

# What's in Grandma's attic? – 1286 words, and 72,321 total

By Holly Lisle

I had kind of a hard start this morning – was up way too late last night, and didn't sleep well once I got to bed, and then woke up at pretty much my regular time (just after 7 am instead of 6:30-sh). So I would have expected to be off my game.

But I'd left myself at a good place yesterday, and picking up from that scene today went pretty well. I wrote slower than usual – seriously, I could use a nap right now. But I had a lot of fun as soon as I opened up the document and started reading through yesterday's work and doing tiny tweaks. (And fixing typos.)

By the time I started writing new words, I was rolling, and I discovered some things about my MC's grandmother's attic that are very cool. And really weird.

And that tie her back to her great-grandfather, or maybe her great-great grandfather, one of whom was a smith – and who was making a lot more than horseshoes.

Fun scene, fair amount of research on cast iron and ancient coins, and still hit my words.

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# Marketing Tuesday #1 – Reading Emails, Building a “Loves, Hates, and Recommends” chart

By Holly Lisle

So because last Tuesday was TAX DAY, in which I had to finish up everything to get to my accountant, today is my first ever Marketing Tuesday.

In which I am building a chart to help me understand who my readers are, what they're looking for from me, what other work they like and what they like about it.

READER	Email	Genre Loves	Genre Hates	Rec'd Author	Titles
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The Research Chart Header

Reader and Email are on there so the folks who answered the three questions I asked, whether via email, on my blog, or over in the HWC forums, can get their stories.

**And so far, it's looking very much like I'm going to have to write a new story for them.** The people who like my work are enthusiastic about it – but in most cases, not for the reasons I thought.

SO FAR... (and I have a LOT of feedback yet to go through) many of *MY* readers love the fact that I mix genres, love my insertion of grim and gritty and real-world into fantasy and science fiction, love the fact that my worlds feel real, and do not mind at all that I smoosh all the stuff I love from nonfiction (anthropology and archeology and history and science and pseudoscience) into books that are ostensibly

about other things.

Turns out... I'm not the only writer who is currently doing this – and the fact that there are folks who write what I love to write and who have really good audiences for it is encouraging as hell.

It just means I've been putting the stuff I love to write in front of the wrong people.

And the answers I'm getting to the questions I asked are showing me everything I was getting wrong... and better yet, how to get those things right.

So I'm going to have to write a story for these folks.

I think it's going to be a short one-off that will introduce a new character, a new world, and an idea I have for my first "now I know what I'm writing" series.

Hugs and thanks to everyone who answered my questions. **You guys are magnificent.**

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## **Mondays... -@\*~&#\$^**

By Holly Lisle

Got my words on Dead Man's Party – that was the fun, interesting, easy part.

We did a site update over at [HollysWritingClasses.com](https://HollysWritingClasses.com) that was overall just buttery smooth. But I did not have "Test Downloads" in my list of post-update checking, and downloads

were not, therefore, tested.

And guess what was broken?

Dan fixed them quickly and beautifully, but in the meantime, between the time we identified the presence of a problem and the time he fixed them, I stressed out all over the place.

And there was just a ton of not-fun email.

And I'm just now getting to the FUN email, which is folks getting me their answers on my search for the identification of the genre I actually write...

Which is NOT Space Opera.

And while research has turned up some amazing gems, and while I had the coolest idea for the next stuff I want to write (after I wrap *Dead Man's Party*, *The Wishbone Conspiracy*, and *The Emerald Sun*), I'm still not even the littlest bit solid on how I can get my existing books re-classified and in front of the readers who will actually like them.

Should be an interesting week. I could totally give Monday Drama a miss, though.

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**The Wishbone Conspiracy: 2027 words, and a Change in the 3-**

# Novels Experiment

By Holly Lisle

Got pretty decent words today on *The Wishbone Conspiracy*. 2027 new words, taking me to a total of 23,873 words in the novel.

I mostly like what I got, though I had a bit of a hard start.

And that's what I want to talk about today.

The "Write on three different novels each week" experiment worked very well. Until it didn't.

I was writing first draft of *Dead Man's Party* on Mondays, first draft of **Moon & Sun: The Emerald Sun** on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and first draft of **Cadence Drake: The Wishbone Conspiracy** on Thursdays and Fridays.

Getting 1515 words or better on Mondays, about 1500 words on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and 2000-ish words on Thursdays and Fridays.

## BUT...

It required a big mental shift, and rolling through three very different projects back to back to back started taking a toll on me.

I kept going... but then I started research in improving the marketing I've done – or in many cases haven't done – on my work, and current methods of increasing Amazon sales, and experimenting with copywriting and cover design and split testing and...

Along with writing the three novels, and writing a new lesson every week in my new **How to Write a Novel** class, and answering student questions, and working with Dan on getting the final pieces of the [HollysWritingClasses.com](http://HollysWritingClasses.com) website out of beta,

plus spending time with my family...

Well, the fiction broke down just a little. And I hit what I have come to recognize as the “trying to do too much at once” wall.

*Dead Man's Party* has to stay. It's my demonstration novel for *How to Write a Novel*.

My writing on *The Wishbone Conspiracy* is still running smoothly.

But the writing on *The Emerald Sun* hit a wall.

This is a book I need to be able to throw myself into exclusively: to NOT be writing other fiction at the same time. It has a specific voice and some specific worldbuilding and a place it's going that is very different from other things I write. It has a deep world that I have not been writing in recently, characters who have become strangers to me, and both Tuesday and yesterday, my mind simply balked. Refused to work on *Emerald Sun*.

Was real damn happy to offer up copywriting, cover design, threw ideas at me for both *The Wishbone Conspiracy* and *Dead Man's Party*.

But it dug in its heels on what was supposed to have been the work of the day.

Had all my fiction crashed on me, I would be taking a different approach than the one I'm taking starting today, but two of three books – the one with NO previous worldbuilding, and the one with a ton of worldbuilding, but in which I've been writing regularly for the last eight or so years – are still fine.

## **So now I enter Phase Two of the experiment.**

This is pretty simple. Monday will still be *Dead Man's Party*, and still 1515 words or thereabouts each week, followed by working on HTWAN, answering questions in the forum, doing the help desk tickets that require me, working with my moderators, working with Dan on the site, answering emails, and other daily task.

With *Dead Man's Party*, I have to have this amount, and JUST this amount, for my class and to make sure I'm applying the material from the various lessons as I write. So I can't just write ahead and be done with this particular novel. Each chapter has to be written along with each lesson.

Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, I'm going to be shooting for 2000 words per day on *The Wishbone Conspiracy*.

That will give me six-thousand first-draft words on that book each week.

I currently have 23,873 words total, and with a 90,000-word target for completion of the first draft, need another 66,000 words (rounded) to hit my target.

So some book math. At 6000 words per week, I'll have the first draft finished in about eleven weeks. Figure I'll have it done around May 17th.

This is nobody's fastest pace on a novel ever, and if it were the only thing I was doing, I could get it done a lot faster. But it isn't, and what I'm looking for at this point is...

## **SUSTAINABLE FICTION CREATION.**

A system that I can put into action and stick with, that will allow me to maintain my nonfiction work while creating regular

publishable new fiction.

## **Now...**

Those of you who didn't get sidetracked by the book math are going, "WAIT A MINUTE!!! What about Tuesday?"

Very good.

Tuesday, my first two to three hours will be focused on marketing my current backlist and learning how to do a better job of launching my front list.

It will also give me a clean break between Fiction Project One and Fiction Project Two.

And it will carry me to the completion of Fiction Project One AND Fiction Project Two at about the point where I also have the class **How to Write a Novel** completed in the Splinters version.

At that point, I'll have two finished novels in need of revision, editing, covers, marketing, bug hunting, launching, and publication.

And at that point, I'll figure out what happens next. I'll probably dive all the way into *The Emerald Sun* at that point.

And look at possible new writing classes or workshops I could create.

## **But as always...**

This plan is subject to revision as I experiment and figure out new definitions for what I want to accomplish, and new ways to accomplish my objectives.

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# The Wishbone Conspiracy: Yesterday and today

By Holly Lisle

Yesterday, a couple things went wrong.

First, the writing dragged because I didn't know where the novel was going. I made it up to 21,843 words – so it wasn't a complete wreck. But it was not that flowing, flying race against the timer that is so fun.

Second, I chose to get sidetracked figuring out some Amazon ads for *Hunting the Corrigan's Blood*.

I did not trip. I did not fall. I made a shitty choice knowing it was a shitty choice, and spent writing time doing non-writing things, and then berated myself for the choice.

Not productive – except it pointed out to me that I absolutely have to have a Provisional Outline to stay on track with this novel.

And in starting to put that together, I found exactly where the story broke yesterday – I was focusing so much on the second conspiracy Cady and friends discovered that I forgot to follow up with the first one.

I'm only thirteen chapters into the thirty-seven I need to outline to get the book into writeable range for "short, tight chapters and 70,000 words", but with the story summary written (the story summary is what I WANT to write, though not necessarily what I'll end up with), and with my focus on weaving the two conspiracies and "Newsletter Guy" into the plot, this is coming together in an interesting fashion.

I'll get back to countable words on *Wishbone* next Thursday.

**Today I'm building the foundation that will make getting them easier.**

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Added at 12:39 PM – it took me hours, but I got the outline built, and I like where it goes.

I know parts of it will change when I'm writing, but for the moment at least I have figured out specific things I need to accomplish in each chapter – and if I can beat those things with better ideas as I'm getting my words, that's all to the good.

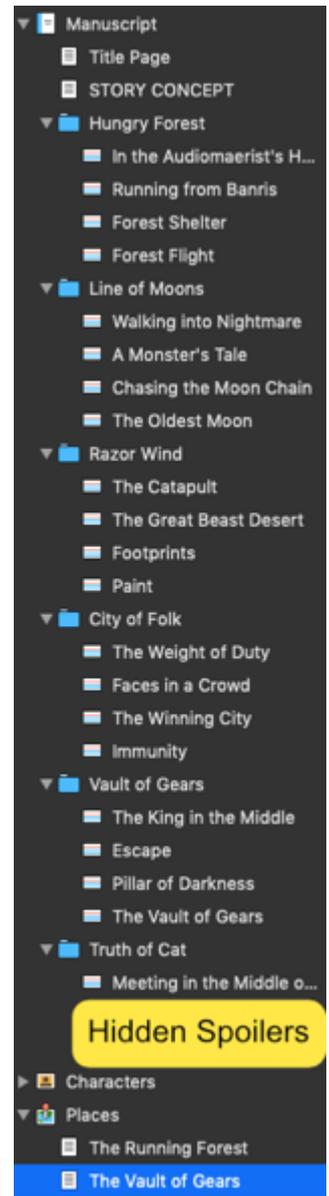
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# **Moon & Sun 3: Sketching with words**

By Holly Lisle

I started out my workday this morning looking for (and finding) a sketchbook among my many notebooks and blank project books.



Followed by staring at the blank pages, with an array of drawing tools in front of me, and with my Muse going, “No, no, no, no, no...”

“I need to see these things,” I muttered, and Muse said, “I already see them. Let me show you.”

So I sat, pulled up my Emerald Sun Scrivener document, and opened a page in Places, and my Muse said, “Tell me about the Running forest.

So I did. Rather a lot.

And then the Muse said, “Okay. Now what’s the story with the Vault of Gears?”

And I started answering the question, and discovered SO much more story.

I didn't have pen lines or shapes for what I was seeing, for what I was discovering – but I had a lot of words, and the words divulged secrets, and the secrets made me hungry to get started on this book.

So.

Next Tuesday, I'll start writing the actual novel. I might from time to time need to slow down to sit with my Muse and sketch more words...

But this story has been waiting a long time to be born, and all of a sudden, it feels like it's in a hurry.

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# **Round 1 Testing for New Holly Lisle Writing School Website: 39 Volunteers Requested Now**

By Holly Lisle

## **CANCELLED**

WebinarJam has crashed every time but one on this, with people unable to reach rooms I'm in. I've checked my links, I've checked their links, and at this point, the only thing I can

do to stop wasting people's time is give up.

I'm going to see if there's some way to do this same process with Skype. I'll set the testing back up again if there is.

—  
CANCELLED  
—

~~Today (Wednesday, September 9th) and tomorrow (Thursday, September 10th), I'm going to be doing what's called "Paper Testing" to find usability problems with the interface the new writing school site (HollyLisleOnlineWritingSchool.com, or HLOWS.com for short).~~

I need a maximum of **39** volunteers (already have one) for one-on-one testing with me in a video chat room.

**Paper Testing is fun, and it will take each volunteer about fifteen minutes WORST case.**

Here's how it works. I have five scripts prepared. They start with things like, "You're a first-time visitor to the site. Find something that interests you, and tell me why."

Or, "You're already a member. Log in."

**Here are the instructions for doing a usability test:**

Paper Test #1 for HLOWS.com

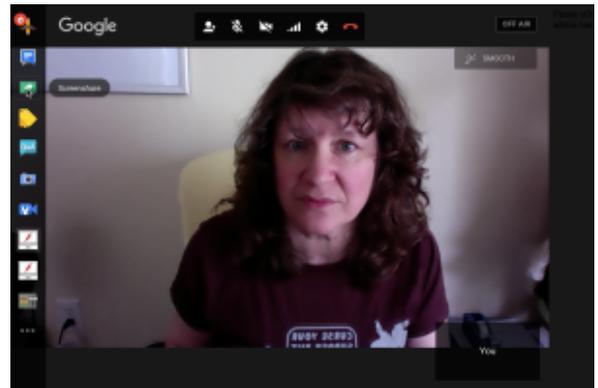
### **How To Do Your Usability Test**

At the scheduled time, log into the web chat link I'll send you.

Make sure I'm already in chat with you. (Have your microphone on, and say "Hi." □ You'll be coming in as a presenter, and I might hear you before I see you.)

Find the screenshare button on the left, where I've

highlighted it. Image below.



Screenshare button on left sidebar

To help me test, all you have to do is talk while you work your way through the instructions I give you by clicking the places on the drawings where you think the necessary actions SHOULD take place, describing what you're trying and what you think your action will accomplish.



When you complete one instruction, I'll give you the next task. There are a MAXIMUM of six tasks in each test, and the whole test will take no more than about fifteen minutes if I've done a terrible job of laying out the site.

You do not need to hurry. **If you make mistakes, me seeing them happen will help me figure out where I've made mistakes in the design. Your mistakes will make the final site better.**

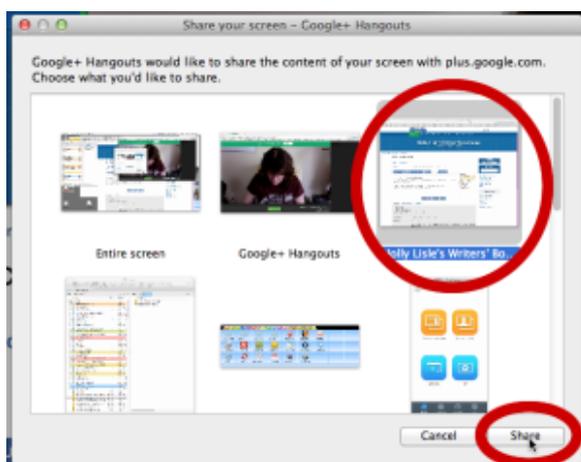
Take your time, think out loud, and let me know every time

something doesn't make sense to you or you cannot figure out or find a way to accomplish the instruction on your script.

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Here's what you'll need to volunteer:

- **A microphone or mic headset that works with your computer**, or a built-in mic that you know has good volume.
- **The Chrome web browser and a Gmail email address.** Reply to this post with your Gmail address because that's the only way I can make you a presenter in the web app, and you must be a presenter to share your screen. You'll need Chrome because the controls I show above won't work if you're not using Chrome. I'll also use this address to schedule our session with you.
- A second browser that ISN'T Chrome. You'll be using that browser to share your screen. The Paper Test is very low tech, but does require that your browser process images. This WILL NOT WORK with a cell phone because of the primitive nature of the test. When you have your second browser opened, you'll click the screenshare button, highlight that browser,



Select your OTHER browser...

and click the share button.

- About fifteen minutes that you can block out of an hour or so of availability. If you post your response here and let me know today or tomorrow, and the time you could be available (any one-hour block from which I can pull 15 minutes, or something cool like “anytime between 10 AM and 3PM” will work, I’ll set up a schedule with testing times and mail each volunteer with your fifteen-minute block, along with the login details. (The fifteen-minute block starting at noon tomorrow is already taken, but as I write this, everything else is wide open.
- I will be saving the screen test as a video, and Dan, the moderator, and I will be going over all of them looking for places where my initial design causes problems, and where we can make things better and easier to use, so if you volunteer, you automatically agree that I can save and use the video of your test.

Let me know you can help by posting your availability times below. NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY—if you can use your web browser, you can do this.

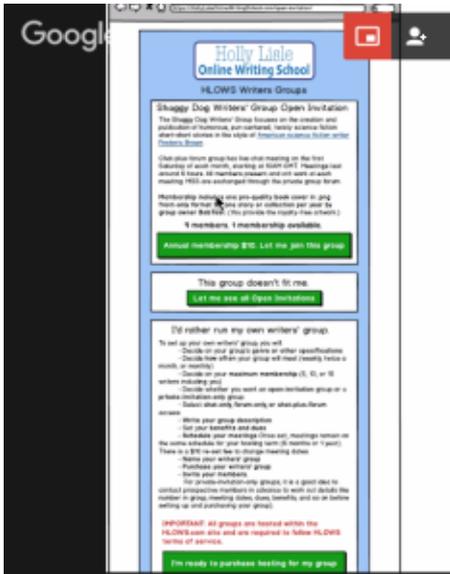
I’ll give you the URL for the papertest site once you arrive and have your screenshare browser set up.

I’ll be starting testing at 10 AM this morning if I have volunteers by then, and doing as many tests as I can before 3 PM. I’ll be doing the same thing on Thursday.

Thank you in advance for volunteering. I want to make sure that when we build the front end for the new site (which will NOT be what we go live with, but which will follow soon after) you’ll have a site that is easy for you to use.

By the way...

This is a sneak peek of one of the test pages:



Paper-test example page

Holly Lisle

**CANCELLED**

WebinarJam has crashed every time but one on this, with people unable to reach rooms I'm in. I've checked my links, I've checked their links, and at this point, the only thing I can do to stop wasting people's time is give up.

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—  
CANCELLED  
—

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# Off-topic, while researching growing food on high-population space stations

By Holly Lisle

I have no time for people who wear their causes on a ribbon, or on their car bumper, and who think this means they're doing something.

I have all the time in the world for people who look at their causes, ask "What could I personally do right now to make this happen?...and then do it.

**This is a website by two such people. (Link opens in new tab.)** If you think agro-ecology is boring, think again. This is some amazing stuff, and has the potential to be so much more.

And this video shows how they got there, and more importantly, **why** they got there.

<httpv://youtu.be/cXSYvSU5Zd0>

I only watched this video because in the site text it mentioned that some of it was in Costa Rica, and I lived there when I was a kid.

Turns out it was the most useful bit of "growing food on a space station" research I did.

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# Self-Publishers: New numbers you need NOW

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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# Totally Off Topic: Writers Who Role Play

By Holly Lisle

I posted this as a response to a comment about office supplies and role-playing games in one of the "Write A Book With Me" posts.

But I realized I'm curious. How many of you who write **are or have also been** role-playing gamers? (D&D, GURPS, another system...whatever. If you've sat in a room with friends talking your way through an adventure aided by the terrifying click of

your DM or GM suddenly rolling dice, I wanna hear about it.)

I never got story ideas from the role playing, but I did use it as a way to test out my universe physics (the magic system, the map, the people and things that lived there) to see if anything could work better. Or worse.

So here's my role-playing story, from when I was GMing my own campaign with a handful of friends.

*I led a GURPS campaign through Arhel while I was writing in that universe and ran (tortured) some friends through the world.*

*It was...interesting.*

*One friend whose character had a rope, rope-throwing skills, and superb athletic abilities, insisted on walking through murky water instead of noticing the stalactites above and the stalagmites across the way. Insisted, against the warning of my raised eyebrow.*

*(I think I even asked her, "Are you sure?" If your GM ever asks you "Are you sure," klaxons, explosions, and the question, "Think, think, what have I MISSED?!" should be running through your head.*

*Playing the campaign without feet until a companion figured out the heal spell proved to be a bit of a challenge for her.*

***Nasty, hungry things LIVE in murky water.***

*Another bought a flying carpet, asked for instruction on the magic word that started it—GM: "Do you do anything else before you pay for your carpet?" Him, thinking... "No." **GM raises eyebrow.**—and flew off.*

*So he's up in the air and flying away from the marketplace. His friends on the ground below are watching.*

Him: "This is great. So, I turn and head back to the market."

GM: "Really? How?"

Pause, while nervous expression crosses his face. Note the sudden silence among his companions on the ground below.

Him: "I say 'Turn?'"

GM: "Nothing happens."

Him: "I say "Turn left?"

GM: "Nothing happens."

Him: "I lean over to see if it'll turn like a bicycle."

GM: "It's still going straight."

Him: (Sighing.) "Okay, so I crawl out to the very edge of the carpet and lift one corner of it to catch the wind like a sail and force it to turn."

GM: "It's a carpet, made of fabric, and at the very edge it does not support your weight. It buckles and you fall off. Dex roll to see if you manage to hang on to the edge."

He makes his dexterity roll. Barely.

GM: "So now you're hundreds of feet in the air, the carpet is still heading straight away from the market, and you are hanging backward from the front corner of it by your fingertips. Any thoughts here?"

Him: "I should have got all the operating instructions before I took off?"

**If the Start command for your brand-new flying carpet is "Atherothromba," the Turn command is unlikely to be "Turn."**

He was also the one who, while leading the expedition, found a room full of treasure with a clearly marked "beware all ye

who enter here" type curse over the door. He entered, (GM raises eyebrow) against advice of the rest of his party, while his friends (who were getting the hang of me) waited outside the doorway.

There was a box. It had a button. The button said, "Don't Push."

Against advice from his colleagues and the **raised eyebrow of his GM**, he pushed the button. There was a moment while the clicking of dice on the table top echoed in a silent room.

Then, "poof!" He went from being the lean, handsome, square-jawed hero to being, ah... extravagantly furry. At which point, to the horror of everyone, including his footless buddy, he muttered "how much worse could it get?" and pushed the button a second time.

The soft click of dice on the table once more, as the device randomizer rolled through its possible combinations.

He became short and female. And **STILL** extravagantly furry.

**There might possibly be good, solid reasons for NOT ignoring signs saying "Keep Out" or buttons saying "Don't Push."**

I LIKE being a GM.

But I will note that my GMing style rewards the anxiously paranoid player over the "leap-then-look" one.

Imagine all the bad things that might be behind that door. Make them bigger. Give them more teeth.

Now ask yourself how they might be getting into position behind you while you and your companions are futzing around arguing **(loudly)** over whether it's better to blow up the lock, shoot it with your arrow, or wait for the guy with the lockpick skills to see if he can get it **(quietly)**.

*Players learned to whisper in my world.*

Have you ever role-played in relation to your writing? As a research tool, story generator, character development tool, or something else?

If you have, what aspects of the role-playing did you use, and how did you apply them to your work.

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