Some quotes from Create A World Clinic

written by Holly
January 14, 2013
By Holly Lisle

I'm plugging along this morning, getting good stuff.

Thought I'd share a couple snippets. NOTE: These are raw first draft, un-spellchecked or edited, and may contain typos or worse. THESE ARE NOT FINAL DRAFT.

First, the Definitions

> ***Worldbuilding*** *is the creation of a setting or settings that will contain a story, plus the essential elements needed to tell the story well.*
>
> *…and…*
>
> ***A fictional world*** *is the setting or settings that contain a single story, and the essential elements the writer uses to tell it.*
>
> *…and…*
>
> ***The SANE process of worldbuilding*** *is to do as only the work you absolutely MUST have, and to do it only when you need it.*
>
> *…and finally…*
>
> *For a writer…*
> ***…The purpose of worldbuilding*** *is to quickly create the section of a living, breathing universe you need to add depth to the part of the story you're writing right now.*

Then, the Problem

I keep saying every writer, no matter the genre or the story type (from short story to mega-novel monster series) needs to worldbuild, and writers keep not believing me.

But what I say when I say worldbuilding, and what they envision, are two totally different animals. So, another two snippets, each of these a bit longer.

What I Believed for Years

> *For years, I was utterly convinced that massive, comprehensive, complete, all-done-in-advance-of-writing Tolkien-style worldbuilding was the only way I'd managed to get published in the first place, and that it was the step in the process that allowed me to write books. That I had to have it.*
>
> *I told people this, too. There I was, with my thumb in my mouth and my security blanket over my head, saying, "My security blanket is why I sold the* ***Arhel*** *series and the* ***Secret Texts*** *series and the* ***World Gates*** *series, and all the stand-alones in between."*
>
> *It wasn't the stories. Couldn't have been that. My editors bought my work because of the indigestible backstory that damn near killed every one of the ones I sent it to.*
>
> ***Of course they did.***

You can mistake the thing that's killing your writing for the thing that's making it work.

> *And make no mistake: My worldbuilding was killing my writing. I'm a really fast worldbuilder, but even at high speed and working long hours, I'd spend months building everything I*

> *thought I needed before I put together a synopsis to send to my agent—who would then shoot me down, and rather than just fix the story, I'd fix the world first, and then fix the story.*

AND…

How I Ferreted Out the Truth

> ***I knew** my books were selling, so I could prove that I was writing salable fiction. That was my point of known truth.*
>
> ***I believed** my work sold because of all the worldbuilding I did before I started writing.*
>
> ***But one day, I tripped over the contradiction,** and it was this: I absolutely never used all or even most of the worldbuilding I did, and much more than half of my work from any pre-novel worldbuilding orgy ended up unusable because of the better ideas I had while I was writing. Sometimes, all of that pre-novel worldbuilding went down the tubes. Once. Even twice.*
>
> *Therefore, my Tolkien-style completist worldbuilding was not what sold my books.*

So what I'm teaching is not Tolkien-style completist worldbuilding. I'm teaching the sort of worldbuilding that actually DID help me sell my novels, and that routinely has readers saying, "I finished this series with the impression that Matrin was real and that, given the chance, I could find my way in it: this is what I call impressive worldbuilding," and from another reader, "I discovered that she was able to flesh out her world while advancing her story and introducing her characters. Well done," and "But Lisle's true strength lies in her world-building. Talyn's despair at seeing her people's culture being thrown up in flames is our own, because

by then, we are able to appreciate its beauty and rarity.”

I’m a solid writer overall. I plot well, I write cleanly and coherently, I do good conflict and I understand story, and know how to tell one.

I have two great strengths, though. One is that I can make my worlds live in readers’ minds. The other is that I can dissect processes, and explain and demonstrate how I do them.

In **Create A World Clinic**, I’m doing the two things I’m best at simultaneously. I suspect this was part of why I kept putting this book off. I knew all along that once it was finished, it was the one on which all the others would be judged.

So I have a lot at stake writing this one.

And with that… onward.

Contents © Holly Lisle. https://hollylisle.com All Rights Reserved