Reader Interview: Ghost Stories

written by Holly
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By Holly Lisle



Ghost Stories for Halloween

In honor of Halloween, if you have a personal ghost story, tell it here.

And here's mine: Dreaming The Dead

> *(Reprinted—Originally Posted on October 27, 2008 by Holly)*
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> *It was 1:37 AM when I woke up. It's 1:48 AM right now, and I'm still shaky.*
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> *I dreamed I was visited by Jim Baen, and by someone speaking for him. I didn't know his intermediary, but Jim Baen was my first publisher, and he taught me a huge amount about the business, and, frankly, I adored him. And then differences of opinion came between us, and I moved on. I tried to call him a few times—to find out how to make things right between us—but he would never take my calls.*

And then he died, ending the chance that anything would ever be fixed between us.

I don't dream the dead. In my memory, I spent some sleep time once with my grandmother after she died. And once, my Persian cat Fafhrd came to sit beside me in my dream. Neither of them did anything. Neither said anything. And in my entire life, those are the only two times before this has happened.

I dreamed Jim Baen. In my dream, Jim had come back to set things right between us. And he did it by telling his intermediary to tell me something to write, something "that you would love, that you would be passionate about." Through his intermediary, he told me that if I wrote it, well, basically, we wouldn't have to worry about money anymore.

The intermediary named Jim's amount. It was big, but surprisingly plausible. I tried to ask Jim something, to speak to him directly, to make sure I understood.

The dead do not speak in my dreams. If approached directly, apparently they vanish. In the dream, I crashed to the ground while trying to talk to him.

And then I woke up.

And I'm sitting here typing at this ludicrous hour of the morning with my pulse pounding, with my skin prickled, with my hands shaking. I had the idea in my head. No. Let me restate that. I have the idea in my head, and it's incredible. Even now that I am awake, even now that I am rational, it is so good it is sucking the air from the room, making it hard for me to breathe. It's an idea that I want to write even if it isn't a gift from Jim Baen, the publisher I adored but with whom I did not end well, making his own amends for the way things ended.

It is rich, it is workable, it builds on something that I'd plunked around with and loved and then put away because I was

doing contracted novels. Because now, you see, I'm not. I'm done with every book of every contract I had, and I'm working my ass off to put together enough money so that I'll be able to write a couple of novels on spec (yes, this is the reason I've been sinking my entire life into the How to Think Sideways course and willingly putting in 70-hour weeks while completely ignoring my fiction since June). I'm buying myself time to write the books I want to write. The books of my heart. I thought I knew what those books would be.

And now…

And now…

Now I have dreamed the dead, and have been offered a freaking brilliant publishing insight from someone I tried so hard to fix things with, and have dreamed that this was the olive branch between us, and dammit, the other thing I was writing was good. But this is better. This is SO much better, and it's fantasy. And even if the amount of money his intermediary told me it would make was a dream, and even if the gesture of the olive branch was a dream, and even if …

Shit. Tears in my eyes. Tears running down my cheeks. And this incredible idea.

I do not dream the dead. But tonight I did. Tonight I did. And whether it was real or not, or whether it was a metaphor, or my subconscious mind trying to fix the thing that could not be fixed between me and a man who was a wonderful mentor before things went wrong, I think I'm going to listen.

The question has been asked, "Are you still going to write **Dreaming the Dead**?" (WORKING TITLE; I still don't have a real one), and it seems prudent to answer it here.

Yes.

I have to redo my writing/publishing schedule to make room for

writing courses and workshops.

But yes. I am NOT going to waste this book, and already have about 50,000 words written on it (out of an estimated 250,000). Words written are subject to discards, and estimated length is subject to replotting and re-estimating.

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