Finally back to work

written by Holly
May 27, 2007
By Holly Lisle

Writing of any variety hasn't been going too well the last few days. Stress doesn't go away when things start looking better, because the possibility that they'll get worse again always exists. But I'm making nice progress on the type-in of the Green Magic proposal right now. It feels good to be writing again.

I finally got a desktop client to work with my weblog, too—the WordPressDash widget. I've never bothered with widgets—always found them kind of silly and pointless. But WordPressDash makes it possible for me to post to the weblog without having to open anything or log in. The reason I had so many posts the first year I started blogging was because I had my desktop client open and I reported progress as I was writing. It was a lot of fun, and kept me going. I might find myself sliding back into that format.

Oh, and I know what next Friday's Snippet is going to be. An excerpt from the Starving Rat Scene in HAWKSPAR.

Second day of migraine

written by Holly
May 27, 2007
By Holly Lisle

No writing done. No weblogs read. Head is screaming. Thought I'd go ahead and update WordPress to the newest version, got the following lovely message:

Fatal error: Cannot redeclare register_sidebars() (previously declared in /path/to/writingdiary2/wp-includes/widgets.php:15) in /path/to/writingdiary2/wp-content/plugins/widgets.php on line 22

This is an across-the-board error—doesn't matter what template I use. I have no clue how to fix this, and I can't make any changes in the sidebards until it's fixed. Anyone else updated to WordPress 2.2 and found (and fixed) the same error?

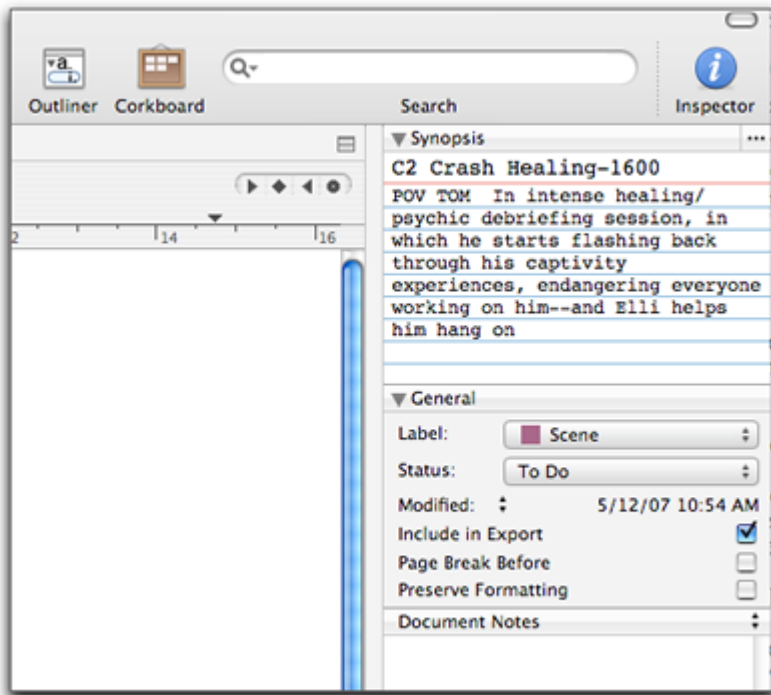Or if not, does anyone have better, less buggy blog software to recommend?

WOW! Found a new Scrivener thing

written by Holly
May 27, 2007
By Holly Lisle

Took me a while to get a couple of plot cards I liked, and while I was working on them, I accidentally clicked a button in Scrivener that opened a whole panel I'd missed before.

The panel opens with the blue I button in the top righthand corner. Yeah, a little obvious. What can I say?

In this panel, you can see and rewrite your current plot card, decide whether the page will be exported, will retain formatting with export, and will have a nice little page break before (nifty for separating chapters but keeping scenes within chapters together). You can also make notes to yourself, the sort of revision notes I was going on about in Plot Clinic, for example.

The document is to the left, the entire plot outline is still to the left of that.

All I can say is, "Oh, wow!"

Plot Outline done for Green Magic One

written by Holly
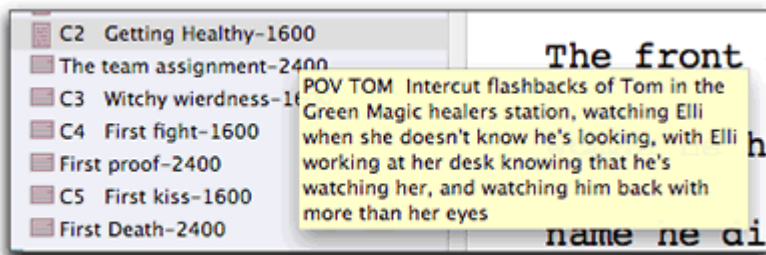May 27, 2007
By Holly Lisle

I had a couple folks ask how I would do headers on the plot cards. So I took a picture of the outline view of my plot card outline for **Green Magic I**.

This is done in Scrivener; your results will look different depending on what you're using to outline your book. But…
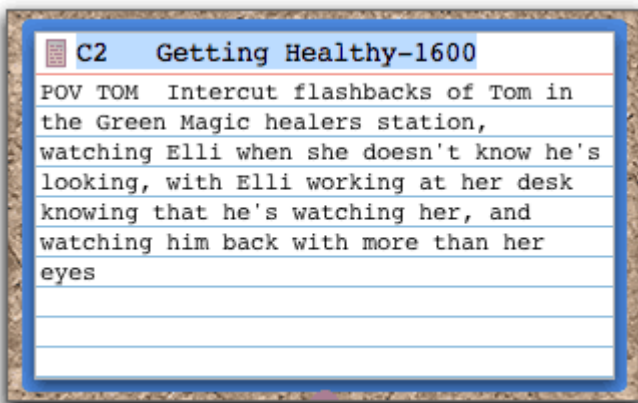
The entire project is in a folder titled (ever so imaginatively) Draft. The working synopsis is the green rectangle beneath it. That holds my short description, main character arc, theme, and cover copy description. Then I have my character list—each character has a short description that I can roll over at any time with my cursor, so that the names of my folks are in front of me all the time, plus pertinent details about their appearances, jobs, etc.

Following that is the title, and then the book divided into three beats. It alsol follows Three-Act Structure, but you'll see that the actual acts, Gathering the Players, Intensifying the Situation, and Resolving the Conflict, do not land at the same place as the story beats.

At the far left of every other title, C[#] marks off each chapter (you can see I'm doing two scenes per chapter), each card has a title that cues me in to what the main action of that scene will be, and the necessary word count I have to hit to come in on deadline at length, and within the specifications for the book. This is a line romance with a requirement for 60%-40% heroine-hero viewpoints. Having the cards marked off this way will keep me on track.

I can see the contents of each card as I roll the cursor over it, preventing me from ever having to click back into the plot-cards working view, but keeping all that information at my fingertips.

Here's the corkboard with card in place for comparison purposes.

The information in the body of each card is the character POV for each scene and the scene's main action.

Finally, here's the titles-only view that I see as I'm actually writing the book. (All of the cards are drag-and-drop, too, to make in-progress revision simple.

And to the cries of "Where's the creativity in the midst of all that structure…" well, I like to write sonnets, too. It's the same process. You learn the rules, you integrate the rules, and then you see just how far outside the envelope you can push you can push your content without breaking the entire structure.

- ▼ **Draft**
  - Synopsis
  - ▼ Character List
    - Tom O'Riley
    - Elli Fox
    - John Green
    - Paul Howard Zmed
    - Rachel Haightly
    - Ari (Aragorn) Linden
    - Marissa Lee
    - Rob Kitura
    - Kate O'Hanlon
    - Mike Brikowski
  - ▼ ███████████ ← Title intentionally obscured
    - ▼ Boy Meets Girl
      - C1 Out of the cage–1483
      - To safety–2559
      - C2 Getting Healthy–1600
      - The team assignment–2400
      - C3 Witchy wierdness–1600
      - Two bods and a jeep–2400 ← Act I ends here
      - C4 First fight–1600
      - First proof–2400
      - C5 First kiss–1600
      - First Death–2400
    - ▼ Boy Loses Girl
      - C6 Power struggle–1600
      - Elli prevails–2400
      - C7 Stuck with the team–1600
      - Hunting the killer–2400
      - C8 San Jose–1600
      - The Room–2400
      - C9 Wake up call–1600
      - Elli scores big–2400
      - C10 Old City–1600
      - Love and Death–2400
    - ▼ Boy Gets Girl
      - C11 And Guatemala–1600
      - Supplying for Disaster–2400
      - C12 Run through the Jungle–1600
      - Following Bread Crumbs–2400
      - C13 The Last Night–1600
      - The Last Day–2400
      - C14 Captured–1600 ← Act II ends here
      - The End of the World–2400
      - C15 Morning After–1600 ← Short Act III
      - Brand New Day–2400
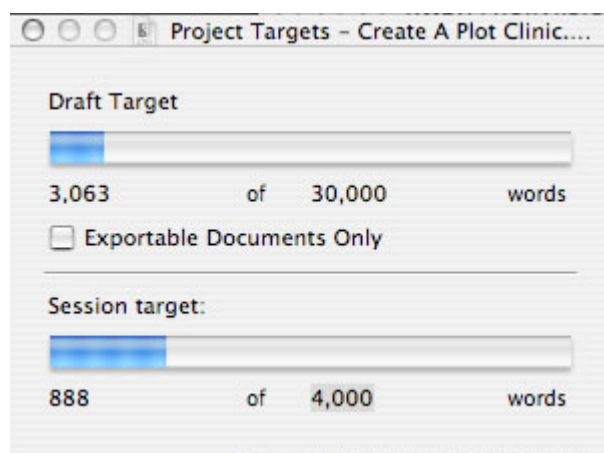- ▶ **Research**
- ▶ **Trash**

Scrivener, and your comments

written by Holly
May 27, 2007
By Holly Lisle

First, I just discovered this in Scrivener (I'm a jump-in-and-use-it, figure-it-out-as-I-go software user, so it always takes me a while to figure out the full capabilities of a new piece of software).

This is the Project Targets window, which allows me to see not only the wordcount for my complete document, but also how far I am on my way to my word goal for the day.

Since the document window itself lets me see the wordcount for each section I'm working on, I'm able to tell whether I'm running short or long on each tool I'm working out while still knowing how I'm doing overall. It's wonderful.

Also wonderful—your comments about plotting, both in the Time for your stories thread, and in your comments on the intro. You've managed to remind me of things I'd overlooked in outlining the book, and it will have some new sections and new material because of this. Thank you.

If your plot issues haven't been addressed by anyone yet, please write them down. I may have already planned to cover them, but maybe not.

Where have you been all my life, WriteItNow? (updated)

written by Holly
May 27, 2007
By Holly Lisle

I only recommend things I use and love, which is why I frequently mention how much I love Inspiration, and rarely say anything about Word (use it, hate it).

I almost never find anything I love, or even like, where writing software is concerned. I've tried a lot of it, and most of it is an enormous waste of money. So when my agent forwarded me an envelope containing writing software, I was cynical, to say the least.

Ah, the difference a day makes. In twenty-four hours, I have gone from "Yeah, yeah, yet another useless writer's tool to try," to "Oh. My. God. **Somebody** knew what I needed."

The tool is WriteItNow, the platform is either Windows or Mac OS X (including Intel versions—it works just fine on mine), the price is $37.55 US, and let me tell you why it's cool. Why it's necessary. Why it will ease your writing burdens.

- **Everything you need, you can see in the left-hand**

column.
I do not remember the majority of my character names, place names, or language and worldbuilding names when I'm writing a book. Part of this is that I do books with lots of characters and detailed worldbuilding, part of it is a short-term memory issue, and I've been dealing with both parts of this equation for my entire writing career. I've always dealt with it by keeping my maps pinned to a nearby wall or board (place names), covering my computer with sticky notes (character names, ideas, world details), and keeping my language vocabulary sheets on the desk while I'm writing (vocabulary). With WriteItNow, I added every Osji vocabulary word and special worldbuilding term to notes (I found them by doing a spellcheck of the already-written chapters I imported—the whole process took just a few minutes). Found my character and place names in the manuscript the same way, and added them to Characters and Locations respectively. Now I look left, and the names and terms I need are right there. But it gets better than this.

- **This program is a perfect adjunct to the *Create A Character Clinic* and the *Create A Culture Clinic*.**
I went through my Character Clinic questions and developed each character in the Characters section of program. Then—HA!—I exported my notes (Export/Text…check all backgrounding boxes, then go to note you want, export) into beautifully formatted printed pages that went into my RUBY KEY notebook. Ditto Culture stuff—most of that went into Ideas. This gave me a nicely organized (typed) notebook that is also a perfect backup for the rest of the MOON AND SUN series (HARDCOPY BACKUPS WILL SAVE YOUR WRITING), since now all the information I need is also right in the writing program. But it still gets better than this.

- **This works with my notecarding process.**

Every category is sortable by alpha, reverse alpha, or clicking on an event, location, or whatever and pushing up and down arrows to move it around. So you can sort characters alphabetically or by their importance in the story (what I do), sort locations by when they show up in the story, how important they are, or by name, sort ideas and notes any old way you please. And…and…and…for me this is the big one. You can dump a bunch of ideas for events into the program by title only (just click in the body of the text and your title is added), brainstorming things you think you want to put into the story. And THEN you can move them around to your heart's content, until they land in an order that works for you. But even yet more wonderfulness awaits. Because……

- **Everything links to everything.**
  I linked my culture notes to character names, linked ideas to events, linked locations to chapters. I added relationship links to my characters, added birth and death dates, created a timeline by adding the first event in the book and giving it a date, and then creating an event for the ending and giving it a date. Connected characters to the events in which they particpated. Spent an extra couple of seconds guesstimating the times that each event started and ended (there are little click-it clocks and calendars [even including BC dates] in events to make this whole process a no brainer.)

And then I checked the charts. Yes. **WriteItNow** generates charts, and you can see if you have one person in two places at the same time. You can see if it would be impossible to get from point A to point B in the given time. You can see if somebody who's dead experiences a miraculous resurrection two days later because you forgot you killed him. You can put dates on those not-yet-in-the-story events you notecarded in the step above

and see how long it will take your characters to get through the story. I cannot begin to explain how huge this is. How beautiful.

But it isn't everything. There is, in fact, even more.

- **You're stuck. You don't know what to do next. Help arrives in the form of dice.**
UPFRONT DISCLAIMER:
I am the most anti-random-generator person on the planet. I do not flip coins to decide character genders, I do not randomly generate names, I loathe random-generator plots. Basically, if you can randomly generate it, I want nothing to do with it, because I like worlds where the pieces fit, and I have found than random generators do a horrible job of making the pieces fit.

For those who like such things, **WriteItNow** offers a slightly-better-than-average random character generator (go to Character, click the dice icon [yeah, it's only a single die, but "die icon" sounded like something you would never, under any circumstances, want to click]) that will give you a name; a birthdate; an already-configured personality slider for Health, Wealth, Happiness, Friendliness, Generosity, Aggression, Extroversion, and Caring; and a description like: "Bud is of average height, wiry and thuggish. His hair is very short, light brown and unruly. As a child he was aggressive. Bud is interesting and goofy. He loves 'The Three Musketeers' by Alexandre Dumas. Bud likes bacon strips. He loses sleep thinking about social standing. In summary he is very excitable," This description is copied directly from the program.

I'll never use the random character generator.

But **WriteItNow** does one random-generation thing that I find intriguing enough that I may try it out from time

to time. Go to Ideas. Click the dice icon. By drawing from what you've already developed (and occasionally pitching in stuff that is wildly out of place), the program will offer up new ideas. Example: "Oris is injured and can't carry out his duties. Could The Cat be less rational? Create an outline for this idea by dictating to a friend." Sometimes, a couple of off-the-wall questions can kick you loose from your stuckness. I figure it's worth a try.

Is that everything, then? Not a chance.

- **You can track submissions.**
  And in a very cool, very organized way. And even that ain't all.

- **You can see how long people have known each other, and what their relationships are.**
  Not only that, but you can see how those dates overlap in a chart page specifically for relationships. The program will tell you how old your folks are, will keep track of gender if you remember to click gender in the Characters section, and will also remind you that someone is dead, and tell you how long that person has been dead, in relationship to your story time.

- **I've used the program for one work day.**
  I'm betting there's more wonderful stuff I haven't even found yet.

So…

Is it perfect?

NOTE: Comments pending. Just got a note from Rob, who created this masterpiece, addressing the three issues I had with the program. He's already modified the Windows version of the program and the new version will be available later today. Mac

version will follow.

Talk about WOW.

The wordcount chapter at a time and inconvenient issue:

The single-space type issue AND the no-blue-background/white text issue:

Best Reason to Upgrade to Tiger 10.4?

written by Holly
May 27, 2007
By Holly Lisle

It comes with PhotoBooth.

I'm embarrassed to admit this, (but not so embarrassed that it would prevent me from showing you the pictures I took).

Nothing like a new OS, though, to induce procrastination. So …

on to work now.

I …. Hate …. Computers

written by Holly
May 27, 2007
By Holly Lisle

Hate.

Loathe.

Despise.

I did a clean install from the factory disks. Did the system
upgrades from the official site. And KEY COMMANDS don't work.

I refuse to be relegated to using the mouse, the whole mouse,
and nothing but the mouse, so help me God. So I'm backing
everything up (This time I did a nice little file for my
serial numbers, many of which I had to track down in e-mails
last time).

And then I'm going to do a do-over. One more brain-
wipe/reinstall, followed by testing every step of the way to
see where key commands die.

And then a third reinstall that doesn't include whichever
system update it was that screwed things up.

My day. My next few days, actually, because after I do that, I
have to hand-reinstall all my e-mail accounts (again), and my
software (again).

Folks who are waiting on crits and WB workshops … I have them about ready. I apologize for the delay — we'll add the extra time onto the end of your courses.

Everyone else … wish me luck. I'm going back in.

Clean-Up Time

written by Holly
May 27, 2007
By Holly Lisle

I've finished backing up and mirroring my hard drive to my backup drive. Everything is there, everything works.

Now I'm getting ready to reformat my Mac hard drive for the first time ever, and reinstall the basic system software. Over the last couple of years, I've added far too much software, and some of it has caused problems that reach deeper into the system than these programs had any business doing. I'm starting over with a clean slate in order to speed up my system and optimize.

In a year or so, when the early adopters have debugged the new iMacs for me, I'll probably get one. But, having been the early adopter on far too many systems and OSes, I've learned that this time I'll wait long enough before I adopt for the new chip and the new OS and the new emulator to allow them to crash someone else's work and screw up someone else's deadline, rather than mine.

Going On, Going On

written by Holly
May 27, 2007
By Holly Lisle

I introduced a couple of brilliant friends to each other this morning. With luck, this introduction will result in a piece of writing software that I've been dying to own since I first saw the physical prototype a long time ago. More on this if it goes anywhere.

On ISY, my start point is 76235. Finish point will be 79,235.

On CCC, start point is 10,333. Finish point is whatever I can eke out.

Have a nasty headache at the moment.