

Wow! 1412 words, two hours... And LIGHTNING struck! (Or... “Am I making a huge mistake?”)

written by Holly

May 17, 2022

By Holly Lisle

I'd written myself into a corner yesterday, and I had absolutely no clue what was going to happen next.

See... Brain writes the outlines and the overall planning. Gut, however, writes the words, and Gut – like a willful horse – is entirely capable of getting the bit between his teeth and galloping straight toward whatever suddenly looks good.

Over the last few days (my time, not hers) my main character has experienced an appalling revelation, a near-death experience, and an unexpected triumph combined with a terrible loss...

And I thought she was still heading toward the same basic end-story objective, but getting there by some strange side paths.

I was still having to get there by pure pantsing, because I left my line-for-scene outline a couple chapters ago in pursuit of The Better Idea.

But today I found myself staring at a wall where I realized I'd just caused the utter obliteration of the ending I thought I was going to write.

Brain was muttering...

“Right... That thing you blew up yesterday was supposed to be

the heart of your conflict for another five books after this five, and now... BLAMMO? You sure you want to save what you did yesterday? You can go back. Back is SAFE. Back in KNOWN. Back is the PLAN... and you liked the PLAN when you wrote it."

Gut held firm. Gut said, "Don't be a chicken. You knew yesterday's stuff was cool when you wrote it, and now you want to wuss out and go with what's safe? C'mon! Grow a pair!"

Small side note here while I point out that my gut is kind of a jerk sometimes... but it's almost always right about the fiction, so I have learned to look past the taunting to the meat of the argument.

Which is that what I got yesterday was really cool. Gut is absolutely right about that.

It isn't what I planned, but it's better than what I'd planned. It isn't Safe. But Safe in fiction, the Known in fiction, the Expected in fiction... are always okay.

They are NEVER fucking amazing.

And today I had to look at the loss of some words to return to the Safe Known. Or to keep moving forward in pursuit of the hope of bringing home something fucking amazing...

With the acknowledged very real possibility that I will fall on my face, absolutely wreck this story, and then have a gruelling, long slog through it when I go back through to do the One-Pass Five Book Revision <shudder> that waits for me at the end of this process. Where I will end up turning it into the book I'd planned to write.

I'm choosing to chase the chance to make this fucking amazing.

This may be a serious tactical error on my part, and if you find me in here next month muttering, "Yep... should have got back to the outline..."

Then...

You're invited to say, "Well, I thought you were nuts when you veered away from your plan into fresh new territory."

Not yet, though. Let's see where this goes.

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Ohio 5: Grandma's Secret and some pasts remembered – 685 words, 9191 total

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Turns out my MC's late and much-lamented grandmother had a secret she was keeping from those nearest and dearest to her.

This secret might explain a scene in the very first book.

The grandmother's personality, by the way, is spun off of my maternal great-grandmother, who lived to be almost 103, and who was a CHARACTER.

God, I loved her. She was seventy when I was born, but she and I were friends right up to her death, when I was thirty-three, and she was 102 and a whole lot of change.

She was fierce, and fearless, and grumpy with almost everyone. But when I asked her to tell me about what life was like when she was a kid, and later, a young woman, she told the best

damn stories.

Hers was a world without electricity or running water, without cars or planes, without fancy grocery stores. She delivered the mail on horseback when her father (who's primary job was blacksmithing) was too drunk to do it. She was courted by a number of beaus, but married a young blacksmith who turned out to be an awful choice, though she divorced him and married him a couple more times. They had three kids.

Hers was a world without nukes on the plus side – but with a lot of deadly air-borne and water-borne diseases on the minus side.

She initially thought cars were a joke. Like me, she loved horses.

I lived in a piece of Grandma's world when my parents moved us to Alaska for a year and a half when I was nine (back in 1969). Because of that, I, too, have washed clothes in a washtub using a washboard, and dried them on racks beside a wood stove. Have eaten food cooked on and bread baked in that same stove, which was also most of the day heat for the house. (The wood furnace below was the heat for the boys dorm above our floor).

I have drunk water pulled straight out of the river and sanitized with Clorox, because no one anywhere up or down the river had plumbing (permafrost is not the friend of water pipes), and old cultures generally aren't eager to adopt new technology anyway. So we had outhouses and a honey-bucket, and the folks upriver from us had the same. And the river was full of water-borne bacteria.

I helped catch food and clean fishing nets, and have lived without TV, or radio, went to school in a one-room schoolhouse in the attic of the house where we lived, had frost completely occlude the single-pane windows in that enormous log cabin in winter, skied on the river on a rope tied to the back of a

snowmobile, rode in a dogsled pulled by a team of huskies, watched the midnight sun in summer.

Some of that stuff is now working its way into this series – bits of a hard and primitive past that are now colliding with a very different, easier but *also more difficult and much more dangerous* present.

With... of course... alien magic.

And Ohio.

Every once in a while, I make myself cry. Mostly, though, I'm having a lot of fun.

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**So today I'm sixty-one...
RIGHT...**

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

We had our little pizza and birthday-pie (I'm not a cake fan) celebration last night, because Matt doesn't have today off.

So today, while I AM going to be taking the day off from the novel, I'm working on fixing the HollysWritingClasses.com website.

Doing a big overhaul, upgrading stuff to a new platform and new software, moving ALL the students and class owners...

This isn't going to be done today. The actual work of it isn't even going to be STARTED today. Today, my moderators and I are just figuring out the new software, and trying to find the easiest ways to bring everything over.

And...

I'm kind of thrilled, actually. I love doing this stuff – and I keep seeing how much more smoothly everything is going to work, and how much more fun it's going to be to use.

And I'm still keeping my promise to myself that I would not work on the novel on my birthday.

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Book 5 outline done – and my application of Creative Destruction.

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So I have all thirty scenes for Book 5.

I love what I got. It's solid, it holds together, it brings in essential pieces from the first four novels and uses stuff I hid throughout the first three (and in-progress fourth) stories to tie things up in a fashion I think is really cool.

It's a target to shoot for... but again –

No plan survives first contact with the enemy.

And when you're the writer, the outline is the plan, then **you are the enemy.**

So there's that.

I have done all this work knowing that I'm going to get back to writing Book Four, using the MUCH better ideas that I've come up with over the past few days to direct it toward the ending...

And I am going to break shit again.

I imagine my re-think on the rest of Book 4 will mostly hold.

I imagine that the completely destructive outline of Book 5 (not ONE scene from the first outline made it to the second one) is probably doomed to Yet Another Outline when I get to it.

The logical question is:

Why do you do this?

And the born-from-brutal-experience answer is NOT –“If I can't see where I'm going, I can't get there.”

It's much messier and crueler than that. It is, “If I can't see where I *think* I'm going, I can't get *anywhere.*”

Writing novels for me mostly happens by me having *better ideas* while I write.

For that to work, I have to have *ideas* first, though, and they need to be the very best ideas I can come up with at the time.

The process is known (though it's generally not associated with writing fiction) as "destructive creation."

It how tractors made horses obsolete – and destroyed the workhorse-breeding industry. How computers made typewriters obsolete, and destroyed the typewriter manufacturing industry.

And it's how I write – I do all this work so that I can break my less-good ideas on my way to coming up with *better ideas*.

Though I *don't think* I've ever really thought of it as that until today.



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