

Dead Man's Party – and Fiction as the Day Job again...

By Holly Lisle

Got 1515+ words this morning on Dead Man's Party, in a smidge under an hour.

Also built my work process for getting a LOT more fiction done, and spending the first two to three hours of every weekday on that.

My daughter Becca is going to modify the process I came up with (after some heavy research over the past couple of weeks) to work in both shorter fiction and long fiction.

Me? Right now, I just wanna do a bunch of novels, the first stack of them in Settled Space.

Then I want to resuscitate some of my Hard Drive Zombies.

And then we'll see.

But the objective is to make my fiction the BIG paying job again, with the classes as this fun thing I get to do alongside novels that are paying the bills.

I'm a lot happier when I'm writing two hours of fiction first every morning... and that's the plan. (Mostly...)

Roughed out, the plan is actually:

Monday through Friday...

- STEP ONE: Write two hours or 2000 words on the current novel
- STEP TWO: Then build the plan for the next novel
- STEP THREE: Then revise/ edit/ format/ publish/ market

for one hour on the previous novel

Then do the nonfiction stuff.

That'll put me up to three to four hours a day on total fiction, leaving two to four hours a day for non-fiction plus forums plus blogging.

In that order.

Consistent Novel Publishing. It's what I'm heading toward.

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Dreaming the Dead

By Holly Lisle

It was 1:37 AM when I woke up. It's 1:48 AM right now, and I'm still shaky.

I dreamed I was visited by Jim Baen, and by someone speaking for him. I didn't know his intermediary, but Jim Baen was my first publisher, and he taught me a huge amount about the business, and, frankly, I adored him. And then differences of opinion came between us, and I moved on. I tried to call him a few times—to find out how to make things right between us—but he would never take my calls.

And then he died, ending the chance that anything would ever be fixed between us.

I don't dream the dead. In my memory, I spent some sleep time once with my grandmother after she died. And once, my Persian cat Fafhrd came to sit beside me in my dream. Neither of them

did anything. Neither said anything. And in my entire life, those are the only two times before this has happened.

I dreamed Jim Baen. In my dream, Jim had come back to set things right between us. And he did it by telling his intermediary to tell me something to write, something "that you would love, that you would be passionate about." Through his intermediary, he told me that if I wrote it, well, basically, we wouldn't have to worry about money anymore.

The intermediary named Jim's amount. It was big, but surprisingly plausible. I tried to ask Jim something, to speak to him directly, to make sure I understood.

The dead do not speak in my dreams. If approached directly, apparently they vanish. In the dream, I crashed to the ground while trying to talk to him.

And then I woke up.

And I'm sitting here typing at this ludicrous hour of the morning with my pulse pounding, with my skin prickled, with my hands shaking. I had the idea in my head. No. Let me restate that. I **have** the idea in my head, and it's incredible. Even now that I am awake, even now that I am rational, it is so good it is sucking the air from the room, making it hard for me to breathe. It's an idea that I want to write even if it isn't a gift from Jim Baen, the publisher I adored but with whom I did not end well, making his own amends for the way things ended.

It is rich, it is workable, it builds on something that I'd plunked around with and loved and then put away because I was doing contracted novels. Because now, you see, I'm not. I'm done with every book of every contract I had, and I'm working my ass off to put together enough money so that I'll be able to write a couple of novels on spec (yes, **this** is the reason I've been sinking my entire life into the **How to Think Sideways** course and willingly putting in 70-hour weeks while

completely ignoring my fiction since June). I'm buying myself time to write the books **I** want to write. The books of my heart. I thought I knew what those books would be.

And now...

And now...

Now I have dreamed the dead, and have been offered a freaking brilliant publishing insight from someone I tried so hard to fix things with, and have dreamed that this was the olive branch between us, and dammit, the other thing I was writing was good. But this is better. **This is SO much better, and it's fantasy.** And even if the amount of money his intermediary told me it would make was a dream, and even if the gesture of the olive branch was a dream, and even if ...

Shit. Tears in my eyes. Tears running down my cheeks. And this incredible idea.

I do not dream the dead. But tonight I did. Tonight I did. And whether it was real or not, or whether it was a metaphor, or my subconscious mind trying to fix the thing that could not be fixed between me and a man who was a wonderful mentor before things went wrong, I think I'm going to listen.

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Friday Snippets: From the Ghost Files

By Holly Lisle

I'm at a point where I really can't post any more of the Moonroads book, at least not for a while. But I still want to do Friday Snippets. So I figured for your amusement and edification, I'd post snippets from the stuff I've had rejected but that I still intend to keep trying to sell, albeit perhaps in a different genre or in a highly revised version.

Black Dog: Chapter 1: Part One

Black Dog: Chapter 1: Part Two

Black Dog: Chapter 1: Part Three

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BLACK DOG

(...Chapter One continued...)

Real plant, scientific marker. F2 ... that was a genetic term. She tried to remember high school biology, and that was either the parent or the child second generation in genetic experiments, wasn't it?

Genetic experiments.

The chill she felt in that instant wasn't from the cold. The fact that tender flowers were blooming and tender plants were bearing fruit in a cold mountain valley while covered with snow could really only be explained by genetic engineering, couldn't it? Natalie couldn't make sense of any of the rest of the label, though the word 'human' in context with a

genetic experiment involving plants scared her.

All her happiness at finding this miracle garden in the wilderness bled off, and she started snapping pictures of the markers at the bases of the plants for another reason. She'd bet her next year's profits that this was a GM live test site – a place where genetically modified plants were being grown outside of controlled conditions. And if the 'human' on the label meant someone was crossing human DNA with plant DNA, she would bet her 401K every bit of this was illegal. Dangerous. Something that could hurt people. With food crops involved – and she stared at the apple trees and the corn and the berries and all the rest – it could be lethal.

She snapped pictures as fast as she could, trying to get all the labels. Someone should be able to figure out what they meant. She had to get as much proof as she could, and as much information. She didn't know who she'd give it to, but she would worry about that later.

And then the feeling that something was watching her returned, and she looked up. And on a post, fairly well hidden by plants, she saw a surveillance camera. Red light blinking on the base. Pointed right at her.

No.

She took two steps to the left. The camera tracked her movement.

A second snake in the Garden of Eden. Oh, God.

And then, right beside her, out of nowhere, a deep rumbling growl crawled into her ears and through her brain and straight down her spine and turned her knees to jelly.

She looked to her right. Slowly.

A black dog the size of a Shetland pony advanced on her, hackles raised, teeth bared, eyes glowing an insane fiery

red. She heard a pathetic, whimpering, dying-rabbit noise and realized that it was coming from her. She turned to face the dog, but at the same time started backing away.

Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God was she in trouble.

The dog had to weigh at least two hundred pounds. At least two hundred. He was the biggest, most terrifying animal she had ever seen in her life; the only thing she could think as she stared at him and backed away was, Run, but if she ran, he'd jump on her and tear her apart. He would. She knew it.

She backed up the side of the mountain, through the carefully planted and labeled genetically-modified plants, past another surveillance camera, her feet leaving deep tracks in the snow. She kept backing, and then she was out of the test beds, and feeling scrub brush and forest understory plants smacking against the back of her head.

She bumped into a tree, and the dog snarled and stalked closer.

His eyes looked as big as saucers. And they were still glowing red. What the hell kind of dog was he? Was he the thing that she'd thought she felt tracking her through the woods?

I'm going to die here.

She skirted around the tree trunk behind her, never taking her eyes off the dog. She wondered if she could find a climbable tree, and if she could get up it before he could pounce on her.

Maybe to the first, she decided, not a chance to the second. She kept backing, with the bright colors of the nightmare garden gradually giving way to more and more leafless understory plants.

The dog seemed to be herding her someplace, she thought. And

when she thought it, his ears suddenly perked forward and he stood up straight and the snarl went away, replaced for just an instant by a big, doggie grin that transformed him almost completely from something terrifying into something friendly. Except for those weird red eyes.

Natalie was staring at the dog. Something about him wasn't right. Not right at all. She was almost certain that she could see the outline of the tree right behind him through him. Which was insane.

And then, right before Natalie's eyes, the dog faded like fog under the hot sun.

She yelped.

And a strong arm wrapped around her chest and a leather-gloved hand clapped over her mouth – hard – and a man's deep voice snarled in her ear, "You have about 30 seconds to decide whether you want to live today, or whether you want to die."

End of Chapter One.

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BLACK DOG

(...Chapter One continued...)

Natalie didn't believe in miracles – she was a practical woman. And yet here she was, and the ground before her was just as snowy as the ground behind her, and yet the vision in front of her held steady. Summer flowers, summer trees, bushes with their thorny canes already heavy with blackberries and raspberries, corn in the tassel, something new and beautiful and exciting everywhere she looked.

Pictures, moron – get pictures, she told herself, and managed with trembling hands to raise the camera and start snapping. Framing her shots out of habit, but not because it was necessary, she started filling up her camera. At her current resolution, she had almost three hundred shots still available. That wasn't going to be enough, and she was glad

she'd jammed her laptop into the backpack at the last minute. There were times during the climbing when she'd resented that extra five pounds, but now she'd be able to transfer all her pictures to the hard drive, then take as many more as she needed. She had two extra sets of fresh batteries. She could get all of this, every bit of it.

She stood there snapping away like a crazy person, taking a few steps forward, turning and clicking, because every angle revealed something new and wonderful, something impossible and magnificent and heartbreakingly pure.

Her mind fought for an explanation. There had to be one. This place where she stood was impossible. The plants she looked at couldn't exist in their current conditions.

And then, with a thud of clarity, the explanation presented itself, and she wanted to cry, and at the same time she had to laugh. Had it not felt like such a cliché to her, she would have thumped herself once on the forehead. The plants weren't real. She'd come upon some abandoned movie set or florist's dumping ground, and she was looking at charmingly realistic silk or plastic plants scattered around. Which would explain why banana plants were growing next to apple trees, and what papayas and some alien spiky things were doing next to corn and strawberries and dark red cherries.

But this place still made a hell of a photo op, didn't it? She snapped a few more pictures, imagining the bewilderment of her colleagues when they received the e-mail with these photos.

Her mind raced, trying to figure out how they could they use a place like this in a game, and for a moment her weariness with her career fell away and she found herself caught up in the sheer joy of creating a story.

She needed a few close-ups. She could send those in a separate e-mail later, after she'd fielded the demands from

her team for an explanation and after she'd had her little laugh. She crossed the ground to the closest flowerbed; she was pretty sure she recognized foxgloves and hollyhocks, and a couple different types of daisies, or flowers that were at least daisy-like. Natalie's mother was a fanatical gardener, but Natalie had never had the chance to catch the bug.

She focused the lens for extreme close-up and crouched next to one of the hollyhocks, wanting to get the detail of thread patterns in the petals.

She couldn't find them. She put the camera down, leaned close, and looked.

The flowers appeared to be real.

No. Not possible.

She reached out with one finger, and touched not plastic or silk but the softness of a real flower. When she pulled her finder back, she could see pollen on her fingertip.

And at her close range, she could see something else. Down at the base of the plant, a little marker. She leaned in close. F2/ polymorphic SSR/ human batch 3084/ STMN2/ CNTN5/ DRG1

Natalie crouched there, staring at that marker for a moment, bewildered. It felt like finding a snake in the Garden of Eden.

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This picks up right where last Friday's Snippet left off.

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BLACK DOG

(...Chapter One continued...)

She could see clearly on the other side of the stream. She could see everything over there. Bare-branch underbrush, unbroken snow, good light from nearly overhead that did not leave any dark puddles where something might lurk.

No big moving bulky skulking thing.

Natalie took a step backward and realized that she was shaking. She was not a nervous person. Didn't jump at noises

in her apartment, didn't fear living alone, didn't have a bit of trouble falling asleep at night. She was imaginative – in her line of work, she had to be – but she'd never had the problem of feeling her imagination trying to push its way into her reality. She was a practical person; this was something that had always been a point of pride with her.

And yet she could look at that empty bank and still be dead certain that she had seen something.

She retraced her steps, stood facing the same way, walked forward slowly, trying to duplicate the flash of red that had caught her attention. Trash on the other side of the woods might have caused the sudden brilliant glow of red; a kid's bicycle reflector or broken glass from an automobile taillight might make such a flash if illuminated for just a moment by a stray beam of sunlight. It would make sense. But she couldn't get the flash again.

But just because she couldn't duplicate it, that didn't mean that wasn't what it had been.

Just some trash. Nothing scary.

And yet, inside her, primitive hindbrain instinct was screaming, "Run. Go back. Get away from here."

Behind her lay the safety of her lovely rented log cabin and the idyllic lake. Ahead lay the siren lure of a mysterious waterfall, the sound of thundering water sweet to Natalie's ears, the possibility of something wonderful drawing her forward. Not just because she needed pictures for the team. Not just for the future of some as-yet intangible project. But for her, because something inside of her was hungry for wild water and solitude and places that no one else had ever seen.

So she caged the small, nervous creature at the back of her mind. That timorous, trembling prey that feared the shadow of

the hawk and the gliding step of the wolf would keep itself where it belonged – well-hidden, where its fears could not control her.

She could no longer find calm within herself; the feeling of being watched, silly thought it was, had driven her self-assuredness from her. But Natalie wanted mystery and beauty, wildness and adventure, even if it was the mundane adventure of locating a hidden waterfall. So she kept walking.

The terrain got rougher. The ground began to rise sharply, and the stream and the valley both took a sharp jog to the right.

She climbed on, stopping for a few minutes at a time to catch her breath. Finally, she reached a sort of plateau, and found herself faced by a rusted chain hanging over the stream between two old fence posts jammed into the earth. And hanging on the center of the chain, a battered, pitted faded metal sign.

NO TRESPASSING

Black with pale yellow letters that had surely once been bright and commanding. But not anymore – nor did Natalie have any interest in being commanded. She'd put too much effort into getting where she was to meekly turn around and go back.

She gave the sign's warning only a moment's consideration, and then climbed over the chain, and walked on. She was very near the waterfall; she couldn't see it yet, but its music was rising to a thundering crescendo, and she could just imagine how beautiful it would be.

Past the chain, the ground again rose steeply. Natalie lost herself in the sheer physical effort of the next leg of her journey, as what had seemed like a path became, briefly, almost vertical.

And then she got where she was going.

She came over the top of the rise, and stopped, blinking, certain for a moment that the altitude or exertion were playing tricks on her mind. She rubbed her eyes, certain she couldn't be seeing what her brain insisted she saw. Looked behind her, down the steep slope, over at the short run of whitewater as the stream shot down the narrows, and then back to the impossible scene in front of her.

To vivid green plants, to drifts of flowers in gold and periwinkle and crimson, pink and amber and lavender and royal purple, to young trees fully leafed out and set with unripe fruit, and behind this paradise, a shimmering rainbow-wreathed waterfall in the background and a deep, sapphire pool at its base that reflected the gem tones of the flowers around it.

Garden of Eden, she thought, afraid to breathe for fear that a single exhalation might erase the vision before her.

"God," she whispered. The starts of tears blurred her vision; she found herself swallowing around a lump in her throat.

She'd come yearning for beauty and a mystery, and she'd found a miracle.

I'll post continuing excerpts from this for the next few weeks.

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Hak bas gokmat!

By Holly Lisle

The language of the Sun Wizards is adding a bit of low comedy to the story. That particular phrase has giving Genna and her best friend Catri a nasty wake-up call—and sends them hurtling into an adventure with the silver door.

And they've found a sort of newspaper, one about as scary as anything they've had happen to them to this point. I'm writing that bit, and more with the silver door today.

I've liked the words I've gotten the past few days, but haven't managed to get over the 1000-words-per-day mark. Today I'm shooting for the full 2000.

Will post the Friday snippet later—today is a full-schedule sort of day, and I'm going to have to dig through the hard drive, and then format the thing.

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BLACK DOG

Chapter One

Out of the corner of her eye, Natalie Hammond caught a glimpse of something moving with her through the snowy woods. Just off to her right, on the other side of the brush. Something big. Something dark. She stopped, hand on the pepper gas canister in her coat pocket, and turned, ready to confront whatever it was. But looking directly at the brush, she could see that nothing was there. Nothing. And still the hair stood up on the back of her neck.

Natalie turned slowly in a full circle, scanning the terrain. The stream bed beside her. Her tracks along the path leading back to the rental cabin and the lake, both out of sight. Woods all around her, the mountains of north Georgia steep but not rugged, tree-covered but – because everything in early March the ground was still covered by snow and all those trees were bare – with decent visibility.

Natalie could see well enough in all directions, and all she could see was that she was alone.

Still, her pulse raced, and her mouth dried out, and she could not force herself to let go of the pepper spray. Her eyes told her she was alone. But her gut insisted something watched her. From nearby.

Dammit.

Natalie took a long, slow, deep breath and tried to slow her skittering heartbeat. She'd been in the city too long. Raleigh always had something going on, Natalie always had friends and colleagues around, and this sort of silence simply wasn't a part of her life. She was alone. She could see that. She wasn't being watched; she wasn't being followed. Her mind, used to the constant press of people, was manufacturing shadows.

But just to be sure, she walked through the layer of snow to the place where she'd thought she saw movement. The snow there was pristine. No footprints. No trails.

She sighed, forced her hand to let go of the pepper spray, and, just to kick her day back onto its planned track, she took a picture of the woods with her digital camera. It was nothing spectacular, but maybe the team would find a use for a shot of underbrush and unbroken snow.

She returned to the faint path she'd been following, breathed in the cold, crisp air, and finally felt like she was getting back under control. She stood quietly for a moment and listened. The waterfall sounded nearer, and she was hoping that she'd be able to reach it in time to get some good shots of it before she lost her light. She checked her watch. Just past noon. She should have plenty of time to get the pictures, then make the hike back to the cabin. And if she decided to be really ambitious, she load all the photos onto the laptop, put them into some sort of format, suggest a possible storyline, and e-mail the whole thing to the team.

Natalie would bet money she wasn't going to be feeling

ambitious, though.

She thought of PirateBox, of her friends back in Raleigh researching conspiracy theories and bouncing ideas off each other at a hundred miles a minute and creating wild stories that they then turned into award-winning video games – and she could be proud of everything she and her colleagues had accomplished together. She loved all of them. She loved seeing the joy they got from doing what they did. But she couldn't feel that hunger inside herself anymore. She didn't know when she'd lost it, but her own fire was gone.

She trudged beside the stream bed, getting nice shots of boulders and overhangs, doing what she'd told the team she was going to do. Wondering if, when she had to leave this haven, she would be able to go back to her old life. Natalie had reached her mid-thirties with a great career and wonderful friends, and she was one of the tiny percentage of people on the planet who could honestly say that she was living her dreams.

She wondered how many of those others found themselves probing their dreams like an aching tooth, wondering if what they had was really all there was –

She froze.

Across the stream bed, from the corner of her eye she caught flash of glowing ruby, a shadow slinking forward. Something as big as a man crouched over, as big as a calf – something bulky, and fast. She jumped and turned in a single movement, the pepper-spray canister in her hand, her index finger on the trigger.

Again, nothing.

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And A Sale

By Holly Lisle

Time to drag out the endless saga of the Onyx Proposal, but this time for happy news. Claire just bought **Shadow Music**, one of the books I worked up in the series of about a dozen that I did for the Onyx Proposal. **Shadow Music** sold to a different Penguin line (Eclipse), with a release date in early 2008, and I'll be doing it under my own name. If it goes well, we'll follow up with others. It isn't the SM Proposal, exactly, though, so the full SM Proposal, minus **Shadow Music**, will go back in the pile to be reworked and at some later date reused for something else. I don't throw away worlds.

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So. About the Writing.

By Holly Lisle

So. Penguin. The EMT Proposal is toast. We're discussing me going in an entirely different direction. I'm not posting details until we've sealed the deal, because there are some things about it that I might not be completely free to

discuss.

It isn't what I'd planned on, but it does offer some interesting possibilities.

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Only Bad News on the Print Version of CCC

By Holly Lisle

I've retired the print version of **Create A Character Clinic** from Lulu, and everyone who purchased a copy should receive a full refund.

I cannot get Lulu to use my PDF file, or to upload my Word document. I don't know what its problem is with Word—it won't give me an error message, though it claims one is there. As for Acrobat ... the problem there seems to be that I work on a Mac, and purchased my version of Adobe Acrobat for the Mac. Mac users pay the same price, but get half the program. Embedding fonts is a nightmare, and evidently I don't have the right ones, and even if I purchased the right ones from Adobe, there's no guarantee that I could get them to embed using the crippled version of Acrobat Mac users have available. And if I could get them to embed, there's still no guarantee that I could get Lulu to accept the file.

I'm bitterly disappointed by this, and apologize deeply to those of you who purchased the book.

I'll explore other printing options, but Cafe Press is

ridiculously expensive compared to Lulu, and I'd hoped to keep the books reasonably priced. There may be other options, as well. None of them will be quick. I won't assume again that the process will work simply because the store was willing to take my money for a copy.

This link will put you in touch with the people who should be automatically refunding your money.
<http://www.lulu.com/support/>

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