

Into the new year: Words for 2017

written by Holly
December 28, 2016
By Holly Lisle

The song that means the most to me today. (Yes, it's a story of lost love, but in this case, make it an older sister who'd expected to grow old taking care of the younger one).

And a new poem...

One View From Shadow

One stands upon dark winter's sill
And shudders at the gathering gloom
The candles gutter from a gust
That chills the room

One at the banquet fears to breathe
And silent and unmoving stands
For Time might hear and make her leave
And still her hands

Ten thousand voices in her head
Are frozen now in breathless fear
Stories untold cannot be read
No one will hear

The clock ticks on as shadow spreads
As winter falls, and cold congeals
The one pushed into shadow dreads
What time reveals

Which stories now will live or die
Which tales will to the banquet bring

Their secrets for the guests to whom
It is still spring

The shadows gather close but won't
Silence the stories pressed by night
The words will come until they don't...

One lifts her pen to write

Holly Lisle – Dec. 28, 2016

In memory of my sister, Julie.

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Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Cultural Appropriation: A question for other writers

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The objective of writing science fiction, fantasy, (and fiction in general) is to explore the world of what could be, what should be, what should never be – to challenge your own assumptions, to discover, uncover, or invent new ways of thinking about life and new ways of seeing the world,



humanity, and life, to expand beyond what is.

Standing directly in the road to this exploration is the politically correct stance that (if you're white) you have no business using elements of anyone else's race or culture for your own personal gain.

The problem with this is that if you're a science fiction / fantasy / speculative fiction writer, it's your damn job to reach beyond your world and the way it works to understand life lived in other ways, other places, and other times, to turn all of that inside out and sideways, to ask questions about it and answer them with actions in your work, and to then present what you've created for people who are capable of appreciating that the world they live in is bigger than they are.

Unlike most Americans, I have lived in non-white, not-English-speaking countries. I've also lived in Alaska in the late 1960s where the BIA (I'm not a fan) was the majority of the government.

In writing my fiction, I borrow liberally from my experiences in these other places. They were mostly not fun though they were extremely educational, and they made me an outsider for most of my life – which it's useful to be if you want to be a writer of fiction that lives off the beaten track.

So.

My favorite main character of all the main characters I've written is black. Her name is Cadence Drake. I'm WELL aware that there are lots of folks who dislike the fact that I – a whitish American woman (more of a brown-rice beige, actually) of unknown but decidedly mixed ethnic heritage – have the temerity to write science fiction novels in the first person as a black female.

Brief interlude while I answer the one person who just asked,

If you don't know what your ethnic heritage is, how do you know it's mixed?

I know because my irises are a splotchy mix of blue, yellow, reddish brown, and dark brown, and the hair on my head contains straight blonde hair, curly red hair, wavy brown hair, straight thick black hair, and thin, fragile, kinky black hair. And now, a fair amount of gray. I'm betting that my relatively recent ancestors represent every broad racial group on the planet.

Back to the objections for me writing a black main character.

Never mind that she kicks ass. Never mind that she's the perfect person for the series and the overall story, never mind that she represents what I value in human beings and what I value in the world I live in.

I'm not black. So how dare I?

And the answer to that of course is that I dare because like all my fictional characters, Cadence Drake is me when I am being someone else. She shows an essential aspect of the universe I want to live in, the one where color of skin is irrelevant, where gender preferences are all acceptable, where humanity has conquered the stars and its prejudices equally...

But where the problems of power and its inevitable corruption of those who seek it still exist, and where people have found new ways to manipulate that power over each other.

Cady lets me tell my story better than any other character I could have created. Her existence as my main character shows what matters in her universe, and also what doesn't.

So to my question:

If you're a writer, what boundaries have you crossed in the pursuit of your fiction?

What boundaries are you afraid to cross? And why?

This is only a question for other writers.

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Reader Interview: The Thing You Want to Do?

written by Holly
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You have dreams, goals, passions, and a vision of things you want to accomplish in your life.



But if you can only accomplish one of them, **what's the big one?**

The one you really love?

And what is it about that dream / goal / passion that makes it special?

Tell your story of the thing that makes you want to fly in the comments below.

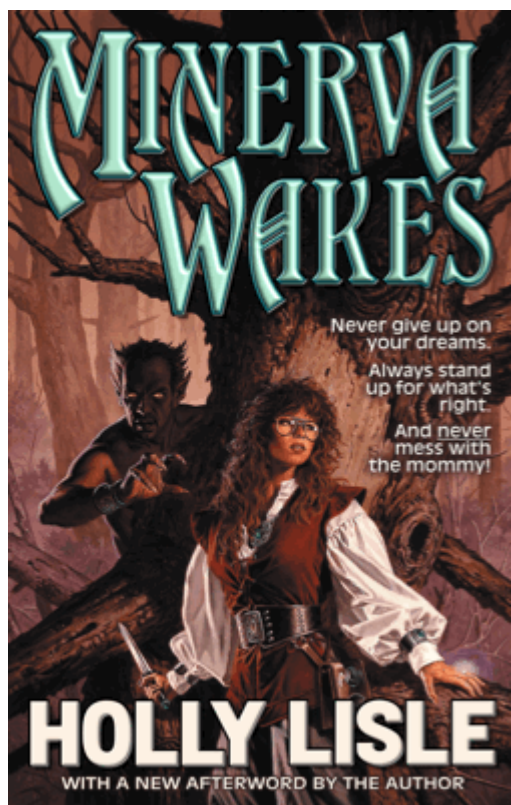
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Minerva Wakes re-release, and new revision freebie

written by Holly
December 28, 2016
By Holly Lisle



The Story:

Ahead of a coming storm, Minerva Kiakra is fighting her way

through crowded grocery aisles, when the last box of cereal is yanked from her grasp...

...by the impossible.

She does not see a dragon. Does not. Does NOT.

And when the same dragon cuts her off in traffic?

No, no, no.

But the thing she doesn't want to see is running one step ahead of the thing she doesn't want to have happen. And she can't stop either one.

Once upon a time, Minerva made a mistake. She stopped fighting for her dreams. Now there's a price to be paid.

But the universe just made a mistake, too. It messed with the wrong mommy.

About this version: In the *Minerva Wakes* re-release, I've included a lengthy new Afterword. I've also cleaned up the typos from the commercially released first version, and fixed one small story bug that I missed when I wrote the book back in 1994.

You can get it here:

Amazon | Apple Store | Kobo | Scribd | Smashwords | Indigo | Mondadori

And if you're a fiction writer and you have one or more manuscripts that are broken, and that you can't figure out how to fix...

I've put together a REALLY short quiz that will identify the biggest revision problem you're having, and that will then provide you with a free video and worksheet that will show you

how to fix it.

Here's the link.

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NaNo Report: On target. GLUED on target.

written by Holly
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☒ Today went well. I've nailed myself to my 2500 words-per-day word limit, in spite of the fact that I'm hitting my planned wordcounts in right at two hours.

It's incredibly tempting to keep going, to push on. Today I had folks in the room with me, and I truly hated leaving. But I'm doing this WITH regular work, and WITH the rule that I take my weekends off.

So I have done one scene a day, and right at 2500 words a day, each of the four days so far. I'm taking tomorrow and Sunday off from writing, even though I left today's scene with a great cliffhanger, and I can feel the next scene sitting right behind me, waiting to work its way out.

But a lot of years of doing this have taught me that planning the work and then working the plan is how to finish. So I'm turning my back on temptation.

With the following single exception. I've decided that I

cannot write one more scene with my male MC's name. It has to change. So over the weekend, I'm coming up with a new first name for him. 'Cause ... DAMN!

And that's my first end-of-week NaNo report.

How are you doing?

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Word Count: NaNo Day 1

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Got 2541 words. Had to hit 2500 to get my goal. Did, but it took me more than an hour longer than I'd planned for.

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For the first time ever, I'm writing a novel in NaNoWriMo

written by Holly Lisle
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I've spent the past few years doing very little fiction. First

there were the problems with WordPress on my writing site that broke my writing classes and wrecked my income, and which had to be fixed.

Then there were the five surgeries in twelve months that caused me enormous pain, a lot of down time for recovery, and meant I had to spend a lot of time playing catch-up with putting my writing classes back together. (They're still not all back together, but I am getting there.)

But it turns out that neither of those were the BIG problem. The big problem was the parathyroid tumor that I'd been carrying around for about fifteen years. Which may have caused the problems with my tongue, but which most definitely caused the problems with my writing.

Gradually and over a period of years, I lost dreaming – including lucid dreaming and nightmares (which were beneficial to my writing, if not to restful sleep) – spontaneous idea generation, developed nearly constant headaches and migraines, and felt my desire to write fiction ebbing away. Conceptually, I still wanted to write fiction. But it wasn't driving my work each day.

I thought that loss of my passion for writing fiction was just life, or maybe life plus overwork.

Turns out, not so much. It was the parathyroid tumor. When removed (at the Norman Parathyroid Clinic – best surgery EVER), **my NEED to write fiction started coming back.**

Started getting inside my skin, started pulling me away from all the things I was supposed to be doing and back into the stories that were running through the creative part of my brain again.

I try not to think about the fact that I nearly lost this feeling forever – the feeling that there are stories I **need** to tell.

I focus on the fact that it's back. I've done some small things for various projects I'm not ready to reveal yet.

But starting tomorrow, I'm going to be pushing to complete a full novel during November. I've linked to my NaNo book page so you can see what I'll be writing (you have to be logged in, but NaNo accounts are free, and you don't have to write to cheer writers on).

You'll be able to follow along there to see how I'm doing.

I won't be blogging during NaNo month, because as soon as I finish my words I have to do all my regular work.

But – and this is a bit weird, I know – if you're the sort of person who enjoys watching paint dry, I'm setting up daily writing rooms where some of those of us from my site who are doing NaNo novels are going to meet and count words together as we write them.

How this works? I set a timer for ten minutes, and write as many words as I can in that ten minutes. The time goes off, all the writers present give their running totals in the chat room, and I restart the timer. I'll be doing this until I've written 2500 words, my daily planned word count – probably two to three hours per day.

Because we don't have dedicated software for this yet, I have to set up a fresh room, which means my first order of business each day is going to be to set up the room and mail out the link to everyone who wants to attend.

If you're a writer (or a reader) who wants to get the links to each day's writing room, sign up below.

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Since last I posted...

written by Holly

December 28, 2016

By Holly Lisle

Since last I posted, which I have just realized has been more than a month ago, Dan Allen (my website guy) and his team and I have done massive work on HollysWritingClasses.com, I relaunched *How to Revise Your Novel*, we had the Cat 4 walk-by of Hurricane Matthew, and I turned 56.

I've been swamped, but it hasn't been swamped with recovering from **Yet Another Surgery**, so that's a big plus. It has been swamped with **Making the Money to Pay the Bills** from three major surgeries in six months, though, so I still can't say it's been entirely ... fun.

No. Definitely not entirely fun.

But one of my writing students asked about the viability of a novel with a human female protagonist and a dragon love interest.

I figured I'd ask you guys what you thought.

But I ALSO thought, *I wrote a song for that.*

So *that's back*. I'm both voice and guitar. I'll apologize some other time.

This song, by the way, is featured in my novel *Minerva Wakes*, which I'm finally almost ready to reprint.

—

No Man's Sky: A Science Fiction Novelist (And Grown-Up Nerdy Girl) Reviews the Game

written by Holly
December 28, 2016
By Holly Lisle

Before I review No Man's Sky, you need to know two things about me.

Well, three, but if you're reading my blog, I'm assuming you already know I'm a professional SF novelist.

So, two.

ONE: Back in 1970 when I was nine, we moved from Ohio – where I'd spent my entire life to that point – to Alaska, and suddenly I was a nine-year-old girl living with my parents, little sister, and very little brother in a log-cabin boy's dorm heated by a wood-burning furnace on the tundra four miles by river from the nearest village (Kwethluk).

I was the only white kid and the only native English-speaker in the one-room school in the attic of the boy's dorm.

I discovered a world where food came to us once a year by barge and anything we did not order we had to hunt and kill and clean ourselves (and I learned how to mend and clean

salmon nets and how to clean game birds because children in primitive places can do real work).

I learned that if it's -81 degrees Fahrenheit and you throw hot coffee into the air, it freezes instantly and explodes with a sound like a shotgun going off. This was, by the way, the coolest real-world demo of "why you can't play outside today" ever done by a father.

I skied on a tow rope behind a snowmobile, and listened to wolves singing at the moon.

I learned what a honeybucket was, and discovered that in a world without plumbing, waste gets dumped well away from the house and on a patch of ground both well away from the river and downstream from the house, and that Clorox goes into the cistern full of drinking water you pump in from the river that runs by the house. Because there are folks who live upriver...

I listened to people speaking and singing in foreign languages, wearing clothing unlike anything I'd ever seen before, telling stories by crouching on the ground and smoothing the summer mud with story knives and drawing pictures in it.

I wore a wolf-ruffed parka and sealskin mukluks because this is how you don't die in a deadly environment.

I was ripped out of what I'd mistaken for "the way things are everywhere" and thrown into the reality of "Ohio is not the whole world, or anything like it", and...

...I became an alien. A stranger in a very strange land. And simultaneously discovered science fiction, in the form of a wonderful stack of YA books left behind by the previous children's home dorm parents.

TWO: A year and a half later, we returned to Ohio.

I became *that weird kid who'd lived in Alaska*.

I had learned that there are still places where hunting and fishing are what stand between you and starvation.

I had become a heavy reader and a lover of science fiction. And I was a skinny eleven-year-old girl with glasses in a new school in a new town with no friends.

I no longer fit in back in the world I'd once considered normal. I realized that I was never going to be normal again.

But...

I discovered Star Trek, and also that if I ran home from school instead of taking the bus, I could get there in time to catch Star Trek re-runs. So I did – and I fell deeper in love with outer space.

At eleven, I wasn't yet an atheist, but I was already having serious doubts. I was giving religion its first long, hard look, and it wasn't doing too well.

But I did pray, every night. This prayer:

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
Please don't make me go to heaven;
Let me go to space.
(And P.S. May I please have a pony?)*

The horse thing came and went.

Space didn't.

My whole life (and I'm fifty-five now, and getting pretty close to fifty-six), I have yearned for starships, aliens, strange skies, faster-than-light travel.

I discovered early that my hellishly bad math skills were

going to disqualify me from ever being an astronaut, even if being a girl didn't – and remember, when I started school, girls had to wear dresses to class and "you're only a girl" was still not just a common phrase, but expected. And acceptable.

Back then, girls went to college for their MRS degree (as in **Mrs. Robert Biteme**, for those of you who are female and young enough that you've grown up with the expectation of actually getting to use your own name your whole life).

Every year after that, from the time I was eleven until the time I was sixteen, I changed schools again. Moved again. To Costa Rica, Guatemala, back to Ohio. I learned another language, got comfortable with being the perpetual outsider, the perpetual alien, the only "whatever everyone else isn't."

I learned to observe, to watch, to listen, to think. I lost religion, gained reason, logic, and the scientific method.

I knew I was never going to get to go to space – not in the real world. So I became a science fiction writer, went to space in my head, and took readers with me.

Two years ago, my younger son, then sixteen, told me about **No Man's Sky**.

I thought, "Maybe this time."

And the two of us waited for it to come out.

At the stroke of midnight on August 9th, with my pre-ordered copy of **No Man's Sky** and the first patch already loaded up, I went to space.

The timing was pretty much perfect. I was recovering from Yet Another Surgery on My Damn Tongue, I was in pain, I was still dealing with not eating and not speaking because I had a tongue full of stitches.

I was too tired, too in pain to work.

So instead...

I soared through a shifting sky filled with stars to wake up on an alien planet, to discover that I had limited resources and a broken space ship.

I thought, I experimented, I discovered.

I found ways to use the terrain around me, to harvest resources.

I figured out how to fix my ship, I got it airborne. I started discovering the planet on which I'd landed.

I started cataloguing creatures and plants, earning money, learning alien languages and decoding conversations and figuring out how each alien race thought so I could get better rewards.

Not my first time, and it turns out being an alien in your own life prepares you pretty well for being an alien in **No Man's Sky**. Even with tiny linguistic cues, I turned out to be pretty good at figuring out the cultures and getting the good stuff.

I was less good at fighting pirates.

And when you have mined minerals like a lunatic to buy yourself a kickass spaceship, and have filled your hold to overflowing with awesome space loot, there are gonna be pirates.

I died a few times, and discovered that the game is insanely forgiving of death.

I went back to my space station and my ship, flew out to the spot where I'd died and picked up all of my goodies, and went on with the game.

I was not so forgiving. I built up my defenses, and started

shooting down the pirates. Last night, with roughly {cough, cough} a hundred hours in the game in exactly one week, I successfully took out four pirates in an aerial dogfight on a planet, while dealing with gravity and terrain. Run, little pirates. You are my meat now.

The last of the stitches in my tongue worked its way out this morning. I'm feeling better. Less pain, more energy. So it's time to get back to work.

But this was the first thing I wanted to do today, on my first day back in quite some time.

Because I want to say thank you. To Sean Murray, Harry Denholm, Ryan Doyle, Innes McKendrick, David Ream, Grant Duncan, Jacob Golding, Suzy Wallace, Paul Weir, and 65daysofstatic.

Thank you, thank you, fucking thank you. For making it possible for me to go to space, to walk on alien planets, find weird plants and animals and weirder aliens, travel faster than light between the stars. To name solar systems Wodehouse, Wyndham, Simak, Curious Cheese, and Questionable Condiments.

Thank you for making it beautiful. Thank you for making it fun. Thank you for taking your vision and working your asses off and bringing it to life. The game might not have been for everyone, but it was definitely for me.

I don't give things stars. I think stars are an idiotic way of rating something. But this game doesn't need stars from me anyway. It already has billions (trillions? Quintillions?) of 'em.

And 18 quintillion planets circling them.

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And back from yet another surgery

written by Holly
December 28, 2016
By Holly Lisle

Let me equivocate. I'm back-ish.



Gah. This is the first day since the most recent tongue surgery—done June 26th to widen the margins on the PREVIOUS tongue surgery—that I haven't woken up already in pain.

I've been just about useless since the 26th, though I did have one really good fiction run with my Kellow story last week.

I've worked a smidge on the HTTS lesson revamp.

And I'm not going to say that I'm back today, either. But I am better enough today to post that I think I'll be better enough to get back to work here pretty soon now.

How's that for waffling? I don't usually waffle. This has been a really rough year, though, with a bunch of surgery and a bunch of pain and a bunch of trying to get back to work before I've been ready.

I think possibly I'm learning not to do that. Progress, right?

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