

How to Write a Novel



LESSON 15

DEMO NOVEL: Chapter 12

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I started this week with a problem.

I didn't know what I was going to do with Jaro.

In my first ten minutes of writing, I discuss the exact problem I'm facing, and why it's a problem, and then to a ten-minute timed run in which my Muse shows up and I figure it out. You'll probably want to watch the first ten minutes of the video EVEN if you don't watch or write along with the rest.

In any case, here are the results of my brainstorming session:

JARO

Why has it taken Jaro ten years to find Amanda?

This is a man who supposedly loves a woman he's never met.

I know why she loves him. She was in his head when he had to do FORCED sessions in the Underworld.

She saw who he was from how he dealt with that. With how he didn't become hooked, with how he did not act any differently in the Underworld than he did in real life.

He was not looking for an excuse to be bad, for a way to be anyone but who he was.

And that's worth falling in love with.

But what did he see of her?

She was a goddess, right?

But what if, when she saw him NOT playing the game, she created a player for herself. A physical-in-game avatar, and she tried to get him to play.

And he wouldn't, but he was willing to explain why he wouldn't.

Flashback scene of this interaction, maybe? From his POV?

So she's the Goddess of the Underworld, and when he treats her like another human being, but one who is asking the right questions...

He's well read. Somehow. He got hold of some of the books that held the philosophies that led to the founding of the original United States. And he told her that all human beings are created equal, that all should live under the same law, that all should be held to the same standards.

And he shows her why in these long, hidden talks these two have in a safe area that Excalibur/Amanda

creates, and she comes to understand fully the depth of the atrocity she is committing

And that's it. From his POINT OF VIEW, how Amanda decided to bring down the Underworld, and how they agreed to meet.

Chapter 12: Jaro

The motel was utter crap. One of the worst he'd been in, and in the little notebook he carried, he wrote down its address, and in big block letters beside it, AVOID.

But he was there, he was paid for the night, and he'd pick up his next truck and his next load in the morning.

This room didn't even have a television, though there was a stand bolted to the wall and a chain waiting for one.

He remembered an uncountable number of channels, but after the fall, it had been five years before anyone even got around to thinking about entertainment again, and another three before they managed to get some of the older equipment functioning, started doing things creative again.

There were two channels now, two separate tracks of programming.

Advertising was coming back.

But he didn't think it would ever be what it once was, because the hell that entertainment had brought to the whole world would be hard to forget.

He didn't undress, didn't climb under the covers, instead, he took one of the disposable paper sheets he carried with him and draped it over the single bed. Unfolded his own blanket, and covered himself with it.

And then he lay there, eyes closed, and suddenly her face was in front of him.

Amanda. Young, eager, clever, terribly innocent. They'd found a room she knew of where the whole of the Underworld had disappeared. She called it a rabbit hole. She loved rabbits, though she told him she had never seen a real one.

And they'd talked. Just talked.

Her rabbit hole became the place where he hid when he entered the Underworld, the place where she always promptly found him.

And he told her what he'd learned from Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson and John Locke [TC – better reading list]. Old books, new thoughts in the age in which they'd lived.

That all human beings were created with inborn rights, that the law had to be equally applied to the rich and the poor alike, that justice was not the same thing as fairness, and that fairness was a monster that enslaved humanity, while justice was the chain-cutting god that set people free.

She'd been young, innocent, trusting – and she had been raised by a monster to be a monster. Had been taught that forcing people do things “for their own good” was being a good girl.

He'd shown her the price of that – the enslavement of almost all of humanity, the needless deaths, the destruction of creation, of joy, of choice.

And she had believed him, because inside her little rabbit hole, he could show her his memories of the time before the creation of the Underworld.

He could show her who he'd been then – a young man designing and building businesses in a city that had once been great.

He could show her what people were capable of when they claimed their own lives, took responsibly for their [TC – change everything before to dialogue and SHOWING this conversation. Pick up with the architect bit]

"I was," he told her, "an architect."

"You made houses?"

"I designed enormous buildings for cities, great structures that gave people and businesses homes, that made life easier and more interesting for the people who lived and worked inside them."

She tipped her head to one side, smiled with puzzlement. "I don't understand what a city is."

He stopped. "You grew up in small towns? Cities are where millions of people live. Lived. All in one place."

And she shook her head and said, "When were there millions of people in one place. That would be a disaster – disease, and crime. The species would fail to thrive with such places."

"Cities," he said softly, "were magnificent achievements of humanity. They were filled with passionate, creative people who made music and art and literature, who did science and math, who invented and built and entertained. They were the pinnacles of civilization, the epic creations of those who could see a future where the individual could succeed by becoming the best at what he or she did."

And when she looked at him with those strange, puzzled dark eyes, he could see that she truly did not understand.

"Why are there no cities now?"

"Because the people in them were first to adopt the Underworld, and when enough of them did, the infrastructure broke down. Those who could escape fled. Those who couldn't died." And then he asked the question he had not dared to ask before, because what human being older than the age of three did not know what a city was?

"What are you, Amanda?"

She froze, and for an instant she flickered, and he thought he saw an upright sword, a radiant nightmare of waiting death, glorious and terrible. And then she was the young woman, and she said, "If I tell you, you'll never be able to come back here."

"To your rabbit hole?"

"To the Underworld."

"They make me come here, Amanda. I'm required to spend one of every seven days in here – or the hourly equivalent. If I do not come in here, they'll kill me."

"Then I can't tell you."

"If I figure it out on my own, will I still be able to come back here?"

"No," she whispered. "I can keep secrets from God, but no one else can. If you know who I am, God will know who you are, and will destroy you."

"How does this rabbit hole work?" he asked.

"You cannot know that."

"Why are you meeting with me?"

"Because you're different. You don't use the Underworld, you don't play my games, you don't enjoy my entertainments. And I need to understand why. When I look at you, it's almost as though I see a light around you. As though you are better than everyone else in here. And if you're better, why aren't more people like you?"

"You're the goddess of the Underworld," he whispered.

She froze. Stared at him. "He'll kill you, and then he'll reprogram me for meeting with you. He'll erase us both."

"God?"

"Yes."

"He's a man," Jaro had said.

And she'd just shaken her head. "You you he might be a man, but he's my creator. He built me, he knows me, he owns me. And everyone else, even you. And now he's going to destroy you. Me."

Jaro repeated, "You're the goddess of the Underworld. Amanda, this is your world. You can destroy it if you choose, can't you?"

"If I destroy myself."

"No. Look around. Find someone who is a truly terrible person. A monster. You know them."

"I know them," Amanda confirmed.

"Find a way to destroy this place, to free the humans who are trapped here, to claim one terrible

person's body as your own. To possibly find other who are like you but lesser than you – the guardians – and bring them to your cause.”

She'd stared at him with those dark doe eyes, with her face frightened. She was, he realized, at most three or four years old. Not human. Innocent, created to be used and abused, to be a slave.

He wanted to set her free, to set himself free, to, set the world free – knowing even as he thought it that the vast majority of humanity had no desire for freedom or the responsibility such freedom demanded.

He wanted simultaneously to take back the words he'd said to her when he figured out who she was, because he believed her when she said she would be reprogrammed, and he would be killed, if he were to return to the Underworld.

And he had no choice but to return to the Underworld. His owners required it.

He closed his eyes, considered his next words carefully.

"Amanda," he said softly. "Freedom is never free. There's a price for it – in work, sweat, blood, fear, sometimes death. But the death that has come from the enslavement of all humanity is worse. Far worse. In the cities around the world, billions of dead lay unburied, killed by addiction to the Underworld either first-hand when they refused to unplug or second-hand when civilization in the cities broke down because no one was maintaining the equipment, the tools, the supply chains, the industries. If you can free people from the Underworld, more will live than die – and that will be the first good thing to happen since the *free connectors for low-income individuals program* made Underworld access a mandatory civil right – and enslaved all of humanity in a month.

She was sitting there, looking at him. Unblinking. "I. Can bring it down. I can. I can find the AIs who

will help me. I can find the worst people in the world to give to them as payment. I can do this. But if I do this, I will be human in the place where I take my monster, and you will be human someplace else, and if that happens, I'll be in the world. I've never been in the world. I don't know anything. How will I find you."

"I'll find you," he said.

On top of the paper sheet, under his own blanket, he stared up into the darkness of the crummy hotel room, and whispered, "I'll find you, Amanda. I promise."