

Winging it: 1259 words, and chasing into the darkness.

By Holly Lisle

I loved today.

The story has moved away from my plans, so I am outlining each new scene before I write it, still with the same landing place at the ending as my objective.

The story and series structure will remain the same, but the events taking place inside of Book 3 are getting some significant upgrades.

For example, today's bit of the adventure had a (unplanned) hint of Picts versus Romans on the ground that would someday hold Hadrian's wall... and (planned) cookies in a warm Ohio kitchen with a handful of friends trying to make sense of what was happening.

I'm writing blindfolded... but I'm doing it while hanging onto a nice, sturdy rope. And I love the story that I'm getting by hanging onto that rope and pushing into the darkness.



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A fine and dangerous day: 1358 words, 64,813 total

By Holly Lisle

The scene rose up around me and pulled me down into it today – it started with my main character doing her job in the present while worrying about the things going on around her that are life-or-death, and that she cannot control, or help with, or make better in any way – and from her frustration and helplessness, it ended with a clear memory of an ancient battle on a hill, with naked men tattooed blue who charged down a hill, led by a woman on a horse. They drove into hell at a dead run to take on the greatest army the world had ever known.

The scene (and the scene within the scene) flew, and I flew with it.

Hit my goal with a bit extra, and like what I got.

Whether I *still* do when I get to the revision remains, as always, to be seen.

But today was a good writing day.

Summer of Fiction Writing, Work Day 2.

Great Ohio words (1264) and Summer of Writing Fiction 2021 goes live today! SOFW DAY 1

By Holly Lisle

Last week, the story hit some pretty rocky shoals, and I had to do a lot of backing and filling.

Today... none of that. The backing and filling left me in a really good spot, and I found my characters and the conflict today the second I sat down, did a scene that started in a direct and practical fashion, and then had the joy of watching it gain momentum on me, at the end turning into something sort of poetical and beautiful.

And because my older son was trying to stay awake while driving home, I read him what I'd written, and he loved the parts of it that had gone poetical. (No actual poetry – just a nice metaphor spun out in a conversation between two women about hope, and the future, and the people you might someday meet.)

1280 words for the day, 63,455 words in Book Three, and...

Day One of *Summer of Fiction* Writing 2021

For writers, the SOFW 2021 event starts at HollysWritingClasses.com today. It's a free event and free membership), and if you write fiction (or would like to), you're invited. Full details are available at the site linked in the header above and in the first line.

I'm already playing, as are a lot of other folks – a lot of other writers are also joining in. And I'll just state here that the event will fit itself around any writing you're already doing – you don't have to start a new project, or write a whole novel over the three months, or fit a schedule set by anyone else.

My objectives, just to give you an idea, are to write five days per week, hit 1250 words per day, and come out the other end with about 75,000 words of first draft (which will have me finishing up Book 3 and starting Book 4).

In other words, doing exactly what I was already doing, but posting progress, encouraging other players, and answering questions other writers might have during the event.

I've provided a ton of free resources (and a bunch of paid ones if you already know you want to write fiction for a living and want to use the summer to get serious about that).

But mostly, this is a bunch of writers encouraging each other, hitting their goals, and then hanging out and talking shop, and having a really good time. I hope you'll come hang out, too.

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Sun Tzu and the art of plotting... 1287 words, and a GOOD stopping point for Friday

By Holly Lisle

Things went well this morning. Granted, I was already up and showered and coffee'd and at work by seven AM (nice when I can manage that), but I'd left myself in a good, conflict-y place yesterday, and today I had a lot of fun making messes and blowing things up and then, at a key point in the chapter, when my characters were about to take a particular definitive action, asking myself, "What would Sun Tzu recommend?"

I have loved Sun Tzu since I was 27, when my then-husband told me if I thought I was going to divorce him, it was going to be a war.

I considered this, went to the library, looked around for books on war and divorce, and ended up taking home both Sun Tzu's tiny red *The Art of War* and some lawyer's *Divorce for Men* from the Laurinburg library.

I read Sun Tzu first, and from his advice, and by reading *Divorce for Men* to understand what a man's divorce lawyer would expect from the woman's divorce lawyer, I informed my husband that I wanted a divorce – but that I didn't want anything out of the divorce but my car, my computer, my books and clothes, and joint custody of the kids (I had a job as a weekend Baylor RN, so I would not need either alimony or child support). I would use his lawyer (he'd

already talked to one before I'd even thought of getting a divorce, and I'd discovered the one he'd talked to, Terry Garner, was by general consensus the best lawyer in town).

I then waited. Barry called me from either work or his lawyer's office, and told me he'd pushed for full custody of the kids for himself, but that his lawyer had told him – and Barry quoted, "Shut up and sign."

And after his lawyer (I was foraging on the enemy's resources by not having my own—a Sun Tzu tactic) wrote out what I wanted, and when I read it and saw that what was on the paper was just exactly what I'd asked for, and nothing else, I signed.

Walked away with my stuff, 50% of my kids' time, and I was **out with no war**, which further research had told me would have been destructive to the two kids.

When it turned out half a dozen years later that Barry was a child molester abusing his own children (he was convicted – I have the right to say this), I damn well went to war then. **BUT** in doing that, I was not the woman who had previously gone to war over the goddamned wedding dishes.

So today, writing my MC finding herself caught in a small, personal war started by someone better armed and better funded and more experienced in warfare, I again turned to Sun Tzu.

And I'll say this: *He does not disappoint.*

I got my guidance, and the precept that guided today's scene, and that will fuel next week's upcoming twist.



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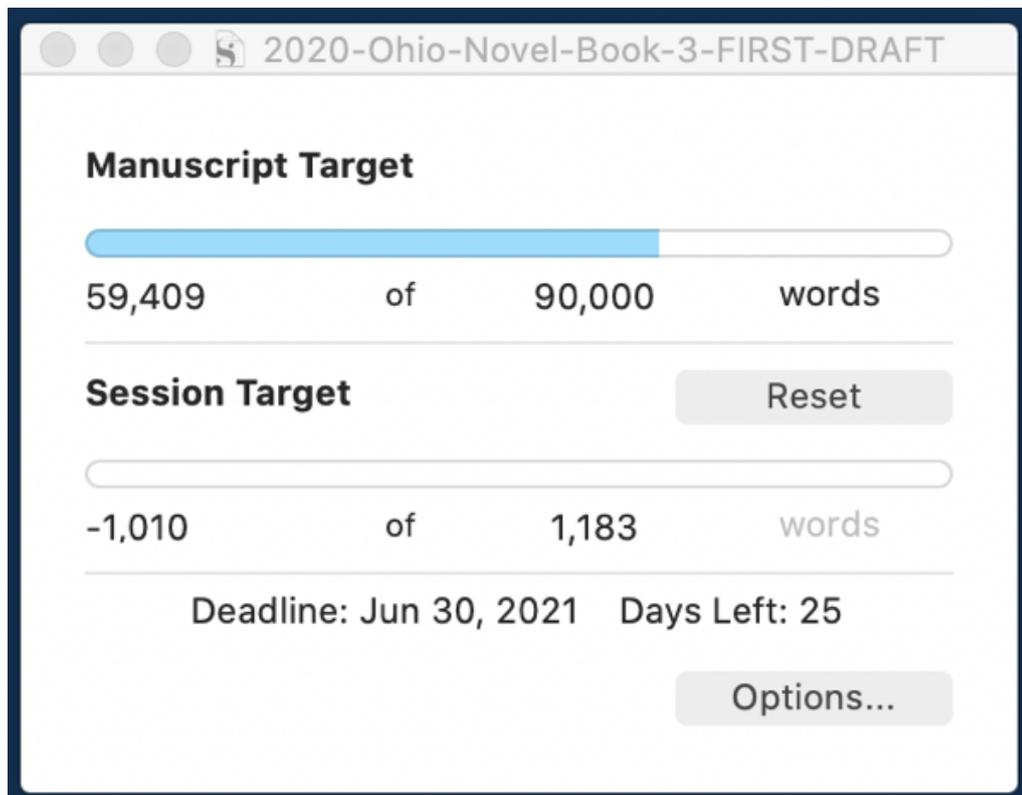


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**1479 words the hard way –
total 60,888**

By Holly Lisle

I ended up having to rip out another section of the story today, so that pretty quickly, I ended up deep in negative numbers. 1010 words in the hole, in fact.



But the things I realized I needed to do yesterday kept me going as I fixed what was broken, and let me get my characters into deep trouble while getting the story OUT of trouble... and I just kept writing until I got to a good stopping place with my main character facing oncoming death, her half-sister facing the horrors from the past... and me 469 words in the blue. (As in blue bar at the top of this post.)

Actual word count therefore, is obtained by subtracting the 1010 words I removed this morning, adding 1010 NEW words to replace them... and then keeping going until I added plus 469 more.

1479 words. Hah! Better than 1250 in spite of the difficulties.

And with that, I have managed to get rid of all the words that were going in the wrong direction.

There is, of course, no guarantee that I won't go in another wrong direction in this book. But for now, I have a brand new scene I love that solves the problem I hit yesterday, and a

good, solid start on today's scene that I will pick up tomorrow.

That counts as a good writing day.

FOR WRITERS:

The Summer Of Fiction Writing event over on HollysWritingClasses.com starts on **Tuesday, June 1st**. But if you'd like to play along with us, you can set up your Goal post now. The event is free, as are the MANY handouts on the Summer of Fiction site (linked above), and the complete 3-week How to Write Flash Fiction that Doesn't Suck class which is a popular starting class for writers who currently have difficulty finishing stories.

It will be a lot of fun, and I hope you'll join us, and get some stories written this summer. ☐



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1131 words in the wrong direction: I just caught what I was doing, and I'm going to start off tomorrow by ripping back

By Holly Lisle

So. Word-counts first. I got 1131 words today (fewer than my goal of 1250, but not by much).

I stopped with time still on the clock and some words not yet written because I realized that I took yesterday's great leap forward, and started driving this novel into an area of fiction in which I do not under any circumstances want to write.

Tomorrow, I'm going to have to start my day by ripping out a chunk of today's words. Might be as few as 250, might be as many as a thousand.

But the rest of today, I'm going to be thinking about what I can create to replace the part of the story I wrote into that giant pothole, and that I'm going to have to destroy.

Not the best of days.

But at least I caught my error before it ate the second half of Book Three.

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Chaos – a pre-writing post. No words yet. Mess will follow.

By Holly Lisle

I woke up this morning (at about 3 AM) realizing that chapter fifteen, which I wrote last week, was actually the ending of the novel.

I mean... damn. Perfect last line and everything.

Moving that scene to the end gives me a ton of extra terrible trouble into which I can dump my main character. It allows me to bring in the big villain and lesser villains in various roles. It lets me leave the readers uncertain, and worried. It lets me make things bad, and then worse, and then even worse.

Which is where you want a middle book in a five-book series to be.

Right up to the ending, with it's absolutely perfect last line.

I might not get a lot of words today. I have to re-plot the scenes between 16 and 29 into a ballet of good and evil, monsters and magic and brilliant villains versus competent, canny small-town folks who can – in the face of evil – get some shit done.

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The Gray Room: 1462 words, and 57,533 total

By Holly Lisle

Today was a pretty good Friday.

I wandered around in the weeds a bit there at the start, trying to get to the center of today's scene, and Monday I'll have to do a bit of clean-up.

But I have now established the ongoing pursuit of a mystery I introduced in Book One, and I have the MC gearing up next Monday to dig down into what really happened way back on the day that changed her life forever.

And I'm about to introduce the last member of my MC's support team – this one tucked away because the first of her critical helpers is a bit of a weasel, in spite of being on her side.

I'm looking forward to the weekend down time, and to letting the next bit of what's coming perk in the back of my mind.

Hope you have a great weekend.



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EXPOSITORY exposition... Oh. My. God. In SPITE of which... 1,666 words, and 56,070 total

By Holly Lisle

Today was a “thinking with my fingers day”. I was trying inside the story to figure out the workings of elements of the big five-book overall conflict, and I was trying to do this in a scene –

Except about 1500 words in, I realized that I hadn't written a scene. I had done worldbuilding in the middle of the book. It's good stuff. I can keep every bit of it, but at the same time, I probably won't be able to use a word of it as is.

I'll have to go through in the revision and turn this into dialogue between my MC and her sister, and I'm going to have to add action, and conflict, and then dump on my character's heads the actual danger that the block of stuff I wrote today brings forth.

It's a GOOD danger – big enough to destroy worlds and solar systems.

Not just all in one place, at one time, in one expository lump from Hell.

So in the moment that Editor Brain broke through and said, "Ahem – that is, if you leave it like that, going to be the most boring bit of mind-numbing nattering your readers will ever try to wade through..."

I invented two new FIRST DRAFT manuscript tags.

The Expository Lump START tag, with included problem definition:

[**EEE- EXPOSITORY LUMP** – NEEDS TO BE DISCOVERED BY MAIN CHARACTERS A BIT AT A TIME THROUGH THE FIRST FIVE BOOKS – LET IT STAND IN PLACE AS THE OUTLINE AROUND WHICH TO BUILD THE RELEVANT SCENES ENTIRE SERIES.]

And the Expository Lump END tag:

[/EEE – EXPOSITORY LUMP]

I got good words today. They were important, and necessary – they allowed me to create an underlying part of the BIG conflict that runs through how this little town in Ohio got into world-alteringly enormous trouble, and exactly WHY this is the one place where that trouble started.

They can sit right where they are while I move back into writing scenes (which I actually did after I blocked off the Expository Lump).

In revision, however, I've got some work cut out for me.

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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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