



# The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into the Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

## Crossing Over (III): Where Did All The Bad Movies Go?

Bret M. Funk

Last month, I explored a mystifying conundrum: why we, the public, continue to spend our hard earned dollars on poorly made adaptations of our favorite books, comics, and television series. In this month's article, I look at an even more startling subject: the as-yet-unexplained increase in well made adaptations that has plagued Hollywood in recent years.

The easy answer is that the movie-watching public is not comprised of pushovers, simpletons, and fools. We simply refuse to watch third-rate actors besmirch the good names of our favorite characters in sloppily scripted productions supervised by hack directors out to make a quick buck. No number of flashy special effects (and sometimes not so flashy ones) will take our minds off the fact that Keaton made a better *Batman* than Clooney; that *Starship Troopers*, the movie, bore little resemblance to *Starship Troopers*, the book; and that Dolph Lundgren apparently had never heard of He-Man before becoming *A Master of the Universe*.

Unfortunately and as usual, the simple answer just doesn't work. If it did, then crossovers would have been well made for decades, perhaps since the dawn of movie making. And if not immediately, then at least by the 70s, when epic crossover flops like *The Bible* were first released. I mean, honestly, if we can't count on Christians to maintain the integrity of this great nation's cross-media entertainment ventures, who *can* we count on?

But if John Q. Public isn't responsible for the im-

provement of cross-overs, who is? Certainly not producers. Though the rare philanthropic producer with an eye for detail and the *cahones* to do a picture right may, in fact, exist; the vast majority are driven by two simple needs: to recoup the money that they—or their investors—spent on the film; and to make a profit, as large a profit as possible. In my humble opinion, they—and the marketing teams they assign to each project—are one of the driving factors behind the poor crossover, pushing out substandard fare with the hope that they can capitalize on the work's popularity.

Actors? Without a doubt, casting the right person in each role helps make a better movie. After reading a description of Professor Charles Xavier, one might be tempted to add Yul Brynner and Telly Savalas to the list of potential candidates (production year and living status notwithstanding). Both fit the bill, but the former strikes me more as a Sub-Mariner; the latter would have made a great Kingpin. Neither could have captured the essence of Professor X.

But casting the right actor is not enough; it alone cannot make a movie good. Prior to watching *Batman Forever*, I was convinced that Jim Carrey and Tommy Lee Jones were good choices to play the Riddler and Two Face, respectively (ignoring the fact that Two Face's character, played by Billy Dee Williams, had already been introduced in the original *Batman*). Despite the stars' efforts, the movie fell far short of its potential. If someone had been there to temper Carrey's performance or inspire Kilmer's, perhaps I'd feel differently.

Which leads to directors, who many would easily discount. After all, over the years some very big names have worked on crossover projects, often with limited success. Then again, other lesser-known directors have earned some well-deserved fame for their adaptations. Is there a secret to making a good crossover film, or is it simply a game of chance, where the winners get our money and respect, and the losers have to settle for the money?

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# Flights of Fancy (VI): Interstellar Transportation

by Brian Otridge

Those who have read the earlier parts of this series will know that I stick strictly to known scientific possibilities. So, I'm sorry to disappoint the fans of Star Trek that I won't be talking of warp drives and worm holes. Okay, they're a neat way of getting people around the universe quickly, but at the moment they're just so much fantasy.

Space is big, awesomely big. The nearest star to Sol is Alpha Centauri, 4 light years away. Doesn't sound far, does it? Let's have that in miles for a dose of reality - 23,463,000,000,000 to the nearest billion - that's 100 million times further from Earth than the Moon is. It took 3 days to get to the moon on Apollo - our journey would take 820,000 years at the same rate. We have to go faster, then, if anyone is to get there in a lifetime, never mind coming back home again. But, there are three practical limitations to such a journey: fuel, interstellar particles and relativity.

First, we would need to cut the journey time to something that even a well-trained astronaut could cope with, say 10 years. To do that, we would have to accelerate for half the distance at 0.15g and then decelerate at the same rate - reasonably comfortable gravity for the crew. Top speed would be a breeze at 148,000 miles per second.

The astute reader will have noted that this is 0.8 of the speed of light (known as 'c'), so the effects of relativity will have kicked in. The principles are that as the ship goes faster, it becomes heavier, and time relative to the rest of the universe goes by quicker - these effects are exponential. An interesting effect of the latter phenomenon is that the perceived journey time for the crew would be less than the ten years. Bear in mind that these effects would only apply to the central part of the journey, when sub-light speeds were approached.

If my math is correct, and I stand to be corrected on this, at 0.8c the time dilation factor would be 0.6. That is, 1 year on Earth would be 0.6 of a year on the ship, over the whole 10-year journey a 'gain' for the crew of 2 years. The mass of the ship would increase in inverse proportion, requiring more energy to be expended to achieve the same rate of acceleration, as perceived by an external observer. To the crew, the rate of acceleration would increase.

Increasing thrust may be impractical, so the ship's perceived acceleration would decrease as its speed approached the speed of light, making the journey a little longer. An alternative approach would be to accelerate at 0.8g for a year, then coast at 0.8c and decelerate similarly. This would reduce the journey time to 6 years, but spin would be required to induce artificial gravity - ship design would be rather complicated to cope with acceleration in two directions.

Now, the next objection - interstellar particles. A vacuum is not empty - there is approximately one hydrogen atom every cubic centimeter - the size of the tip of your little finger. Doesn't sound much, but at 500 million miles per hour it would represent quite a significant drag on the ship. Also, there would be other stuff out there - dust and larger lumps of rock. Even a speck of dust could put a neat hole through the ship's hull and anything else in the way - microchip circuits and human beings.

It doesn't look very promising, does it?

The final major objection is one of fuel and reaction mass. Assuming a near limitless supply of nuclear energy, we still need a reaction mass. Chucking a hundred-pound weight off a frictionless cart (weighing the same) at one mile per hour would impart the same velocity to the cart. Throw a one pound weight at a hundred miles an hour and the effect is the same. Assuming that we could accelerate particles to, say 0.8c, then we'd need as much reaction mass as the weight of ship to accelerate it, as much again to decelerate it, ignoring the return journey. At best, the ratio of reaction mass to payload and structure would be 2:1. The reality might be a reaction mass/payload ratio closer to today's space shuttles of 20:1.

There is salvation, however, for the problems of both particles and reaction mass - the interstellar ramdrive. Using limitless power from your nuclear generator cast a massive electromagnetic field out in front of the ship. Draw in all the interstellar hydrogen and dust, and funnel it through a nuclear ramjet, ejecting it out the back with imparted energy. Free reaction mass, and the ship's living quarters would be protected behind the electromagnetic 'wall'. You wouldn't want it to fail, though.

Another advantage of this drive is that the faster you go, the more reaction mass you collect, therefore the externally-perceived rate of acceleration can be maintained. However, there would be an ultimate limit when the crew wouldn't be able get up in the morning, pinned into their beds by 8g of acceleration. Another approach would be to commandeer an asteroid, hollow it out, and use some of it as reaction mass. Sufficient thickness of rock might protect you from the interstellar particles. But what an engineering project!

It all sounds pretty bleak, doesn't it? So, when you sit down to write your space opera, I'd forget about everything I've said and have a few wormholes to slip through.

# RPG Corner (v2.3): Creating A World

by Doug <!-- Roper of Epic Gaming

## Creating a World

The first place to begin is deciding on very broad questions, such as the whole of the world. Is the world round, flat, or maybe inside a hollow sphere? How many suns, moons or other orbiting satellites does it have? What is the make-up of the world? Is it rocky, or covered completely in water? These broad questions help to create a framework for the later things, as each detail is built from a broader idea laid down before it.

Also, at this point I suppose I'll slip in the disclaimer. *It is a fantasy world, and subject to fantastic physics and the like.* Just because your players will expect water to flow downhill, doesn't mean it will in your world. Anything goes, however, it is also much easier on the GameMaster to have a world that operates like the one in which we all live. Taking some things for granted can, in this case, make your life much easier, and it will definitely make playing easier on your players.

My world will be very earth-like; that is to say it is on a sphere, with one sun and a single moon. There is approximately 70% water on the surface, and the planet is tilted on an axis approximate to Earth's, giving rise to seasons. Knowing this allows me to go right into setting up landmasses and oceans and whatnot, without having to be aware of all the things that would need to change if even one of these details were different. As an example, were I to create a world with two moons, there would be a whole new set of tides based on the positions of these satellites. Assuming that one moon orbited faster than the other, the range of tides would vary greatly, and the ends of the spectrum would be extreme from month to month. (Or would there even be months? A month, as it is on earth, is based on a single orbit of our lone satellite. If we had two moons, would we still have temporal denomination based on only one of them?) The varied tides would lead to changes in fauna, human (or humanoid) settlement, and later commerce and technical development. Landmasses may develop differently due to more water moving about on the coasts. Would tidal flats be more prevalent, or would there be great cliffs instead, where the relentless tide has worn away the land? I myself would prefer not to have to deal with these questions in too great a detail, unless there was a specific purpose in my changing one of these basic things. It's just much easier to say "earth-like" and vary the climates and regions within that as you see fit, than to redesign an entire planetary ecosystem.

So now we have a foundation for our world, but what do the main landmasses look like? Is there one or two or several hundred? In a fantasy game, where the average

level of technology is low, it is unlikely that your characters would ever leave a continent on which they are placed, so just having a general number and shape should be more than adequate for your game. If, at any later date, you decide that it is time to explore a whole new land, the next continent can be developed as is needed, without too much energy being spent on it at the beginning, when all possible time and energy must be placed into the continent where the majority of the action will take place.

Now (finally) we can examine some techniques for creating actual landmasses.

## Hand Drawn

Obviously the easiest and most straightforward method of creating maps and terrain is to simply sit down and draw them out by hand. This takes very little time, and should involve a small amount of planning, but on the whole, the GameMaster (GM) can do as he likes.

Starting with a pleasing shape for the coastline, (Most pre-industrial civilizations require access to water for food, irrigation and transportation. Of course the Romans were an exception to this with their aqueducts, but these technologies can be discussed later), the GM can add mountains, rivers and forests wherever he likes. A general knowledge of how weather and winds affect vegetation growth is handy, but not usually required, so long as one takes reasonable steps to avoid obvious mistakes (like deserts between the coast and a set of mountains, etc. etc.). The basic lay of the land being set, the GM can then add cities and political boundaries, though the GM can also wait, and choose to go through a history/technology creation phase to handle all of these things.

The main problem with a map of this kind is the level of detail and realism involved. These hand drawn maps tend to work very well for authors of books, because all of the pertinent areas of the maps are fleshed out in the text of the story, but RPGs are different. Maps for RPGs should be more detailed, simply so the GM can glance at them to quickly acquire details, instead of having to look them up on a separate legend or key. The immediacy of the game requires that the GM have as much information as possible as readily available as possible, and hand drawn maps simply cannot carry that information as easily as some of the other types.

## Computer Cartography Programs

If you are more comfortable with a computer than a pencil, there are programs that are designed to create

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# Future Fashions: Functional or Fairy Tale?

by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

## Part Two: The Women's Department

Having previously expounded on how text readers need vivid description and the visual media's need to connect with viewers to sell or convince us to buy into the work, we can now examine the real need for clothing in space and how both media portray this. Protective clothing is a realistic fact. Futuristic thinkers may try to convince us that changes in air pressure make no difference if you are wearing, for example, the handy 'Life Support Bracelet' (from the 1977 television series, *Space Academy*). This device claims to let you breathe in any hostile atmosphere and keep the body warm in all manner of temperature. Yeah, right. So we give license to future needs and turn our heads with the attitude, "Look at Star Trek. It could happen!"

## Women's Wear: The Casual Day

We have experienced the gamut from one-piece jumpsuits to loincloth-thong coverings to no clothes for the ladies throughout the last century in text and visual media. Counselor Troi's casual wardrobe, seldom seen, typifies one camp of casual wear—soft, sleek, colors that compliment or contrast with some jewelry and matching boots/shoes. The other casual camp is the opposite. Outrageous colors or black/white combinations with large geometric or curved patterns reminiscent of polyester of the 1960's dominate this category. If you think *Austin Powers* you come close. These clothes tend to be stylized and overdone to convince the reader/viewer of a new day for fashions in the future. Still, they look like 60's throwbacks stuck in the back of a thrift store. Does it seem that future and past cycles are caught in a strange time warp?

*Star Wars'* Princess Leia's all-white flowing robes hid almost everything! Did you notice the white pants and 'spacer' boots underneath? Only Carrie Fisher could make this work on camera. Why? Every woman knows that white is the color of fat—visually adding pounds while the camera lens adds more. Unless you are extremely slender, wearing a flowing, all white choir robe is like advertising you have a lot to hide. Since then, Lucas' women's attire has become more of an eggshell/sand color. If you think this is picky, ask any coordinated woman and she'll agree with this assessment. Color shades are incredibly important—even in the future.

## Women's Wear: Court/Fancy Attire

Fancy attire for women moves back into the outrageous category. Large projecting collars, starched to stand out six inches from the shoulders are typical *Buck Rogers* queenly attire, not to mention Mrs. Jetson's only dress style. Unfortunately, the portrayal of the rich in science fiction is repeatedly stereotyped – from the earliest book cover to series from the eighties. If the rich and queenly do not wear form fitting (hugging, revealing) clothing, then the costumes are large, frilly and dripping with jewelry. This, by the way, describes court attire from the sixteen and seventeen hundreds – especially dripping jewels. *Children of Dune* producers appear to have done an admirable job in finding new ways to clothe royalty without falling into the outrageous. Yes, there appears to be some very big collars, but the detail looks like it cancels out concerns in that department. This information is gleaned from movie trailers, so who knows? But is it futuristic or simply updating and imitating history?

*Star Wars'* Princess Leia and her mother have become science fiction hair and fashion icons for the 'courtly' woman and any dress-up event she may attend. The designers for *Star Wars* brought us sound and texture. We could see minute detail: cording and fine stitching on Princess Leia's senate outfits in the subsequent films. The sound of the material soothed like suede and velvet (yes, there are sounds like that in films!). *Wizards and Warriors* type hoods and cloaks complimented the colors and fabrics, though may not be other than a fashion statement or you'd see them now. So thank *Star Wars'* rich portrayal of royal hierarchy for tasteful and elaborate costumes that are fairly believable.

## Uniforms

Often, science fiction takes a militaristic flavor and the use of characters in uniform for a series or book immediately lets the reader/viewer identify with a certain assumption of protocol and mission. We have seen frumpy uniforms for women as everything from polo shirts and stretch pants to sharp creased, over-starched, neck binding 'serious' uniform, presumably for work on a base or star ship where they never get dirty. Early *Babylon 5's*, Susan Ivanova's uniform is so high and rigid she looks like she's ready to choke.

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# KeyCOMMENTary Deep In The Heart of You

by garrie keyman

Why is it, in certain circles (unless, perhaps, it has something to do with the minions decked-out in Star Fleet Academy attire frequenting Sci-Fi Conventions) that fantasy, as a genre, seems to have been relegated to the role of country cousin—the barefoot brother of what some might see as higher literary achievement? Fantasy lies deep in the heart of all of us.

Whether or not we realize it, we were weaned on the fantastic, cutting the first teeth of our imaginations on all things beyond ordinary. From talking gingerbread men to children led away to the tune of a piper, fantasy forms the storytelling core of our society. Of course, we are not alone in this. Consider the myths of the Greeks and Romans. As far back as memory goes, beyond the first attempts by ancient peoples, such as the Phoenicians, to fashion the written word, the oral tradition conveyed the themes of being, often drawing on the fantastic to illustrate central truths of the human condition.

Why then, is it, that as readers and writers of speculative fiction, we often get *the look*. You know the one—from the stranger who spies the cover of the novel we’re currently reading to the agent at the writer’s convention to whom we’re attempting to pitch our saga while still sounding like someone whose intelligence has not left the planet alongside their imagination. We’re the Rodney Dangerfields of the literary world; we get no respect.

Yet fantasy *works*. It is the prime mover and shaker of the storytelling tradition, first captivating, then ensnaring us. We long to step into the very skin of the characters that populate our favorite tales, to share their experiences, or concoct a few of our own

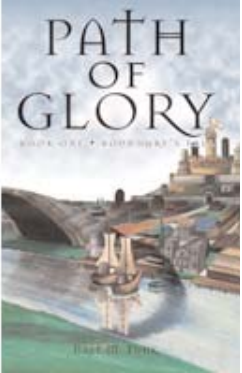
(why else would we attend functions where no one would blink if we dressed like the Ambassador from Voltar IV?). But seriously, even those who would not be caught dead in tights are often the very people living a secret inner life.

Fantasy is already popular but viewed a bit like a basal body function—it’s common to us all, yet we don’t discuss it in polite company since we’re afraid what others may think. It is high time to acknowledge the hold that fantasy has over us, the centrifugal, compelling power it possesses to create forums wherein the building blocks of society can be creatively examined: truth, justice, kinship (all the more easily digested when stirred into a nectar sweetened by adventure and the conquering of adversity).

I hope there’s an agent out there, somewhere, who’s listening.

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# The Writer's Block: RQW3R

by Charles Gramlich

"Where do you get your crazy ideas?" I often get asked.

Well. All right. I'll admit that I've never actually been asked that question—except by my wife and she wasn't talking about writing—but I've imagined myself as the kind of famous author who gets asked that question. I even have an answer ready just in case it happens. It's called RQW3R, and I hope you'll let me tell you about it.

RQW3R is a variation on SQ3R. You see, I'm a teacher by profession, and SQ3R, which stands for study, question, read, recite, review, is something that I frequently hammer into my students. It's a study strategy that I used in school, and it worked so well that it was natural for me to adapt the concept to my fiction. Here is what my version (RQW3R) means.

The first "R" stands for READ. Reading is, after all, the wellspring of most ideas in fiction. Direct experience is also necessary, but most of us who write fantasy, horror, or science fiction will be writing about things that we have not, and can not, directly experience. Reference books, novels, magazines, and newspapers can vicariously provide us with the experiences that we lack, and, indirectly, with the ideas that flow from those experiences. Many of my ideas come from reading nonfiction, and I'll give you some examples in the following paragraphs.

A few years ago I sold a long piece called "Haunting Place" to *Nether World*. It's about a man who kills his girlfriend while high on PCP, but who

has no memory of the act when the drug wears off. Later, the man suffers a head injury and develops epilepsy. Every time the seizures occur, he relives the murder. This story was based on a case study described by Dr. Oliver Sacks in his book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat*.

Another story of mine, "Machine Wash Warm; Tumble Dry," which sold to *Crossroads*, came from a newspaper piece about an odd murder, and "Roses and Thorns," which appeared in *Tales On The Twisted Side*, was stimulated by a magazine article on flower gardens. Now, I'm not a medical doctor or a murderer, and I've never even planted a rose bush, but that didn't matter because my reading provided me with the ideas and background information needed to tell the stories. Your reading will do the same for you.

If step 1 of the RQW3R method is reading, then step 2 is using that reading to generate further ideas, the kind that don't strike immediately after you put down a book or an article. This is where the "Q" comes in. The "Q" stands for QUESTION, and this is how it works for me. First, I select a scenario for myself. Second, I ask myself questions about that scenario. I might, for example, imagine myself walking down the street late one evening. I ask myself a question. What do I see? Well, I see houses, lights, cars, and—

But wait a minute. What do I see that no one else sees? What do I see that is different or odd? The questions force me to generate answers, which in turn lead to more questions. The resulting sequence might be something like the following:

**QUESTION:**

What do I see?  
What kind of shapes?  
What are they then?  
What are they doing?  
Why?

**ANSWER:**

I see two dark shapes.  
Well, they're not human.  
They're werewolves.  
One is chasing the other.

Suddenly I have a mystery, one that I generated myself and which I'm just a little curious about. Now I sit down to write that mystery out on paper, asking and answering more questions along the way. Pretty soon I have a story, one that I sold to *Nightscript* magazine.

This is also the technique that I used to create the story "Messiah," which appeared in *Dead of Night* magazine. I imagined myself at Jesus Christ's crucifixion and asked myself what I saw. I saw a vampire,

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# Reviews

## Planet of The Apes (The Original Television Series) DVD Box Set



\$36.60 @ DeepdiscountDVD.com  
Review by garrie keyman

### Camp Ape

Recalling a fondness for a show of my youth, it was with some surprise that I recently re-viewed it. While I anticipated a sour slice of unmitigated camp—the type of television you or I would be loath to admit we once liked—I was served, instead, a satisfying meal of mid-years science fiction. I say mid-years because it was not the dawn of televised Sci-Fi, as in the *Twilight Zone* or re-runs of movies like *The Blob* or *Day of the Triffids*, yet neither was it up-to-snuff with the digital special effects viewers anticipate today.

*Planet of the Apes*, the TV show, strayed from the movies launched by Charlton Heston's well-known character, Taylor; but not in any way that's bad. The series follows the escapades of a trio of pals whose bond of friendship is forged at first by common desperation, to wit, the need to stay alive, when, having been identified as enemies of the state, they are in perpetuity hunted by Chief Urko (aptly played by Mark Lenard, who immortalized the character Sarek on *Star Trek*).

The world, or rather time, into which astronauts Major Pete Burke, swimmingly played by —yowsa!—James Naughton (*The Cosby Mysteries*, *Faraday & Co.*) and Commander Alan Virдон, portrayed by Ron Harper (Garrison's Gorillas) find themselves cast is one of clearly defined social strata. Gorillas such as Urko are the brawn: the brutal if somewhat dimwitted police and local security. I'd be apt to cry stereotype had I not also once worn a badge—as the first female police officer in a certain Lancaster County, PA township which shall remain nameless. I had some hairy co-workers, but none of them were dumb.

Burke and Virдон are aided, then joined, by a sympathetic chimpanzee named Galen, keenly portrayed by Roddy McDowall, whose expressive eyes make you forget you're looking at layers of latex. Chimpanzees are the future-world think-tank (and you thought I was talking about now) where the third caste of ape, the orangutan, represents the political—the long-long-arm of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government. The head orangutan, Dr. Zaius (Shakespearean-trained actor, Booth Colman), and his cohorts, while not as lacking in sympathy as Gorillas, live in fear that Burke and Virдон

will infect the human slave/poverty-line-wage-earner population with the dangerous knowledge that man is no mere dolt—or at least wasn't always—and either by accident or deliberation incite revolt.

The union formed between Galen and the astronauts turns to genuine friendship as they travel, ever on the run and always a half-step ahead of Urko's troops. Determined to find a remnant of past technology that can interpret the data stored on his flight recorder, Virдон keeps the others moving, always hoping that, somehow, he'll find a way back to his wife and son.

If two's company and three's a crowd, remember that the interplay of the tertiary role can still work well. Think Kirk-Spock-McCoy, if you like. In that familiar trio we saw the inter-racial tension and potential for likable banter that can come of the odd-man-out-amid-peers character structure. In *Planet of the Apes* we have the same ingredients, but with a twist. This time, the odd-man-out is no man at all, and rather than inter-racial we have inter-species. But with both species being sentient, we are left with an apt framework in which to examine telling social issues without exactly picking on anyone.

In its short span, this show did not shirk when it came to addressing conflicts of the human condition. From the evil of slavery and the irreversibly sinister efficacy of mass weaponry, to the need for tolerance across the lines drawn in the sand, *Planet of the Apes* availed itself of the opportunity to comment meaningfully while remaining an imaginative and entertaining vehicle of potentially epic quality. It is only to our loss that this show did not clear the hurdles that CBS executives required of it, cut short of life—like so many decent shows are—in its prime.

I had the added perspective of viewing this show with my husband who is himself no die-hard fan of anything SF&F. Mike refers to my favored genre collectively as “men in tights,” whether or not the characters are, indeed, so clad. Burke and Virдон aren't, but that's not to say there is any lack of opportunity to view this fit pair in burlap breechwear or toiling shirtless beneath a punishing sun while lashed to leather leashes. Perhaps his impetus was merely to scope out the competition, knowing as he does that James Naughton was not only the heartthrob of my teenage years but a personal launch-point for one of the main characters of my own fantasy novel series, ‘The K'lahni Family Chronicles’. My husband did comment at one point that these fellas seem to sweat on a regular basis—that, or be soaking wet (I told him this was merely a theatrical device intended to infuse the program with a sense of realism and returned to panting at the screen). My point, likely all but entirely lost by now, is that despite his prevailing judgement of the genre at large, my husband liked the show. His observations were

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# Reviews

## Babylon 5 - Season One DVD Box Set (Six Disk Set)



Warner Home Video, 2002  
MSRP: \$99.98  
Review by Doug <!> Roper  
Six-disc set

For fans of the series, it has been a long time in coming, and quite a struggle at times, but our perseverance has paid off, as the Season One Box Set of Babylon 5 is well worth the wait. Containing all 22 episodes of the first season, titled "Signs and Portents," the set also includes two behind the scene documentaries, the original teaser advertisements for most of the episodes, an interactive tour of the station, and two commentaries by the Great Maker himself, series creator J. Michael Straczynski.

Babylon 5 was envisioned from the beginning as a single story, with a beginning, middle and end, and what began with the pilot ("The Gathering", see *The Illuminata's* October Edition for a partial review) is picked up in season one without missing a beat. The effort to introduce the characters and their world in the early episodes may seem a little heavy handed, but these early episodes are necessary, because later on there is very little time for exposition. Key episodes advance the characters and the plots of the Babylon 5 Universe along the series arc, taking television in a relatively new direction for American audiences.

Through episodes like "Soul Hunter," "And the Sky Full of Stars," and "Babylon Squared," the mystery around Commander Sinclair deepens, and connections to Minbari Ambassador Delenn are discovered, while the potential conflict between the Narn and Centauri powers grows in scope through episodes like "Midnight on the Firing Line," and "Chrysalis." Long running plots are established in these episodes as well, such as the presence of the Great Machine, Ambassador Mollari's dealings with the mysterious Mr. Morden, the enigma of Babylon 4, as well as a host of smaller puzzles.

Special mention should be made of the episodes, "Signs and Portents," "Babylon Squared," and "Chrysalis." These episodes are masterpieces of science fiction television, hurling the characters and the viewers headlong

into the deepest mysteries and most startling revelations of the series. Sadly, much is set up in the first season, but little is resolved, leaving us ravenous for more.

Now, on to some technical comments. The episodes are in a 1.78:1 wide screen presentation that features the anamorphic enhancement for 16:9 displays. Unfortunately, many of the original special effects shots were done in regular formatting schemes, and were digitally "stretched" into a widescreen format. For the nit-pickers with enormous screens and too much time on their hands, there is some fuzziness in these CGI shots, but the casual observer will not notice much in the way of decreased quality on these shots. The audio is clear and crisp, with good channel separation, and the film quality is sharp.

The extras, mentioned above, are a mixed bag for the fan of the show. The first documentary, hosted by Walter Koenig (Al Bester in Babylon 5), is around twenty minutes long and was produced for the beginning of the first season. It contains some interviews and a small amount of behind the scenes access to the early part of the show. The second documentary was created just for the DVD release, and runs around fifteen minutes, showcasing some interviews with select cast members and members of the production team. The real gems are the two commentary tracks by Straczynski. He speaks on the two most powerful episodes of the season, "Signs and Portents," and "Chrysalis." His commentary never wanders off topic and is informative and interesting, even to a occasional viewer of the show. Straczynski covers all aspects of the show's writing, production and shooting, demonstrating his incredible passion and unwavering vision. Fans of the show will be left wanting more, but will have to wait until the next release for any new insights from Straczynski.

On the whole, I would heartily recommend this series to any fan of good science fiction, as well as anyone who enjoys good television. Fans of the series have been out in force to support the release, but the appeal of Babylon 5 goes beyond genre television. It's a great story, and it finally has a great format for display. In closing I'd like to offer more good news (since fans of the series who have followed it from the beginning are so used to bad news): Season Two "The Coming of Shadows," should be available in late April or early May of 2003, and will feature 4 commentaries (though only three will be by Straczynski). Look for a review here as soon as I can get my hands on it.

# Reviews

## The Shadow Rising (Wheel of Time, 4) Robert Jordan



Tor, Oct 1993  
\$7.99, Mass Market, 1006 pages  
ISBN: 0812513738

This, the fourth book in Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, picks up right where *The Dragon Reborn*, leaves off. Rand holds Callandor, the Sword That Can Not Be Touched, offering conclusive proof that he is, indeed, the Dragon. The Stone of Tear has fallen, and Tear had become the first nation to bow to the Dragon.

But the High Lords do not intend to relinquish their power easily. On the surface, they pretend to serve, but behind Rand's back, they plot and scheme to reclaim their places as Tear's governing power. Foreseeing these troubles with all the nations of man, who have dreaded the Dragon's return for millennia, Rand devises a bold plan, a plan that will win him an army of loyal warriors, and keep him one step ahead of his growing list of enemies.

*The Shadow Rising* continues Jordan's tradition of powerful epic fantasy. The main protagonists are again separated—once more into three groups—and the prose is divided almost evenly between each storyline. The focus of the book, however, does slightly favor Rand, whose party—which includes Mat, Egwene, Moiraine, and Lan—travels go to the Aiel Waste, where Rand plans to visit the forbidden city of Rhuidean.

Meanwhile, across the Spine of the World, Nynaeve and Elayne are once again seeking the Black Ajah—Aes Sedai who use their powers to aid the Dark One. At the request of Rand and Moiraine, they are accompanied by Juilin Sandar, a thief-taker; and Thom Merrilin, the gleeman who is much more than he appears. Their adventures takes them to Tanchico, a nation on the verge of chaos, where they must battle both the Black Ajah and one of the Forsaken for a control of an object capable of controlling Rand, of bending him to the Shadow.

### Planet of The Apes (con't)

that not only could he not see why this show did not last longer, but that he could easily see it airing today.

At an hour per episode, the series was comfortably paced with ample time to develop character as well as plot, which to my mind is a crucial characteristic of success. We get to know the players. We know their stats: Virndon the optomist, raised farm boy; Burke the sardonic street-brat of Jersey City who played running-back with Michigan State, pitched no-hitter baseball in high school and

And in the Two Rivers, trouble stirs. The Whitecloaks have come, searching for Rand al'Thor and a man with golden eyes, a man that runs with wolves. Acting on orders from Pedron Niall, their Lord Captain Commander, the Whitecloaks harass the villagers, seeking Darkfriends and turning once-close neighbors into enemies. Fueling their suspicions is the presence of Shadowspawn in the Two Rivers, Trollocs and worse, that are raiding farms under the command of a mysterious figure, Isam.

Into this comes Perrin and his small band of companions. Fighting the pull of ta'veren, Perrin has returned home to save his people from both the Whitecloaks and the Shadowspawn. He is willing to sacrifice anything—his life included—to see them set free.

For the fourth time in a row, Jordan has written a story compelling from beginning to end. Though the prose does drag from time to time, the wordy descriptions often conceal clues to other happenings, and to plot lines as-yet-unrevealed. The suspense builds throughout the novel, leading to a dramatic three-part climax and an ending that, while perhaps not surprising, makes the reader feel that perhaps the forces of good actually have a chance against the Dark One's evil.

Unfortunately, this book does foreshadow some of the problems that plague Jordan's later works. The vivid detail, memorable places, and list of 'important' tertiary characters continues to expand, and Jordan feels compelled to keep us abreast of everyone's activities. More chapters are devoted to the actions of minor players, which, though making the story more complete and believable, takes valuable space from the main characters and unintentionally detracts from the flow of the overall story. At times, the descriptions and analogies used seem inappropriate, odd or accidentally comical.

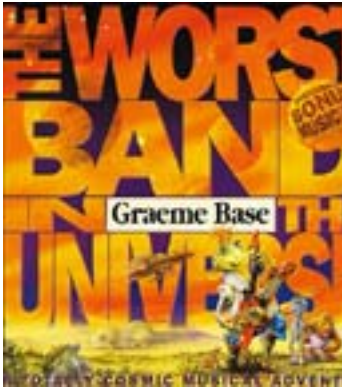
Despite these minor complaints, *The Shadow Rising* is a sound addition to the series, and a fine work of epic fantasy. It leaves the reader waiting anxiously for book five.

laments he should have bought that cozy corner bar instead of aspiring to the stars.

*Planet of the Apes* is family fare and food for budding minds if you want your kids to develop a rudimentary social consciousness when watching TV rather than just be anesthetized by grotesque aliens and gore. I know, because a new generation in my house has gotten hooked. Sorry Mike.

# Reviews

## The Worst Band In The Universe Graeme Base



Penguin Books, 1999  
\$19.95, Hardcover, 48pages  
ISBN: 0-8109-3998-3  
Review by garrie keyman

*A Mind You'll Want to Meld With*

Every age has its idiosyncratic vernacular. If I spoke of multi-tasking, for instance, you would know what I meant. Allow me to introduce you to the Master Multi-tasker, Graeme Base: author, poet, artist, cartoonist, social commentator, musician and all-around madcap hyper-dimensional entity (his term). This, folks, is a mind you'll want to meld with: a veritable Dr. Seuss in hyperspace.

Billed on its eye-catching jacket as a "totally cosmic musical adventure," *The Worst Band in the Universe* is all that, and more. In a pithy sure-footed poetry, Base introduces us to Sprocc, a thirteen(standard)-year-old member of the Blippian Tribe who, along with his instrument of choice –the Splingtwangerdars –dares to defy the mandates of the Musical Inquisitor. Sprocc's crime is innovation, for which he is banished to Wastedump B19 after his band is named winner of the bogus Annual Worst Band in the Universe Contest advertising as first prize an all-expense-paid trip to Alpha 10.

On B19 Sprocc meets, among others, Skat, self-proclaimed overseer of the Wastedump and former recipient of the Worst Band in the Universe one-way-ticket to paradise lost. Skat rules since he alone can hold the indigenous flesh-devouring creepers, called Gulpers, at bay — by hammering ear-splitting chords on his PowerAxe. But all is not lost. Fellow exile, ButtonPusher, a member of the Midimoog Tribe (proficient on all bU.Mff compatible keydevices and associated NrD electro-sonicware) holds a B.S. in SonicEngineering from the University of GalSec14. ButtonPusher turns out to be a bit of an innovator, himself, having drawn up schematics for a *ship that sails on song*.

Sprocc, disappointed when Skat refuses to join in the scheme to escape, lifts off on F sharp and returns to Blipp in time to witness the Musical Inquisitor declare all Tuneful Worlds bereft of moral principles and declare himself Ruler of the Universe. Sprocc interrupts with a slap of the musical gauntlet: *A triple-octave mega-riff with whammy bar and feeling*. Called on by the Eldest One to reply, The Musical Inquisitor reveals himself devoid of talent and unable to play a chord. Revealed a fraud, this Hard Rock answer to Darth Vader declares war, unleashing the unthinkable: a universally-broadcast numbing flood of drivel Base calls *Random-Access-Digi-Drone*.

The mindless monotonous noise fells the crowd and incapacitates Sprocc as he tries to respond to the assault with his Splingtwanger before being overcome and slumping against the speaker stacks. Who will save the day? Does Artoo appear secretly housing plans that can be used to destroy the Death Star? No! It is Skat, inspired by and following on the heels of Sprocc, arriving in another *ship that sails on sound*.

As a homeschooling mom with a poetry-loving nine-year-old learning to play electric guitar, *The Worst Band in the Universe* struck gold. And talk about building vocabulary. It comes as no surprise that Base is the father of three. His picture on the inside flap calls to mind a sort of down-under Dave Berry-Dana Carvey contemporary. Other works by Base include *Animalia*, *The Eleventh Hour*, *The Sign of the Seahorse* and *The Discovery of Dragons*.

Base, who refers to his books as "paper/ink/glue composite products for small Earthlings," rounds out this keeper with a music CD of his own – selections from The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Worst Band in the Universe Competition, including titles like, *Let's Go Back to the Big Bang*, by the Omnivores; *Planetfall*, by The Mesh; and *W.Y.S.I.W.Y.G.* (What You See Is What You Get).

I strongly suspect if Spock would have melded with this mind, his icy Vulcan exterior would have cracked. I know mine did. Now I'm *froozled in the head*.

# Sci-Fi Buzz

## Movie Releases

Daredevil - February 14th

## DVD Releases

### February 4<sup>th</sup>

Stargate SG-1 2<sup>nd</sup> season v.1

Red Planet

Lost Souls

The Rats

Deep Blue Sea

Fallen

### Feb 11<sup>th</sup>

Daredevil vs Spider-man

X-Men 1.5 (Criterion Edition)

### Feb 18<sup>th</sup>

Invasion

Meteor Man

Metropolis

I Eat Your Skin

Frank Herbert's Dune

### Feb 25<sup>th</sup>

Farscape Season 2 v.5

Star Trek: Deep Space 9 Season 1

Red Dwarf Season 1

Red Dwarf Season 2

Have an event you want mentioned in The Illuminata?

E-mail us at: [Illuminata@TyrannosaurusPress.com](mailto:Illuminata@TyrannosaurusPress.com)

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## Tyrannosaurus Press Original Fiction

*The Illuminata* is proud to debut its first pieces of original fiction. Special thanks to garrie keyman for her kind donation of the poem, 'Quantum Coven'. Not to be outdone, I searched my own archives and found one of my old pieces, 'The Oath', which I hope you enjoy. In coming editions, we hope to see this section grow, and we encourage all aspiring writers to submit their SF&F short stories and poems.

### QUANTUM COVEN

by garrie keyman

death was becoming

countless numerators --

a quantum coven of atoms dancing --

splitting from their common denominator

to journey onward

the stagnant waiting

wrapped in creature comforts

had passed,

a brief pause

between

travels

and death was again becoming

under weigh

under whim

under the wheeling stars

and the cantilevered dropcloth

of The Artist calling,

be!

come!

### The Oath

by Bret Funk

When lightnings flash and thunder booms,

When bandaged mummies flee their tombs,

And Pharoah's Curse descends on you,

You will not stand alone.

If wizards dressed in midnight robes,

Chant mystic spells from ancient tomes,

Or monsters call your closet home,

You will not stand alone.

Should Odin call for Ragnarok,

Or monsters spring up from the loch,

And all the others run from shock,

You will not stand alone.

Against dragon fire and orcish horde,

Against axe or spear or bow or sword,

Or when Charon beckons you to board,

You will not stand alone.

To fight the Gods with you I've sworn,

And threats both man and magic born,

But just once should you a woman scorn,

Then, friend, you're on your own!

## RPG Corner (con't)

fantasy maps and terrain from scratch. The top three programs seem to be Computer Cartographer 2 (profantasy.com), Fractal Mapper v 6.0 (nbos.com/products/mapper/mapper.htm), and finally, AutoREALM (gryc.ws/autorealm.htm). Of the three, only AutoREALM is shareware. I've tinkered with the Fractal Terrain Generator add-on for Computer Cartographer 2, but have had no experience with the other programs. There are many who have, however, and for a review of Fractal Mapper v 6.0, check this out: ([http://www.rpg.net/news+reviews/reviews/rev\\_5889.html](http://www.rpg.net/news+reviews/reviews/rev_5889.html)).

The digital map creators can create detailed maps and whole worlds with a few keystrokes. The fractal terrain generators can take a map of the entire world and zoom in all the way to the layout of a backyard vegetable garden. There are also packages for creating maps of town and homes, and even dungeons and caves.

These tools are great for the GM who has great ideas and not much time, and a decent piece of hardware. Some of the interfaces require some getting used to, but on average the commands are easy to execute. The only problem I foresee with using this format is getting a hardcopy of a map for the players to look at. Unless you have an inside track at the Laserjet Ink factory, printing out the maps can get expensive.

## Contour Map Adjustment

This method was first introduced to me by a friend of mine, Dr. Charles Wellington, and has since become my preferred method of creating fantasy maps and terrain. It takes a little more time, and a little more patience, but I think that the results are better, and more versatile. This method I will discuss in more depth than the others, since it is the area that I have the most experience in.

In order to be able to do any of this, you have to start with a good set of contour maps (contour maps are maps that show elevation by a series of lines). These are surprisingly hard to find, unless you order them from the US Geologic Survey. I have found an alternative to shelling out the money, a wonderful website called [topozone.com](http://topozone.com). It has contour maps of every inch of the United States, at varying scales. For my example,

I picked a map of some terrain in West Virginia. (See Fig. 1) Ideally, all of this is done with pencil and paper. I have done the examples here in Photoshop, and found that I prefer having the actual papers in front of me. Call me old fashioned.

The first thing you should do is look at the map and find the lowest elevation. From that elevation flood the

map say 500 feet. The depth of the water doesn't really matter. If you don't have enough land, flood it less, and if you have too much, flood another elevation level or two. This creates a brand new coastline, and hence brand new terrain. Alternatively, if you want an exceedingly dry world, you may want to get a contour map that also features ocean depths, and lower the water level by so many feet. This will create a world with smaller oceans, and a lot more land area. In my example piece, I found a pleasing coastline shape I wanted, and adjusted the water level to give me that shape. (See Fig. 2) You don't need to color over all of the unused space, I just did so in my example to make it easier to see. I wouldn't recommend writing at all on any of your maps, since they can be used over and over again, and they may be a little expensive if you purchase them. I highlighted the contour lines on the original map to make them easier to see. (Fig. 3)

This can be done at any scale, but keep in mind that the larger the area, the less detailed the elevation. For example, if you had an elevation map of the entire United States, chances are each contour level would be 500 feet of elevation, maybe even 1000 feet, as opposed to my example piece, which had 100 foot elevation lines. That's fine if you want to flood the whole continent, but once you begin to expand the scale to show more detail, you may have to fill in the intermediate elevations yourself. Smaller maps, such as the one from which I took my example piece, have contour lines at every 100 feet of elevation, meaning that I can increase or decrease the scale of the terrain as much as I want. In general, though, if you increase the scale of the horizontal plane, you also need to increase the scale of the vertical plane, otherwise you end up with pretty flat land.

Con't on page 13



### RPG Corner (con't)

It sounds like I'm advocating smaller to medium sized scales to start with, so how does that fit into my top-down method for creating terrain? If I'm starting small, don't I have to get bigger to expand my world? Well, in taking the smaller scale maps, I have access to a lot more elevation lines, making expansion of the vertical scale easier. I just expand the horizontal scale until I get a land mass that I think is the right size. From there I zoom into the part of the bigger map that I want to detail, so if I were using this example piece, it would be part of a much larger map. I would create much larger maps than the one I am using in my example were I actually designing a new game. A GM should at least have a map (at some scale) of the entire region where his game will be taking place.

Once the new coastline is in place, lay a sheet of paper over the map, and trace all of the remaining contour lines onto that clean piece of paper. (Fig. 4) This will give you a good map template to use for a variety of things. Copies of this sheet are very important. At this point, you are also ready to take your two-dimensional map and turn it into a three-dimensional model of your terrain. This isn't necessary, unless you enjoy doing model scenery (as I do), and want to have something to show your players. Look for a how-to on terrain model-making later in the series of columns.

Adding color to each level of elevation makes the map much easier to read, and a whole lot prettier. (Fig. 5)

Now that you have the finished contour map of your new terrain, you have to decide on the scale for it. Will the selected piece be a narrow peninsula, the bottom half of an island, or will it be a huge landmass with a frightening peak? You also have to decide on where the forests lie, where people are living, what animals are about and so on.

These details will be discussed in next month's column. For now you should have a good starting place on deciding what kind of maps you want, and how to get them.



### RQW3R (con't)

and that led to "Messiah," and to a several other projects as well, all of which sold to the anthology series *Prisoners of the Night*.

So, my strategy for coming up with ideas is to ask myself questions, bizarre questions, silly questions, all kinds of questions. Some of my answers—perhaps even most of them—go nowhere. But some of them take me to stories that curiosity demands that I tell. And there are a million questions. What if it began to rain inside my house? What if my son is really an alien being? (The latter has been answered in the affirmative.) What if I had been born rich instead of so good looking?

The last two components of RQW3R to be dealt with are "W" and "3R." The "W" stands for WRITE, and it always helps me if I start writing before I know the answers to all the questions. At least for me, part of the real fun of writing a story is finding out how it ends. The "3R" stands for REWRITE, REWRITE, REWRITE. Whoever said that "Writing is really rewriting" knew a lot about the craft. In fact, three drafts is a bare minimum for me. I usually have to do many more.

Well, it's time for me to close now. I just thought of a question that desperately needs answering, and I hope you'll excuse me while I go work on it.

QUERY: What would happen if a struggling young writer were to kidnap a rich New York publisher and demand a book contract instead of a ransom? Now there's an idea.

### Future Fashion (con't)

The uniforms for the Romulan women in the world of *Star Trek* are polarized. The one time viewers saw a female Romulan Captain in the original series, the uniform was stately, but it also accentuated her figure. Contrasting this is the use of outrageous shoulder pads in TNG. The overdone style keeps the air of authority vibrant. In contrast, TNG's Counselor Troi's short, mid-calf skirt/dress with boot-pants underneath uniform caught our attention, but differently. Her uniform tended to be more casual, letting the personality of the wearer maintain an 'air of authority' while still keeping the conforming style of other officers. She needed no padding.

### Fighting Attire

*Captain Power*' 'Pilot' had a power suit that gave her plenty of coverage, but defied logic. Her power suit, with a limited force shield had a projecting, though rounded, breastplate, extending inches from her real chest (at the wrong angle they would be tempting targets). In an attempt to make her character distinguishable from the male Captain Power team members, the production staff made a caricature. We needed gender specific armor as well? The *Power Rangers*' suits are the opposite, in that other than the typically boy/girl colors, they pretty much look alike (except, perhaps, to the young, who know every Poke'man card and character by heart but forget how to multiply). One last entry into the fighting attire arena must be the Klingon women, who wear a type of armor and yet, curiously, provide bull's-eyes for their enemies. Could it be that a designer from *Star Trek* defected to the *Captain Power* camp?

Part III will examine men's wear in the future, and in Part IV-a look at Accessories and Essentials in the future. As for the well dressed futuristic woman? Keep in mind that Ferengi women are 'shamelessly' clothed if they wear anything!

"One obstacle to adulthood needs to be solved immediately: We must learn not just to accept differences between ourselves and our ideas, but to enthusiastically welcome and enjoy them. Diversity contains as many treasures as those waiting for us on other worlds. We will find it impossible to fear diversity and to enter the future at the same time."

-Gene Roddenberry

### Crossovers (con't)

Directors, just like actors, need to be selected, not based on their past successes, but on their suitability for the role. No one would expect Scorsese to tackle the intricacies of Middle Earth, or even the more familiar playground of Spider-Man (*that*, at least, takes place in New York!). Similarly, a wise producer would never ask Woody Allen to direct Superman or expect Kubrick to produce an action-packed rendition of... well, of anything. (Though he might have been an ideal choice for the epic sandscapes of *Dune*). On the other side of the coin, Burton's dark mind was a perfect choice to direct in Gotham City; coupled to an excellent casting job, he made 1989's *Batman* a classic in crossover entertainment.

There is, however, one more element crucial to making a successful crossover, one not always considered but even more important than choosing the right player for the part: selecting someone with a personal interest in the franchise. Rumor has it that Sam Raimi—a Spider-Man fan since his youth—practically begged for the chance to direct the movie. It payed off: Spider-Man was another excellent crossover film. And without Peter Jackson's deep love of *The Lord of the Rings*, who can say how butchered the final product would have been (though it might have clocked in at under nine hours!).

Directors with a personal stake are more willing to take risks, too, such as casting a virtually unknown actor because he's right for a role. Hugh Jackman can thank Bryan Singer for his fame; if Singer hadn't thought him perfect for the role of Wolverine, he'd still be in Australia making films like *Paperback Hero*.

Finally, adapting a novel or comic book superhero into a two- to three-hour movie (if we're lucky!) is not an easy feat; some aspects of the story will have to hit the cutting room floor. A director familiar with the story knows which elements are essential, and which can be lifted out without destroying the gestalt. Even more importantly, a committed director will go to bat for the story, facing down producers, writers, and God Himself to protect the integrity of his vision.

After all, if they didn't, how could they look in the mirror and call themselves fans?