# REALMSCAPES DISPATCH

## Foundations and Frameworks

**August 1, 2026**



*Annette Zimmerman*

# The Footnote

Hello Friends!

Happy Lúnasa and welcome, August! July was one of those months when I did quite a lot, but ended with me wondering what I'd accomplished.

The heat and humidity kept me indoors more than I wanted, though Scott & I escaped with the dogs for a few days in Shenandoah. The larger problem was that much of July's work left little finished evidence. I cleared part of the studio, tried different materials, and admitted that realistic watercolor really isn't my thing.

What I wanted was interesting color, looser lines, and less fussing. I made new ACEOs, practiced continuous line drawing, and began experimenting with simplified shapes and opaque gouache.

I did finish some things - a commission, the ACEOs, and another chapter of the litrpg book. But July's real accomplishment was a clearer sense of direction.

In August, I hope to follow those paths a little farther.

Hope your July treated you well!

Anni

# Recent Adventures

## *From the Realmscapes blog*

When Watercolor Textures Turn Into Tiny Storytellers... A discussion about using watercolor textures as backgrounds for artist cards.





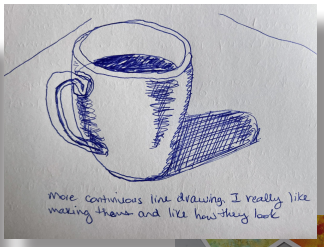
Sketching Shenandoah... A recap of my trip to Shenandoah National Park, with sketches and lessons learned

Still Working On Life Ten Years Later... A post about my 10 years of blogging and how it's helped me figure out who I am.




## *Other stuff*








# THE MAIN

Back in 2020, I began writing a novel loosely titled 'Prophecy of the Songs'. It was about a brother and sister descended from a family charged with guarding a musical instrument that was a key to an ancient prison. When the prisoner, a really powerful bad guy, escaped and brainwashed the brother, his sister had to find him, uncover their family's legacy, and recover the instrument.

I made it well into the scene blocking stage. I liked the characters and loved the setting, but eventually gave up because the story didn't feel original enough.

I've also written several private stories set in a LOTR-inspired world, where my characters aided the Dúnedain and went on adventures. I never published them, not even as blog posts.

Then, in 2024, I fell in love with Matt Dinniman's books and decided that I had to try writing LitRPG. Why not take the parts I still loved from those older stories and use them to make something new?

# QUEST

That was how 'A Key For A Broken Song' began.

Elenor, a young woman from the U.S., falls into an ancient well at the rvins of an English castle and finds herself in another world. There she discovers that the system governing the world is misbehaving — and that the key she carries may unlock an instrument capable of correcting it.

First she has to decide whether she will help. Then she has to survive long enough to discover how.

Writing it has been fun, but creating the classes and leveling system has also been difficult. A LitRPG novel needs more than a fantasy story with experience points sprinkled over it. What draws me to the genre is its momentum: the action, constant progression, and feeling that something important might happen on the next page.

My first draft may not have that feeling yet. After 18 years of playing The Lord of the Rings Online, I understand the appeal and psychology of fantasy games. I also know how to write fantasy-inspired stories.

The real test is whether I can combine the two into something exciting to write and satisfying to read.

# Lessons from the Road

This month I learned that I don't really enjoy realistic botanical painting. When I first started experimenting with these kinds of tutorials, I think I liked how they challenged me. But after playing around on my own, then signing up multiple times for classes, I find that I get bored far too quickly.

I reserve the right to change my mind about this in the future, of course.

The conclusion? I'll stick to more simplified stylistic realism. Maybe it's because I grew up in the '70s when children's books were being illustrated by Blair Lent and William Steig. I like that style. It's comforting. It seems natural. And it's fun.



# The Quest Ahead





August has always felt like a month of transition to me. Summer hasn't ended – the weather certainly insists it hasn't – but it's begun to lean towards autumn. In the Celtic calendar, Lúnasa marked the beginning of the harvest season. Today, August is "return to school" month here in the U.S. Either way, it's the month for ending playtime and getting back to work.

This month I plan to continue experimenting with simplified stylized realism and maybe some more abstract art, and trying new methods and materials. I want to make more ACEO cards, write about the influence of Mr. Rogers on me, and keep working on the book.

I'm also hoping for sunshine without so much mugginess. If given the choice between staying inside to write and going outdoors, outdoors will win. The days will grow short soon enough.

So I welcome August: part harvest, part fresh start, and perhaps still holding a little summer.

# Links

Realmscapes:
https://realmscapes.world

The blog:
https://realmscapes.world/rants-and-ramblings-blog/

'When Watercolor Textures Turn Into Tiny Storytellers':
https://realmscapes.world/when-watercolor-textures-turn-into-tiny-storytellers/

'Sketching Shenandoah':
https://realmscapes.world/sketching-shenandoah-what-i-packed-what-i-used-and-what-i-brought-home/

'Still Working on Life':
https://realmscapes.world/still-working-on-life-ten-years-later/

Patreon:
https://www.patreon.com/cw/annettezimmerman

Instagram: @annette.zimmerman.artist

*Thanks for reading!*