

Writing for Myself

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

Today I've been working on the MPII proposal, writing for myself. I've scrapped most of the opener that I posted a few days ago, including the line about the salted butter, and have gone for something shorter and tighter that pulls me into the central conflict more quickly.

I'm searching for resonance with my characters, and with the whole of the story. I'm still aiming for humor, of course – I want the entire series to be funny in first read. But I want something to linger afterward, in the back of the mind or as a little shiver down the spine when some corner of the world turns darker than the reader expected.

It's always been my objective to write two stories into every book – the one the conscious mind reads, and the one the subconscious mind keeps. In the books where I was most successful with this – TALYN, SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL, VINCALIS THE AGITATOR – I buried those second stories good and deep. Out of thousands of e-mails and letters I've gotten from readers, a mere handful have included the "AHAH! In TALYN (or SftD, or VtA) you were talking about ..." comments, that tell me my second stories made it all the way to the surface.

Most readers won't look for or find the second stories. That's okay. Maybe I'll manage to raise a question or two that leaves them hungry to go looking for answers on their own. Maybe my stories will slide off of them like water off waterfowl, leaving them untouched.

The fact that a few readers have dug all the way to the bottom of these stories tells me that my incessant search for resonance, for the power of the secret second story, has not

been time wasted. I'm satisfied to succeed rarely; all success is rare. If I matter to a few, I don't need to matter to everyone.

The writing is going well today. I'm burying bones, burying them deep, building in a skeleton beneath the flesh that everyone sees. This is what I love, telling two stories at the same time, like knitting reversible cloth that holds one pattern on the front and a second on the back that most people don't even suspect exists. You don't knit a thing like that for show, but just for love.

For me, this is magic. This is why I write.

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