

Alas, for Non-Amrin:

Writing High-Fantasy from a STEM background

To Write a Novel

“I do not think that you can be changing the end of a song or a story like that, as though it were quite separate from the rest. I think the end of a story is part of it from the beginning.”
— Rosemary Sutcliff

Four years ago I started filling in a notebook. Inside are sloppily written paragraphs about places, people, languages and stories, and little one liners that I can't even read anymore. This notebook is now battered and rather-welld used. From those pages, the beginning of my novel was born, which has the working title of *Alas, for Non-Amrin*. When the opportunity arose to apply for the VKURA award, I thought it would be marvelous to pick up the project and try to make a true book out of it. Thanks to the generous and patient help of my supervisor, I am now one step closer to completing my book. I am exceedingly grateful to have had the opportunity to hone my skills this summer.



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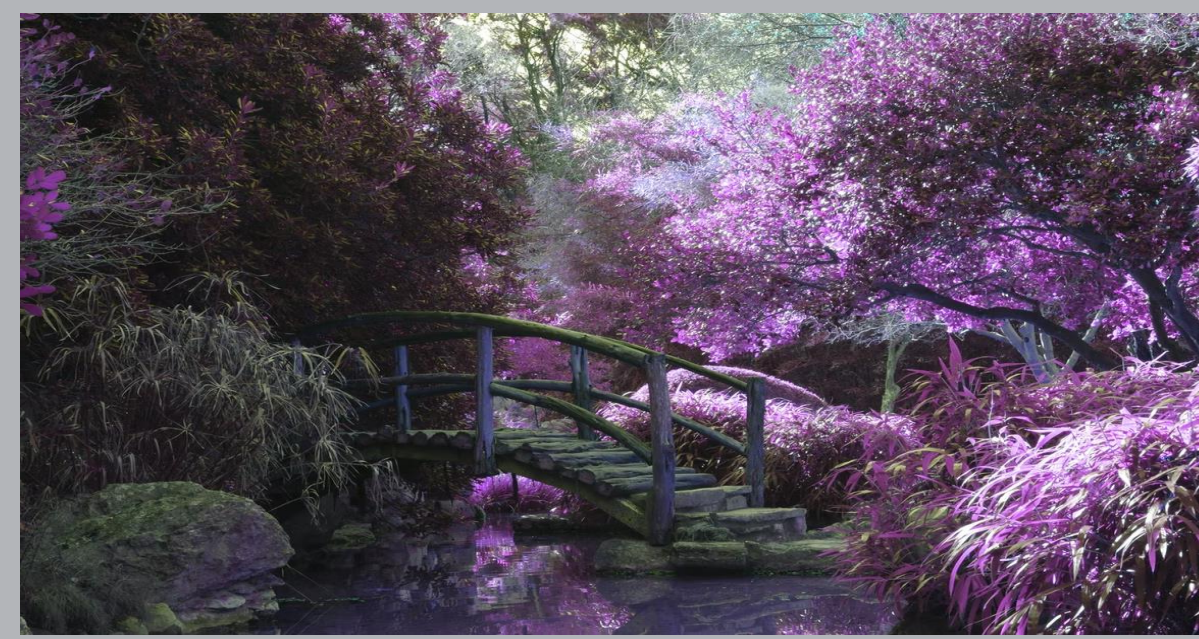
The Magic of *Alas, for Non-Amrin*

“He took a deep breath and pulled a south-west wind from the sky as well as a sharp northern one. Not winds, ren.”
— Savannah Dam

A large part of fantasy is the magic, whether it be hard, soft, elemental or fairy dust. In my own writing, I tend towards harder magic-systems with firmly laid out rules that stray towards a scientific approach. The magic of *Alas, for Non-Amrin*, follows this trend. Below is an excerpt from a book within my novel that lays out some of the groundwork of my system.

The Four Quarters of Man:

The practising of merging is highly uncommon in Eregard. Associated with the Anuwin, ancient beings who died long ago, all the art was believed to be cursed. That being said, suspected practitioners are the Asir, using the Quarter of the Spirit, and the Deraeths, using the Quarter of the Body.



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Four Quarters of Man:

Body – Spirit – Mind – Soul

The Quarter of the Body:

This is the quarter of all living things and fuels time moving forward. Those who are rooted in this quarter describe seeing aurlines (gossamer trails of green) that connect to anything that is alive. Supposedly these aurlines have little matter and can be easily walked through. Traditional uses of this quarter include: healing, and manipulation of decay. It is suspected that these phenomenon are achieved by moving life force around using the aurlines.

The Quarter of the Spirit:

This is the quarter of consciousness and emotion. Those who are rooted in this quarter are able to see, and manipulate, ren, the pieces of non-living spirit that float over from Sangriel through Rifts. Ren are described as colourful winds that vary in shape and size. This matter can be used to increase physical strength, and agility, or act as easily shape-able matter. It is unknown whether practitioners can influence a human spirit or not.

The Quarter of the Mind:

This is the quarter of thought. There have been spectral reports of mortal users and few immortal ones. It was noted that those rooted in this quarter could create powerful glamours that altered the perception of reality for those nearby. How substantial these glamours were was not mentioned, nor if they were the only manifestation of power. A suspected user is Persaphenid, a spirit who often spoke to Asir in the early days.

The Quarter of the Soul:

This quarter cannot be accessed by mortals, no matter the attempts, and is completely uncharted.

Book Recommendations:

“But in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.”
— C.S. Lewis

Reading has always been a large part of my writing journey. I believe it to be an integral aspect of the art and that the better books one reads, the better their writing becomes.

- The Lord of the Rings – J.R.R Tolkien
- Dune – Frank Herbert
- Howl's Moving Castle – Diana Wynne Jones
- The Way of Kings – Brandon Sanderson
- The Chronicles of Narnia – C. S Lewis
- Out of the Silent Plant – C. S Lewis
- Pride and Prejudice – Jane Austen
- Ender's Game – Orson Scott Card
- The Brother's Lionheart – Astrid Lindgren
- The Golden Key – George Macdonald
- The Eagle of the Ninth – Rosemary Sutcliff



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What is High-Fantasy?

“Elend: I kind of lost track of time...
Breeze: For two hours?
Elend: There were books involved.”
— Brandon Sanderson

High-fantasy was a term first used by Lloyd Alexander in 1971, in his essay titled “High Fantasy and Heroic Romance.” Another name for this sub-genre of fantasy is epic-fantasy and includes books whose setting is entirely in a foreign, fictional world with its own unique rules and idiosyncrasies. Classic examples of high-fantasy are Lloyd Alexander's *The Chronicles of Prydain*, and J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.



By KELLERCS on pixabay
<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/fantasy-sun-see-dragon-flying-4032001/>

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The Process of Writing a Novel

“When you grow up to be an author and write books, you'll think you're making the books up, but they'll all really be true, somewhere.”
— Diana Wynne Jones

There are many ways to approach writing a novel. Some authors spend years creating precise frameworks for their story (J.R.R Tolkien), while others prefer to simply write and then smooth out the details later (Ellen Raskin). I've found that a combination of these two approaches has worked best for me, with the initial story and draft written without detailed thought before moving to a more structured layout for subsequent editing. Below is a timeline of my writing process for *Alas, for Non-Amrin*, including the projected path I believe I will follow.



Brewing Pot of Ideas



Start the story



Restart the story



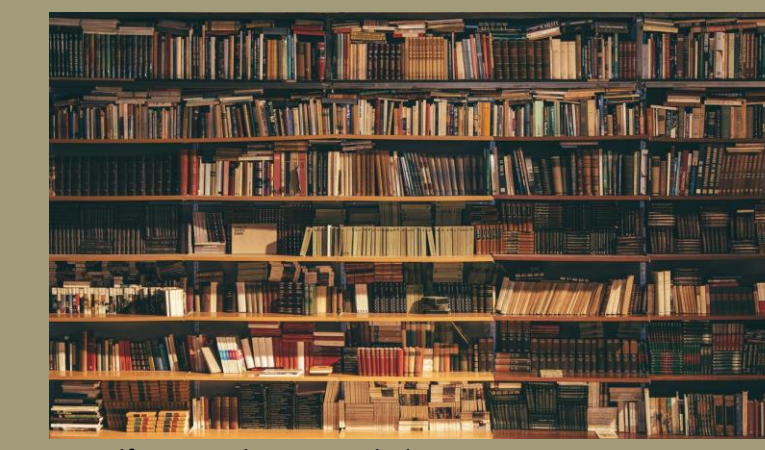
First Draft is completed



Detailed outline is written



Second Draft is completed



Drafts 3 - 99 are completed



Full read through and edit



Looking into publication

Part 1:

The genesis of my novel was in a small story I was calling, *My Lady*. It was a novella heavily influenced by Tolkien and Rowling. From this story came the character of Lienarr.

Part 2:

The official first draft was written on my 1942 Underwood typewriter. The main focus of my internship was taking this draft and turning it into an actual, systematic story with a chapter-by-chapter outline.

Part 3:

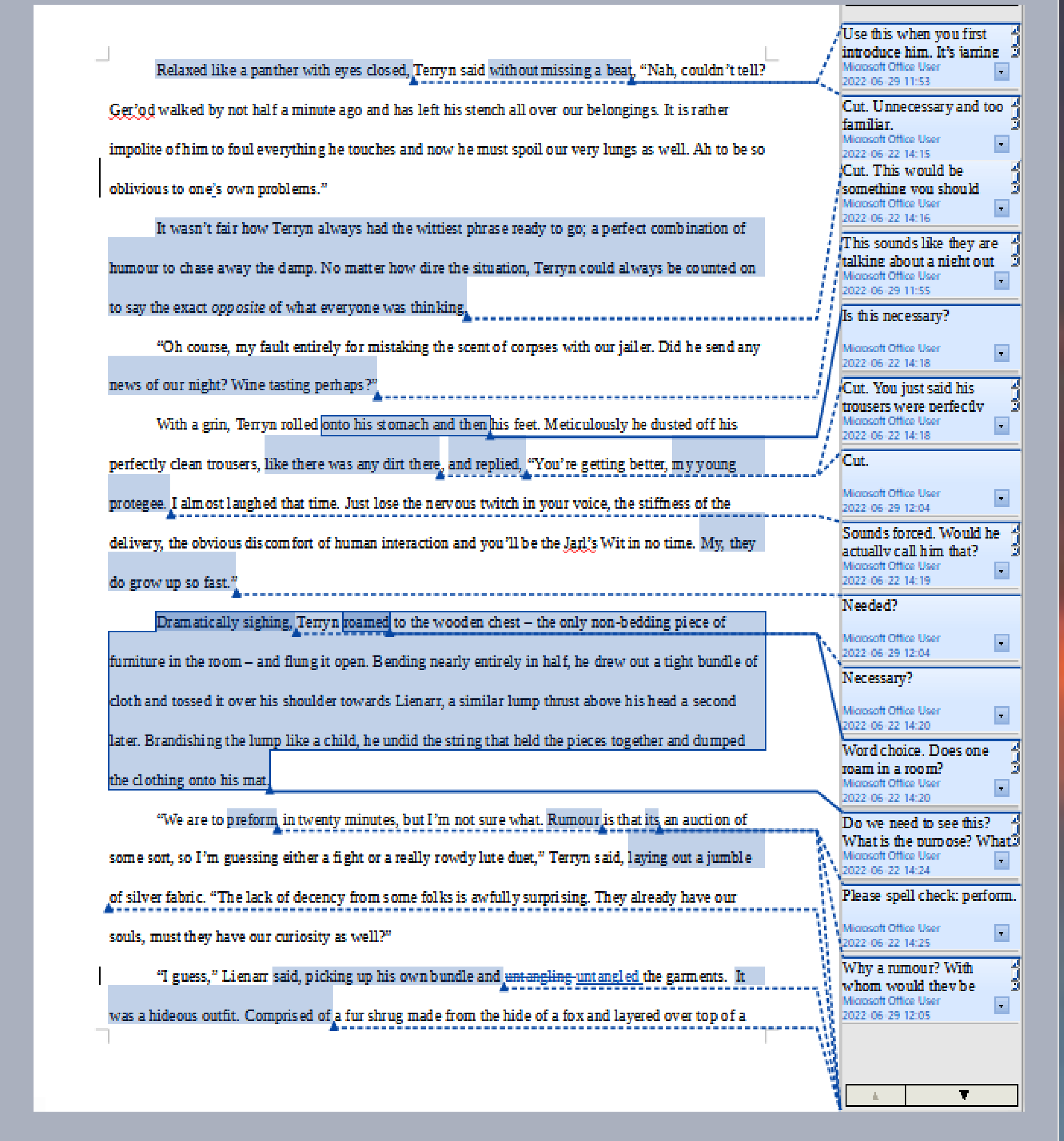
I plan on writing at least three more drafts. This procedure keeps me from becoming overwhelmed at the prospect of fixing every error all at once. I hope to work with an editor to finalize the book before approaching a publisher.

“Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children that dragons can be killed.”
— G. K. Chesterton

Editing

“A good novel tells us the truth about its hero; but a bad novel tells us the truth about its author.”
— G.K. Chesterton

Early in my writing endeavours I was told that your favourite bits of prose are often the exact ones that need to be cut or rewritten. Below is a page from the first chapter of my book that my supervisor graciously edited. As you can see, I still have a lot to learn. Initially, it was quite overwhelming to work through the edits, but after I looked over the finished product, I was happier with my work.



Savannah Dam, Department of Physics and Astronomy, August 2022

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