Fog Town: Exploring the Novel-Writing Process

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Fog Town: Exploring the Novel-Writing Process

Spencer de Vries
Advised by Dr. Julie Dugger

Tuesday, December 7th @ 2pm in Old Main 330

FOR DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS, PLEASE EMAIL HONORS@WWU.EDU
Background

- Linguistics major, Spanish minor
- “The Haunted House,” 4th grade
- Always having a project
- Fog Town
The neighbor’s porch light

The neighbor’s porch light is green. I try to shut my eyes and ignore it but it’s one of those lights that bleeds through your eyelids like they’re tissue paper. So I turn on my other side, but it’s lighting up my wall, getting brighter and brighter behind my eyelids. And I close the curtains and put my head under a cushion and throw the covers over me but the neighbor’s porch light is greener than green and it’s peeling back the sheets, or maybe those are my eyelids, but it doesn’t matter anymore because it’s all I can see and all I can hear and there’s nothing but green getting louder and louder. And louder. Until I can manage to get myself out of that room. Away from that light that cuts through the night.

So I switch my room with the guest room. I walk to other direction to the bus stop. The green light never disappears, but it scampers away to hide, content to lurk somewhere almost beyond the edges of my conscious mind. Somewhere I can’t quite see, but can never stop feeling. Because even those nights, in the new room, I can still feel the green light’s glow reaching its fingers around my door, slowly creaking it open to sneak in. I feel foolish to be so perturbed by a simple light, but it isn’t something I can control. On those nights that it shines brightly, I am paralyzed, green ropes tying my limbs to the bed.
Backstory & Outlining
Background & Outlining
Drafting
Revising

Options

- Change the death
- Change F.O.’s feelings
- Add something else to lighten the tone

Solution: Cheshire
Revising: A Before and After Comparison

Before revision

The next day, I had brunch with Nora. I told James I’d be in a couple hours late because I was meeting with a researcher for a story on this fall’s whale watching season. Which was technically true. Nora was a researcher and she did study whales, she just also happened to be my best friend from college who I hadn’t seen in years. Minor detail.

I spotted her sitting at a table outside as I walked up to the restaurant. I waved to get her attention. She waved back and I realized she was sitting with someone. He had dark hair and skin, but the brightest shirt I had maybe ever seen. It was white with a rainbow of polka dots on it and from the small portion of his legs I could see, they matched the color scheme.

“F.O.!” she exclaimed, jumping up to give me a hug. “It’s so good to see you!”

So we weren’t going to talk about our last conversation. Got it.

I was running out of breath from her hug, but other than that, it was actually good to see her too. I studied her face, noticing the little bits of change that had appeared on it to remind me of how long it had been. A bit of eye shadow, more fullness in her cheeks, a second piercing in her ears, all indicators of my absence in her life. I looked away, to her companion.

After revision

The next day, I had brunch with Nora.

“F.O.!” she exclaimed when she spotted me, jumping up to give me a hug. “It’s so good to see you, it’s been ages, I’ve just been so excited to catch up, I can’t believe we let it get to be so long without talking, I mean, I know we talked for a second to plan this, but you know, we haven’t talked talked in forever!”

She was running out of breath from her run-on sentence and I was running out of breath from her hug, but it was good to see her too. I studied her face, noticing little changes that reminded me of how long it had been. A bit of eye shadow, more fullness in her cheeks, a second piercing in her ears, all indicators of my absence from her life.
The Synopsis

When his friend Chiaki disappears, Cheshire tries to find out what happened and clues point him towards lighthouse keeper Simon. While at the lighthouse to ask Simon questions, Cheshire meets F.O., whose dad died in a nearby shipwreck. A storm traps them on the lighthouse island and Simon lets them stay in the lighthouse for shelter, although they are suspicious of him.

After making it back to the mainland, F.O. discovers her dad’s logbook from the crash is missing. She looks for clues on the day he died. She is also interviewed by a local reporter after a crash. Cheshire tells his girlfriend Nora his suspicions about Simon, and Chiaki’s sister Mei reveals the disappearance was faked and Simon was in on it.

After being out of the house for a day, F.O. discovers the logbook has gone missing. F.O. confronts her neighbor Jude, believing he stole the logbook but he convinces her otherwise. She means him and uncle Adaline and Peter as she leaves. Mei tells Cheshire that Chiaki has actually now disappeared and asks for his help. They find an abandoned car in the woods that Mei identifies as Chiaki’s.

Cheshire, Mei, Nora, and F.O. all congregate at Nora’s house to figure out what’s going on. F.O. investigates her mother to see if she took the logbook, but finds nothing. The next day, she snoops around the neighbor’s house, but Jude catches her as she discovers strange sets of robes in his mom’s closet. Jude explains his suspicions about this group that his mom’s are a part of that is run by Adaline and Peter.

Cheshire notices the logbook in another reporter’s office when he goes to him for help and waits for an opportunity to steal it. He then leaves it at F.O.’s house. On his way home, he is kidnapped and taken to an underground cell next to Chiaki. When F.O. returns home, she finds the logbook on her bed.

F.O., Nora, and Mei are unable to locate Cheshire, but Mei has the idea to look for the imprint of what F.O.’s dad had written on the torn out page on the next page and it reveals a description of Adaline and Peter, leading them to realize they’re linked to the disappearances. They decide they’re going to need more help and they bring in Simon and Jude.

Nora, Jude, and Simon start attending Adaline and Peter’s gatherings to infiltrate the group. F.O. and Mei realize all the disappearances took place before full moons and somewhere near tunnels and decide they must be moving people underground. They try to map out the tunnels as best as they can.

The next full moon is that night and they decide they need to act fast. Mei and F.O. enter the tunnels to find Cheshire and Chiaki while Simon and Nora head to the group meeting and Jude goes to confront his parents. F.O. and Mei find Cheshire and Chiaki and are able to break them out. But, when their escape is discovered, their way in is closed off and they have to find another way out.

Simon and Nora believe they are being taken to a special ceremony, but it turns out they’ve been figured out and are being taken to be sacrificed. The others manage to find their way out right into the very same sacrificial ceremony, interrupting it. Adaline attempts to finish the sacrifice of Nora, but F.O. intervenes, being gravely wounded herself. Jude and his parents show up. In the ensuing struggle between the cult leaders and everyone else, Adaline is killed, causing the cult members to flee and the others to rush F.O. to the hospital.

Cheshire collects evidence of the cult’s activities and sends it to the authorities to get the cult shut down. F.O. spends a short while recovering in the hospital and then is sent back to her mother’s house.
Final Thoughts and Takeaways

- Drafting is the most important step
- Write what feels right
- Deadlines and schedules
- Utilize tools available and created
Future Directions

Write more!
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Not a single night here passes without the fog. Sometimes it settles in softly and slowly, like a wary cat watching for unusual activity on the highway that runs through town. Other times, it’s everywhere so suddenly it would be frightening if it weren’t so gentle. Most nights, it happens while you’re not paying attention, but every night, like the town is tucking itself in, the fog is here. And after a while, it starts to become hard to sleep without it.

On the nights that the fog takes a little longer to roll in, the air has a sort of tension. There’s an electricity that comes from the anxious eyes of everyone waiting, fingers pulling the slats of the blinds an inch apart to peer through. You don’t have to see or hear another living soul to know they’re still awake. You can feel it in prickles on your skin and the pit of your stomach. Maybe it’s something about the way the streetlights shine when there’s nothing between you and them. Maybe it’s how there’s nothing to muffle the silence of nobody snoring. It could even be the moon. There’s something unnerving about the way it dangles in the sky, asking you why it hasn’t fallen to Earth—and what you could possibly do if it decided to. So, the town waits to sleep until the fog arrives. That way, they’ll be cushioned if the moon falls in the night.

Tonight, the fog made an early bed as I sat on my mother’s porch, staring at the only illuminated house on the street. Its porch light was a sickly shade of green that reverberated in my head like a dissonant chord, but the windows glowed with a warm yellow light. Their curtains were drawn, except for a sliver showing the inner workings of the place.

I could see the corner of a young-looking man’s face. He looked to be talking to someone behind the drapes, but occasionally, he would glance out the window. It felt like he was looking in my eyes but there was no way he could see me where I sat in the darkness. Still, he kept doing it.

When I arrived earlier that day, two women had come out of the house to greet me. One was tall and blond, wearing a full-length green gown as if she was about to attend a red carpet. The other was short and her hair was just beginning to gray, streaks of ash painted among the browns.

The taller one spoke first, “Hi darling. I’m Evelyn. This is Greta”

I recognized those names; these were two of the neighbors my mom liked. Or maybe disliked? Definitely one of the two.


Before I had even finished speaking, Greta was wrapping me in a claustrophobic hug and patting the back of my head in what she must have thought was a comforting way.

“We know. I’m so sorry, your dad was a lovely man. He used to come over for tea. You know, you’re older than you were in the photos he showed us. What are you now, twenty-five, twenty-six? Are you still living in Chicago? How are you holding up?”

I was glad I was so cocooned by her hug that I didn’t have to fake a grateful expression. I tuned out her words until it sounded like she was done and croaked out a thanks through the fragment of my windpipe that was not being crushed by her collarbones.
“We’re here if you need anything,” she said, finally releasing me and standing beside Evelyn again.

“We live just there,” Evelyn added, nodding towards their house.

“Thanks. I should probably get to unpacking.”

“Are you moving in?” Greta asked. “It would be so lovely to have you around, you’re the spitting image of your father. It’s like you stole his nose right off his face.”

My polite smile faltered. People had always compared our noses, but I wished she hadn’t said anything. I wasn’t going to be able to see my own nose anymore without thinking about his death. Water rushing, him all alone—nope, this was not the time.

“Not moving in, just staying for a bit. I’m mainly here for my mom.”

“Of course. You should come over sometime, we can share stories about Walter. We’d love to get to know you a little better.”

“Yeah, maybe,” I said as noncommittally as possible. I thanked them and made my exit before they could corner me for longer.

But I saw neither of them in the house now, just this man. As I watched, he stood. This was new. He moved behind the curtains for a moment, then appeared again, pressing his nose to the glass and putting his hands around his eyes to block out the light from inside.

Instinctively, I flung myself back in the chair and slunk down into my coat, pulling the hood over my face. He was definitely looking at something, but whether it was me or not, I couldn’t say. Now that I had hidden myself away, I was afraid to come back out. I sat there, so focused on holding myself still that I lost track of time. Had it been a few seconds? Minutes? How long did I need to stay like this anyway?

Slowly, I pulled back just enough of the hood to let me get a glimpse.

The house was dark.

My heartbeat started to pick up again. Had he left the house? I stuck my head out completely to search the street for movement, but saw nothing, which didn’t make me feel better. I fumbled my keys around in my pocket until I had one between each finger and then slid with my back to the wall all the way to the front door.

Despite my rush, I tried to close it gently to not wake my mother, but that turned out to be unnecessary. She was sitting at the bench seat in the kitchen, awake and sipping tea. She had gone to bed before I went out to the porch and she was usually the type of person that couldn’t be woken even by someone vacuuming nails in the bed next to her, so something was amiss.