[Blocked: A Day-Old Memoir](#) [1]

October 28, 2019   [Writer's Life](#) [2]
[Distraction](#) [3]
[Transitions](#) [4]

Essay by Gina Hanson

The Joy of Secret Headshots

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){ (i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o),
m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m) })(window,document,'script','https://www.google-
analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

You'd think I would{i[be accustomed to writer's block by now, but I'm not. It always catches me a little off guard. I don't know if I'll ever get used to the idea of wasting all those MFA years and all that student-loan interest on such an elusive passion. One minute, I'm certain all the stories moshing around in my head are creating a dangerous mental combustion chamber in my prefrontal cortex and, if I don't open a pressure valve soon, I might suffer permanent brain damage. Other minutes, I hate words and sentences and punctuation and character development and other people's opinions and my department chair and kittens. But to be fair, I always hate kittens. Kittens are just so unapologetically self-centered.

I'm a happy person.

Most of the time.

I like video games. You'd probably be shocked to learn that about me if we ever met face-to-face because I'm a middle-aged, nondescript white woman with meaty fingers, and you'd be more likely to assume I crochet or garden or keep a tidy house or use words like *cockadoody* or *dontchaknow*. I doubt you'd guess I revel in first-person shooter games, especially the ones where headshots are rewarded in some way. But I do. I like first-person headshots possibly more than I like writing.

And yes, I teach. Don't a lot of writers? Whether I'm any good at it is open to debate. Every term at my Southern California state college, I seem to have at least one student who feels entitled enough to tell me I'm a bitch and I suck at explaining myself and I've left them no choice but to take up the matter with my boss. They never know who my boss is, so I have to tell them. But then they race to the department chair's office as if he were offering a 75-percent-off deal on the latest selfie filter app.

They tell my chair how unreasonable I am for requiring them to cite their sources in a way that's understandable to folks not in the Illuminati. My department chair then has the gloriously stupid task of asking me to take it easier on my students—but to *please* be sure I don't reduce the rigor of my course or inflate grades for better student evaluations. It'd all make a great short story if the premise weren't so hackneyed.

So, yeah, writer's block. I'm in its feisty little grip right now as we speak. Dialogue is my strength, or so I've been told by everyone except that one editor who felt my dialogue was forced and unrealistic. I imagine she's the kind of person who thinks pesto tastes like hot dogs.

A little secret: I may give up on this whole writing thing.

I haven't had much published since I graduated from my MFA program a decade ago. Before that, I garnered a long list of mid-to-low-prestige short story publications. Did you know all the fiction teaching jobs are going to poets these days? Fiction writers usually have to teach Freshmen Comp, like I do. I think poets do academia better. They fit in. They're just quirky.

And I'm not quirky. That's a cute kind of weird.

I'm the weird kind of weird.

If you chat with fiction-teaching poets about the state of fiction writing as a profession, they often imply anyone can teach fiction because anyone can write it. They say it so eloquently, so opaquely, in lyrical flights that hide their condescension. But they mean it—and it's how you know you're not chatting with a fiction writer. Because we know that's not true. We know how bad we suck at writing. I know I do. I suck at writing, event planning, timely oil changes, checkers, and convincing my department chair of my value as a fiction writer. Because, obviously, I'm not a poet.

I'm also not a gun enthusiast. I despise guns in real life. I tried to shoot a real gun once, but my meaty fingers weren't strong enough to pull the trigger. Even when my corrections officer roommate took me target shooting one time and gave me a small gun with a little doohickey that's supposed to make pulling the trigger easier, I hated it. I worried too much about something going wrong. I worried about the gun firing out its ass end and the bullet hitting me in the face. I even worried about sneezing and accidentally shooting my roommate in the foot and ending her career in law

enforcement. And it was all so loud.

Shooting in video games has none of these problems. There's volume control, for starters. The game controller is made of plastic, and the trigger responds to a delicate touch. In a video game, the most disastrous thing that can happen is that you shoot the wrong guy and have to start the level over.

And I don't mind starting over.

I've had a lot of practice at it.

If you were to ask me what my favorite part about headshots in video games is, I'd have to say I love the way your target immediately drops out of your life. Henchman #4? Done. Gone. He might have survived a shot to the chest, but a shot to the head? No way. That guy is down for good. All that brilliant computer programming, and I just ended it with nothing but the twitch of my oversized index finger. I usually turn off the gore—that's an option in a lot of games these days—because it's poor sportsmanship. Henchman #4 is dead. No need to make some bloody celebration out of it.

You'd probably be interested to know that I also like headshots in video games where the weapon is a bow and arrow or a laser beam or a rip saw or a sling shot or even a farting Terence doll. Anything that lets me take out the enemy with little fanfare and a whole lot of points. Anything that resembles a tattletale or an omniscient poet or a clueless kitten or a department chair who views me as a rotary dial in an era of smartphones.

Anything that keeps me from noticing how bad my writer's block is. Because no matter when it is that I'm shooting a pixelated alien in the head, I should be writing. *I should be writing.*

But not today.

Today is shot.

Art Information

- "[We Come in Peace...](#) [5]" © id iom; Creative Commons license.

Gina Hanson is a writer from Southern California. She holds an MFA in creative writing from a California State University, where she also teaches writing and runs a campus tutoring center. She lives in the Inland Empire with her wife and a menagerie of ill-behaved rescue animals. When she's not writing, she's pestering others to write or playing video games and feeling guilty about not writing.

For more information, visit [Gina Hanson's website](#) [6] or follow her on Twitter [@hansonwrites](#) [7].

Source URL: https://mail.talkingwriting.com/blocked-day-old-memoir

Links:

[1] https://mail.talkingwriting.com/blocked-day-old-memoir
[2] https://mail.talkingwriting.com/tw-channels-and-categories/writers-life
[3] https://mail.talkingwriting.com/tw-issue-themes/distraction
[4] https://mail.talkingwriting.com/tw-channels-and-categories/transitions
[5] https://flickr.com/photos/id-iom/12302677595/
[6] http://www.ginahanson.com/
[7] https://twitter.com/hansonwrites