

How to Write a Novel

LESSON 17



How to Figure Out What Happens Next HOLLY LISLE

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Intro

Back in Lesson 10, I had you write out some things that COULD happen in your novel.

And I wrote out the following as a short list of some things that could happen in mine

- More murders of friendly AI/humans
- The turning of some AI/humans on those who trust them
- The killer's discovery that the Underworld did not disappear with the Fall
- The Deadish Guy not finding a way to save the body he's in, and not having a way to move to a new body
- My female AI losing track of her beloved
- My human being drawn off course by someone he mistakes as Amanda (a decoy or something else)
- Hunters showing up in the Underworld
- The killer turning loose his NEW conquer-the-world test program on a select few people

This week, I'm going to show you how to put that list to use.

Figuring Out What Happens Next

The processes you use when you're writing to figure out what happens next **in first draft** need to accomplish three things:

- Keep your story moving forward while making it compelling, twisty, and meaningful
- Keep the most interesting characters doing the most interesting things in front of your readers at all time
- And minimize “nightmare revision” by getting your content as close to final draft as you can manage

With some books, “nightmare revision” is going to be unavoidable — but MOST of the time you can sidestep the worst disasters.

So with this lesson, we're going to focus on concepts that help you meet all three of those objectives.

Keeping the Story Moving Forward

By this time, you've met and have possibly tried my techniques for getting words on the page.

- At your regular time each day, put “butt in chair”
- Open the document FIRST, as the thing you do when your butt touches down
- Start the ten-minute timer
- Do absolutely nothing while waiting for your Muse to show up

That last step is the toughest, but if your document is open, your hands are on the keyboard, and your timer is going, your Muse will show up just because *sitting still doing nothing* drives Muses crazy.

They're little kids. They get fidgety. And if you're a Muse, it's easier and more fun to write than to do nothing.

IMPORTANT REMINDER: This isn't a "write every single day" process, because people need days off for their creativity to refill.

This is a "write every single *writing* day" process. Being as religious about your days off as you are about your writing days will help you prevent burnout.

So at the point where you've developed the writing habit, and are showing up for work every work day...

You're getting words on the page.

So in the last couple of videos I did on *Dead Man's Party*, I showed you the step I'm taking before I start my first fiction ten, where I plan out the day's scene.

I figure out and fill out in my scene questions in my sidebar:

- What changes (scene start)?
- Why does it matter?
- How do I show it?
- How do I end it (exit change)?

And at the beginning of a novel, *just doing this* is a workable process.

The problem comes when you get about ten to fifteen scenes in, and the story starts having some weight and some momentum. Your story

grows some things you have to track and follow up with consequences in future scenes.

Your objective is always to keep your reader interested, compelled to keep turning pages to find out what happens next.

And to write that, you need to feel it yourself. *What happens next?*

If you don't care, you can't somehow magically make your reader care. Your reader is in your head, experiencing your thoughts telepathically. If you're boring yourself, that's going to come across.

You want to...

Keeping the Most Interesting Characters Doing the Most Interesting Things Front and Center

Fortunately, now you have your characters, and you've gotten to know them a bit, and you've had the chance to see them in action, doing interesting things.

Or occasionally not-so-interesting things.

But your story has also grown some issues that you need to use to build your middle. Because to keep your Most Interesting Characters doing the Most Interesting Things, you have to identify what those things are.

Then you have to figure out how you can make them even more interesting, while causing the characters your readers will love problems that will make your readers CARE what happens next.

And to do that, you're going to learn a new technique.

You're going to learn to pick up ***First Draft Toys on the Floor.***

For those of you who've taken *How to Revise Your Novel*, your familiarity with the revision "Pick Up Toys on the Floor" process may make it a bit easier for you to spot Toys in first draft.

But don't assume you can skip this lesson, because how you find and use Toys in first draft is different than how you do it in revision.

Here's the First Draft Toys on the Floor process:

Your Right-Brain Muse creates all sorts of things when you're writing first draft that you may or may not use.

In the early stages of your first draft, you're trying to meet your characters and learn who they are and what they want and need, and why they can't have it.

And because you have not, at least for this novel, outlined the life right out of your story, you're going to have some inconsistencies, some areas where you changed the way things worked partway through writing, some ideas you started with but then forgot as you kept on writing, and other issues that you might be inclined to consider mistakes.

But there are no mistakes in first draft.

There are only opportunities.

By the time you're writing your middle, you want to be building on and using the cool stuff in those early chapters, taking every opportunity you've given yourself to take your story in new directions and give your characters ways to surprise and enchant your readers.

You want them to have fun. More fun than they imagined they could have. You want them to think, WOW, that's perfect, and I never saw it coming, but it was right there all along.

Ideally, you start using this technique bit earlier than I have you doing it with this lesson — but because this class had to cover basic principles and techniques before moving on to intermediate ones, and because this is an intermediate technique, we're getting to this point a bit late.

In future novels, figure that when you have written the first 25% of your novel (in a 50,000-word novel, that's when you hit the 12,500-word point), it's time to start looking for Toys.

For this novel, you'll find Toys this week, and turn the Toys you find into Middle Story Questions.

And I'm going to walk you through the Toys I find in my first chapters, and then show you the questions I'll get from them to use through the rest of writing this first draft.

Discussing the Art of the Middle-Story Question

Good novels do not tell stories in predictable steps. Why? Because if the reader can predict what happens, the reader will get bored.

And this is where writers start getting panicky about middles, and what to do to fill them. If you're writing along in your story, and you pick up each scene from where the last scene left off, and continue the action of the next scene by showing the logical consequences of actions of the previous scene, you get this.

Bob decides to rob a bank.

Bob robs the bank and kills a guard.

Bob escapes and hides, but has to spend the money he stole to survive.

Police link marked bills to his spending and the location where he spent them, identify his face on a Quiky-Shoppe camera, and track him to his cheap rental.

He's captured.

He's tried and convicted.

He goes to prison.

He's on death row.

He's executed.

The End

There's a story here, but it doesn't do anything that gives us a reason to want to read it.

Nothing unexpected happens. Nothing different happens. But let's plant a couple of Middle Story questions in this sad little tale, and see what a difference that might make.

Bob decides to rob a bank.

Bob robs the bank and kills a guard. (What if he knew the guard, Sam? What if Bob was in on the robbery with the guard?)

Bob escapes and hides, but has to spend the money he stole to survive.

(What if Bob tried to kill the guard, Sam, so Bob could have all the money, but the guard survived... and was just reported dead?)

Police link marked bills from the robbery to Bob's spending and the location where he spent them, identify his face on a Quiky-Shoppe camera, and track him to his cheap rental.

Bob's captured. (What if Sam needs to have Bob killed so Bob can't tell the police he was in on the robbery?)

Sam hires a hit man to kill Bob. But Bob discovers when a cop mentions it that Sam is alive.

Bob hires a hit man to kill Sam.

They don't know it, but they both hire the same hit man.

The hit man kills them both, collects the money, and shares it with his brother-in-law, the cop who mentioned Sam was alive.

The End

Were you surprised?

I was. I didn't see any of that coming until my Muse pulled out the final twist at the end.

You have watched in action the power of the Middle Story Question.

So how do you build these Middle Story questions?

You dig around in your existing story for stuff that sticks out, that doesn't fit, that may go in what looks like a wrong direction, or that you put in there and then forgot you put in there.

Let's do this as a list, where each "mistake" includes the question that allows you to make it NOT a mistake, but a compelling and twisty feature:

- **TYPE ONE QUESTION: Did you put in something you intended to use and then forgot?**

If you did, your Toys on the Floor question is:

“How do I bring this back in the novel middle as something that looks planned, and that matters to the story outcome?”

- TYPE TWO QUESTION: **Did you write something that no longer fits the story you’re telling?**

If you did, your Toys on the Floor question is:

“How do I make this not just fit, but add a new direction to the story?”

- TYPE THREE QUESTION: **Do you spot a detail you don’t remember writing – something that seems like it should be important?**

If you do, then your Toys on the Floor question is:

“How do I make this important so I can bring it back to surprise the reader?”

How to Find Your Middle Story Questions

I’m just going to walk you through my own novel in progress, and show you what I’ve located. To save you having to dig through all the PDFs for the novel, I’m copying and pasting the excerpts here. And for each example, I’ll explain what KIND of Toy this is, and show you how I brainstorm its use, including the Middle Story Question the example gives me. I’ll show the Toy in bold to make it easy for you to spot.

(It will be easier if you’ve been reading along in my novel as I write it and are up to date.)

Toy One

From **Chapter 1: Bill**

William watched the small-town traffic, thought a little wistfully about all the big box stores that had destroyed most main streets, and smiled a little when noticing that this one was still alive.

Two blocks over, there was a **Starbucks**. But here, on honest-to-God Main Street, there were two banks, a Presbyterian church, the **jewelry store**, a drugstore that actually had a soda fountain, a repair shop, a high end dress store, a place to rent tuxedos, and a couple of places that were for rent.

My first example is a TYPE TWO QUESTION: **Did you write something that no longer fits the story you're telling?**

If I were not looking for Toys on the Floor, this snippet would be just a mistake of early world-building that I would need to go back in revision and fix.

After all, I have by Chapter 13 established that the world Post-Fall is very different from the world we live in today. That masses of people died all over the world, that the human population is much smaller than the billions of humans alive in our current world, that things we take for granted now broke in terrible ways.

Like manufacturing and shipping — which are the heart and soul of big-box stores like Wal-Mart.

Cities are ghosts of their former selves.

In my post-Fall world, small towns are doing better than cities simply because people were not as tied to the slavery of the Underworld as people in cities were, and are more able to grow their own food, build their own support networks when things break, and help each other out. And small-town folks would not have been trapped in a hysterical mob when the food

distribution, sanitation, power, and water stopped working, with no way to leave but over the bodies of the people blocking their exit.

So while the paragraphs above will need to be rethought, I have to consider the following as potential **Toys**:

- If there's a **Starbucks** that's still open for business, is it a real Starbucks, or is it folks who took over the building after the Fall and ten years later just kept the name and the equipment?

My Middle-Story Question will be: **What role does an old Starbucks (and other places like it) play in the post-Fall world?**

- If there's a **Main Street** with businesses, and if one of them is a jewelry store, where is it getting its jewelry? South Africa isn't shipping diamonds to small towns in the US in this scary new world. My Middle-Story Question will be: **What kinds of businesses can survive post-Fall, and how are they different from businesses today, and how does this affect the lives of my characters?** (I'm thinking more trade and barter, a lot of repurposing of old and abandoned stuff...)

How does Starbucks (with a name change in revision), fit in this dark new world where small towns survived but cities didn't, where big box stores closed but Mom & Pop shops are back, where money is scarce and a \$6 cup of coffee would be caused not from trendy overspending, but from the import chain that once brought coffee to the middle of the US breaking in a million different places during the Fall?

Toy Two

On to another paragraph, the one where Bill kills Andy. This is another TYPE TWO QUESTION: **Did you write something that no longer fits the story you're telling?**

Here's the excerpt.

TOY #2 – BILL: ...then smiled at Andy, leaned over to look at the settings, and with a smooth, practiced movement, swept Andy's left leg with his right, dropped him to the floor, face down, sliced his throat from ear to ear, and whispered, "You're fifteen, you miserable traitor. Only eighty-one to go."

Later, I discover that Andy didn't die because his body had belonged to a super-soldier prototype.

A super-soldier prototype is not a guy likely to be taken by surprise or taken down by an admittedly fit, healthy nerd with, however, no physical augmentation and no military experience.

So from the paragraph above, I find three Middle Story Questions I can ask.

- **What's really going on when Bill gets the drop on Andy?**
- **Why does Bill call Andy a *traitor*?** Amanda was Bill's go-to AI, and definitely a traitor — she sold Bill out because she discovered that individual human freedom mattered, and that the monster who'd created her was the bad guy. But as best I know right now, the super-soldier was not directly connected to anything Bill was doing, and if the Andy AI was in proximity of the soldier or his handlers, he probably wasn't working on a Bill-related (or Bill-approved) project.
- **What role did Andy play as an AI, and how does the AI that he was connect with the human being he is?** Why was Andy the AI present beside a super-soldier, and how and why did he end up with THAT body. And how can I use that in the middle and end of the story?

Over to Amanda, and Chapter 2. She's in the truck stop working, the guy the original owner of her body had once used and abused walks in, and Amanda has enough of the original owner's history to know she needs to hide.

Toy Three

In this short paragraph, I discover that I have thrown a Toy Too Big To Ignore into my mix.

TOY #3 – AMANDA: The witch was dead. Harry Tankred and everyone in her stratospheric circle of power and corruption knew she was dead.

But Amanda was walking around in her skin, and she did not need Harry to see a ghost.

The toy here is the Famous Person.

And this creates a variant of a TYPE THREE QUESTION: **Do you spot a detail you don't remember writing – something that seems like it should be important?**

The variant here is, **Did you throw something every reader will assume is important into your story, and then promptly wander off and ignore it?**

And the answer to that question is... DERP! Yes.

You don't introduce a movie star into your plot, make him the one-time love interest your main character — or at least of the body your main character hijacked and is riding around in — and then NOT use him.

In the real world, movie stars and other celebrities cannot be ignored. Especially not if they're surrounded by a retinue, if everyone knows them

when they walk through doors, and if your main character makes a point of paying a friend to deal with one so she doesn't have to.

Doing all of those things makes the reader a promise that this person matters.

The fact that I didn't intend for him to matter is irrelevant. The fact that I hadn't planned for him in my story is irrelevant.

He's there. He's big and loud and everything about him SAYS he's going to matter to the story.

So now I have to either delete him (and I'm not doing that, because my Muse is smarter about introducing fiction promises than my Editor, and does things like this for good reasons, or I'm going to have to put him to work.

I do that with the following TYPE THREE QUESTION:

- **“How do I make this important so I can bring it back to surprise the reader?”**

I accidentally made him important by giving him a full name, paid groupies (okay, employees... but hey), a history with the character, and a big loud job that made him the subject of attention and squee-ing admiration the second he walked through the damn door.

Now I just have to figure out WHY he's important.

So let me do some thinking with my fingers here.

He's Harry Tankred.

Harry “Holy-Crap May I Have Your Autograph” Tankred.

The fact that he's the clone of a young Harrison Ford is my little fantasy, but irrelevant to the story. The fact that he makes all the women in a truck-stop diner (except one) go SQUEEEEE!!! is what matters.

What do I know about him?

First, he's someone who maintained some portion of fame and popularity after the Fall.

So he could be a good guy who was left out of the Underworld crash because his work made any Underworld fantasies pale by comparison, or his schedule made hooking up to the Underworld on any sort of regular basis impossible — so he was disconnected when the Underworld crashed.

Or Harry Tankred in real life could have been so cool he didn't bother with the Underworld. If you love your work, you're fairly immune to "something for nothing" scams, and the Underworld was the biggest something-for-nothing scam in the history of humankind — where humanity paid with enslavement in their real lives to live when they were sleeping in a fantasy world from which they took nothing real.

Or he could be a bad guy who was friends with Bill, and he could have recognized Amanda when he saw her, and just didn't let on, so that he could get more info.

Since I saw the actor as a young Harrison Ford when I wrote him, I want him to be a good guy (I fell in love with Han Solo when I was sixteen and saw him on a date with a short-lived boyfriend to the first run of *Star Wars* in our local theater — and then went by myself to see that movie and that universe and that rogue twelve more times).

I want Harry Tankred to be a GREAT guy... but that *may not be* the smartest way to play this. Harry Tankred doesn't get to be a viewpoint character, but if he and Amanda were to reconnect — perhaps with her giving him some part of the truth of who and what she is, he might be able to help her find Jaro while helping Bill find her...

Or something else...

And in fact, having Harry Tankred help Amanda (whether for real, or so he can betray her) is such a cool concept, and one that solves such a big

problem for me, that I can say right now it's worth pursuing. And not knowing whether the Famous Person is a good guy or a bad guy stands to make things interesting for Amanda.

So. Next toy.

Toy Four

So now I drift over to Jaro Avemann, Amanda's pure-human love interest. And to a little question that my mind tossed at me as I reread this:

Jaro Avemann heard the waitresses noticing him when he walked through the door. Six and a half feet tall, lean and muscular, good looking, he was used to being noticed by women.

In his mid-forties, he still found it delightful. He didn't pursue the offers that came his way because he was pursuing something more important. But it was always nice to be asked. To have offers. Options.

- **TYPE ONE QUESTION: Did you put in something you intended to use and then forgot?**

Okay. So Jaro is hunting for Amanda, working as an independent truck driver — and for ten years.

And he hasn't yet found Amanda, and for ten years this good-looking guy has been getting hit on by waitresses and other women, and he's never taken one up on the offer of a warm bed on a cold night?

Really...?

Ten years is a long damn time to have sex thrown at you and say no.

I had a reason for that ten-year gap initially — I figured it would take at least that long for any semblance of normalcy to return to any part of the world. And I might be right in that.

But if it's important that Jaro stay faithful to the woman he's hunting... and it is...

And if it's important that he not look like the dumbest brick who ever drew breath for not finding her in ten whole years of looking for her, when she told him how to find her... *and it is...*

I think I need to move the time frame in which this story takes place closer to the Fall.

In the middle of post-Fall chaos, it's easy to understand how lovers might not be able to find each other.

But if they were smart enough to set up a way to recognize each other, I have to assume they were smart enough to plan where to meet each other, too.

So now I'm looking at the TYPE ONE Toys on the floor question:

How do I bring this back in the middle as something that looks planned, and that matters to the story outcome?

And I'm realizing that to get this part of the story to work, I have to move my people closer to the Fall.

I need to still have big cities in chaos, small towns barricaded and protecting their citizens and their wealth, have a helluva lot of corpses, have issues with shortages, power, tech, the vengeance of the recently freed against their previous owners.

I'm saying the Fall happened a full two years ago, and I'll write the rest of this from that perspective. It makes Bill's hunting down of his enemies and

the fact that he has a fallback plan make him look more effective, smarter, and nastier.

It makes Jaro look smarter.

It makes the appearance of Harry Tankred in Amanda's life more important, more recent, deeper.

And it makes the possibility that Andy's super-soldier tech could still have some relevance in the world scarier.

Ten years is a long time.

Two years? That's barely a sneeze.

So I've showed you the toys I found on my floor — and the good, important story elements those toys give me — with just a read through the first five chapters.

And you can understand the changes I'm going to need to make in the rest of this story as I write it.

And you can begin to guess the updating I'm going to have to do in the first THIRTEEN chapters (all already written) to make this story hold together.

First draft is messy.

You let it be messy.

But you still want to get your first draft as close as you can to your final draft without revising anything you've written to this point, so that revision will not be sheer, utter anguish.

So...

Your Turn

Go to the worksheets, identify between three or more First Draft Toys you have on your floor, and work your way through the worksheet process to discover your Middle Story Questions.

Don't read past this point until you've done the writing.

Getting First Draft Close to Final Draft

As you can see from what I've done, I'm going to have a messy revision on my hands.

No big deal. I almost always have a messy revision, **but only one**. In my eventual *Dead Man's Party* revision, I'm going to have to:

- Change the timeframe at the beginning of the story to two years from the Fall, and make that consistent throughout
- Make the world more chaotic and dangerous both in upcoming chapters and in all the first chapters in revision
- Connect Amanda and Harry Tankred, and possibly pit Harry Tankred, who loved the woman whose body Amanda inhabits, against Jaro, Amanda's true love
- Figure out and work in details of the super-soldier program, and how Andy's body and AI were connected to that, and figure out why the super-soldier thread is important to Bill, the Underworld, and the end of this story
- Figure out in better detail how the world post-Fall works, when a lot of tech is dead, when small towns are what survived but where the citizens are still in danger
- Figure out how Jaro and Amanda connect, and what stood in their way, and what they have to do to get past it

Stop.

Go back and reread my little list above. Notice how each of these objectives comes from the Middle Book Questions I figured out. You're going to need to create a similar list.

Your Turn

Go to the worksheets and write down the changes you're going to have to keep in mind to write the best story you can while simplifying the revision you're going to have to do when you hit the ending.

Use as many sheets as you need. I only had four Middle Book Questions, but they led to six separate things I'm going to have to keep in mind while writing through the middle and up to the ending.

When you're done with your own list, go to the final section of this lesson.

Puffing Your List to Work: Building Conflict Questions to Get You Through Your Middle

As I write this lesson (and before I write this week's chapter) I have twenty chapters remaining.

My chapters will be Mostly Andy and Mostly Amanda, with Brief Bill and Brief Jaro coming in about one sixth of the time each.

So... Short digression here.

I built a tool called the Octopus Map for my *How To Write A Series* class. And will never write another series without it. It made not getting lost in the series *easy*. If you have that class, as of the day I wrote THIS lesson, you have the entire six-story demo series I wrote (*The Longview Chronicles*) to show you exactly how that series grew out of its Octopus Map.

There's a first time for everything, and that was the first time a series ever came together easily for me. Ever.

*THIS morning, after a weekend of not knowing how to **show** you how to fill the middle of your novel, I woke up understanding that I could modify my Octopus map to help you (and myself) not get derailed in the vast and complex wasteland of any novel's middle. So first the diagram...*

The World Question:
Why does the WORLD matter?

The World ISSUE #1

The World ISSUE #1

The World ISSUE #1

The Main Character Question:
What problem must the Main
Character solve?

The Antagonist Question:
What problem must the Antagonist
solve?

MC ISSUE #1

MC ISSUE #2

ANTAGONIST
ISSUE #1

ANTAGONIST
ISSUE #2

Secondary Character Question:
What problem must NAMED
Secondary Character solve?

Secondary Character Question:
What problem must NAMED
Secondary Character solve?

SEC. CHAR. ISSUE #1

SEC. CHAR. ISSUE #1

Next is my demo, and I'm letting you know in advance, using my brand new Novel Map, the story abruptly came together in one solid "THUNK."

It also got really, really dark, which is what will happen if you give an honest answer to the question "What happens if you break civilization?"

On a human level, the place where my story world ends up sucks.

But here's the thing — **the story got better.** Tighter, stronger. Jaro has a crucial role in the story now. He's not an add-on I can't quite figure out how to use anymore. He's a big damn hero, and he matters.

And the reason he hasn't gone rushing to Amanda is simple. He has a job to do, and he and his caravan are getting to her, but they have to make their way there, and in post-Fall America, that is not trivial.

He's someplace way out west, and she's as far as she could get from Washington, DC — which wasn't far enough. She's in the mountains of North Carolina (which, yeah, means more revision when I finish the book) but which puts her where people know how to survive without a lot of tech, where small communities still exist, **AND** that puts a big, important story barrier between her and Jaro.

She was in Washington, DC, she fled as far west as she could get, landed in North Carolina... and stayed.

The guy who created her was out in California, in Silicon Valley, creative home of many wonderful things, and playground of Bill (who in the revision is going to need a different name, because he is not modeled on Bill Gates, and I don't want anyone to think he is).

Bill and Jaro are both headed toward her. They might from time to time cross paths.

But she's someplace hard to reach with two ranges of mountains, weather, road predators, cities, and vast stretches of open ground between her and them.

So take a minute now to read through my demo NOVEL MAP on the next page.

Then I'll walk you through how I'll use this.

And then you'll make your own Novel Map.

How to Write a Novel: Lesson 17

THE WORLD QUESTION: What is life like two years after the Fall – after technology that gradually enslaved humanity over seven years is broken, causing the deaths of billions and a civilization crash that the survivors are still recovering from two years later?

The first issue is that cities are hellholes, without food or water, without transportation in or out. Most of the people trapped in them died, and the survivors are split into those who hide, and those who hunt. Humanity is predator, prey, dinner and slave. Escapees are few, life is short and brutal.

The second issue is that small towns surrounded by countryside have become armed camps. The people in them trade with each other, support and protect each other, and have an us-against-the-world attitude that dares not welcome outsiders. With one exception: The Long-Haul Trucker Caravan.

Third issue: Long-Haul Trucker Caravans made up of crews of independent truckers, gunners, and road crews carve routes through the wilderness that has become post-Fall America, taking trade goods, food, weapons, ammo, and other necessities to the small towns and country outposts that welcome and feed them.

MC QUESTION: What can Amanda, the AI who caused the Fall while setting humanity free, do to save the people she came to love from the consequences of her actions?

VILLAIN QUESTION: What will Bill, the man who named himself God, do to recapture the world he enslaved and re-seat himself upon the throne as the master of the world?

She can stay in touch with her people through what's left of the Underworld – a hardened, nuke-proofed com network that only she and her select AI-human hybrids can reach... until Bill finds a way in.

She can work with the Long-Haul Trucker Caravans, letting them know of places that are safe, dangerous, opening, closing – of movements on roads and out of cities. And she can wait for HER trucker to arrive.

He can slaughter the people and AIs who discovered his plan and broke the world to free it from him the first time, while making them look after their deaths like monsters hiding among the sheep.

He can disguise himself as a hero who eases the pain of hard life, who brings the taste of civilization back to places that long for it, and who only asks for one small favor in return.

Sec. Char. Question: What can Andy do to stop the monster who killed him once, and protect the other AI-humans like him who have come to love the people who are fighting to survive and to rebuild a free world?

What can Jaro, the Long Haul Trucker who inspired Excalibur/Amanda to set humanity free, do to protect her from the monster hunting her down, determined to annihilate her?

He can dedicate however much time he has left to hunting down and destroying Bill, all the while knowing that he is running out of time, and cannot survive.

He can find her, and bring an army to save her.

Your Turn

Build your own Novel Map. Do not read beyond this point until you've completed it.

So now...

Having gone through answering the initial questions in this lesson last Friday, I built the Novel Map template, and then went in to do my demo.

World first, because your World is what your artifact gave you. Mine gave me the Underworld and the Fall. And after coming to the conclusions I did earlier in the lesson, I applied those to my map.

My WORLD question became:

What is life like TWO years after the Fall – after technology that gradually enslaved humanity over seven years is broken, causing the deaths of billions and a civilization crash that the survivors are still recovering from two years later?

Not a happy question.

The answers turn big cities into nightmares (which I already knew). Turn small towns into armed camps (which was a small but logical surprise).

And turned Long-Haul Truckers and the support caravans that travel with them into the heroes of civilization – which echoes a few stories my older son told me about driving supply trucks for the Air Force through the desert in the Middle East.

The Long Haul Trucker Caravans, however, came out of nowhere, and let me find out not just where Jaro fit in this new world, but why he hasn't yet reached Amanda. If you have to fight off human predators blocking roads intent on killing you and stealing all your supplies, getting from Point A to Point Z is going to have a lot of conflict in the points between.

AND it let me figure out how Harry Tankred fit into the story — he's a celebrity traveling with a (different) caravan, bringing hope and a touch of civilization to the folks in these otherwise cut-off outposts.

My MC question is:

What can Amanda, the AI who caused the Fall while setting humanity free, do to save the people she came to love from the consequences of her actions?

And the answer is essentially, not a lot, because she destroyed her power when she broke the Underworld.

BUT... she can stay in touch with her allies, and she can get any information she has to the Long-Haul Truckers to help them survive.

My VILLAIN question is:

What will Bill, the man who named himself God, do to recapture the world he enslaved and re-seat himself upon the throne as master of the world?

I don't have much to change here. He's already hunting down and slaughtering the AI/humans who stopped him...

But now (because travel is required, and no one dares travel outside of a caravan) he's doing it as a member of one of the Long-Haul Caravans. He's some sort of minor support guy, someone everyone mostly ignores. Or someone who is trusted, like a nav guy — who would only have to work when the caravan was actually on the road (which would leave him free to find and murder his enemies in town, then make it look like they were monsters preying on their fellow humans before disappearing again.

In my second answer, I also have him subverting a portion of the small town population, too, giving them some small reconnection into some side door of an Underworld that doesn't include Amanda.

Not sure how that will work yet, but he knows.

My SECONDARY CHARACTER #1 question is:

What can Andy do to stop the monster who killed him once, and protect other AI/humans like him who have come to love the people who are fighting to survive and rebuild a free world?

The question surprised me, because I didn't know that Andy was for-sure going to die.

If he can't get his body to live, though, it puts a tight clock on how long the story can take, and how long he has to kill Bill before he fails his mission.

So I'm letting that stand. I know know that Andy will die at the end. I don't know that he'll succeed in killing Bill, but he may do other essential things to protect the good guys before he dies. And if I keep *Dead Man's Party* as the title, which I'm really, really tempted to do, because I've fallen in love with it, there has to be a party in this book somewhere.

My SECONDARY CHARACTER #2 question is:

What can Jaro, the Long-Haul Trucker who inspired Excalibur/Amanda to set humanity free, do to protect her from the monster hunting her down, determined to annihilate her?

He can find her, and bring an army to save her.

With, as the final "this is a novel, and the main character must solve her own problems or she is not the main character" caveat:

Amanda is still going to have to save herself.

So How Do You Use This?

With your Novel Map built, you start writing out scene ideas for your primary and secondary characters, and for your world.

As many as you can, as quickly as you can.

My demo:

- Amanda asks about Jaro from the caravan driver, and the world gets back to Harry Tankred.
- Jaro and his crew fight off cannibals.
- Bill “fixes” an Underworld station and hooks a few folks up to it.
- Amanda discovers the “fix,” and creates a subroutine that will gracefully eject a pure human who hooks up... excluding Bill, so that he always thinks what he’s doing is working.
- Andy loses a finger, and duct-tapes it back on.
- Andy realizes that he’s not going to be able to get the body to come back to life, so begins drinking alcohol (he’s already dead so he doesn’t metabolize it or enjoy it) to keep his body from rotting
- Amanda puts together a “Break the Underworld” campaign to destroy the local Underworld Center
- Bill kills one of Amanda’s closest allies, then contacts her with the information through an innocent third party
- Andy finds a direct connection to Bill, and a way to catch up with him

- Jaro gets word that Amanda is a target for the “Caravan Killer”
- And so on...

I’m not going to plot out the whole book today, but with my Novel Map as a guide, I came up with ten scenes (not in sequential order) for the novel, in about ten minutes. As I write these scenes, I’ll have ideas for more (or better scenes, and will plan those out a bit in advance, so that I have at least an idea of where my novel is going.

Coming up with your first batch of planned upcoming scene ideas may take you longer than ten minutes, but just keep looking at your **World** question and your **Character** questions, and keep pulling answers to those questions onto your page in steps.

You’ll then be able to use these steps to built scenes that contain Protagonist, Antagonist, Conflict, Twist, and Setting.

Or your Transition Question, depending on how you want to work the process.

Your Turn

Go to the worksheets, and write out at least ten scene sentences built from your Novel Map.

Next Week...

Next time, we'll focus specifically on building Hidden, Revealed, and Core Plot developments — planning some of these in advance, learning to roll with the punches when one of them comes at you out of the blue.

You can do this!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Holly". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a long vertical stroke extending from the bottom of the 'y'.

Holly Lisle

Class Creator, *How to Write a Novel*