

The New Year, My Ohio Series and the Hero's Journey

[By Holly Lisle](#)

The Crash

The new year is just an arbitrary date – not a real thing, not something that can change your life. If you're in a Western European-derived country, then you use the Western calendar. In which [Pope Gregory XIII built a new calendar to update the Julian calendar \(which had an issue with equinoxes\)](#), and western Europe (and by extension, the US) adopted the calendar...

But the truth is that years and months and days and hours and minutes are arbitrary measurements, [best guesses by a multitude of civilizations all over the world](#) at marking time using different methods, usually outside the measurement of the speed of atomic decay of hydrogen or cesium atoms.

January 1st is a roll of the dice. The first day of the “new year” could be on the first day of spring, the summer equinox, the winter equinox, the date of the birth of the favorite person of the guy with enough power to memorialize that date for the life of that civilization...

Point is, the day itself...? Just. Doesn't. Matter.

It's one more wake-up call in a lifetime that you hope will be long, and that you hope will be good, and meaningful, and full of joy and excitement (of the right kind).

But humans in general seem to like to take stock. To look back at where they've been, to look forward to where they might want to go... and to see where they are.

That taking stock, for me, did not happen on December 31st, or on January 1st this year.

It happened when, after MONTHS on a revision that would in most cases would have just take me a couple of weeks, on Monday, January 6th, I crashed the novel *Dead Man's Party* into a ten-ton block of iron at about a thousand miles per hour.

It happened I came face to face with the true nature of the villain I'd built, and realized that day that while he was perfect for the role he held, and absolutely true and right for the story, *I could not write him*. And I could not remove him – he was perfect for the role, perfect for the book. He was simply the wrong character for me. I could not write him and find any joy in the writing.

It was a true dark night of the soul, and I was stunned by my vehement reaction to the story *Dead Man's Party* was becoming.

I stalled, froze, locked up.

Matt kicked me out of that locked-up, shut-down state by asking me, “Why are you doing this to yourself? The Ohio Novel has been sitting on your hard drive for six months? Why don't you work on that?”

And my daughter Becca said, “Why don't you take a think week? Figure out what you need to do?”

The Think Week

I took a [Bill-Gates-style Think Week](#), (in-house, no vacation) in which my theme was simply to define what I wanted my writing career to be. The last decade, it has been heavily non-fiction, but last year I wrote three first-draft novels while also writing the massive [How to Write a Novel class](#), and realized that I am burned all the hell out on nonfiction, and that I want to take a run at making my fiction my full-time job again, this time as an indie, and to use THAT experience

to build the support of my non-fiction classes around the fact that I'm a full-time pro **indie** fiction writer.

Walk the indie walk, in other words, and not have the majority of my credibility come from the thirty-some commercially published novels – because going commercial is simply not the best choice for most novelists.

And while I took my think week, and decided to pass *Dead Man's Party* on to my son Mark, I revised my first Ohio novel. Start to finish, read-through AND write-in. In three days. My previous personal best for an author's revision (as opposed to an editor's request for revisions, which usually takes a week, best case) is about two weeks. And that was grinding.

I did not experience a single moment of grinding on this, a single spot where I didn't know what to fix or how to fix it. And I loved the book on the read through, and loved it even more on the write in.

Three days is by far is the fastest I have EVER revised a full-length novel.

Doing that revision, I realized a couple of things.

The Ohio Series is what I want to be writing through at least five books.

To do them well, I need to do them exclusively, and stay deeply embedded in that world.

So between Monday, January 13th and today, I have been building the overall themes of the Ohio Series (it won't be called that when it goes on sale, but it's going to have to be Amazon exclusive when it launches, and I want to do either a three-book or five-book monthly release of the novels, which means I'm throwing everything I have into this.

The Ohio Series

I built a Hero's Journey type-in revision outline for the first Ohio novel, and Hero's Journey outlines for the other four books in the series – books 3 through 5 this morning.

I'll now transfer the Book 1 HJO (Hero's Journey Outline) to my Scrivener chapter notes, and do the type-in revision from the manuscript. Put the Book 2 HJO into the notes of the next novel manuscript, and start writing that one. Revise.

Write the third. Decide if the end of the midpoint novel of the series is a good place to put everything that I have on sale... OR wait until I have all five done.

I'll be updating [How to Revise Your Novel](#) during this process, and will no doubt have some nice examples of my accelerated process to bring to the class update... but that's going to have to be in small steps, and will not be done at the blinding one-lesson-per-week pace I maintained while building of *How to Write a Novel*.

At this point, I revert to being a novelist first. And that means fiction first, and lots of it. My first two hours of the morning, Monday through Thursday. More if I can streamline my schedule.

So... to sum up...

Things are changing. And I'm glad.

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First snow in 30 years, and huge strides on the Dead Man's Party revision

[By Holly Lisle](#)

We knew yesterday there would be snow today.

I made Matt promise to get me up when it started – and around 4AM, the snow began. (He was editing someone's novel at the time, and he does that best when the house is quiet and he has it to himself.)

So he came and got me, and got the kid, who's 22, but had never seen snow.

And all three of us went out onto the front porch in the cold, just wearing our inside clothes, and for a few minutes we let the cold and the snow bite into us and bring us the ultimate expression of this season that was brand new to Joe, and which had been lost to me for the last thirty years.

We had one snow in North Carolina when the two older kids were little, and I took them outside in that so we could build snowmen and I could drag them around the street on a sled we only ever got to use that once.

So. Snow. We haz it, and I'm happy.

Got a TON done on the revision of Dead Man's Party this morning (working four straight hours because you lose track of the time will do that for you).

Some pieces of the beginning of the story connected for me, and made what's going to be the new middle a helluva lot darker.

The world itself is pulling in tighter – fitting together better. I love this book in spite of the fact that it keeps trying to turn into a series on me.

Dead Man's Party is and needs to be a one-off. It doesn't fit into my Ohio universe, and it doesn't need to leak into its own larger world.

But I do love the damn thing, in spite of its expansionist tendencies.

So... with fiction done for today, and having gone WAY beyond my planned page count, now I'm starting into wrapping up the upgrade of Lesson 1 of HTRYN.

It's taking longer than anticipated. But that happens to, and the final class will be worth the extra effort.

Onward then, while happily at home with snow.

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Back to Words: The Dead Man's Party Revision

[By Holly Lisle](#)

The last few days have been wordless because of the ongoing chaos, which still has to get a lot worse before it can start getting better.

Today, though, I managed to write Chapter 9 – 1956 words.

Again because this is still inside the first twelve chapters where I had not yet figured out the story I was telling or where and when it took place, these were all brand-new words, and from the POV of Laurie, the brand-new character who picks up a part of the story I needed but mostly missed in the first draft – that of the Caravan Volunteer.

I like her. She's too young for the job she's taken, but she's tougher than her years. And she's going to be a very cool secondary hero.

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Dead Man's Party – Cali on the day after

[By Holly Lisle](#)

Still all new words in the type-in revision. Today was a brand-new Chapter Eight.

Five, Six, and Seven were three different takes on the same event – the point where things go from “wow, that was pretty bad” to “okay, the world has now officially fallen apart.”

Chapter Eight brings in the character who WAS my primary protagonist in the first version, now named Cali (folks who have taken [How to Write a Novel](#) will know her as Amanda).

Today, I got to play around inside her head a little, to see how she's been coping after the Fall, and to see how she's planning on dealing with the novel's Big Bad (nod to Joss Whedon for the term).

I like what I got.

Personal stuff is still chaotic.

The only way out is through. So I'm head down, pushing through.

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DMP Revision – Friday, and I'm running long... by an estimated 30,000 words [FRIDAY SNIPPET]

[By Holly Lisle](#)

I knew this would happen.

The raw first draft of the novel was 50,718 words in length.

I figured during my read through revision that I'd add 10,000 words (because in revision, I always end up adding words – my first drafts are thin).

So I thought, *Hey, I'll shoot for 60,000, but I'll give myself a little extra elbow room on this one, just because.*

So I set my top limit plan at 70,000 words.

As of today, if I continue as I'm going, the novel is going come in at 81,000 words.

Eighty. One. Thousand.

My line-for-scenes build-out gave me 34 chapters, same as the raw first draft.

But this time I know what's going on from the very beginning, I know the world I'm writing in, and a lot has to happen in each chapter to get me where I'm going.

I'm contemplating eliminating the three POV scenes for the villain – but that's still on the table. If I don't show him from his own POV, it's going to be significantly tougher for readers to understand WHY he's doing what he's doing.

Word count for today: 254 words. It meets my one-chapter-per-day revision schedule.

Those 254 words comprise one full scene from my villain's POV. It's my compromise for now. I'll do the villain POV scenes, but keep them short, tight, focused on his actions.

When this goes out to my bug-hunters, I'll get feedback on him, and work from there.

FRIDAY SNIPPET (this is my current opening to the novel).

[The Snippet Disclaimer: This is raw first draft, Copyright Holly Lisle and All Rights Reserved. Do not quote, review, or bug hunt. The contents of this snippet are subject to change, and during revision I will not see any problems you find here.]

In the beginning, there was the Hero. And the Hero moved Heaven and Earth to create a place of Joy and Excitement, a retreat from the Suffering and Toil of Humanity. And the Hero declared that access to this Second World beneath the World – this glorious Underworld – should be made a human right given regardless of race, color, creed, or ability to pay to every

human being on the planet.

And so it was done, and all of Humankind rejoiced.

Introduction to The History of The Underworld: The Authorized Edition, by Nathan Ardement

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Dead Man's Party Revision – Wednesday, and the NEW character arrives.

[By Holly Lisle](#)

Today, just like Monday and yesterday, was 100% new words. 2115 of them at final count, probably about twice that many that I actually wrote to get the ones I kept.

Everything I wrote today required new settings, new names, a completely different starting point – every single word was brand new.

So what makes this a revision, rather than a different first draft?

The fact that this time through, I know exactly where I'm going and why, what I have to accomplish with each chapter to get it to the end that I know is coming, and what each scene has to do.

I have my provisional outline, the weight of an entire first draft and entire write-in revision and the brutal crucible of the week spent in the Monastery building my focus outline.

All the crud fell away from the story when I did that, and what I'm writing now is stronger. Better.

Still going to have to have a deep edit by Matt, still going to have to be bug-hunted by my bug hunters.

But... even though every word is new, this is pure final revision, and I've been here before with other books.

So...

Today, my Goddess of the Underworld had help from the new secondary character I realized during revision I was going to have to bring in to show the world through the eyes of a normal human being who had been one of those most harmed by the world before the Apocalypse.

I ended up writing about twice as many words as I kept. Had to keep tossing out the "As you know, Bobs" that tried to creep in.

But it was a good writing day.

Now onto the next stuff.

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DMP Revision Tuesday – 3038

new words, brand-new second chapter started and finished

[By Holly Lisle](#)

Today was another good writing day.

100% new material, but it flew because in this revision, the whole thing is now growing out of everything I discovered in the read-through and write-in revisions of the first draft.

Added a couple hundred words to yesterday's chapter, but everything I wrote yesterday still worked this morning.

Everything else was the start to finish of Chapter 2.

My Line-for-Scene outline is holding together. My characters are stepping up, doing more in this version than they did in the first one. They're deeper, have more going on, have actual pasts.

And this version of the story is starting darker, meaner. I think this is happening because now I know what brought all of them to this point... and because I'm starting at the exact right point, in the instant before "the way things are now" collapses and all hell breaks loose.

This is a post-apocalypse in which the folks in the middle of it don't yet realize that the Apocalypse has come. That's the second shoe.

Right now, only the first shoe has dropped.

And this time through, the story means more to me. It's scarier, closer to the bone – because this time, I know how it ends, and I know what has to happen before it gets there. This time, there's no writing into the dark, no guessing.

This time, I already know how dark the darkness is going to get.

Things happen in ways that I don't expect, but they're pieces of a puzzle I've already seen.

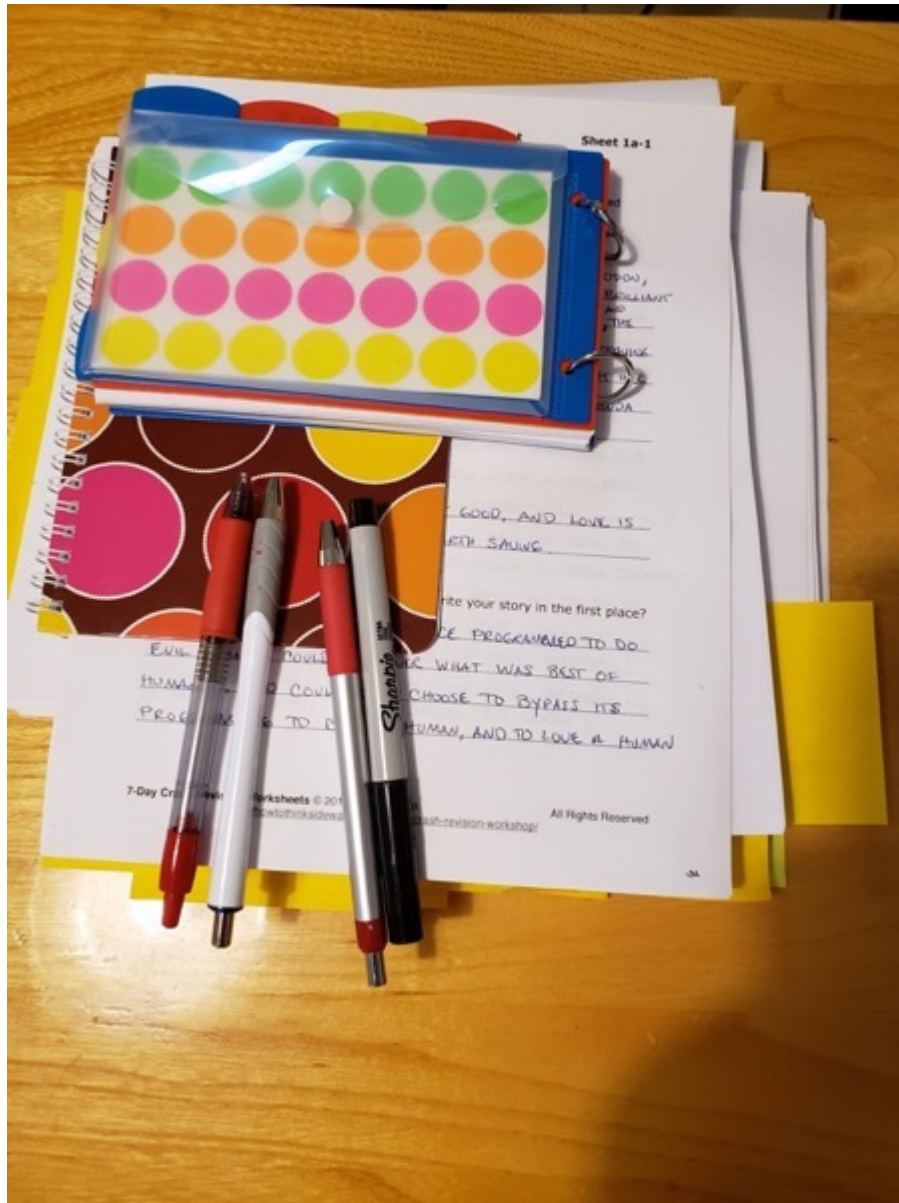
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Dead Man's Party – The Write-In Revision is done.

[By Holly Lisle](#)

Have been working on the read-through/write-in revision of Dead Man's Party for the past month or so. Finished it today after a four-hour hard push.

So the next step, which starts tomorrow, is to build the color-coded index card line-for-scene, which is my PLAN for



FIXING IT.

That should anywhere between a day or two and a full week of heavy lifting.

Since I couldn't find any of my favorite index cards, I'm improvising with some plain white ones that I had in a neat little Oxford ring binder, and color tabs I located in one of my "Office Supply" drawers that I'll stick on the right edge.

These colored tabs indicate :*

- **GREEN:** No changes or small changes – Up to 24% of the scene needs to change
- **YELLOW:** Moderate changes – 25% to 49% of the scene needs to change

- **ORANGE: Big changes** – 50% to 74% of the scene needs to change
- **RED: BRUTAL OVERHAUL** – 75% change up to toss scene, write something completely new.

I might have two or three green cards.

I already know I have three or four red cards.

In between, I'm going to be living in the yellow-to-orange zone, and I'm betting I'm going to end up with MORE orange.

I'll show you the card outline when I get it built, and give you the actual Scene Count and Damage Report. Being realistic rather than hopeful, it will probably take me the rest of the week to get this done, and MAY run over. I'm out of practice, and this is a process that gets easier the more often and more FREQUENTLY you do it.

Maybe the Inspiration Fairy will land on my head and hit me with its vicious little mallet. If that happens, this will go faster.

BUT...

The thing you want to avoid at all costs during your revision read-through and write-in is to make the discovery – after your first draft has cooled off – that the novel is nothing you want to finish: that you don't care about the people, the conflict, the world, the twists.

And that didn't happen.

Even in the midst of the wreckage I love this. Love it much more than I thought I would. Revising it is going to be a big, hard, dirty job. But it's SO going to be worth it.

And this is the ONLY thing I'm going to be working on (excluding the necessary stuff of paying bills, answering emails, spending time on the forums, and dealing with the

nearing Big Chaos).

This gets half or more of every workday until both the revision replot and the final type-in are done.

This part can take a long damn time. Or it can go quickly. And I am a lousy judge of which way any particular revision is going to fall.

I just know, though, that I'm going to love doing this one.

*The colored index card process is part of [How to Revise Your Novel](#).

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First draft of The Ohio Series First Novel is DONE! Includes FRIDAY SNIPPET

[By Holly Lisle](#)

I did not expect to finish the first draft today. Thought it would take me a couple more days to get there, but while Becky and I were running ten-minute work sprints together, what had to be in there just clicked, two complete chapters flew off my fingertips, and all of a sudden, I have a done first draft in my brand-new Urban Fantasy world.

I wrote it using the same process I teach in *How to Write a Novel*, I had a blast doing it..

And now it sits in a corner of my hard drive for a minimum of one month while it cools down.

Because I need to NOT be wildly in love with it when I do the read-through. I have to be tired, and grumpy, and bored, and wishing I was someplace else. In THAT frame of mind, the good stuff with hook me in, but I will be unable to make excuses for the bad stuff.

But before I put it away for the requisite month (and possibly a bit more), I have the Friday Snippet for you.

The Snippet Disclaimer: This is raw first draft, copyright Holly Lisle and all rights reserved. Do not quote, review, or bug hunt. The contents of this snippet are subject to change, and during revision I will not see any problems you find here.

THE FRIDAY SNIPPET

Now here I was with a cookie junkie who'd just heard there was a new dealer for his long-lost favorite drug, looking at me with eyes that were shining with need, that said he was jonesing pretty hard.

People.

"I could get you the ingredients so you could make them," he said. "If you told me what they were."

"Didn't Grandma give you the recipe so that you could learn how to make them yourself?"

I was watching him. I work the streets, I know what addiction looks like, and I was seeing a guy who'd gotten a hit of something that had sunk hooks into him and dragged him out on a cold, mean day to a dead woman's house in search of cookies. Nobody does that.

Nobody.

Only the look people get when you've pulled them over and they think they're about to pull one over on you was on old Mr. Yeager's face, and that cop sense kicked in and all of a sudden I knew this wasn't about cookies. It was... but there was a lot more here, and for some reason I didn't know, it was important.

Really important.

In no universe are cookies a big deal.

So this was something else. Something was wrong with my picture.

When in doubt, poke the problem with a stick.

"I'm not going to be baking cookies here," I said. "I'm just going to be going though the attic and the basement, clearing and cleaning, and then I'm going back home." When I said the word home, it sounded like a lie in my ears. No matter. I was watching his body, watching his eyes.

And I saw a whole lot of panicked crazy go skittering beneath the surface. "Could I buy the recipe from you?" he asked.

The answer to that question came out of my mouth unbidden, instantly, like someone had programmed it there. "Old family recipe," I said and shook my head.

And he hung his. "That's what she always said, too."

And though I could not understand what made me do it, I grabbed my metaphorical stick a little more firmly, and said, "Tell you what. Why don't you bring those papers by the house for me so I can look them over while I'm cleaning. If you do that, I'll think about making some more cookies."

When it came out of my mouth, I knew it was a mistake. No lawyer would say yes to that. There was no guarantee, there was no promise, there was nothing to pin down. It was an utterly one-sided deal.

"All right," he said, and sighed.

And that gut thing I had going said, Ding, ding, ding. We have a winner. Whatever Mr. Yeager is, he is not a lawyer.

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The Ohio Series – 2842 words, and a series-anchoring question

[By Holly Lisle](#)

Yesterday, I discovered the dark secret in Tori's past. It's grim, harsh, and leaves her with some questions she's been fighting the whole rest of her life to answer.

Today, I discovered the long line of dark secrets in Duncan's

past. This over a breakfast he and Tori share.

Everything flew, came together, answered some earlier questions in the book for me, and set up one of the BIG questions that will be asked only implicitly for most of the rest of the series.

It was a damn fine writing day.

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