

The Pointy Marketing End of Writing Fiction: Old Dog, New Trick

written by Holly

March 6, 2019

By Holly Lisle

No big secret that I'm working hard on making my fiction a full-time paying gig again – my objective is to earn 50% of my income from fiction, with the other 50% coming from my writing classes.

Fiction has been shoved over in a corner for years, because, well – writing good nonfiction is about a million times easier than writing good fiction, and in general it pays a lot better for significantly less work. And at the point where my writing site broke, it was getting the nonfiction up and running again that kept us from ending up living under a bridge.

And, honestly, after being taken in by that con artist John Locke, I had any hope of making a living writing fiction crushed out of me for a long time – everything that including both “indie publishing” and “earn a living doing it” looked like a scam.

But writing fiction is the dream job I love – sitting by myself in a room talking to invisible people on a page, watching them do things I don't expect, finding better conflicts, bigger stories – and writing about what matters to me in THIS world that translates into *my* worlds.

I did it for free every spare minute I got for seven years before I sold anything. Did it as a commercial novelist working fiction as my full-time paying job for seventeen years. Throwing in all the years when I've been an indie doing

fiction at least part time, I'm now over thirty years in on this – and it is STILL work I love.

When you find **WORK. You. LOVE...** you do not ignore that. It's rare. It's astonishing.

I'm writing hard again. Fiction is what bounces me out of bed every morning. Knowing that I'm writing the stories I love, and that they will not be destroyed by bad editors or cancelled by ordering-to-the-net publishing idiocy matters to me.

Knowing that if I can get my work in front of a broader readership, what I'm writing has a chance to matter more – to me because it will help pay the bills, but to MY perfect readers, who can find something in fiction that they love, that matters to them as well – that's what **MAKES** this the dream job.

I know how to write fiction. I'm good at it, and a good number of my students are making REAL money writing fiction after taking my classes.

They learned the “write good fiction” part from me.

Learning how to bring in serious money as indies? No.

That's the part I'm learning from them.

And here are the books and here is the software they have pointed me to that I am fighting with and fighting through in order to make fiction a business, while STILL keeping it MY fiction. Good fiction.

1. Mastering Amazon Descriptions: An Author's Guide: Copywriting for Authors
2. Mastering Amazon Ads: An Author's Guide
3. Rapid Release: How to Write & Publish Fast For Profit
4. How to Write a Sizzling Synopsis: A Step-by-Step System for Enticing New Readers, Selling More Fiction, and Making Your

Books Sound Good

5. Become a Successful Indie Author: Work Toward Your Writing Dream

6. KDP Rocket

None of these are affiliate links. They're just links to books I'm reading and software I'm using.

I do NOT yet have numbers to prove any of this will work for me. I can prove (using KDP Rocket) that my folks are earning what they say they are. That the writers of the books above (and the maker of the software), are earning what they say they are.

So this time, I can see that there is a path that leads from where I am to where I'm going. I am going to find my way down that path.

You're going to be seeing more split tests on this site. NOT just cover art. Sometimes cover copy. Sometimes blurbs.

If you'll help me out by participating in the split testing (just click whatever you like best), I'll be grateful.

The only data I'm gathering is clicks. Nothing personal, nothing identifiable, nothing that will track you across the web and show you damned advertising.

I'm simply learning the split-testing process to figure out how to write better cover copy and blurbs, and how to build better covers.

Whether you're a reader or a writer, thank you for reading this, and thank you for your help in clicking to let me know what you like.

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No Man's Sky: A Science Fiction Novelist (And Grown-Up Nerdy Girl) Reviews the Game

written by Holly

March 6, 2019

By Holly Lisle

Before I review No Man's Sky, you need to know two things about me.

Well, three, but if you're reading my blog, I'm assuming you already know I'm a professional SF novelist.

So, two.

ONE: Back in 1970 when I was nine, we moved from Ohio – where I'd spent my entire life to that point – to Alaska, and suddenly I was a nine-year-old girl living with my parents, little sister, and very little brother in a log-cabin boy's dorm heated by a wood-burning furnace on the tundra four miles by river from the nearest village (Kwethluk).

I was the only white kid and the only native English-speaker in the one-room school in the attic of the boy's dorm.

I discovered a world where food came to us once a year by barge and anything we did not order we had to hunt and kill and clean ourselves (and I learned how to mend and clean salmon nets and how to clean game birds because children in primitive places can do real work).

I learned that if it's -81 degrees Fahrenheit and you throw hot coffee into the air, it freezes instantly and explodes with a sound like a shotgun going off. This was, by the way, the coolest real-world demo of "why you can't play outside today" ever done by a father.

I skied on a tow rope behind a snowmobile, and listened to wolves singing at the moon.

I learned what a honeybucket was, and discovered that in a world without plumbing, waste gets dumped well away from the house and on a patch of ground both well away from the river and downstream from the house, and that Clorox goes into the cistern full of drinking water you pump in from the river that runs by the house. Because there are folks who live upriver...

I listened to people speaking and singing in foreign languages, wearing clothing unlike anything I'd ever seen before, telling stories by crouching on the ground and smoothing the summer mud with story knives and drawing pictures in it.

I wore a wolf-ruffed parka and sealskin mukluks because this is how you don't die in a deadly environment.

I was ripped out of what I'd mistaken for "the way things are everywhere" and thrown into the reality of "Ohio is not the whole world, or anything like it", and...

...I became an alien. A stranger in a very strange land. And simultaneously discovered science fiction, in the form of a wonderful stack of YA books left behind by the previous children's home dorm parents.

TWO: A year and a half later, we returned to Ohio.

I became *that weird kid who'd lived in Alaska*.

I had learned that there are still places where hunting and

fishing are what stand between you and starvation.

I had become a heavy reader and a lover of science fiction. And I was a skinny eleven-year-old girl with glasses in a new school in a new town with no friends.

I no longer fit in back in the world I'd once considered normal. I realized that I was never going to be normal again.

But...

I discovered Star Trek, and also that if I ran home from school instead of taking the bus, I could get there in time to catch Star Trek re-runs. So I did – and I fell deeper in love with outer space.

At eleven, I wasn't yet an atheist, but I was already having serious doubts. I was giving religion its first long, hard look, and it wasn't doing too well.

But I did pray, every night. This prayer:

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
Please don't make me go to heaven;
Let me go to space.
(And P.S. May I please have a pony?)*

The horse thing came and went.

Space didn't.

My whole life (and I'm fifty-five now, and getting pretty close to fifty-six), I have yearned for starships, aliens, strange skies, faster-than-light travel.

I discovered early that my hellishly bad math skills were going to disqualify me from ever being an astronaut, even if being a girl didn't – and remember, when I started school,

girls had to wear dresses to class and “you’re only a girl” was still not just a common phrase, but expected. And acceptable.

Back then, girls went to college for their MRS degree (as in **Mrs. Robert Biteme**, for those of you who are female and young enough that you’ve grown up with the expectation of actually getting to use your own name your whole life).

Every year after that, from the time I was eleven until the time I was sixteen, I changed schools again. Moved again. To Costa Rica, Guatemala, back to Ohio. I learned another language, got comfortable with being the perpetual outsider, the perpetual alien, the only “whatever everyone else isn’t.”

I learned to observe, to watch, to listen, to think. I lost religion, gained reason, logic, and the scientific method.

I knew I was never going to get to go to space – not in the real world. So I became a science fiction writer, went to space in my head, and took readers with me.

Two years ago, my younger son, then sixteen, told me about **No Man’s Sky**.

I thought, “Maybe this time.”

And the two of us waited for it to come out.

At the stroke of midnight on August 9th, with my pre-ordered copy of **No Man’s Sky** and the first patch already loaded up, I went to space.

The timing was pretty much perfect. I was recovering from Yet Another Surgery on My Damn Tongue, I was in pain, I was still dealing with not eating and not speaking because I had a tongue full of stitches.

I was too tired, too in pain to work.

So instead...

I soared through a shifting sky filled with stars to wake up on an alien planet, to discover that I had limited resources and a broken space ship.

I thought, I experimented, I discovered.

I found ways to use the terrain around me, to harvest resources.

I figured out how to fix my ship, I got it airborne. I started discovering the planet on which I'd landed.

I started cataloguing creatures and plants, earning money, learning alien languages and decoding conversations and figuring out how each alien race thought so I could get better rewards.

Not my first time, and it turns out being an alien in your own life prepares you pretty well for being an alien in **No Man's Sky**. Even with tiny linguistic cues, I turned out to be pretty good at figuring out the cultures and getting the good stuff.

I was less good at fighting pirates.

And when you have mined minerals like a lunatic to buy yourself a kickass spaceship, and have filled your hold to overflowing with awesome space loot, there are gonna be pirates.

I died a few times, and discovered that the game is insanely forgiving of death.

I went back to my space station and my ship, flew out to the spot where I'd died and picked up all of my goodies, and went on with the game.

I was not so forgiving. I built up my defenses, and started shooting down the pirates. Last night, with roughly {cough,

cough} a hundred hours in the game in exactly one week, I successfully took out four pirates in an aerial dogfight on a planet, while dealing with gravity and terrain. Run, little pirates. You are my meat now.

The last of the stitches in my tongue worked its way out this morning. I'm feeling better. Less pain, more energy. So it's time to get back to work.

But this was the first thing I wanted to do today, on my first day back in quite some time.

Because I want to say thank you. To Sean Murray, Harry Denholm, Ryan Doyle, Innes McKendrick, David Ream, Grant Duncan, Jacob Golding, Suzy Wallace, Paul Weir, and 65daysofstatic.

Thank you, thank you, fucking thank you. For making it possible for me to go to space, to walk on alien planets, find weird plants and animals and weirder aliens, travel faster than light between the stars. To name solar systems Wodehouse, Wyndham, Simak, Curious Cheese, and Questionable Condiments.

Thank you for making it beautiful. Thank you for making it fun. Thank you for taking your vision and working your asses off and bringing it to life. The game might not have been for everyone, but it was definitely for me.

I don't give things stars. I think stars are an idiotic way of rating something. But this game doesn't need stars from me anyway. It already has billions (trillions? Quintillions?) of 'em.

And 18 quintillion planets circling them.

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Writing contest sites, and fiction versus the NBA

written by Holly

March 6, 2019

By Holly Lisle

I never recommend writing contest sites that charge an entry fee. No exceptions. I've never entered one, because I was out to make a living from my writing, and contests were an unnecessary diversion from my path.

Your mileage may vary. But I received an interesting request from someone building a "perpetual writing contest site" and once I removed all the identifying details, I thought you might find it interesting to observe the conversation.

Here's the link to the article (the first one I've added to "Writing Mind, Heart, and Soul in a while):

<https://hollylisle.com/why-i-dont-recommend-writing-contest-sites-and-why-writing-fiction-isnt-like-the-nba/>

From there you can come back here and add your comments on the article if you care to.

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Apple is Fighting for YOUR Right to Privacy

written by Holly

March 6, 2019

By Holly Lisle

I bitch about Apple being a pain in the ass for not keeping old document formats for me on new systems. I don't like the Apple store's "Walled Garden" approach. And I think the newest iPhones are so ugly and crippled that I got a Samsung instead. I disagree rabidly with their "free tech to people in crappy countries" program—which is sending iPads and things like them to countries that don't have the infrastructure to support them.

But Apple was my first-EVER experience with technology that just worked. Mostly, it still "just works."

I still buy Apple. I still use Apple products. And when Apple gets something right, dammit, I want to say so, and say it loudly.

Apple is fighting for your right to privacy. For your freedom. Not Google. Not Facebook. Not just about everyone else.

Apple is right about individual privacy on the internet.

You will have the choice to make your life better if you read the link above.

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Tom Vetter Hits #11 on Amazon's Bestseller List

written by Holly
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By Holly Lisle

Tom Vetter holds the #11 spot this morning in Adventures and Discoveries World History on Amazon's Bestseller List!

The book jumped significantly overnight, from the high 300,000s overall to 28,289 right now, and he's sold most of his first editions.

The author's page with first editions is here:
<http://www.tomvetterbooks.com/i-read-from-30000-leagues-under-sea-authors-intro/>

The book on Amazon is here:
<http://www.amazon.com/000-Leagues-Undersea-Submariner-Submergence-ebook/dp/B00VERWICQ/>

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The Indie Authors' Advent Calendar? Brilliant!

written by Holly
March 6, 2019

By Holly Lisle

I think both readers and writers will find this a simply brilliant idea.



A group of writers has banded together to create a series fiction advent calendar. Each of the writers has done a series story, and different parts of it will be posted throughout the advent season.

You go to the calendar, click the links as they become available, and read the part of each story as it goes live.

It's fun for readers, who get to read stories by writers they might not know yet. It's great for the writers, who have a chance to connect with folks who might not have found them yet.

And...

...It's just so cool! **Make sure when you go that you sign up for the notices. (The link is at the top right corner of the page.) You'll get one email each day with the link for that day's story section.**

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Self-Publishers: New numbers you need NOW

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

I did that interview with Simon Whistler...

<http://rockingselfpublishing.com/author/simon/> (link opens in new tab)

...that went live last Tuesday, and from doing that interview I bumped into Hugh Howey, and from doing that, I encountered an entire series of links to writers who have done the HARD math on self-publishing.

I'm only giving you two. There are many, but these two are CRITICAL if you're a writer.

I have not done THIS math. I have never seen THIS math done before. I didn't even know which questions to ask to get me to this math.

(Aside from deadline math, I suck at math.)

Fortunately, both Hugh Howey (the author of WOOL that I keep raving about) and Courtney Milan (whose work I have not yet read) are Good At Math.

And really, really good at explaining what the numbers mean, and why they matter to you, the writer.

Howey and Milan have done math on self publishing vs. commercial

publishing. It is mind-blowing.

Go here to read Hugh Howey's thing first:

Hugh has discovered the actual numbers of print books vs. ebooks in a limited but relevant sample, the numbers of these that are commercially pubbed, the number that are self-pubbed, has gotten a good idea of the size of the market, and is going to knock your socks off.

<http://authorearnings.com/the-report/> (link opens in new tab)

You'll need what he's discovered before you read Courtney Milan's math, because with his dissection of the book publishing market and where self-publishing stands in it, you can understand the absolutely mind-boggling importance of what Courtney Milan has discovered.

So now read Courtney Milan:

Courtney is going to show you what commercial publishing contracts are worth versus self-publishing your own work over time. She, too, is going to knock your socks off. (Assuming you put them back on after reading Hugh.)

She's also going to give you a downloadable spreadsheet so you can test things yourself.

<http://www.courtneymilan.com/ramblings/2013/08/19/know-what-your-rights-are-worth/> (link opens in new tab)

What's MY take-away on this?

I have printed these off. I have read them and re-read them, but I have not yet taken them apart piece by piece to work into my own publishing plan, or used Courtney's spreadsheet so get the important view on what my personal sales numbers mean.

HOWEVER...

I was already done with commercial publishing. Now? Even that one book I was considering as my last connection to traditional publishing is off the table for anyone but me.

This is not THE happiest day of my life. But it's up there.

What's YOUR take-away on this?

If you read these two articles and go through them (with a math-savvy friend if necessary), at bare minimum you will understand the potential, revised-and-edited value of those unpublished books in your inventory—or the rights you're considering selling to publishers.

Potentially, this is much more than that. Potentially, depending on what you decide to do with the knowledge you gain, this is the information you need to create the life you want to live for yourself.

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Published the WARPAIN Soundtrack

written by Holly

March 6, 2019

By Holly Lisle

It took a while to find the right music for WARPAIN.



First, this is the music I have playing in the background while I write, so it has to fit the universe, the characters, and the “feel” of a lived-in place full of real humans, real needs, and the themes of the story. And it has to not grate on my nerves or distract me from my words.

It has to become subliminal, has to leak into my subconscious mind and feed the story I want to write.

So the soundtrack places HEAVY emphasis on Jim Tozier’s guitar work, which fits Cady like her skin.

The rest of the music in the soundtrack hits plot points, characters, or some element of theme or characterization I want to have in my head.

But Tozier is the backbone of the whole track.

So here’s the WARPAIN soundtrack.

(Link is to iTunes. It’s quick and convenient, and every other listing option I’ve tried has proven a giant pain in the ass.)

Consider it a sneak preview.

On a personal note, I still have the damn headaches and

migraines. I'm getting some work done—putting the soundtrack together was a little bit of relaxation when my head hurt too badly to do anything else.

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Heads Up on the Book That Changes Publishing

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

Last week, like a zillion other writers, I received notice of the publication of John Locke's *How I Sold 1 Million eBooks in Five Months*.

I bought it.

It fits PERFECTLY with **How To Think Sideways** and **How To Revise Your Novel**.

I've been focusing heavily on teaching the traditional path to publishing because I'm good at it, I know how to do it, and I know how to show others how to do it. And one look at the Eureka! boards will show you my students are succeeding.

BUT...self-publishing has been as good to me as professional

publishing. The only problem is, I can't teach what I do with self-publishing because my method starts with, "First, sell 32 novels to top New York Publishers..." and ends with writing **non-fiction**. Not exactly a path most of you have any interest in following.

Certainly not a way to sell your fiction yourself.

EVERYTHING changed when I read John Locke's book. He made himself into the first self-published million-seller, and then he wrote a book on how he did it. It's a good book, and the parts he goes into detail on are genius.

But HE DOESN'T COVER EVERYTHING. He has whole vast swatches where he says "You're going to have to learn how to do this yourself."

I realized reading through what he's leaving you to figure out on your own that I ALREADY KNOW this. Every bit of it. The week six lessons are on developing your own personal genre, finding your target market, and writing books to that target. These are steps in Locke's process.

So the Walkthrough for WEEK 6 of How To Think Sideways—Finding Or Creating Your Market—is going to be be **the step-by-step on what John Locke left out and said you were going to have to learn on your own.**

His book is available as an e-book via Kindle, Nook, and iBooks, and there are software readers out there you can get for your computer if you don't have one of these e-readers.

Please understand that I CANNOT and WILL NOT reveal the parts of his system he covers in depth.

He earned his \$4.99, and I'm not going to violate his

copyright—so to get full benefit from Week 6, you’re going to have to get a copy of John Locke’s **How I Sold 1 Million eBooks in Five Months**.

This is about building your career yourself—controlling your fiction, making sure that you and your hard-earned career don’t get dumped into professional publishing’s “didn’t do as well as we had hoped” bin after three books. **I’ve been there**. Remember? It sucks, and here’s the thing.

YOU DON’T EVER have to be there.

This is your path to full-time writing if you want it, and I’m going this route with some of my own work.

This is the book, the system, the process I’ve been waiting for. If it’s what you’ve been waiting for, buy his book and get ready for Thursday, when the Week 6 Walkthrough Talkthrough: What John Locke DIDN’T Cover goes live and I walk you through the rest of how to make his system work for you.

Here are links to buy the book. They are NOT affiliate links. I want the man to keep full price on each sale—this book is that much of a game-changer:

Kindle:

<http://www.amazon.com/Sold-Million-eBooks-Months-ebook/dp/B0056BMK6K>

Nook:

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/how-i-sold-1-million-ebooks-in-5-months-john-locke/1103948392>

iBooks: From your i-device, go to iBooks and search “John Locke 1 million ebooks”

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The Writer's Heart

written by Holly

March 6, 2019

By Holly Lisle

I'm going to point you at a relatively new weblog I discovered called THE WRITER'S HEART, written by Charles Towne. Towne has a way with wildlife and photography, and has had adventures of astonishing and frightening sorts...and his weblog is a lot of fun to read.

Better yet, he's an opinionated cuss, which I find both delightful and charming, (and I haven't yet spotted a four-letter word in a single post, which puts him higher on the politeness scale than me). Drop in, tell him hello, and look over what he's put together so far. I think you'll like him.

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