

## Organizing a novel

This morning I thought I'd mention organizing to write a novel.

I start every new project by setting up a folder in My Documents for the project. With Tinker 2, I've labeled the folder, oddly enough, TINKER 2. From my desktop I've made a shortcut into the folder.

Into this folder I make two folders. One is NOTES, where I have things like the synopsis that I sold the novel with (which I did have stored in the Tinker (1) folder) and the bible I'm building which has all the characters from the first book and descriptions of them.

I also needed to work out a rough timeline so I know when this novel starts. In Tinker, the story starts shortly before Midsummer's Night Eve, and then runs for roughly two months after that date, so it's now the end of August. August tends to be muggy hot during the day and cool in the evenings. The days are still long, and the summer stars are in the sky. The trees will be starting to turn if the novel runs more than a month in time. There won't be a lot flowers blooming, the corn is starting to be hard to find, and apples will be harvested soon. As the story pushes into September, flocks of geese from Canada will be flying overhead. If I run into the end of October, frost starts.

While I write this, I track the days, so I know if the events start on Monday and three days later the characters are trying to refer back to that day, they can say "Monday" or "Three days ago." If the story is based in the real world, I find a calendar for that year and figure out the dates (June 21 – is it a Monday or Thursday), when the sun rises and sets, and what phase the moon is in.

I also set up a CUTS folder, for the things I don't want to use but don't want to throw away.

I write every day on the computer, but I also usually carry a tablet around with me at all times. During my first novel, I would scribble on anything handy: napkins, scraps of paper, paper bags. I discovered that this is really, really bad. You lose such notes, so you might as well not written them. Even if you save them, there's no easy way to store them. Keeping the notes in one or two notebooks or all on notecards in one box, or some other carefully organized manner is the only sane way.

A lot of these notes are just thinking on paper. Sometimes I write something and then scratch it out and write "no, no, that won't work" in the margin. When I hash something out that I think is really important, as soon as I can get to my computer, I type the notes into my computer.

When I'm starting a project, all notes are important, and I usually key them into the computer in one file. This is the big stuff – the main story threads. I'm thinking big and everything is new and easily lost. I want to keep track of it all in one place. And it's

easy to do so because there isn't a lot already stored.

Later, when I'm trying to work out little plot details or a fight scene – and I have TONS already on file with the project, I usually make up a separate file for each set of notes.