Why do you rant?

written by Holly
September 20, 2006
By Holly Lisle

I got an email wanting to know why I put the occasional political or social-issue rant into a writing blog. I've previously had blog guests ask me the same question in comments.

The answer goes like this. I hate politics. I hate social-issue strife. For years I lived in a voluntary news blackout zone, because I had come to realize that, A) news stresses me out big time, and B) I could not do a damned thing about any of it.

But as my worldbuilding got more complex and my stories got bigger, I realized that my plotting needed more than what I'd previously been doing. And so, as a sort of worldbuilder's sudoku, I set myself the intentional task of creating solutions to seemingly unsolvable social and world issues. I gave myself the rule that I could not magically remove some portions of the puzzle in order to fix things—no "Suddenly the UN decided to play fair" wave of the wand, no **Age of Aquarius +5, Enemies Listen to Reason and Embrace Peace** card, no **National Organization of Women Remembers Its Reason for Existing** dice roll. I could only work with the tools at hand: the current governments and leaders with all their flaws, the current laws, the current political and social climate.

Once I figured out workable solutions, I posted them to the blog. For me, they had served their purpose. Things that I learned by indentifying the sources of large-scale problems, playing out various scenarios, and coming up with what seem to me to be workable solutions to chosen ends translated into better storytelling and deeper and more complex problems, with less easily resolved solutions, in my work.

But there’s more to it than that….

The hardest, darkest, most complicated social issues I reserved for my novels. I’ll let you in on a deep, dirty secret about my fiction. My fantasy novels are allegories. *Fire in the Mist*, *Bones of the Past*, *Mind of the Magic*, *Minerva Wakes*, *Hunting the Corrigan’s Blood*, all three *DEVIL’S POINT* books, *Glenraven*, *Glenraven II*, the entire *SECRET TEXTS* trilogy, *Vincalis the Agitator*, *Memory of Fire*, *The Wreck of Heaven*, *Gods Old and Dark*, *Talyn*, *Hawkspar*: Every single one of those books is, down in its core, about a current social or political problem, and where I’ve been able to figure out a real-world solution in the working through, I’ve included it. (The real-world solution is never the ending, which is the fantasy, magic-works-here solution.)

For example, *Vincalis the Agitator*, that story about Wraith, a boy born immune to (and from) magic who brings about the fall of the Dragon Empire, is at its heart the story of the effect of welfare upon recipients and how government uses welfare as a weapon against those it most despises. I won’t tell you any of the real-world issues in the other novels. They’re there if you care to dig for them, but they are not critical to the understanding or enjoyment of the novel. And to find them, you really have to dig. Western Union is about sending messages. Fiction is not. So I made it a point to bury the real-world issues so deeply that, even though they fueled the storytelling and created the plot and fed off of my anger and frustration that these issues existed, not a single reader has ever written me a letter or an e-mail saying, “Is *Vincalis* really about welfare reform?” Or, “Is *Fire in the Mist* really about …?” I forced the stories to stand on their own as stories, and left the messages for myself.

But that’s why I rant. I’m sharpening my knives for my fiction.

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