

## Writing a novel

So, I'm doing a rough outline for this novel. Tinker (1) was started blindly, throwing words on a page and seeing what stuck. It was a mad scramble, writing frantically and yet at the same time, trying to figure out where the novel was going.

Writing, as I like to say, is like planning a trip to Disney World. You say okay, I want to go to Disney World in Florida. I want to drive, which requires cash, a car and a map. From my house in Boston, I'll drive down south, and since it takes like 20 hours, I'll break it into three days, so the maximum I'll drive is like 7 hours before stopping. That means I'll stop here, here and here and arrive at Disney World on Tuesday. Or I might do this side trip in North Carolina and visit Baen's offices – or I might drop that idea. I'll stay at this cheap hotel and the actually GOING to Disney World, well, I'll deal with that when I get there.

I know that the story I want to tell revolves around Tinker, Windwolf, Pony, Riki and Lain. I want the 'action' to be supplied by a monster (Riki) and the anomaly of Turtle Creek (everyone else). The whole monster sideline might be dropped. The anomaly will need to be investigated, possible actions discussed, attempts made that failed, and finally a solution.

So I plan my trip out -- and that takes scenes.

Scenes are the basic building blocks of story telling. It's a snapshot of story, a single setting and usually one piece of the story handed at a time. One mystery writer said never more than two characters per scene, and I like this idea – a character alone is boring, two people give them someone to talk too, but more than two characters are hard to do well. But it's not a hard fast rule -- sometimes you can't help to have more than two characters in a scene – but if you can juggle people around so that for the most part there are only two people – go for it. This might mean sending them out for coffee, tying someone up, knocking someone out, but get rid of the extra people. The easiest way to get rid of them is just to delay them arriving. Walking or riding horses or a crowded party is a great way to split people up so you can have two people talk in a crowd.

So you start collecting scenes, these snapshots.

I know that I need to introduce the unstable area where the oni gate once sat. Snapshot. Tinker looking at Turtle Creek. What does it look like? What happened here? What steps does looking at suggest for future actions? How does Tinker feel? Of course I want a second character with her, but who?

My gut says Pony. Why? I think because he's the easiest to explain in so many ways. First "her bodyguard" explains why he stands around and doesn't say much without needing lots of text. And I need text to explain the entire world to the first time reader. I don't need a story reason for him being there – and yet I need to keep in mind that first time readers don't know who he is. A description, his name, and "elfin

bodyguard” will do until later. I need to keep in mind that I need to describe Tinker too. I like to keep things dramatic, so I start on the massive George Westinghouse Bridge with Pittsburgh spread out behind them – which is handy to set up the world.

Once I get the entire basic layout of the world nailed in as few words as possible, I can let the two venture down into the valley, do some poking and pushing, and then introduce the other big story element – the monster. After roughing them up – I bring in Riki to lure it off.

One long scene to start the novel. There are only two characters until the end where an important third character is introduced. I keep all other people out of the conversations to keep the story uncluttered as possible. I’ll do introductions later. The world problems are set. There’s this mysterious ...something ... where the gate used to stand and now a monster to contend with. Note that I haven’t gotten the descriptions all in yet.

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Elfhome

1: Ghost Lands

There were some mistakes that “Oops” just didn’t cover.

Tinker stood on the George Westinghouse Bridge. Behind her was Pittsburgh and its sixty thousands humans now permanently stranded on Elfhome. Below her, lay the mystery that once was Turtle Creek. The valley seemed filled with a blue haze; the air shimmered with odd distortions. The land itself was a kaleidoscope of possibilities -- elfin forest, stone oni buildings, the Westinghouse Air Brake Plant – fractured pieces of various dimensions all jumbled together. And it was all her fault.

Except for a blue taint, color seemed leached from the valley, making the features seem somehow insubstantial. Perhaps the area was too unstable to reflect all spectrums of light – or maybe various spectrums of light weren’t able to pass through – the – the – she lacked a name for it.

Discontinuity?

Tinker decided that was as good a name as any.

“What are these ghost lands?” Pony shifted uneasily beside her.

Or not.

Pony had spoken in low Elvish – as he didn’t speak Pitsupavute or Pittsburgh Speech – but “ghost lands” had been in English, so most likely a human had coined the term.

Certainly the name suited the place well. She winced, remembering that the oni had an army poised to invade Elfhome through the gate they forced her build, the one she booby trapped and caused this mess. The disjointed valley. Pittsburgh stuck on Elfhome. The hyperphase in orbit so much space debris and burnt ash on the ground.

Even “sorry” didn’t seem adequate.

What happened to the oni army on Onihida? Of the oni on Elfhome? She found herself worried about those she thought she hated.

Her bodyguard looked at her, waiting an answer.

“I don’t know what happen.” Tinker ran a hand through her chopped short hair, grabbed a handful and tugged, temptation to pull it out running high. “I set up a resonance between the gate I built and the one in orbit. They were supposed to shake each other apart. They did.” Certainly neither was still intact. “This was – unexpected.”

“Is it going to – get better?”

“I don’t know.” Tinker sighed, releasing her hair. “I’m going to have to study it, take – some – measurements.” Although what kind alluded her. “Try to build some kind of computer model to figure out what happened in order to see if it’s – fixable.”

Pony grunted a slight optimistic sound, as if he full of confidence that she could solve all problems. Sometimes his trust in her was intimidating.

Posted by wen at November 17, 2003 01:28 PM