

Ha-HA! I figured out how to do it

written by Holly

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Making the Culture Clinic usable in a clear, linear form seemed impossible. So much to do, so much to show, so much to make. And no one needed everything all at once, but someone would need everything sooner or later. Fluffing the curtains didn't help, walking in circles didn't help, knitting helped a little.

The nightmare I had last night helped enormously. Nasty nightmare.

I was in the heart of a cave—a developed, built-up, inhabited cave, faintly lit, with grottos in which people were trapped, frozen in postures of horror or pain, and surrounded by equally frozen monsters attacking them. And I was dealing with a voice. Just the voice. Imagine Darth Vader speaking while chewing bones and you're most of the way there. Couldn't see what had trapped me, couldn't move, but I could see to one side of me some sort of torture device and a few stalls of the sort you'd keep horses (or monsters) in, and on the other side, a massive, slightly arched wooden double-door banded and studded with brass.

I was told I had to bring someone I didn't like to be the sacrifice, or I would be the sacrifice. And I was released.

The dream jumped immediately to me leading a dozen people through the heart of the cave. I didn't know any of them except my youngest child, but when I saw him, I knew that somehow, something had gone very wrong. I tried to back up, to change the dream so that my child wasn't with me, but that

didn't work. We moved forward. A giant spider sat to the left of us, and as I looked at it, I could see that it was mechanical, and fixed in place. If we stayed along the wall, we could avoid it. So we moved along the wall, and a live spider twice as large as the mechanical one raced out of a dark hole behind us and came after all of us, grabbing those closest to it and dragging them away.

I backed up the dream, and found another way to go, thus avoiding the spiders entirely. And suddenly I realized that what I had to do was get everyone out of the cave. Not just my little party of healthy folks, but the ones who were frozen in the midst of monsters, and held in place by frozen torturers, and everyone in the rest of the grottos. Something told me I had to free the monsters, too. That we all had to reach daylight.

The dream jumped forward again, and behind me and my son strung a line of hundreds—humans, monsters, and other things—and I had just pushed open the gate that took us into daylight. Before me lay a long earthen causeway with grassy but impossibly steep sides, one person wide, hundreds of feet high, with what looked like safety on the other side. No guardrails, of course. I started out onto the causeway, then stopped and turned to see if everyone was coming. And the ground beneath my feet softened and began to swallow me.

I backed up the dream, and was at the doorway again. I had everyone join hands, I told them to keep moving at all costs, and said that each had to help the one behind him to get across. And that we had to move fast. And we fled across the thing with our feet moving as quickly as we could make them, with all the monsters crumbling into dust as the sunlight hit them, and the humans joining hands with other humans as quickly as the monsters they'd been hanging onto crumbled.

There was more, but it was more of the same sort of thing.

Make an error, go in the wrong direction, back up and fix things. And I woke up this morning and stared at the ceiling, and thought, where have I run into that sort of structure before? (Well, first I just shuddered for a while, but eventually I got around to the structure thing.)

I realized I'd seen the structure in *Choose Your Own Adventure* novels.

And **that** was when I figured out the structure for the *Create A Culture Clinic*. It needs to be written as a branching tree, where the writer can select the basics of the section of the culture he's developing, and along the way will be given the choice to pursue that small section in depth, with more advanced development, or to continue with broad and basic development. Where he can always return to the trunk and choose a completely different path.

Inspiration comes from some strange and scary places.

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