight out my office window. But a quick death is not what it deserves.

My anxiety is at the highest possible level with this pitch. I sat on PTD for 3 years mostly so I could have another novel ready if I found an agent, but it took me a further 3ish years to write PTD before that. I can crank out a short story in a couple weeks, get rejected, then write another. This is different. I spent a long time with these characters in which we got into a lot of trouble and came out with some knowledge and a black eye or two. Rejecting PTD would be like watching someone piss on my best friend's shoelace.

I'll let you know. ...

Update: Query was rejected, same day. I have now sent a pitch to an agent.

22/06/24

On Completion of my Second Novel ...

I didn't quite know how to feel about this novel.

My goal was always one and the same--write something that tween Clint would find interesting and engaging. I needed something fast, imaginative, and peppered with ideas for a developing mind and developing body. It was also meant to be an experiment in my writing style. With my last novel, I decided to write in a way I had never written before, while this one goes back to how I had always written in my past endeavours--but long form this time. It was science fiction and it was single perspective. I think it was mostly the single perspective that threw me off.

When I get an idea for a story, it plays out in my mind like a movie. When you think of a movie, very rarely are they shackled to one perspective. You follow your main character for a bit, then maybe you follow your supporting character or even the antagonist for a spell. When I was writing three perspectives for Punch the Devil, I was able to daydream in a different direction while my main character simmered in his present situation. I was able to provide a cliffhanger to the reader in Perspective One, leaving them in suspense for a few pages while we went over to see what Perspective Two was doing before dropping a cliffhanger off that, too. But with Star Treasure, I had no time to dream up what the next scene would be--it had to be cooked up right away. Oh sure, I tried to insert suspense, but it felt like it worked much better with a three POV cycle. Without having this cycle, there came a time when I was concerned that the story wasn't going well.

Fortunately, it reads better than I had feared.

At a certain point in the creation of the story, I realized that the second act felt so different than the first that they could be two independent stories. I then went out of my way to end the second act as its own story and create a self-contained third, which, of course, ended all three. So, does that mean I wrote one book or three? I will let someone else decide that. I have a few ideas to make the first act seem more like its own story that I will start plugging away at as I plug a few plot holes I noticed here and there in the rest of it.

By the novel's conclusion, I realized I actually did have a lot of fun writing this and, upon reread, I realized it turned out better than my POV frustration let me believe. Hopefully, I will find a publisher who agrees.

I'll let you know. ...

Star Treasure - SF - Novel: (From 'Upcoming')

First Draft: 20/07/24 ~ First draft complete! I removed the last 1,500 words, replaced them with a further 1,500 bringing the total to 127,689 @ 305 pages. The first three chapters need some TLC, in fact the whole novel could use another pass, but I feel it is all how it should be now.

Current Editing Status: 16/07/24 ~ The last couple days I have been at it; a little here, a little more there. The big difference between this novel's edit and the last has been plot holes. I can't just plug the holes, I have to carve the plot around the holes like I'm lathing a table leg. I still think I need to rewrite those last two chapters--they feel rushed. 304 pages @ 127,621 words. I have also written a synopsis and query letter to get a head start on my pitch.

Current Editing Status: 08/07/24 ~ A few more tweaks. I think I need to let this one simmer for a bit. 303 pages @ 126,878. 08/07/24 ~ A few more tweaks. I think I need to let this one simmer for a bit. 303 pages @ 126,878.

Current Editing Status: 06/07/24 ~ Added another chapter to Act One, tweaked here and there, but still have some work to do. Those last 2 chapters need to be reworked as well. New total: 301 pages @ 126,213.

Current Editing Status: 22/06/24 ~ 296 pages edited, at 123,782 words. The initial polish is done! I will be correcting a few plot holes either today or next week, then back onto PTD.

Current Editing Status: 25/05/24 ~ 22 pages have been tweaked. 224 of 293 pages edited, thus far. I must maintain 20 pages of editing per week to meet my birthday deadline.

Words for Star Treasure: 17/02/24 ~ Star Treasure is complete and being edited! 118,185 Words, 284 pages.

Current Progress: 17/02/24 ~ 2,500 Words Written (Star Treasure is done!)

Words for Star Treasure Written in 2024: 9,100; 2023: 39,400; In 2022: 42,100; In 2021: 27,600

Date Started: 19/06/21

Adjusted Goal: 3 - 40,000 word novellas [Part One: 33,000 / Part Two: 73,000 / Part Three: 118,185]

Perceived Goal: 100,000 Words

A young adult, sci-fi adventure!

Vicious Vizz, a spaceship repairman, is rescued by a strange ship that everyone wants to know more about. But finding that ship again sends Vizz on the adventure of a lifetime.

01/01/24

Fireworks for the New Year ...

I didn't quite get to where I wanted to in 2023. Every New Year I make a promise to myself that I will get published. I'm still trying to make good on that promise. It will happen at some point, I

am still quite convinced. Writing every weekend is bringing that carrot closer to my lips--I can almost taste it now! I skipped a few writing weekends here and there, but I hammered out my first short story in years, and I'm currently throwing it around to magazines. All of my attention has been toward novel creation, when my attention isn't broken and I'm not feeling lethargic, that is. Writing a novel is a lot of fun for me, since I can just continue on with the same story to my heart's content and get my characters in all sorts of trouble that I never saw coming. My goal of getting *Star Treasure* done before my birthday is still quite feasible, fortunately.

I meant to have the novel written before the year ended, much like what happened with *Punch the Devil*, but it wasn't meant to be. I don't expect to be writing it into February, though, as the end is nigh. I will be giving it a single polish (albeit a heavy cut of polish) before I go back to take another look at *PTD*. From there, I will tweak *PTD*'s submission package and look for either an agent or a publisher shortly before The Big 4-0. It will be nice to have something in the submission rotation again. I feel like I'm actually accomplishing something by sending out the "Otherworldly" short story, even if that accomplishment is just the receipt of rejection letters. You miss every shot you don't take, right?

I think I will still call this year a win for my writing. Being this close to having another novel in my back pocket will give me a sharp boost of confidence when I start talking with publishers and agents. Most writers go to a publisher (or agent) with an idea, then promise a book. I will be going to them with two books and promising them more. This year will be a very exciting, but nerve wracking, experience in my journey to authorship. Wish me luck!

I'll let you know. ...

16/09/23

The "Otherworldly" Short Story ...

I've taken a break from my novel today for a very specific reason. Despite my last entry of *Ruminations*, I'm actually starting to have some fun with the *Star Treasure* novel. I've got some ideas for the beginnings of the wrap up, and still have a long way to go before it's finished. That being said, I fully intend to have everything on paper by the end of 2023, with the intention of having a sendable copy done well before my birthday. Before my birthday, I intend to do another polish on *PTD* and finally send that to agents or publishers. Today, however, was the start of a new short story.

I entered a contest called "Writers of the Future" a while back but got no traction from it. I allowed their newsletters to keep coming, but decided it was no longer worth my time. Until last week, that is, when they warned me that there was only two weeks left to submit a story. That part wasn't what caught my attention, though. No, what caught my attention was in the postscript, which said: "This is a good quarter to enter ;)". What did that mean, exactly? Why did that postscript not appear in any of the other newsletters they sent me about their other quarters? This interesting little bit of information came from an email from the curator of the competition, who I have had one-on-one communications with before. Yes, it was addressed to all prior

entrants of the competition, but why was that postscript there? Did it have something to do with their 40th anniversary?

So now I had been offered a challenge: to take the postscript seriously and cook up a sci-fi within two weeks. I plucked a few ideas off my imagination tree and started thinking about whether these fruits had seeds--if they could grow into something interesting. That was last Sunday. Today, I wrote 4,000 words in a sitting. A full story with a beginning, middle and end. It turned out very well, or so I currently imagine. It is now printed and on my desk, waiting for a review and polish. Did the stars align? Could this be the one? Is it possible for me to write and polish a short story in two weeks when it used to take months? Perhaps my pencil is super sharp from my weekly novel writing. Whatever the case may be, my juices are flowing, and I intend to enter the contest for the second time to see if I can get anywhere. I'll let you know.

Update: Although rejected from Writers of the Future, I am now tossing it around the submission circuit.

03/09/22

Halfway Through My Second Novel . . .

The first Act started out so good, but then something fell apart. It may have something to do with the change of setting and scenarios that I've shifted into with Act Two. In Act One, everything happened on a space station, or a spaceship, or an asteroid; there were space battles and fun characters and a sense of direction. But all that was initially meant to be a short preamble to setup where I am now--a planet-based adventure story. My aliens and creatures are unusual, there is a lot of action involved and short experiences of different cultures, but it somehow seems I left the tracks laid by Act One, so much so that my new plan is to make sure Acts One, Two and Three have separate beginnings, middles and ends in case I want to split this story into three distinct novellas. So I'm sitting here wondering why, and I think I may know what happened.

For this second novel, tentatively titled *Star Treasure* (title doesn't work anymore as I have diverged too far from the concept) I wanted to try something completely different than what I had done with *Punch the Devil*--that is, I wanted to stick to one POV character. I now believe this was a mistake. I have a lot of background and personal interest in my other characters, but since I have shackled myself to Vizz, I don't get to know what they are up to, or thinking, or anything that might be of interest. I have even been playing with the idea of going back once I'm finished to insert interludes for my antagonist throughout the narrative. This POV problem might be the only problem I'm having with this story, but deep down, I think there might be something else going on that I don't necessarily want to admit to.

When I wrote *Punch the Devil*, I had one rule: no rules. It was going to be violent, gritty, obscene, vulgar, and anything else I wanted to do with it just because it was more of an experiment into whether or not I could actually complete a novel. Now that I've proven to myself that I can, I've gone back into my preferred genre, writing PG material for a teenage audience. I've restrained my jokes, neglected (for the most part) sexuality, and tried to make it family

friendly. Is this why I'm not enjoying the experience as much as I enjoyed *PTD*? I remember writing lines for *PTD* that made me laugh in front of my computer screen. I remember writing passages that made me cringe and think to myself: "this will never be able to see the light of day". I'm not getting those grand ol' feelings with *Star Treasure*. Perhaps my best work is destined to be demented crime novels. I think I'd be cool with that, actually. But I won't give up on *Star Treasure*. I have an interesting Act Three brewing in my brain that wasn't there before. Much like *PTD*, the story is revealing itself to me one page at a time. Once I wrapped *PTD*, it felt like everything I had written beforehand fit in perfectly. I expect the same outcome with *Star Treasure*. Godspeed, Clint, Godspeed.

08/05/21

On Writing the Punch the Devil Novel . . .

I have finished my first novel to some level of success. I started out just wanting to see if I could possibly do it. Despite what my legend states, a crime novel should be anywhere between 80,000 and 100,000 words. Most science fiction tends to be even longer than that. The longest story I've ever written was less than 10,000, so how the hell could I possibly generate something so massive? I had no idea. So I just started out spinning as many plates as I possibly could and just put words on the page.

About a third of the way through, I realized I had living, breathing characters and writing for them was not only fun, it was easy. All I had to do was give them a setting and a scenario and let them tell me how they would handle it. I have never had so much fun writing in my life. It was exhilarating. I only wrote on Saturdays, so all week long I could think about how I would handle the weekend's writing task. I did start thinking to myself, considering, whether I should have just started out writing novels instead of receiving dozens (if not hundreds) of rejection notices on my short form. But there were lessons learned from the multitudes of rejections, and learning to create tight plots while jamming in interesting characters into a 5,000-word count was an interesting challenge.

At about the two-thirds point of writing my novel, I realized I was getting close to the end, so I started reconsidering what I had already written, seeing if there was any way to incorporate those initial spinning plates into the back half of the narrative. And things couldn't have fallen into place more perfectly. I fancy myself as something of a problem solver, the nature of my autobody work is problem solving, after all, but there was this part of me that just had to ask: "Are you problem solving, or is your subconscious leaving bread crumbs from the same cookie for you to gather up later?" I'm still not sure. But the end result was, I think, cohesive. It almost felt like I had it all planned out. The reason I didn't plan it out was because this was an experiment, and it needed to bring back the fun of writing to me. Some of my short stories would take a full year before I thought they were submittable as I worried about all the minutia of

proper writing and story structure. But even then, they weren't published. I just needed to go back to the old days when I just wrote for the sake of writing.

By the end of the novel, there is a distinct character journey for the two leads, and an appropriate and exciting climax. Every character I inserted into the narrative had his or her own flair, every setting was dark, dingy, destitute and unnerving, and there is an overarching entanglement of thoughts on mental health and bullying. It is quite vulgar, violent and upsetting at times, but it also has genuine and even funny moments. I am very proud of myself. I sure hope it sells.

I'll let you know. . . .

(From 'About')

June 19th, 2021. My peer reviews are taking a while to come in, which is no big deal as I knew they would. The pitch is written, the synopsis is written, I'm doing a little bit of editing on the first three chapters (as those are the ones reviewers are going to be looking at the most), but I'm getting a little antsy and don't want to stop my weekend writing escapades. So, after scribbling out a little background information on the universe in which it's set last weekend, ... I've started writing another novel! The working title is *Star Treasure*. With this one, I want it to be completely different from the previous novel. A young adult, science fiction, coming-of-age story is very different than the no-holds-barred, '70s-set crime novel that was *Punch the Devil*. I also intend to stay on only one POV, instead of the three I used for PTD.

The first draft of my first novel is complete, ahead of schedule on **April 24th, 2021**. My goals going forward are to create a submission package, hopefully hear back from a couple peer editors, then start my next novel.

December 26th, 2020 is the day I finished writing my novel, *Punch the Devil*. By my calculations, if I edit 10 pages per week, I will have a rough draft by my birthday.

Sometime in the winter of 2018, I started my first novel based upon characters I created in the short story "Won't Die Old". After about a year, I'm only a third of the way through, but I figure if I write 1,500 words per week, I will have it licked before 2021. In 2021 I intend to do all the editing on that novel, create a pitch, then start my next novel. I still intend to write a movie-length screenplay at some point, but my new interest is now novel-length. I'm having a lot of fun writing for the sake of writing, instead of trying to make every word fit into a set limit.

**There were Writing Ruminations before this last entry, but, fortunately, I did not archive them. From my recollection, a few of them really exemplified my frustration, and essentially kept me*

*from moving my writing forward. Now, I write just for me, not to be published. Perhaps when I die, someone will go through my stories and self-publish them so something of myself still exists.**

The Pinnacle Personality Pyramid:

Perseverance

Positivity - Placidity

Always be full of P!!

-Clint A. Hall