

## — How To Write A Book: From Rough Draft To Finished Manuscript —

At the time of writing this, I am, if all goes according to schedule, just two weeks away from finishing the manuscript of my second novel: a zombie apocalypse science fiction horror novel, which I am titling *Eventually Demons Catch Up*.

Now, finishing my first manuscript—a high fantasy novel titled, *IV: Aurora and Luna*—that feat took almost seven years. I started in the late Spring of 2015, and I only just finished the book in the early Spring of 2022.

Contrasting this, *Eventually Demons Catch Up* took less than two years. I started working on *EDCU* in the Spring of 2022 (shortly after I finished *IV: Aurora and Luna*) and, as mentioned, I should be finished *EDCU* by January 1st, 2024 (which, coincidentally, is also the day this essay will be released to my Patreon).

I should mention: while working on both projects, I took breaks, long breaks. With *IV: Aurora and Luna*, partially because it was my very first manuscript, and partially because it is intended to be the first instalment in a larger high-fantasy series, *The Sun and Moon Saga*, I often got stuck. Sometimes, during these moments, I would persevere and work through said obstacle. And sometimes, I would take several months off.

In other words: *IV: Aurora and Luna* really taught me *how* to write. During my seven years of *IV: Aurora and Luna*, I wasn't drafting the entire time. Of course, that is how the story got started. But after my initial draft, I took the manuscript through about ten rounds of editing—no joke! These weren't superficial edits to merely pretty the prose; every time I edited, I was basically *rewriting* the book. I rewrote, and rewrote, and *rewrote*—until I was satisfied—until I knew that I had done the idea justice.

By the time I started working on *EDCU*, I was fortunate enough to already understand my writing process, which made everything much simpler.

Now, I should mention: *Eventually Demons Catch Up* is a much shorter manuscript, currently sitting at 65,910 words; while *IV: Aurora and Luna* currently sits at 173,323 words. *EDCU* also has a significantly smaller cast of characters than *IV: Aurora and Luna*.

And *EDCU* has considerably less world-building. The only other-worldly aspects are the zombies; everything else is mundane. *IV: Aurora and Luna*, on the other hand, is set in a completely different galaxy: Prevaedo—also known as ‘the Magical Way’.

Furthermore, *The Sun and Moon Saga* contains several different kinds of magic, as well as several different religions and spiritual paths. There are magical races like elves and fairies, and dragons and mermaids—each of which possess a different mythology and folklore. All this world-building is a lot to consider; it is a lot to keep *consistent*.

Of course, I am a huge geek and I fucking *adore* creating my fantasy world! Still, writing *Eventually Demons Catch Up* was a nice break from all that complexity. It was nice to tell a simpler story, one with a short word count and a small cast of characters, and one that will *not* be part of a series. (That said, I am beyond ready to write more fantasy, and drafting a portal fantasy novel for children is one of my goals for 2024!)

So, yes, *Eventually Demons Catch Up* is a much simpler story than *IV: Aurora and Luna*. And, because of that, writing *EDCU* was always going to take less time.

Still, I feel knowing and understanding my writing process—knowing the different phases one of my books must go through before I consider it ‘complete’—that was, and still is, invaluable. And this knowledge was part of why I was able to write *Eventually Demons Catch Up* in less than two years—or, if you subtract all the breaks, nine months!

So, what *is* my process for writing a novel? In this essay, I will take you through each step, from drafting, to revising, to editing, to *finishing*.

I should mention: this essay will assume that you already have an idea for said novel—because addressing the topic of how to come up with a good idea could, and most likely will, be an essay in and of itself!

Now, without further ado, on to step one...

### **Step One: Draft**

Drafting is, in some ways, the easiest part of writing a book—*and*, in some ways, it is the hardest part. This is the phase during which many writers struggle with ‘writer’s block’. Personally, I

do not believe that this alleged ‘writer’s block’ exists. However, I must acknowledge the force that is *resistance*.

In June of 2023, I challenged myself to draft thirty short stories in thirty days. Obviously, this was as much of a challenge in facing resistance, as it was a challenge in writing. When the challenge was over, I wrote an essay about my experience, and in the essay, I reflected on resistance...

“Us creatives, of all mediums, are in a never-ending battle against resistance. Resistance is our enemy. When we sit down to write, to paint, to play the guitar, to bake that vegan chocolate cake, much of the time, we will not feel like doing so.

“Now, resistance can show up in a variety of ways... Sometimes it shows up as disinterest, or a lack of inspiration. Sometimes it shows up as chronic busy-ness, being ‘too busy’ to create. Sometimes it shows up as laziness. Sometimes, crippling depression. And sometimes it shows up as what it actually is: *fear*.

“Underneath the games the ego likes to play, resistance to being creative is always fear, fear of doing good, meaningful work. When we commit to showing up for our art consistently—for some this means everyday, and for some this means once a week—we are slaying the dragon of resistance, and we are facing our fear.”

The key to succeeding in this challenge of writing a short story every day for thirty days was to *simply write*. When drafting both *IV: Aurora and Luna* and *Eventually Demons Catch Up*, it was just as crucial that I simply got the words down. In fact, anytime I am drafting *anything*, even this essay, I tell myself that the first draft is allowed to suck. Basically, I give myself permission to write a bad first draft, because doing so is freeing.

This principle applies, regardless of whether you are an ‘outliner’ or a ‘discovery writer’, by the way. I know, based on the previous paragraphs, it may seem as though I have a bias towards discovery writing, but, actually, I typically prefer to outline my work. However, even when you outline your work, writing is a messy process. It always will be a messy process. Writing is a matter of throwing paint at the wall and seeing what sticks.

The key to drafting is to *keep going!* Instead of getting stuck figuring out just how I want to word something, my priority with a first draft is to get a loose sketch of all my ideas: in the

case of fiction, all my plot points—or, in the case of non-fiction, all the ideas I want to communicate. Obviously, any issues with the content or the prose will be addressed later. (More on that in steps two and three!) However, at this point in the process, I try to silence my inner critic and inner editor, and, instead, channel my inner *artist*, and simply allow the words to flow.

If I am inspired, drafting is fun and playful. And, if I am able to internalize this notion that it is okay to write a bad first draft, it can even be easy. However, if I am *not* inspired, if my creative well has run dry, then drafting can be quite challenging.

On those days, I like to write longhand. I find physically writing in a tangible notebook to be very helpful for getting into the flow of my work. I also like writing first thing in the morning, as, typically, this is when I am the most creative and sharp. But what about you? Are you more of a night owl?

Regardless, you have to find a way to get those words down. I repeat: *you have to find a way to get those words down*. The book will not write itself! It doesn't matter if you write on paper, or in Pages document, or with an old typewriter, or in your iPhone notes. Nor does it matter if you write at morning, noon or night. Experiment and see what works best for you, and then optimize your schedule accordingly.

## **Step Two: Revise**

In college, I had a Political Science professor who, when giving us advice on writing papers, said something along the lines of, “Write like a poet... and then butcher it with a murderous axe.” I love this message, and, to this day, I hear my old prof saying this whenever I am in the throes of a project.

Particularly when I am *revising* my work—which is step two in my writing process. Step one is all about letting your inner artist play, which is both beautiful and necessary. However, step two—revision—requires you to look at your work with a critical eye. This is when I highlight problems in the manuscript and solve them.

When I finished my first—and very *rough*—draft of *IV: Aurora and Luna*, many of the people in my life were surprised that I did not immediately try to get it published. They would ask me, “When are you publishing your book?”, and, feeling frustrated with myself and my

creative process, I would answer, “Once it’s edited.” My at-the-time boyfriend’s father advised me, “Don’t edit your own book. *Hire* an editor. It is very hard to proofread your own work.”

Now, his advice is true: proofreading your own work is challenging, as you are unlikely to catch your own errors. (Side note: this is why, as I grow my writing business, one of my priorities is to hire an editor. Having a trained set of eyes look at each piece will be invaluable.)

However, what my aforementioned boyfriend’s father failed to understand was this: at this point in the conception of *IV: Aurora and Luna*, I was not doing superficial edits to catch grammatical errors; I was doing deep developmental edits. I was editing, not so much the prose, but the *content* of the book; not how I wrote something, but *what* I wrote. Actually, in a sense, I was still drafting.

A deep developmental edit is quintessential to my writing process—yes, even when I have outlined my work. Sure, having a solid outline to draft from usually makes revision simpler. Regardless, revision is paramount to the quality of my work.

And even though, when revising, I am less free-flowing than I am while drafting, I actually find revision to be just as, if not more, creative than drafting.

When people ask me how many manuscripts I have written, it feels like a bit of a lie answering ‘Two’, because, when writing *IV: Aurora and Luna*, I revised that manuscript over and over again. Essentially, writing *IV: Aurora and Luna* was like writing ten books. And, honestly, I probably could have written ten books comparable to *Eventually Demons Catch Up* with the time and energy *IV: Aurora and Luna* took.

Maybe it seems silly: reworking the same idea for nearly seven years. And, yes, even though, with each round of revision, I was getting closer and closer to my goal, in the moment, I did often feel as though I was failing, or somehow falling behind.

Honestly though, this process of highlighting problems in the story and then ironing them out, *that* is really what transformed *IV: Aurora and Luna* from a very rough draft to a finished manuscript, and into a piece of work I am genuinely proud of. The story needed that time to develop; the first draft is almost unrecognizable from what it is now.

And because it is intended as being the first instalment in a larger series, a larger *high fantasy* series, I had to carefully craft New-Camelot, my fantasy world. I had to build a solid

foundation with the world-building because, once the first book was done, I would be writing the rest of the series in that world. (Warning: a common trap us fantasy writers fall into is spending too much time on world-building and not enough time actually writing. So, when world-building, do so with purpose. Ask yourself if taking an afternoon to draw a map is really going to help you tell your story, or if it's just procrastination in disguise!)

By the time I started writing *Eventually Demons Catch Up*, I understood this revision phase to be a crucial part of my process. I saw it, not as a failure, but as a stepping stone to my success. And I planned for it. Just as I spent three months drafting, I spent three months—January 2023 through March 2023—revising. During these months, just as I did with *IV: Aurora and Luna*, I worked on the story, itself.

Specifically, I wrote in subplots, including a backstory that sets the foundation for the novel. And I worked on the dynamics between the characters. These were the elements missing upon completing my first draft. I also tied up the loose ends of the story, fixing any plot holes I had identified.

You see, as stressed in step one, drafting is about pushing passed resistance and just getting shit down. When drafting, anytime I come across a potential problem, I tell myself that ‘editing-Melody’ can fix it—and then, when revising, I do. Revision is about playing with what you’ve already written, taking what you like and embellishing those things, and, of course, fixing what’s *not* working. Or getting rid of those things altogether. Seriously, if it will improve your book, do not be afraid to delete a whole chapter!

Essentially, when revising your book, you are developing its *content*. At this point in the writing process, I try not to get too bogged down in the prose. Sure, if I have an idea for an edit, I will go ahead and implement it. And if I notice a technical issue, I will fix it. But I do keep myself focused on the big picture. At the end of your revision, you should have a manuscript where the content is solid—*that* is when your prose is ready for editing.

### **Step Three: Edit**

Once all the developmental edits are complete, it is time to tackle the prose. At this point in my creative process, I read through my manuscript, and, essentially, I question the purpose of every

sentence. What is the job of this sentence, and is it performing said job effectively? Am I adequately communicating what it is I need to communicate?

In both of my manuscripts, I have noticed two habits: I have a tendency to *underwrite* sensory detail, while I also have a tendency to *overwrite* whatever is going on in the viewpoint character's psyche. As a once-straight-A-psychology-student-now-armchair-psychologist, the latter does not surprise me.

So, yes, a thorough edit of *IV: Aurora and Luna* required me to remove paragraphs upon paragraphs of Aurora ruminating, and then replace said paragraphs with sensory description, allowing the reader to, not just know Aurora's psyche, but experience the world of New-Camelot in all its magic and wonder.

I also found this to be the case with *Eventually Demons Catch Up*. No, I didn't allow Casey to ruminate nearly as much as I did Aurora. (With each project, I learn!) However, much of Casey's rumination revolves around her backstory, and I realized it would be much better story-telling if I *hinted* at this backstory, rather than making it explicit right from chapter one. So, like *IV: Aurora and Luna*, I removed a *lot* of sentences from *Eventually Demons Catch Up*, and doing so truly improved the manuscript.

This is really what editing is: asking myself what it is I am communicating and whether or not I am communicating effectively, and then deleting the sentences that just clutter up the message.

And, honestly, on top of this, probably *rewriting* the remaining sentences. Robert Graves said, 'There is no such thing as good writing, only good rewriting,' and I firmly believe this to be true. Sure, as I practise my craft, I get better at stringing words together. But, like developmental editing, a thorough edit of the prose is quintessential to my writing process.

With each paragraph, once I have ensured that my writing effectively communicates with the reader, I then read through the paragraph very, *very* slowly. Actually, I get my computer to read me the paragraph aloud. I find hearing the work to be a crucial step in the editing process, as it ensures that my prose reads well.

You could say that editing is simply technical and logical, but I find it to be creative in its own right. And, quite the opposite of drafting, if I feel uninspired, I find editing to be easy

enough to get into the flow of. In a sense, when editing a piece of work, there is less pressure, as I am not required to come up with something from scratch.

On the other hand, there is simultaneously *more* pressure. While I certainly never attain this, in this phase, I am aiming for perfection. Once again, *I never attain this!* Every single time I read through an old piece of work, I see things I want to change, things I would write differently now. This is just the cost of getting better at something. Still, with each and every piece, I do my damned best.

Once I feel the work is ‘finished’, I then read through the entire thing, slowly and carefully. Probably a few times. With *IV: Aurora and Luna*, once more, I had my computer read me the entire novel aloud, and, along the way, I made any final tweaks I deemed necessary.

Then I put a PDF of my manuscript on my iPad, and I sat on my couch and read the novel in the Kindle app, as though it was just another e-book. However, this time through, if I wanted to change something, I had to *really* feel the change was necessary; because, in order to make an edit, I would have to get up off my couch, log onto my computer, open up the Pages document, find that point in the story, make the change, save it as a PDF again, transfer the new document to my iPad, go back to my couch, open up the new PDF, find where I was in the story, and then get back into the flow of reading... Holy fuck! It was exhausting just writing that!

But, at this stage, having this obstacle in the way of making an edit is a very good thing. Because, while I really do want each piece to be as good as it can be, in my eight (plus) years of writing, I have learned that, at a certain point, I need to trust that I have done all I can, and dub my piece ‘finished’.

Of course, my inner-entrepreneur wrote that last paragraph. As an artist, I do *not* feel ‘finished’ with *IV: Aurora and Luna*—and, honestly, I don’t think I ever will. In a sense, I will always be writing that book, in my psyche, in my spirit. Maybe this will be the case with every book I write.

Regardless, if I want to realize my dream of becoming a published author—with *physical* books on the shelves of readers—then I have to get comfortable with the idea of my books being



‘finished’. No book will ever be perfect, but I can do my damned best to ensure I do right by each story.

Sincerely,

MD Luna