

Fighting with Myself – my next week or two, and the process of figuring out the rest of the series.

By Holly Lisle

Today and for the next few days, I'm going to be writing five provisional synopses.

What are these, and why would I write them?

The way I write, I have an outline – but it's very, very light.

Each chapter (which can include multiple scenes) receives one sentence of no more than 30 words to cover the movement of characters through conflict in that part of the story, following the PACTS formula.

PROTAGONIST

ANTAGONIST

CONFLICT

TWIST

SETTING

Or, in story sentence form, *Protagonist versus antagonist in a setting with a twist.*

This is great in that it allows me to never write a scene in which a character is sitting at a table thinking (frequently whining) about how *shit* life is.

This is bad in that my characters, in the heat of engaging in interesting action in exciting places, frequently decide to take the story into their own hands, and do things I didn't plan – and because my characters are both fragments of me, and fragments of things they pull out of the damned ether, their actions can sometimes shock the hell out of me while being worlds better than what I'd planned.

(Occasionally, they kill off someone I love... but I've already told that story.)

But back to the Story Sentence process, and two necessarily vague examples of how fighting my Line-for-Scene is making things challenging for Book 3.

1) My MC (main character) and her cat went out to meet with an adorable live teddy bear who was supposed to be important later. The teddy bear was lying to me about what he was doing there, however. My main character saw through his lies, and dealt with him based on who he really was rather than who I'd believed him to be, and a major plot point to a part of the world I thought I understood went sideways.

2) In the very first scene of the first chapter, I'm suddenly writing about trying to save a guy I really didn't like when I first met him. It was a good scene, and I was happy with it. Then Mr. Unlikable showed me who he really was, and the price he'd paid to become that guy, and all of a sudden I fell in love with the little bastard. Was sitting there with tears running down my cheeks, knowing that he isn't a throwaway. Instead, he's a primary character throughout the series – and one of the most unlikely heroes I've ever written. So right at the midpoint of the novel where I met the real him, (and where – in general – you know what the story is about for 45,000 words or so) the ENTIRE focus of the second book changed from being about a different character to being about him. So all the shit I'd planned for that OTHER character is being moved around, and will have to be spread in pieces through the

entire five books.

I will note that it's entirely possible to write to a strict outline and follow it.

I will also note that I have never successfully done this.

I've always fought against the outline, because if I already know what's going to happen as I'm writing, in the back of my mind where the fiction lives, that story has already been told and there's no point telling it again.

However... I do have to have some big, planned events in place. Stuff that the rest of the story can build around.

For the rest of this week, and maybe some of next week, I'll be going through and building summaries of what I've done in the first two books, picking out those big planned events and deciding how to use them in the next three books so that they fit...

Writing rough 200-word synopses for the next three books (with the understanding that this process is usually as effective as herding cats...

And then, when I think I sort of know where I might be going, I'll write 30 PACTS sentences (one for each chapter) into the line-for-chapter outline for Book 3.

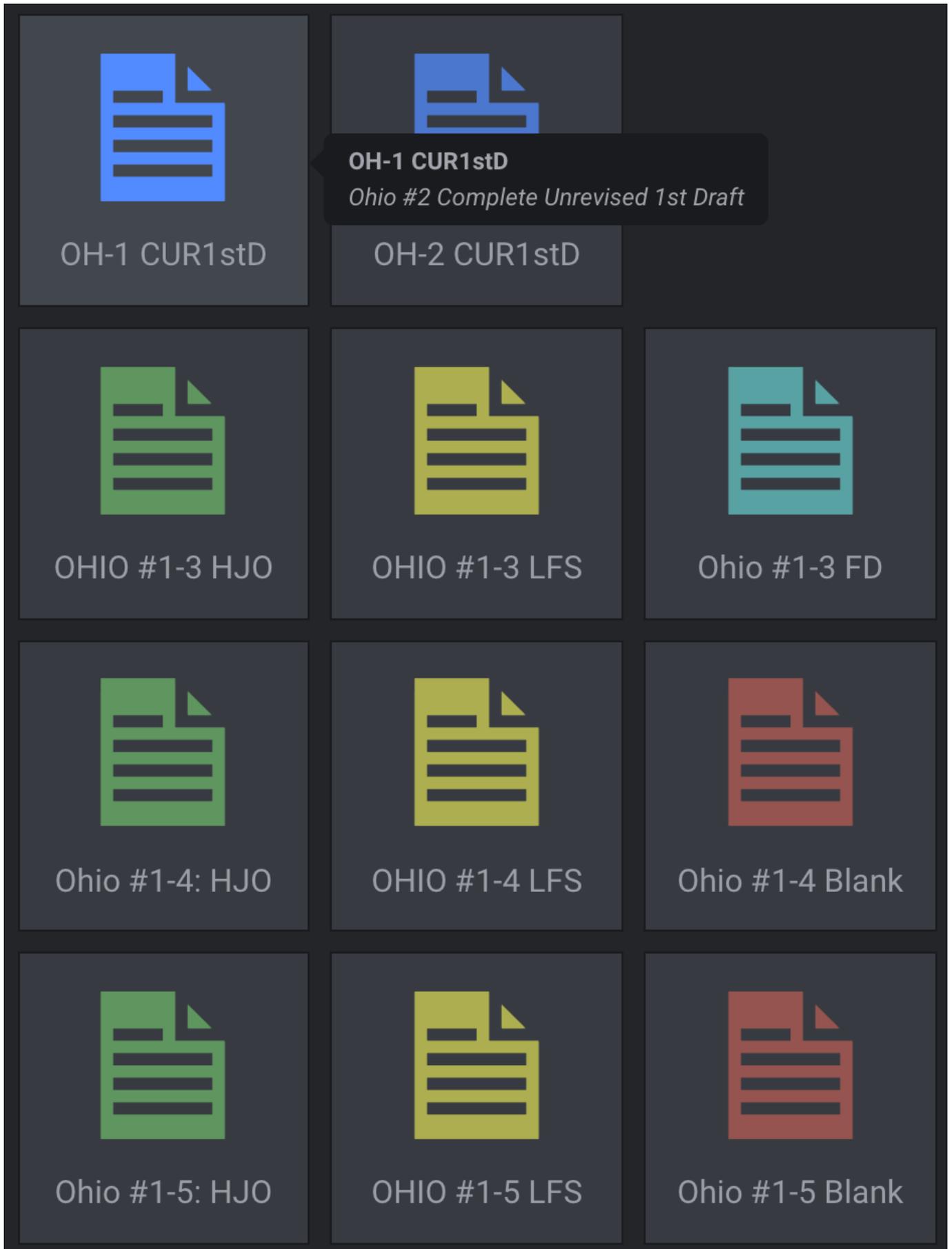
There is NO DAMN REASON to try this process yet for Books 4 and 5.

Because Book 3, like Books 1 and 2, will turn out to be almost nothing like what I'd planned – but will be all the better for me having to fight the outline to come to the better fictional truth that's living inside it.

And SOME TECHIE STUFF for FICTION WRITERS

I use Freeter Pro to keep my projects where I can find them.

The screenshot below is the current state of the Ohio Novels.



The two books at the top are Ohio 1 and 2, which are currently in Complete Unrevised First-Draft State.

With a series like the one I'm writing (which is unlike any series I've written before) I discovered that revising each book as I finished it was pointless. I'll have to know the ending before I can revise the beginning.

In this project, I'm essentially living in the non-magic version of the world, so I don't have to draw maps – but I'm discovering the physics of the alternate universe as I go – and while I know the magic rules for the story, and a lot of the critters, and some important characters, each of these is bringing new parts of the universe to me as I write.

I just met Crazy Tree yesterday. That was a shock, lemme tell you.

Having Freeter, however, lets me keep this whole project and all its interconnected pieces carefully labeled, and just one click away.

If you're a writer dealing with dozens of different projects, and you need to be able to find each of them (or each part of them) with one click, this is my favorite piece of software ever. \$29 bucks, no subscription. New version updates will require payment, but there hasn't been one yet. I love this, and recommend it: <https://freeter.io/> (NOT AN AFFILIATE LINK).

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Just finished Book 2 (in first draft, but STILL...) 1455 words today, 93,419 total

By Holly Lisle

Today's words went well. I love the ending I got.

I already know the revision on this one is going to be big – but everything in it now can wait until all five books are done in first draft.

Starting tomorrow, I'm going to begin outlining the third book, using the process I've used for the first two – something that, once I've done five books with it, I'll be adding in as an advanced level for How to Write a Novel. (Gotta figure out what the bugs are before I suggest anyone else try this...)

Today, though?

Today I got the right ending.

I saved the cat.

I made myself laugh.

And my little Ohio town just got a bit weirder.

THAT? That is an awesome writing day.



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Well, it's Monday, after all... 888 words, and... damn Monday

By Holly Lisle

I bumped up my projected word-count to 95,000 words so that I could still have the progress bar show what I've done. I got 888 words in spite of deleting a bunch. While writing today was liking rollerskating uphill against a headwind, but I still got words.

Here's hoping tomorrow will be less of a pain.



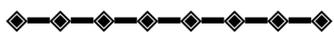
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My characters keep surprising me – and with 1436 words, I don't think they're done yet

By Holly Lisle

As always, I started by cleaning up the last stuff I wrote yesterday, just to get back into the flow, and realized that what I was writing happened during the Great Flood of 1913 – and got a fair few extra words building the relevance from that bit of backstory.

AND made myself cry while I was writing, which is pretty annoying. It's hard to type when your eyes are drippy and your throat is tight.

And then I landed back in my main character's present, tangled in with the hell of a mess she's just discovered in her past that's in the process of colliding with the hell of a mess in her present.

And which is all tangled up with her lawyer, who she's discovered has been lying to her in a big way.

Good words, good writing day, and I'm now over 90,000, and still have a ways to go.

I've given myself all five days next week to finish this, and

I really want to hit that deadline.

If I have to, I can go maybe another five after that, but in the back of my mind, I'm already pulling out events from this book and the first one that are going to have to start dripping their fallout into Book 3.



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**Nearing the end – 1521 words,
a spiffy twist, and the
REALLY fun stuff tomorrow**

By Holly Lisle

I ran over my planned words today (1250) because I got hooked by the scene and couldn't make myself stop.

My MC got to spend some time with someone she'd thought was a

hallucination, found out a bit more about how she's surviving in a town where things keep trying to kill her...

And the best stuff is still to come.

I have, I think, about four more scenes to write to get this book done, which will put it at, best guess, about 95,000 – 97,000 words.

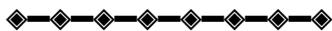
That's a nice, meaty novel length.

And once that's done, I'll build the line-for-scene outline for Book Three.

I figure I should be working on that by next Friday (the 25th of February).

I love so much the way this is coming together. I wish I could be more specific. Wish I could give some snippets, maybe an early first-draft chapter or two like I used to.

But I can't screw up my pseudonym by attaching myself to it. I have to give this series a legitimate chance of starting out fresh, with a brand new author name and no publishing history at all.



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Got 1909 words, one GREAT “grandma revelation”... and moved several plot lines forward.

By Holly Lisle

I made my word count and more. Better, though, I discovered what the Second Room wanted to show my main character, and I left myself with a couple dilemmas she gets to deal with tomorrow.

I found out about my town’s past and a few of its important past inhabitants – and the effects they’re still having in the present.

And I set myself up for that “barbecuing Grandpa” last line in the chapter that’s going to come back again in a couple of future books.

This was a GOOD Tuesday.



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First the time, then the weather. THEN the words.

By Holly Lisle

THE TIME

This morning, I dreamed a digital clock, which showed me 7:31.

I woke up. Immediately checked the time. It was actually 7:41.

My brain is ten minutes slow...dammit.

Anybody still have your copy of *The Brand New Human's User Manual*? If you do, could you give me the steps for resetting my brain clock? At least my software has updated to the digital clock, but I'm pretty sure my manual got lost in a move.

THE WEATHER

Right now, outside it's 16°. According to my weather app, we're not going to go above freezing for the rest of the week. The last time I saw weather like this, I was nine years old; I lived in Alaska, three miles upriver from Kwethluk, in an enormous 3-story log-cabin boys' dorm where my folks were dorm parents; and we heated the place with wood, which my father

and the bigger boys in the dorm went outside and cut.

The entire compound had been, I suspect, a cold-war US listening post – though nobody tells nine-year-old girls this sort of thing. You have to piece that stuff together by yourself from context.

The compound still had a flag on one of the walls, though, that said Nunipistinguk – which in the local Yu'piks' dialect probably meant “Those Dummies Built a Basement in Tundra.”

(Every time the river rose over the banks – which was a recurring spring-thaw event – the basement flooded.)

(As a longish aside, because my one-room, five-grade school up in the boys' dorm attic, was in English and the kids there were all learning English, the only thing I ever learned to say in the local dialect was “I want another cup of coffee.”

The spelling is wrong, but I learned it phonetically. It sounded like “jolly goofamick gootoden.” I was nine back then, and nobody sane would have let me near coffee. (Votes are still out on whether someone wound as tight as I am should be drinking it even now.) So I never got to try the request out in real life.

(If you know any Yu'piks, ask if that's what it actually means. If it's profanity someone thought it was funny to teach a kid, I apologize. I much prefer to make my profanity intentional.)

Oh. And I still remember the word *gussak*. Which, as the nine-year-old outsider, I got called a lot by the other kids. It's derogatory. It derives from the word Cossack.

Anyway, the extreme low temperatures we're moving into in the north and east, if they hold, will be the most extended period of deep cold I've experienced since Alaska – so if you're up in the Big Purple Belt of coming freezing temperatures, here's

some useful information I learned when I lived on tundra.

The coldest temperature I ever experienced was in Alaska, and it was -81°. Not a typo. (This was in either the winter of 1969 or the winter of 1970 – probably '70).

The military guys – who I assume built and operated the place before the US military decommissioned the site and sold it to the Moravians – had an Arctic thermometer outside the window of what was, to me, the boys' dorm-parents' suite (probably officers' quarters) which was situated on the floor beneath the boys dorm (certainly barracks). Anyway, I wanted to go outside to play, in spite of having seen the temperature.

So my dad walked me over to the door, opened it, threw the contents of a cup of hot coffee he'd been drinking over the steps down to the boardwalk – and the liquid exploded with a crack like a shotgun, and turned into brown snow.

What I Learned: Things made out of mostly water don't go outside in weather like that. Since a lot of us are about to have weather like that... be careful out there. Fingers, toes, and noses don't grow back.

THE WORDS

Today, my fingers flew. I got 1,386 words – significantly over my must-hit objective of 1,111. And I found out something so very, very cool about what caused the invisible car. It wasn't something I'd planned, it wasn't something I'd even imagined, but when the words started rolling, it just rolled out, and it gave me another scary thing to drop into my little Ohio town.

Also, I'm creeping toward identifying a character who's going to be very important in Book 3. I've known all along who he really is, but it's one of those things that I'm dripping into the stories a bit at time. And today, I discovered something

new about him.

Excellent Monday, and I'm very happy with the results.

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Memory holds some dark nights within it – my MC is facing a bad one today. 1341 words, and good progress.

By Holly Lisle

Yesterday there were no words. There was, instead, me cutting prices of all my writing classes over \$20 by 50% – the economy is not great, and indications on whether it will get better or worse are all over the place.

I'll raise prices again when the economy recovers.

So no, there was no Tuesday post.

But today was a good writing day.

My hero is learning a number of new things about herself – painfully. But the truth of what she's discovering, while it's

scary, is still the truth. And the more she comes to grips with her past and what she's had to pay to be alive already is about to pay off by introducing her to some new tools she didn't even know she had.

And there was a dragon.

She thinks.

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Fat's Where It's At – A quirky scene, and 1657 words. AWESOME writing Friday!

By Holly Lisle

I have been beating the crap out of my main character on a regular basis – she has a dangerous and very weird job, and she's pissed off some seriously WRONG folks.

Over the last few writing days, I've been clobbering her.

Today, while recovering, she started looking at herself through a different lens. And because she's starting to change the way she sees the world...

She's started asking better questions.

Today's scene was a LOT of fun to write, and I discovered (right along with my main character) something that I didn't realize was going on, hadn't planned, and didn't expect.

But what my MC and I discovered today fits perfectly, and it moves the series in a direction it needs to go.

Today, she asked the first of many RIGHT questions she'll need to answer to get to the eventual truth.

On Monday when I get back to the book, she's going to come to the wrong conclusion (the book I'm writing now is, after all, only the second book in the series). But this is most definitely going to improve the directions in which she's looking for the correct answers she will eventually uncover.

I'm truly happy with the way this series is building.

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Oh, boy! Hurt my character, wrought vengeance on an evildoer, and made myself laugh... in 1356 words!

By Holly Lisle

Excellent Monday! And how often does anyone get to say that?

I rolled into work this morning (a few hours ago) with my

Conflict Sentence in the right corner of Scrivener.

That's Protagonist Versus Antagonist in Setting with Twist in 30 words or less. Today's chapter sentence was twenty-nine words, and was the aftermath of her going out for a run to see if she could get herself hurt.

Seriously.

There was surgery. Projectile vomiting. More surgery. Pain, confusion, fear, and danger... and some wry and kind of snarky commentary from the subject of all this awfulness, my main character – it was funny as hell, fun to write, and I went over my daily word limit again.

I love this book.

I love this world.

And I'm in the final third, hitting deadlines and even getting a bit ahead on them, with three more books to write after this one. And I can't wait.

Well, I can. I have to. But today is what, if you're a writer, you wish all days were like.

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