
English [course]
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Unit One

Shitty First Drafts (and other awkward things)

As a dedicated fantasy writer, I must say that Shitty First Drafts really struck a chord with me. The first word of title itself immediately grabbed my attention. Though I do not swear myself, I have to admit sometimes a curse word, as crude as it may be to my sensitive self, is just the right way to catch the reader's attention. Something like this also happened when I read the "Origin of Bitch". From that moment, I knew I was in for a very interesting read. Unlike the myriad other article I have been forced to read, this one got straight down to business, no filler, fluff, or wasted sentences here.

This was an author who spoke with a red-hot passion, and was not afraid to hurt and few feelings to get across what she wanted to say. Maybe it was just a writer thing, but as I read I could picture the author and I chatting face-to-face. In my vision she was looking over the latest of my short stories and giving me the hard constructive criticism I needed to turn this little drabble into something worthwhile for the readers. My vision-self took what she said to me In stride, for despite the scathing tone I knew she only had my best interests at heart. Being a writer meant getting criticism, and lots of it. The red-hot tone she used only made me more determined to prove myself to her. Though I was but a whelp-of-a-writer in her eyes, I was undoubtedly going to make her admit I was a worthwhile writer by the time she read my revised story. After all whelps do not stay whelps forever. Nor was this shabby (you won't catch me saying *that* nasty word) first draft going to stay a shabby first draft.

Even though this entire critique was but a vision in my mind, I knew somewhere inside that there was a kernel or truth I would take away from our 'session' that would invariably make me a better writer. After all the short story the author was reviewing in my vision was real - I have it on file on my PC, right with the seven or other short stories I have concocted in these last few months. They are mostly test drives for me to better get to know my characters and test out a few ideas that I have been itching to try. If the subject of our discussion was real, than that was one bit truth right there. The session would last as long as I was reading "Shitty First Draft", so I eagerly plunged forward into the rest of the article while my vision went onward.

Something interesting happened was I kept reading the article; the vision ended only to replay the next instant. This vision played In my mind several times, each reverie flowing effortlessly into the next like a river on its way to the open sea. However with each run through the vision changed a little. Sometimes she was badgering me about a phrase that didn't come out right, but I know about reveries, as a fantasy writer I have them very often, *dangerously* often (or least a non-writer would think that). When you spend much or your time contemplating other worlds where dragons fly through burning

skies and werecats inhabit vast savannahs, a reverie is the perfect place to let these fantastical ideas experience a moment of reality. I imagine more than I write, much more, for crafting a novel is about 90% contemplation, and about 10% writing. Despite the thick novels I plan to create (bestsellers I hope), most of the work goes on my head. The author seemed to really understand this, coming from experience herself.

Especially when she came to the part about those little voices of doubt in our head that can make writing our worst nightmare. To her, writing was both an author's greatest passion and biggest chore. Personally, I would no more call my passion a chore than swear in my thesis paper. However she did have a point. As I read over this section the vision changed and suddenly I found myself confronted with biggest demons from my writing past; bland characters, a plot with no sense, and worst of all - the giant plot holes that reduced my writing to nothing but a hunk of swish cheese. Tasteless characters, nonsensical plot, and plot holes were my Achilles heel when it came to fantasy writing; I had faced the many times in my past endeavors, and although experience has helped diminish them, they were far from gone.

When the fear of committing one of Three Sins of Writing came to mind, in the past I would immediately fall into 'scathing critique mood' and mentally beat the stuffing out of my writing. I would tell myself to put my laptop down and never pick it up again. Here are a few sample of those oh-so helpful piece of advise I would offer myself: ("you see that plot hole, its more like a plot chasm!" or the more generic "What were you thinking when you wrote that?" and last but not least "Ugh, sometimes I wonder if your writing a novel or comic!"). Usually I would set aside whatever I happened to working on and wait for tirade to stop, but in my vision things happened quite a bit differently. The author took my mental critique by the collar and beat her to a little pulp. I was flabbergasted, but she just smiled and told me that if you want to get anything written you've got to shut up that critique while your are writing. Let the critique complain and howl all she wants, but only when the writing is done. Be a writer first, and critique second. If you try and somehow do both at the same time nothing gets done, it was as simple as that.

I finished the article soon after, and as I predicted, the vision ended the moment my eyes left the last sentence. I sat there for a minute or two trying to piece it back together in my mind, but like when I wake up from a dream I could only keep track of the gist of it. In the end I walked away with this; shabby first drafts are shabby, but If we swallow our pride (or critique in my case) and drudge through it in, when you finally get to that final draft you will be amazed at how far you've come. I learned that, and that nothing is funnier that watching your inner-critique get the thrashing of a lifetime!