

Facing Devastating Failure

written by Holly
November 15, 2010
By Holly Lisle

My heroine has been going through hell in hopes of achieving a tremendous goal, only to have everything she worked for ripped away from her because she chose integrity over compromise. 754 words tonight. Story, **Help Wanted**.

Headache is pretty bad right now, but I finished out scene two with a nice cliffhanger.

How are your words coming?

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Back To Fiction

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I've had to take a bunch of days off, and I don't see that changing anytime soon.

However, when I've been up to it, I've been working. On **Rebel Tales**, on **NovelWritingSchool.com**, and also on fiction.

I was doing pretty well with **TalysMana**, but my daughter has some scheduling problems right now, so we're having to put that on hold until she gets her schedule worked out.

Meanwhile, I'm putting together some shortish serial fiction for **Rebel Tales**. The current piece is **Help Wanted**, introducing a new heroine in a new SF world. I also want to write some Cadence Drake shorts for Rebel Tales. And I'm considering what I could do in the way of Tonk short stories for Rebel Tales Fantasy—probably not Talyn, probably not Hawkspar.

You can watch the progress on the progress bars to the right.

ADDED LATER: Got 581 words on **Help Wanted** tonight.

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Rebel Tales Submissions Go Live

written by Holly
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You've probably read about my war for the midlist—to recreate something that should never have been destroyed.

You may have read my New Year's Resolution.

Well. I've almost got one piece of the puzzle done. And I just turned fifty a couple weeks ago, so I'm even almost on schedule.

Holly Lisle's Rebel Tales is accepting submissions NOW—however, we're still in beta, so they are not yet OPEN submissions. If you would like to submit your story to Rebel Tales (and currently we're seeking Fantasy, Science Fiction, Paranormal, and Suspense), please sign up to the Rebel Tales

Priority List and get your Rebel Tales Query/Synopsis manual.

If you're not sure what we're looking for, here are the critical links:

- Guidelines for All Manuscripts
- Additional Guidelines for Fantasy
- Additional Guidelines for Science Fiction
- Additional Guidelines for Suspense
- Additional Guidelines for Paranormal

And if you want to meet other folks involved in this, join the Rebel Tales Community.

CLOSING DATE FOR SUBMISSIONS DURING BETA is November 18th at 10 AM EST.

My editors and I are waiting. Let's create something wonderful.

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Buying To The Net Redux: Or 'I told you so'

written by Holly
November 15, 2010
By Holly Lisle

No less a writer than Norman Spinrad has hit the publishing death spiral, and with a flip of the bird to those who tried their damndest to ruin my reputation when I laid out the

whole evil “buying-to-the-net” process back in December ’06, I’ll simply say:

- I told you so.
- I told you so.
- I told you so.
- I told you so.
- And ... I told you so.

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That surprise I promised? TWO surprises.

written by Holly
November 15, 2010
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That surprise I promised?

There are actually two, though I spent all night working to get everything up and running on both. (And for those who got the e-mail first and discovered you couldn’t post anything, please pretend you didn’t notice that I clearly should not be setting up anything complicated at 3 AM.)

The Rebel Tales community opens today. (And if this is old news to you, my reply is, “But now I’ve fixed the bugs!”)

And the TalysMana Be A Character Contest is finally back on track. You can vote for the character you most want to see in the book, but you only have a week to do it, because I want to get back to writing the story.

Editor Incest, Surprise Delay, and a Favor

written by Holly
November 15, 2010
By Holly Lisle

Editor Incest

A question came up in a previous post on whether **Rebel Tales** editors could publish stories by other **Rebel Tales** editors.

Frankly, I thought the answer so obvious that it didn't occur to me to mention it—and now that it's been asked, I have proof that it wasn't obvious after all.

I'm going to invent a term here—**Editor Incest**. And I'm going to define *editor incest* as **"Editors competing for limited publishing space in the same market with the authors whose careers they are supposed to be trying to help build by buying their own or each other's stories."**

And now I'll state the policy that I thought too obvious to state before:

No.

Rebel Tales will not permit editor incest, either by editors publishing under their own name or by pseudonym.

The integrity of any publication is dependent upon writers

being able to trust that their editors are on their side. Permitting even the possibility that an editor might grant a prize story slot to himself or an editor friend will destroy that trust.

What about me? I'm a pretty well-known writer, and my story in a season could ostensibly sell more issues and make more money for the other writers in that season than if my story wasn't there.

I may in fact publish some of my own work in **Rebel Tales**. **If I do, I'll publish in a separate, unpaid slot.** I'll only get paid as the publisher, not as one of the writers, in order to avoid cutting the percentage other writers make on their stories, and to avoid taking up a paying slot.

And if this policy causes some of my prospective editors to drop out?

I'll go through existing applications and contact those people I wanted to say "YES" to and couldn't because of space restrictions. As noted in an earlier post, I still have a huge number of qualified applicants waiting.

Yesterday's Surprise

...is on hold because I've run into a problem finding appropriate software. It may take me a few days, or even a week. Watch here for updates.

And a Favor

Craig Campbell and I have a new version of HollyLisle.com up in beta.

If you could click around it (excluding the writing diary and shop, which are unchanged) and give us feedback here on what works, what doesn't, what you love, and what you hate, I'd

really appreciate it.

Here's the test site.

It's not in final form—we're looking for input and a chance to fix what doesn't work for you before we take it live. Thank you.

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I now have all my first-round editors

written by Holly
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I received 152 applications, and in what has to be a world record for someone taking job applications, more than half were not just qualified, but WELL-qualified.

It was both astonishing and gratifying.

It was also hell to get through, because I had 32 slots to fill, and 152 prospective people to fill them.

I had the fun of telling 32 prospective editors they'd made the first cut, and got to move on to the tryout phase.

And then I got to write out 120 personal rejection letters. I mentioned this elsewhere, but no matter which end of the process you're on, saying No is no fun.

But now I have my first group of folks, and I have something

cool coming up for everyone else in just a couple of days—Rebel-Tales-related, and for readers, writers, editors, would-be publishers...

More on that tomorrow.

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Rebel Tales Editor Update

written by Holly
November 15, 2010
By Holly Lisle

I've now filled all try-out slots for Fantasy and Suspense editors. I took the weekend off, spent all day yesterday catching up on customer service, and today I'm going to get the last SF and Paranormal applicants.

I received more than 150 applications, and was blown away by the skills, experience, and vision of the folks who responded.

If you've applied, I'll do my best to have a response up for you today or tomorrow.

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Rebel Tales: My War For The Midlist

written by Holly
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By Holly Lisle

What used to be assets

It wasn't that long ago that science fiction and fantasy were genres supporting a lot of midlist careers. And if you say "What's the midlist?" you're not alone.

The midlist was where writers who'd never had a New York Times bestseller, but who created great stories regularly, lived. They weren't household names. But they **were** full-time writers, they sold a lot of books, their backlist (their old books) stayed in print and earned them royalties twice a year, and their frontlist—their NEW books—brought them new readers who then found all the old stuff they'd written and bought that, too.

Backlist was the keystone upon which you built your career. Your older books kept making you money year after year after year, while you wrote new books and gained new readers and built a following. Your older books were your assets, and they paid off just as any good investment pays off.

And when I first got into the field, this was still what writers thought would happen.

Only publishers don't keep backlist in print anymore.

So there are no midlist writers anymore, because if you don't have big numbers on your first book, and bigger numbers on your second book, you don't have a career.

Now frontlist is all that matters, backlist dies, and writing fiction for a living has become not building a career but playing the lottery.

There are a lot of reasons why this happens, I have gone into them at great (and contentious) length elsewhere, and WHY has ceased to be my issue. I have discovered that I cannot fix the problem from the inside.

So I'm attacking it from the outside.

What readers need

We know what readers need. Great stories. That's a given. So to head off a lot of "but what about readers" arguments in response to this post, let me say right now that what I'm doing only works if there are great stories to put into print. I'm not on any mercy mission here, Princess. (Yes, a Darth Vader misquote.)

There will be no pity publishing, no "but I need to sell something because we're broke" sales. If you're a writer, work your ass off and turn yourself into a good writer. If your stories suck, I'm not going to buy them, because the people who pay you when you're a writer are **readers**, and I'm not going to screw over readers. Period. Haven't done it with my work, and I'm SURE not going to do it with yours.

With that said, however, we are not here to talk about readers. We are here to talk about writers, and the brutal state of publishing. The question NOBODY has asked (ever, as far as I can tell) is "What do writers need?"

What writers need

Now I'm writing from the perspective neither of a reader nor of a publisher, but from that of a writer—one who has written a helluva lot of novels, who has a huge backlist of good

books—novels that have won rave reviews from reviewers and readers alike...and who has watched as the damn backlist I was supposed to have been able to build a career around has gone out of print one book at a time.

There are no every-six-month royalty checks to pay me while I write the next book. There is no buffer from closing on 20 years of professional work as a novelist. There is a treadmill of “write a book, write another book, watch the previous book go out of print, live on the the advance from the next book, and never gain any traction.”

The midlist is gone.

You want to know what writers need? Writers need a way to get paid every month for their backlist while they’re creating their newest book. They need to be able to build careers where the readers who find what they’ve written most recently can find everything they wrote before, still in print. They need to stop being publishing’s redshirts—replaceable, disposable, forgettable.

What writers need is someone to bring the midlist back—to bring back the place where you can gradually work your way to bestsellerdom (if that’s in you) by building an audience of loyal readers who look for and can find everything you wrote...and where, if you’re too offbeat to become a bestseller, you can still do what you love and get paid enough to live on while doing it.

Writers need someone who will print, distribute and promote their frontlist while keeping their backlist in print—and who will pay them regularly and reliably for every sale of every item they have in print—and not AFTER figuring profits, either.

You don’t need to have a publisher sit for six months on a book that has been finished, turned in, and accepted, while your payment works its way through accounting and your credit

rating goes down the drain because you have no money. (Yes, I'm talking about myself. I have a deep, personal, bloody-mindedly determined stake in making Rebel Tales happen BECAUSE of that publisher, that six-month-delayed check, and the havoc it wreaked on my life.)

I found a way to keep my head above water by teaching other people how to write. It's fun, I love it.

But there aren't all that many other writers out there who have published more than 30 novels, who know the ropes, who have analyzed their own mistakes and success over the past 25 years, and who know how to teach what they've learned from that.

So what I've done isn't a model that's particularly repeatable for other writers.

Besides, if you want to write fiction for a living, there should be some way other than winning the **Twilight** lottery (horrible book) to make a living doing it.

What a writer who wants to do this for a living needs is:

- A publisher dedicated to keeping his backlist in print, and to buying new frontlist from him, and to actively building his career...(and here's where it gets tricky) a publisher who figures profits AFTER everyone has been paid on gross sales, not net, so that the writer starts seeing money the first month his work sells, and then gets paid again every month in which he has sales thereafter.
- An editor who loves his work, is actively working to help him build a long-term career with that house, and who is not going to be told by the accounting department that she cannot buy his stories anymore because his first couple of stories sold slowly. Careers GROW slowly. If you plant an acorn and expect shade from your

oak tree in one year, you're an idiot. Writers are acorns, and the current state of publishing is idiotic.

- A publishing platform that will allow the writer to connect with fans, other writers, and his editor, to promote his work, to gain visibility and credibility as he builds backlist while his publisher, editor, and fans ALSO promote his work...and that will allow him to get paid every freakin' month out of gross sales (NOT NET) for every single sale of every single title.

And that's where I come in

In one of my **How To Think Sideways** lessons, I tell my students when dealing with editors, agents, publishers, and the publishing industry as a whole to think before they pick a fight. To ask themselves, "Is this the hill I want to die on?"

Up to now, I've only gone to war once, and that was in the publication of **Hawkspar**. I took that hill, I didn't die on it, and I figured that was it. I'd won my battle and considering how long I'd been writing before I hit that one, I figured I'd never need to fight another.

I was wrong.

Rebel Tales, and what it can mean to writers if I can make it work, is the hill I'm willing to die on—and considering the current unknown state of my health, I can't pretend that's entirely a metaphor. I don't **know** how I am.

But even the possibility that I'm running out of time faster than I'd hope has forced to examine my priorities, and to decide where to put my time. To paraphrase Sun Tzu, I can't plan based my future based on what life MAY do to me—I have to plan based on what it CAN. That means accepting the worst-case

scenario as my start point and working from there.

If I only get one last battle, it's going to be this one—to create a publishing house and a working model for other publishers that values writers and helps them build careers as part of its goal—and I'm starting the push to get it done now. I acknowledge there are no guarantees I can make it work.

But I've always been pretty good at picking my battles. I'll only fight in self-defense, and mostly my philosophy is that the battle avoided is the battle won...but creating a publishing house designed to build rather than destroy careers is worth the fight.

I've been fighting behind the scenes for a while—this is not a “someday” fantasy for me.

Since I first made the announcement about **Rebel Tales** and bought the domain, I have invested thousands of dollars of my own money in developing the software that will ALLOW me to pay writers (and editors) monthly out of gross sales on every sale. As software goes, it's a complicated bitch, and when you're working with other people's money, you want to be damn sure you get it right. So Margaret is being careful, and I am giving her the time she has to have to make the software perfect. **This matters.**

I'll invest more to finish the software, more to integrate it into the publishing platform, more to make the website both pretty and functional (you will have noticed that right now it looks like crap) and a lot more once I start paying people.

NOTE FOR OTHER CAPITALISTS: If you want to invest thousands of dollars of your own money into something, and you don't have thousands of dollars lying around, you have to invest a little at a time as you go—and the process takes longer. If what you're investing in is complex, it can take a LOT longer. Whether you make the investment or not comes down in the end to how much what you're doing matters to you, and why you're doing it—and how much you have to maintain control in order to make sure your goal doesn't get subverted by partners or shareholders who would dilute what you're doing.

I don't anticipate seeing a profit from **Rebel Tales** for years, though I will get there (or my heirs will). I have bigger reasons than personal profit for doing this, though, and the biggest is to fix what's broken in a field I love.

If I could pick my legacy, leaving behind a whole lot of writers who had built careers and were making a comfortable, reliable living writing fiction because of what I'd done would be it. Every nonfiction work I've done has been headed in that direction. This is simply the last critical piece of a very big puzzle.

To that end, I'm ready to start sifting through applications to find the people who want to fight this battle alongside me.

I'm starting by taking on editors

I'm looking for several really special people, and I'm asking for a lot out of the ones I'll hire. You need to be as dedicated to the WHY of all this as I am. This isn't going to be just any editing job, and you're going to have to show me what you can do to get it.

When I've found people who make my initial cut, I'll open up the query section of Rebel Tales (it's already set up and waiting), and writers can start submitting queries to prospective editors.

But editors first.

NOTE:ALL PROSPECTIVE EDITOR POSITIONS HAVE BEEN FILLED.

We're getting ready at this point to start accepting queries.

If you're a prospective reader, writer, editor, site designer, artist, or someone else interested in getting involved in

Rebel Tales, sign up for the Rebel Tales priority notification list. You'll find the sign-up form in the righthand column on the site.

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“I Have A [Writing] Dream”

written by Holly
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Fiction is my passion. Stories that matter and that have something to say were my earliest independent love, they have been the focus of my creativity for a quarter century now, and I have made them my career.

Now, a few months from fifty, I want to tell you about the vision I have for the future of writing and great storytelling, and ask you where and how you might choose to join it.

My vision compresses down to three words:

Create, Teach, Produce.

One: Create

I want to bring meaningful stories to discriminating readers, viewers, and listeners.

This means I'll continue to write my own fiction. Working on novels 34 and 35—with 32 published novels behind me—I'm pretty

well established in that part of my vision.

Two: Teach

Beyond writing my own work, I want to help more good stories make it into the world. To me, this means offering powerful tools to writers to help them write stories that are **the best work they have in them**—not just filler for bookshelves, but stories that come from their heart and passion, and that, when written, move, inspire, and enrich the lives of the readers who discover them.

To this end, I've created all the free writing resources on the Forward Motion pages of my site, all the short writing courses in my online shop, and my first two comprehensive writers' training courses, my how to write your novel and build your career course, How To Think Sideways, and my novel revision course, How To Revise Your Novel.

Those are a start. I have a stack of notebooks full of other ideas, and am simply working to make the time to create what's in those notebooks. (Create A World Clinic is next.)

Three: Produce

Even beyond that, though, I want to create a publishing enterprise where editors come up with their genres and themes and are directly rewarded for their success, where writers create stories that matter to them and are directly rewarded for connecting with the readers who long for the stories they're telling, and where people whose creative passion is storytelling can make a good living doing what they love.

Rebel Tales is the start of this part of what I want to create. Rebel Tales is still in a holding pattern while Margaret finishes and tests the backend that will allow me to pay each writer and each editor monthly their percentage of

their work's monthly gross income.

Because I think direct, perpetual monthly royalties on works created are the best way to encourage great work, and because building a way for people to be able to make their passion into their career matters deeply to me, it's critical that I be able to pay my writers and editors in this fashion from the start.

Four: Help Out

While not immediately connected to the production of great storytelling and the creation of an expanding body of fiction worth reading, **making sure that my readers, writers, and editors don't starve is a big deal for me.**

I've done some work to this end. I created affiliate programs to pay 50% of individual sales to anyone whose recommendation of my courses (or my writers' courses) leads to the sale.

I created the **33 Worst Mistakes Writers Make** publishing program for people who had deep knowledge in a subject to create writers' guides on subjects writers frequently get wrong and sell them through my shop.

I want to create a site that will allow these folks and other specialists to teach regular courses and offer information in their areas of expertise to writers who need a one-stop shop for research.

Sitting in a holding pattern, I have Money To Write (how to create monthly "royalty" income that will allow you to write full-time). I have an enormous amount of material for this program, but no time to get it into the software or do the necessary promotion.

I have discovered to my chagrin that I cannot do everything.

And the reality is that I'll be fifty in October, and no matter how much time I have left, it's running out at a hell of a pace.

I need help.

I have never longed to change the world. In fact, I'm utterly and ferociously against anyone whose stated goal is to save the world.

My objective is and always has been to work with those people who dare to dream that they could create, who dare to act to pursue their dream, and who want to make their own lives better—for them I create the tools and the training and the community that will allow them to do this.

To fulfill my own dream, to build my chosen vision into reality,

I need people for whom bringing great, unique stories to readers tired of “canned fiction product” **matters**. And if you aren't a writer, a reader, or an editor of any stripe, I still need artwork, web design, data entry, product finishing, contract and rights assistance, and other things I guarantee you I haven't even thought of yet.

If my objective strikes a chord with you, if my vision resonates with you, and if you can see yourself as a part of this, then look at what I want to do, and tell me where you fit in—what you can do, why you want to do it, where your passion lies. What is YOUR dream, and how could working with me help you achieve it?

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