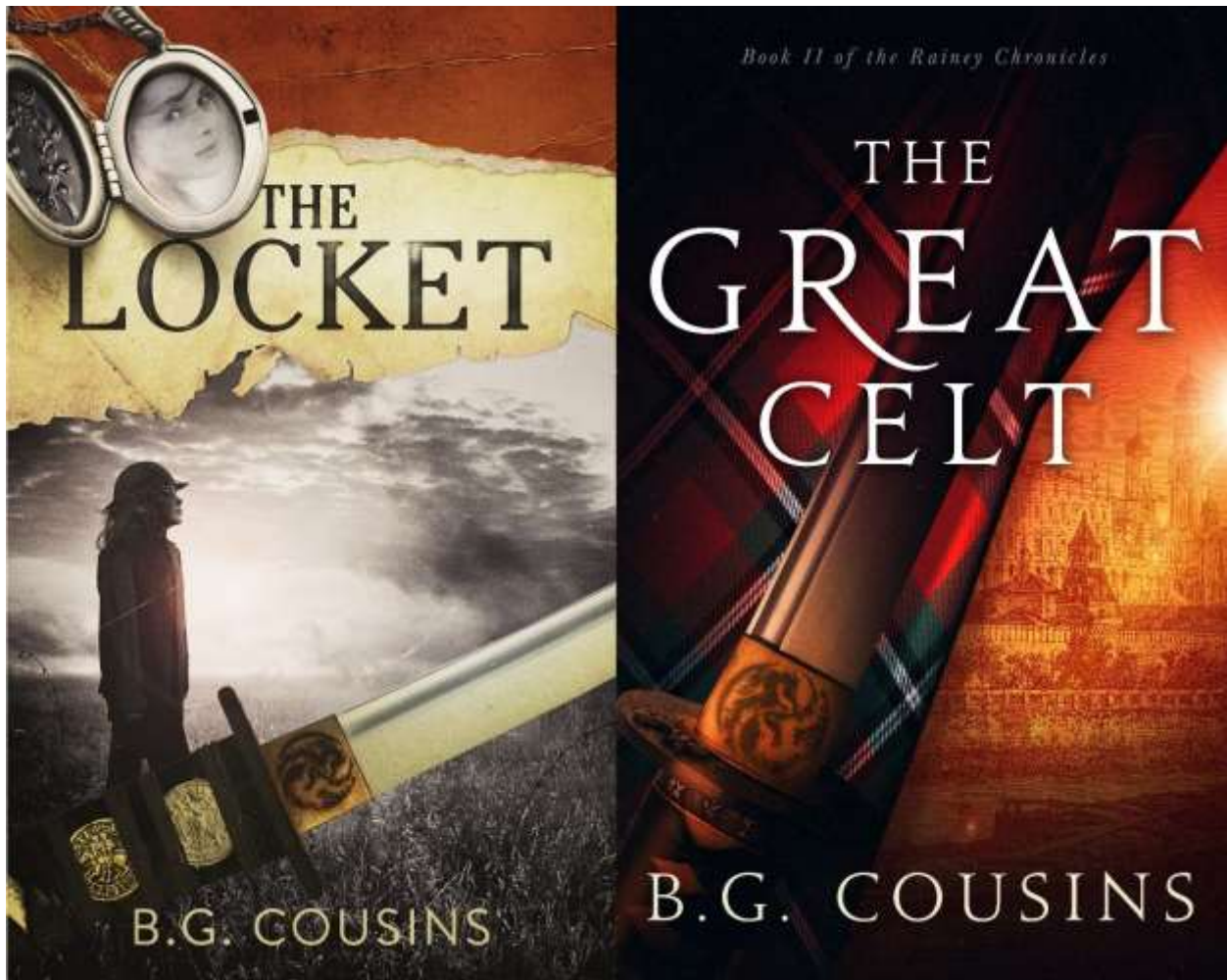


Character Sources



So, Spring has arrived in Calgary, although it started snowing tonight. Weather is funny here.

But no, I'm not going to do another weather blog, even though just about every conversation in Canada generally starts with the weather.

Today, I'm going to talk about characters. The inspiration for the characters in my book tend to come from real life people. For the actual historical figures, I undertake extensive research, taking what they've done, what they've said, and formulate character traits for their true beliefs. For fictional characters, it becomes much easier because you can start from scratch. But to make it believable, you want to model your characters from the real world.

Who do I use? Well, I'm a great observer of people and I've met hundreds of people from all walks of life. Scientists, military types, CEOs of large corporations, creative entrepreneurs, assembly line workers, artists, the list goes on and on. From these people, I see character traits that show whether they are successful, mediocre or failures in their given field, but if placed in a totally different environment where their skill set may be more or less suited, you can create a very interesting character study.

Motivations are key. There are those who are just selfish. Some are just trying to survive. Some are full of compassion for people hurting in some way. And some might have a warped sense of purpose. For anyone who has been following the Marvel Avenger series, the villain Thanos is a case in point. He sees a galaxy running out of resources. His solution? Wipe out half of the people so the other half can survive. In his mind, he's trying to save the galaxy from itself. His thinking and methods are warped because in the end, even though his purpose is right to him, he is playing god. I would guess he can take one step away from godhood because he wasn't directly deciding who would live and who would turn to dust. Marvel comics were always good because of characters like Thanos. They are very multi-dimensional.

In my first book, *The Locket*, my villain was Kolochoff. He was a soviet agent who switched from being an agent of the Czar to joining the Bolsheviks. At first, he was considered an opportunist. But when confronted by Charles Appleton at Samara, he claimed to be a patriot. He switched sides because the decadence of the Czar and his regime needed to be toppled. For him, he was just doing his job. The fact that he enjoyed torture doesn't change the fact that he saw himself as a patriot to Russia. Makes for a complex character.

Who did I base Kolochoff on? He is a composite of a few people I met who are in sales. Some are very self serving and will lie and cheat to get a sale. The only motivation is working the system to get a bonus and they would sell their mother if it gave them an advantage. But I've met a few sales people who believe that if the company does well, they will do well. They may do things that border on unethical, but the company comes first. They have a different motivation than with the first type of salesman. Kolochoff is this second type. The dinner conversation in chapter 27 was derived from a few dinners I've had with this type of sales person. They wanted to convince me that what they had was better than the competition's. It included trying to feel me out to see if they could manipulate me into thinking what they thought was important. This is what Kolochoff was trying to do at the dinner.

For a single real-life person, I chose my grandmother as the basis for the character of Winnie Samuel in my new book, *Dark Before Light*. In fact, I even used her name for the character, although she never let anyone call her Winnie. Not even my grandfather.

My grandmother was very English, very good at getting things done and had a very definite view of the difference between right and wrong. She had quite the moral code. Imagining how she would have handled being an organizer for a WW2 era spy organization with the resources that came with that job was really fun. Every time I wrote the character into a scene, I would ask *what would Grandma do?* I think it made the Winnie Samuel character much more believable.

Using real people and asking what they would do in a given situation has helped me, according to my readers, create sound characters and creatively believable stories. For me, creating these characters is what makes writing so much fun. And I hope to be able to continue writing stories for several more years to come.