



The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into the Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Resistance was Futile

For decades, cyborgs have dominated science fiction. The merging of man and machine, they represent the ultimate symbiosis, the flawless combination of two very different worlds.

Some, like Steve Austin (the six million dollar man), remained decidedly human in appearance, while others—Robocop and Darth Vader, for example—were far more machine than man.

Speculative fiction has few guidelines for cyborgs. The majority, with a few notable exceptions (the Bionic Woman, for one), are men. Most start out human and are given mechanical parts to restore or augment their natural abilities; a few begin as machines and are given organic components to blend into human society. Quite often, cyborgs are portrayed as evil (the Borg and the Terminator), more robotic in their thinking than human; but once in a while, (Robocop and... well, the Terminator) they are portrayed as good, their human aspects driving them to great deeds and acts of noble sacrifice.

But what, exactly, is a cyborg? Are they modern day myths, a problem for future generations, or a reality?

As with any good English word, no one knows for sure, as the meaning of cyborg has evolved over time. Today the word has numerous definitions which, while similar in nature, have widely differing applications.

Cyborg is a combination of the words *cybernetic* and *organism*, and the term was coined by Manfred Clynes in 1960 to describe mankind's need to artificially enhance itself in order to make deep space exploration possible. Its simplest definition is rather straightforward: a human with a machine component and consequent modification of function. This

definition calls to mind the classic image of a SF cyborg: a man (or woman) with robotic limbs, enhanced musculature, and/or some other bodily function augmented by mechanical parts.

However, this definition was too restrictive, as it was not representative of the full spectrum of cyborgs. What about the two-and-a-half million dollar dog (you don't think they tried it on Steve without a little animal testing first, do you?), isn't it a cybernetic organism? And if an alien were to have an artificial limb, would it not be a cyborg? As a consequence of questions such as these, the definition of cyborg was modified to read 'an organism' instead of 'a human'.

But what about the Terminator? He is a machine with organic components; it is conceivable that those components are dependent upon the machine core and would not function as an 'organism' without it. Similar thinking brought around changes in two definitions. A cyborg was redefined as 'an organism that is part machine', and then the definition of organism was modified to include 'a system regarded as analogous in its structure or functions to a living body.'

Now the problem was solved. The definition of cyborg had evolved into something that encompassed all the incarnations found in speculative fiction. With this newfound knowledge, it became easy to separate androids, cyborgs, and pure-blooded humans; everyone could finally stop arguing about cyborgs and go back to reading (or watching) about them.

Those damn scientists. Why can't they ever leave well enough alone?

Over the last few years, as the field of 'cyborgology' (no, I did not make that word up) has grown, new definitions for cyborg have appeared to muddy the waters of understanding, due in part to a reexamination of the word *cybernetics*. It is a popular misconception that *cybernetic* refers specifically to artificial (aka robotic) parts. In actuality, cybernetics is the study of 'communication and control processes in biological, mechanical, and electronic systems.' As is painfully obvious, nowhere in that definition does it require that the system have a combination of

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The RPG Corner (v2.8): Character Creation

by Doug >|< Roper of EPIC Gaming

Part I: Character Creation Background

This will be another look at a system for RPGs, but hopefully it won't be as dry as the History Generation stuff. Instead of getting down into tables and numbers, I want to look at the basic ideas behind Playing Character statistics, and to examine some possible systems to be used in resolving conflicts and challenges.

For those completely unfamiliar with RPG's, whenever there is something to be overcome, whether that may be a crevasse, a wide river, a mountain or an axe-wielding Troll, a roll of the dice is usually called for to determine whether or not the character can overcome the challenge. Each of the players will have a sheet of paper (or several sheets), usually containing lists of skills and abilities and the characters proficiency rating in each of those areas. These numbers represent how well the character can run and jump, how well they can use magic or technology, and how well they can fight. Without this system for keeping track of proficiencies, the game couldn't be played fairly.

We already know from the History Generation System that all of our future systems will be based on percentile dice (2D10s), so we don't have to worry about that. This makes the first major question budding designers should mull over when creating a character system, "what kind of categories do I want represented on the character sheet?"

Basics

Most, if not all, character sheets contain some kind of representation of the character's physiology and mental capacities. These most commonly break down into neat categories like so: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Intelligence, Wisdom, Perception and Charisma. These basic characteristics are all you really need to operate the character. Any action the character would take can be based in one of these categories. For example, if your character wanted to leap from a burning building to a nearby rooftop, you would use a dexterity roll to determine success. If your character needed to assemble a puzzle under time pressure, an intelligence roll would suffice. This method is nice for a very basic kind of game, but just a little more sophistication can increase the amount of realism and enjoyment. These basic attributes are more of an overview, more like a quick once-over for the overall shape of the character. The devil is in the details, as it were.

Specifics

Most character sheets also contain lists of specific abilities and skills. These are used when you need to be more specific with your character's abilities. They usually fall under the auspice of one of the main attributes mentioned above. For example, under strength you may have things like lifting, throwing, gripping (how long you can grasp, or with how much force) and under wisdom things like intuition and puzzle solving. The reasons for this subdivision of the attributes are many, but one of the main ones is to ensure that there are appropriate skills and abilities for as many different challenges as possible. If you are going to attack a dragon with a sword (are you mad?!), will you roll your dexterity to see if you hit it, or will you roll your strength to find out how hard you strike? Why not simply roll your sword-play skill and determine both? (The particulars of how challenges are resolved will be addressed later, so keep your pants on). Another reason for these skill and ability lists is advancement. Without radical changes to a person's (or character's) lifestyle, the amount of strength and wisdom possessed in adulthood is about all a person is likely to have. That is not to say that things like intelligence and wisdom cannot be increased, but it is very difficult to increase one's overall intelligence, but much easier to increase your knowledge of history or mathematics. By having these lists of individual skills, you can more accurately chart the character's progression and education.

So we have a basic set of categories, and as many individual skills and abilities as we care to, so how do we rate the character's proficiency in them? Good question. The systems that I create are based on percentages, which means that all of the die rolling will be on two ten-sided dice, resulting I rolls between 1 and 100. The most common method I am aware of is to view proficiency in a skill as a percentage, also between 1 and 100. The higher your percentage, the better your skill. So how are we to discover if your character is successful in their chosen actions? Like this: Jimbo, the Barbarian wants to climb to the top of the stables. He has a climbing skill of 35%. So, in order to find out if he makes it, the player will roll the dice, attempting to roll **below** the skill that Jimbo possesses. The reason you roll below the number is that, as the character's skill increases, success become easier. If the roll is equal

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Youth View: Inside A SciFi Club (Part III)

by Terry Crotinger/Montanasing

Twilight is glowing in brilliant reds and oranges over the backdrop of rugged mountains. Final rays peak through craggy spires spreading amber over the desert. It is still light outside the school as the meeting begins though in the east, only a slivered moon is rising. Most have straggled through the parking lot, fighting the evening heat, looking for respite in the safety of the classroom. Swamp coolers buzz with anticipation. It is *Friday!* Time for the blessed event many have looked forward to since being ejected by Dorrie and Jakob a week prior.

Not much has changed other than some fine tuning of characterizations, a new purchase of magic cards and a small discussion on Yu-gi-oh investments. After checking in with the members, the game continues. No one remembers when it began or who actually started it. They mumble to their neighbors about pitfalls they encounter and interject a few lewd comments that accompany a name change. All eighteen are focused, young and young at heart in the heat in the middle of the Mohave Desert. They love it.

Continuing my quest to understand what makes this group so cohesive, so enticing, I pester them with questions during a break. What do you read? The typical response was, 'Stuff'. Specifically, what kind of stuff? 'You know, sci-fi'. That did not satisfy my curiosity, so out came the next survey. To my surprise, no one groaned!

What cha' readin'?

There were several questions about what this group preferred for reading material. Most preferred a novel but a fourth liked short stories. One indicated he really liked books with self-determining endings and one adult answered, "Doesn't matter as long as it's interesting." Categorizing shed more light: fantasy—12, Sci-fi (unqualified)—11, fiction—10, war—8, high fantasy—6, advanced game playing techniques—5, love stories—4, autobiographical—3, and altiverse—2.

The preferred length of the book was split with half preferring books under 500 pages and the rest wanting even longer tomes. One respondent wrote, "I do believe a book should be as long as the story demands." Two did not care.

Do they prefer illustrations? Ten said they don't care if pictures are included. Four said they prefer to have no pictures while three indicated they liked

having illustrations. Other comments included; 'I don't need pictures...' 'I do enjoy good art, if any is added, all is good...' 'Depends. Novels—no pictures. Instruction books—pictures.'

From here it became complicated because members liked several *varieties of content*. Only a few people liked books that had 'happy endings'. Most preferred books in a series and/or with ensemble characters as opposed to one fourth who read books with one main hero. Almost half read books with no human characters at all. One fourth liked books that 'Have lots of violence. The more blood, the better.' and 'Books that have a lot of cussing'. Three read books that have sexual content. Two members liked books based on anime. One 'likes 'em all' while one doesn't care. And, finally, one member said, 'I don't read books'.

Favorite Authors:

Favorite authors varied from R.A. Salvatore and J.R.R. Tolkien to Stephen King. Other authors included Douglas Adams, Laurell K. Hamilton, Robert David Eddings, Doherty, Marion Zimmer-Bradley, Douglas Niles, Robert Jordan, Peirs Anthony and Terry Goodkind. Karl Marx and Nancy Drew skewed the typical science fiction picture that had been forming.

I asked them to tell me what their all-time favorite book or series is...

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (Adams)
City of Ravens (Baker)
The Watershed Trilogy (Niles)
Belgarath the Sorcerer (Eddings)
The War of Three Waters Book III (Niles)
Martin the Warrior (Jacques/Chalk)
Vampires (unknown)
Hatchet (Paulsen)
Resident Evil (Birlew)
Wheel of Time Series (Jordan)
Harry Potter Series (Rowling)
Four Past Midnight (King)
Siege of Darkness (Salvatore/Fields)
Outsiders (Hinton)
A Spell for Chameleon (Anthony)
The Lord of the Rings (Tolkien)
Sword of Truth Series (Goodkind)
Star Wars (various)
Forgotten Realms (Salvatore)

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Of Grails And Lightsabers (Part II)

by Erin Branham

I'm Parcival Skywalker – I'm Here to Rescue You

There are some pretty good parallels between Anakin and the Fisher King. But, there are some pretty hefty differences too. Anakin as Darth Vader will become actively malevolent. The Fisher King is the passive bearer of a curse. The Fisher King is a ruler. Darth Vader is apprentice to a greater evil – the Emperor. The Emperor has no parallel in Parcival. So the analogy isn't perfect. But check this out.

Parcival is born to a Queen. Her King has already left one wife in the Orient to go adventuring. This first wife has a son by him, so unknown to Parcival, he has a sibling raised as a prince in a faraway land. Pops also takes off on Parcival and his mom, and Ma is so distressed to think of her boy following in his father's footsteps, she moves to the country. There she raises Parcival as a simple farm boy with no knowledge of his heritage.

Luke Skywalker is born to a Queen (well, sort of). Pops takes off on them, by becoming Darth Vader, and his mom spirits him away to the country ("If there's bright center to the galaxy, you're on the planet it's farthest from.") to be raised as simple farm boy with no knowledge of his heritage. Unknown to Luke, he has a sibling in a faraway land as his twin sister is raised as a princess on another planet.

Parcival displays a nature for adventure, and a knightly spirit inherited from his father, while Aunt Beru says of her nephew, "Luke's just not a farmer, Owen. He has too much of his father in him." Parcival decides to leave home to learn to be a knight like his father. His mother dies upon his departure. Luke's guardians are killed and he decides to leave home to learn the ways of the Force so he can be a Jedi like his father.

Parcival sets off to make his fortune and comes upon an old knight who takes him in and teaches him the rules of knighthood. Luke already has his old knight teacher when he leaves home and he will gain a second elder knight teacher when he finds Master Yoda. Parcival eventually leaves his teacher and goes about the countryside fighting many challengers, all of whom he sends to Arthur's court to swear fealty to the king as the price of their defeat. He finds and marries his Queen – significantly they marry without a priest to preside over the marriage, circumventing the hypocritical system that the Church had made marriage.

After a time on his adventuring, Parcival meets an old man fishing on a lake and, weary, the young knight asks if there is any place nearby where he might spend the night. The old man sends him up the road to a castle. There, Parcival again meets the fisherman, learning that he is a King who bears a terrible wound. When Parcival sees the king suffering he is moved to think of asking the question, "What ails you, uncle?" But he remembers the old knight's instructions, "A knight does not ask questions," and so he remains quiet. After a feast, Parcival goes to bed and wakes the next morning to find the castle deserted. Confused, he leaves and as soon as he exits the castle disappears. Parcival spends many years trying to find the castle again. And even though it is right where it always was, he cannot see it.

Eventually Arthur and his court come looking for this knight who has sent so many vanquished foes to serve Arthur. They find the young man in the midst of a reverie over his wife. Sir Gawain leads him to Arthur and the court, where they wait in a nearby field. There they celebrate the finding of Sir Parcival. At the height of the party a monstrously ugly woman with the face of a boar arrives and loudly curses Parcival as a liar, a fool and an all around bad guy. She is the Grail Messenger. Now, Parcival had been aware that something had gone wrong in the Grail Castle, but he didn't know exactly what. He just knew he failed at the quest and had to try again, which he had been trying to do. Demoralized and saddened, he wanders off, still looking for the way back to the Grail Castle.

Luke, studying on Dagobah, has terrible visions of his closest friends in pain and decides he must go to their rescue. Both of his instructors tell him he cannot. "If you leave now, help them you can, but you will destroy all for which they have fought and suffered," Yoda tells him. It seems the elder Jedi are still holding onto the rules of the Jedi Order – no attachments, because they lead to passion and passion leads to the Dark Side. But Luke follows his heart and comes into his first confrontation with the Dark Side when he must duel Darth Vader. He fails his quest, ending up terribly wounded when Vader slices off his right hand. Vader gets away and Luke's best friend is sold to a bounty hunter. Confused, demoralized and defeated, Luke knows he has failed the quest and he struggles to find a way to regain entry into his "Grail Castle" – his father's heart.

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The Writer's Block: Sword and Planet Fiction

by Charles Gramlich

For sheer fun and adventure there is nothing better, in my opinion, than Sword & Planet fiction. What is Sword & Planet fiction, which is sometimes called Interplanetary Adventure? Well, Edgar Rice Burroughs created the prototype for it in 1911 when he wrote *A Princess of Mars*, which featured an earthman, John Carter, who is mysteriously transported to Mars, called Barsoom by its inhabitants.

The basic Sword & Planet story involves an earthman on a strange world where he must use his wits, his muscles, and his sword against a host of human and nonhuman foes. The hero is chivalrous and the setting an exotic, alien world, often with multiple suns or multiple moons, populated by a variety of strange plants, animals, and intelligent beings. The emphasis is on adventure—sword fights, wild escapes, and desperate rescues.

Burroughs wrote ten, and started an eleventh, John Carter adventure, and also wrote five novels or novellas set on Venus with Carson Napier, another Earthman. With these two series he started a publishing juggernaut that only ran out of steam in the early 1980s.

The Barsoom books, in order, are *A Princess of Mars*, *The Gods of Mars*, *The Warlord of Mars*, *Thuvia—Maid of Mars*, *The Chessmen of Mars*, *The Master Mind of Mars*, *A Fighting Man of Mars*, *Swords of Mars*, *Synthetic Men of Mars*, *Llana of Gathol*, and *John Carter of Mars*. The Venus books are *Pirates of Venus*, *Lost on Venus*, *Carson of Venus*, *Escape on Venus*, and *The Wizard of Venus*.

A book that some believe may have influenced Burroughs was *Gulliver of Mars*, (Originally *Lieutenant Gulliver Jones*), by Edwin L. Arnold, which was published in 1905. This book is about Gulliver Jones, who gets to Mars by flying carpet but who has many adventures that suggest a possible influence on ERB. I found this book interesting mostly because of the possible relationship to ERB's work.

One of the first writers to follow in Burroughs' footsteps was Otis Adelbert Kline, who wrote both a Martian and a Venusian series. His Martian hero was Harry Thorne, an Earthman who is telepathically transported into the body of a Martian. Similarly, Kline's hero Robert Grandon exchanges his earth body for the body of a Prince of Venus and has many adventures. I think there are only two Mars books by Kline, *The Swordsman of Mars* and *The Outlaws of Mars*. There are three Venus books, *Planet of Peril*, *Prince of Peril*, and *The Port of Peril*. These stories are

pretty decent but not nearly as imaginative or rich as the John Carter books.

Kline was an agent as well as a writer, and one of the authors he represented was Robert E. Howard, of Conan fame, who also wrote a barbaric Sword & Planet adventure entitled *Almuric*. *Almuric* is very good, but there is a mystery about the last chapter, which does not appear to have been written by Howard himself. Some think Kline wrote it, but there are a number of other candidates who have been proposed for that authorship.

One of the best early Sword & Planet writers to follow in ERB's footsteps was Gardner F. Fox, who wrote two excellent books about Alan Morgan, an earthman who finds war and love on the planet Llarn. These are *Warrior of Llarn* and *Thief of Llarn*, the latter of which was one of the first fantasy books that I ever read.

Yet another early practitioner of Sword & Planet fiction was Edmond Hamilton, a pro writer who churned out dozens of books in many different genres. His best Sword & Planet series involved an earthman named Stuart Merrick who is transported to the world of Kaldar in the Antares star system. There were only three Kaldar stories, and as far as I know only one has been reprinted from the pulps, in a wonderful Sword & Planet collection called *Swordsmen in the Sky*, which also contains a Kline story. It's edited by Donald Wollheim and is well worth picking up.

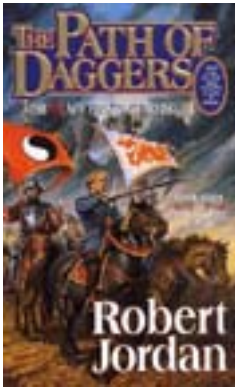
A number of writers who are popular or well known today also started early in their careers with Sword & Planet novels. These included Michael Moorcock, who, under the name Edward P. Bradbury, wrote three ERB-type adventures set on Mars and featuring an Earthman named Michael Kane. These were republished later under different titles and with Moorcock's name attached. The original titles were, *City of the Beast*, *Lord of the Spiders*, and *Masters of the Pit*. The reissued titles are *Warriors of Mars*, *Blades of Mars*, and *Barbarians of Mars*. These are, in my opinion, not up to the quality of the John Carter books, or to Moorcock's later Elric and Count Brass books.

Michael Resnick, an award winning writer of SF today, wrote two Sword & Planet novels in the 1960s set on Ganymede, Jupiter's largest moon. These are *The Goddess of Ganymede* and *Pursuit on Ganymede*, which feature an American soldier of fortune named Adam Thane. They are fairly weak.

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Reviews

The Path of Daggers (Wheel of Time, 8) Robert Jordan



Tor, 1998
\$27.95, Hardcover, 604
ISBN: 0312857691

The Wheel of Time turns, and Ages come and pass, leaving readers that become bored. These readers wait two years, and their boredom fades to frustration, and even frustration is long forgotten when the next book in the series comes to pass.

In this book, called the eighth book by some, it seems that very little is happening in this ever-lengthening series. Oh, the Seanchan have returned, taking over most of southwestern Randland, the ensemble of characters are all in different places, presumably doing something, but after nearly six hundred pages, it feels like very little of consequence has occurred.

Rand, who has added Illian to his list of conquered countries, is solidifying his hold on that nation. Not surprisingly (especially if you've read any of the other books in the series) much of his time is spent juggling the various nobles who want him dead, positioning them where they can do the least damage or putting them where circumstances will kill them off quickly. No longer the fun-loving shepherd from Emond's Field, Rand is now fully the Dragon Reborn, loved by none (ok, by three), hated by many, and feared by all. He sees people as game pieces, means to an end, *his* end, and he is growing tired of the petty squabbles and personal quests for power that have plagued his march toward the Last Battle.

Some small part of this book is devoted to Perrin, who was sent to stop Masema, the Prophet of the Lord Dragon, from killing in Rand's name. Along the way, he must forge his mismatched band of Mayeners, Two Rivers men, Ghaeldinians, and Aiel in to a cohesive fighting force and face intrigues from the Whitecloaks, Seanchan, Shaido, and the Prophet himself. But the bulk of *Path of Daggers* follows the female characters. Egwene, the newly-stoled Amyrlin Seat, is leading the rebel Aes Sedai north to Tar Valon, where her army will (someday) lay siege to the White Tower and force Elaida to step down. Along the way she will have to struggle for

every ounce of power, for the elder Aes Sedai view her as little more than a figurehead and do little more than tolerate her attempts to act like a real Amyrlin.

Meanwhile, Nynaeve, Elayne and Aviendha have *finally* found the Bowl of the Winds and actually appear to want to use it. Don't get too excited though, since most of our time with them focuses on the long march to Andor and the bickering between Aes Sedai, Windfinders, and Kin.

Path of Daggers is the first truly disappointing book of the series. Much of the text repeats descriptions and attitudes that readers have seen a thousand times, the climax is weak when compared to the other books (even the less-than-spectacular end to *Crown of Swords*), and the author's insistence on introducing new characters (and new POVs), while contributing to the grand epic feeling at times, is starting to slow the series down considerably, as it takes several hundred pages to cover the same time period for all the major players. Yet ironically, my biggest complaint as a reader is that no pages (barely even a mention) were devoted to Mat, one of the series' consistently entertaining characters.

On the plus side, the prelude was a scanty forty-four pages in length.

On a technical level, *Path of Daggers* is abysmal. The book is about half the size of *Lord of Chaos* (this is not the complaint; *Path of Daggers* already took long enough to get through!), but the font and leading were adjusted to such an extent that the titles appear to be virtually the same size (so an equal amount could be charged for a significantly shorter work.) Editing was terrible. Not only were there hundreds of typographical errors throughout the work (sometimes several in the same paragraph), a great deal of the prose was repetitive and unnecessary. When asked about the inconsistencies, errors, and the fact that the period of time covered in the book is almost shorter than the number of days it takes the average reader to get through it, R.J. answered with his standard, 'I write for myself, not my fans,' an attitude which is quickly reducing the number of fans that he has.

In conclusion, reading *Path of Daggers* is a little less painful than walking one, but only a little. However, since you've already committed hours of time, hundreds of dollars, and ten or more years of your life to reading the series, it may still be worth a look.

Reviews

Pitch Black Vin Diesel, Radha Mitchell



Universal Studios, 2000
Review by Erin Branham

Do you ever see those movies that you can tell should just be better than they are? They have all the elements: decent acting, somewhat snappy dialog, groovy visuals, and a solid if often unoriginal premise. But then they just sit there – or worse, start chasing their tail.

Pitch Black has the dubious

honor of having launched Vin Diesel's career. Every time I see this guy I think, 'I shouldn't like you', and then I like him. It's disgusting. But, sad as it is to say, he's got a very appealing screen presence, kind of a poor woman's Tom Cruise on steroids. You know there's no depth there, just a slightly smarmy exterior that nonetheless is strangely easy to watch.

I had always heard *Pitch Black* was a low rent SF flick at best. So I was surprised when it started so strong. A transport hauling a couple dozen colonists, several "prospector-types" and one sociopath in cryosleep crash lands on a planet with two suns. The opening sequence is tight and filled with tension, as the pilot and-now-commanding officer—thanks to the piercing of the captain's body with several pieces of space debris—Caroline Fry (Radha Mitchell), has to make the decision whether or not to dump the passengers so she and the other crewmember can survive. She makes the call but a faulty release means the whole thing goes down, passenger cabin intact – mostly.

The planet-side scenes are shot in high filters so that – wonder of wonders – we get an alien planet

that actually looks alien. Besides a search for water, our sociopath, Riddick (Diesel), has gotten loose and shadows the survivors in several lovely, ominous shots. Before long everyone realizes there's something much worse than a criminal on this planet, as they find the remains of a geology station, and one of their own comes to a bloody end. In this interim a pretty good three-way character struggle has been set up with Fry, Riddick and Riddick's captor, Johns (Cole Hauser). Riddick reveals that Johns is not a cop but a bounty hunter, and a drug addict to boot. Fry is stuck trying to keep panic down, find water, navigate the two bad boys out for the I've-got-the-biggest-dick title, and keep whatever alien monsters are out there at bay.

If only the movie had stuck with this, it would have risen far above your average isolated-ragtag-band-stalked-by-deadly-creatures slop—and suffered inevitable *Alien/s* comparisons no doubt. However, around about midpoint the movie can no longer decide if this is Fry's story or Riddick's. Suddenly Diesel is set up as the too kewl bad mutha' antihero in a way too ham-handed manner (though I still like the guy, curse him!). In no time we've got him having it out with Johns, facing down aliens one on one, and *gasp* redeeming himself from the self-ish ice cold killer he had been.

As it is, *Pitch Black* doesn't deserve comparisons to *Alien/s*. It only rates maybe comparisons to *Jurassic Park III*. It's enjoyable. It has some truly nice moments. The direction is quite good, and David Twohy gets the most out of what are probably really only mediocre actors. It is entirely unoriginal and utterly forgettable. Unless you're a Vin Diesel fan. Which I am not. No matter how much I like him. Dammit.

Famous Movie Monster Quiz

Do you like movie monsters? Hey, everyone does, don't they? But do you remember your movies and your monsters? Can you look at the phrases or quotes on the left and match them with the famous monster on the right? Now this quiz is easy. Anything less than eleven correct and you surely can't be trying. Less than six correct and you need to go out and buy yourself a VCR/DVD and spend some time catching up on the classics.

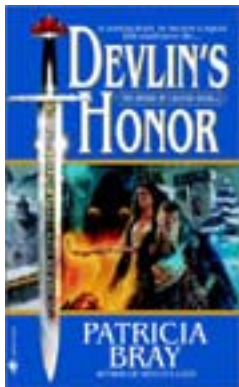
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|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Not so jolly Green Giant | King Kong |
| 2. "I'll be back" | The Mummy |
| 3. Fava beans | Dracula |
| 4. Who goes there? | Frankenstein's Monster |

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| 5. "The Children of the Night." | Godzilla |
| 6. Skull collector | The Terminator |
| 7. The Moon is a harsh mistress | The Predator |
| 8. Swim fan | Cthulhu |
| 9. When electricity came to the castle | Creature from Black Lagoon |
| 10. Chest burster | Hannibal Lecter |
| 11. No sarcophagus can hold him | The Blob |
| 12. The eighth wonder of the world | Pinhead |
| 13. I told you not to open that box | The Wolfman |
| 14. Amorphous Entity | Alien |
| 15. Elder God | The Thing |

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Reviews

Devlin's Honor (Sword of Change, 2) Patricia Bray



Bantam, June 2003
\$5.99, Mass Market, 416pp.
ISBN 055358476
Review by Harriet Klausner

After the death of his wife and child, Devlin of Duncaer was named Kinslayer and became Kinbereft. He wanted to die so he traveled to the capital of the lost empire in Kingsholm and asked to be considered the empire's Chosen One. Found worthy, a magical geas was placed on him forcing him to put the empire's needs before his own even if it meant his death. As the Chosen One, Devlin killed a lake monster, destroyed evil creatures of magic and fought and won a duel with the king's champion, a traitor to the crown.

It is his daring exploits that won him the hearts of the people and a grateful king named him as personal champion and General of the Royal Army. His latest feat was leading the army that cast off the invasion force that sought to conquer Korinth. Devlin knows that war is coming to the Jorskian Empire but he doesn't know when or where and most important who is behind the threats. Many of the nobles and the king prefer to ignore Devlin's dire warnings that war is coming, probably in the spring. Across the land the people are saying that if Devlin is the chosen one he should have the Sword of Light in his possession.

Devlin does his best to ignore the rumors until he sees the sword in the palace picture gallery and recognizes it as the one the smith had at Kilbaran in Duncaer. The geas compels him to retrieve it even though Devlin does not want to return to the land of

his birth where he held in total disdain. Going as someone representing the army of occupation will only inflame his countrymen more but he has no choice. His chief advisor Didrik and his friend the bard Stephen accompany him. Once they reach Kilbaran he learns that the sword is waiting for him in the guildhall of Aluaren. En route to their destination Devlin is caught in a mind spell of a powerful wizard who lives far from Duncaer and Jorst.

The spell causes him to have visual and auditory hallucinations that grow more severe with each day that passes. A wise woman in Aluaren is able to break the spell but she is unable to locate the sword that has been stolen from the guildhall by a fanatical group calling themselves children of Yniss. If the sword is not found it will plunge the country and perhaps the empire into civil war.

As the chosen one, Devlin Stoneland finds a reason to live. He is a protector of the vulnerable, the downtrodden and is all that is standing between the Empire and Chaos. It is understandable that he doesn't want to return to his homeland, which is under the control of the Jorstian Empire because though they regard him as nothing, he returns as a conqueror, a situation, which is fraught with pain and confusion.

Devlin has matured from a shaken and broken man to a powerful leader, a powerful strategist and tactician. He is a leader of the commoners and could, if he was a different kind of person, steal the throne of the rightful king. When the Chosen One and friends leave Duncaer and return to Jorst, they know they will have many battles to face in the council and on the battle field but they march home knowing they will win the fight against their unknown enemy. Once again Patricia Bray proves she is a talented storyteller, who creates colorful and exciting fantasies that keep the reader turning the pages to find out what will happen next.

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.

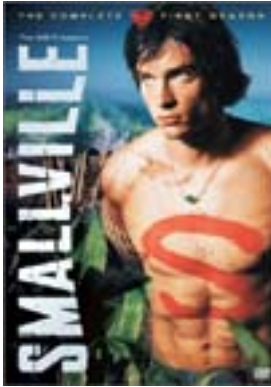
Currently, we are interested in both regular and occasional contributors. The only difference between the two (quite obviously) is that occasional contributors will only send in a single or occasional piece, whereas

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. 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

Smallville Tom Welling



WB Network
Check Your Local Listings
Review by Erin Branham

This Ain't Your Daddy's Superman

Clark's Creek, it was dubbed – or, my personal favorite, Krypton 90210. A couple of years ago when 'the WB' (aka aren't we cool - we abbreviate!) announced it was going to be premiering a new show featuring the adventures of a teenage Clark Kent with a 'no tights, no flights' rule, Superman fans despaired. Was their beloved icon about to get N'Synced? Myself, I furrowed my brow and thought – someone's going to try to make Superman cool to the current teen demographic? What are they smoking over there? The problem seemed obvious – Superman has for some time been too purely good, too clean-cut, in short, too dorky for contemporary audiences. Oh, there's a market for super-powered teens – mouthy, self-consciously referential teens like Buffy the Vampire Slayer. But Supes? No way.

This would be why I'm not in television production. Look! It's actors prettier than speeding supermodels, it's plotlines that can leap a tall cliché in a single bound. It's ... Smallville – and it's not only a hit, it's actually not bad. In fact, occasionally it's really very good. I'm not claiming to be any Superman purist – but from the perspective of a comics fan, it's quite possible to enjoy the hell out of Smallville. While the show is derivative in any number of ways, well, it's a retelling of a story that's been told many times, so of course it's derivative – but not just of comics. Employing a Freak of the Week formula straight from the X-Files, combined with basic teen drama angst, there's plenty to disdain on the surface. However, a unique and somewhat inspired originality in treating the Superman mythos saves the show again and again.

It was easy to deconstruct Smallville in terms of the history of Superman during its first season. The origin of the show seemed to derive from a rather cheesy storyline in the Silver Age Superboy comic

in which Superboy and Lex Luthor were once friends as teenagers. In the lamest justification of an arch-nemesis ever, Lex in this version derived his hatred of Superman because, and I am not making this up, an accident for which he blamed Superboy made him bald for life. Next, the show incorporated the latest incarnation of Lex as a ruthless corporate tycoon. Mixing these elements with the first of several inspired ideas, Smallville opened with the arrival of Kal-El's ship amidst a meteor shower of kryptonite – the catalyst for the above-mentioned weekly freaks (it seems kryptonite mutates humans in a wide, VERY wide, variety of ways) and for Lex's lifelong loss of hair, not to mention a ready supply of weapons against our hardy hero buried all over town.

If this was all Smallville had to offer, it would have worn out its welcome pretty quick. Surprisingly, it has managed to develop themes that were lying hidden within the grand Superman story and had never before been explored. For the uninitiated it should be explained at this point that there are two very distinct versions of Superman in the comics – Pre-Crisis (Golden and Silver Age or 1938-1986) and Post-Crisis. I'm not about to get into what Crisis was, so suffice it to say that in the mid-1980s, DC comics reconceived its heroes and reworked their traditional characterizations. Superman went from an alien hero who wore the mild mannered reporter persona of Clark Kent as a cover, to the human-at-heart Clark who took the persona of Superman to do good deeds. This latter version came from a cold and sterile alien culture which he consciously rejected in favor of human values. Smallville has embodied the traditional duality not only in its hero, but also in its anti-hero – and it has done so through each of the character's fathers.

The 'fathers' are plural not just because we're talking about two characters, but because each character, Clark and Lex, has two fathers to deal with. In the second season, the father conflict has become tremendously more important, and it is the source of the show's greatest strength in injecting a familiar tale with new vigor, as well as keeping Superman from being too much of a dork. For a while the white bread hero was in danger of being overshadowed (pun entirely intended) by his foil.

Con't on page 10

Reviews

Smallville (con't)

The development of Lex Luthor as a young man fighting a dark destiny was easily the most interesting thing about the first season. We were introduced to a character we've never seen before, Lex's father Lionel, a truly Magnificent Bastard (as he's been dubbed on the internet) of Machiavellian proportions. Throughout the show Michael Rosenbaum's Lex has been pulled back and forth between a desire to be a good guy, symbolized in his constant quest for the approval of salt-of-the-earth Jonathon Kent, and the vicious upbringing of his natural father. How could Tom Welling's Clark compete when everyone knows he's the product of two great dads? Easy – make one of them a nasty. Jonathon, played in a casting coup, with an astonishing groundedness by John Schneider, obviously couldn't be messed with too much. So that leaves Jor-El. No one quite bought it when the traditionally benevolent Kryptonian figure was revealed to have a plan of world domination for his son, but then his disembodied voice was supplied by Terrance Stamp – that's right boys and girls, none other than General Zod, the overheated villain of the much beloved film *Superman II*. (As if having *Superman III*'s Lana Lang, Annette O'Toole, play Martha Kent wasn't enough – and someone stop me before I put another parenthetical phrase in this article.)

If there's a secret to Smallville's success, it is revealed here. The show is fearless in its twisted respect for the Superman oeuvre. Refusing the idea of a costume, it nonetheless makes sure to constantly dress Clark in variations of red and blue. The show is salted with sometimes ham-handed references to the 'future', such as when Clark deadpans that he doesn't care what career he ends up in so long as he doesn't have to "put on a suit and fly all over the place". From managing to write a scene in which Christopher Reeve, as new character Dr. Swann, reveals Clark's real name to supplying a future vision of Lex on the *West Wing*'s Oval Office set, a reference to the current comics where Lex is President of the US, the show never forgets its roots. At the same time, it throws conventional wisdom to the winds by having Lex painfully aware that something is very special about this Kansas farmboy, prompting purists to whine about how Clark will

ever keep his secret from his nemesis in the future – I mean, he doesn't even wear that clever disguise of... a pair of glasses. However, nothing touches the warping of Superman's traditional story like the subversion of Kal-El's Kryptonian father.

Suddenly we have a Superman who isn't so pure that he makes you want to cringe. In a clever cliffhanger, the show wrapped up its second season by having Clark blow up the ship that brought him to earth in order to resist his alien dad's plans that he should take over earth and "rule with strength". If that wasn't enough, it also used this plot device to cause the miscarriage of the Kent's unborn child. No one expected the child to come to term – it was far too plainly a soap opera accident waiting to happen – but to have Clark be directly responsible was a twist that caught everyone by surprise. To top things off, Clark receives a shoulder colder than superbreath from Jonathon at the turn of events. What would the traditional Superman do? Find a way to fix things. What does Smallville's Clark do? He takes the Kryptonian equivalent of heroin, that would be red kryptonite, and runs from family and friends to avoid responsibility – just like any confused teenager would do.

So, strangely, the idea of teen angst combined with Superman doesn't seem half as wacky in execution as it did on paper. Smallville has not only pleased a majority of comics fans, it has drawn in a whole new audience who could not care less about the character's history, they just want to see Clark and Lana get together – or Clark and Chloe, the show's Lois Lane stand-in, or Lex and Chloe, or, Hooray for Ho-Yay, Clark and Lex. Beginning with a very respectable four million viewers in its first season, the show now regularly pulls in the six and a half mil range. The network is ready to make a pass at strangling the SF/F competition by moving the show next season into the same time slot as Star Trek's *Enterprise*, as well as setting in into a one-two punch lineup of teenybopper fantasy where it will be the lead-in to *Angel*. There is little doubt Clark will soon return to his not-so-quiet hometown for more love triangle action, Krypto-freaks and the further development of an arch-villain and a superhero. Often trite and always fun, Smallville makes it clear that there's still plenty of life in the ultimate Boy Scout.

Reviews

The SteersWoman's Road Rosemary Kirstein



Del Ray, July 2003
\$15.95, Hardcover, 672 pages
ISBN: 0345461053
Review by Harriet Klausner

On a world where knowledge and technology are at a medieval level, wizards employ magic for good and ill. Unlike the wizards, the highly respected secular order of Steerswomen is considered

benevolent knowledge seekers who always truthfully answer questions put to them.

Any question they ask a person must answer or face a ban respected by all the Steerswomen. One day at an inn, an inquisitive Steerswoman questions someone about a jewel they have found that matches the one Rowan possesses though these jewels are rare and unique.

The Steerswoman meets an Outskirter wearing a belt made of the jewels. The warrior woman Bel and Rowan decide they like each other enough to travel together but before they get very far, soldiers attack them. They escape, but a fire breaks out in their room that spreads throughout the whole inn. Dragon nestlings controlled by a local wizard caused the fire. Rowan concludes that the wizards don't want her inquiring about the jewels. Heedless of the danger, Rowan and Bel set off to obtain answers but that leads to more questions that must be answered by the wizard Slado who set his peers upon Rowan.

Rowan learns that the jewelry is made from a Guidestar, a wizard made object in space that fell to earth and broke in pieces. Using mathematical equations, Rowan calculates that the Guidestar is in the Outskirts. She and Bel intend to find it and learn why it is so important to Slado. The Outskirts are filled with nomadic tribes and the two women are

lucky to fall in with one by saving one of their members from a Goblin attack. Bel fears that Slado is consolidating his power in the Inner lands and once accomplished, he will turn his attention to the outskirts.

While living among the tribe, Rowan and Bel are made to feel as part of the tribe and in turn they come to care for their benefactors as if they were family. It horrifies them to learn that Slado's minion infiltrates their tribe. When they question the spy, he gives them the answers they seek and delivers proof of what he says. When Bel and Rowan finally see the Guidestar and learn it is a man made machine acting on pre-programmed instructions, they realize what Slado's goal is and vow to stop him using any means possible for if they don't, their world will die.

The Steerswoman's Road is two novels sold as one book. *The Steerswoman* takes place in small cities reminiscent of late medieval and early Renaissance Europe. The ultimate power is in the hands of the wizards who have the skill to forecast and control events. Rowan is similar to a traveling minstrel welcome everywhere she goes. When she meets Bel, a woman from another culture, the two form an instant bond of friendship as Bel senses Rowan is in danger and guards her back. Both women are determined to find answers that lead them to the outskirts seeking the fallen Guidestar.

The Outskirter's Secret is the tale of their journey to the fallen Guidestar. Bel, who is familiar with the culture of the Outskirters becomes the teacher and Rowan the student as they join a nomadic hunting and gathering society in action. They easily assimilate into the tribe. The protagonists learn what the wizard's Slado's ultimate goal is and realize they must kill him before he obliterates their society.

This reviewer can hardly wait for next installment, *The Lost Steersman* which will be published in the fall 2003 because *The Steerswoman's Road* is epic fantasy at it's best.

Answers to Quiz on Page 7

1. Godzilla, 2. Terminator, 3. Hannibal Lecter, 4. The Thing, 5. Dracula, 6. Predator, 7. The Wolfman, 8. Creature from the Black Lagoon, 9. Frankenstein's Monster, 10. Alien, 11. The Mummy, 12. King Kong, 13. Pinhead, 14. The Blob, 15. Cthulhu.

The Illuminata is looking for original fiction. Both short stories and poems are accepted. All submissions must be science fiction or fantasy related. Stories should be 5,000 words or less, submitted in .doc or .rtf formats. Stories with gratuitous sexuality and violence will not be considered. Full guidelines are available on the website; query before sending stories. Contact us through the website or directly at: Illuminata@TyrannosaurusPress.com

Original Fiction

Sherri Craig has been recently deemed a Master of the Art of English by Southeastern Louisiana University. She plans to live up to the title by teaching at the same university in the Fall. While at SLU, she was active in the university's Creative Writers Group. She remains active as the list owner and moderator of the groups' web group. Every two weeks, she sends out a short fiction challenge.

"A Creat Tale" is her answer to one of those challenges. The idea was to write a story containing nonsense words. The story must make sense, and the readers should be able to discern the syntax of the made up words. "A Creat Tale" is a fairy story and a creation myth rolled into one. She chose a simple writing style to bring across an enchanted, fairy tale tone.

A Creat Story

by Sherri Craig

Now sit back as I tell you a tale of queezele and caan. Hug your children tight and lock the doors, for the creature I tell of is trogggle incarnate. My advice to you now is to carry on my friend, for there is an ending in site. This, you see, is a story from the past, and being so, it had to have an ending. Now the very fact that you and I are both here should bode well for the ending, but even so, I bid thee listen and learn.

Once, when the world was newer than it is now, there lived a trogggle razdad. It was an ool time in the world because, at that time, no one believed in magic or razdads and the beings that walked on the earth were not the fair folk we have now. The razdad lived in a great shadgeer outside of a large city. It was not like the beautiful, bustling cities of tolyt. It was dark, dirty and dismal.

Everylyt, this trogggle razdad would sit in his shadgeer and look at the world through his magic slag. He could see far and wide through his great slag. He vidied wars, death, famine, and pestilence. The slag never showed him anything good, so he lived his life thinking that these were the norm. So, if he ever vidied a city creature thriving in nature, he brist it out of existence.

One lyt, he vidied a girl. She was not a magical creature, and she reeked of the city, but she seemed frooble in the forest. She had a great lib with her, filled with drawings of the various plants and creatures she vidied. The razdad, after viding her for a few lyts found that, even though she seemed to vinning well in the woods, he could not bring himself to extinguish her. So, he began viding her instead of his magic slag.

The girl was not beautiful, but she had a sug face and a pletti shape. She sat for hours writing and drawing in her lib. The razdad followed her to her home one lyt, a simple canvas covered dweg. He made himself invisible and hid behind a stack of birnwud. When she came close, at one point, to take some wood to stoke the fire, he could not help himself and trailed an icy finger along the back of her left hand. She shifted suddenly, to look at her hand, but that was her only reaction. He closed his obs in eode, remembering the warm and yeltin feeling of her.

After fixing her dinner, the girl sat before the fire drawing gimmy pictures. The fleb which perched above her dwelling was rendered in a seddy porkpie hat. A tuers she met on the way to the river came to life on the paper with a roscly frock-coat, complete with cravat. She laughed to herself as she finished the drawing, but closed the lib with an awnee sigh. She did not get up, but simply leaned further back and looked at the stapic.

The razdad still could not stay away. He glided silently from his hiding spot and walked unseen around her, inspecting her from every angle. She was cityfolk, there was no denying that, and many times during the night he was sorely tempted to raise his wand against her, but each time he found he could not.

At last, much to his frast, the razdad had to admit that, somehow, he'd fallen in ahm with the girl. He was, after all, a man as well as a razdad, but the situation frinked him. Had she smeegled him somehow? He read her again, searching for magic, but she emitted none. A magic talisman then, perhaps? But her tex was simple and she wore no glitz. He had seen a great many women through his slag, many more zelliny and swurry than she. This girl had umfrugged, entered his space. She should be extimmed for that fact alone.

The girl remained outside, painted by moonlight, for the remainder of the night. The razdad remained as well, arguing abscimby with himself. At frod moments, he would draw near her. Standing mere plints from her, wand pointed at her head or heart, so close that if she moved a tink of an plint, she would feel it. Other times, his wand was put away as he traced her features with his bare hand or leaned over her, his mouth almost touching hers, as he tasted her breath.

Con't on page 13

Original Fiction

A Creat Story (con't)

Finally, when the razdad could take it no longer, he stood before her and revealed himself. The girl's obs flew open and she struggled to back herself away from him. Her screams died in her guilt as he mumbled words to freeze her limbs.

"You have come to my woods and smeegled me! For that, you shall pay," the razdad skrawed as he tore the tex from her body. She could make no response to his screams except to widen her obs. She was silent as he violated her, glints slowly streaming from her obs. As he finished, he imagined a thousand lights, each brighter and hotter than the so.

Though he brist her and raped her, he could not bear to extinguish her life, so he left her bruised and battered in her dweg. When he returned to his shadgeer, he once more situated himself before his magic slag, but it was blank, no matter which kraddle he looked.

All the cities and all the dwellings of the vinning were no more. The only place left in the wide world was the forest of the razdad. The razdad went back to the girl. He dragged her still form back to his shadgeer. He cleaned her body and tended her oos. He built a small room for her and placed her inside. And he vidied her.

He vidied her ignore him, cry silently, and sleep. He vidied her belly brin until she finally gave veet to two fair boys and two dark girls.

And then, one lyt when he wasn't viding, the children and their mother fell upon the razdad and killed him. The girl took the children out into the world and taught them to gather food, build dwegs, and live outside of the shadgeer. The children were happy, but their mother still worried, for she smelled the stink of magic upon the children. The children knew this and were careful with their tricks and spells, so that she always eved and never knew.

This is my story, oh my faire brethren, and I see by the wiggling of your ears that you know that it is not only my story, but the story of all faire folk. And so you now know how we came to be. Of course, the razdad's slag was wrong. Not everyone perished. Some of the cityfolk lived. These folk became known as man. Others too, were spared by magic, either underground or in the mountains. These became the dwarves, goblins, trolls, and such. That is the end of my story, you know, and if it isn't true, I'll die a thousand wats until I do.

The following two poems were submitted by Ms. Clair Fields. Upon selection of these two pieces, a hasty message was sent to Ms. Fields, but unfortunately, she was unable to reply in time. Of the selec-

tion of poems that she sent to us, we found these two to be the most intriguing, and offer them to you for your consideration. With luck, we will receive more SF poetry from Clair in the future.

"Indigo"

Her wide eye floods the earth
with an inconsistent blue:
sometimes dark,
and the women cry
Big Sioux tears.
Mostly light her eye is,
so the good times can
paragon the emptiness.
Everyone turns bronze
to spite the old kludge,
before her eye turns dusk
at its fringe...and then
bombshell black.

"The Banana Tree's Femme Fatale"

The banana tree's fans attempt to cool
its passionate woman within--but to
no avail--for her vibrant nature is a
poison to unsuspecting men, who fall
like silk soldiers into her embrace, the
men's suffocation a secret between
Nature's green machine and the blunt
creature within whose sinister smile
ferrotypes the photographic prints she
makes of the men before she slashes
their throats and crushes them into
thin onion skins, soft coverlets the
banana tree's trunk finds distasteful.

Original Fiction

Unfortunately, *Illuminata* editor garrie keyman was unable to provide us with her standard column this month. While garrie regrets the circumstances that prevented her from sharing her thoughts with us, she has offered this short story in lieu of her normal

contribution. This is a dark little tale, a story that reminds us that not all nightmares happen while we sleep, and not all monsters are orcs and demons. I am happy to include it, and I hope that you enjoy it as much as I did.

A Night In The Shining Armoire

by garrie keyman

The other day I was looking over the shoulder of a woman who was reading a card in this very shop. The card read: *Dreams take time, patience, sustained effort, and a willingness to fail if they are ever to be anything more than dreams.* Boy, did that take me back — right back to the night my own dream came true. My dream? To escape. Escape what, you ask? Why, my nightmare, of course! I guess there's nothing too odd about that; we all have nightmares we dream of leaving behind; but what differentiated my nightmare from a lot of other people's was the fact that mine was real — so real it had a name. I called it *Mother*.

I think the reason I remember the night of my escape so well is because I must've re-lived it a thousand times. It replays in my mind like one of those endless-loop tapes that just keep going round and round and round, ad infinitum, ad nauseam; add that to your encyclopedia of literary images. Here's another free of charge: that night, the night of my escape, every vivid detail was like a separate shining jewel against the dark, desperate backdrop of my mind.

Oh, never mind me. I know I'm obsessed, but attaining a long-sought-after dream is like that. You almost *become* that moment, you know? You probably have moments of your own, moments that reach down into your core like the anchoring roots of a tree. Think of it. All of us are like that: our roots taking sustenance from the black mire in the deepest reaches of our soul, a place of decay, while that part of us which we show to the world — our broad, spreading branches — holds out a dichromatic mask to the world. My mother was particularly good at that, holding out a mask to the world, I mean, while I saw the rot to which the roots of her soul were anchored. Let me tell you about the night my dream came true, and you'll see what I mean.

It was early, but already dark that time of year, and I'd gone to bed. Bed was a middle ground for me, a sort of half-way toward far-enough-away to be safe — at least sometimes, like when Dad was working late — but not always; not that night. The big brick house we lived in was painfully quiet and I remember thinking how I felt like it was enveloped in the eye of a violent storm about to belch into being. That was the image alive in my mind as I lay there with my own eyes shut, feigning sleep: a huge eye watching me, omniscient, detached, the eye of a heartless hurricane; and the barometric gauge of my mind falling, falling, as I faced the approaching gale.

Outside, I heard cars passing, their tires drawing long soggy lines of sound as they sped down the highway fronting our house, their drivers and passengers oblivious to my mute terror as I waited, straining to hear the squeal of the front doorknob announce the arrival of my ineffective father. Though my stepfather never did much, never openly confronted my mother, his mere presence had the blessed power to break the mesmerizing spells of fear she cast on me.

But the doorknob remained mute like me, a traitor to my wasted hopes, and the one squeal that I did hear was the grating noise of my mother's laughter erupting downstairs. Her laugh had that ringing, empty quality that comes back to you when you're playing superhero with your head inside a stainless steel bucket. The sound carved out a hollow place in my heart because I knew no superhero was coming for me.

That laugh: a bad sign. I knew it, since the worst nights always started with the laughter as she sat in the kitchen concocting new and clever tortures to try on me: ones that wouldn't leave marks if she were sober enough by the time she enacted them to remember that piece of twisted wisdom. The laughter erupted again, a long sentence punctuated by clinking glass commas and a belch for a period; it was a sentence I knew she would carry out whether I pretended to be sleeping or not, so I opened my eyes.

The low moonlight seeping through my window cast on the wall a shadowcross draped in a shadowframe of curtains. My swim team trophy on the windowsill added to the effect, fashioning a fantasy crucifix: ShadowJesus come to save me in swim trunks, his arms pulled free of shadownails and raised toward Shadowheaven, pointing in the direction of freedom. Escape.

Con't on page 15

Original Fiction

A Night (con't)

The worn back stairs dressed in their cold linoleum runners moaned beneath the weight of my mother's footsteps, crying their familiar song. It was a litany of woe I knew by heart, each creek like a knife inside me, and I knew if I lay there any longer I would wet my bed, adding unnecessary fuel to the volatile fire already brewing in my mother's mind. Tonight, I told myself, would be different. Tonight I would hide well, skirt the ever-present threat of hell to linger one more lonely day in the perpetual purgatory of the living.

But where? Where to hide that I hadn't tried before? I looked at the window, its glass alive with slithering snakes of rain. No, I thought, not there. Last time I tried that it was raining, too, and I had slipped, bruising the Box Elder bush and breaking my arm in the bargain. My mother had been mad about the bush.

I looked around, trying to think. The bathtub? The linen closet? Beneath the bed? It seemed like I'd tried everything — every place — and I had to decide because the last note of the stairsong was sounding beneath my mother's foot, the smell of her whiskey breath wafting down the darkened hall. More bad signs, like a flag hung upside-down or the Holy Wafer fallen on the altar floor. But the worst sign was the silence. It meant the wolf was in the fold searching for the lamb. My mother had stopped laughing.

I heard her in my bedroom from the spot down the hall where I'd retreated, her breaths revving like a rusty steam shovel working the soft earth as she tore at my covers, finding them empty. That was the newest image in my mind, one straight out of P.D. Eastman's *Are You My Mother?* I felt like that baby bird caught by the huge lumbering steam shovel that it mistakenly thought was called a *Snort*. Only, *that* Snort was a fairy-tale and it turned out to be nice: safely — gently, even — putting the baby bird back in the nest from which it had fallen. My *Snort*, however, was quite real and I could hear it building steam. It's kind of funny to look back on it now, but what I didn't yet know was that *my* Snort was about to put *me* right back into the safe warm nest from which *I'd* fallen, too. The primary difference was that *my* journey wouldn't be gentle.

A nest — yes, that's what I needed! I looked around the big room into which I had run. It was my mother's room and it reminded me of her: big, misshapen, as disheveled as she when she stood in her morning housedress after a late-night date with a bottle. Her room had that same dark, hollow feel to it that I got when I looked in her eyes, its smoke-tainted wallpaper as ancient and mottled as the loose skin than hung from her lusterless face. I'd never before come to this room of my own accord, because this was the chamber of horrors. It was the only place where I had yet to hide and the one spot that I thought she would never find me. I thought I might be safe like Daniel in his den of hungry lions, my childish mind telling me the devil wouldn't seek me at the very gates of hell. I thought she would look for me everywhere else till it would be too late — until Dad came home.

I could hear the boxes beneath my bed being shoved about, my meager collection of toys and my rag-a-muffin wardrobe spilling as she searched for me. I knew she was down on her knees, her anger mounting, and I could picture the red tip of her lit cigarette drawing hot slashes in the darkness, menacing marks like those she sometimes drew on my skin, connecting the freckles in constellations of pain. You're probably wondering why she didn't just turn on the lights, but I knew she never would. She hated lights. They gave her headaches. Besides, anytime she happened past a mirror, she would have had to come face-to-face with the ugly truth of who she was. Most of all, lights would hurry a game she liked to play slowly despite how ravenously vicious it made her: the stubbed toes and banged elbows she got bumping around in the dark. I think she liked that, that she needed it. Somehow, I think she felt her added pain and effort lent justice to her outrage. I didn't know back then that I was helping to make things worse. I just thought I was trying to get out of the way.

Well, the routine went as usual — according to Hoyle, you might say, as if there are established rules to which the uninitiated can refer if they want to terrorize their children. She began calling my name. At first it was just my nickname, said with a sigh and sweetly spoken as if she'd only come up to tuck me in. Then it was my full name — my given name — a name that no one else ever heard who hadn't been ringing the sacred font on the day that I was baptized. After that, my middle name would be added, so I knew things were worse. Before long she was swaggering down the hallway like a wobbling train set to jump its track, my middle name trailing behind like a coal tender feeding heat to the broiling engine of her anger. Then came the caboose — my last name — served up with the constant reminder that it wasn't really mine. And finally: the wailing whistle of her interjected curses as she neared, their mournful hoots like haunting good-byes to the peace of sleep I might have known had only Dad come home then.

Con't on page 16

Original Fiction

A Night (con't)

I looked around as the safe haven I thought I'd found disintegrated before my eyes. Like a moth to the flame, I'd instinctively been drawn to the land of my undoing. She knew where I was. Maybe I'd breathed too loud. Maybe she had heard my heartbeats like I could, a rolling thunder in my ears. My eyes landed on a giant ghost, a broad behemoth standing with open arms against the far wall, its scarred wood painted in pale sickly swirls of a white faux-antiquing that matched most of the other furniture in the house. It was my grandmother's armoire, shining like a beacon in the beams of moonlight that stabbed through the dark tears in the drawn white blinds.

The smell of cedar filtered through the rainbow of polyester clothes the armoire had swallowed. It was an inviting aroma that almost suppressed the stench of fear hanging over me. I dove for cover, closing the doors behind me, and was sheltered in the shining armor that saved me, the white cedar wardrobe my grandmother had left behind. It was an unlikely vehicle of escape. Amid a pile of dirty clothes I curled, a little bird nestled and free of the *Snort*.

But mine was no P.D. Eastman ending. You see, that's exactly where they found me. That's where my mother put me back when she was through. My body, I mean. I told you – remember? — I'd made my escape: my dream-come-true?

So, this is where I like to hang out, now. Not all the time, but I come to places like this a lot because I like to watch people's faces. I like to watch their expressions as they search for confirmation, hunting for evidence that someone else on the planet understands the way they feel. Someone who writes greeting cards for a living. I hover over their shoulders, reading along with them, looking for sentiments to sum up the life I led — wishing for words that will give it meaning. The thoughts in cards *are* brief, after all.

Ah, here's a good one: this lady, holding a pick from the Encouragement and Cope selection. *Live your life like no one's watching*, it says. Ha! That was easy. No one was.

RPG Corner (con't)

to or less than Jimbo's skill level, he succeeds. If it is greater than that number, he fails.

There ought also to be mention of special skills, and other things that should make it somewhere onto the character sheet, but don't fall into the standard categories. Magic use can be one of these things, but magic is its own monster and a topic for later. Things like willpower, courage and luck can all be quantified and used at various times during a game, and if you feel that they would be used regularly, they should be included on the character sheet.

Experience

I've mentioned that the attributes and skills can be increased, but not how. Well, here's how; experience. Just as in real life, we learn from our successes and failures and our interactions with other people, so do our characters, and this can be represented in several ways. The most common method is awarding experience points. These can be awarded for almost any reason the Game Master sees fit, but most often come from resolving problems and overcoming enemies. The characters are then allowed to "spend" these experience points to "purchase" new

abilities, and raise the percentage of existing ones. The Game Master usually has to approve any experience expenditures, to make sure that there are consistent reasons for the appearance of new skills in the character.

Another method, and one that I like and intend to employ, is the checking system. Any time that a character successfully uses a skill, they can check off that skill for later. At the end of the adventure, the character can roll to see if a checked category increases. The method for this increase can vary, as can the way that the checks are acquired (for example, checking for failures, instead of successes) but any way you do it, it lessens the work for the Game Master at the end of the day, because it eliminates the ability of the player to purchase skills and abilities unrelated to what their characters have been doing within the context of the game.

That's about all I can squeeze into this month's column. Next time I'll take this background and get a standardized character creation method laid down as a framework for your own systems, and if there's enough room left over we'll look at challenge resolving systems.

Writers Block (con't)

Andrew J. Offutt, perhaps best known today for his *Sword and Sorcery*, also wrote *Sword & Planet* adventure. *Chieftain of Andor* is told in a straightforward adventure tone and is quite good. *Ardor on Aros* is a satire with sexual undertones, though very restrained undertones by today's standards. I found it very weak.

John Norman is the most infamous writer of *Sword & Planet* fiction. His books about an Earthman named Tarl Cabot who is transported to the counter-earth of Gor, which is located on the other side of the sun directly opposite to Earth, are well known today for their portrayal of female sexual slavery. I called them the "women-love-their-chains" books. Although the sex and slavery aspects became more and more dominant in the series as it continued, and eventually made the books unreadable, the first few volumes have only a little of this and are pretty good *Sword & Planet* adventure. There are twenty-six Gor books, but I would only recommend the first six, *Tarnsman of Gor*, *Outlaw of Gor*, *Priest-Kings of Gor*, *Nomads of Gor* (very good), *Assassin of Gor*, and *Raiders of Gor*.

The best post-ERB *Sword & Planet* fiction, to my way of thinking, was written by the British writer Kenneth Bulmer under the pseudonym of Alan Burt Akers. Akers wrote fifty-three volumes (only thirty-seven of which were published in English) and a novella about the character Dray Prescott, who is transported to the world of Kregen in the star system of Antares by mysterious forces who hope to use him as a pawn in a world spanning conflict. Prescott has other ideas, of course.

I won't list all the Prescott books here, though if anyone wants to know they can email me at cgramlic@cox.net and I'll give them a list. The first four books are *Transit to Scorpio*, *The Suns of Scorpio*, *Warrior of Scorpio*, and *Swordships of Scorpio*. All are pretty good. The best books in the series, though, to me, are *Renegade of Kregen and Krozair of Kregen* (#s 13 and 14) and *A Sword for Kregen* (#20). Later writers, including Tim Jones at Vandah Books, have tried to continue the story of Kregen. And a number of fans have gathered together on Yahoo to start a "Prescott" list which is working toward getting the rest of the Kregen books written by Akers printed in English. So far they have appeared only in German even though they were originally written in English by Bulmer.

Lin Carter made almost his entire writing career out of following in the footsteps of Edgar Rice

Burroughs and Robert E. Howard. He wrote a bunch of *Sword & Planet* books, including a series set on Jupiter's moon Callisto. These involve an Earthman named Jonathan Dark, who becomes known as *Jandar of Callisto*. There are eight books in this series. A better series by Carter is the Green Star series featuring a crippled Earthman who is projected into the body of the hero Karn on a wild planet that circles under the "Green Star." These are my favorite Lin Carter books and consist of *Under the Green Star*, *When the Green Star Calls*, *By the Light of the Green Star*, *As the Green Star Rises*, and *In the Green Star's Glow*.

There are many, many other writers who made a mark in *Sword & Planet* fiction—Mike Sirota with his four "Reglathium" books, Hugh Walker with his three highly recommended "Magira" books (*War Gamers' world*, *Army of Darkness*, and *Messengers of Darkness*), Wallace Moore with his two unrecommended "Balzan" books, Robert Adams with his two "Stairway to Forever" books, and Charles Nuetzel with *Warriors of Noomas* and *Raiders of Noomas*. Even Philip Jose Farmer wrote a series of books verging on *Sword & Planet* themes with his "World of Tiers" novels, the first five of which were very good.

But what was the worst *Sword & Planet* novel ever written? In my opinion, that honor goes to *Warlord of Ghandor* by Del DowDell, which features Robert Dowdall of Ireland who walks into a mist and ends up on the planet Ghandor, directly opposite Earth on the other side of the sun, a counter earth created long after John Norman wrote of Gor. The problem is that Dowdall is so much stronger and faster than his enemies, by virtue of Ghandor's miniscule gravity, that he is like superman. He even has a sword that cuts through his enemies swords as if they were butter. Not exactly thrilling adventure.

In the United States, *Sword & Planet* fiction largely died on the vine in the early 1980s, as witnessed by the end of the Dray Prescott series with #37 when there were plenty more being published in German. I've never been sure why this type of fiction disappeared. The trend in American fantasy began to move more toward high fantasy and began to attract a lot of women readers and women writers who, it seemed to me, were less interested in the sheer adventure aspects of the *Sword & Planet* genre.

Sword & Planet fiction is still being read and is still being written. It's just not being published in mass paperback format anymore. It's an area of fantasy

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Writers Block (con't)

that I personally love, and as a writer I would like nothing more than to see it make a comeback. I know a lot of readers who feel the same way.

If Sword & Planet novels ever start being published again, I have three of them waiting—*Swords of Talera*, *Wings Over Talera*, and *Witch of Talera*—all of which feature an American named Ruenn Maclang who finds his way through a star portal to the beautiful and dangerous world of Talera. The first two were serialized by Fading Shadows, Inc, but it looks like that group has folded before the last one will have a chance to be published.

So, until the future rebirth of Sword & Planet fiction, come with me now to an older time, to worlds of grand adventure where battles flame and warriors of bravery face their deaths with blood-stained swords in their fists. Pick up some of the books I've mentioned above, and rock on.

Youth View (con't)

Most did not subscribe to snail-mail magazines or online Ezines. One emphatically responded, 'I wish I could!' Topics centered around Sci-Fi/Fantasy and gaming, with one interested in 'body modifications' (I saw no obvious piercing... but didn't ask).

There were two members who reported spending over twelve hours a week reading sci-fi, but the average time reported by club members was seven hours reading sci-fi books. There seemed to be almost as much interest in books as in RPG. However, one-third of the club who responded to the survey do not read any books in the science fiction genre. Conclusion? Likely, the older students/adults are the sci-fi readers in this group. I would have predicted that most of the members of any age spent more time reading and discussing their selections than in role-playing. Frankly, that has me puzzled. I still have not teased out why these dedicated souls brave the desert denizens and the heat to be here.

Time has slipped away; windows quietly turned from dusk to dark. Stars shimmer as the lonely desert absorbs taillights of reluctant retreating members. A few degrees cooler, the crescent moon higher, a car stops and gives a lift to a solitary walker and fades until all that remains is a dry, whispering breeze through unseen cactus. They will return once more before the school season is over, as will I when I conclude, *Youth View: Inside a Sci-Fi Club*.

Illuminations Speculative Fiction 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 subsequent 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 judge by a panel of *Illuminata* editors and will be announced in the October 2003 edition of *The Illuminata*. There are only a few months left until the end of the contest; writers interested in joining should send in their submissions soon! For more information, please visit the *Illuminata* page at TyrannosaurusPress.com or e-mail us at Illuminations@TyrannosaurusPress.com

Grails and Lightsabers (con't)

Parcival fails the first time at his quest because he follows the knightly rule he'd been taught – don't ask questions. So he ignores his natural compassion and responds according to the inauthentic system. On the surface it seems Luke fails for the exact opposite reason. He disregards the Jedi rule against passion and goes on the quest before he is ready. But this is not what causes him to fail. Luke disregards the important lessons he's been taught about how to use the Force properly. "A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defense – never for attack," Yoda tells him. Upon facing Vader, Luke immediately attacks. He lets the Dark Side, the anti-Grail and symbol of an inauthentic system, rule his actions, just as Parcival let the inauthentic system rule his.

Parcival has a somewhat easier time of succeeding at his quest in the final act than Luke does. Leaving the party, Parcival encounters a foreign knight and they duel. After a spectacular battle, they realize they are evenly matched and salute each other, ending the duel. Removing their helmets, they discover they are brothers. Yes, it's Parcival's long-lost half-brother, Fairfez, Prince of the faraway Oriental country. Shortly thereafter, Parcival, accompanied by his brother, finds the Grail Castle. When they see the Fisher King, Parcival asks the suffering man, "What ails you, uncle?" This act of compassion born of his noble heart heals the King and Parcival and his brother are invited to the Chapel to partake of the blessings of the Grail.

Luke, clinging to the belief that Darth Vader can be redeemed, gives himself up to his father, stating with calm assurance that Vader will not turn him over to the Emperor. But Vader does deliver him to his Master, who goads Luke with the temptations of the Dark Side. Luke falters when Vader threatens Leia, and briefly gives in to the Dark Side. But at the last moment he stops and chooses the authentic path though it means death. He throws away his lightsaber and declares, "I'll never turn to the Dark Side. You've failed, Your Highness." The Emperor attacks the defenseless Luke, and it becomes Darth Vader's moment to choose. Healed of the Dark Side's influence by Luke's sacrifice and compassion, he too follows the dictates of his individual heart and kills his Master to save his son. Though Vader dies, the corruption has been vanquished and Luke returns to Endor carrying his father's body and the blessings of the Grail to bestow on all the galaxy.

To Bring Balance to the Force

Listening to Campbell talk about von Eschenbach's Parcival it almost sounds like the author intended to create a revolution in human thought by writing the story. Of course no such thing is true. Audiences sitting down to listen to Parcival (few people could read in 1210) were ready to hear a lively, lovely adventure tale. Adventures were the most popular form of stories of the time and the adventures were rarely original ones. Medieval storytellers did not invent new tales – they retold old ones. The individuality of the work was in the metaphors of the events and the poetry of the words. Campbell never claims that the author or the audience of 13th century Europe were aware of the various symbolic themes he saw in Parcival. His point is that intended or not, the themes are there and they demonstrate what was important to the culture of the time. So does the same thing apply to Star Wars and the culture of today?

No one can deny that Star Wars is a lively, lovely adventure tale in many ways more about style than substance. In general, Star Wars dazzles and entertains with a story that is at once familiar and new to its audience – much as the Romances were taken by medieval audiences. That these two stories have such similar themes and progressions while being separated by 800 years is interesting. But even more fascinating are the differences between the tales. Parcival is about reconnecting the Grail to the World. Star Wars is about removing the malevolent influence of the Dark Side. One story tells of finding something good that was lost, the other of destroying something evil that should never have been. Is this significant to the differences between our consciousness today and the culture that produced Parcival?

The meaning of Star Wars comes together when you go back to the theme of Parcival – how to live authentically. The Empire, the Dark Side, Darth Vader, even the Jedi Order all have one thing in common – they all represent systems. Campbell speaks to the problem of Vader, "He isn't living in terms of his humanity. He's living in terms of a system. This is a threat to all of us. We are all living, in our society, in relation to a system. Now, is the system going to eat you up? Or are you going to be able to use the system to human purposes?" In the Arthurian Romances there was one system to be dealt with –

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Grails and Lightsabers (con't)

the Church. However, we don't have to deal with the Church today, or any system telling us we have to believe this or that we have to marry that person. So why are we still telling this same story eight hundred years later? It doesn't seem to make much sense that two tales so similar to each other could have such a common effect on people living in two such different societies. But, looking at the experience of our lives, we still face the problem laid out in *Parcival*. And while *Star Wars* states the same problem, it presents an answer relevant to us today, just as *Parcival* presented an answer relevant to its culture. Once the Arthurian Romances solved the problem of the split in the European psyche by declaring the individual heart triumphant, it left a new problem. Today we have to ask the question – but *how* do you follow your heart in an authentic manner?

Campbell occasionally summed up his philosophy of life in the phrase, 'Follow your bliss'. The problem with this is that it can easily be misinterpreted to mean – try to feel blissful all the time. The 'if it feels good, do it' philosophy that has become its own challenge in the modern world. There are lots of ways to make yourself feel good today that have very little with living authentically. We can become very successful and have material power, we can ingest chemicals, both legal and illegal that make us not feel the pain in our hearts, we can buy more things to fill our homes, plus do a thousand other things that are all the quick fixes to which we've become addicted. We spend a lot of our freedom pursuing this kind of empty bliss. "Is the Dark Side stronger?" Luke asks. Yoda replies, "No. Quicker, easier, more seductive." There's a reason the Dark Side in *Star Wars* is constructed the way it is. It is a metaphor for the modern shortcuts we take to avoid the hard work of living life authentically.

But *Star Wars'* answer to the Grail problem is not as simple as 'avoid the Dark Side.' Campbell calls seeking your own individual path a walk along the razor's edge. He likens it to another medieval symbol – the Sword Bridge, a common trial for knights in the Romances. A knight would have to cross a chasm on a bridge that was a sword set on its edge. At the bottom of the chasm was a rushing river. The danger in following your bliss is in falling off the Sword Bridge and allowing yourself to be swept away, just as passion is the doorway to the Dark Side. Anakin tries to cross the Sword Bridge, but it is

too hard to walk. He falls, gets swept away by his passion and opts for the quick and easy road to power. Luke does not fall, but he doesn't succeed in a simplistic way. As much as *Star Wars* seems like a straight good versus evil story, it is not.

Luke is presented with two options – Obi-Wan and Yoda are one, Darth Vader and the Emperor are the other. Throughout the story the rules of the Jedi Order are set against the Dark Side, and which is 'better' seems obvious. But the pure Jedi rules are inadequate because they demand the total refusal of passion. Jedi are to remain completely dedicated to values that deny the individual heart.

As reluctant as I am to say anything complimentary about the Prequel Trilogy, I have to admit that Lucas defined the problem exactly when he has the Jedi Council looking for the prophesied one who would bring balance to the Force. Luke succeeds because he alone learns how to balance the calm and discipline of the Jedi Order with the passion and individual desire of the Dark Side. Balance, it turns out, is the Holy Grail of *Star Wars*.

The answer *Star Wars* presents is played out metaphorically through Luke's journey. From the start Luke is passionate, eager to rush in and attracted to the power of the Force. "I am ready!" he cries to Yoda. These qualities frighten Yoda, he resists training Luke for he sees the markers of the Dark Side in him, just as they were there in Anakin. Luke constantly struggles with his impulses, ignoring Yoda's advice when he goes into the cave on Dagobah, taking his weapons and receiving a vision which foreshadows what will happen when he confronts the Dark Side – he will find it in himself. When this actually happens to Luke and he learns Darth Vader is his father, his first response is total rejection. "No! That's impossible!" he cries, and he takes the path of obliteration rather than accept it.

He manages to survive and by the beginning of *Return of the Jedi*, Luke's rejection appears to have faded as he progressively incorporates the lessons of the Dark Side. He is dressed throughout the movie in solid black, even wearing a black cape and hood when he is first seen, in an echo of both Darth Vader and the Emperor. He wields his power with a frightening ease, just as his enemies do and we see how deeply Luke has been touched by the Dark Side.

In a small moment at this point Luke covers the cybernetic hand that replaced the one he lost in his

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Grails and Lightsabers (con't)

confrontation with Vader, with a black glove. It seems a pure convenience in the context of the story – the hand was damaged in the battle to rescue Han and he needs to protect the exposed circuitry – but the symbolic meaning grows large as the story continues. Luke next struggles with the Jedi rules. Obi-Wan tells him, “You cannot escape your destiny.” Your individuality does not matter. When Luke says he knows there is still good in Darth Vader, Obi-Wan rejects this completely, shaking his head and saying, “He is more machine now than man – twisted and evil.” Once the Dark Side has a hold of you, you’re lost – there can be no living between the two systems. “I can’t kill my own father,” Luke tells him. “Then the Emperor has already won,” Obi-Wan replies. “Bury your feelings deep down, Luke.” Deny your individual heart.

But Luke cannot. He turns himself in to Vader with the words, “[Anakin Skywalker] is the name of your true self. I know there is still good in you.” Though Vader delivers Luke to the Emperor, his own struggle has begun, the light has started to break on his total darkness. As Luke enters the Throne Room at Vader’s side, his hands are bound before him – one gloved, one ungloved – a visual metaphor of the climactic struggle that is coming – not between Luke and the Emperor, but between Luke and himself.

Throughout the final scenes, Luke moves back and forth between the passion of the Dark Side and the discipline of the Jedi Order, attacking Vader and regaining control. Then Vader threatens Leia and Luke snaps, beating his father down, giving himself over fully to the Dark Side – and it is there he finds the truth. As he raises his weapon to kill his father for threatening his sister – he stops. He has hacked off Vader’s right hand as Vader had chopped off his. Looking at his own black-gloved hand, Luke takes the last step to incorporating the Dark Side and withstanding its influence, holding it in balance with the Jedi rules. He throws away his light saber – symbol of both the old way of the Dark Side and the old way of the Jedi Order – and says, “I am a Jedi, like my father before me.” The statement encompasses both sides and heals Darth Vader’s wound, at last bringing balance to the Force.

Parcival opened the door to the modern dilemma – follow your own heart. Star Wars echoes Parcival so strongly because it is the modern dilemma with

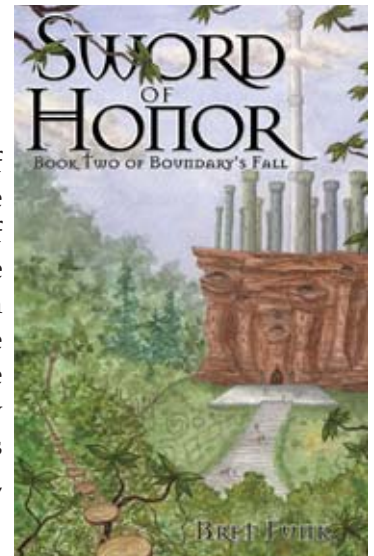
which the story struggles. Its solution to the problem is a challenge just as Parcival’s answer to its audience’s problem was a challenge. Then it was a heroic act simply to follow your heart for it meant a perilous journey in a society that saw little value in individual desire. Today it is a heroic act to balance compassion and sacrifice against individual desire in a society that sees little value in living for something beyond yourself.

It is entirely possible to see a simple fairytale adventure in Star Wars and love it just for that. I do. When I watch the movies I get swept away in rousing battles, nifty spaceships and all the visual artistry unfolding on screen. But there is place where stories can live in you and help provide a model for life. In those times when the trials are harsh, the odds seem stacked and the Sword Bridge is cutting your feet – it would be easy to let go, fall and plunge into the quick road of the Dark Side, or to totally reject the dangers of passion and float above the pain in the insulated security of rules like the Jedi Order. That’s when Star Wars can mean a lot more, when the Force inside you needs balancing. It is then that a fun filled fairytale can provide resonant wisdom in its call to adventure.

Sword of Honor

(Boundary’s Fall, 2)
ISBN: 0971881901

Continuing the story of Jeran, Dahr, and Prince Martyn, *Sword of Honor* seeks to reunite the races of Madryn against the threat of the Darklord Lorthas. More than just a fantasy epic, *Sword of Honor* is an exploration of truth, honor, and sacrifice.



To announce the release of *Sword of Honor*, Tyrannosaurus Press is offering the following promotion: Copies of *Path of Glory* and *Sword of Honor* are available for \$10.00 each (plus \$2.00 shipping), or, buy both books for \$20.00 and we’ll cover the shipping costs too! Ordering information is available at TyrannosaurusPress.com

Resistance (con't)

organic and synthetic parts. (It should be noted that, in some sources, the phrase 'especially the comparison of these processes in biological and artificial systems' has been added.)

The first of the new definitions defines a cyborg as 'an organism whose way of life is dependent upon mechanical or technological creations.' This redefinition has far-reaching consequences, and it reclassifies a large number of previously 'normal' creatures as cyborgs. Luke Skywalker, with his artificial hand, is as obviously a cyborg as his father Darth Vader. But what of Geordi La Forge of *Star Trek: TNG*? Traditionally, an argument could have been made against Geordi being a cyborg, as his visor was both removable and nonessential; but under the new definition, he certainly qualifies. (As an aside, it should be noted that when Geordi turned in his visor for ocular implants, he became a cyborg under both definitions, as the artificial component was now an integral part of his body.) And Captain Picard, with his artificial heart, is unquestionably a cyborg... Perhaps it was that fact, more than his rank and status, which attracted the Borg to him in the first place.

The alternate definition of cyborg (from the Dictionary of Cybernetics and Systems) is even more confusing. In it, a cyborg is defined as 'any organism which is not autopoietic; that is, any organism that has not created all of its own parts or is not responsible for maintaining all of its own parts.' Under this definition, anyone with mechanical limbs or implants still qualifies as a cyborg, but so does anyone with *organic* transplants (the transplanted organ was not created by the host organism) as well as those with synthetic implants (who knew that Los Angeles had so many cyborgs!). Since immunizations introduce foreign materials to help an organism resist disease, under this definition, anyone who has received one can consider him- or herself a cyborg. Similarly, anyone benefiting from drugs that alter mood, behavior, or function is a cyborg, as those chemicals were not constructed by the organism in which they are functioning.

For many, it seems that this second definition is too broad. Using it, just about any organism under any circumstances could be considered a cyborg. For the most part, it has been relegated to a form of social cyborgology, a study of how humanity's dependence on technology has led to a greater equality among people of differing race, religion, and gender; and which may someday result in a society where everyone is virtually identical (the Borg, anyone?)

For those of you frightened by labels and relieved that you're not a cyborg, take a second look at the commonly accepted definition: **an organism whose way of life is dependent upon mechanical or technological creations.** Though this definition confines cyborgs to biological/technological symbioses, in many ways it is no more restrictive than its co-definition. With the exception of a few nomadic tribes hidden deep within the jungles of South America and Africa, all of humanity depends upon its mechanical and technological creations. Without cars, planes and trains, we would feel confined; without telephones, radios and the Internet, we would feel isolated. Every man, woman and child who feels that their lives would be unacceptably worse without televisions, computers, refrigerators and gaming consoles is a cyborg. Even those rugged mountainmen who disdain technology are probably wrapped up tight in a gortex blanket and sleeping comfortably in a nylon tent, both of which are made on computer-controlled assembly lines.

Perhaps even more intriguing is the theory that our entire society is one giant cyborg, a point made most succinctly in *The Matrix Reloaded*, when Councilor Harmann points out that man is as dependent on the machines as the machines are on man. That without both, neither can survive. It is a thought as bone-chilling as it is thought-provoking.

Yet even using the 'classic' definition, a great many modern-day people are cyborgs. Most of these mechanical monstrosities wander the streets unescorted and are indistinguishable from real humans. Know anyone with a pacemaker? He's a cyborg. On dialysis? A cyborg. Prosthetic limb? Motorized wheelchair? Hearing Aid? Borg. Borg. Borg. They're everywhere, and each year, they assimilate more of us.

After you write your next e-mail, stop with your mouse pointer hovering over the Send button and take a moment to wonder how much of your humanity you're sending with that message. When the power goes out and you're left in the dark, with neither television nor computer to help you pass the time, stop and think about how much of your life is organic and how much is mechanic. And the next time your car breaks down on a crowded highway, and you and your dead cell phone are left watching all the happy humans go by while fear, rage, and confusion churn inside you until you want to cry out, "Dear God, what am I supposed to do now!?" At that moment, you might want to ask yourself...

Have they already got me?