

Lessons from the Fall: Beta Test Hell

By Holly Lisle



The Current HTTS Website:
Undead and still coming for
me.

To see if I could make things easier for writers using the **How To Think Sideways** site, (still with the shop locked while it awaits installation of the interim site), I put together a beta test site using a theme I thought would help, and a plugin I REALLY thought would help. (Both theme and plugin shall remain nameless because I have no desire to rip apart the work of others.)

One of the writers who did the beta test contacted me after reading my post-beta analysis (**link opens in new tab**), worried that if I got so few responses from so many folks who had actually joined the beta test, he had no hope of anyone ever finding his work.

Not so.

Here is my reply to him:

Hi, BOB, (name changed to my all-time favorite fall-back name to protect the innocent)

I spent the weekend down with a migraine that I still have. More on that in a minute.

As for the beta test, I think what happened was fatigue.

I built the site and sent folks in to give me comments in the form at the end of the first test class.

People went in and did the comments in the form.

The form didn't work.

I sent everyone back in to do the comments in the form again after "fixing" it.

The form didn't work.

I set up a page for comments, and the people who had already done the damn thing twice thought, "Fuck it, I've already done the damn thing twice," and didn't comment a third time.

But I could only use the comments I had, and the comments I had were not sufficient to demonstrate to me that repainting my current sinking ship was valid use of my time.

I'd already wasted about a week building the beta, and my long-suffering testers had made two attempts using software I was hoping would make life easier for everyone on the current site, and had received resounding proof that the plugin I'd hoped would fix things would in fact... NOT.

And this process, which has a lot in common with most of my experience with building my own sites—and which is why I don't WANT to build my own sites anymore—gave me the migraine that I still can't shake.

Which is further proof that I need to focus on writing, let Dan do the software end of things, and make life less hideous for my head.

I wanted to let folks know where things stand right now.

Dan is running ahead of schedule, and may have the fixed interim site up on HowToThinkSideways.com as early as tonight. If he does, I'll go into the help desk, grab all the ON HOLD tickets, and fix each of those accounts tomorrow morning. AND open the shop.

Even if he doesn't, we are very close, and will be using the same URL for now.

The new site will go live when Dan is done building my new software, and not in a half-assed fashion beforehand.

So now I'm getting back to Episodes 3 and 4 of Tale From The Longview, so that I can get Module Four of How To Write A Series started.

Onward, migraine in tow.

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Scheduling a writing life: Follow-up #1

By Holly Lisle



Picture of me in my office.
Sort of.

I'm following up on the "How Would You Clear My Schedule" post.

First, INTERNS!!! was the cool and awesome suggestion that I leapt on, only to discover that the legal ramifications made it impossible for me to do. (Enormous thanks to Margaret Fisk, who did the research and let me know about this.)

There are folks actively hunting for ways to monetize the suing of folks who offer internships, **so I killed the intern program.** I don't make enough to pay even one full-time employee at minimum wage, much less the numbers I need to actually get my out of print and "messed-up-in-print" work into circulation in a professional fashion.

So here are the three things I'll be dealing with in May (with probable leak-over into June)

PART 1: Working with Dan on software development for my new sites.

This HAS to be done, and it has to be done now. The most recent WordPress update broke HowToThinkSideways.com admin for a full week. Dan had to do major, major overhaul work to get it up and running for me again so that I could go in and fix accounts for folks and do the other things I do in admin. (Create products, set up coupons, kill spammers, add new pages

for things like the live chats...)

I have to consider that the NEXT WordPress update is likely to not just break MY access, but everyone's access.

So, as I said, this has to be done, and it has to be done now, and I am not a passive observer. I am wire-framing the designs for my future software, designing interfaces and front-ends and describing how I need elements to interact with users and databases. I am designing a fair amount of stuff that doesn't exist yet, but so far, I haven't done anything that Dan says is impossible.

I have most of the wire-frames that I think I'll need done. As we build, and as we start bringing in live testers, I'll have to amend things and I'll have to add things. But Dan's and my objective is to have me off of WordPress for good, and onto the software I need, by the end of the year, and sooner if possible.

PART 2: Finishing up *The Prisoner Gambit*, and then writing the next HTWAS Demo Story for the HTWAS Class.

Before I can take the next module of How To Write A Series live, I have to write my proof-of-concept story for my writers. MODULE FOUR of How To Write A Series, by the way, is going to be **PREVENTING SERIES BOREDOM—Yours and Theirs**.

So figure that I'm going to have to pull out all the stops for the fourth HTWAS demo story—***Longview 4: Vipers' Nest***. AND keep it between 20,000 and 30,000 words, which is getting really tough. These things keep trying to turn into novels on me, and in the first three stories, I've already done the equivalent of one full-length novel.

PART 3: Working with RMW Beta Testers

What I've done instead is ask founding members of ReadersMeetWriters.com to beta-test the in-house certification courses I'm putting together for RMW, and to test the courses using my lessons, letting me know where there are problems,

and letting me fix the courses while they practice on my books. That way, RMW members who take the training for things like Manuscript Layout and Cover Art Design will not have to get the versions with splinters. My volunteers are taking the pain for them.

I'll fit in other things as I can, but getting my out-of-print stuff off of my hard drive is done, and delegated, and the weight off of my mind from just that is massive. If I can also get two stories written, and my part of the software development mostly finished between now and the end of June, I'll be in much better shape than I was when I asked for help.

Thank you for your suggestions. I wanted you to see what I've done with them so far.

I'll be back here when I've finished something. ☐

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The Grueling Revision Of Penitence and Disbelief

By Holly Lisle

Where revision is concerned, making the assumption that you have the process of knocking out an upcoming revision well in hand before you start in is an act of hubris that will be punished by the Manuscript God.



This I know, for I have walked through the Valley of What-The-FUCK-Was-I-Thinking many and many a time before, and have had my ass handed to me by simple black ink on white paper more times than I can count.

Knowing this, I like to think I have learned something from my previous revisions.

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But, you see, THIS revision was going to be a piece of cake. 22,000-word story, knew what I was writing when I was writing it, I'd knock the whole thing out on Friday, do the type-in on Saturday, give myself a well-deserved day off on Sunday, and be back in here bright-eyed and perky today.

Hubris.

Ouch.

So I am now clawing my way out of a three-day ordeal that left me battered, bloodied, and unrested, to face type-in today

with much more to type in than I had anticipated, with both the addition of a shitload of new words to the story, and a significant addition of plot that I'm going to have to track back-brain as I work to keep out the stupid, and one item that I FORGOT to deal with in the write-in and that I must now remember to address during the type-in.

Odds are high that I will not be finished with this today.

Nothing else happens in my universe until this is done.

I have a ton of other things that MUST happen soon, but this must happen first.

Watch this space. Once this manuscript is done, a bunch of things are going to start rolling out very quickly.

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A nice wordpress theme for authors, briefly free

By Holly Lisle

One of my students, Kathryn Kistner, found this. It's a very attractive WordPress theme designed specifically for writers.

I have no idea how "limited time" this is, but the theme is free now, and will be \$35 when it returns to being pain.

I'm passing on the recommendation. You can check it out here:

<http://originalthemes.co/author/free/>

10/04/13 SITE UPGRADE UPDATE

By Holly Lisle

MemberMouse, iDevAffiliate, and bbPress: MOSTLY Done

- MemberMouse is awesome, and Mark and I are about done setting up everything.
- bbPress has some strange issues that we're still working out.

The iDevAffiliate folks are installing iDevAffiliate because 1) I'm sick of software installation, and 2) They won't screw it up and I'm so fried at this point that I might.

Too many loose ends yet to go live tonight. We're looking at October 11-13 as both reasonable and reachable.

Triage One—My Jeff Walker “Ugly Workshop” Bonus

By Holly Lisle

JUST ADDED: Jeff went live early. PLF is not available—and you can get his course, and MY bonus, Now.

Here’s the link

<http://hollylisle.com/Jeff-Walker-NOW>

Post questions about my Jeff Walker bonus here.

If you have questions about the course that I can answer, ask them, too—but remember, I don’t know what the price is going to be yet, have not yet seen the new version of the course, and my old version has become outdated, as proven by what I’ve already learned from the existing videos.

You’ll get a very solid idea of what the course offers from these three free videos—Video One, Two, and Three—where Jeff uses the process he teaches to present the course he’s teaching. You’ll come in on Video Three. If you haven’t seen the first two, click back to the first one and start there.

Remember that if you have not posted to this blog before, I have to approve your first post, so when you post, don’t re-post. I’ll get your post live as quickly as I can, and answer as soon thereafter as possible.

And because the link to the videos above is my affiliate link (which you must use to get my bonus), let me include my affiliate statement regarding Jeff Walker here:

My Affiliate Statement

Jeff Walker is one of THREE people whose work I recommend without reservation if you're treating your writing like a business. If you write fiction, he is one of two. (Jimmy D. Brown is great for teaching you how to put together courses, but is not really applicable for fiction writers).

And after a personal invitation from Jeff, I became an affiliate.

Which means if you buy this course through my link, I will get paid.

I was recommending him long before he asked me to be an affiliate, because what I learned from him changed my life immeasurably and for the better.

I would continue to recommend him even if he dropped his affiliate program, and for the same reason. He treats his students with care and understanding, he gives a damn that you succeed, and his course is the best course on the Internet for showing you how to connect your work to the people who will love it.

Holly Lisle

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Good writing day, plus starting into rebuilding the

HTTS site

By Holly Lisle

Today has gone pretty well. In spite of major napping, I managed to write 1220 words on **Create A World Clinic**. Working on the Tube Of Toothpaste World now, and why it matter.s ☐

And I'm rebuilding the core pages of the How To Think Sideways site to make it 1) easy to navigate, 2) easy to join, and 3) easy to understand why you might WANT to join (as well as making it easy for folks who WON'T be happy there to know it before they sign up). Have been searching web pages that WORK (which HowToThinkSideways.com basically hasn't to this point).

Don't look for anything but cosmetic changes yet, though. I am **rebuilding** the entire flow of the site, and that means I have to have all the new pages completed and connected before I can take them live.

So the mess that it is (though with new wallpaper) will continue a bit longer.

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How To Think Sideways site redesign begins

By Holly Lisle

I have had another brutal migraine. My creativity is at low ebb. I'm struggling for concepts. Writing **World Clinic** is

beyond me right now.

So, since this also needed to be done, I started into the HTTS site overhaul.

My objectives are clarity of purpose and simplicity of use.

I figure getting the entire site fixed will take me about two weeks, but I got the initial stuff laid out and live today.

I'd appreciate a few folks to tell me (just reply here) where you ran into any problem areas.

It's NOT done. But it's mostly workable...

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I'm officially on Holiday Hours #wabwm

By Holly Lisle

Getting the whole month of December off didn't quite work out.

But I am taking off the rest of the month. I don't remember ever having been this tired before, but I now have a chance to rest. Mostly. Sort of.

UNTIL MONDAY, JANUARY 7th, I'll do Student Support on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. It's just me in there. Margaret is going on holiday, so it'll mostly be me WITHOUT major techie backup, so big problems will be "as I can fix them" or "when Margaret gets back".

On Monday, January 7th, I get back to work for real.

So what does next year's work look like?

What Happens Next Year

First, I write **CREATE A WORLD CLINIC**. I have my outline in Scrivener, the first couple chapters are done already, and I'm **FINALLY** going to finish the thing. Starting in January.

Drip (the piece of software I needed to offer new **BIG** courses) is done and working. (Margaret built this, and it's wonderful.) This is **HUGE**. It means I can do workshops with small class sizes and personal feedback, new bigger courses, and "textbook" classes for things like **CREATE A CHARACTER CLINIC** and the upcoming **CREATE A WORLD CLINIC**, where we'll meet a few times in a single week, and I'll crit your creations. Real assignments. Real deadlines. ☐ It'll be fun.

Next year I'm bringing back the **FULL**, timed-lesson, everything-included version of **How to Think Sideways**. I have had a ton of requests to make the structured version with the walkthrough, all the downloadable stuff, the bonus course, and the community as a single purchase available again.

HTTS Direct will still be around, and still be a less expensive and unstructured alternative. **HOWEVER**, after the new year, **HTTS Direct** lessons will come off their extended introductory price. Individual lessons will be \$5.99. The community + additional downloads option will remain available at the same price. When I have the Walkthrough finished, it will become available as a separate upgrade.

How to Write A Series will move to the new classrooms, and get the promised 6-lesson extension.

I'll write **THE EMERALD SUN**.

How to Revise Your Novel will move to the new classrooms.

I'll start **WISHBONE**.

I'll begin doing some live (online) workshops.

These are not in sequential order, and I'm not putting dates on any of this. I'll just work through the list, and get as much done on it as I can, take next December off (jumping up and down on this one), then pick up wherever I left off in January of 2014.

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I'm ... um ... redesigning the site

By Holly Lisle

...in case you missed the vivid new colors and still-not-working slider menu in the header.

Did as much as I could before I took it live... but expect a mess today. I should have everything done by tomorrow, though.

I hope.

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