

How to Write a Novel



LESSON 13

DEMO Novel:
Dead Man's Party, Chapter 10

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Chapter 10: Bill

Bill came out of the Underworld screaming.

It was a good thing he was alone.

His connection powered down, and he yanked the chip out of the back of his head, and dunked it in alcohol, and swore.

He hadn't been alone in there, and he'd been sure he was going to follow the Target he'd tagged, and then she'd just. Fucking. Vanished.

Gone, blinked out of his view like a ghost, like a mirage, like something that disappeared, and he was so furious he couldn't even think of a good simile.

The temptation to punch a wall was big.

The desire not to break his hand and have to go to the emergency room was bigger. He was out in the cold, away from the seat of his power, his money, his quiet walled in kingdom full of people who were still slaves,

still under his power, still utterly and unquestioningly subservient.

He'd thought the woman in the Underworld would take him out her gate, and he'd get a current bead on her. Would scare her, flush her out of cover, out of the partial safety of the place where she was known, get her running, and then kill her where when folks found the body, they would marvel at the brutality of the kill, and then find out who she'd really been, and what she'd really done, and they would have admired him for getting rid of her.

So far, by creating a path that had given him that outcome with every kill – that had made his victims into monsters, and himself into an invisible vigilante working for justice – he had managed to not just slaughter his victims, but gain some sympathy from those who found the bodies, and get another cluster of stories for his Murder Book.

But something had gone wrong with the jeweler. Bill didn't know what, but there had been no report of a murder.

No police investigation where the cops had followed the false trail he'd laid out for them – a trail that would have shown the jeweler to have mob connections and a history of rape, torture, and murder, which would have implicated him in a series of criminal activities that would have left the town reeling, but which would have gotten his murder written off as “glad somebody did it.”

Until the jeweler, every execution Bill had carried out had run perfectly. [TC- go back and bring Bill's story to this storyline]

Every one of them had been carried out by a different character Bill had created, and each kill had been accomplished in a different fashion, with a different weapon or style. Every one had included a wonderful made-up story about the victim that made it

clear after the fact that the corpse had deserved far more than the quick, efficient death it had received.

Every death had been found, reported, covered with the sort of gleeful, gory coverage popular media specialized in. And every media outlet that jumped in bought his backstories, reveled in the horror of monsters living in the midst of such charming little towns, and then, when the fifteen minutes of attention had passed, leapt on some other horror with the same shallow, short attention span that made them all such excellent tools.

He forced his breathing to slow. Forced himself to calm. He was good at calm, at being serene. He'd learned early on to meditate, had found that it allowed him to step outside himself, to release his ego for a bit, to create the place where he could become the best killer he could be.

He'd been spotted when he went in this time. It had never happened before unless he'd wanted it to happen.

The Underworld was almost always entirely empty. His beautiful creation, abandoned and closed down.

Occasionally he'd find someone drifting through, and every single time, it was one of the [TC - number} Eighty-Three.

He could never figure out where they were going, but figuring out where they'd come from was dead simple.

He'd only let Excalibur create three gates.

There was the Rich Gate, the Broad Gate, and the Slum Gate – and the pleasure inside were the pleasures that fit the classes of people who'd used them.

Once Excalibur broke the Underworld, kicking everyone out and locking them from access, shattering the wonderful connections he'd created, shutting down and then erasing and writing over all of his lovely programs, locking the code tight, breaking all his work, the damned AI had vanished.

The skeleton of the Underworld remained, and the other AIs who had worked secretly in collaboration with Excalibur had disappeared. And then he'd discovered that they had grabbed the bodies of the richest and most famous of his demigods. His top-tier power-holders, the people with the best and healthiest and youngest and most beautiful and well-cared-for bodies. Of course they had. These were the bodies wired for the deepest Underworld experience – wired to be able to sit in their own virtual experience while also experiencing a safe, gated version of what someone else was experiencing.

Their connectors were of the highest quality, and offered layers of integration with the Underworld system that could not be bought for any amount of money. It had only been available to those Bill had chosen personally: Kings and presidents and senators, the most beautiful of actresses, the most brilliant of singers. They'd been known to each other as the Five

Hundred, and there had only ever been five hundred of them.

And after the AIs, there were none, because their connections were the best, deepest, gave the most compelling integration. So while those with cheap, thin connections had been kicked out of the system, those with the deep connections had died.

Or been inhabited and taken over.

It had taken him five years just to find the bastards who had broken his world.

Another two to figure out how to get his revenge on them and getting them out of the way so he could bring back the Underworld, this time with himself as sole ruler of everything, with everyone else as his unquestioning slaves.

And then a couple years to get into top physical shape, to create the characters he would play when reaching out to his victims, to set up the false (and

sometimes true) histories that would make his murders of each of them a public service.

And no he was looking at something going wrong again.

It wasn't that he didn't know how the creature in the Underworld had escaped him. The process for that was "one hard tug at the transmitter in the back of your head, and half a day to a full day of vomiting and feeling like you're going to die." Not something he would willingly do.

What had gone wrong was that whoever it was who'd seen him had thought of him as dangerous.

Had been willing to yank that chip, to take the consequences rather than to exit gracefully.

That was bad.

It meant that somewhere out in the real world, someone might be starting to look at his activities, might be starting to understand a connection between seemingly unrelated murders, might be questioning

activities in the long-dormant Underworld. Might be putting his plan in danger.

And that was when he made the connection between Andy – whose death had been unnoticed and unreported – and the Underworld traveler who'd vanished.

He played back that murder.

Andy had died. There had been no way he'd survived – so that wasn't where things had gone wrong.

But... what if Andy had been working that jewelry store, had not been the only AI in that location.

What if someone in place had known exactly who and what he was. [TC – PROBLEM TO FIX IN REVISION: This makes the back-of-the-head chip a known thing, something everyone had, though in most folks after ten years, skin will have grown over the socket, or most people will have had the socket surgically closed. So the AIs have to have a different way to get into the Underworld, because Bill is going to have grabbed their transmitter chips.]

The girl in the shop? No. She was at most in her early twenties. Sixteen was the absolute youngest anyplace would allow chips to be installed – well, except of course for those countries where pedophilia was not just legal but where children were a major export product.

But not in [TC- location of Andy's death].

He became fascinated by the problem. There was someone high up in the little town, someone who knew about the AIs, or who was one. Someone who had been willing to cover up a horrific, brutal murder and keep the death out of the news... Why?

That was the stopper, wasn't it?

And then he realized the truth.

Someone – one of the AIs on someone who had managed to connect into the Underworld and gain some control of it... Maybe a competitor?... was on to him. Had figured out that God was back.

There were two ways this could go down, Bill thought.

The first was that he would have to negotiate with his competitor, check the Underworld for any traps now built into it that might be there to enslave him.

The second was that he would have to track down the second AI in the little town where Andy had died, and kill that one off in a particularly horrific manner. Make up a second story, tie it in with Andy's, make sure the media got wind of the sort of evil that was possible in small towns everywhere – places where people had privacy.

That would be his play, he thought. Prove that because the world had gone back to being an evil place, because individuals had privacy, they were doing the most terrible things imaginable with that privacy.

He'd make the world afraid. And then he would offer them a way back into some new version of the Underworld, this one a place where the promise was

simple. When everyone is watched and nothing is private, nothing bad can ever happen.

He laughed.

They'd buy that. It had been long enough.

And then... then he would show them how bad their lives could be.

"Thank you," he whispered to the creature who had tipped him off to what was going on. "Thank you for showing me how to get them all back."