

# Not much sleep – but so into the story, I forgot to stop: 1408 words, 54,404 total

By Holly Lisle

I had a rough night (one of those where you need sleep, and want sleep, but it won't come) so only managed to doze for a few hours by the time I woke up this morning, and I was not as perky as I prefer to be.

I did not have my "+10 Well-Rested Bonus" going.

Nevertheless, as I read through yesterday's work to catch up with where I was starting today, the Ohio 3 story caught me, and dragged me into it, and when I looked up, I'd run over on my wordcount, and had written words that work, and now I have a great new conflict waiting to show up in tomorrow's words.

I like the fact that writing fiction can remove lingering darkness from the real world, can let you burn that darkness as fuel for the writing, and turn it around, and leave you happy at the end of the writing day.

None of the nightmare goes into the story – its creator deserves only to be forgotten. But anger can be burned productively, so that when you're tired, you have that extra fuel that can be turned into something good, and interesting, and even fun.

I don't know of many jobs that can make that work. This is the only one like that I've ever had.



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# Trauma, memory, and my main character – 1283 words

By Holly Lisle

I got some of my favorite words in the series this morning. (1283 of them, in fact.)

My MC (main character) had a BAD morning a couple chapters back, and finally made it back home in this chapter – worse for wear, but not as much so as one would have reason to expect.

She's discovered – as a lot of us do – that there are things she left in her past that haven't quite finished with her.

She'd discovered – as a lot of us do – that she isn't exactly the person she believed herself to be, and as memories catch up with her, she's realizing that she might not have as much

reason to like herself as she thought she did.

Like everyone, she has some monsters in her closet.

Hers just have bigger, pointier teeth than yours or mine.

And at one point way back in her past, one of those monsters might have been her.

And I got to pull in some bits from my own experience on dealing with trauma, and how it catches up with you even years after the fact and shakes you when you're vulnerable and unprepared.

She's tough, my MC.

**She'd better be.** Because I know what's coming down the road for her over the next couple days of writing, and she doesn't.

Oh, yes. Because some of my characters tend to eat the way I'm eating at the time, she's making good use of keto. (Except for the cookies.)

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# **Setting Out A Bowl For Jim**

# Baen

By Holly Lisle

Just over a year ago, on October 28, 2008, I had a dream that is still changing my life.

My first publisher, Jim Baen, who died on June 28, 2006, paid me a visit.

Now, I'm not pagan, Christian, or otherwise religious in any way, shape, or form. I'm not a believer in things. I'm not a fan of faith, which to me is the denial of the provable and rational in favor of the unprovable and irrational.

I do NOT, however, think that humans are just animated meat. I think that we are creatures of energy AND flesh, and that when the flesh falls apart, the energy goes on.

In what form this energy that we were goes on, I don't know. I have some speculations based on areas of science I follow, but they're only that, and worthless beyond my own personal interest.

However, while I'm waiting for scientific proof in either direction, I'm willing to play with my theory, and consider it as rationally possible as the theory of oblivion at the moment of death, which does not deal in any fashion with what happens to the energy of life.

I'm willing to consider that, along with the possibility that my subconscious had a brilliant idea while I was sleeping and found a way to make it unforgettable, I also could have experienced something real on October 28th of last year.

Either way, it's Halloween, traditionally time to acknowledge the dead, and I would like to take this moment to set out a metaphorical place at the table for Jim Baen.

I'm still writing the book that came from that dream. The idea I got that night is still something that at times leaves me trembling with the potential power of the story, if I can only find the craft within myself to realize that potential.

And whether the idea came from Jim, or whether my subconscious used him as a highly effective attention-getter, he is in my thoughts today. And whether the experience was real or metaphorical, I offer my thanks for it.

And I miss you, Jim.

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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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## Lunch Break Update

By Holly Lisle

I finished yesterday's work at 12:12 *this* morning. I was

ragged and bleary-eyed, but I got the words for the day, added a new scene that I'm fairly happy with—though I'll add things as I do the type-in—and I fell into bed and dreamed that I was the last vampire hunter, and I was constantly surrounded by monsters, and I was endlessly fighting. Everywhere I went, beautiful homes would turn into ruins as I reached them, indicating that vampires inhabited them. Children would grin at me and flash fangs. People I had once known and liked would walk up to me smiling, then try to kill me. I realized that there were no people left, that the world was inhabited by nothing but the walking dead. That there was nothing left to save, no one left to save it for.

Grim way to wake up.

Hard at work again, but taking a break for lunch—two slices of toasted Ezekiel bread, tahini, and kim-chee. I'm down thirteen pounds in the last couple of months, and feeling better than I have in a long time. Discovered that if I focus on eating low-glycemic foods, I feel better, I work better, I don't stay hungry, and the weight comes off without me actually having to work at it. At the moment, that's a big deal.

Anyway, back to the pages.

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# **I had a dream**

By Holly Lisle

FADE IN:

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Through her eyes, we see the hands and forearms of a young woman pushing a wheelchair. In the wheelchair, we see the back of a bald, liver-spotted head and the thin, vein-roped arms of an OLD MAN. Young woman and OLD MAN are moving at a brisk pace along a pristine sidewalk with precision-cut emerald grass to the left, a brilliant autumn-blue sky overhead, and alabaster skyscrapers in front of us.

Over stirring, passionate MUSIC:

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

We have the best cardiac hospitals  
in the world.

(CONT.)

Young woman looks far right, and we see a veritable cathedral to medicine, shining in white marble, reaching toward the heavens.

While MUSIC soars, promising us miracles:

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

We have the best neurological  
hospitals, the best hospitals of  
every sort in the world.

(CONT.)

Young woman's gaze travels forward, showing us yet more grand, shining edifices to health, while MUSIC crescendos.

Abruptly, we hear SHATTERING GLASS and, music stops  
dead.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Which won't do you a bit of good

(CONT.)

Young woman abruptly turns left down fork in sidewalk, and through her eyes we see a hulking building, an edifice of polished black marble and reflective black glass, squatting in a miasma of darkness like Darth Vader beckoning us toward the pits of hell. The grass surrounding this hospital is dead, the sky behind it storm-clouded and threatening. Young woman and OLD MAN glide down the darkening path toward the building as if on a fast conveyer belt.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

If they won't let you through the  
goddamned doors.

(CONT.)

Door of the Building of Darkness swing wide in welcome.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Welcome to

(CONT.)

Young woman and OLD MAN are sucked inside, into a place of charcoal gray concrete walls, black carpets, and a broad corner nurses' station where wan nurses and coughing doctors greet the new arrivals with faint smiles.

Smoke swirls around us; the smell is overwhelming.

Through doors to left and right, we see rows of skinny,  
sick old men smoking in beds.

Joyous, triumphant music erupts:

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Smokers' Hospital.

OLD MAN

(Waving arms  
gleefully)

Fuckin' AAAaaaay, baby, I'm HOME!

I don't know if there was any more to this, because I woke myself up laughing.

Only time in my life I've ever smelled anything in a dream—there was nothing to smell when I woke myself up, but while I was dreaming, the stink of a thousand cigarettes being smoked it close, airless quarters damn near choked me.

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# Ha-HA! I figured out how to do it

By Holly Lisle

Making the Culture Clinic usable in a clear, linear form seemed impossible. So much to do, so much to show, so much to make. And no one needed everything all at once, but someone would need everything sooner or later. Fluffing the curtains didn't help, walking in circles didn't help, knitting helped a little.

The nightmare I had last night helped enormously. Nasty nightmare.

*I was in the heart of a cave—a developed, built-up, inhabited cave, faintly lit, with grottos in which people were trapped, frozen in postures of horror or pain, and surrounded by equally frozen monsters attacking them. And I was dealing with a voice. Just the voice. Imagine Darth Vader speaking while chewing bones and you're most of the way there. Couldn't see what had trapped me, couldn't move, but I could see to one side of me some sort of torture device and a few*

stalls of the sort you'd keep horses (or monsters) in, and on the other side, a massive, slightly arched wooden double-door banded and studded with brass.

I was told I had to bring someone I didn't like to be the sacrifice, or I would be the sacrifice. And I was released.

The dream jumped immediately to me leading a dozen people through the heart of the cave. I didn't know any of them except my youngest child, but when I saw him, I knew that somehow, something had gone very wrong. I tried to back up, to change the dream so that my child wasn't with me, but that didn't work. We moved forward. A giant spider sat to the left of us, and as I looked at it, I could see that it was mechanical, and fixed in place. If we stayed along the wall, we could avoid it. So we moved along the wall, and a live spider twice as large as the mechanical one raced out of a dark hole behind us and came after all of us, grabbing those closest to it and dragging them away.

I backed up the dream, and found another way to go, thus avoiding the spiders entirely. And suddenly I realized that what I had to do was get everyone out of the cave. Not just my little party of healthy folks, but the ones who were frozen in the midst of monsters, and held in place by frozen torturers, and everyone in the rest of the grottos. Something told me I had to free the monsters, too. That we all had to reach daylight.

The dream jumped forward again, and behind me and my son strung a line of hundreds—humans, monsters, and other things—and I had just pushed open the gate that took us into daylight. Before me lay a long earthen causeway with grassy but impossibly steep sides, one person wide, hundreds of feet high, with what looked like safety on the other side. No guardrails, of course. I started out onto the causeway, then stopped and turned to see if everyone was coming. And the ground beneath my feet softened and began to swallow me.

*I backed up the dream, and was at the doorway again. I had everyone join hands, I told them to keep moving at all costs, and said that each had to help the one behind him to get across. And that we had to move fast. And we fled across the thing with our feet moving as quickly as we could make them, with all the monsters crumbling into dust as the sunlight hit them, and the humans joining hands with other humans as quickly as the monsters they'd been hanging onto crumbled.*

There was more, but it was more of the same sort of thing. Make an error, go in the wrong direction, back up and fix things. And I woke up this morning and stared at the ceiling, and thought, where have I run into that sort of structure before? (Well, first I just shuddered for a while, but eventually I got around to the structure thing.)

I realized I'd seen the structure in *Choose Your Own Adventure* novels.

And **that** was when I figured out the structure for the *Create A Culture Clinic*. It needs to be written as a branching tree, where the writer can select the basics of the section of the culture he's developing, and along the way will be given the choice to pursue that small section in depth, with more advanced development, or to continue with broad and basic development. Where he can always return to the trunk and choose a completely different path.

Inspiration comes from some strange and scary places.

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# WWIII

By Holly Lisle

Article sent to me by Jim Woosley. Funny thing is, I said the same thing to Matt about three weeks ago. Guess I'm not the only one thinking it.

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## The Cliff, the Killer, the Talking Dryer, and Morgan Freeman

By Holly Lisle

So ...

*I was driving through this dense forest – we're talking medieval forest here, trees with trunks wide as houses, the sky blacked out by branches and leaves. Spooky place, but you don't mind spooky places so much when you're in a car. Still, I was driving pretty fast, because in a place like that, you aren't inclined to dawdle.*

*Saw light up ahead, and sped up. Hit the light, and suddenly I wasn't on flat land anymore. I was rocketing around a hairpin turn on the side of a mountain – or rather, if I hadn't been heading in a straight line for the edge of a cliff, I would have been. Instead, I fought to get control of the car, but it wasn't happening, and I shot off into the*

air.

Woke up. I **hate** that dream. Did some deep breathing, managed to get my heart rate down to something that could pass for normal.

*And damned if I didn't find myself at the bottom of a mountain, driving a car, with people trapped on the other side of a river; they were waving their arms at me, and were surrounded by ruins and wreckage of their car. Guess they missed that hairpin turn, too. I drove over the bridge and stopped to see if I could help.*

*And then I was on the road, with people in the car. One of those abrupt dream transitions. And the people were telling me about the man who was sitting in the front seat, wearing one handcuff. He'd been a killer, they told me, but he'd reformed. He was a great guy. Salt of the earth. He'd redeemed his serial killing ways and dedicated his life to good works.*

*I didn't like his eyes.*

*Then they were gone, and I was home, fighting with a clothes dryer that was telling me in very clear words that it was about to overheat and explode. I stopped the load of laundry I was trying to do, got down on my hands and knees, and found a little hidden panel there. I gingerly opened it and stuck my hand inside, and pulled out a sock. And then another sock. And then hundreds of socks. I'd found the Nexus of Missing Socks, and I was weirdly happy about this. Also found a mountain of dryer lint, and some wood scraps, and other sundries. I cleared out the mess, bagged everything that wasn't a missing sock, and took it out to throw in the trash.*

*Where I was accosted by Morgan Freeman, who apparently not only lived next door, but was one hell of a nosy neighbor. He told me that he'd met my boyfriend. I explained that I didn't*

*have a boyfriend – that my family arrangements were the same as they'd been for as long as we'd lived there. He then told me that he'd gone over and introduced himself to the man who came out the back door of my house and carefully locked up, and the man said that he was my boyfriend, and was seeing me on the sly, so Morgan shouldn't say anything to anyone. Morgan said the guy seemed nice enough – but he didn't like his eyes.*

*I got him to give me a description of the guy, and it was the description of the “reformed” serial killer, who had found his way not only to my home, but inside it.*

So that was **my** night. Yesterday, I had great breakthroughs on both ISY and HAWKSPAR. I'm excited about where I'm going with both of them today.

Oh, yes. Today's goals:

- To 30,000 on ISY (2500 words)*
- One red-card scene in HAWKSPAR, plus the revision of a fight scene, which I have marked as yellow. So there's hope.*

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# Me and the French Revolution

By Holly Lisle

So. I'm wearing these ludicrous shoes. Pink, satin-bow-bedecked. I think of them as dancing slippers, but they have a heel, and they're about the most impractical shoes I've ever seen. And this dress that is no doubt gorgeous, and expensive.

Silk and tucks and bows, long full skirt, all sorts of underpinnings. I'm eighteen years old. Maybe nineteen.

And I'm scared. I'm running like hell, and trying not to fall off those ridiculous shoes. There are other young women with me – all about my age, all equally impractically dressed, but I am in the lead because we are in "my father's house." This is a very clear thought in my mind. This is my father's house, and I know a safe place.

There's screaming behind me, at a distance, and the sound of things crashing, and smoke in the air. But I know a safe place, and this gaggle of butterflies and I are hauling ass to get there.

Two big doors to one side of a large corridor, doorknobs like a man's handlebar moustache, and inside, a study. Paneled walls, bookshelves. This is my father's study.

I go to one of the panels that looks like every other panel and push it open, and there's a little room. All of us cram into it, I close the panel behind us.

And outside the panel, a little dog starts to bark. White, fluffy, the word in my head is Bichon, and I don't know if this is that dog's name or breed. Could be either one. It is my dog, and it wants in. I want it to go away, but open the panel, praying no one is out there, and drag it in with us. Quiet it, get it calm.

The noise gets closer, is right outside the door, things being smashed, men shouting rough words; none of us inside the hidden room dare to breathe. And then that damned dog starts to bark.

What happens next you want to wake up for, and I do, and lie there in the bed for about fifteen minutes trying to shake it off.

So, here I am, fresh from being on the wrong side of the French Revolution, off to face the cannibals again.

Start count for the day 78,717. Goal for the day: 81,717 or better.

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