

# We Have Gremlins

[By Holly Lisle](#)

**Into every biological existence of finite duration some metaphorical liquid precipitation must gravitate downward at a rapid rate of acceleration.**

Hi. I hope your Yule/Christmas/Hanukkah/Other Decemberish Holiday was wonderful, and that your New Year will kick ass. I apologize for my sudden vanishment; I found myself in a place without Internet or a computer where I was anticipating the existence of both, and while it has become clear to me that I really, really needed the rest (nor am I quite done with the resting, honestly), I had intended to do cool things during my vacation, like put up a holiday greeting and let folks know I was going to be away for a while. I had intended to answer e-mail. Stuff like that.

Life is full of surprises. And they do keep coming.

Metaphorical precipitation, you know.

I'm going to need some store beta testers – people of all levels of technical expertise, from “my mouse has one button, and that's enough” to “I dream in optimized machine code” to see if you can break my e-book store.

This process will take some time. What I wanted has turned out to be complex in surprising ways, and while it will be both cool and nifty when it's all together, the process of getting it all together has not exactly been “unpack software, install.” Margaret is still in the putting-everything-together stage, but we should be ready to go to beta in a few days.

We won't be ready to roll out on the 2nd of January. So publication of **Create A Character Clinic** (plus two other writing e-books by other writers, about which I'm tremendously

excited) will be delayed. We're setting the official roll-out date at January 20th, in the hopes that this will give us time to break everything that can be broken, and then fix it.

If you would like to beta-test, please sign up in comments. I'm not sure how many people Margaret will need, but I think "lots" was suggested.

If you can help us out, we thank you. We wave mystic passes over your lives, that unanticipated downward precipitation of the metaphorical variety will bypass you. We bow deeply.

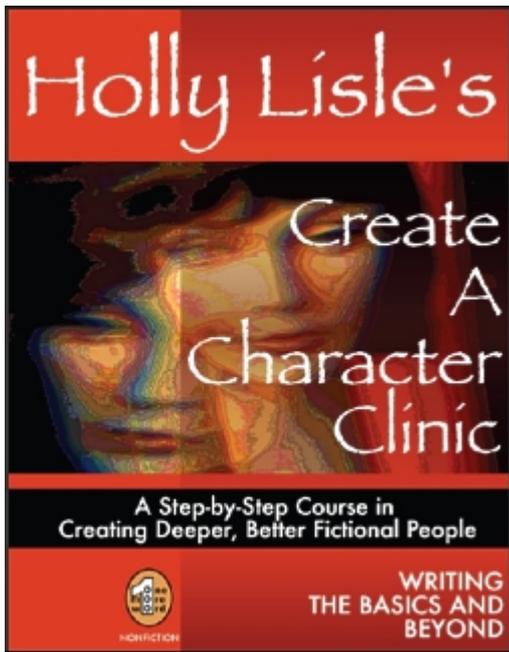
(We might even do the Dance of Joy, but in my case at least, that will be done in private, because people make fun of me when I dance.)

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# Cover Art: Create A Character Clinic

[By Holly Lisle](#)



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# How I Became A Reader (and a Writer)

[By Holly Lisle](#)

Like the other people who have answered this question, my relationship with education was an odd one, and my introduction to reading started early.

My mother taught me to read by getting me a Dr. Seuss Books subscription—one book in the Dr. Seuss line-up came to our house every month, and went into rotation with the growing stack of Little Golden Books that I think she picked up for me from the grocery store. She read to me, and when I started memorizing the books, let me “read” to her. My parents spelled things out in front of me that they didn’t want me to know—early on, understanding the relationship between letters

and words became a high-value pursuit for me, and by the time I was five, I could read well and they had to give up spelling anything because I'd broken their code.

This presented a few problems when I started school. I already knew how to read, so the odious Dick, Jane and Spot books that my first school used as primary readers didn't even slow me down. Nor did they engage my interest. I dutifully filled out the mimeographed worksheets we were handed, and I did the reading (in about three minutes), but my teacher ended up giving me other things to do to keep me busy.

I liked writing projects, though, because then I could use my own words and engage my imagination in telling a story that I found interesting. The first time my writing was recognized as being exceptional was in the first grade, where my teacher chose a three-page story I'd written about Winnie-the-Pooh (going well over my assigned wordlimit to do so—an issue I have since mostly resolved) to read aloud to the class. This was a big deal for me, and I still clearly remember my delight at both pleasing my teacher and interesting my classmates. My story had a beginning, a middle, an end, and a plot, even if it was a pretty minimal one. (Pooh was having issues with bees and honey.)

I lived for Scholastic books, because if I was very careful with the budget my mother allotted to me, I could get three or four books out of every order.

Aside from that, though, I remained mostly bored by school and ahead of my classmates through the third grade, when we moved to Alaska.

The trip to Alaska changed my life. Suddenly, I was in a one-room schoolhouse with grades one through six all taught together, and I was the only native English speaker in my class. I didn't fit in and I didn't make friends; I was too different, and unlike the other children there, I had parents.

Besides, I was good at school; this was a big issue for children who were struggling with the basics of speaking English. I was seen as privileged (and compared to them, I was.) So I was isolated, and very lonely. However, along with being encouraged to read books to the kids who were having trouble learning to read, I was given carte blanche to read anything I wanted, any time I wanted. This took the place of most of my classwork. I did my required math, and then I was left to my own devices.

This was wonderful in two ways—first, the missionaries who'd been dorm parents before my parents took over had been science fiction and mystery readers, and had left their extensive collection of books behind. I read most of them, in spite of the fact that most were written for adults. Second, the boys dorm had an enormous collection of National Geographic magazines from the 1800s and early to middle 1900s, and I read all of those, too. Science fiction and National Geographic both had a special resonance for me, because I was in an alien culture, completely cut off from the world I had known up to the age of nine. I absorbed myself in other alien cultures, fascinated by all the possibilities, consuming our world, its history, and its possible futures at a tremendous rate.

We returned to the world I had known (Ohio) in time for me to start fifth grade, but I was not the same kid who'd left. I'd lived without plumbing, hot and cold water, television, 24-hour electric, and friends who spoke English. I'd learned to carve linoleum block prints, run a hand printing press, weave a fishing net, walk in snow shoes, ski, drive a snowmobile and a boat with an outboard motor and a dog team, shoot a gun, paddle a kayak, set nets for salmon, and countless other real-life skills that meant survival. I'd learned to read for entertainment. And I'd been cut loose from the lock-step educational model I'd left behind. I never bothered trying to get back into step again.

From fifth grade on, I read my textbooks when I brought them

home for the first time, then never bothered with them again. I took a cold and distant view of homework; my opinion was that if teachers weren't good enough at what they did to teach me what they wanted to know in the many hours a day that I was at school, why should I bother with their crap in my own time? Unless a grade rode on the homework, I didn't do it. What I did with my own time was teach myself. I learned to roller skate, hike, read maps, sew, draw, paint, do various crafts.

And then my folks took us down to Central America, where for seventh grade, I went to the Friendly Hippie School (actually called the Costa Rica Academy) in San Jose, where I learned to build geodesic domes, create my own cartoon characters, unlock the mysteries of the Mayans, design my own science experiments (teaching a parrot to talk and determining how long it took ants to find and clear measured amounts of sugar from different locations in and around our home), and other goodies way, way outside the normal US factory-school curriculum. The librarian turned me on to Tolkein. I was the only missionary kid in with a bunch of kids who thought I was weird. I finished my school year early and became the youngest student to that point to be accepted into the Instituto de Lengua Española. My fellow students there ranged in age from twenty to seventy. I was fourteen. It was a tremendous learning experience. After my trimester there, we moved to Chiquimula, Guatemala.

And I homeschooled (a horrible, horrible Christian correspondence course that had no redeeming value whatsoever, except that it was so easy I could knock out a day's work in about half an hour). I attended the Quaker school next door, which was taught in Spanish—I found the challenge of doing classwork in another language much better than the awful correspondence course. And in my free time, and I had a lot of it, I unravelled a moth-eaten cable-knit sweater and taught myself to knit by watching the stitches come undone. My first project was a very small cable-knit sweater. I taught myself

to read basic music and play the piano in the mission, and hung in the hammock reading the stacks of ancient Readers' Digest Condensed Books and magazine issues there. I discovered both Cherry Ames nurse novels and Charles Dickens in the mission library, and read those by the pound, and then tripped over Cervantes and the magnificent **Don Quixote**. In the evenings, I sat around and argued politics with the David the Socialist Draft Dodger (AKA conscientious objector) who thought communism was a great idea, and fell madly in love with Loren the Vietnam Vet who was fresh from the war and suffering from shell shock, and who never knew of my wild adoration. At least I hope he didn't, poor guy. They were both mission volunteers, and when they went, another batch came.

And then there was the earthquake. Feb. 4rd, 1976. BIG earthquake. Devastating. We ended up back in the US, back in Ohio, and as far as anything like regular education was concerned, I was completely broken. Don't get me wrong. I made great grades. But it was a game, and I played it like a game. I read the books I wanted to read in class, I did only the homework that was required to pass the course, I studied for the teachers I liked and blew off the teachers I didn't, I took courses that interested me regardless of the college-prep value, and kicked around in summer school with my friends simply because we could rack up extra credits toward graduation that way. I had no intention of wasting my time in college; I knew I'd had enough of sitting in desks and being talked at. I had a couple of great teachers, a pretty good pool of good ones, and the usual execrable disasters, but I knew by then that my life was going in a different direction. For fun, I taught myself to play guitar, and I wrote notebooks full of dreadful, angst-ridden songs. I had a few friends (some of whom are still friends today), I hiked the hills around our house in the country, and I read. Everything. I finished off most of our school library, and became friends with the librarian. I joined the Science Fiction Book Club. I ordered everything that hinted that it might contain

questionable content. I devoured anything with words, in any subject, any genre.

I was established as a reader, I knew how to find out whatever I wanted to learn by reading and then applying what I read, and I'd determined that I was going to be famous. I didn't care whether it was as an artist or a musician, just so long as fame was in my future. I tried out dramatic signatures on my teachers. (The John Adams clone signature didn't go over too well.) My junior/senior English teacher had us keep a notebook, in which we had to write five pages a day. Didn't matter what we wrote, but by the end of the semester, the notebook had to be full. I'd always written, I'd always received positive attention and praise for doing it, but that was the moment in which I discovered I could write in bulk. It had never occurred to me to do that before.

It took me years and a bad marriage to come back to what I'd learned about writing pages per day, but I did eventually get there.

And here.

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# Bulgarian Rights

[By Holly Lisle](#)

Got the neatest news today. I sold (or, rather, Penguin Putnam sold) Bulgarian translation rights to MIDNIGHT RAIN; the book should be available in Bulgaria and wherever else the purchasing publisher distributes sometime this month.

**Bulgarian** rights. So cool.

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## Done, DONE, Done, DONE!

[By Holly Lisle](#)

**Create A Character Clinic** is done. Came in at just over 30,000 words, is on its way in beta version to my readers, and I am HAPPY. And done for at least a few days.

Heard from Claire this morning that she loved I SEE YOU, that the revisions are small and few, and that she'd like to have another book with my EMTs from ISY. All in all, today has been a damned good day.

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## Politics Sucks

[By Holly Lisle](#)

[Haven't heard of the Barrett Report? You probably won't.](#) Our government in action, deciding once again that we don't need to know.

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# Should Finish the Create A Character Clinic Today

[By Holly Lisle](#)

With luck, and a bit of diligent effort, I should have the first draft for **Create A Character Clinic** finished today. I have two beta readers already lined up. I need two more.

There is, of course, a catch. I don't have an editor for this project, so my beta readers will have to be very focused on typos, spellos, grammatical errors, redundancies, and irrelevancies. They will also have to be pretty quick, because I want to be able to put the book up for sale on the site by Jan. 2, and I'll need a couple of days to go through and make corrections.

So I'll need your corrections back by, at the very latest, December 27th. And earlier would, of course, be better.

In exchange for your work, you'll receive thanks in the acknowledgements, a free final version of the e-book, and my wild, insane gratitude.

Volunteers?

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# A Writer's Goodbye: Frank O'Brien Andrew

[By Holly Lisle](#)

✘ Now that I'm here, I'm lost for words. As I mentioned before, I never met Frank in person. But when I needed knowledgeable people to offer criticism on LAST GIRL DANCING, Frank gave me an in-depth view of Atlanta that changed significantly the direction the story took. When I needed someone to look over the shipbuilding I'd done for HAWKSPAR, [Frank put a great deal of time and effort](#) into helping me get details right.

There are people you're sure you'll meet in person one day, and Frank was one of those. I thought we would discuss writing, that I would read **Virgin of New Orleans**, that we might find ourselves sharing an agent, because my agent had been interested in his work. I'd promised to send him a signed copy of TALYN when I finally got my author's copies; I still haven't received them, which is why he didn't have one. I'd hoped to have him read and offer commentary on the ship stuff in HAWKSPAR that he so greatly influenced, to see if I'd managed not to screw up what he told me; now that won't happen.

I feel worst about that, because there are so many parts of the book that would not have existed without the comments he offered, and one character, a shipwright, whom I shaped from knowing Frank.

*"If you're sure you must buy ready-built, you haven't much selection," the shipwright said. His name was Makkor Gurak-Golak-Dok-Hkukguh, or, as he translated for Aaran with evident pride, Makkor Only-Hkukguh-Builds-A-Better-Boat. Hkukguh being his people's god of the sea. Makkor's calluses*

*had calluses, he told Aaran and Tuua, because his hands built ships even in their sleep. And his muscles had muscles because he had been building them since his father first brought him to work in his shipyard when he was merely four years old.*

Makkor believed in Aaran and his mission, and so gave Aaran a great deal on a ship. In doing so—in exhibiting that faith and taking that risk—Makkor changed the world, simply because he believed.

That ship that changed the world in this novel was the ship that Frank Andrew helped me make real. Makkor asked in return a favor of Aaran, and Aaran managed to repay the favor. I had hoped to return a favor, too—to do what I could to see Frank in print—but I will not get to repay my favor.

I don't know what religion, if any, Frank followed. I don't know what words to say in this world, but since I knew Frank primarily in relation to worlds that don't exist, I'd like to offer a goodbye from the world he had such a large hand in helping me create.

From HAWKSPAR:

*Tuua knelt on the deck beside Neeran, and put one hand on the boy's narrow chest. Aaran stood at the child's head, wishing Neeran didn't look so young, so small, so helpless. Wishing they had someplace for his body but the cold depths of the sea.*

*Wishing that someone somewhere would weep that he was gone, and understand what a good boy he had been.*

*The boy wasn't Tonk, but he was theirs. So Tuua said the prayer for a Tonk warrior for him.*

“Jostfar silent but near,  
Ethebet, hand of the sword,  
Guardians of the souls of your people,  
Take Neeran Old-Walk home,  
To horses and meadows and family  
And the long halls of the honored.  
Give him place, and name,  
And rest for a time.  
Remember him,  
And that he served in life,  
Honored living.  
That he is in death,  
Honored dead.”

*“Gitaada,” Aaran said, in unison with Tuua and the other Tonk officers gathered around the bodies, and with the sailors and marines who had fought and lived. And the women and girls, who whispered “Gitaada,” with the rest.*

*Aaran said, “The spirit is gone to the Summerland. The body remains, but is not the boy. We honor the life of Neeran Old-Walk, and grieve it’s passing. We are made less by his absence.”*

*Aaran folded the shroud around the boy’s body. So small, so young. He had died fighting, a dagger in his hand. He had been brave. He had deserved a long life, and great adventure.*

*Aaran forced himself to concentrate on the task at hand; on folding the corners, on wrapping the cords, on tying the knots. Each step had to be done with respect, in the old way. Each step took concentration – and it was as he squared the corners and carefully tied the Falcon-Head knot at each point down the midline that he understood why. It was a way of stepping back. Of building a wall between the living and the dead, of making the death about form and custom, so that it could be borne a piece at a time.*

*Aaran finished the wrapping, which was always the captain's duty, and nodded to his officers. Six men would not be needed to carry the boy's body to the rail of the gombaar deck – but six men would carry it, because that was the way a warrior went. Two officers, one marine, and one sailor stepped forward, and along with Tuua and Aaran, carried what remained of the boy to the rail.*

*Aaran bore responsibility for the next part of the ritual. When the afterdeck filled with everyone aboard ship save the healers and the injured, Aaran said the old words:*

“His spirit is with Jostfar.  
His flesh is as nothing.  
He was born of salt and tears,  
In a gush of brine and blood.  
His flesh is one with the sea,  
And the sea will keep him.”

*Aaran tried not to look as the wrapped body hit the water, as the lead sewn into the shroud bore it down, beyond vision, beyond retrieval.*

*He would remember Neeran. Even if the boy had no other family, he'd had a family on the Taag. And Aaran stood in as his father. And no father would forget his own son.*

Find the Summerland, Frank, in whatever fashion you sought it, and live on with the heroes, and with your beloved Gretchen.

You will not be forgotten here, in name or in spirit.

The novel HAWKSPAR will be dedicated to the memory of Frank O'Brien Andrew, without whom it would have still existed, but without whom it could not have been as good.

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# Inspiration Revisited

[By Holly Lisle](#)

I'm bringing in and categorizing posts from the old **Silent Bounce** weblog, preparatory to deleting it pretty soon. Came across this favorite post, and thought I'd return it to your attention, as a reminder that [odds are beatable, and you are exactly the person to beat them](#).

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# Why Public Schools Fail to Create Readers

[By Holly Lisle](#)

[Here's an article I dug out for one of my worldbuilders](#). It's well-written, it's fascinating, it's full of history, it's true, and if you haven't run across it before, you're going to struggle with some major resistance to what it says. You won't like what you read.

But, with that in mind, it's something every author should know, and probably every reader, too.

Once you've read it, I'd like to hear your stories on how you

became readers, and how you became writers.

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