Hawkwood Books Blog: February 22nd 2021

Software

Strange that 'software' is so named; I often find it extremely hard. Hawkwood, as with many businesses, requires a huge amount of behind-the-scenes mechanics to keep things ticking over. Every book, every isbn, every RRP, every purchase, expense, order, invoice, every review, every communication, every aspect of the whole enterprise needs attention, development and maintenance.

The management software I use has been developed over sixteen years. If I'd bought an off-the-shelf package, it would have set me back thousands of pounds. This has just set me back a few hundred sleepless nights. My goodness, it was hard. There am I wanting to devote my life to the written word, and there is the publishing machinery demanding more and more time and energy. I've lost count of how many lines of code currently keep the package afloat. Thousands. Not just Excel sheets but masonic Visual Basic posing endless problems, the solutions to which are often to be found in online forums. God bless some of the boffins for whom VB is as natural a process as breathing is to us mortals.

It wasn't as if I planned the entire package from the start. In 2006 I could not see what would be needed in 2021. Programming ideally requires long term strategy. Instead, I just jump in and code and change and code and change until the cows come home. It's a foolish way of doing things. I would imagine that the best lives are led by far-sighted people who see the bigger picture. I see only bits of the picture. All I can do is beaver away at these bits and hope that, somehow, in the end, after endless chopping and changing, the right solution will emerge.

I would guess that most of us approach life in the same way, piecemeal. Chop time up into hours and trust that the hours make a decent day, that the days make a decent week, and so on. Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not. I have been overhauling my management system for the umpteenth time. I would love to give it someone with the skill and insight to turn it into a professional, slick system, but I would have to rob the Bank of England to pay for it.

Instead, I nibble away at it, testing relentlessly to make sure it doesn't collapse, as it has a few dozen times, making certain that it does what it's supposed to do and not deliver the equivalent of fake news – bad data. It definitely is a case of rubbish in, rubbish out, so I'm ultra careful. It doesn't come naturally, and often fries my brain. Just how do you calculate roylaties on thirty books by different authors and different artists, each with different criteria, without having a nervous breakdown.

There is something frighteningly obsessive and compulsive about the process. I'm in awe of those for whom complex coding is so straightforward. It isn't for me, but it has to be tackled, and tackled it has been. Version T105 is now complete. Named after The T101 Terminator, my latest management package is ready for action.