

How to Write a Novel



LESSON 12

DEMO NOVEL: Chapter 9

HOLLY LISLE

<https://HollysWritingClasses.com>

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My Scene Questions & Answers

What changes (scene start)?

Amanda has decided to create a fourth access portal to the underworld, one only she can use.

Why does it matter?

It will allow her to leave and enter secretly.

To what character does it matter?

To her, but also to Bill, who thinks he has all the entrances watched, and who is using movement of the AI/humans within the underworld to track them down and murder them.

How do I show it?

This needs to be a painful and frightening process, on that carries a risk of death or brain-damage.

How do I end it (exit change)?

Amanda prepares to test what she's built.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The following scene is a very good example of how what you think you're going to be writing (as demonstrated above) changes when you're actually writing.

I never got to writing the scene I planned. Instead, my right brain took me through more about the Underworld, and about what Amanda had to do just to get to the place where she could build the thing she needed to build. I didn't know until I started writing that she couldn't build it from her room – but Right Brain Muse said that would be WAY too easy. So you'll see what happened compared to what I actually planned, with the note that The Fourth Entrance still doesn't exist, and I suspect that I'll be writing someone else next

week, so getting that built might take me on a round-
about path back to Amanda.

Chapter 9: Amanda

Early morning. Amanda was still in her room. The same room God probably knew about, and that scared her. The same room he had probably already located on a kill map, because she knew after running into *Howdies* and recognizing him in the beautiful, welcoming God light that he was in the Underworld.

She knew he was human.

She knew that when he had been God, he had never been chipped. But she also knew that there was no way to enter the Underworld without a chip, so he was now in her terrain, and he didn't know that she knew he'd arrived.

He would have all the entrances and exits marked, which was why she'd just yanked her transmitter, had spent her entire night with a migraine, vomiting, shivering, sick as hell.

It was the first thing travelers to the Underworld learned. Exit gracefully.

The migraine, the vomiting, and horrible shaking were programmed. Because as long as everyone exited gracefully, everyone could be tracked.

But they gave her a great reason to call in sick. The verisimilitude of vomiting partway through the call had her boss requiring her to stay out for the rest of the week so no one could catch what she had.

That awful reaction to hard-quitting the underworld had been necessary, because if folks jumped out instead of leaving through an exit, they could disappear, as she had done.

And when she built her fourth, private entrance, she was going to leave the quick-exit punishment in place. She pondered that for a moment, because it would be so nice to just jump in and jump out... but even God, now chipped himself, was subject to the Law of the Graceful Exit, and now that she knew he was in her

terrain, she needed to make sure that if he ever found her private entrance, she would know.

One experience of doing a [TC - term for quick exit] would teach him never to do that again.

She had to find where he'd come in. Like her, he only had three existing options.

Unlike her, he would be a new record.

The only new record.

She needed to get the coding ident for his chip so she would recognize him. So she could see where he had been, how he'd entered, where he'd moved. But she did not want to do that until she had her private entrance.

She did not think he could know *who* she was – that she was Excalibur, that she had been the Goddess of the Underworld.

She was sure he knew that the AIs were in there, but even chipped, he could not get into the bulletin boards because he did not have the DNA ident that would let him.

He could not take over the body of an existing AI.

He might be able to decompile a chip from one of the people he'd murdered, but to have a reason to do that, he would have to know that he was looking for bulletin boards and a DNA sequence tied to a specific chip.

There was nothing in the Underworld that looked like it required that. The layer she and her people used was hidden inside The Opium Den, the worst of the terrible places she'd built to entertain God's pantheon of demigods.

It was open. Nothing was in there that anyone without a pre-existing DNA code could see.

And what God could see would only be that no one had been in The Opium Den since the fall.

Amanda had been paranoid enough to make sure that the only records the place would keep would be those from people who were not supposed to be there.

Which meant God.

Which meant that when he went in, the place would wake up, would welcome him, would announce that he was the first visitor since... however many days and hours it had been.

Just as all the other places in the Underworld did.

And he would have reason to believe The Opium Den hid nothing from him.

Meanwhile, because of the DNA coding, her people inside the Underworld would be able to move right past him, invisible, would be admitted to a door that only they could see, would slip between the pretend bulletin boards and the real but outdated bulletin boards to the one that was currently in use. Their DNA would only ever take them to the right board, and the right board switched every twenty-seven nanoseconds, taking all the real information with it, leaving lies and random forgeries in its wake.

So God would not find the truth until he had a way to suspect what the truth was.

And if she had her way, he would be dead before that happened.

So she had to go to the outskirts of Milknap, to Building a fourth entrance required a special kind of connection – a direct hard link.

It meant going to one of the old stations, now abandoned, where slaves had once slept physically jacked into the Underworld, living false and empty lives in the hours between the drudgery and horror of their physical existence.

Most of the old stations had been destroyed after the fall. But she was in Milknap, Wisconsin, and the reason she had come here was because it still had a station that had been forgotten. That station had been nicknamed the Opium Den.

Milknap was a small town with a small, down-to-earth population of people who primarily did physical work. The town had never had big slave owners who spent their entire lives in virtual running their godhood

twenty-four-seven. The place had had its hierarchy, of course, its small gods – but they'd owned dairy farms, and had cheese factories, and had trucking interests, or banks, and both they owners and the slaves had needed to stay strong and functional to show up for work every day.

On the dairy farms, because cows had to be fed, milked, pastured, checked for illness and disease, cared for.

On the other businesses, because the bigger farmers expected to be able to conduct their business with the person in charge, not with some flunky.

So, because it had been small, because it had been grounded in physical businesses with physical products that required strength and physical effort, Milknap, Wisconsin, like a lot of small towns along the Interstates, had been a bit more lightly touched by the poison of the Underworld than big cities.

And had rolled back to reality with few – if any – utterly broken Underworld junkies who starved themselves to death retrying the dead jacks on the turned-off system.

The town had figure out the Underworld wasn't coming back, and had gone back to regular work.

The slaves' bare-bones Underworld access, unused and forgotten, had eventually come back to life, but no one noticed. If they had, they would have been able to enter, but would have found everything closed, the streets empty, the one-time amusements offering nothing but a noisy welcome, and then nothing for them to do.

Amanda dressed warmly. The basement in the building at the edge of town wouldn't have a lock, because when slave quarters were in use, the doors were required to be always open, and once she'd brought down the the Underworld, people discovered that it wasn't coming back, and stopped trying to jack in.

And eventually their jack ports grew over, and they stopped even thinking about it.

She glanced out the window. Called an Uber, gave a location that was a block from the rooming house.

Went outside, walked to the location she'd stated, and was waiting when the guy drove up.

He'd driven her before. Always picked her up at the same place. Always talked about the weather.

They agreed it was cold. Damn cold.

"Bite-your-ass-off cold," he said, and she laughed.

Usually it was "melt-your-ass-off hot," and she always laughed at that, too.

He drove an old Toyota, took her to Buckley's, which was one block from the old Underworld station, and she paid and went on her way.

She was not alone on the sidewalk. There were folks going to work, folks parking behind the little businesses that still remained open on the half-abandoned main street.

She looked like everyone else – heavy coat, jeans, boots, knitted cap pulled down over her ears, breathing frost, hands jammed in her pockets.

She walked down the block, around the corner.

The Underworld sign was still over the old side-door entrance. Graffitied over with some impressive profanity, but other than that, the place looked intact.

She went in, found that it had been used by other folks, though. The beds were gone, but there were some bottles lying around. Leaves, dirt that had blown in, more graffiti on the walls.

No current inhabitants, but blankets suggested either teenagers looking for places to get laid, or homeless looking for a place out of the weather.

She would need a place out of sight – and this station had once had two hundred simultaneous ports. That was small for a town of this size [TC-have I given this town a name?], but the only reason this town

hadn't dried up completely was that it had an offramp from the Interstate.

Two hundred jacks. She only needed one that still worked.

She walked to the row of wall units farthest from the door, and found a plug that still had its port cover.

Held her breath, because plugging in to the underworld from a public jack was going to be risky. If God was in there, odds were pretty good he'd see her come in.