

The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into the Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Domo Arigato, Dr. Roboto

Scientific discoveries, many of great significance, are made daily. Forward thinking men and women around the world analyze the results from a near-infinite number of experiments to better understand our universe, improve upon current technology, and formulate new ideas and even better technologies. Yet these hard-working visionaries often go unpraised and unnoticed in today's society. As a rule (really it's more of a guideline) these men and women aren't supermodels, and their every-man appearance earns them little face time with the media. Their ideas are too complex, their explanations too verbose, and their writing far too dull and jargon-filled to interest the average person, who remains happier when benefiting from scientific advancement without understanding it.

Thankfully, a few bold men and women are fighting lay-person apathy and an entrenched elitist oligarchy by bringing mass appeal and a certain amount of showmanship to science. Topping this list is Professor Kevin Warwick of the University of

Reading (in the United Kingdom), a pioneer in cybernetic research and artificial intelligence. Dr. Warwick is a celebrated teacher and a prodigious writer, having published over three hundred papers and a series of books on cybernetics (including *In the Mind of the Machines* and *I, Cyborg*). But Warwick is perhaps best known for challenging outdated and overly-cautious scientific conventions, conventions like animal trials (Warwick claims to have never conducted an experiment on an animal—we assume he means other than human) and the stigma against self-experimentation.

by **Bret Funk**

That's right, this modern day Jekyll and Hyde has decided to put his money where his mouth is (or rather, where his arm is). In 1998, he underwent surgery to have a transponder implanted in his arm, proclaiming himself 'the world's first cyborg'. The transponder allowed him to 'communicate' with his office: doors opened at his approach, disembodied computerized voices welcomed him home, and his e-mail and favorite web pages loaded up without his having to say a word. Though the chip was removed after only nine days (if left in longer, Warwick noted that his body would have started to accept it, making its removal more difficult), Warwick felt the loss of his robotic implant acutely. "I'm feeling more at one with the computer. It's as though part of me is missing when I'm not in the building. In my house, I have to open doors and turn on lights. I don't feel lonely, but I don't feel complete."

The implications of this research should be obvious, and for many people (especially in the U.S.) a welcome relief. To be freed of the burdens of opening doors, selecting television channels, and adjusting thermostats is a milestone in our quest for complete and utter laziness, and with the decline of the community and breakdown of the traditional family, more and more Americans yearn for the day when their house will ask after their health and compliment them on their new hairstyle. (Of course, this advantage will quickly be overshadowed by most houses' continuous complaining that they don't receive enough attention.)

Despite making what some might consider the most significant cybernetic breakthrough of the millennium, Warwick was far from finished. In March of 2002, Warwick had a larger array of electrodes implanted into his left arm. This array allows the good doctor to communicate with a variety of robotic components, including an electric wheelchair and a mechanized hand. Moreover, the connection works two ways: Warwick can feel impulses sent via radio signals and hypothesizes that his team of scientists might be able to perform complex arm movements without his even being aware of it.

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The RPG Corner (v2.8): Character Creation Systems

by Doug >!< Roper of EPIC Gaming

Character Backgrounds and Race/Class/Level

What I intend to demonstrate here and in the next few columns is a basic formula for the steps one should use in creating a character. As with my History Generator (RPG Corner 2.6, in the May *Illuminata*), it should provide a framework for aspiring Game Masters to look at and build on.

Before I hit the banal, numerical gibberish, I'd like to take this opportunity to discuss the biggest part of the character creation process. In my opinion the best characters are not necessarily the results of a good set of numbers on your character sheet. The true character—the personality, quirks, habits, likes and dislikes—are what makes the character. The thought and attention that the player pays to the formation of the person that lay beyond the numbers should be the single most important element of any character creation process. For example, I'll borrow on a character that most of us should already be pretty familiar with: Emmett "Doc" Brown, of the *Back to the Future* trilogy. Were he to be translated into a RPG, he would undoubtedly have a 10 for his intelligence (out of a possible 10). He would also have very high numbers in mechanical repair and various other technical skills. If we stopped there, and never bothered to think about his personality, all we have is a very smart character sheet, and an essentially boring character. Add a physical description, some catch phrases, a wild disregard for personal space when talking about something important, and you begin to have a character. Every effort should be made to go beyond the numbers and delve into the qualities that make the character as round and deep as possible. I'm not just speaking of good qualities either. Role-playing offers excellent opportunities to explore the darker traits people are subject to. You can't do all of this if the only notion of character you have is how many dice you can roll to run away from a giant.

The numbers on the page serve to maintain fairness in the resolution conflicts that cannot be solved through dialogue. They serve to chart the physical and mental progress for the character, and for some players, maximizing their character's statistics is the whole point to RPG's. If you've stuck with this column to this point you probably aren't as interested in advancement as you are with enjoyment. For some, one is the same as the other, but I don't believe

that role-playing achieves its greatest potential with this philosophy. Of the top 10 moments in role-play gaming that I've participated in, either as a player or a Game Master, only one or two involved the rolling of dice. The rest were pure role-playing; the interaction of two (or more) characters and not the adjudication of a conflict.

All that being said, it's now time to take a look at how to create the teeth and bones of a character, so you can get on with all of the good stuff. The process is without a lot of details and not quite complete, since there are a lot of things that I haven't addressed yet (combat, secular magic, clerical magic, etc.).

Player Race, Class, and "Level"

For the purpose of my game, all of the characters available to the players will be Men (or Women). No humanoids will be allowed. In your game, however, you may want to offer humanoid (even non-humanoids) as characters. This decision is yours to make, but you should be aware that when detailing the character creation process for humanoids, you will need to take into account all of the differences between your humanoids and a regular Joe. For example, my idea of a Sprite is a tiny, winged person-like creature about as tall as a pencil. It's unlikely that a Sprite has very much in the strength department. It's also unlikely that they can fight, or carry equipment, or can even interact with most people in a normal fashion (as an example, I think kids would be dying to pull their wings off). These faults have to be balanced out by positives to create balance (flying is a nice benefit, though). The same would apply to any humanoid or non-humanoid.

The idea of class is entrenched in gaming. Class is another term for profession, and describes in a word what your character does for a living. In the classic Dungeons & Dragons vein, classes are things like, Fighter or Warrior, Wizard, Cleric, Thief, Bard, etc., etc, etc. Each class has advantages and disadvantages based on the skills necessary to succeed in that profession, and most classes have limitations on what else the characters can learn, do and use. I'm disinclined to use these types of stratifications, simply because I choose to start the characters from a point before they would have had a chance to specialize. The characters may be on their way to something approaching a class, but they should still only be aspiring. The specializations that the characters

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Youth View: Inside A Sci-Fi Club (Part 4)

by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

With summer's heat came a trickle, like sweat, of interest in the Sci-Fi Club hidden away in Northwest Arizona. A few have met through the summer, but the others have put aside their cards, dice and RPG profiles until the fall when the club 'officially' resumes. I go over my notes. Have I found the answer to why this group of students and adults enjoy each other's company? I think not. So I continue to probe about outside interests and the role of their parents in their club.

Listening Pleasures:

I asked if they listen to music while gaming or reading. Most (sixteen) reported that they did. Their interests in music reflect their diverse interests in science fiction. The club members listen to 'all but opera' in most cases with some typical preferences surfacing (Heavy Metal, Rap, Techno, Classical, Alternative, Country). Belly Dancing/Middle Eastern, Celtic and Spanish Guitar are specific favorites.

Viewing Pleasures:

The adults and students attend movies or rent/own a wide variety of videos. When asked about this, the top responses, in order of highest interest, were: Fantasy, Science Fiction, Fiction, War. Next came movies/videos having to do with Anime, Chick-flicks (I actually shell out good money to go!), fiction, science, altiverse and autobiographical/documentaries. I'd like to know a movie/video that deals with altiverse! I think that answer was more wishful thinking.

As For Television:

The average viewing time was three hours a day. The highest interest was for cartoons/animation (there are some pretty old adults watching cartoons, here!). I must admit a fondness for Speed Racer. Re-runs, old shows, and comedy finish the race with the Science Channel & Discovery Channel not as far behind as the local/national news. And, of course, Star Trek is high on the list when viewing individually (with wrestling a close contender).

Parents:

Generally, parents were reported as duds in sharing interests with their offspring. Clearly three-

fourths of the members indicated that their parents have 'no clue' what they are interested in (or doing online) and as many let junior cloister in his room with electronic games or the Internet. Most are unsupervised. I'm speculating that using a filter on the family computer is a joke. These kids know how to get around them or are savvy enough to know passwords. I was told that adults (parents, in this case) always leave a paper-trail because they don't trust their memory. The young man was probably right. But, because I know these students, most would not frequent porn, illegal or extreme butchering sites. I did say 'most'. Frankly, a few would not be allowed to go out with my daughter who, incidentally, went to school with these students. But, then, they'd have no interest in my daughter... they'd be online.

Prediction hits and misses:

I said that the club read science fiction. Most, if not all, did. I was close.

I said that these kids have a 'life' outside of school (for school aged). I was wrong on that one.

I said that the students and adults have a rich imagination. 50-50. Adults were more creative but within typical cultural norms. The students who were more imaginative did so outside those norms.

I predicted that these members have satisfying relationships. Didn't really ask this question, but my observations was that for some of the student group members, this was the only relationship they had with adults other than immediate family. But, then I have worked with many of these kids, so I have the advantage of inside information.

Odds n Ends:

Combined, the club indicated that they had 74 years of science fiction related interest with the most being 32 years.

Hours a week playing online games:

5.4 hours.

Hours playing or planning RPG a week:

7.8 hours.

Hours reading sci-fi or interest books a week:

7.1 hours.

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The Writer's Block: Creating Sympathetic Characters

by Charles Gramlich

Readers don't like unsympathetic point-of-view characters. That's the definition of the term "unsympathetic." And though they might follow such a character through a vignette or a short story, they won't follow him or her through a novel. That doesn't mean that characters have to be perfect, and they shouldn't be, but they have to have some qualities that the reader will root for.

So how does one create a sympathetic character? There isn't any magic dust that can do it, but there *are* some rules, or perhaps guidelines, that can help. Here are some of the observations that I've made over the years.

1. Children are automatically seen as sympathetic characters unless they are clearly shown not to be. Most people love kids, or at least think they are cute at a distance. Most readers won't want to see a kid hurt in a story, and I'm not saying that writers should do so. But kids in danger tend to evoke sympathy from the reader. And, after all, John Saul and Dean Koontz have done it.

2. To a lesser extent than with children, women are seen as sympathetic characters, especially if they are in danger. This probably comes out of the stereotype, which has still not been dispelled, that women are the weaker sex. However, women, much more easily than children, can also be made into villains. All they have to do is behave in a conniving or manipulative way.

3. The elderly are seen as sympathetic characters, as long as they are not demanding and are basically healthy. People fear old age, though. If the character is old to the point of grotesqueness, or if they have some horrid disease that makes them disgusting to be around, then people, even in these so-called enlightened times, will recoil.

4. Characters who have disabilities tend to be seen as sympathetic unless they are shown not to be. Stephen King has a lot of these characters. Check out *The Stand* for examples. But be careful here, too. Disabilities that cause too much uneasiness or even disgust in the reader will not create sympathy without a lot of work on the writer's part. The world isn't quite ready for the Elephant Man as an action hero.

5. Characters who show sympathy or empathy for others become sympathetic characters themselves. And this is *especially* true if their sympathy or empathy is directed toward animals. You might notice that Dean Koontz has a lot of good, loving dogs in his books.

6. Outsiders or underdogs can quickly become sympathetic characters as long as they are not *too* far outside the mainstream. When someone is misused or mistreated in a story they are very likely to gain sympathy from the reader. Stephen King has a lot of these characters in his novels, as well.

7. Characters who think good thoughts, or who at least get upset with themselves for thinking bad thoughts, tend to become sympathetic. This ties in to the fact that readers, like all humans on the planet, want to think of themselves as basically good. And given a chance, readers will root for someone who is a lot like they are.

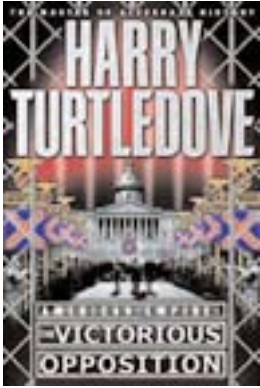
8. Characters who have experienced loss or who are suffering in some emotional way can easily become sympathetic. This has become a cliché in action movies where every heroic cop seems to have lost a wife or child, or both, and is on the verge of committing suicide. Even the cliché still works, though, and if you can find a new way of causing loss for your hero, then you're ahead of the game and should be writing articles like this yourself.

Are there any commonalities among the eight observations I've listed above? I think there are. Sympathetic characters are both weak and strong at the same time. They are both like the reader and different from the reader at the same time.

How can such statements make sense? They can because what the reader really wants to see are characters who succeed even though they seem to have everything going against them, *and*, the reader wants that character to be enough like them to identify with but not so alike that it seems the reader is reading about him or herself.

Reviews

American Empire: The Victorious Opposition Harry Turtledove



Del Rey, August 2003
\$24.95, Hardcover, 512 pp.
ISBN 034544423x

Review by Harriet Klausner

In a world that never was but could have been, the Confederacy won the War of Secession and the United States had to recognize them as a sovereign nation. As the victors, they imposed certain restrictions on the way the United States governed itself. When the Great War broke out, the United States was the winner, wresting territory away from the Confederacy and bringing it into the union.

To prevent Britain from ever being a threat in the USA again, the army marched into Canada and made it a territory of America. Canada is no longer a recognized country and all laws and military rules come from the American Army of Occupation. Texas is part of the CSA but during the Great War, the US annexed part of the state naming it Houston and bringing it into the Union. Sequoyah is a part of the USA but like Houston and Kentucky (which was also forcibly brought back into the USA) they want to rejoin the CSA.

There are very few blacks in the USA and most of them live in Kentucky. Former slaves trying to leave the CSA are turned back at the US border. When the world plunges into a Depression, the fascist Freedom party elects Jake Featherston president. He uses strong-arm tactics against his enemies, takes control of the radio and newspapers and sets up internment camps for political prisoners and Red Negroes. He begins building tractors and farm equipment at a fast rate so that the Black sharecroppers become redundant. Many resort to fighting a

guerrilla war while others go begging for menial jobs in the cities.

Under the terms of the 1917 Armistice, the CSA military is sharply curtailed but Featherston finds ways of getting around the restrictions. He is slowly building up the military strength of the CSA to the level it was in 1863. His freedom party goons are agitating in Sequoyah, Houston and Kentucky for a plebiscite and the socialist president of the USA finally allows the people of those states to vote on whether they want to stay in the USA or leave and rejoin the CSA. Many people in both countries believe that another war between the USA and CSA is inevitable.

Harry Turtledove is the recognized grand master of alternative history and in *American Empire: The Victorious Opposition* he shows his talent. The Freedom Party can be compared with the rise of the Nazi Party in our universe, and just like the SS troopers, the high-ranking members in the party use strong-arm tactics to cow the populace. Instead of Jews being discriminated against, the Blacks are the scapegoats. France and Russia sided with the confederacy, and when they lost the war, they had to obey the terms of the armistice, but they are unhappy and ready to go to war again to regain their freedoms. France especially wants to regain Alsace-Lorraine from Germany but are wary of fighting the Germans a third time.

The characters in this novel are real people representing all walks of life so that the reader has a very visual picture of what life is like in this altered universe that seems similar but is so very different from our own. The CSA president is not a likable man and freedom lovers will despise him, but the audience will understand that many of his constituents want him in office so that he can turn their country around and make it a world power.

Original Fiction Wanted!

In addition to our writing contest, *The Illuminata* is accepting regular fiction submissions. Short stories and poems are both welcome, provided that the subject matter is at least loosely SF related. Poems should be concise, but there is no set word limit. Short stories should be well edited and no greater than 5000

words; shorter stories will have a greater chance of publication. Unfortunately, as we are a free publication, we cannot to compensate authors, but if you are content with a little exposure, please query us by visiting our website or e-mailing us a brief outline and any applicable writing credits to us at:

Illuminata@TyrannosaurusPress.com

Reviews

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix J.K. Rowling



Scholastic 2003
\$29.99, Hardcover, 870 pgs
ISBN: 043935806X

Peevish Review by Sherri Craig
*Because No Matter How Popular it
May be, it Still Has Nits to be Picked...*

At midnight on June 21, 2003, thousands of rabid Harry Potter fans burst through the doors of bookstores across American and Great Britain.

The rest of the reading population were waiting for the postal workers to bring their copies, preordered months ahead of time from Amazon.com, which were guaranteed to be delivered that very day. It had been a long and difficult three year wait for the next installment of Rowling's series, book five out of the seven book series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. The series is touted as a children's series, and there is no doubt as to its popularity with the kids, but over half those fans waiting at Barnes and Noble in the middle of the night were adult. The parents were just as eager as the kids, and most likely put the kids to bed as soon as they returned home in order to have the books for themselves. The childless adults, who could have cared less what anyone thought of an adult waiting for a child's book, turned out en masse, clad in robes and brandishing wands, ready to hex the nearest clerk, should the stores have happened to run out before they received their copy.

Okay, so I'm one of those geeks who was eagerly awaiting the book. I was not waiting at the store to get my copy at midnight, though. I had preordered it. I'd gone away for the weekend, but there it was when I returned, calling out to be read. I ignored its pleas long enough to take care of some unfinished work and then, when I could stand it no longer, tore the box open and lost myself in the world of Harry Potter.

I finished the book in about two days, but only because real life and work got in the way. If only I could have read the texts assigned in college that quickly. The great wait was over (the wait had been longer for others, I will admit, because I had not been hooked until after my son dragged me to the theatre to see the first movie). But as I said, the wait

was over and there I was. The book was a good read, but it just was not fulfilling. I had had problems with the other books, (don't get me started on *Chamber of Secrets*) but I have to say that the end of *Order of the Phoenix* was extremely poor. There was very little resolution, and it just left the reader hanging, which lead to a record number of post to the Harry Potter section of Fanfiction.net, where fans go to read and write stories based on other popular works. Fans wanted a resolution and were forced to create their own, because no one knows when the next installment will come out.

Yes, I am being a little harsh. Most of the fans did enjoy the book, for the most part. Rowling gives her readers fun new characters and a few answers. She follows the typical template for young adult/ children's books. This means she introduces characters kids can relate to, and reintroduces them and other concepts of the world she's created, in each book. She deals with typical young adult angst such as friendships, family, and school troubles. She also keeps her characters in type, for the most part. The Durley's are still horrible, Hermione is still brainy, and all Slytherins are still despicable. Keeping these characters flat works for the kiddies, but it is what causes the most grumbling from the adult readers.

Rowling does have some character growth, however. The characters of Ginny Weasley and Neville Longbottom are both explored a bit more, and with good results. Ron Weasley, surprisingly, also benefits from minor character growth. The character of Harry Potter is still oblivious to the big picture, as he is in the other books, proving once again that he is rash and does not think things out. However, in this installment, Rowling has given Harry a consequence for his rash behavior.

The Harry of book five is moody and angry much of the time. No, strike that, all of the time. Younger children might find this a little upsetting. Female readers will most likely wonder why he's such a jerk. Male readers might sympathize with Harry, as he is going through the ordeal of being a fifteen year old, on top of being "The Boy Who Lived." Harry does have a tough time in this book.

The ever-changing Defense of the Dark Arts position is filled by a deliciously evil character who lives to torment poor Harry. She is a ministry official, which

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Reviews

Potter (con't)

makes her idiosyncrasies even more amusing to adult readers, as she is always posting really stupid Ministry orders and decrees. While the readers were able to get a glimpse of how powerful Harry has been becoming in the fourth book, they witness his abilities to the fullest in this book, when he becomes a teacher to his fellow students.

As promised, Rowling reveals more of Harry's history prior to the death of his parents and also reveals more about Harry's parents themselves. Harry falls into one of Professor Snape's memories and witnesses his father and godfather being less than kind, an image which bothers Harry. The character of Professor Snape, the sour and biased potions master of the school and head of Harry's rival house, Slytherin, was revealed to be a double agent in book four. Rowling set up a chance for dramatic character growth with this character as one who has redeemed himself from evil, but it does not pan out, in this book at least, as the reader finds that Snape's (a former Death Eater, which means he was a follower of the main baddie and killer of Harry's parents, Voldemort) worst memory was that of Harry's father picking on him. Talk about lame, especially for a member of a group known to torture and kill people.

Before the book hit the shelves, Rowling had spoke of a character death, admitting that it was very hard to write and that she bawled like a baby after she'd finished it. The book steered the reader in many directions throughout the story as to who was going to die, but the actual death scene was very quick, and the circumstances were murky. This is part of the reason the books ending was so unfulfilling, but hopefully all will be sorted out in book six.

Overall, the book was entertaining, but even though it was longer than any of the others, it seemed to be just a placeholder in the series. The readers learn of the great prophecy that the Headmaster, Dumbledore, alluded to in the first book (the truth Harry wasn't ready for), but it was glaringly obvious and most readers had probably guessed it a long time ago, but beyond that it was simply an introduction to new characters and, hopefully, a lesson to young Harry which will help him meet his destiny. The story, itself, is not able to stand alone as the other installments have, but it should be enough to content the readers until the next book comes along, which, with any luck, won't be another three years.

Illuminations

A Speculative Fiction Writing Contest

This is the last month to submit entries to *Illuminations*, the speculative fiction short writing contest sponsored by Tyrannosaurus Press. Entrants must have their stories postmarked by September 1.

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 \$100 (US). 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 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 15061
New Orleans, LA 70175-5061

Winners will be announced in the October 2003 edition of *The Illuminata*. For more information, please visit the *Illuminata* page at TyrannosaurusPress.com or e-mail us at Illuminations@TyrannosaurusPress.com

Reviews

Spirited Away Walt Disney Pictures, 2003



Review by Erin Branham

I'm not one to have a lot of faith in the Academy Awards necessarily, but they did us a favor this year when they recognized a film that until then was but a blip on the American radar. Pure and passing strange, Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* is an absolute must-see for anyone who hungers to be carried into realms of myth and magic. Filled with extraordinary dream-like imagery, this is a fairy tale the likes of which hasn't been seen in animated film in a generation. Beginning with a family in that mysterious in between place when they've moved out of their home and have not yet arrived at their new one, a simple wrong turn leads to an adventure of fantastic proportions for the young heroine, Chihiro. This girl acts by instinct throughout the story, by turns wreaking havoc and gaining favor with the odd denizens of a magical land where spirits come to be refreshed and renewed. She alone senses the danger when her father leads the family on an exploration of an abandoned theme park. She warns her parents when they sit down to eat at a deserted

booth filled with platters of delicious food. "You'll get in trouble!" she yells – and so they do. Within minutes they are transformed into pigs with no memory of their humanity.

So begins her frightening and enchanting journey. With the help of a young boy who is not what he seems, she learns to survive in this odd realm by working for a witch. Among strange and powerful spirits, living balls of soot, talking frogs and other amazing creatures, the human girl is the lowest of beings. Endowed with only her noble heart, Chihiro triumphs through random acts of kindness, courage and the most powerful magic of all in any fairy tale – unselfish love.

Perhaps it is because *Spirited Away* is Japanese that it succeeds so brilliantly in creating its atmosphere of purest wonder. Perhaps it is because the Hero's Journey is so universal that it doesn't matter in the slightest that it was conceived half a world away. Perfect pacing, beautiful animation and an imagination that will leave you breathless create a tale that outshines even the most clever American animated productions with their self-conscious modern sensibilities. As if you were one of the spirits served at the magical bathhouse, you'll feel adulthood washed away like layers of caked-on dirt as you watch.

Columnists Wanted: Apply Today!

The Illuminata is looking for talented, aspiring writers with strong opinions of SF who are seeking an outlet for their pent-up rage or artistic expression. Article topics are left (for the most part) to the columnists discretion, and all rights (except the right to include it in the *Illuminata*) remain with the author. Visit our website or e-mail us at Illuminata@TyrannosaurusPress.com for details.

Movie Villain Quiz

(answers on page 17)

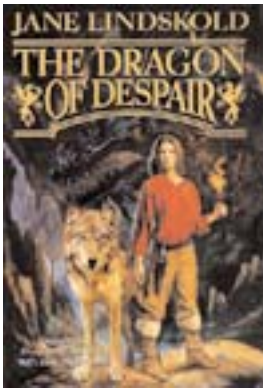
They're big. They're bad. Mostly they're ugly. Who are they? They're the movie villains of our nightmares and they're here to...GET YOU!. Can you match the descriptive phrase or quote on the left with the evildoer on the right?

Zero to five correct means you may be too innocent for your own good. Six to ten correct and you are exhibiting just the right amount of nastiness. More than ten correct? Be afraid. Be very afraid.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Spider hater | Jason Voorhies |
| 2. Danger, Will Robinson! | The Joker |
| 3. Dream blade | Thulsa Doom |
| 4. Deep Breather | Leatherface |
| 5. Camp Nightmare | The Penguin |
| 6. What a big eye you have | Darth Vader |
| 7. Holidays can be killers | Roy Batty |
| 8. Permanent smile | Randall Flag |
| 9. Snake magic | Lex Luthor |
| 10. Buzz Cut | Freddy Krueger |
| 11. Umbrella fella | Green Goblin |
| 12. The Dark Man | Khan |
| 13. Kryptonite lover | Michael Myers |
| 14. I spit my last breath at thee! | Dr. Smith |
| 15. Made man | Sauron |

Reviews

The Dragon of Despair Jane Lindskold



Tor, August 2003
\$27.95, Hardcover, 640 pp.
ISBN 0765302594
Review by Harriet Klausner

Desiring to increase their land holdings, the old Country Lords and the colonists sailed to the New World making a place for themselves on the almost deserted continent. However, when the Fire Plague broke out, the Old World lords fled back home, taking with them their magic and leaving behind many of the colonists. They settled into lands of the East never realizing that in the west were the Royal Beasts: thinking, sentient beings that did not want humans encroaching on their lands

The wolves raised the human child Firekeeper, speaking to her and treating her as one of the pack. Humans who ventured into the Royal Beast territory discovered her. She was taken to the royal court, and Firekeeper became involved in the royal intrigues of the King of Hawk Haven. When a group of men travel to the lands of the Royal Beasts, the sentient beings debate whether to declare a war on humanity, a guerrilla style action they have every chance of winning. Firekeeper begs the king to bring his citizens back and to prevent others from going, and he agrees if Firekeeper undertakes a mission for him.

Melina Sheild, exiled from Hawks Haven for her treachery and treason has married the Healed One, the hereditary monarch of New Kelvin. The Kelvinese are drawn to magic and want to find a way to bring it back into their world. Melina, a powerful sorceress in her own right, wants to find that magic

and free it, believing she would become the powerful ruler of a new empire if she succeeded in her evil quest. Firekeeper has already fought Melina once and she fears that she and her specially chosen companions will have to do battle with her once again if they don't want evil let loose in the New World.

The world Jane Lindskold has created is very similar to medieval Europe, but the Church is not in a position of power. There is a vassal system in effect where lords are vassals of the king and commoners are free men tied to their estates. The guilds are powerful and it seems like more and more younger sons, having no land to inherit, will go into trade. This is a world in flux and nobody except the author knows how it will evolve.

FireKeeper, although human in form, thinks of herself as a wolf and her first loyalty is to them, and her human friends' respect her for her stand even if they don't understand it. Some of the best scenes in *The Dragon of Despair* involve Fire Keeper talking strategy with the wolves, who show more mercy than their human counterparts.

Every fantasy novel needs a villain and Melina Shield is the perfect one. She abandoned her daughter, who was held hostage for her good behavior, and the little girl was tortured as a result. She also tried to undermine her country and turned her back on her remaining children. Her one love is power, and she doesn't care who gets hurt in her quest to obtain it. There are several story threads left dangling, so there is at least one more book in this enthralling sword and sorcery epic.

Although this exciting epic fantasy novel is part of a series, it is also a stand alone novel that will have readers turning the pages to see what happens next.

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Illuminata@TyrannosaurusPress.com

Reviews

Winter's Heart (Wheel of Time, 9) Robert Jordan



Tor 2000
\$29.95 Hardcover 668 pages
ISBN: 0-31286425-6
Review by Bret Funk

This book, the ninth installment in the Wheel of Time series, continues the grand epic of Rand, Perrin, Mat, Egwene, Nynaeve, Elayne, Siuane, Lan, Aviendha, Min,

Morgase, Loial, Cadsuane, Gawyn, and a host of other characters to numerous or unimportant to mention. This book finds Rand—a character whose sanity even readers are beginning to question—fleeing from his countless enemies with Min, one of his three love interests. At the top of Rand's hit list are the four Asha'man who betrayed him (openly), and who are now hunting him. He leads them to the city of Far Madding, a city where they must battle him on equal footing, and plans an ambush.

Further west, Perrin's mission to rein in the Prophet has hit a snag. His wife, Faile, has been abducted by the Shaido Aiel, and the generally duty-conscious Perrin rushes after her with scarcely a thought of the world's more pressing problems (like the fast approaching Last Battle) and his obligations to Rand, the Dragon Reborn. Actually, it's an understandable reaction (she is his wife!), but the storyline falls flat as Perrin makes a number of decisions that seem out of character.

Further south, the story rejoins Mat in Ebou Dar. He is now trapped in Seanchan-controlled lands, recovering from injuries sustained in their attack. Living in the Tarasin Palace as the queen's boy toy, Mat meets The Daughter of The Nine Moons, a Seanchan princess whom he is destined to marry. His portion of the book revolves around his plans to escape both the city and the gholam, a frightening creature from the Age of Legends that is out to kill him,

North and east, Elayne and party finally get back to Camelyn, where Elayne intends to wrest control of the city from Rand (the man she loves) and then conduct a long and excruciatingly-detailed campaign to become the next Queen of Andor. The majority of pages devoted to the ladies involve arguing between

the various groups (Aes Sedai, Kin, Windfinders, Aiel, and damane), complete with arm crossing, eyebrow raising, and little bit of sniffing.

As disappointing as *The Path of Daggers* was, most readers did not enter *Winter's Heart* with high expectations. Those readers may have been mildly surprised, as the book returned (somewhat) to the grander storylines and climactic conclusions of the earlier books. Mat's chapters were a joy to read, and his character continues to evolve nicely. Rand's plan, while seeming a bit daft at first, actually starts to make a little sense by the end of the book, and his ultimate goal—and the book's grand finale—was one of the best in the series. Formatting and typographical errors, while still more numerous than appropriate, were nowhere near as abundant or blatant as in the last two books, and Jordan introduces a few new and interesting ideas into the storyline (and only a handful of new characters!)

Winter's Heart did fall short in several areas, though. The prologue jumps in at a hefty eighty-five pages (a number still reasonably short for Jordan). Virtually no mention is made of Egwene and party, who at the end of the previous book traveled through a Gateway to lay siege to Tar Valon. This was a scene that many readers were anticipating, and the fact that not even a section was dedicated to the army arriving (and surprising the bejesus out of the Aes Sedai in the tower) was vexing in the least. The Elayne chapters started out as dull and ended as barely endurable; it seems that the more time Jordan devotes to her character, the less she manages to accomplish. Perrin's chapters were even worse: to see him go from a level-headed and duty-conscious man to an idiot, while perhaps important to the overall story, diminished his character to the point that I no longer care about him.

In conclusion, while *Winter's Heart* makes steps toward advancing the plot, and actually manages to recover some of the series' momentum, it falls far short of the earlier works. In fact, I believe it safe to say that had the series started with writing like that found in books seven, eight and nine, the series would have never been more than a trilogy. Jordan has stated time and again that he does not write for his fans; he writes for himself. I am left wondering whether or not he actually reads what he has written.

Original Fiction

Charles Gramlich is the author of *Cold in the Light*, a horror thriller from <http://www.invispress.com>. He is also a member of the Science Fiction Poetry Association. His poems have appeared in such magazines as *Star*Line*, *Hazmat Review*, *Penny Dreadful*,

and in anthologies like *Once Upon a Midnight* and *The Bible of Hell*. He has twice been nominated for the Rhysling Award, which is given annually and is the highest award offered for genre poetry (Fantasy, Horror, Science Fiction) in the United States.

ONE SMALL STEP

With one small step
he put boot to another world
a humble man
with close cropped hair and pale eyes
but wearing the bio-legacy of a conqueror
the genetics
of a hunter

It wasn't the moon upon which he walked
not Mars, nor any Jovian sphere
but a distant place under another sun
where this captain of a fine ship
with a crew all prepped and humble
landed

On this world with strange oxides
the dust was blue
the sky orange with an aurora's halo
from the ion sleet that constantly fell
out of its furnace bright star

This man
yes, the captain of a fine ship
built by bone & blood & flesh
wearing the flag of a nation light-years away
wearing a suit that carried a breath
from home to keep him alive
went out on that plain in the vast
unusual light
among leather trees and rocks that crawled

A smile creased his humble face
seamed under a yellow sun
as he gazed on a land where life
rivered in an exotic way
at a homeland of the future
for his kind

When something flickered past his eyes
purred off the bubble of his helm
he swatted
from the animal quickness in his DNA
and the something fell
down from sky to soil as he frowned

Lying there in alien dust
a "moth" with scorpion sting
an iridescent-winged scarab
its smoke-nova eyes
dying in a flutter of indigo blood

An emotion/thought roiled his brain
a momentary flash of melancholy
to realize that the first act of his race
on this, a new world
had been to kill something lovely

But down silver steps came his crew
laughing/shouting/gesturing
in a humble way
rich with the thrill of finding
a world that proved by its very existence
that Earth was not alone with life
not alone

And maybe, the captain thought
somewhere alien friends and lovers
beings to call...people
to converse with on God and baseball
lived

So, the captain smiled
slapped backs and toasted the bravery
of his fellows
besides, he'd killed a beast with a sting
a dangerous thing
and the celebration that followed was grand
loud in that human way
until moth-scorpions came to call
in vengeance for their beloved queen

And the ship ended in a museum of sorts
or perhaps it was the trash.

by Charles Gramlich

Original Fiction

This story is written by Charles Sinclair, and is the first part of a much larger work entitled "The Dragon's Eye" which follows an unlikely and highly dysfunctional pair of adventurers, a dwarf and elf named Draco and Vole. Ostensibly, the two are on a quest to find a stolen artifact called (rather appropriately) "The

Dragon's Eye." However, their real quest is to keep from killing each other as their various idiosyncrasies slowly drive each other up the wall and their constant bickering, blatant cowardice, and Vole's chronic ineptitude drive the members of their party (especially Draco) into a murderous rampage.

The Following Is An Excerpt From:

The Fierce, the Furious, and the Faceless Freaks A Draco and Vole Adventure

"Well, *that*," said Draco Orcshire, pulling himself out of the mud. "Is an experience I would not care to repeat any time soon."

Draco pulled himself to his full four-foot-seven-inch height, tall for a dwarf from the Valley of Fire, and looked around for his companions.

As if on cue, Draco's elven travelling companion, Vole, stood up from behind a nearby log where he was strategically concealed—Vole's pet phrase for "hiding."

"Are they gone?" he asked, his elven eyes scanning the darkness. Vole's hair was jet black, as was typical of elves from Sylara. But he wore it cropped close to his head in the style of many of the humans around the western portion of the Commonwealth.

Draco sighed. "Yes, Vole. The big, bad gang of *kobolds* is gone. Along with all our gear. No thanks to you, I might add."

"Well, it's good they spared us." Vole spoke not with the liquid fluidity common to the elves, but with the sharp and fast-paced nervousness that typified an elf who had spent far too long away from his own people, and around humans.

Vole stepped over the log and scanned the forest around him. Row after row of bare and twisted trees loomed above him in the icy night air. Their twisted branches formed an ugly canopy over the tiny clearing Draco and Vole stood in. A thick layer of clouds rumbled far overhead.

Draco sighed again, and began picking out the bits of mud and twigs that had gotten tangled up in his long, dwarven beard.

"I can't believe this," he muttered to himself, straightening his belt and looking down at his twin axes that had been dumped into the mud by the gang of kobolds. "First, we get lost in this stupid forest. Now, we get robbed by a gang of *kobolds*. Measely, weak, little kobolds." He shook his head. "We are *never* going to get to Ardwyn Daine now. We're going to die in this wretched forest."

The third member of their party, Inartan Orlif, a largish man with a mane of blonde hair very typical of people from the Northern Wastes, poked his head out from behind a large bush. His breastplate, which he was busy buckling, was emblazoned with image of a bright and burning sun. It was the holy symbol of Valla, the sun god, identifying him as a follower of that deity.

"Well, if they're so weak," said Vole. "Why didn't you just take them on yourself?"

"*Eight* of them?!" said Draco.

Vole shrugged. "If they're so weak."

"No, Vole. Sorry. Three or four, yes. Five, maybe. But, eight? That's too many, even for me."

"Well, Inartan could have helped you."

"No, I couldn't," said Inartan, stepping fully out of the bushes, his armor finally buckled.

"Why not? Valla doesn't like his servants to fight in his name?"

"I was busy."

"*Busy*?!" spat Draco.

"Yeah. I was ...you know..." He paused for a second looking a little uncomfortable. "In the bushes."

Con't on page 13

Original Fiction

Draco and Vole (con't)

Draco groaned and shook his head. "I can *not* believe this," he said. "I mean, Vole, shouldn't your elven senses have picked up on the approaching kobolds? Shouldn't you have heard their footsteps or smelled them or something?"

"I *did*."

"Well, why didn't you say something?"

"I thought you knew they were there."

"And the fact that I was standing there, unarmed, looking up at the sky and talking to myself about the impending storm didn't give you a clue that I was unaware of their presence?"

"I thought you were playing it cool."

Draco scoffed. "Great. Well, you could have at least helped me while they robbed us of... well, *everything* we had!"

Vole shrugged. "I was waiting for the right time to jump out from behind the log."

"Oh? And, when would that be?"

"When they were gone."

Draco rubbed his temples. A slight pressure had begun to build up there. "Vole, do you even realize what just happened? We just got robbed by kobolds. *Kobolds*, Vole. Do you know what that means? That means we can never show our faces around other adventurers again. We'll be the laughing stock of the entire adventuring community. We'll be outcasts. I'll have to return to my homeland in shame. And, it's all *your* fault."

"My fault? How is it my fault?"

"Well, correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't you scream like a little girl and yell 'Eeeeeek, monsters!' and dive behind that log the moment those eight ugly kobolds jumped out of from behind those trees?"

Vole shifted uncomfortably. "Seemed like a perfectly rational thing to do."

"A perfectly cowardly thing to do, you mean."

"To-MAY-to, to-MAH-to."

Draco sighed. "Well, let's just agree on one thing. To *never* mention this kobold incident again. Ever."

Vole shrugged. "Okay," he said, pulling out a well-weathered map from a hidden pocket in his shirt.

Draco looked at him.

"You know, it disturbs me that you're not at all... disturbed by being robbed by a bunch of kobolds."

Vole shrugged. "I can deal with it. My ego is not so fragile that it can be damaged by being robbed by a bunch of kobolds."

"Well, *mine* is. So, do it and me a favor and don't *ever* mention this incident again. To *anyone*."

"Okay."

"I mean it."

"Okay..."

"I'm serious."

"I know."

"No one."

"Got it."

"Ever."

"I *get* it."

"Under any circumstances."

Vole paused. "Draco, do you not trust me?"

"No, I most certainly do not." Draco sighed and kicked at a piece of wood which stood in the ruins of a small pile of the few useless and now broken belongings the kobolds had left behind, after they were done tearing through Draco and Vole's packs.

"What did they get?" asked Vole.

Draco kicked away a stick. "...everything."

"Not the ale?"

"Yes. Everything."

"Well, I hope they didn't take my green gem."

"Yes. They took everything."

Con't on page 14

Original Fiction

Draco and Vole (con't)

"Damn." Vole kicked the log. He thought for a second. "Well, what about the brass key from Dantrinar?"

"Yep, that too. Everything."

"Oh, what about that silver amulet I found last week?"

"Yes, Vole. They took everything." He paused for a second. "And, you didn't *find* that amulet, you *stole* it from that lady in the tavern."

"Whatever."

"Anyway, we'd better get--"

"Oh, don't tell me they took that copper ring I found in that abandoned abbey?"

"Yes. That too was including in the aforementioned 'everything.'"

"Oh... Well, surely, they couldn't have taken my silver dagger from the temple of Kathalis."

"Yes, Vole. Everything."

"Damn it." Vole thought for a second. "Oh! Oh, what about that jade idol I got in the bazaar in Svii Palass?"

"Yes. They took *everything*."

"Oh..." Vole looked into the twisted ranks of the forest for a second. "Oh!" he said, turning his head back around. "What about my collection of magic rocks?"

"Yes, Vole. They took it. They took your favorite shoelace, your lucky sheep's bladder, your stupid miniature rock-sculpture of a two-headed cow, and even that bag of smelly dirt you carry around whose purpose I don't even want to speculate on. Okay? They took... *everything*! Everything was what they took and what they took is everything. From the smallest to the largest, the largest to the smallest. If you had something, well, now it's gone. Why? Because they took it. They took... *everything*! Everything has been taken and they have taken *everything*."

Vole looked around at the tiny pile of useless debris lying in the mud. "Wow," he said. "They took *everything*."

Draco groaned and sat down on the log. He began to rub his temples again, as an unignorable pressure was beginning to build up behind them. This happened a lot around Vole.

"Well, at least they didn't get the map," said Vole.

"Your stupid map is what got us into this mess."

Vole scoffed and looked up and down at Draco. "There is nothing wrong with my map," he said.

"Then why are we lost?"

"We're not lost."

"Vole, we've been wandering around in this forest for two and a half days. We're *lost*."

The sky above grumbled as the clouds that had been gathering most of the evening finally threatened to unleash a torrent of rain. The three of them felt the first drops of what Draco thought would be quite a downpour.

"Oh, great," said Draco. "As if this night couldn't get any worse already. First, we get lost, then we get robbed by kobolds. Now, we're going to be soaked by some hideous storm."

"Well... we should find some shelter," said Vole.

"Yes," said Draco, rising. "Shelter. What a fabulous idea. Oh. Oh, perhaps there's one tiny little detail we might want to consider... Vole, we're in the middle of friggin' *nowhere*! There is no shelter, no caves, no houses, no inns, not even a large enough rock for us to crawl under. Only these accursed, leafless trees." He glared at one of the sickly looking trees menacingly, as if to reproach it for not offering shelter against the coming storm.

"These trees *are* awfully ugly," said Inartan.

"I kind of like them," said Vole. "They remind me of home."

"They would." Draco looked around and sneered at the ugly trees. "No wonder you never spend any time around your own people. They must live in some unwholesome hell-pit like this forest."

"Pretty much," said Vole, peering into the map.

Draco looked at him. "Seriously, Vole. Are you sure you're reading that map right? This really doesn't look like the way to Ardwyn Daine."

"Don't get your panties in a bunch," said Vole, rotating the map half a turn from the way he had been

Con't on page 15

Original Fiction

Draco and Vole (con't)

reading it. "I know what I'm doing." He stared at the map for a minute, then rotated it another half turn.

Draco groaned. "I'll believe that when I see it."

Vole scoffed.

"Seriously, Vole. This better not be like that time in Karada Daine where we got lost in the cemetery and spent the night with those two hideous barmaids with those... moose-jaws. Ugh." He shivered.

"Hey, the blonde one liked you."

"Vole, she had *horns!*"

"She's still a blonde."

Draco groaned. "Vole, before we waste any more time in this awful forest, could you *please* make up your mind about which way we should go?"

Vole pursed his lips for a minute, staring into the map, then turning it around again. "This way," he said, pointing south.

"Vole, we just came from that way!"

Vole turned the map around again.

"No. Sorry," he said. "It's this way." He pointed east.

"Are you sure?"

He looked at the map.

"Yeah, definitely..." He looked again at the map. "I think..."

Draco sighed. "Let me see that map."

Vole stuffed the map back in his shirt. "Look, it's this way. I'm sure of it."

"You'd better be. Some of these trees are starting to look awfully familiar. If we're traveling in circles thanks to you and your accursed map, I swear I'm going to chop your head off and nail it to one of these ugly trees."

Far above them, the first thunderclap cracked against the night sky, and the first steady raindrops began to fall.

"Here it comes..." said Draco, tightening his chain mail shirt.

Far ahead of them, a sliver of lightning lit up the dark sky. Draco shook his head. "Come on," he said.

Vole stared at the remnants of his shredded backpack and grimaced, deciding it wasn't even worth trying to salvage. Draco, kicking aside the mud, grabbed his axes, which were left behind, since they were too large for the kobolds to carry, and started to wipe them off.

Inartan looked around. "I'll be glad to leave this forest behind. The light of Valla shines not in this accursed abode."

"Bet this rain makes you think of home, eh, Inartan?"

"Not really. The rain where I come from doesn't usually smell this bad."

"This rain *is* awfully smelly," said Vole.

"*You're* awfully smelly," said Draco.

"I heard they have forty-seven words for 'rain' in the Northern Wastes."

"How many words do they have for 'idiotic, lying elf who can't read a map?'"

"Hey," said Vole, totally ignoring Draco and stepping over a large puddle. "If one of you guys have a shield, we could use it as cover from the rain."

Draco kicked the mud in front of him, annoyed. "What a fabulous idea," he said.

"Don't you have one in your backpack?"

"I *did*." He indicated the torn remnants of his backpack that lay on the ground.

Vole looked away sheepishly. Draco sighed and began walking into the forest. "You know, it's times like these when I'm hopelessly lost in some hideous forest, with an idiotic elf, having just been robbed of all my worldly possessions by a troupe of marauding kobolds and about to be rained on by a fury that could quench the fires of the nine hells that I really, *really* wish I would have listened to my mother."

"Why? What did she say?"

"I don't know. I wasn't *listening*."

Dr. Roboto (con't)

Perhaps even more interesting is the fact that Warwick's wife has allowed a similar (though less sophisticated) implant to be placed in her arm. With it, the couple hopes to transmit basic physiological signals (i.e. pleasure or pain.). Though excited by the prospect, Warwick does have some reservations: "If she [his wife] starts looking at a young guy walking down the street and she starts to get all excited, will I feel what the hell she is up to or will I feel excited too in a strange way?" Mildly homophobic worries aside, Warwick is supportive of his new technology and has suggested that, with further refinement, it could be used to transmit more complex human sensations, like emotions or thoughts. However, most proponents of this technology seem fixated on the ability to share pleasure, and much speculation has been given to its potential effects on the pornography and prostitution industries.

Warwick is more than a showpiece, though; he has opinions and he isn't afraid of sharing them, not even when they go against the consensus of his colleagues. Several of his more insightful opinions follow:

On intelligence: "What is it that puts humans in the relatively dominant position we are in on Earth? I believe it is our intelligence, coupled with the power to do something about it. So if something more intelligent and more powerful comes along, the logic is that it will, most likely, be in the driving seat."

On applying his research to business: "The company would know when [the employees] come into the building and when they leave the building. They would know when employees went to the toilet and how long they stayed. If you did get the sack, you would have to have your implant taken out. It might make people even less keen to get sacked, knowing it would mean surgery."

On applying his research to sex offenders: "If that person [the sex offender] tries to go into a school, bells would ring, doors would shut, and so forth. You could have pedophile-free zones,"

On his heritage: "I was born human. But this was an accident of fate - a condition merely of time and place. I believe it's something we have the power to change."

On his critics: "Putting myself out on a limb probably makes a few people jealous more than anything else. If our work can help someone who is blind have some extra sense and increased ability to move around then what the hell about some media people!"

On the future of our species: "I think humanity is, at the moment, obsolescent. It's on its way out. Either we can really suffer at the hands of machines more intelligent than we are, or we can look to upgrade humans and make ourselves more intelligent."

In separate interviews, Warwick has made other bold statements, such as his claims that television can improve test grades, that cyberdrugs will soon be available free via the Internet, that humans may soon be remote-controlled, and that self-aware machines may become a reality in less than a decade.

Like all visionary thinkers, Warwick is not without criticism. Numerous scientists in cybernetics and artificial intelligence have disagreed with his statements on the future of the fields (and on the fate of humanity) and have raised cautious eyebrows at the mention of his ground-breaking experimentation. Critics have been quick to point out that Warwick was not, in fact, the first cyborg: anyone with a pacemaker qualifies, making a good number of people over the age of fifty-five pioneers in the realm of man-machine symbiosis. Others point out that Warwick's first implant was little more than a modified animal transceiver, similar to the kind used to track of animal migrations, and was far from the leap in cybernetic research that Warwick claimed it to be. Others have brought his publication record into question: comprehensive searches have turned up less than fifty published academic papers (most of which were not about cybernetics), a bit short of the three hundred claimed. He has been lambasted for his numerous failures, accused of embellishing the implications of his research, and chastised because a number of his studies disregarded something called the "scientific method" and could not stand up to cursory statistical examination. There was even a move to have him removed from the British Association's list of competent spokespeople on the grounds that his comments were having a negative impact on the serious study of artificial intelligence.

Warwick has been called a media hound and 'tower-jumper' because of his controversial experiments and unique, doomsayer perspective on the future of cybernetics. Some claim that his 'experiments' are geared more toward selling books than toward legitimate scientific research, and his antics have spawned at least two websites that devote a

Con't on page 17

Dr. Roboto (con't)

good amount of time to tracking his movements and reporting his latest 'breakthroughs'. Like all revolutionary thinkers (Galileo, anyone?) he is criticized for swimming against the tide and for attempting to make science more accessible to the masses.

One can only wonder if, twenty years from now, when the sentient machines of the future are using remote-controlled humans to implement their plan of world domination, and the rest of us are caught with our pants down (pun intended) because of our fascination with trans-atlantic, telepathic cybersex, will Warwick's critics have the *chutzpah* to admit that they were wrong?

I don't think so.

Research for this article was conducted at the following websites: kevinwarwick.com, cnn.com, guardian.co.uk, the-register.co.uk, wired.com, and ABCnews.com.

RPG Corner (con't)

aspire to are their own choice, and there are no restrictions on the skills that they can learn, provided they have access to someone who can teach them.

The idea of a "level" is another element so deeply rooted in gaming that it is hard to get around. In many games, once a character acquires a certain amount of experience, he ascends to another "level." This is representative of the character being smarter, wiser and tougher for his travels and adventures, and is denoted by more skills, access to new magics, and usually the ability to endure more wounds before dying. I am disinclined to use this method of character advancement for a few reasons. Primarily, it seems to place too much emphasis on character advancement and can detract from role-playing opportunities. It also requires the creation of some kind of scale that can be used to measure the character's experience and assign a level. I prefer allowing the characters to advance through the development new skills, and the advancement of existing skills.

It looks like I'm out of space again. Next month's column will look at methods to design the physiological shape of the character, how to designate what skills are available and how to acquire new ones. We'll also look at setting up some of the other categories that should be included on a character sheet, such as weapons skills, hit points (the amount of damage that a character can sustain before falling unconscious or dead, often measured in a point system. We'll talk about this more when we get to the Combat discussion), magic skill and willpower, and how to determine them.

Youth View (con't)

Hours spent looking for websites each week:

6.3 hours.

Sleep missed each week:

10.3 hours.

R.A. Salvatore wins as favorite author while 'the Classics' (Star Wars, Star Trek, Lord of the Rings) created the initial interest and foundation—and it soars from there in a scattershot pattern.

What's next?

I checked back with Jakob because the last meeting for the club was rescheduled. He reported that the 'club' was taking a break but would be back by the second week in August. 'Most of the group is still active with role playing, ccg's and of course raiding the movie theatre to whisk themselves away on some new adventure. The gamers are usually finding a home at Fenton's shop, Beyond Imagination. As for the sci-fi club itself, I am going to attempt to re-start it shortly. I am also considering changing the format to a more broad-based, all encompassing look at the genre while still including the core events that have made it so popular in the past.'

I also checked with Dorrie who reported, 'As far as I know, K. and the gang play a RPG each Wednesday at Fenton's shop around noon. I was supposed to play, but I'm too lazy to drive to the valley. I think a few of us will trek (no pun intended) to San Diego for the ComicCon in late July.'

And so, the club and the games continue. Most of the players will be back in the fall when the shadows lengthen sooner in the afternoon; the heat becomes tolerable. A few who graduated are moving from the area or will be enrolling at the local community college. No one has indicated that they'd rather not return. Perhaps they will gravitate to others with similar interests in their new location? Have I found the key to this groups' success? I have data; I come away with more insight. I think I may need to get something like magic cards or frequent an online RPG. Or, I could wait until the fall. I've been told I'd be welcome in the group. I'll let you know!

Answers to quiz on page 8

1. Green Goblin, 2. Dr. Smith, 3. Freddy Krueger, 4. Darth Vader, 5. Jason Voorhies, 6. Sauron, 7. Michael Myers, 8. The Joker, 9. Thulsa Doom, 10. Leatherface, 11. The Penguin, 12. Randall Flagg, 13. Lex Luthor, 14. Khan, 15. Roy Batty