

# The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into the Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

## Hero Worship: America as Spider-man

by **Bret Funk**

America loves to be the hero. Ever since throwing off the shackles of British oppression (with no insult intended toward our long-time British allies) America has been trying to save the world, one country at a time. It loans money, donates food, provides medicine, and even goes to war on the behalf of beleaguered innocents and subjugated peoples. Instead of annexing and exploiting the countries it fights, America has a history of rebuilding its one-time foes, turning them—in a generation or two—into strong economic powers and relatively supportive friends.

Americans have a desire—an ingrained need!—to be on the right side. Not necessarily the winning side, but the *right* side. We seek moral justification for the wars we fight, we demand those justifications when they are not readily apparent, and those who oppose an action quickly, and loudly, voice their opinions, trying to steer the country in the 'right' direction. At various times throughout our history, we have been likened to valiant crusaders,

brash cowboys, and noble-yet-uncouth roughnecks. A few sensitive souls may view these barbed compliments contemptuously, but many Americans encourage them. They help to define us; they enable us to see ourselves the way we want to be seen—as the good guys.

Yet America's not just a power; it's a Superpower. So why should it strive to be considered a hero when it could be likened to a *superhero*?

But which one? There are many to choose from, each with a unique history, power, and style. Comparing America to any one (with the possible excep-

tion of Captain America) is a daunting task. It was a quandary I mulled over until, in a pre-war speech justifying the military buildup around Iraq, I heard a CNN correspondent say, "We are a great power, and with great power comes great responsibility." Those words made it seem so obvious.

America is Spider-man.

At just over two and a quarter centuries old, America is a young nation, not unlike mild-mannered Peter Parker, who at the start of the comic series is still in high school. New York City, as Parker's home and America's heart, is central to both. If one were cataloging defining characteristics, sarcastic wit would top each list, and both appear to have a fondness for the colors blue and red. Additionally, both Parker and America share a love of science and innovation, and both benefit from a strong support base (in Parker's case, the love of his aunt and uncle; in America's, the founding ideals of equality and freedom derived from the works of John Locke). Innocent in the ways of the world, and often picked on by the older students, Parker is comparable to turn of the century America: introverted, physically unimposing, and often ignored.

Then, like the bite of a radioactive spider, came World War I, and at its conclusion, America was different. Stronger. More confident. But lacking in direction. When Parker first acquired his spider-like abilities, he did not immediately join the forces of good. Instead, he did what any right-minded teenager would do: he exploited his powers for financial gain. During the 'Roaring Twenties,' America experienced a similar period of carefree exuberance, wasting the gift that it had been given.

For Parker, the crucial turning point came with the death of his beloved Uncle Henry. After letting a would-be thief escape because "it wasn't his problem" a mortified Parker learned that the very same man was responsible for his uncle's murder. Enraged and guilt-ridden, Parker donned his wrestling uniform and began his life as Spider-man, using his powers to protect those less fortunate than himself.

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# The RPG Corner (v.2.6): Generating Histories

Doug >|< Roper of Epic Gaming

Last time, we looked at the basic considerations for creating people in a fantasy game setting. One of those was the need to create some kind of historical background for whatever particular group of people you are designing. To do that, I've developed a quick system for randomly generating that history. The history will be what I call non-specific, meaning that you will know about the events and who was involved, but the reasons and any details (such as names and exact dates) will not be determined. Once you have some history laid down, you may choose to invent specifics where you feel they are needed. I recommend doing this because it makes the history richer, and makes it more personal and memorable to the GameMaster. It also helps to come up with names for the really big events, such as wars, since heroes and legends often emerge from them. The things can be worked into the fabric of the local culture.

To use it, we'll need a quick word on dice. Dice are available from most hobby or gaming stores, sometimes coming in a bundle with other dice, and sometimes as singles. When referring to a die, it is generally understood the D means die. A number after that D indicates how many sides are on the die (Ex: D6 for a six-sided die, D10 for a ten-sider) and a number before the D indicates how many of the dice should be rolled (Ex: 3D6 means roll three six-sided dice). For this system you will only need two ten-sided dice (2D10) of differing color. Using them, we roll percentages. One die (lets say a red one) represents the tens place, while the other, which is blue, represents the ones place. So on a roll where Red = 5 and Blue = 2, our percentage is 52. If the tens place is 0 (the 0 represents "10" on the die) it is understood that you have rolled between 1 and 9. If both dice show 0, that's understood to be 100.

Right, so now that we can randomly roll between 1 and 100, we're ready to start making history, so to speak.

## Non-Specific History Generation

1. Pick a Date to begin the History
2. Decide on a Period in which Events can Occur
3. Generate a Number of Events for that Period
4. Pick a Date to Begin
5. Pick a Duration for the Event
6. Decide on an Instigating Party
7. Decide on an Opposing Party
8. Select a Nature of Event, then a Specific Event
9. Select and Outcome
10. Determine the Public Opinion on the Event

Steps 4 through 10 should be repeated for each Event in the current Period.

The Starting Date for your history can be as arbitrary or as meaningful as you like, but it should afford you enough time to get some good events into the books before the date you select for your start. As I mentioned in last month's column, the time span you cover should reflect the individual needs of your game.

## Period of Events

You should decide how busy you would like your population to be. By that I mean you need to decide on how many events you would like to see in a given time period. The basic unit for measuring history in my system will be the Generation, or 20 years. However, if you want the history to unfold at a slower pace, then you can increase that number to 30 or 40, or whatever you heart desires. However, increasing this measurement will mean that you will have to tweak the starting dates for each event.

## Number of Events

This is easy. Take a single ten-sided die and roll it.

<u>Die Roll</u>	<u>Number of Events</u>
1, 2	0
3, 4	1
5, 6	2
7, 8	3
9, 0	4

## Beginning Date

Roll 2D10, and add the results. Take this number and add it to the date on which your Period of Events begins. Viola!

## Duration

The length of time that the given Event takes to run its course is decided by rolling 1D10. This number may need to be increased, especially if you have settled on using a longer Period than the 20 year increment. For 30 year and longer periods, I'd suggest 2D10. I wouldn't recommend making the duration much longer than that, as twenty years is a really long time to be doing any one thing, even for the most committed group of people. Events that would be of sufficient worthiness to be recorded in fledgling histories should be brief, and powerful. Extended durations have a way of lessening the impact of even tremendous historical events.

## Instigating / Opposing Parties

Here is where I must unfortunately begin to include tables. There just isn't any other way I can think of to do this, and though my editor will hate me for it, here

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## Alas, Poor Motherless Child

In *O Pioneers* Willa Cather wrote, "There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before<sup>1</sup>;" which is to say that all stories are journeys traveling upon the common undercarriage of recognizable archetypes. One of the best known writers on the topic of archetypes was Joseph Campbell, whose explorations of the meaning and power of mythic structures continue to be as applicable in explaining our enduring love of classic tales as they are capable of explaining the storytelling successes of popular modern icons such as Lucas or Spielberg.

This, my personal examination of ten major archetypes of fantasy (and other good) writing will be just that – personal. I'll confess that while I am aware of Campbell's work I have not read it, meaning my own exploration will (as it should) differ from his. Let's begin with a look at the protagonist, an archetype Campbell called *hero*, but more specifically a category of protagonist I am going to call *The Waif*. Although by no means a universal given, protagonists – especially those in coming-of-age stories – frequently fall with the parameters of this character-type.

The American Collegiate Dictionary defines a waif as: 1. a person without home or friends, esp. a child; 2. a stray thing or article; 3. something found of which the owner is not known. For our purpose I am going to use the term a bit more liberally. In our discussion of archetypes, *The Waif* will denote not only characters that have been separated – by whatever means – from at least one of their biological parents (by definition: an orphan), but also those characters who might be better off if indeed they *had* been (the abused and/or neglected). A little later on, we will broaden this definition a bit more to include yet another sub-classification of *Waif*, but for now let's look at some examples as defined above.

Those that come to my mind will no doubt differ from yours. Let's compare. Immediately Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* occur to me. So, how about *Luke, Leia* – even *Anakin – Skywalker*? There's Lucy Maud Montgomery's familiar and loveable *Anne Shirley* from her *Anne of Green Gables* series, Dicken's *Oliver Twist*, and yes, even J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*. Closer to home, we can hardly overlook our own Bret M. Funk's *Jeran Odara*

and *Dahr* from his *Boundary's Fall* series, nor my own (while I'm pointing fingers I might as well step up to the plate) *Rahben K'lahni* and *Janel Solus* from *The Secret of Sharada Nye*. Of course, we don't have to stop there. You might be thinking *Heidi*, *Little Orphan Annie*, *Pippi Longstocking* – even the Von Trapp kids (all seven) in *The Sound of Music*.

The task, then, of establishing *The Waif* as a legitimate archetype seems less burdensome that does dissecting the cause for this type of protagonist's overwhelming popularity. Before we begin doing so, let's go back and expand our definition somewhat. As I mentioned earlier, *The Waif* character-type tends to be more easily recognized in coming-of-age tales; however, *Waif*-like pasts of grown protagonists, while not as immediately apparent, are often every bit as central to their character. The backstory, which reveals a grown character's *Waifdom* – if you will – slowly sifts into our understanding of that character's persona as the story unfolds. Examples can be drawn anywhere from Sci-fi to Westerns: think Warf of *StarTrek: The Next Generation* fame, or those Cartwright boys from *Bonanza*.

It is here that I wish to add that sub-category touched upon earlier, a category of *Waif* we'll call "someone suffering from *The Blends*." A character suffering from *The Blends* – such as Spock (*StarTrek*) – is one of mixed blood and typically accepted by neither parent's race; an individual thereby thrust into the role of social rather than biological outcast. Then again, the character might possess a pureblood origin but is being raised by foster or adoptive parent(s) of an entirely different race (Superman, Warf, Dahr, Mowgli, Moses).

## I Stink Therefore I Am

What, then, is the draw of *The Waif* and why does this brand of character hold sway over our hearts? A friend of mine who is a producer and a budding screenwriter suggested a need to give characters something against which to struggle; the baggage, so to speak, that they're carrying when they walk onto the scene. And yet family status is rarely, if ever, the crux of a character's tale; being an orphan is not central to their *quest* so much as it is simply a mantle adorning the character *en route*. Being *The Waif*, then, is not the mountain a character must climb in the course of the story, but rather the load they carry that makes the climb more perilous (and

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**I work with kids.** My day job keeps me in contact with the remarkable children in our public schools. Occasionally, there is a kid or a group that stands out—a different caliber. Usually, it is the higher, free-association thinking skills that impress me. I find this trait in people who enjoy science fiction. What amazed me was that I not only found kids and adults working together and enjoying the company of those a generation older (or younger) than they were, but that the topic centered on science fiction—not sports. And, it was practically in my own backyard! Northern Arizona has the best kept secret around.

What I found was a sci-fi club that catered to kids and adults on weekend evenings—sometimes going on until midnight. While other high school kids are out ‘partying’, this bunch squeezes into a classroom to talk. This can’t be! Kids...talking to *adults*? Learning from each other? Sharing ideas! I am about to challenge those tired idioms. After ensuring confidentiality, this club allowed me to interview them so I could find out why they continued to be such a draw year after year. (Student names have been changed.) Some members spend a lot of money on this interest. There were post-high school youths (below 21 years old) and adults as well as high school kids. There were groups within groups. I wanted to know why! What I learned surprised me, inspired me, and frankly, my common sense warning flags unfurled a few times.

**Demographics.** This club, open to the public, is going on their third year. The evening I came to interview them, sixteen members were present. I was told it usually averaged about twenty. Most members are still in high school. A few were recent graduates (last year or in December) or adults who love to talk about science fiction. Some of the school-aged members come from other schools in other school districts. Average age is nineteen, spanning from fourteen years old to a modest thirty-seven. Males outnumber females five to one. All planned to get a high school diploma (or had one) and the adults possessed varying levels of college education. There were no dropouts attending this group.

**To warm them up.** My first question to them was about the science fiction/sci-fi label controversy that our editor, Bret Funk, wrote about in *The Illuminata*

(November 2002). After a lull in the discussion, Dorrie Board, one of the school’s head teachers explained, “The term ‘sci-fi’ is *generational*. What I grew up with was a term that encompassed everything from *Lord of the Rings* to hard-core science fiction. But these kids know it as science fiction and fantasy and magic and a host of other things.” To this group, it was all sci-fi, and it was all ‘good’. If it branched off to science or fantasy, it was never mentioned, and yet everyone indicated by behavior or syntax that they knew the difference. They had never heard the term ‘high fantasy’ but once explained, added this term to the mix. These are very adaptable and eager people.

**My next question.** I asked what the ‘draw’ was that brought these kids and adults out every Friday night when many American youths were working at jobs or out on dates. The answers were varied and refreshingly candid. ‘This was cheaper,’ one confided over the din of voices while his girlfriend was distracted on developing her roll playing game character across the room. Some liked the sci-fi club enough to walk from their homes, often over a mile and sometimes two miles, because many have no transportation other than the biped kind. This is dedication! But I still did not get a definitive answer. Was it the instant social acceptance? Yes, that was a factor. Was it the chance for non-threatening creativity? Some thought so. Some, sadly, enjoyed getting away from their families because of conflict at home. A few answers made those flags fly. Here are some of their answers from the written survey:

...I have a big imagination.... Social interaction, shoot pretend things to alleviate tension.... a source of ‘color’, a creative well-spring of wonderful and horrible incantations that normally are beyond my reach.... The acting appeal and the ability to be whoever I want to be.... Faster play, entertainment.... It’s fun and gives me something to do.... X-Box is at home but role playing/board game is at school.... The fact that I can use my imagination and make worlds, heroes and have fun.... Alternate reality.... They are all my friends and peers.... Non-patronizing environment.... It helps with my anger problems and it’s a good interest that I was brought up on—mom’s a *Star Wars* fan.

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# Stories Without End OR Why Farscape's Timing Was Anything But Bad

by Erin Branham

Anyone who has been through 8<sup>th</sup> grade English class knows what makes a story – a beginning, middle and an end. Since Aristotle laid it out for us in *Poetics* a couple thousand years ago, it's been as simple as that. Ye Olde Bard preferred a five-act structure, adding rising action and falling action to the mix. Being as he's generally regarded as the greatest writer in the English language, well, let's just say his preferences had a little influence on following generations of authors. It's no wonder Shakespeare added some length to his plays. Back in the day there were only a few theatres instead of 155 channels, so people liked their stories a little longer then.

Or did they? I'm not sure even *War and Peace* takes longer to read than the 60 plus years of Superman publications. In terms of length, *Henry VI* (Parts I, II and III) doesn't hold a candle to Star Trek's over 500 hours. We like our stories real long these days – years long if possible. But how do our tales stack up according to basic story principles? Aristotle called episodic plots the worst possible kind, "in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence". Not that there weren't sequels in those days. Somewhere between 450 and 405 BC, Sophocles wrote the Oedipus cycle, *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus* - which makes you wonder if Sophocles was around today would he be busy working on *Oedipus, Episode I*?

Serials vaulted into the modern consciousness with Charles Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers*, a phenomenally popular novel published in monthly installments in 1836 and 1837. In fact, most of Dickens' books were originally published as serials. For this reason, Dickens's writing is pretty episodic – but he still had an end in mind. He still meets Aristotle's criteria that the acts proceed with necessary sequence, even if he does stretch things out a bit. (He got paid per installment). So he still had a place he was getting to – the classic climax, resolution and denouement. There's a reason we crave endings. In a great story, so conventional wisdom goes, there is something inevitable about an ending. When it happens, the audience leaves the story with the sense that it simply couldn't have happened any other way, that everything was leading to this, and no other, point. True episodic storytelling does not satisfy this requirement and you can't help but feel that something is missing.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has seemed given to episodes,

however, and somehow it seems tied up with speculative fiction. You might think this started with TV, the quintessential medium of the endingless story, but it happened far earlier. In 1900, Frank L. Baum created a sweet fantasy tale of a young girl magically whisked away to a land over the rainbow. Oz eventually spawned 14 books. In 1912 Edgar Rice Burroughs published the first installment of "Tarzan of the Apes – A Romance in the Jungle" in the October issue of *All-Story* magazine. By the time he was done, there were 25 Tarzan books (not to mention 11 Mars books and a couple of other series!) The works by both Baum and Burroughs were highly episodic in nature. Movie serials were immensely popular as introductory pieces before the main feature in the 1930s. These were tales with absolutely no intention of ever wrapping things up, and their content definitely tended to lean toward the fantastic. Comic books came along in the late 1930s, starting episodic fiction that may contain the longest running characters ever, and it seems significant that while comics once told tales in a number of genres, it's the fantasy ones that have survived and still inspire rabid loyalty. Radio, the first mass media, abounded with episodic entertainment, in all genres.

While every kind of story from drama to comedy has its share of serials, there is a particular relationship between serials and speculative fiction that seems to spawn a hunger for stories without end. Perhaps it is the fierce loyalty of the fans who show no desire for an ending, in fact preferring things to continue forever and ever in one form or another, with movies spawning books, tv series spawning movies, and on and on. In science fiction and fantasy fandom, the great raging debate is between those who prefer episodes and those who prefer arc-based storytelling, whether the medium is print or film. There are vicious internet fights over which is the superior form of story, or whether one is really superior or at all, or just a matter of personal preference. In the realm of television, fans make a good case for overall storytelling quality rising somewhat higher in arc-based stories, but this is countered by the fact that episode driven series end up being more practical. Personally, I've tried to join some arc-based series in the middle and never could quite catch up. The general model for this is *Star Trek: The Next Generation* versus *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. TNG was by far the most popular Trek series ever. DS9 on

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# The Writer's Block: To The Point

by Charles Gramlich

## I. STAND OUT STORIES

**Write Short:** Most markets will buy two 2,500 word stories over one of 5,000 words. Short story readers want quick reads and lots of them. Editors cram their pages with as many stories as possible.

**Write Genre:** It's easier to sell genre stories than literary ones. Surprising editors is easier. Take, "boy meets girl." Genre writers can add boy meets monster, boy meets alien, boy meets machine, boy desperately wants to meet girl, any girl. "Surprise" sells.

**Rewrite:** (The most important rule) Rewrite until you hate it; rewrite rejected pieces again.

**Resources:** You need a dictionary, thesaurus and grammar guides (See Bibliography). The internet is great but don't blindly accept facts you find there. Remember library cards and encyclopedias.

## II. GETTING ATTENTION

**Contact:** Contact editors (letter or e-mail, not phone) and request "Guidelines," the best help—outside the publication itself—on cracking a market. Researching a publication impresses editors. Search for internet samples and guidelines. Sign guestbooks to show you visited.

**Professionalism:** Follow guidelines. Send brief cover letters but don't summarize plots. Mention previous sales if you have any; don't apologize if you don't. Use dark print, white paper. Put your contact information (name, address, phone number, and e-mail address) at top left of page one, and word counts at top right. Put page #s, partial titles (headers), and last name on each page. Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) for editors to use.

For online submissions you may not need page #s, page headers, or an SASE, but you still need the contact information, the cover letter, and the professionalism. Don't let the casual nature of so much online communication lull you into thinking casualness is always acceptable. Be safe rather than sorry.

**Use Market Guides:** Book guides compile large lists (*Writer's Market*, *Novel and Short Story Writer's Market*, at *Writer's Digest*, [www.writersdigest.com](http://www.writersdigest.com))

Newsletters report fewer markets but update frequently (*The Gila Queen's Guide to Markets* <http://www.gilaqueen.com>, and *Scavenger's Newsletter* <http://66.39.35.131/scavengers>.) Don't forget the internet as a source for market information.

## III. SURVIVE

**Persevere:** Rejections hurt. So wallow in self-pity, but then write. Don't quit.

**Money:** Forget it. It's nice to get paid but you won't make a living at first. Few writers get rich. Keep getting better. The money will come. Good luck.

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Strunk & White. *The elements of style.*

## Worlds of SF Quiz

Science fiction writers have created many exotic worlds. Below are just a few. Can you match the authors on the left with the worlds they invented on the right? Twelve or more correct means you've placed a colony on the moon. Eight to eleven correct means you've made it to orbit around the moon but it's not yet time for "one small step." Four to seven correct means you didn't quite make escape velocity. Below four? Have you invented rockets yet?

- |                                 |             |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Frank Herbert _____          | Flatland    |
| 2. Poul Anderson _____          | Neweden     |
| 3. James P. Hogan _____         | Azlaroc     |
| 4. Arthur C. Clarke _____       | Pern        |
| 5. Gordon R. Dickson _____      | Mirkheim    |
| 6. Stephen Leigh _____          | Kithrup     |
| 7. David Brin _____             | Rama        |
| 8. Fred Saberhagen _____        | Darkover    |
| 9. Anne McCaffrey _____         | Winter      |
| 10. H. Beam Piper _____         | Arrakis     |
| 11. Albert Augustus, Jr. ____   | Dorsai      |
| 12. Ursula K. Le Guin _____     | Minerva     |
| 13. Dan Simmons _____           | Lomooro     |
| 14. Marion Zimmer Bradley _____ | Zarathustra |
| 15. Edwin A. Abbott _____       | Hyperion    |

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# Reviews

## Signs

Mel Gibson, Joaquin Phoenix



Review by garrie keyman

**Six sure signs your husband will fall asleep watching the DVD you just bought**

- 1) It's a Sci-fi film set in Pennsylvania.
- 2) The name of the writer/director is better than the characters'.
- 3) It's a story set around poor motherless children.  
(Go ahead, read my column!)
- 4) The top performances are given by the supporting cast.
- 5) Your husband can compare the film to "The X-files meets Little House on the Prairie."
- 6) The aliens are men in bumpy green bodysuits reminiscent those shriveled pickles which you forgot were in the back of your fridge from that picnic last July.

That being said, *Signs* is far from the worst Sci-fi movie I've ever seen and, if you liked it, this additional tidbit may come as consolation: I bought this DVD to share with my husband after seeing it in the theater—twice—without him.

*Signs* is the tale of Graham Hess, a farmer-preacher (is there a call for a lot of those in eastern PA?) whose faith has fallen following the death of his wife. Hess (Mel Gibson) wakes one day to discover a crop circle stamped in his field. The pets are acting up and Hess's son Morgan (Rory Calkin) has to impale the family German Shepard with a barbeque squewer to save little sister Bo (Abby Breslin). Add one Officer Caroline Paski (Cherry Jones, whose contribution to the film is as believable as it gets), and one Merrill Hess (Joaquin Phoenix, whose contribution isn't)—Graham's younger brother who has moved in to help out after his sister-in-law's death—and we've set the scene.

Perhaps we should begin with the three elements that are truly on par in this film, since a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine ball go down. Before I was halfway through with my first viewing, I already had these elements pegged: cinematography, score, supporting cast. Now, if I were a reviewer worth my salt, I'd be telling you what recognition—if any—this film won in the awards circuit (in other words I'd be busy backing up my opinion with somebody else's). As it stands, I don't know. I don't base my movie watching on other people's reviews nor on the issuing of awards and nominations because I often don't agree. But if you want my word on the matter, read on.

James Newton Howard's score is one of a trio of elements which help buoy *Signs*, keeping it from sinking into the murky waters of B-flick also-rans. It is just the kind of music I like to hear: music that I don't—at first. Good soundtracks do not distract viewers from the story matter they were designed to compliment. For instance, you should not be sitting in the movie theatre thinking, "Gee, that's great music; think I'll go buy the CD." What well-crafted and carefully conducted scores *should* do is help establish mood and draw you into the action. They should echo your feelings as you watch the film or—for those less emotionally astute—serve to clue-in the viewer on the intended tone of the scene. Howard's work does all this and more. More than one SF&F movie has been ruined by a poor score (*Willow* comes to mind), so the success of this leg of the tripod shoring up *Signs* is a crucial one.

The second excellent piece of work in the film is the cinematography...the filming itself. We're talking what's being framed in the shot, the lighting, the pacing and proper juxtaposition of close-up vs. longer view, the angles chosen, etc. Cinematography is not just the set—it's the wardrobe the set is sporting and the ability of the cinematographer to know well enough not to attire the set in grunge when the scene calls clearly for eveningwear. From the opening scene of the Hess's backyard as seen from a second-story bedroom window to the final shot in the film, I can find little fault with this element in *Signs*. Like the score, the visual interpretation of the story proves keen, compelling and apt.

The third leg of the tripod of virtues that redeems this film from its lesser qualities is the work of the supporting cast. Cherry Jones is down-home familiar as Officer Caroline Paski and my view—for those of you who know my former profession—is not a product of personal bias. In fact, if anything, passing off as believable a woman police officer is a difficult task; it's too frequently abysmally done. Jones makes the grade and winds up one of the three actors I would like to see in another movie. The other two are Merritt Wever as Tracey Abernathy, the teenage drugstore clerk, and—interestingly enough—Manoj Nelliayattu Shyamalan. *Who* you say? That's M. Night Shyamalan: writer, producer & director of *Signs* (told'ja he had a great name)—cast as Ray, the affable fellow who, having fallen asleep at the wheel one night, swerved off a dark road and into Hess's wife who was out on a stroll.

So, with all these elements going for it, what, you ask, are the movie's lesser merits? Dismissable, if you don't mind stilted dialog, contrived plot lines and obvious give-aways (like Bo's obsession with water and its guaranteed link to story resolution). This is a movie

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# Reviews

## Signs Review con't

that would have benefited by a cast of “unknowns,” the renown of the leads doing little but getting in the way of the tale’s veracity. It doesn’t help that Gibson had never portrayed a father well (see – gag – *The Patriot*) nor that the other three are all riding the wake of their sibling’s acting successes (in Hollywood, as in politics, I happen to hate familial dynasties).

Nevertheless, a few decent scenes emerge, including one between Graham and Merrill, with the children asleep on their laps, as they discuss the issue of faith in

whispered tones. I’ve never developed a rating system and now, that I’ve reviewed several works on film, perhaps I should. Let’s make it a simple 1 through 10 system with 10 being most meritorious. This will be a rating against all filmed works, not just those within genre. For comparison purposes, let’s go back and rank the other pieces I reviewed in past issues.

Planet of the Apes TV Series on DVD: 7½ to 8

Galaxy Quest: 10

Signs: 6½ to 7

## Talon of the Silver Hawk Raymond E. Feist



Eos, April 2003

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ISBN 0380988087

High in the ice-capped mountains reside the villages of the peaceful Orosini, where the villagers celebrate the Midsummer ritual in which boys go out by themselves seeking a vision before returning to their home as a man. A few

days ago, Kieli left his home, the Orosini Kulaam Village, but so far he has received nothing except cold and hunger. He believes he must not return until he sees his vision, but also realizes his water supply is running low and he will have to act on that soon.

Kieli observes carrion birds flying over a nearby village. He knows immediately that a catastrophe must have hit the Orosini living there; most likely a devastating attack because the vultures would only be there to scavenge off the dead, which means few survivors remain to remove the corpses. Realizing that his village is nearby, Kieli races home to warn his people, or at least help them fight the enemy. In his haste, he falls, but when he regains his footing he sees a hawk perched on his arm. The hawk telepathically tells Kieli he can act as a protector or seek vengeance. The lad knows the hawk is his vision and now he is a man, the *Talon of the Silver Hawk*. When he arrives at his village, the sight of the horrible genocide confronts him just before an assailant severely injures him, leaving him to die.

A few days later, a very weak Kieli regains consciousness. He is the lone survivor of the massacre of his village. Only by the luck of traveler Robert de Lyis finding him has he lived. Talon knows he owes a life debt to Robert and begins remittance by doing simple chores once he heals. He shows his intelligence and hunting ability, leading to Robert wondering if he is ‘the One’ in light of the fact that Talon must first avenge the destruction of his people by Raven and his horde.

Returning to his beloved Midkemia (see the *Riftwar Legacy*), Raymond E. Feist provides his audience with a stirring opening gambit in the “Conclave of Shadows” series. The plot begins with a delightful sociological look at Orosini society through the eyes of a charming, naive child seeking to attain the respect accorded to manhood. Following the slaughter, the book relocates to Kendrick’s establishment where the audience meets Talon’s mentors, a various lot, and observes the learning that the hero receives as he slowly prepares for life as a mercenary.

Mr. Feist insures that the reader knows what makes the key protagonists tick and how society outside the mountains operates especially during the Kendrick chapters as the story line slows down with no epic adventure, but turns into a fabulously deep character study. Once the novel switches to the Mercenary stage, Talon goes through a series of adventures that test his mettle and enable him to step closer to his personal confrontation with Raven. Mr. Feist provides fans of his fantasy realm with a cherished first book that hints at great things in store for the audience.

# Reviews

## Music from the Monster Movies



St. Clair Entertainment  
UPC: 77966-19452  
Review by Terry Crotinger

The *Music from The Monster Movies* CD is a fun way to remember that offshoot of science fiction that developed from our fears of science getting out of hand or having no way to stop 'mother nature' when she decided to make large, and usually hideous, destructive creatures. From *Frankenstein* to *Jurassic Park*, J.R. Valery mixed great monster movie titles with a few horror (or 'creep-you-out') flicks like *Rosemary's Baby*. Most of these movies are about the 'nature gone awry' type like *King Kong* and *Godzilla*. Fans of the *Godzilla* sequels will be thrilled to know there are five different movies representing the skyscraper-loving monster on this CD.

It is odd that what soothes one person soothed is the very same music that creeps pit the rest of us. Did

you know that classical music could be used as a backdrop for this genre? Several pieces, it turns out, are simply classical passages just twisted enough to give it new meaning, for example, *Rosemary's Baby* is represented by Beethoven's *Fur Elise* in a slightly slower tempo.

Andrew Lane, the conductor for *The American Festival Orchestra*, accomplished what producer, Valery, envisioned. The quality is outstanding—clear and sharp. The dynamics of these selections are not as impressive as one might think, though the hair on my neck stood up on occasion. The price was very reasonable—an eBay find for 3.45. On-line bookstores (Amazon, Barnes & Noble) either had it or had someone willing to sell it pre-owned at a reduced rate.

I tried *Illuminata* writer, Garrie Keyman's, idea of writing my more intense/scary scenes while listening to this in the background, but I found my fingers playing along instead; wrong keyboard! However, it was a great find and now one of my favorite CDs.

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## *Illuminations*

### A Speculative Fiction Writing Contest

As part of our ongoing campaign to promote quality works of science fiction and fantasy, *The Illuminata* is proud to present *Illuminations*, a speculative fiction writing contest sponsored by Tyrannosaurus Press.

What is speculative fiction, you ask? Technically, it is defined as 'a fictional story in a world that has not happened'. That being said, speculative fiction is a general classification that encompasses science fiction, fantasy, horror, alternate reality and all of their respective subgenres.

We are seeking writers of all levels interested in showcasing their talents and pitting their skill with a pen (or word processor) against other like-minded individuals. There is a \$10 entry fee per submission, and first prize is currently \$100 (US); but both number of prizes and prize amounts will be increased if there is sufficient interest in the contest. First and second place are guaranteed publication in subse-

quent editions of *The Illuminata*; all other entries will be entered into our files for consideration. Guidelines for the contest are as follows:

- 1) All submissions must be 'speculative fiction'.
- 2) 3000 word limit
- 3) Formatted with 12-pt font, double spaced, 1" margins
- 4) Entries must be previously unpublished.
- 5) Multiple submissions acceptable, fee is per entry.
- 6) Deadline for entries is September 1, 2003

Make checks payable to **Tyrannosaurus Press** and mail entries to:

*Illuminations*  
c/o garrie keyman  
PO Box 431  
Lititz, PA 17543-0431

Winners will be announced in the October 2003 edition of *The Illuminata*. For more information, please visit the *Illuminata* page at [TyrannosaurusPress.com](http://TyrannosaurusPress.com) or e-mail us at [Illuminations@TyrannosaurusPress.com](mailto:Illuminations@TyrannosaurusPress.com)

# Reviews

## Acorna's Search

Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Scarborough



Harper Collins, 2001  
\$17.50, Hardcover, 278 pages  
ISBN 0-380-97898-9  
Reviewed by Terry Crotinger

*Acorna's Search* is one more book offered by Anne McCaffrey to compliment her writing accomplishments and it is the fifth part in this series. Ms. McCaffrey and her writing partner, Ms. Scarborough,

bring us the idea that unicorns are people too, after a fashion. The McCaffrey/Scarborough team would have us believe that unicorn-people were dropped off on earth, and other planets as well, by an alien species who play demi-god with genetics and create new life forms to populate the galaxy. Actually, Acorna's race, the Linyaari, are a horse/human gene blend with fingered hands, hooves and a horn in the middle of their foreheads.

Acorna's homeworld, Vhiliinyar, was destroyed by the insect-like Khleevi—a nasty, space-faring, bipedal, slug-beetle combination. They make torturing the Linyaari captives an art and a delicacy. After wading through the other books in the series, we find that these large, dangerous creatures have finally been eradicated but not before they virtually trashed the homeworld and killed many of the Linyaari. Acorna is among the remnant trying to clean it all up.

In the process of mapping the planet for restoration, several of the best scientists vanish, as well as our beloved Acorna's lifemate, Aari. Our heroine tries to find them using her considerable brains and equip-

ment owned by her 'Uncle' Hafiz, who just happens to be rich and prosperous and has adopted Acorna as his own. Trying to find her loved ones brings Acorna closer to an understanding of who her people are as a genetically-created race. They find a special time-link to the past but by the end, Aari is still missing. I smell a sequel!

Using a cliffhanger ending, *Acorna's Search* lacks the motivation for me to find what happened! Where was the earlier spark that had me buy the first four books in the series? What happened to the development of the characters? I realized that the Kleevi publishing bug had probably hit McCaffrey/Scarborough in that tried and true (and tired and boring) methods were replacing the freshness that the first books had. Did their publisher give them an unreasonable deadline? Are they milking the grand dame of Pern for every last drop of creative juice (and every penny they can get riding the winning horse? Pun intended). I'm beginning to wonder. People do need to make a living, so I can't fault the duo for that. But, *Acorna's Search* lacks any real emotion until halfway through the book. Yes, Acorna is concerned for her beloved lifemate, Aari. We know this because we are told. I never feel anxiety, nor relish in the discovery of new artifacts. My heart never pounds at the mystery of relatives disappearing, and my eyes do not long for the beauty of long ago Vhiliinyar. This could have been an archeology textbook for all the emotion I felt. With several awards for writing between them, I am disappointed that the Unicorn Girl series is becoming sterile. Admittedly, I will read every one of the Acorna books just to say I did. But, I hope the fire lights on this saga once again to spark my interest rather than my loyalty.

## Column and Review Writers Wanted!

*The Illuminata* is a newsletter dedicated to speculative fiction in all its forms. To help us serve as many readers as possible, we are trying to increase and diversify the selection of articles and reviews that we include. If you are an aspiring writer who wants a forum to express your opinions of SF, this may be the place for you.

Currently, we are interested in both regular and occasional contributors. The only difference between the two (quite obviously) is that occasional contributors will only send in a single or occasional piece, whereas

regular contributors do their best to provide at least one column or review per month. Generally, we leave article and review topics up to the author, but if you are interested in writing, but have no specific ideas, we might be able to point you in the right direction.

If you have an idea for an article or review that you would like to submit to *The Illuminata*, e-mail us at [Illuminata@TyrannosaurusPress.com](mailto:Illuminata@TyrannosaurusPress.com). Be sure to include your full name and contact information, any writing credits you have, and a brief description of your idea for an article or review. We look forward to hearing from you!

# Reviews

## Cerulean Sins Laurell K. Hamilton



Berkley, April 2003  
\$22.95, Hardcover, 405 pgs.  
ISBN: 0425188361  
Reviewed by Harriet Klausner

On an alternate earth similar to our own, vampires, werewolves and other preternatural creatures have the same civil rights as human beings. When any go rogue, Anita

Blake, a licensed executioner and federal marshal, hunts them down and kills them. Her lovers are Jean-Claude, the Master Vampire of St. Louis, and Micah, co-leader of the loyal shape-shifting leopard.

Anita's main job is raising zombies, and her latest client is a contract killer who wants to talk to one of his long-dead ancestors. Before she can fit him into her schedule, the Regional Preternatural Investigation Team calls her in on a case. A man is killed and someone nails him to the wall in a mockery of the crucifixion. Painted on the walls are Nordic Runes, but Anita is pretty sure that this was a "mundane killing" and not a magical one. She also is sure that the killing of a woman who was torn apart was the work of a shape-shifter, but she gets sidetracked from the investigation when Jean-Claude informs her that his creator's representative has come to town a month early.

The woman, Belle Morte, who turned Jean-Claude and his second-in-command Asher into vampires, has sent her trusted aide, the sadistic Musette into town to check up on her "boys" and see why they are so infatuated with Anita. Both vampires fear Belle because she is very old and powerful, and she hates them because they are the only two male vampires to have left her side and stayed away. To protect Asher, who has no natural defenses against Belle, Anita does something she thought she

would never do, but even that is not enough to stop Belle and Musette from taking vengeance upon the once beautiful Asher.

While Anita is trying to negotiate vampire politics and keep her loved ones safe, she is followed by a German national terrorist. If all that isn't enough to keep her occupied there is a shape-shifting serial rapist-murderer in town, and the police don't know how to stop him. Anita comes up with a creative idea to catch the killer but the police won't let her try it until he commits a vicious double homicide and they have nowhere else to turn.

Over the course of this series Anita Blake has gone from a feared vampire executioner to a woman who realizes that the non-humans are sometimes more humane than their mortal counterparts. She has no qualms about having a vampire lover and in *Cerulean Sins*, Anita finally comes to terms with the fact that she has more in common with the vampires and shape-shifters than she does with the mortals who fear them. She has also gotten used to the idea that she is the leader of a pack of were-leopards and recognizes they make her feel safe and comfortable. Micah accepts Anita for who she is and doesn't have a hidden agenda, something she can't always say about Jean-Claude. She can relax her guard with him.

Belle Morte is a truly frightening villain, and readers will be able to understand why some very powerful shape-shifters and vampires fear her. She is getting ready to do something that will have repercussions throughout the entire vampire community—something that will be addressed in the next Anita Blake book. Just when readers come to think that Anita can't surprise them, she turns around and does it while keeping completely in character. Laurell K. Hamilton is a brilliant and imaginative storyteller, and fans of this series will be very pleased with the way Anita keeps growing and developing.

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### Answers to Quiz on page 6

Answers: 1. Arrakis, 2. Mirkheim, 3. Minerva, 4. Rama, 5. Dorsai, 6. Neweden, 7. Kithrup, 8. Azlaroc, 9. Pern, 10. Zarathustra, 11. Lomooro, 12. Winter, 13. Hyperion, 14. Darkover, 15. Flatland.

## RPG Corner (con't)

goes. You need to figure out who is causing the ruckus, and who is seeking to end it. First you need to decide on whether or not it is an individual, group, natural occurrence, or something else.

<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Result</u>
1 – 40	Individual
41 – 80	Group
81 – 90	Natural Force
91 – 00	Supernatural Force / Other

Upon deciding that your instigating or opposing force is an individual or group, you should decide on a more specific item. The list that follows is adjusted to include what I expect to find on my little peninsula. Your lists may be more expansive, and may favor any one type of person more than another, according to your tastes and wants. The elements are variable, of course. My list is slanted in favor of humans, since they will make up the vast majority of people in my neck of the woods. That doesn't mean that there won't be other types of people moving through the area, just that they aren't often contributing to the historical logs.

<u>Individuals</u>	<u>Specifically</u>
1 – 75 %	Human: Man, Woman, Boy, or Girl
76 – 00 %	Non-Human: Native Goblin (because there are some Goblin villages on the Peninsula); Traveling Aelf, Dwarf, Wylf, Slyph, Brodamennan, or Senfeanis. (All these are creatures I've decided to include in my fantasy world)

<u>Groups</u>	<u>Specifically</u>
1 – 75 %	Human: Tribal Council, Usurping Group, a Church, an Occult / Secret Group, Family
76 – 00 %	Non-Human: Goblin Tribe; Band of Aelves, Dwarves, Wylfen, or Slyphs; or a herd of Senfeanis

Natural Forces include things such as: fire, flood, famine, storms, earthquakes, animal herds or swarms, climactic changes, volcanic events and even impacts of foreign bodies.

Supernatural Forces include things like: friendly or hostile spirits, vampires, werewolves, wizards, magical devices or items, or wild magic. I will assume everyone knows what I mean by Other, so we can just skip that part.

Once you roll for your instigating party you should roll for the opposing party. Obvious weirdness should be

abandoned and re-rolled, unless you can place a really interesting story around it. (Remember the Rule of Why, it applies here as well)

## Nature of Events

So what is everyone all up in a huff about? To find out the first thing you must do is roll a 1D10 to determine the nature of the event.

<u>Die Roll</u>	<u>Event Categories</u>
1, 2	Foreign Relations
3, 4	Domestic Relations
5, 6	Nationalism / Culture
7, 8	Innovations
9, 0	Magic / Supernatural

Within each of these Categories are individual events, which you should determine by again rolling a single ten-sided die. The breakdown of the categories is as follows:

### Foreign Relations

- 1, 2 – War / Combat
- 3, 4 – Diplomacy
- 5, 6 – Partnerships / Alliances
- 7, 8 – Trade
- 9, 0 – Intelligence / Counter-Intelligence

### Domestic Relations

- 1 – Government / Rulership
- 2 – Social Norms
- 3 – Social Reform
- 4 – Marriages / Social Pairings
- 5 – Laws / Legal Systems / Penal Codes
- 6 – Revolt / Rebellion
- 7 – Economic Development
- 8 – Material / Natural Resources
- 9 – Families / Social Groups
- 10 – Local Community Issues

### Nationalism / Culture

- 1 – Exploration
- 2 – Colonization
- 3 – Imperialism
- 4 – Discovery
- 5 – Creative / Performing Arts
- 6 – Organized Sports
- 7 – Social Gatherings
- 8 – Organized Religion
- 9 – Social Classes / Castes
- 10 – Guilds

Con't on page 13

**RPG Corner (con't)**

Innovations

- 1, 2 – Education
- 3, 4 – Philosophy
- 5, 6 – Science / Technology
- 7, 8 – New Perspectives
- 9, 0 – Medical Knowledge / Advancement

Magic / Supernatural Powers

- 1, 2 – Occult Happenings / Groups
- 3, 4 – Secular Magic
- 5, 6 – Clerical Magic
- 7, 8 – Mysticism / Natural Magic
- 9, 0 – Death

**Outcome**

How does it all end, and who wins? Unless after seeing the groups involved and the event you have a particular outcome in mind, the following chart should answer those questions.

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Result</u>
1 – 20	Complete Victory for Instigating Party
21 – 40	Partial Victory for Instigating Party
41 – 60	Draw. Neither group was able to triumph. Things carry on.
61 – 80	Partial Victory for Opposing Party
81 – 00	Complete Victory for Opposing Party

**Public Opinion**

I thought it might be interesting and helpful to know what the people think about the event that has just occurred to them. This step isn't necessary, but I think it may end up adding a good bit a flavor to the events. Of course, the public opinion may never be known, for the victor writes history, and the good guys don't always win in the real world.

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Result</u>
1 – 30	Majority side with Instigating Party
31 – 60	Majority side with Opposing Party
61 – 90	The population is split evenly
91 – 00	The population has no interest

And that's it. Using this you should be able to rapidly come up with the histories for the peoples that you choose to work with. An example of a finished historical entry would read something like this:

(Assuming a starting date of the year 1000)  
1012 – 1015 - A man is opposed by a tribal council over the matter of natural resources. The result is a partial victory for the tribal council, and the majority of people supported the council.

It's up to the individual GameMaster to fill in some of the details here, but it shouldn't be too hard.

**Youth View (con't)**

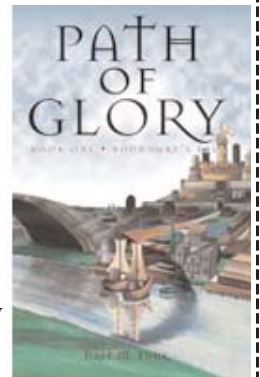
**Predictions.** I wanted to know what games they played at home, what television/movies they watched, what they read, what they did online, and how much this interest/hobby was costing in terms of sleep and finances. My prediction before giving out the survey that reading was a high priority. What I found was my own generation gap gapping. The kids (and some of the adults) put gaming as the priority. I would have thought that the geekier people would be part of this group. Wrong again. After seeing them, I would have predicted that these were outgoing kids in class. Nope. There are (I've taught some of these kids, so I know) those who are the class clowns, but the majority of the school-aged members are animated about their interests, but not in a classroom setting.

**The Results.** Join me in the next issue of *Illuminata*, for the results and follow-up of this unusual rural science fiction group. Meet Jakob and Dorrie, two instructors who sponsor this kid/adult interest club in the Arizona Mohave desert and discover what our youth are doing with their time and imaginations every week. It should be illuminating!

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#### KeyCOMMENTary (con't)

perhaps the victory more sweet) than if it were a journey being undertaken by someone less emotionally shackled.

At times, I think, *The Waif* as character is overdone, perhaps seen by the writer as a 'shoe-in' for our sympathy from the outset. After all, what boorish oaf of a reader would be without feeling for someone known right off the bat to be a poor, motherless child? Can *Waifdom* too easily be used to reduce the work of the writer when it comes to developing character? After all, when confronted with this archetype, an established base of understanding is quickly met since a series of anticipated traits arise in the reader's mind. The reader will not be wondering why the character in question is socially marginalized or emotionally fragile. Another handy advantage of casting *Waif* as protagonist is that the main character is unhindered by parental authority. *Waifs* are often propelled into settings where they are freer to explore and move about their environment (i.e. partake in adventure) than they would be if not for the fact that they were orphaned.

My friend with whom I discussed *The Waif* suggested a reader would have less reason to care about a character that hails from a 'perfect' family. Yet can we define a family as 'perfect' simply by virtue of it never having been fractured? Surely there are other forces which can be brought to bear on a character to create dramatic tension even while parents are (or were, when the character was young) lovingly present. To illustrate this notion you might call to mind the books of Laura Ingalls Wilder or *The Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann Wyss (Irwin Allen's *Lost in Space* being a space-age adaptation of Wyss's tale). And yes – I liked *The Waltons*.

I am becoming convinced, be it in science fiction, fantasy or any other genre, that a greater challenge meets the writer who attempts to pen an adventure-drama within the parameters of a functional-family setting. In so doing, the standard crippling burdens imposed on *The Waif* are automatically eliminated from the writer's toolbox. I think, too, that once upon a time there was a greater sense of something foreign – almost exotic – about *The Waifs*. They weren't us; their trials were not ours. With the deterioration of the nuclear family and the (unfortunate) growth in the number of children either shuffled between parents or abandoned by one parent altogether, *The Waif* as protagonist is no longer a

stranger. Perhaps it is this truth that accounts for the continued popularity of *The Waif* protagonist: that our relationship (as reader) to the archetype has evolved.

Till next month I will leave you with a twofold assignment. As reader, examine your shelves. List five characters living amid the books there that you could classify as *Waif*. As writer (for those of you who are) either examine a character that you have already begun to develop for traits definably *Waif*-like or create a character now by doing a thumbnail sketch which will place them soundly within this archetype. Keep the results of this exercise handy for next month when we will be looking at Archetype II: *The Quest*.

1. *The Writer's Journey*, Christopher Vogler, p 13

### Sci-Fi Buzz

#### May Movie Releases:

X2: X-Men United  
The Matrix Reloaded  
Pokemon Heroes  
Bruce Almighty

#### DVD Releases:

Star Trek: Nemesis (WS)  
Babylon 5: Second Season  
Men in Black II (Superbit)  
Men in Black (Superbit)  
Satan's Brew  
Clockstoppers  
Barb Wire (UR)  
Darkman 2  
Star Trek II (DC)

#### Books:

Oryx and Crake - Margaret Eleanor Atwood  
Star Trek: Voyager Companion - Paul Ruditis  
Hell's Faire (Human - Posleen War, 4) - John Ringo  
The War of the Flowers - Tad Williams  
Condemnation - Richard Baker  
Long Hot Summoning (Keeper's Chronicles, 3)  
Tanya Huff  
The Left Hand of Destiny, DS9 Book 2 - Jeffrey Lang  
Dragons of a Vanished Moon (War of Souls, 3)  
Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman  
Ranma 1/2, Vol. 22 - Rumiko Takahashi  
The Phoenix Exultant: or, Dispossessed in Utopia  
John C. Wright  
Hulk: The Incredible Guide (Marvel Comics)

### Stories Without End (con't)

the other hand spawned a fandom more loyal than any other in the Trek-verse. DS9 also enjoyed a sense of completion that TNG will never achieve, since TNG's series finale was open-ended to allow for feature films. And those will be made until box office receipts determine their time is at an end. Which is to say, there will never be a definitive ending to TNG the way there was to DS9. Yet, even with DS9 there are those eager (even desperate) to see it continued. While every character arc was brought to a close, surely there are more stories to tell seems to be the fan mantra. Surely we don't have to leave these much beloved characters.

Which brings us to *Farscape*. Definitely more of an arc-based show, to the point that it was extremely difficult to miss a season, or even a few episodes, and come back into the show, *Farscape* attracted the usual dedicated fanbase, fiercely loyal, but small. Too small for the show to survive in the end, and so *Farscape* aired its finale – “Bad Timing”. One can't help but feel the title was a dig at the parent company for going belly-up when there was already a fifth season arc planned. Fan reaction to the last episode has been mixed to say the least. Rather than wrapping things up, the episode addressed and closed some long-running arcs, opened new ones, and left off with a cliffhanger that carried the tag “To be continued...”, which was followed by a note from the production company that made it plain it was done with the whole thing.

There are alternate explanations for the cliffhanger and the to be continued... Some say that it represents the further efforts of show producer David Kemper to get a telemovie, or final season produced somewhere. Others concluded – well, it was appropriate to the style of storytelling *Farscape* always did. Still others have advised fellow fans to turn off the tape before the last minute. All in all, the question of *Farscape* as a story without end is controversial to say the least.

Realistically the chances of more *Farscape* being produced are fairly small unless some very rich, as yet unknown fan steps forward to finance it – and quickly before the actors move on to other projects. So this is the end we are left with. *Happy ending interruptus* and a note that more is to come, when no more is to come. It seems oxymoronic. But it's not.

*Farscape* knows its fans well and may understand the modern SF fan's psychology better than any pro-

duction previously created. For the truth is once a great ending is received – it is just over, for once and all. If we travel outside the genre for a moment and ask – what is Scarlett without, “Tomorrow is another day.”, or Rick and Ilsa without, “You're getting on that plane with Laslo where you belong.”? I've read the ‘sequels’ to both these tales, and let me tell you, when an ending is that good, further stories with the same characters are something approaching abomination. For all that some may crave a perfect ending – beware of what you wish for. An ending is the final note, beyond which the symphony can never again go on.

So did *Farscape* screw itself and its loyal followers with “Bad Timing”? Or did it acknowledge that, finally, we want to believe these grand characters who we have laughed with and cried with, will continue on as they have, tackling one adventure after another, struggling through, facing wacky aliens and triumphing through love and loyalty (and Rygel's enlightened self-interest of course). For all that so many felt disappointment in the moment at seeing John and Aeryn disintegrated after finally agreeing to marry and raise a child, the audience is ultimately better served with the enigmatic final dangle, for *Farscape* has learned the lessons of serials and become what it is we really want – a story without end.

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### Original Fiction Wanted!

In addition to our Illuminations Writing Contest, *The Illuminata* is seeking regular submissions of speculative fiction for publication. Short stories and poems are both welcome, provided that the subject matter is at least loosely SF related. Poems should be concise, but there is no set word limit. Short stories should be well edited and no greater than 5000 words; shorter stories will have a greater chance of publication. Unfortunately, as we are a free publication, we cannot at this time offer to compensate authors for their work, but if you are content with a little exposure and have a story you want to share, please query us by filling out the appropriate form in the newsletter section of our website or by e-mailing us a brief outline and any applicable writing credits to us at [Illuminata@TyrannosaurusPress.com](mailto:Illuminata@TyrannosaurusPress.com).

## Hero Worship (con't)

Parker's metamorphosis from nerdy recluse to reluctant hero is similar to America's foreign policy decisions in the 1930s. Despite blatant aggression and acts of criminal inhumanity, the United States ignored the growing threats of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Believing that the problems of Europe and Asia were none of its concern, America was content to sit passively on the sidelines, and it was only after the terrible tragedy at Pearl Harbor that the country mobilized for war. These events opened a new chapter in American history, changing a quiet, isolationistic nation into a world superpower, a champion of freedom, and a protector of the downtrodden.

The similarities between America and Spider-man are not limited to their histories. Many characters in the comic books bear a striking resemblance to America's strengths and weaknesses. Take Dr. Connors, for example: a talented, good-natured surgeon, brilliant genetic researcher, and long-time supporter of the wall-crawler. But Dr. Connors is also The Lizard, one of Spider-man's enemies, an evil mutant who causes untold devastation to those around him. Connors' story is a parable for the duality of scientific discovery, a warning that any technology, even when put in the hands of the well-intentioned, may have serious negative effects on the world and those who live in it.

And what of the Chameleon, a diabolical criminal with the ability to mimic others? A shape-shifter and accomplished impersonator, he can slip past the strongest defenses and attack at the very heart of his foes, then blend into the populace to escape detection. There is a word that describes those who act in such a fashion: terrorist. But the Chameleon is more than a terrorist; he is terrorism in its purest form, and one must wonder if the prophetic Stan Lee recognized the threat terrorism posed on American society, or if he simply made a lucky guess.

Perhaps most revealing are the roles played by two of Spider-man's worst enemies: The Kingpin and Venom. The Kingpin is a criminal mastermind, a successful businessman in his own right, but one who desperately covets more and is willing to do anything to increase his wealth and power. Venom is an alien symbiote, one who tried—and nearly succeeded—to tempt Spider-man with the promise of greater power. Eventually rebuffed by the web-slinger, Venom found a new host and instilled in it a hatred of the Spider-man; since then, his sole purpose has been to bring about Spider-man's demise.

These villains represent the two greatest threats to American society: greed and corruption. The Kingpin, from his gluttonous love of luxury to his over-sized frame, is greed incarnate. His efforts to increase his influence in the criminal underworld bring him into constant conflict with Spider-man; just as the unrestricted desire to obtain more, at any cost, is constantly at odds with America's more noble values. And though Spider-man is adept at capturing The Kingpin's henchman (just as the American criminal system—at least occasionally—captures the greedy), The Kingpin himself (greed, that is) has proven himself to be all but impossible to eliminate.

Corruption, whether it be corporate, political or personal, is much like the symbiote Venom. Its promises can be seductive, and if one man proves too hard to assimilate, it merely seeks out another host. The very idea of corruption is a direct threat to America's principles and democratic government; nevertheless, there have been times when America as a whole almost succumbed to corruption's temptations. But, just like Spider-man, the country has so far been able to keep the monster at bay.

Finally, the public's perception provides even more evidence of the Spider-man/America duality. After saving countless lives, capturing numerous criminals, and risking his life time and again for the people of New York, Spider-man receives a depressingly mixed reaction from the populous. There are those who love him, who view him as a hero, friend and ally; but this group often appears to be in the minority. Far greater are those who question his intentions, fear his powers, or disdain him for having something that they do not. The media treats him as a monster and will often overlook his good deeds in order to report the more sensational—and accidental—collateral damage that his crime-fighting causes.

Few—not even the wall-crawler himself—would argue that Spider-man is purely good. In the past he has stumbled, made mistakes, and doubted his own motives. (He is only human, after all, and susceptible to all of humanity's weaknesses.) At times he has felt isolated, unappreciated, and alone; he has even questioned his role as 'policeman of New York' and wondered whether he should step aside and allow others to fend for themselves. In the end, he remembers the words of his beloved uncle—"With great power, comes great responsibility."—and knows that he has no choice but to be a hero.

Is America the same as Spider-man? The only way to find out, true-believers, is to keep watching.