

June 4, 2016

Dear Friends in fiction—

Since it's been well over a year, I figured I'd better send out another Novel Update and let folks know what's going on with UPON THIS ROCK. Otherwise you may imagine that I have sputtered to a halt and quit. I haven't quit. Still sawing away at it every day.

Today's headline is — Book 1 is 99% done.

It's being copyedited right now, and I will give it another critical pass, but essentially it's in the can.

Since my last update I have outlined and synopsisized the entire story. Then I chopped the story arc into bite-sized pieces. I, who swore never to attempt another series, find that I have five books in this one.

When you keep in mind that the standard SF book is 120K words (about 336 pages), Books 1 and 5 will be longish at about 140K words, and the three middle books will be shortish at about 100K words.

I even have some working sub-titles:

BOOK 1—FIRST CONTACT
BOOK 2—A LITTLE NUDGE
BOOK 3—CONSIDER PIPNONIA
BOOK 4—THE BIG BUMP
BOOK 5—OUR TOWNISH

Naturally, as my characters come to life (a glorious but vexatious process), they can and do change the story, so nothing beyond Book 1 is set in stone.

As it happened, a tertiary character in Book 1 was a favorite among my beta readers. So she gets a promotion in Book 2 to secondary character. Whole scenes are added for her, story threads are taken apart and rewoven, subtle foreshadowings are inserted in already completed chapters. It never ends.

Fun Facts: The entire Book 1 takes place in December 2012 (and chronicles the year our reality diverges from the timeline of the book). The entire Book 2 takes place in January 2013.

In the last Update I thought the series was going to be a trilogy, and I offered a totally inadequate “dust-jacket” synopsis of it. Now, that I've done a comprehensive outline and synopsis, I'll take a stab at a more refined blurb, though still inadequate.

UPON THIS ROCK

The largest national park in the U.S. is located in the southeast corner of the state of Alaska. In the heart of this 20,000 square-mile tract of federally protected wilderness lies McHardy, a ghost town from the copper mining days of the early 20th century. A single gravel road, sixty miles long, connects McHardy and its few dozen residents to the state highway system and the world.

One night in December, 2012, a UFO makes an emergency landing near the remote enclave of McHardy. Only two locals witness the event: the patriarch of a large fundamentalist Christian family that has come to Alaska to await the Apocalypse and a young backcountry NPS ranger spending his first winter in Alaska.

Poppy Prophecy and Ranger Minder stand on opposite sides of almost every issue, from the efficacy of prayer to the management and use of public lands. Worse, Jace has fallen in love with one of Prophecy's many daughters, the innocent and lovely Deuteronomy.

Poppy Prophecy arrives at the UFO landing site and finds what appears to him to be a ten-foot-long glass herald's trumpet from the throne room of Heaven. He takes it home to his mountain keep, an abandoned copper mine at Stubborn Mountain outside McHardy, where he and his family are preparing to ride out the seven years of the coming Tribulation.

Ranger Minder tries to confiscate the artifact from the Prophecies in the name of science and the park service, but fails.

The trumpet soon disintegrates in the Prophecy keep. It leaves behind a tiny golden orb and what appears to be an angel of the Lord. Once a magnificent and proud seraph, Angel Martha has been cut down by the sins of Man. She has fumbled the golden orb, which she claims to be the key to the bottomless pit of Hell. If the key is not returned to Heaven, the prophecies in the Book of Revelation cannot be fulfilled. She begs Poppy Prophecy to help her send up a flare that will be seen in Heaven to summon a host of angels to save the key from Satan and restore God's plan for salvation.

Ranger Minder, when he makes contact with the golden orb, does not see an angel at all but rather a cute Hollywood E.T. that only wants to return to its mothership and begs him to help it "phone home." Minder eagerly agrees to help, but phoning home turns out to be more costly than he could possibly imagine.

Who exactly is the patriarch and ranger attempting to summon: an angelic rescue party? A friendly mothership? Or something entirely different?

With diligence and luck, I'll have a better dust jacket by the time it goes to press. Which brings me to some business decisions I need to make. I'm still dealing with traditional publishers and have to let that take its course. As I've told you, I doubt a NYC publisher will want this series, but if one does and offers a contract that a self-respecting author can sign, then the publication schedule will be out of my hands.

On the other hand, if I do end up self-publishing, I plan to hold off releasing Book 1 until Book 2 is within a few months of completion. Ideally, you'll be able to order (or pre-order) B2 as soon as you've finished B1. So even though B1 is for all intents and purposes complete, I'm going to sit on it until B2 is further along.

The good news is that B2 is about half done. So, ideally, I could release B1 at the end of this year and B2 at the beginning of next year.

I've also been playing with the cover. Here's the latest draft.



Well, that's all for now. Email me questions or opinions, or just drop a note to say hi. Inform me of any changes in your email address. Have a great summer.