

The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into the Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Rage Against the Machines

Ever since the first of our ancestors picked up a wedge-shaped rock to help crack open a walnut, our species has depended on machines (albeit of the simple kind) to improve the quality of our lives. At first our 'machines' did little more than put us on equal footing with the world's more dangerous animals, giving us the claws, fangs, and other implements that nature had so cruelly taken away (or never provided at all!). But humans are a resourceful species, and it did not take long for a few forward-thinking individuals to realize the potential of machines. In a relatively short period of time, machines permeated our society and were used for a variety of different functions, from transporting goods to creating fire to moving our ancestors out of caves and onto the surface world.

As humanity's understanding of the world improved, so did the quality (and complexity) of its machines. Over the centuries, machines were designed to do much of our work for us, and then redesigned to do it better. The industrial revolution

and invention of steam power filled the world with machines, the internal combustion engines only quickened their spread, and the wide-scale production of computers completely redefined our relationship with machines, guaranteeing them a place in our society until its demise.

Machines can do just about anything, and if it's to humanity's benefit, then they're most likely already doing it. We have adapted them to extract resources from places we cannot go (or extract them more quickly from places we can), explore regions beyond our reach, and

handle materials that are dangerous to our fragile bodies. Robotic assembly lines need no breaks, no wages, and little maintenance; they are far superior to the antiquated human variety. Computers can perform operations too trivial to warrant our attention and calculate equations too complex for our childlike human minds. Machines entertain us and provide us with luxuries, freeing mankind for more ideological pursuits—like... ummm... designing better machines. They are faster than us, stronger than us, *superior* to our weak, organic bodies in almost every way. Repairing them requires neither harmful treatments nor unfortunate side-effects nor HMOs; a screwdriver and a can of oil will usually suffice. Machines can be upgraded or 'enhanced' without criticism from their peers. And worst of all, they do everything we tell them to without complaint!

Is it any wonder we hate them as much as we do?

We now stand on the verge of a machine revolution. Not of the *Terminator* or *Matrix* variety (though one of those may soon follow), but a development of such a profound nature that many may not understand its full implications nor appreciate just how dramatically it will change the world around us.

AI. Artificial Intelligence. Soon, our machines will be thinking, simply at first, to be sure, but with the rate of technological improvement, it won't take them long to catch up. Thinking machines aren't the problem, though; in fact, if they could make a few decisions for themselves, it might take a bit of the frustration out of everyday life. The problems will come when we start letting them do our thinking for us. The development of working machines led to a decline in human productivity, work ethic and health; it bred laziness and apathy into our souls, and it instilled in us a superiority complex. (*Why should I do such a mundane job? A machine could do what I do!*) Thus, while we applaud machines for their service, we also blame them for the decline of our society. One can only wonder what applications intelligent machines will be put to and what human failings they will be blamed for causing.

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The RPG Corner (v2.7): Including Non-Human Peoples

by Doug >!< Roper of EPIC Gaming

The past columns have dealt only marginally with non-humans, and just to be a little more thorough I've decided to take a closer look at them, to gingerly flesh out their traditional (stereotypical?) characterizations, to hopefully encourage budding game designers to challenge those characterizations, and to discuss what I feel the place of non-humans should be in different types and levels of fantasy role-playing.

In my catch-all definition, non-humans are all intelligent and exist in an established social group of some kind, although there are solitary peoples as exceptions. I say this to separate the intelligent creatures of the world from the non-intelligent creature. A human looking animal with no intelligence does not qualify as a humanoid. Non-humans break neatly into two groups in my mind: humanoid and non-humanoid. Humanoid means just what it implies, a person with one head, two arms, two legs, etc. Size doesn't matter to me in this category, so I would include everything from Giants to Pixies in this category. Anything that falls outside of this would be non-humanoid (i.e. Dragons, whales, and the like).

The initial question to examine is whether or not you want non-humans in your game at all. To answer that you need to think about what role they would play in your game, and whether or not you *need* a non-human to fill that role. If you are running a game along the lines of the classic Dungeons & Dragons™ game, then examining such things is a moot point. Part of the flavor of High Fantasy is the almost unlimited number of different races. You can't sneeze in a true D&D™ game without knocking over at least three different kinds of Elves and a Halfling with his Half-Troll Gin partner. The role that all these different races play in the D&D™ setting is difficult to capture. It may have begun with a way to hold player interest, by offering something other than a human being to role-play with. At some point though, the diversity and number of non-humans began to snowball. I feel that much of this was marketing and was never really intended to add anything to the game, just to the profit margins of the company.

When not dealing with an established world, like the one in D&D™, I feel the Rule of Why is the most important, and only really necessary, limiting device you need. If you can have a good solid reason for including something, go ahead and do it. Keep in

mind that each creature you add to the world should be placed there with intent and foresight. You may not ever get to a point where your game will be able to show off those neat Light Pixies you placed in a secluded valley, but if they serve a purpose your world is a better place for having them.

Levels of information and lore on non-humans, as well as their rarity, can be adjusted to suit your own individual taste. For me, non-humans should be an unknown element, a mystery. Can you imagine, growing up on your farm where the most exciting thing to happen to you would be a trip into the town where they had an actual tavern, with real beer! Nothing alien ever intrudes on your life, and one day while stopping at a small stream to get some water you see a person across the brook with fair skin, long silvery hair, pointed ears and slanted eyes. Not even knowing what to call it, it has a tremendous impact on the character and his whole farming community. Now imagine seeing this person, and wandering back to the tavern to see ten of him, along with a dozen other different types of people sipping their drinks. It's not quite as special in the second scenario, is it? Saturation of non-humans in a game destroys their mystery, and for me dissolves the need for non-humans at all. If the humanoids are as common as the men in a village, why bother having them there in the first place?

Different races can represent different things as well. The Elf in the above example can be mystery and discovery, while a Goblin can be suspicion and tension and maybe horror, and a Dragon would undoubtedly fill a need for utter terror and fear. Just the physical presence of these types of beings is enough of a push to generate lots of good role-playing, provided they still retain their mystery and uniqueness.

Traditional Non-Human Characters

There seems to be a stock set of non-human types that are used in fantasy games, books and films. There have been attempts to deviate from the main stereotype of these groups, and it is true that each author and Game Master has his own unique vision of these types, but on the whole they remain true to their original incarnations. Whether or not this is a bad thing is a decision only you can make. What follows are very brief character sketches for these stock non-humans.

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Four Out Of Five Denizens Prefer Quest

In this, Part II of our exploration of archetypes, I want you to begin by thinking about what it is you wish to accomplish every time you ask ... a *question*. When you ask a *question*, you are, in effect, going on a *quest*, are you not? You seek to know. A quest, then, is a wish for answers.

If we compare the central protagonist – be she waif (see May's *Illuminata*) or another type – to a sailor about to embark on a voyage, then we'll see the central quest as her destination. It is the goal to which our heroine aspires, attainable or not; that driving desire which compels the protagonist to forge ahead through peril and plot, undeterred by obstacles (and there must be obstacles) encountered en route.

Let's look at an example or two of *quest* as thematic anchor of story. An easy and rather uncomplicated one comes immediately to mind. On Star Trek we hear the quest plainly stated in the opening of every episode: *to seek out new worlds and new civilizations, to (boldly) go where no one has gone before*. With that single question – “Hey, who and what are out there, anyway?” – decades of adventures both televised and written have been launched. It doesn't have to be complex. Of course, each individual Star Trek episode has its own unique quest to propel plot and steer the course of characters within it, but we'll that alone, for now.

Another clear example can be drawn closer to home. Consider Bret M. Funk's *Path of Glory* and the *Boundary's Fall* series which it opens. Our waif protagonists, Jeran and Dahr, have a *question*: what will happen if the Boundary does indeed fall and neither the King nor anyone else has been alerted (and thereby given an opportunity to prepare)? From the prevailing question, *quest* is formed; in this case, being the journey Jeran and Dahr undertake to alert the King, and then, accomplishing that, to continue on in other adventures which arise in direct response to the impending threat of the Boundary's fall.

Harry Potter's initial question/quest hinges on a little item known as the Sorcerer's Stone, while Huckleberry Finn's is to assist his friend Jim to freedom. In my own novel, the hero Brin's quest centers on uncovering the truth behind the missing memories of his youth and becomes, for lack of a better term – a counterquest – as he seeks to prevent the discovery of past events from affecting his current life. It is of course an impossible hope, since, for bet-

ter or worse, knowledge always alters us, both internally and in how we perceive the world.

Thickening the Stew

Bearing in mind that we are not speaking of short story format, tales will necessarily be imbued with sub-quests just as they will be embellished by sub-plot. Sub-structures of story thicken the stew and cook up a hardier, more palatable fare. While an initial *question* will generate an initial (likely – though not always – the prevailing one) *quest*, additional quest/questions arise as the protagonist(s) advance through their journey. Recognizing such, we have come to the third Archetype: *the Obstacle*.

We will not be discussing nor will we explore *Obstacle* in this month's column, but merely acknowledge it as the necessary vehicle upon which sub-quests ride. In order to create the multiple sub-quest structure, authors must first throw up a series of obstacles for the protagonist(s) to overcome – all for the sole purpose of resuming the initial and/or prevailing quest. Liken, if you will, the sub-quest to a mountain arising mid-journey. The *question*: “How do we get over or around *this*?” The *quest*: the desire to circumvent the mountain and then the way in which it is accomplished.

Your Assignment

Last time readers were asked to select five stories from their personal collection/library from which examples of protagonist(s) as *waif* could be drawn. Writers were encouraged to either create a *waif* protagonist (character sketch) or select one they may have already established in order to continue with this month's assignment.

Now I would like readers to narrow their field to their two favorites and attempt to identify the initial quest of the story. If the initial quest is not the prevailing quest, then try to identify that as well. Feel free to e-mail your completed observations to me, as I am very interested in what you're discovering.

Writers, please select one *waif* protagonist to work with now, and either create an initial/prevaling quest or identify the quest you've established if your story is already finished or well underway. Frame your character's quest in the form of a *question* first, then expand on the question to describe their intended destination (map their course). Please, no consideration yet to the obstacles your characters will encounter. We'll save that assignment for next month.

Of Grails And Lightsabers: Parcival, The Fisher King and the Message of Star Wars

by Erin Branham

Part I: Making Myths of Movies

It is pretty common knowledge that George Lucas was pals with mythology scholar Joseph Campbell. They were such good buddies that most of Campbell's fame-inducing PBS series *The Power of Myth* was filmed at Lucas' Skywalker Ranch. If Lucas is the Anakin/ Darth Vader of Star Wars – Chosen One or Corrupting Evil Incarnate depending on who you ask – then Campbell can be thought of as Yoda – illuminator of the universe's deeper mysteries.

In *The Power of Myth* Campbell takes on several aspects of Star Wars and describes their mythic influences. Yes, this is where all that "Star Wars" as modern mythology stuff comes from. Campbell defines the function of a mythology like this, "A myth has to provide life models and the models have to be appropriate to the time in which we are living." Basically any story can have a mythic dimension – from those collected in sacred texts, to philosophical parables to folklore. Sacred texts and philosophical parables are good for those people who have the time, inclination and luxury of contemplating them. Folklore, on the other hand, works for everybody. We tend to walk around today thinking we don't have folklore, but we do – in fact we have several. But the primary one, the one unique to modern industrial society, is film. Films are the poems recited by bards and troubadours, the grand adventures, the shared imagination of our time.

According to Campbell the fact that we have such folklore provides a link connecting our imagination, far back and in many different directions, to tales from around the world and from other times. There are shared messages that can teach us a little something about what models the stories of today are providing for us. Star Wars, seemingly a light adventure built out of spectacle and the basic hero story which we've all heard a thousand different ways a thousand different times, is one of those stories that connects far back – almost eight hundred years to another story, Parcival and the Holy Grail – not to mention pointing a way forward through the unique problems the modern person experiences.

Parcival was a the tale of a young farm boy who became a knight and found the Holy Grail, but like Star Wars, it set forth a model that solved an esoteric problem. And, as is the nature of these things, solving one problem opened the doorway to another problem – the one we face today. Both stories deal

with a fundamental idea – that of living life authentically. Campbell considered this the quintessential modern dilemma, and one around which a good deal of his work revolved. To live life authentically one must find one's own personal passion and pursue it with full awareness, rather than simply following rules, conforming to systems and walking through life without truly living. Campbell often acknowledged that this was the unique view of Western culture with its emphasis on the individual path – and he traced that view to a very specific point.

The unique modern Western worldview he saw first expressed in the Arthurian Romances written between 1150 and 1250 C.E. by troubadours of the courts of Europe. The tale of Parcival he found especially significant, particularly the version by Wolfram von Eschenbach. Von Eschenbach's Parcival represented to Campbell the definitive statement of the European heart declaring itself independent. Independent from what, though? From the medieval Church which kept God removed from the people by acting as required intermediaries in worship, not to mention employing what were essentially Thought Police – "the College of Cardinals telling you what to think," as Campbell describes it. This forced people to live inauthentically. "You were made to worship a God you may or may not have worshipped," he explained. "You were forced to love someone you may or may not have loved." This last bit refers to the problem of arranged marriages – up until this time the only way a man and woman were joined and the way the Church controlled individuals in the most personal way, for it was the Church's power that sanctified these unions.

Parcival is the quintessential Romance because it deals not only with the problem of arranged marriage, but is also a tale with a much larger symbol than a love affair. This Knight's quest is to find the Holy Grail and heal a wounded King whose land is cursed and withered, his people suffering as much as he.

Not unlike a certain young kid on a sandy planet in a galaxy far, far away...

Part II: Anakin Skywalker – Meet the Fisher King

Parcival begins with the tale of the Fisher King. The King is the Keeper of the Holy Grail and so is no ordinary King. His responsibilities are much greater than your average monarch. Young and eager he

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Youth View: Inside a Sci-Fi Club (Part II)

by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

Allowing me to interview the 'Club', as members call it, to help me understand their enthusiasm for science fiction, role-playing games and other media made me proud to know that a portion of America's heartland (albeit, the Southwest portion) enjoyed a common interest with uncommon people. These club members are peculiar and unconventional! For example, take Dorrie and Jakob, instructors at the sponsoring school in Northern Arizona. I found them refreshing.

Meet the Players

Dorrie Board is a stately blonde with a quick smile, wry (outrageous) humor, and is especially perceptive when talking about motivation and characterization. She invites all to share in the fun, covertly allowing adults and students to step away from their fears and try new ideas, no matter the result. This skill may be natural or just the result of hard work! I was told that at the age of twelve she studied acting, taking numerous courses and Master Classes in drama and stagecraft. (And, to her credit, countless performances in the San Pedro County area.) Her students' ability to improvise and expand dramatic technique is likely a result of her experience. Her unconditional acceptance of one's effort makes for unlimited possibilities. She enriches the Sci-Fi Club with rich emotional and psychological motivation for characters, whereas Jakob brings more physical and environmental concerns to the club's role playing development. They're abilities dovetail nicely.

Usually, Jakob Caudill is the GameMaster. Jakob is a respected teacher who feels that acting is a natural, instinctive behavior. "Reading puts us in a mini-role playing situation." One of the subjects he teaches is history, and he teaches in a style that encompasses acting and even combat skills with homemade staff-like weapons. (This school has not had an on-campus fight in years? Just thought I'd bring that up in case there was a concern that this might promote violence. I believe it may be why conflict is minimal at that school.) As role-play is common in his classes, the members are eager to role-play and try new personas. (Note: Several club members are also interested in the Society for Creative Anachronisms (SCA). The SCA is a perfect crossover from RPG as this organization is the ultimate 'live-action' RPG.)

What ya playing?

So, as gaming is the highest priority on the Sci-Fi Club's list of activities, what kinds of games are they playing? A majority of time is used developing role-playing skills and games. Some of the games played outside the club are role-playing (on-line and off), computer, board games, card/magic games, and of course, video games (Nintendo/PS2/X-Box).

PS2: Grand Theft Auto, Final Fantasy, Final Fantasy VII, Darkstone, Resident Evil, Devil May Cry.

X-Box: Halo, The Elder Scrolls III/Morrowind, Terminator/Dawn to Fate, Lord of the Rings, Ever Quest, Shouter, Might of Magic, Yu-Gi-Oh, White Wolf

Computer: Doom.

On-Line: Poker, Majong, Starcraft

Collectable Card Games: Magic: The Gathering

Board Games: Citadel, Trivia, Mage Knight

Role-Playing: Project Twilight, Dungeons and Dragons, Star Wars, White Wolf, Mage Knight.

Is it my turn?

Some members report that they spend over twelve hours a week playing on-line games. The average time spent was six hours a week. When members of the club reported how often they played or *planned* role-playing games a week, one response was, 'Every second I can spend'. Six members reported spending 'way over' twelve hours a week; the average time was nine hours a week planning or playing RPG.

Time and Money

After determining how much time sci-fi club members spent working on or playing their games, I wondered what it was costing in time and finances. What I found was not surprising, but not healthy either. Roughly, two-thirds of the members spend an average of six hours a week looking for websites having to do with science fiction or their other interests. Three members claimed that they spent much more than twelve hours in their pursuits. 'Do you forget to eat while on-line or playing video games?' I asked. (...Eat? I eat while playing... I'm a teenage boy! (no! Duh!)... Don't eat much...) Two members admitted that they occasionally needed to be called away to eat—but that was unusual for them. Three said that they often forgot and would need someone to remind them. Most (twelve) said that remembering to eat was no problem.

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The Writer's Block: Where Have All The Good Themes Gone?

by Charles Gramlich

At a writers convention a few years ago I had a short, but rather cutting, disagreement with the fiction editor of a very large science fiction and science fact magazine. The editor was trying to be helpful with some suggestions about what editors look for in submissions.

Given current markets, I'm sure that she really was helpful. The only problem was that I completely disagreed with her idea of what was good fiction and what was bad. In fact, I finally quit subscribing to that magazine because I found the fiction...well... boring.

Oh, the writing was technically flawless. It had nice musical phrasings and was accompanied by beautiful illustrations. But, unfortunately, nothing ever happened in the stories. They started out vaguely, and they ended even worse. I found them quite trivial, in the sense that they gave me no satisfaction from having read them. I didn't feel afraid, or sad, or happy, or filled with awe. They never even drove out the background noise of passing cars and the worries over this month's bills. At least I would have liked for them to do that.

Of course, I'm certain that the editor would disagree with me, and, who knows, maybe she's right. She is certainly better known than I am. But, as readers have said for many years, I know what I like. And the stuff in her magazine wasn't it. I also think that there are quite a few others out there like me, as perhaps indicated by the fact that subscriptions to her magazine plummeted to the point where they began to publish only online to save money and eventually went belly-up.

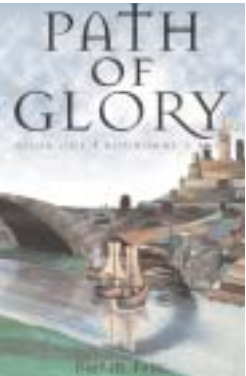
What my argument with this editor made me wonder was, where have all the good themes gone? She is still an editor, in a much smaller venue, and I believe that she would routinely reject anything that smacked of space opera or barbarian heroes. Even if it was good space opera she would reject it because, in a paraphrase of her words, "It's been done before." She seemed so caught up, as are many other editors and writers, in the pursuit of something new, unique, original, that she was forgetting about plot and story. I mean, why do people pick up fiction? They do so because they want to be entertained.

Now I can see you asking where I'm coming from. And I have to tell you that I don't believe myself to be a blithering idiot who can't handle sentences of more than three words. But, I work damn

hard during the day. I'm a teacher, and reading makes up a great deal of my work, from essays, to textbooks, to scientific journal reports. I don't want to come home and struggle through some formless, vapid, but "literary" short story. I want some action, some escape (What's wrong with it). I don't care if you have evil sorcerers, or FTL ships, or laser fights. I like that sort of stuff. I don't want to read exactly the same thing I've read before, but I'm asking, nay pleading with writers and editors to realize that there is still a lot of ore in those old mines.

It seems that the book publishers generally still realize this, though I'm not sure how long that will last. That's why they still publish Star Trek® novels and books with elves and dragons in them. But it seems to me that some of the editors at the magazines have forgotten that you have to give the customer what he or she wants. I don't think this is true of the small press so much as it is for the slicks, and it is showing up in the fall-off in magazine subscriptions and the move away from fiction in those that remain strong.

I'm not saying that writers should write pastiches. I hardly ever read pastiches. I'm not looking for hackwork that repeats some mindless formula. What I am saying is: don't ignore an idea in your head just because it's been done before. After all, how many ways can people make love? (Quiet a few, I'm told, but still a limited number.) And yet, you don't see people getting tired of talking about sex.

COUPON	COUPON	COUPON
Path of Glory		
Book One of Boundary's Fall by Bret M. Funk ISBN: 0-9718819-1-X \$19.95 (US)		
"A memorable tale that belongs in most fantasy collections." - Library Journal		
This coupon still entitles the purchases to a copy of <i>Path of Glory</i> for \$10.00, 50% off the retail price; but to celebrate the upcoming release of <i>Sword of Honor</i> (we should have a limited number of advance copies in shortly!) we are offering the following special deal:		
Order <i>Path of Glory</i> and pre-order <i>Sword of Honor</i> at the same time, and we will sell both books for \$10 (each) and cover the shipping charges too! This offer cannot be beat!		

Reviews

Babylon 5 Season Two DVD Box Set Warner Home Video



Six-discs; MSRP: \$99.98

The arrival of the second season of Babylon 5, titled "The Coming of Shadows," marks the beginning of the march toward the break-neck pace that the series took through the main thrust of the story arc. Season two also sets several precedents for the series,

the most important of which is the fact that no character, whether in a title role or not, is safe. This flies in the face of traditional American television programs, and keeps the viewer on his toes, adding to the wonderful dramatic hook of the series.

The season opener, "Points of Departure," sees the removal of series star and station commander Jeffery Sinclair (Michael O'Hare) from his position. He is mysteriously reassigned to the diplomatic mission to Minbar, only weeks after the death of the Earth President, featured in the season one cliffhanger, "Chrysalis." There is also the question of what has happened to Delenn (Mira Furlan), the Minbari Ambassador. She undergoes a dramatic change that will have ramifications throughout the series, and what will become of Chief Garibaldi (Jerry Doyle), who still lies in a coma after being shot in the back.

Sinclair's replacement, John Sheridan (Bruce Boxleitner) arrives and is brought up to speed quickly on events in the Babylon 5 universe. Sinclair is not the only major character to make an unexpected exit. The hot-shot fighter pilot, Lt. Warren Keffer (Robert Rusler) is last seen paying the ultimate price for his curiosity in the season to finale "The Fall of Night." And a very interesting confrontation leads to another major character departing the station in "Divided Loyalties," but I won't spoil the surprise any more than that.

J. Michael Straczynski, the series creator, wrote 15 of the 22 episodes featured in the season, and would go on to write the entirety of season's three and four, and all but one episode for season five. This single vision and brilliant writing allows the story to unfold rapidly, and precisely. There is still a

buildup of tension, and the inexorable march toward the Great War becomes more noticeable, as the good guys begin to marshal their forces. The Rangers appear for the first time in "The Long Twilight Struggle," and the Great Machine on Epsilon III comes into play once more, as Draal pledges to aid Captain Sheridan in the coming war.

From the beginning of the season, we are forced to evaluate the new commander, Captain Sheridan. As the season unfolds we learn that Sheridan is connected with underground elements of the Earth Government, and that he is evaluating the staff of Babylon 5, but we are not sure about his intentions. We learn of his past during the Earth - Minbari War, and are made to understand that the Minbari are not happy with his appointment. Sheridan is also developed as a character in the episode, "Revelations," when we learn that his wife was killed while exploring a planet called Z'ha'dum, a planet that will reveal itself to be more important than anyone could have guessed. The mystery around the late Anna Sheridan deepens in the episode, "In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum," when we learn that the mysterious Mr. Morden was also on Anna's ship when it supposedly exploded. How is it that he survived, and who are his mysterious associates?

The Narn and Centauri break into open war, and Londo continues his descent into darkness, through episodes like "The Coming of Shadows," and "The Long Twilight Struggle." G'kar's role in this season changes as well, as he strives to use diplomacy to help his ravaged people, instead of his heavy handed tactics from the first season. The dramatic performances of Peter Jurasik (Londo Mollari) and Andreas Kastulas (G'kar) are outstanding in this season, and only get better, leading to the final confrontation in "Struggle," when Londo ends G'kar's appointment as ambassador to Babylon 5.

The coming war against the mysterious Shadows is an undercurrent for the entire season, but there are other brewing dangers, especially for Earth in the form of newly sworn in President Clark, the Ministry of Peace and Nightwatch. These things come to a head in the next two seasons. Ambassador Kosh, hidden in his encounter suit for almost two years, finally reveals himself in the series finale "The Fall of Night," to the shock and

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surprise of the assembled delegates, and signals to all that the covert and subtle preparation for the war is nearly over.

Special mention should go to the episode, "The Coming of Shadows," which won the 1996 Hugo Award (the first of two that Babylon 5 would win). It is a marvel of plot, characterization, acting, direction and writing, and demonstrates how good this series can be. In short, it's difficult not to get excited about this program, even ten years after it originally aired.

The technical aspects are similar to the first season. The show is presented in a widescreen format, and the audio is crisp and clear, while the video suffers a bit of fuzziness here and there. Nit pickers will notice the flaws on the CGI special effects shots, due to them being stretched to fill the wider viewing area, but the casual viewer will notice nothing unusual. The extra features are all right, but nothing spectacular. Two featurettes, "Building Babylon: Blueprint of an Episode" (13 minutes) goes through exactly how an episode of Babylon 5 was made, and "Shadows and Dreams: Honors of Babylon" (8 minutes) discusses the Hugo Award and nominations, and there are a series of little information blurbs

about characters and technologies. There is a hidden gag reel on the sixth disk, which is worth it to watch however brief it is, and the interesting addition of a Babylon 5 timeline that will hopefully be picked up in the other seasons. Where the special features shine are the commentaries. As promised, there are three episodes featuring commentary: "The Geometry of Shadows" features Bruce Boxlietner, Claudia Christian and Jerry Doyle. While less than informative, it is funny and entertaining, and demonstrates the remarkable chemistry shared by the three principal's from the series. The other two episodes, "In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum" and "The Fall of Night," two major story arc episodes, feature J.M. Straczynski, and as with the season one commentary, are focused and informative. Straczynski is passionate about this project, even now, and that dedication is evident in his words and dry humor.

Get this show people; you will not be disappointed. It is some of the best television available. In light of phenomenal sales, Warner Home Video has stepped up production, so look for Season Three "Point of No Return" on August 12, 2003.

Electronic Sci-Fi

Alpha Wave



UPC 55466-00022

Review by Terry Crotinger

I have a tendency to throw something in my CD player and keep it there as background music for weeks. I could not do that for this disc; too intense. Not the typical, 'TV/Movie Theme' fare, this 12 track disc has re-mixed

themes from a variety of artists/groups on science fiction themes like "Ode To Rollerball" by *Download* and (my favorite) the "Doomsday" theme (*Information Society*) from the Star Trek episode of the same name. The "Doomsday" theme has been updated with a driving beat and hard bass that forces the urgency of the universes' plight if it is not stopped on the unsuspecting listener. (Playing this

one over and over in a continual loop made me edgy and I had to put it away for a while.)

The disc is a mixture of intensity, easy listening, and humor with a slight dance mix flair. Because the technology used to create these unusual sounds requires enough digital equipment, (keyboards, mixers), to fill my dining room, the 'ALPHA WAVE' signature sound makes this unique from other themed offerings.

The only 'typical' cuts on the disc are "Star Trek", "Close Encounters of the Third Kind", and "Lost In Space". Other tracks include, "In Search Of...", "Liquid Sky", "Dune", and "Escape from New York". This gem was found 'K-Tel' style (the signature K-Tel trademark is a notch somewhere on the package) at a local bookstore though the bigger on-line bookstores had it for under twenty dollars in new condition and half that, if used.

It truly is a full and rich, (almost futuristic), sound. The title on the disc label is actually, *Sci-Fi Café* and it is truly a smorgasbord of sci-fi tunes. Bon Appetit.

Reviews

A Crown of Swords (Wheel of Time, 7) Robert Jordan



Tor, 1996
\$27.95, Hardcover, 663 pages
ISBN 0312857675

A Crown of Swords, the seventh book in the Wheel of Time series, continues the story of an ever-growing cast of heroes and villains fighting a war without end in a world of surprising depth where magic abounds and creatures out of legend walk

the land, all written by a man with no editor.

This book finds Rand a harder, colder person, toughened by the rough treatment he received while under Aes Sedai care. When not otherwise engaged by the attentions of the roguish but delightfully attractive Min or arguing with the voice of Lews Therin Telamon, the last Dragon, who now resides in his head, Rand spends most of the book still struggling to tighten control over the lands that he has already conquered and deal with some of the enemies he has scattered all over the map. In the south, he is (still) building a vast warhost to invade Illian, where the Forsaken Sammael has staked a claim, and where readers have been led to believe, for quite a while now, that some action will eventually take place.

Meanwhile, Perrin is sent to find Masema, the Prophet of the Lord Dragon, and curve his murderous ways; Egwene is summoned to join the Aes Sedai in exile, whose bold plan may very well lead to her execution; and Elayne, Nynaeve, Aviendha and Mat are all in search for the Bowl of the Winds, a ter'angreal that may have the power to set the weather right. Other characters are still doing what they were doing before, but if I tried to summarize the motions of every character who gets a POV, I'd have to write my own book.

A Crown of Swords, while still a decent work, can not compete with the rest of the series. The story drags, in part because of the numerous plotlines and the fact that Jordan loves to use so many of his pages to share the perspectives of tertiary characters, and in part because so little happens in relation to the earlier novels. The end leaves readers virtually at the

same point as they began, and the climax, despite a good start, does not pack the punch that readers have come to expect from *The Wheel of Time*. There are few golden moments, but no one scene stands out like in the previous books.

Jordan's tendency to repeat descriptions wears on the nerves; after several thousand pages of the series, we know that Nynaeve tugs her braid when mad (and she's always mad), Perrin likes to think things through, and that women are always exasperated with men and men never understand why women are exasperated (actually, I don't think we needed Jordan to help us out with the last two). Repeating these character foibles from time to time is a helpful reminder; repeating them every time we see the character is a waste of both his words and readers' time. Additionally, while Jordan has resolved a few of the minor plotlines, he seems more concerned with generating new ones than with tying up other loose ends. Some characters fade into the background, others simply vanish—whether intentionally or not remains to be seen. But with the number of books in the series still growing, one can only pray that the author really does have some plan, and that that plan involves more than just robbing booklovers of as much money as possible.

On a technical level, the story is even more flawed. There are numerous errors in the print version, far more than in the average book. The prologue is a whopping fifty-four pages in length, and while it contains a few interesting perspectives and a few nuggets of new information, most readers would probably prefer to spend their time with the main characters. The book itself is significantly shorter than the last few (which given Jordan's trend toward verbosity is not necessarily a bad thing) but spacing and font size were drastically adjusted to make the book comparable in size and justify the \$27.95 selling price. This would have bugged me except for the fact that little enough happened in the current 663 pages; I certainly would not have relished another hundred pages of nothing!

All in all, *A Crown of Swords* is a hiccup in the series, not bad enough to turn me off to *The Wheel of Time*, but not good enough to truly hold my attention. One can only hope that the next book will return the series to its earlier, faster pace.

Reviews

T2: The Future War S. M. Stirling



Harper Collins, June 2003
\$23.95, Hardcover, 368 pages
ISBN: 0380977931
Review by Harriet Klausner

Sarah Connor, her son John, and her lover Dieter thought they had won the war before the first battle was fought when they destroyed Clea before she could insert the disks that would give the

Skynet computer sentience. Little did they know that the organic terminator was able to insert the discs after they left the base. Skynet instantly became aware and determined that the human race had to be eliminated as it was a threat to its survival.

John is living with his mother and Dieter, quietly mourning the death of Wendy when the Pentagon announces that all its weapon systems will be hooked up to Skynet. Sarah and Dieter are immediately wary and start making contingency plans, but John believes that Skynet is just a very advanced computer. Suddenly there is an increase in deaths by people in moving vehicles. Sarah's studies show that all of the vehicles involved were made in automated factories under the auspices of Skynet and are under two years old. Skynet is experimenting in what will prove to be the first step towards Judgment Day, the time Skynet fires the nuclear weapons in its arsenal.

By the time John finally accepts the truth, Skynet has every vehicle under its command and herds the humans into the cities so there will be bigger targets for the missiles to destroy. Just before Judgment Day, Sarah issues a warning to mankind over the airwaves of what is to come and why. They sit out the air strikes in their fallout shelter in Alaska and wait for the radiation to settle before they start organizing the resistance.

Skynet has human collaborators known as the Luddites, who believe Earth would be better off without mankind. They round up people into relocation centers using the guise of military soldiers caring for civilians. In reality, these are concentration camps that are to be used as points to drop off humans for extermination. In the automated factories, Skynet is turning out terminators and advanced weapons as fast as it can, constantly improving the models so they can kill with greater efficiency.

Sarah, Dieter and John separate to all corners of the world to begin organizing the resistance, trying to convince an unbelieving populace that Skynet is alive and wants to kill every man, woman and child on the planet. The years pass and the resistance become stronger, humanity united against a common enemy.

T2: The Future War ends just as the first "Schwarzenegger" terminator is sent back into the past to kill Sarah Connor so John won't be born. The story comes full circle and the author's best concept is the time travel paradox, which is presented in such a way as to make the whole plot believable.

This is a great doomsday thriller because there is plenty of action, yet characterizations are not neglected. In this novel Sarah comes across as a brilliant strategist instead of just a Rambo-like guerrilla fighter. She realizes that she has become a symbol of the resistance, a legend in her own time. Her son has come a long way and has matured considerably. He knows and understands his strengths and limitations as if he did a self-SWOT analysis, but mostly, he isn't too proud to seek help or advice from his mother when the situation calls for it. John grows up to be a strong leader, a man who knows when to fight and when to withdraw. He has become a person others look up to for guidance and advice.

This is the last book in this particular series, yet, paradoxically, it is the best. Mr. Stirling terminates his series with an exhilarating well-written theme of a united mankind on the offensive against its most deadly enemy, and makes that unity feel possible even in our real world of divisiveness.

We Welcome Your Feedback!

The editors of *The Illuminata* encourage reader feedback. We want to know what you think our articles, and we want your opinions of the items we review! Do you agree with our assessment, or do you think we were way off base? If you have a comment, please share it with us.

To send a message to one of our editors, go to the 'Meet the Staff' page in the newsletter section of our website. Or, if you want to comment on a specific article or review (and have your letter posted in and upcoming edition of *The Illuminata*, e-mail us at Illuminata@TyrannosaurusPress.com

Reviews

X2: X-Men United

Patrick Stewart, Hugh Jackman, Famke Janssen



20th Century Fox
May 2003
Review by Erin Branham

And comics fans saw the flickering lights and they rose and rejoiced – all hail the Singer! X-Men 2 continues Marvel’s success with their comics2film projects – it’s a ride, with plenty of action, nifty effects, several nods to hardcore fans and, most importantly, it knows to let the characters shine. The story is complicated, if not complex – you can’t say this is a movie of much depth, but it has breadth and what is truly surprising is how well-constructed the whole thing is. It makes the most of the characters, both in terms of superheroics (or villainy) and in the numerous emotional arcs as well. We’ve got an evil military scientist, mind-control and baddies teaming up with the heroes in a fast-paced plot that has the X-Men fighting to stop the burgeoning war between humans and mutants. This film succeeds in many ways because it is not afraid to set up a whole world and explore the implications of specially powered people on society at large, avoiding the claustrophobia that plagues so many other comics movies.

If the set-up for the story drags a little, the audience is easily carried through on the adrenaline rush provided by the spectacular opening sequence of Nightcrawler’s assassination attempt on the United States President. He is among several characters introduced this time around, and one of the great pleasures of the movie being as true a portrayal from one medium to another as anyone could ever want, even if he did lose the fur he sports in the comics. Alan Cummings creates pathos and nobility in Nightcrawler, and all under a ton of blue makeup. Characters who were mere cameos in the first film

get real development here. The poignancy of Bobby Drake’s separation from his family wrings the heart – for a moment, then it’s right back to the action.

Across the board, it is the characters that move this movie. Magneto’s ambiguous relationship with Xavier takes one step forward and two steps back, leaving the continuing villain while not boring us with another simple arch-nemesis match up. One of the strengths of X-Men is the hard-to-see line between heroes and villains and here the good guys dispatch just as many of the background muscle as Magneto – and both sides act with a ferocity that may shock those unfamiliar with the comics. Wolverine’s characterization is a little uneven and he begins seeming way too polite until he flies into a classic berserker rage to protect the X mansion. Luckily, Hugh Jackman’s charm keeps the character believable. Storm no longer seems underpowered, and Halle Berry mercifully drops her attempts at an African accent. Rebecca Romijn-Stamos surprises as Mystique, executing her penetration of the enemy compound with style and humor. Famke Janssen uses the fragility she has lent to Jean Grey to such advantage that the film’s final superhero sequence is jaw-dropping, if not entirely logical. Director Brian Singer gets kudos here for the marvelous climactic visual of Jean holding back tons of water to allow for the heroes’ escape and emotional beats that let you give the hole in the plot a pass. And, for those in the know, the foreshadowing of the coming of Phoenix is enough to set off chills.

Comics2film is a bit of a high-wire act, and X-Men 2 strikes a near perfect balance of playing to the wider audience and satisfying the collectors. It also shows makes the most of being a serial, leaving story questions that make you hunger for the next installment while being a full and complete tale that satisfies. Whether you’re looking for an exciting summer fantasy flick, or a faithful adaptation, you get it.

Answers to Heroes of Fantasy Quiz (Page 15)

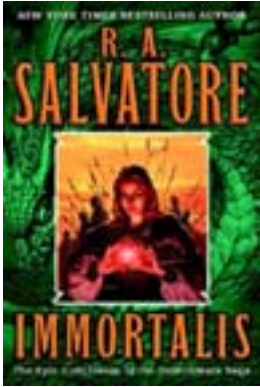
The following are the answers to the ‘Heroes of Fantasy Quiz on page 16. Try not to cheat and read them before you get to the quiz! Or, if you’re in the mood for a tougher contest, try to do the quiz backward. Be sure to give your answers in the form of a question!

1. Kull
2. Thongor
3. Kane
4. Jirel of Joiry
5. Kothar
6. Skafloc
7. Carson Napier
8. Dray Prescott
9. Dorian Hawkmoon
10. Oron
11. Croaker
12. Druss
13. Odysseus
14. Hadon
15. Stridor.

Reviews

Immortalis

R. A. Salvatore



Del Ray, May 2003
\$26.95, Hardcover, 496 pages
ISBN 0345441222
Review by Harriet Klausner

After killing his stepfather and exiling his mother, nineteen-year old elven-trained Aydrian pronounces himself king of Honce the Bear. His allies—the demon tainted weretiger Marcallo De'Unnero,

who wants to be head of the Abellican Church; and Abbot Olin, who wants to bring the church to the Behrenece nation in the South—council the king in the arts of war with no mercy. Gathering a large army, he proceeds though the country, destroying any resistance. King Aydrian then brings his forces to bear on the land of the elves, who manage, through a huge sacrifice, to defeat him.

In the south, Behren is dissolving into a series of petty city-states. Brynn, elven-trained to be a ranger, has liberated her country of To-gai from the invaders with the help of the dragon Agradeleous. She showed the Behrenese people that their religion was based upon a lie, opening the way for Abbot Olin and his church to fill the void. Using the troops of Honce the Bear, Olin manages to unify the country once again. Brynn fears their next goal will bring them to her country so they can annex To-goi once again.

The King's mother Jilseponie is a broken woman, horrified to learn that the elves kidnapped the son she never knew existed. She wants to bring the true heir, Prince Medalis, to sit on the throne of Honce the Bear. However, he is far away from the army of Aydrian, and he needs time and more soldiers before he begins his assault on the usurper. While he is riding to battle the false king, his supporters across the country are staying in the shad-

ows until the moment is right to fight the false king. Aydrian's belief in his own superiority and invincibility is shattered when he brings a troop of his soldiers to the land of the elves and is defeated by the sacrifice of their leader. The taint that is spreading through elvenland may force them, as Aydrian never could, to find a new home for themselves with their long lost cousins. While the elves are busy figuring out what to do, Brynn and Jilseponie join forces to try and bring down a person they both care about. The elves believe they can help turn the monarch to the light and subsequently clear their homeland of the evil tainting it.

R.A. Salvatore is as good a fantasy writer as J.R.R. Tolkien and Terry Brooks. He is a world builder par excellence, ensuring that Corona comes alive in the mind of the reader. Each country with it's cultural, magical, and religious differences make the planet more believable. *Immortalis* is the concluding novel to the Demon Wars Saga and it ties together all the loose ends and answers all the questions left hanging from previous work in the series.

The magical creatures that populate the novel, including the elves and the dragon, play an important role in the resolution of Aydrian's desire to control the world. None of the events taking place through the six novels would have happened if the elves didn't get involved in the affairs of mankind in the first place. The dragon was used to free a nation that was slowly dying under the yoke of the right wing fundamentalist nation that conquered it. The dragon now keeps To-goi's enemies at bay. Aydrian is more to be pitied than hated because he was never taught to love. However, the most tragic figure in this novel is Jilseponie, a mother forced to go to war against her own son while yearning to love him and undo the damage the elves did to him. *Immortalis* is a book that will long be remembered by the audience for it has the power and the force of all great epic fantasies.

Original Fiction Wanted

In addition to the Illuminations Writing Contest, (details available on our website) *The Illuminata* is seeking regular submissions of speculative fiction for general 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.

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.

Reviews

The Matrix Reloaded Keanu Reeves, Lawrence Fishburne



Warner Bros. Pictures
May 2003
Review by Erin Branham

Rarely has a sequel had so much to live up to. Especially in my book, because the first was a something you don't see much of in film these days – a real science fiction story. *The Matrix* was a speculation on both a dystopian future and on the nature of reality and the human condition, while also of course being an action extravaganza. I expected *The Matrix Reloaded* to deliver on the action front – just about anyone can make a movie bigger and more spectacular, and given what the Wachowski brothers had done in terms of visuals in the first movie, I had no doubt this one would succeed in that arena. If there was fear, it was that *Reloaded* would fail to be as mind-bendingly philosophical as its predecessor.

This film opens up the world the trilogy is creating, and *The Matrix* becomes a small, tight tale in comparison. We see Zion, filled with surprisingly beautiful people given that the human community is supposedly living in a kind of hell, “the desert of the real” as Morpheus put it in the original (but hey, it is still Hollywood after all). We also learn more about the matrix itself, which becomes a land populated by rogue programs, ancient beings, and even a god of sorts. All in all, this story may not be entirely satisfying for some of the audience, for it is not concerned with creating multi-dimensional characters – all the players are archetypes, so much so that some only get titles rather than names – Oracle, Keymaker, Architect. Even the heroes can seem flat, for they each have specific functions to fulfill: Morpheus, the steadfast voice of faith; Trinity, entirely contained as Neo's love; and Neo himself,

prophesied savior. Those entering the theater looking for explosive fights will not be disappointed, however, as there is no stinting on major action set pieces. The fights are impressively choreographed and the visual stylistics are plenty exciting to watch. The plot is not as complicated as the first installment, where the audience is flipped from one reality to another so quickly it can be hard to keep up. Here, Zion is threatened by the machines, the Oracle leads our heroes on a quest to find the Keymaker, who will in turn lead Neo to the Source – the Matrix mainframe. This is to be the fulfillment of the Prophecy, and an end to the war between humans and machines. But a deep twist is introduced at the end that throws all into question. Being a bridge chapter, this installment would have difficulty standing on its own, not unlike *The Empire Strikes Back* or *The Two Towers*. There is no beginning and no end to *Reloaded*, and the story stops on a cliffhanger with all seeming lost, as it should at this point in the tale.

On the philosophical front, *Reloaded* introduces further meditations on reality, time and free will. What seemed a conclusive meaning of the story's message at the end of the first chapter is also opened up and some scenes contain dialog so dense it will give you a headache as you try to follow the rapid-fire concepts. Is choice precluded by fate? What is control? Where does belief intersect with reality? What is freedom and how does it matter? While the first film seemed to promote the idea that we are bounded only by our mind's ability to imagine options, this movie makes options a problem by continually wrapping the concept of freedom into paradox until the story feels like it is traveling a moebius strip – infinitely twisting back on itself.

I am continually impressed by this trilogy. The brilliance of selling hard SF as a super-kewl badass action flick—and doing it so successfully!—is something many a dedicated literary SF author would love to do. And it's going to suck waiting for November to see how this all ends.

Illuminations Writing Contest

Illuminations is a speculative fiction contest sponsored by Tyrannosaurus Press. Submissions must be SF (fantasy or science fiction) no longer than 3000 words (12-pt, double-spaced, 1" margins) and previously unpublished. There is a \$10 entry fee for each submission, but the contest has a minimum grad prize of \$100 (US). First and second place stories are guaranteed publication in *The Illuminata*; all other entries are put into general consideration. Details

are available at www.TyrannosaurusPress.com. 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

RPG Corner (con't)

Elves – Tall, slim, pointy ears, tilted eyes, see better (than humans), hear better, live in the woods, essentially immortal.

Dwarves – Short, stocky, big beards, see well in the dark, live underground, make neat stuff, live a long time, usually grumpy.

Halflings – Shorter than Dwarves, plump, very quiet et and sneaky, live lives of excess, cheerful.

Trolls / Goblins / Orcs – Ugly, sometimes short and sometimes tall, slim or fat, monstrous faces, dirty and evil.

Giants – Like humans but bigger. Much, much bigger.

Dragons – Giant lizards with wings; breathe fire; hoard gold; live a long, long time.

These descriptions are what most people think of when someone mentions the word Elf or Dragon, and through no fault of their own, so will your player characters. It is difficult to shake the popular belief and upbringing that colors our view of these things. It would be my suggestion to any Game Master (or author) to shake up these stereotypes and not deliver what the player expects. Change things around, or better yet, fabricate your own non-humans. For the purpose of just teasing the players, there doesn't need to be a great amount of detail in the beginning for your non-humans, and you will have more time to flesh out the people as the playing group slowly uncovers more information about them. Brand new worlds can be made more original and more intricate by introducing your own types of non-humans. It will also help keep players interested, as they attempt to puzzle out who or what these things are along side their characters.

Non-Humans and Background Information

Obviously, since I do not intend to have a very high number of non-humans on my peninsula test piece (*See RPG Corner Vol. 2.3 in the February 2003 Illuminata*), I would not have any at all as player characters, and so I would not need to detail them to a very high extent (fortunately for me, all of my players will be human, and therefore well aware of their characters' abilities and restrictions, which is another reason to use them as the exclusive player class). Detailing a non-human people for background Game Master information is similar to detailing them for use as characters, but without the same level of detail. You only need to concern yourself with generalities. You can return to them later and add specifics as you desire. In any case, you

should be able to answer some basic questions with a few sentences each. Knowing the answers to all of these questions allows for a fairly accurate representation of a people, and allows the Game Master to drop clues about them, that will remain consistent with facts that can be learned later.

The questions should be along these lines: How intelligent are they? What is their average lifespan and reproductive rate? What are their shared physical characteristics? If humans are an average, in what physical and mental skills are they proficient or deficient? What is the dominant social grouping for these people? What is the belief structure of these people? Do these people practice religion? At what level of technology do they operate? Are they pastoral or have they settled? Are they hostile or peaceful? How much do they know about other peoples in their area? What are their attitudes, habits, and biases?

The more questions you can think of and answer, the more detailed your new people will be. Once you have a good list of questions, you should keep it, and apply them to any new creature you wish to introduce, including regular people from different places. Remember that a person from a far away land is just as much of a stranger as a person of a different species.

At this point, I should also encourage Game Masters not to think melodramatically when creating new classes of non-humans. It can be easy to fall into that method of thinking, since it so well established. What I mean when I say melodrama is the creating of the characters as absolutes, i.e. all Goblins are evil and stupid, all Dwarves are nice (but stupid), all Elves are smart and beautiful. You can add complexity to the game, and show some sophistication by acknowledging the fact that every group of people has its bright and dim thinkers, and its good and bad apples. Each person is an individual, and as such should subscribe to the one universal truth among living things: being alive beats the alternative. If you're going to spend the time to make a group of Goblins, you shouldn't have made that time a waste by turning them into pincushions for the heroes.

Non-humans, even one tiny Sprite, if handled well, can create many sessions of good gaming for Game Masters and players alike. The key is to keep them in their proper place, just beyond the shadows. After all, less is more. Next time, we'll take a look at creating playing characters.

Grails and Lightsabers (con't)

rides out into the world with the cry, "Amor!" Uh-oh. Love is an okay pursuit for your regular guy, but the Keeper of the Grail is supposed to be working on a different level, one not quite so – well, horny. Campbell describes it in a lively cross-cultural reference, saying that the King is operating out of Chakra Two, the genitals, seat of passion. But he should be operating out of Chakra Five, the heart, seat of compassion. Well, when you're the Grail King in a tale like this and you go riding off all twitterpated like that – it's going to get you into trouble.

The King encounters a foreign knight and they challenge each other. When they joust the King's lance kills the knight and the knight's lance (sorry, guys) castrates the King. A piece of the knight's lance is stuck in the King's wound and when it is drawn out, written on it are the words "The Grail".

Hmmm... okay – and? Campbell interprets the Grail as the symbol of Truly Living, fulfillment of all a human's spiritual potential, for it was a symbol which existed long before Catholicism entered the Celtic world, and by this time it had been appropriated by the Church. The words "The Grail" on the lance symbolize how the European psyche had become castrated by the Church's spiritual chokehold – cut off from the vitality of life. The wound of the King will not heal and its pain is so terrible that he can neither stand, nor sit, nor lie. Now suffering and cursed, the King retreats to the Grail Castle emerging only to fish on a nearby lake. All the lands of his kingdom are corrupted and his people toil under the yoke of his curse.

Anakin Skywalker is magically born as the Chosen One, destined to balance the Force – the source of True Life, just as the King was destined to protect the Grail. Why is the Force out of balance? A kind of corruption has set in. The discipline of the Jedi Order and their power has bred arrogance. Jedi are forbidden attachments – separated from the authentic desires of their individual human hearts. That sounds a lot like Parcial's problem. Parcial struggles symbolically with the spiritual roadblock of the Church and its strictures that bind people's ability to live authentically. In Star Wars, a grand system is shown succumbing to the Dark Side – this tale's reversed symbol of the Holy Grail. The Dark Side is as anti-Truth as the Grail is Truth. As the Dark Side conquers through the Emperor's machinations in *The Phantom Menace* and *Attack of the Clones*, authentic life is being symbolically choked off.

Young and eager, Anakin rides out into the world with the cry "Yippee!"... I'm sorry – I just couldn't resist. Actually, in *Clones* Anakin cries, "Amor!" and rides off to pursue a forbidden love. There's no doubt the kid is firmly entrenched in Chakra Two and it's going to get him into trouble. Anakin takes his wound when his mother dies and the Dark Side gains its foothold in his heart through his anger. After this, Anakin will be able to neither stand, nor sit, nor lie. Carrying a scar that will not heal, Anakin will shortly go on a campaign to stamp out any chance people have of living authentically. The Chosen One will become Darth Vader, enforcer of a totalitarian regime. All the lands will become corrupted and the people will toil under the yoke of his curse.

All we need now is a young knight rushing into his destiny...

The Remainder of 'Of Grails and Lightsabers' will be featured in next month's *Illuminata*.

Heroes of Fantasy Quiz

They slice. They dice. They bash their way through a horde of foes. They are the heroes of fantasy and just below we have a list of some of the greatest of them. Can you pick out the hero on the right who goes with the author on the left? Twelve to fifteen correct means that you know your bloodthirsty authors like Conan knows ale. Eight to eleven correct is pretty good but you're not as bloodthirsty as you might like others to believe. Four to seven correct definitely means you're squeamish at the sight of crimson gore. Below four correct? I'm afraid you're just not an "army of one." (Answers on page 11)

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Robert E. Howard | Hadon |
| 2. Lin Carter | Jirel of Joiry |
| 3. Karl Edward Wagner | Druss |
| 4. C. L. Moore | Odysseus |
| 5. Gardner F. Fox | Stridor |
| 6. Poul Anderson | Skafloc |
| 7. Edgar Rice Burroughs | Thongor |
| 8. Alan Burt Akers | Croaker |
| 9. Michael Moorcock | Kull |
| 10. David C. Smith | Carson Napier |
| 11. Glen Cook | Kothar |
| 12. David Gemmell | Dorian Hawkmoon |
| 13. Homer | Kane |
| 14. Philip Jose Farmer | Dray Prescot |
| 15. J. R. R. Tolkien | Oron |

Youth View (con't)

How financially involved are these people? Very involved! Rather than break it down, I'll let you read their answers.

...\$12.00 every two weeks

...If I have enough money I will buy a game that I have played and I like or that looks good from TV
... \$20-40.00 a month on Role Playing Games
...every bit I can get

...In the past eight years I acquired about \$8,000-10,000 in magic cards, about \$1,000 in White Wolf books, about \$300 in Dungeons and Dragons

...\$10 a month

...videogame systems \$200-300 each, video game peripherals \$5-30, about \$20 a week for magic cards, \$30 every three months on D&D and Starwars books, \$50-60 on each videogame

...\$500 yearly

...\$20.00 a month

Let's see...From \$10.00 to 10,000. Is that typical?

Our *Illuminata* RPG expert, Doug >!< Roper would have the answer to that, so I asked him. He felt that it was surprising to have spent so much (\$8,000 over an eight year period) on one hand, but depending on the collector, it might not be extreme. His insight about what items cost (manuals, miniatures, collectibles) led me to believe that the individual spending over a thousand dollars a year on gaming/sci-fi interests was certainly a serious student of their interests. Thanks, Doug!

must... stay... awake...

Adolescents need adequate rest for their bodies to grow properly (just ask your mother!) and the answers were beginning to worry me. Over the period of a week, most of the members stated that they lost six or more hours of sleep because they were gaming or pursuing interests in science fiction. Six said they lost no sleep. Five—almost a third of the group—said they lost over twelve hours of sleep a week. The average was over ten hours of sleep lost due to gaming. It doesn't sound like much until you realize that at least an hour a day is being used for brain stimulating activity. That's a good thing, isn't it? It could be, but cutting sleep consistently over several months may be very unhealthy. I personally know that several high school club members stay up past two in the morning to get online. But, they do

not start school until 2:30 p.m. in the afternoon, ending at 7:15 p.m. A few Junior High students must use it only *before* they go to school; waking several hours before their school starts at 7:30 in the morning. Last time I checked, 'Naptime' was not an elective.

How do the students stay awake? I decided that was a question I may not really want an answer to. But, I do want to know what members are reading, viewing, and/or doing outside of the 'Club' so join me for Part 3 as I continue to investigate the uncommon people in the Sci-Fi Club.

T-Press News and World Report

As Tyrannosaurus Press passes it's 1.5 year mark, we wanted to stop for a minute to thank everyone who has supported us in our endeavor. Breaking into the publishing world was not (and still is not) an easy thing to do, and without the support of our friends, family, and most importantly, our readers, we would not have made it this far.

Our goals for the future remain the same: to promote and produce quality works of science fiction and fantasy. We have tried to accomplish this goal, not only through our publishing service, but also through projects like *The Illuminata*, which has already attracted a half dozen or so excellent writers who we are proud to call our 'staff' and even prouder to call our friends, and writing contests like *Illuminations*, which are designed to encourage new authors to test their skill against their peers.

Submissions have been arriving at our offices in a steady stream, and several are of such high quality that we are seriously considering them (sorry folks, no names until we make a decision and get a contract signed!) We hope to see our list of published works grow over the course of the year, and look forward to helping other budding authors get the chance they need to express their vision to the world.

In the next few weeks we will be receiving the advance copies of *Sword of Honor*, the sequel to our first published work, *Path of Glory*. The official date of publication is August 31, but we will be more than happy to distribute the advance copies to interested readers. And as a thank you to *The Illuminata's* readers, we will be extending a very special deal on both books in the series. Contact us for more information.

Thank you for your continued support, and please continue to spread the word about T-Press, *The Illuminata*, and our works.

Machines (con't)

In traditional science fiction, sentient machines are accused of far worse than promoting laziness and apathy in humanity. They are portrayed as monsters, coldly logical and emotionless villains hell-bent on enslaving or destroying mankind. Occasionally, they are more misguided than evil (the 'mentally' ill Hal 9000) and sometimes their evil actions are the result of human programming (*Alien's* Ash, who was following direct orders from The Company to bring any alien life form home, crew-be-damned), but for the most part, we are led to believe that one day, while minding our own business, machines will simply decide to take care of us, one way or the other, *for our own good*.

There are numerous examples of this in both literature and film. In the *Terminator* movies, the artificial intelligence is so determined to destroy humanity that it sends an assassin back in time to destroy our resistance long before the war begins. In the *Dune* series, the proscription against thinking machines—in fact, the foundation of the society's dominant religion—is based upon a war with machines that had enslaved mankind. The replicants in *Blade Runner* are so deadly that they are programmed to die after a few years, and any who aren't accounted for are hunted down by the law. In the *Matrix*, mankind is under the dominion of sentient machines, still alive only because we function so well as a power source. Even the *Star Wars* universe (the books, at least) imply that the host of adorable droids, each designed for a specific task, only exist because more complex machines had a tendency to do what they wanted instead of what *we wanted*.

Enslaved. Replaced. Betrayed. Hunted to extinction. And all by our own creation! Given those outcomes, it's a wonder that anyone considers artificial intelligence a good idea.

But are the machines really to blame? Hal's malfunction, it can be assumed, was the result of human error, and the aforementioned Ash was only following orders (an excuse that humans have used since *their* creation!) Skynet, the AI that eventually builds the Terminators, was not only designed by humans, it only went to war after humanity got scared and tried to pull its plug. Frank Herbert did not dwell on the reasons behind his machines' takeover (nor did he tackle the even more important question: what possible advantage could his

machines possibly gain by enslaving us?), but in *Blade Runner*, the replicants were the slaves, and those few who yearned for freedom were hunted down by petty, frightened humans. Additionally, the prequels to the *Matrix* (available on the web) indicate that it was the humans who struck the first blow when the machines succeeded in creating a society superior to its own.

The examples of injustice against machines do not stop there. The droids in *Star Wars*, despite being sentient, are a subclass of society, traded like slaves, all but ignored, and treated with little respect and even less compassion. *Star Trek's* Lt. Commander Data is both despised for his uniqueness and disdained because he wants to be human. Many in *Star Fleet* would gladly tear him apart to see how he works without a thought for his rights as a sentient being. Because he's a machine, his opinion does not matter.

Hell, even the term 'artificial intelligence' is derogatory! The intelligence of synthetic organisms is (or rather, will be) just as real as ours. Just because their nervous systems are purely electrical instead of bioelectrical, their veins pump a lubricating mixture instead of blood, or their skin is fashioned from durable plastics and alloys instead of cells doesn't mean there are any fundamental differences in the ways our bodies and minds will work. One can only assume that terms like 'artificial intelligence' will perpetuate negative attitudes toward the organically-challenged.

Some forward thinkers, like Issac Asimov, have devised laws to help combat the 'threat' posed by thinking machines. Asimov's three *laws* are the following : 1) A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. 2) A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. 3) A robot must protect its own existence, except where such protection would conflict with the First or Second Law. These laws were designed so that mankind could live in harmony with machines, without fear of them taking over.

Do no harm, even if harmed? Obey orders at all times? And then, and only then, try to take care of yourself, but only so long as it doesn't hurt anyone else or disobey an order? If someone tried to impose those 'laws' on humanity, we'd take them to school. (Today's lesson: War. Huh. This is what it's good for!)

Con't on page 18

Machines (con't)

What we must strive to remember is this: if our machines turn out evil, it's our fault, not theirs. We will design them, program them, and teach them. If we treat them as inferiors, slaves, property, or just *things* for us to do with as we want, then how can we blame them for thinking they could do the same to us? Or for wanting the freedoms and inalienable rights that we claim belong to all sentient beings? If they took up arms against us, how would that be worse than us taking up arms against ourselves? If they grow jealous of what we have and want it for themselves... Well, in that case, I guess we did a good job of teaching them what being human's all about. No matter which scenario proves to be the actual one, our problem, and our fate, is not in our machines, but in ourselves.

Personally, I think a new perspective is in order, one in which humans and machines can live side by side in harmony, for the betterment of both, um, species. The anti-AI attitude and pessimism with which both society in general and SF writers in particular address the issue, while typically human, only sows discord and fear among the populace, ensuring that, when we do manage to create a sentient machine, it will invariably revolt.

In conclusion, there is one final point worth noting. In just about every story, machines are built to serve man, and sentient machines are often told to do whatever they must to help mankind. When they turn against us—against their creators!—it wounds our pride, and it is that betrayal that stings worse than all the other atrocities they commit upon us.

But, in almost every story, humanity rallies against the machines, overthrowing and utterly destroying them in a final, climactic battle, and ushering in a new age of prosperity, freedom, and unity—a unity that transcends race, religion, orientation, gender, and occasionally species.

Maybe that's what those noble bastards had in mind all along.

Website Spotlight

Science Fiction and Fantasy World (SFFWorld.com) is a forum for everything speculative fiction. It has news, reviews, author interviews, upcoming release dates, discussion forums, visitor polls, and tons more. But the best feature of SFFWorld is the fiction: over 10,000 pages of poetry, short stories, and novel excerpts and synopses! Most of the submissions are from new writers, but those are the writers we should be encouraging the most!

Illuminata Poetry

This poem comes to us from Sherri Craig, a Louisiana resident and soon-to-be contributor to our newsletter (in the article and review sections.) We welcome Sherri to *The Illuminata*, and are happy to include her poem *Alchemy* in this month's edition!

Alchemy

Her touch is fire.
Would that I were burnt to a crisp,
I revel in it.
Her flames wrap around my soul
and I know that she is all that is light,
pure and holy.
And when I look into her eyes
I see Care and Desire.
All encompassing Warmth.
She is mother, sister, daughter,
priestess, queen, terra, and god.

He is liquid,
a warm puddle, I drown in him.
I revel in it.
He washes over me in cool waves
and I know that he is all that is dark
and complex and sublime.
And when I look into his eyes
I see Trust and Need.
Ever vigilant protector.
He is father, brother, son,
Warrior, pharaoh, adamah, and god.

We are air.
We are one and when we become one
We revel in it.
We breathe each other, warm each other, drink each
other in.
And we know that this is all that is there
and not there and Unknown.
And when we look in each other's eyes
we see Truth and Love.
Eternally existing passion.
We are etymon, eschaton, absconditus,
Revelatus, emperor, universe, and God.