



The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

3-D Characters (4 of 4): Making Characters Stand Out

By Bret Funk

Characters with Length (a past, present, and future) and Width (the interests and personality dependent upon that timeline) are memorable. Not only do readers understand the motivations of two-dimensional characters, but enough similarities exist between the two for readers to empathize with the problems and desires of such characters. Moreover, works sprinkled with enough two-dimensional players will stand out in their own right. Like a fine painting, there are enough colors to catch the eye and enough details to inspire the mind. But also like a painting, characters with only two dimensions are static; they, and the universe they live in, have no life of their own. To make characters stand out, they must have Depth.

In short, Length and Width are what a character is given; Depth is what is acquired from others. Depth is the interaction of characters with each other and their environment and the effect those interactions have on their Lengths and Widths. It manifests itself in many ways. On an individual level, Depth results

in the transformation of a character's perception and personality or in the addition of new interests. Occasionally, it may even lead to a change in the ultimate goal. But the introduction of Depth is not a one way street. As characters interact with their environment, they affect changes in others, too, and these changes may expand throughout the world, ultimately toppling governments, forming religions, or changing social mores. Changes to society brought on through the direct or indirect actions of characters represent a more universal Depth.

Worlds with Depth are vibrant and dynamic. In the real world, a thousand actions may occur without comment, hundreds of lives may end without having a lasting effect, but there is always the chance that the actions of an individual will bring great change, or that words spoken by one will be taken up by thousands, until society itself has no choice but to adapt. For a fictitious world to truly be immersive, it must have the same quality. If a character never changes, or if his actions fit the story but have no effect on the world around him, then the work will stagnate. If, however, characters are given Depth, if they adapt to their world and their world adapts to them, then the world itself can and will exist before and beyond the scope of the story.

Of all three dimensions, Depth is the hardest to incorporate and the rarest to find. Properly used, it transforms a work from an interesting story to a living, breathing world. Poorly used, Depth results in characters that no longer seem real or in worlds which lose their focus. Neither option is particularly palatable to an author, but the benefits of added Depth more than justify the risk.

It is easy to see Depth in television. Shows with Depth develop strong cult followings, spawn subsequent series in the same universe, and result in near riots when they are cancelled prematurely. An even better indicator of Depth is a quick walk through the isles of the local bookstore; if you see a line of paperbacks based on a television show, chances are high that the show had Depth. *Star Trek* is the quintessential example: a series that resulted in ten movies, four additional series – taking place both before and after the original – numerous books, and a slew of fan fiction. The stories are sometimes preachy and the science is usually crazy, but the message is clear: *Star Trek* has a life of its own.

Yet *Star Trek* is not the only SF phenomenon. *Babylon 5*, *Farscape*, and many other shows have dedicated fanbases and more than a few books to their names, but popularity and the crossing-over of a series to different media are the results Depth, not the cause. True Depth comes from within.

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As Dreams

by Trent Urness

Before a Game Master can design an appropriate magic system for the world that he is creating, some very big answers must be finalized. The questions to which these answers belong should help the Game Master decide where magic will fit among the characters and environments of his world. How pervasive is magic? How rare or abundant is it? How accessible is this magic to people in general (and Player-Characters in particular)? Are there limits to what magic can do? In short, what role will magic fill in the game? Setting, tool, or perhaps a character in and of itself, it all depends on how the Game Master wants the characters perceive and use the magic.

It's true that I saved magic till last, and I did so because I feel that it can have the biggest effect on the type of game that is run, even in small amounts, and I want some of the major formative questions that I listed above fresh in your mind before you strike off to design a world according to your own designs and whims.

The mean level of magic in the world will be a profound influence on the way that people develop and interact with their environment and each other. A true lack of magic, meaning that there is little to be had and only a few people alive at any one time who could use even that tiny scrap, means that the world will be very similar to our own. Men use machines and technology to ease labor, and wars are fought with strength and steel. The same world where magic was available, and could be put to any variety of uses by just about anyone, would be radically different. No machines exist to help mankind, because he uses magic in the place of them. Spells to lift and heat and manipulate, spells to make glass from sand, spells to carve out great lumps of earth, anything we need to do can be accomplished with the right knowledge. Are wars even fought now, or do the conjurers see the future, and carefully avoid every misstep along their path toward utopia? Or is it quite the opposite? Has the world fallen into battle after battle of super-powered, nearly indestructible magicians who constantly seek to usurp total control of the globe from one another?

A crystalline example of the differences between high and low magic worlds exists within the same series of books. The Harry Potter series, penned by J.K. Rowling exhibit two worlds separated by their use of magic. The everyday world uses no magic whatsoever, but the world of the wizards and witches uses magic so much that it has become commonplace. There is little wonder involved with the use of the magic by

those who have done so since birth. We as an outside party "ooh" and "ahh," and of course Harry does as well because he is new to that world, but the luster of magic is lost on those that live too close to it's light. This leads us to what I believe to be the fundamental question about magic: How special is magic in your world?

The Availability / Accessibility of Magic

Obviously, if magic is as commonplace as water and air, it's not very special. With a high availability, nearly everyone is familiar with it and understands that magic and magicians are among the population. This leads to a rather blasé perception of magic among the Non-Playing characters, and a setting where magic is used as a tool, to help the characters through tough situations and to make life easier and more convenient. This is compounded if magic is accessible to a wide variety of people. Magicians who can scribe spells onto scrolls or parchment (or loose-leaf or floppy disks for that matter) that anyone can read and "cast," have made magic accessible to just about everyone. Should Game Masters want to run a high adventure game, then highly available magic could be a way to easily capture the scope that you're after, but it could quickly spiral out of control as more and more impressive magic must be created or employed to keep the interest of the Playing-Characters.

A world with little magic, compounded with a high difficulty and / or general inability to use it, creates a more traditional picture of magic. Secretive and jealous magicians who spend their time trying to unlock deeper mysteries and increase their power, as well as the wondrous and exotic nature of seeing magic, even simple tricks. Next to no magic in a world creates powerful and memorable moments when characters are exposed to even simple spells. In this type of environment, it is unlikely that the Characters will have access to powerful magic, and very likely the only first hand experience they have with magic could be on the receiving end.

Obviously, though, the characters (and more likely than not the Game Master) would like to be exposed to magic more than once in a blue moon, and not always on the business end of a charm or spell. A middle ground needs to be developed, where magic can still be special and unique, but not so rare as to almost never be encountered. Finding this balance isn't easy, and can take a good bit of time and reflection.

Peeling The Fandom Onion: An Eye-Watering Experience

by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

Just what did I get myself into when I embraced science fiction? It has become a friend when I'm lonely or bored, a mate that nurtures my creative and speculative side, a lover as it lures my fantasies in directions I sometimes do not want to go. It has become a religion, a cult, so to speak, as I pay homage to the newest manga or praise its name in a favorite chat room. It has become my benchmark and I relate to people accordingly: sci-fi vs. *not* sci-fi. It has broken my heart, lifted me up, and kept me chained in bondage. I am part of fandom, and suddenly, I'm not sure I like the idea.

Forgive the theatrics, but while making dinner recently, chopping veggies and throwing them into a huge silver stew pot I love to use, I found myself mulling over the question of what the fan dance means in anime, frustrated that I have to wait until I can email someone for an answer. Then it hits me! Science fiction has invaded my life! I love it, but I'm seeing another side of the sci-fi coin: the edge. Yep, the edge with its dark grooves and valleys, highlighted peaks and sharp angles. And sometimes that coin has nothing but a smooth side, dull and pitted. Guess I'm no longer the newbie; is the honeymoon is over?

What was it that bothered me specifically, I wondered as chopped carrots go in the pot? I listed the *types* of science fiction or what is now generically termed, speculative fiction, and came up with a rather exhaustive list. The only thing that bothered me about SF was some of the extremes in horror and the extremes in anime (hentai/ecchi). Well, I generally avoid that as a choice, so it couldn't be types of science fiction that was haunting me.

I listed *sources* of science fiction in my head as I peeled onions. Nothing surprising there: bookstores, friends, websites. Nope. I peeled my onion, and the problem, to the next layer. If it wasn't types of science fiction, or how I enjoyed it, maybe it was the expense of sci-fi? Checking recent eBay purchases, I find nothing extreme, but it is all paraphernalia related to my chosen cult. However, the expense isn't significant, and it's within my budget. (Whew! I don't need to go to SFA--Sci-Fi Anonymous! Auctions Anonymous? Let's don't go there...)

In the next layer, my eyes started watering; I might be on to something. If it isn't *types* of sci-fi or *ways* of acquiring my passion, it must be *who I enjoy it with...* brothers and sisters in the faith. I needed to look at who I shared this rich life with, and being the

counselor-type, examine who I did not share it with as well. I start listing fandom types. I'm not too far into the list when, first, I realize how diverse we are. My second discovery is what a contrasting bunch we are.

Diversity. My Fandom list, demographically speaking, encompassed professionals, blue collar, young, old, poor, rich, male, female... It was, well, diverse. I know schoolteachers and rocket scientists (really!), church going types and atheists, educated and uneducated and those perpetually in the cycle (a.k.a. professional students). If I could think of a profession, I was pretty sure I'd find someone who was a member of this quasi-cult and could find them in any state and border countries. So, it was not that attribute that bothered me and I crossed it off the list. Next layer!

Contrast! This took guts to examine: I wasn't sure which side I would find myself on. The next list started with extremists and the every-day Joe, the normies. That wasn't very conclusive and the only two things on the list, so I needed to examine each one and list qualities of each type (trying to find as many generalities and cliques as humanly possible):

Normies: The Normal. Middle of the Road. Balanced. Social Skills. Broad world outlook. Socially accepted. Steady Job. Relationships that at least appeared fulfilling. Not big risk takers.

Extremists: Intense. Broke or SF budget is as big as a house payment. Rigid. Introverted / Extroverted. Outlook centered on various degrees of 'self'. As a *group*, not as socially accepted, or on the edge. Steady job/career to job hopping, temporary positions or unemployed. Relationships ranged from non-existent to sporadic to very stable.

Ouch. I saw myself all over the place. I categorized myself as a *quasi-normie extremist* (yeah, I laughed, too). In one area I was balanced, but in another, compulsive, spending way too much time in the pursuit of my passion. The typical rule is: if you neglect an area of your life or do not fulfill responsibilities, you may be a SF addict (or a redneck). There were a few other attributes in both categories. I really *am* on the edge!

But, it wasn't just extreme behavior that put up warning flags, it was the steady *and* extreme behaviors of my sci-fi brethren that bothered me. Normies could be boring and predictable but dependable. Extremists were more rigid and inner focused, yet, at the same time, I savored their non-normie passion and individualism! I needed to go one step further, and I

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The Writer's Block: Problem Words II

by Charles Gramlich & Y Du Bois Williams

There are many problem words that I didn't get a chance to cover in my last Writer's Block. Below are a few more.

Elicit / Illicit: Another pair of words that sound alike and yet have no relationship in what they mean are elicit and illicit. Both are used frequently, especially in referring to illicit (meaning "illegal") drugs, or to eliciting a response from someone, meaning to "draw forth," "bring out," or "trigger" a response.

Exhausted / Exhaustive: Perhaps a teacher once assigned you to do an exhaustive search of the literature regarding some famous writer like William Shakespeare. Even though you were probably exhausted when you concluded such a marathon task, exhaustive and exhausted mean very different things. Exhaustive means "comprehensive" or "thorough." You examine all possibilities. Exhausted means "extreme fatigue, the feeling of having used up all of your energy."

Explicit / Implicit: If you make something explicit, then you make it "clear" or make it "specific." An explicit set of rules is either written down or is clearly stated and understood by everyone. It is out in the open where nothing is hidden. "Thou shalt not kill," is an example of an explicit rule.

When something is implicit, this means it is "understood" (or supposed to be understood) by everyone without being written down. For example, most groups of humans have rules that everyone understands but no one says. The unwritten or informal dress code at a business is a good example. Everyone dresses at about the same level of formality, even though the form of dress is not specified in the employee handbook. Such rules are implicit.

Extant / Extent: When you decide to write a book on the history of science fiction you'll need to read as much of the extant literature as possible. This will increase the extent of your knowledge about your topic. Extent means "scope" or "range." Extant is totally unrelated. It means "still in existence," "not lost," "not destroyed." To read the extant literature on a subject means to read all the literature available on that subject. Extant is also used in biology. "Dinosaurs no longer exist on Earth, while their probable descendents--birds--remain extant."

Imply / Infer: One way to remember the difference between these words is to imagine yourself as a speaker saying: "I imply, you infer." The difference lies in who (or what) is acting and who is interpreting the actions. Imply means to "suggest" or "hint" without stating clearly. Only the person or thing that is acting can imply. Infer means to "draw conclusions from information provided." Only the person who is not acting, who is watching, can infer. For example, a politician might imply in her speech that her opponent is a liberal with a capital "L." You might infer from her attack on her opponent that she is a conservative.

Principal / Principle: Again, here are words that sound just alike but have very different meanings. It might help to remember that a princip"al, with an "a," is usually a hum"a'n, also with an "a." The head of your high school was a principal, which means "chief" or "director." Or perhaps your "pal" from high school was the princi"pal" player on your neighborhood basketball team. This means he or she was the "primary" or "leading" player. A principle, on the other hand, is a "basic truth," or "law." "Matter is neither created nor destroyed" is a principle of physics.

Qualitative / Quantitative: Qualitative relates to the "quality" of something, and quantitative to the "quantity" or "amount." Quantitative things can have meaningful numbers assigned to them. Twelve inches is longer than four inches. Ten pounds is twice as heavy as five pounds. Color, on the other hand, is a qualitative value. Numbers don't make any sense when referring to such concepts. Is red more than blue? Is green twice as much as yellow?

Subconscious / Unconscious: These two terms are frequently confused but they do have precise meanings. Subconscious refers to thoughts or memories that we are not thinking of right now, but which we could easily call to awareness if we wanted. For example, you probably aren't thinking of the mascot of your high school football team, until it's mentioned to you. It comes to mind easily, though.

Unconscious is different. It has two common meanings, one general and the other specific to psychology. The general meaning of unconscious is being "without awareness," like being "knocked out" by a blow to the head. Someone who "passes out" from drinking will also be labeled unconscious in this sense.

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There is a long-standing battle among writers. It is a battle which exists solely on the grounds of academia, and most people are not even aware of it. My first semester as a grad student, I let it slip that I was a fan of *The X-Files*, and that I wrote fan fiction. When I signed up for the Creative Writing: Fiction class the next semester, everyone I knew warned me that I was in for a hell of a time. "Gautreaux hates *genre* fiction," they would tell me in ominous voices, "He will tear you apart!"

"Genre fiction?" I asked. I mean, I knew what a "genre" was, but what were they talking about? Didn't all fiction fall into some genre or another? Well, lucky me, I was given a lecture on the spot by my caring colleagues, especially the veterans of Gautreaux. "Genre" fiction, you see, is popular fiction, such as science fiction, fantasy, horror, and dime store romance novels. This fiction, I was told, has no place in the sacred halls of academia, where academic, memetic fiction rules supreme.

Dr. Tim Gautreaux was my writing teacher. He's a southern writer of some renown. He's had poems, short stories, and novels published, so he is chock full of good advice for the fledgling writer. He also had a reputation for being a total bastard when it came to critiquing those novice writers' work. I have to say that my experience with him wasn't bad, perhaps because I am a masochist when it comes to my writing; I like being torn apart. I really think though, that, underneath all the brass, he knows what the hell he is talking about.

I fully expected to be criticized for first plot synopsis I turned in; I probably did it to test him, now that I think about it. It was a science fiction story. His comments, in front of the whole class, were nowhere near as hurtful as I expected. He said to be able to write good genre fiction, writers have to be able to write good, memetic (or reality based) fiction.

This is true, I think, to some degree. It is why Stephen King, for example, is so popular. Think about it. King writes about extraordinary people and events, but he does so in a way that somewhere, in the back of their minds, readers get the impression that, yeah, that *could* happen. The same is true for Tolkien and other fantasy writers. Their works contain universal truths and struggles that can appeal to people in the real world. That is why you have so many scholars who are also Tolkien fans.

However, even when the world of literature contains the excellent genre fiction writers, academia still looks down upon the texts and denies them their place in "serious" literature. That is, until now.

More and more universities are offering classes and programs in genre fiction. It seems that academic fiction and genre fiction are finally agreeing to coexist peacefully. Some writers, such as Kurt Vonnegut and George Orwell have blended the two into a legitimate and critically acclaimed style of writing. Writers like these have lead students and faculty to question that if this kind of speculative, quasi-science fiction is legitimate because it forces the reader to think critically, then why not popular fiction that addresses universal truth and meaning too? Well, say the contemporary English programs, why not indeed? Campuses across the country offer Pop Culture specializations. Classes are being designed to study the impact of the graphic novel and/or comic books on literature.

This new trend in popular literature classes might also be a move to make English a more interesting subject for the non-English major, but subtly hidden behind popularity is an easy and enjoyable way to painlessly introduce today's young college freshmen into critical thinking, a subject that it seems most entering freshmen do not even want to think about.

At Southeastern Louisiana University, my alma mater (and employer), the English department was actively looking for ways to recruit interest in the department, and many feel that offering classes in popular genres is the way to go. Last summer, a class was offered that discussed books and the movies that were based from them. This summer, Dr. Jayetta Slawson will offer an interim course based on the literary elements in the *Harry Potter* series. Dr. Jeff Weimelt is working on a Tolkien course that will center around *The Lord of the Rings* and still look at Tolkien's less famous works, as well as his extensive notes on the saga.

The tie in with popular fiction does not end with upper level electives either. Many instructors are choosing to teach science fiction and graphic novel units in English 101 and 102. These classes are wildly popular and open the world of literature up to those who might normally struggle or sleep through their English classes.

It seems that now that the line has finally been crossed, genre writers are getting the respect they deserve, not just from students, but from many of the faculty who, in the past, spoke out actively against that type

KeyCOMmentary: Formula for Success

by garrie keyman

Keyman's series on the ten archetypes of Fantasy will continue in next month's edition.

Writing: The Breakneck Journey

As writers, the thing we all have in common is one seemingly little, deceptively simple desire: find the formula for success. One man believes he has found it. Donald Maass, former president of AAR (Association of Authors' Representatives) and literary agent to many dozens of successful and well-known writers like Anne Perry, has made *writing the breakout novel* the central theme of his expertise; his accomplished quest to package his knowledge and take his show on the road.

Last October I had the worthwhile experience of traveling to Boston where I sat in on one of Maass's two-day seminars, the well-structured, informative, and interactive presentation a name-sake to his book, *Writing the Breakout Novel: Insider Advice for Taking Your Fiction to the Next Level*. I was curious about Maass. I wanted to know more about what made him tick and was going to have to pay for the privilege. I had queried him several times throughout the years; Maass having risen early on in my research to become first choice on my agent wish-list.

The first rejection I received was a blanket form rejection. Although disappointed, I wasn't surprised; I'd already received my share of those. I waited a year and a draft or two later to query him again. This time, though put-off, I felt a little better. The response I received was that he felt my submission merited a closer look, but that his duties as president of AAR was presently keeping him too busy – could I please re-submit in a year? Up to that point I had never had an agent ask that I re-submit, nor tell me my work merited a closer look, so naturally I was captivated. I went back to the proverbial drawing board and worked another draft, then worked on the sequel. Between that, adopting a daughter, and logging a few more hundred miles jogging, a year quickly slipped by.

The third time I queried *dreamagent man* (insert quasi-Bond music here for dramatic effect) I received a more personal response. Believe it or not – even when it's a rejection – anything more than a form letter is progress in this business, unless you're one of those struggling authors who live a particularly charmed life. Well, while Maass appreciated the action and tension of my opening sequence, he felt the hero entered too late (page eight). However, Maass went on to state that he did believe Brin (title character/hero) had strong potential as a compelling and popular hero. *Thanks for querying. Have a nice life.*

My sister, the published playwright, was the one to find out about the seminar and convinced me to go. She accompanied me, in fact, and it was a great weekend. It only added fuel to my fire that she had a friend who queried Maass (once) and snagged him. It was interesting to watch from the sidelines as *Killer Hair* became a published work of chick-lit genre mystery. And though I've never met the D.C.-based Ellen Byerrum in person, she was kind enough to be helpful early on when I was trying to figure out the optimal structure and content for my query letters. Good for her, I thought. Now if I could just do the same thing.

In Boston I found Maass at ease and personable in front of his class of wannabe authors. He must read more than any other ten people on the planet combined, I decided, but clearly knew his material. More information was imparted in those two days than I garnered from some university courses I'd taken which spanned entire semesters. Maass delivers adequate bang for your buck.

Admittedly, I laughed at one point – only because of personal experience – when Maass stated the hero character should appear on page one (mine does, now). But what Maass is *not* telling is how to write. Positioned as he has been in the publishing industry (and a many-times published author, himself, under various pseudonyms), Maass has simply made astute observations. He knows what books that succeed in gaining wide audiences have in common. He knows what elements appear to jettison novels to the New York Times Bestseller List. It is these observations which he shares in his book and seminar.

Maass, like all agents, gets hundreds of queries every week. Naturally, when I had a moment to meet with him alone he couldn't have known me from any other *Wanda Wannabe*. But he seemed genuinely surprised when I spoke of the rejection I'd received from him, saying he doesn't usually send anything beyond form letters due to the sheer volume of queries, and that my work must have certainly 'stood out' if it prompted him to get more personal. Since he obviously didn't recall my name, my novel, or my previous queries, I asked if it would be beating a dead horse to send him a fourth set of sample chapters. He only offered a quirky smile.

The truest test of Maass's magic remains yet to be proven. I am waiting to discover how many of the people he has taught have gone on to garner agents and sell their books. Has he picked up new clients of his own through his lectures? Better yet, has the advice

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Reviews

Fool's Fate Robin Hobb



Bantam, Feb 2004
\$24.95, Hardback, 640 pp.
ISBN: 0553801546

Review by Harriet Klausner

Heir to the throne of the Six Duchies, Prince Dutiful promises his fiancée that he will present her with a dragon's head, which means an expedition to a remote tundra-like Out Island.

No one but Dutiful wants to go on the journey. For instance, the former fool Lord Golden knows that he is going to die on this northern wasteland trek, but feels it is his duty to accompany the prince. His friend assassin FitzChivalry Farseer tries to persuade Golden into not going, but fails, so he, too, will go. Telepath Trick also joins the party that leaves the comfort of Buckkeep Castle for a trip to a dangerous frozen wilderness with no central monarch.

When they reach one of the independent Out Islands, the royal retinue meets the Hetgurd who disagree with the slaying of a dragon. The teenage prince negotiates a deal with the Outislanders. He and a small party, accompanied by island warriors, will set on the trek to slice off the head of a dragon, thus leaving much of his force behind at the ship.

The agreed upon hunters continue on the quest. However, Dutiful and company run into a new problem as the local dragon community refuses to provide the head of any of them on a platter. Will the two species war, cooperate with some sort of deal such as an exchange for one of the regal crew, or will Dutiful break his first promise to his future wife?

The third entry in FitzChivalry Farseer's narrated Tawny Man fantasy series is a delightful tale that shows the complexities of groups trying to come together on an objective, but with each member bringing baggage and an agenda to the table (ship?). The old adage of asking a committee to design a horse leads to a camel comes to mind as the audience sees how each key player envisions the trip, and to the pessimists, its consequences.

The story line is exciting, but it is the ensemble that makes Robin Hobb's realm seem so real. Fitz is a delightful protagonist who narrates this tale (and the previous two books) so that the audience

predominantly sees the action through his eyes. Fans who read the other two Tawny Man books (see *Fool's Errand* and *Golden Fool*) will see how much Dutiful has matured, but not lose sight that he still is loaded with out of control raging hormones.

Readers will enjoy this deep look at those who must carry out the wishes of their leader. However, unlike real life whether it is World War One or Operation Iraqi where the decision makers attend posh parties and stay away from the battlefield, Dutiful to his credit joins his team on the harrowing trek. No doubt newcomers will seek the other books, which should be read first, but *FOOL'S FATE* can be enjoyed on its own merit as a strong novel. Also the tyro to Hobb's heaven will want to peruse the Farseer trilogy.

Assassin's Apprentice by Robin Hobb



Bantam, Mar. 1996
\$6.99, Mass Market, 464 pp.
ISBN: 055357339X

Reviewed by Scott Andrews

"Assassin's Apprentice," the opening book in Robin Hobb's Farseer Trilogy, recounts the coming-of-age of the noble bastard FitzChivalry Farseer through a skillful first-person narrative. The flashback

perspective from Fitz as an old man drips with somber nostalgia, producing a more mature narrative voice than most coming-of-age fantasy. Hobb excels at delicate tactile details of things that Fitz experiences, especially his mental bond with animals.

However, the narrative offers no correspondingly thorough details of many other plot-related points, such as how Fitz steals the letter left in Prince Regal's chambers or any of his assassin training. The first three-quarters of the novel drag as the plot bounces Fitz through a string of trades and mentors, including Burch, Chade, Lady Patience, and Galen, each period of his training ignoring the previous one(s). These characters and others, such as Verity, Regal, and the Fool, veer wildly from background to major importance with no apparent reason. Fitz's rare forays out of Buckkeep provide only fleeting glimpses of external plot threads, such as the aftermath of the raid on Forge.

The Six Duchies rarely feels like more than an ordinary quasi-medieval fantasy kingdom, except for

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Reviews

Assassin (con't)

Hobb's stocking of traditionally male occupations like the military with both men and women. The nobility's convention of taking names that fit their character traits produces ridiculous epithets like "King Shrewd" and "Lady Patience." The pseudo-historical passages opening each chapter feel like forced exposition from outside the point-of-view, rather than the integrated back story or the old Fitz's nostalgia that Hobb seamlessly weaves into the narrative.

In contrast, the last quarter of the book speeds toward an abrupt climax of court intrigue, almost jarring in the shift of pace, plot focus, and style. The conclusion provides several surprises among the obvious twists, and most of the previously discarded characters retain importance as prominent or gratuitous participants. Hobb describes the city and culture of Fitz's mountain hosts far more vividly and uniquely than anything in the Six Duchies, while largely abandoning the emotional focus of the first three-quarters of the novel. The intrigue concludes without resolving the main external plot, the coastal raids, and the sudden ending leaves the novel feeling like an incomplete set-up for the next volume of the trilogy.

"Assassin's Apprentice" uses a skilled and emotive first-person narrative to tell a bland story through an unevenly paced plot. This produces an above average novel and an intriguing introduction to the trilogy, but as the work of an experienced fantasy author ("Robin Hobb" is a pseudonym), "Assassin's Apprentice" fails to live up to the hype.

Silent Mobius: Symphony

Original Soundtrack Vol. 1



J.Haskell and S. Katayama

Ayers, Inc. Series

\$ 23.50 - \$ 34.00

Reviewed by: Terry Crotinger

From the anime movie soundtrack, *Silent Mobius*, this CD was pleasing to listen to but I found one major flaw: it is touted as an *original* soundtrack. However, since when does one take well-known songs and call it original simply because they have been rearranged superbly? The main theme is based on the beautiful Russian folk music called *Troika*, (meaning: three-horse carriage). Sergei Prokofiev wrote a little music based on the *Troika* for *one* of his Operettas, *Lieutenant Kijé*, but he never considered

it *his* creation. I would not take such offense, but throughout this CD I hear 'borrowings': Christmas carols, one song, *The Hope* (and synthesized all the way—including the voices) is note-for note—*O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*, and strangest of all, the old 1980-90's PBS theme! Original music? Not likely.

In defense of this CD, I have never heard the Troika used in a lullaby-Brahms treatment so beautifully. I enjoyed the entire CD immensely and felt the arranging was thoughtful and fresh. Using a variety of instrumentation, including an impressive pipe organ sound and real voices, the first selection, *Prelude*, is haunting and provocative with the use of dissonance and harmony creating the tension and groundwork for the rest of the CD. I had to check the inside flier to see actual names, but it is so well mixed, it could be accused of being synthesized. *Prelude* is done in a *fax fugue* style (*fugue*: one part repeating or echoing exactly the part before it as it musically steps on itself until it dies at the end. Similar to a round or a canon), again, nicely done. My absolute favorite is *The Attack*.

One thing that did bother me was the English vocal selection, *Silently*. The song is weak thematically to start with. (Remember that one nice Japanese song that made the top Billboard charts in the U.S. in the 1970's? This is its' sister, and *not* well sung.) This is probably due, in part, that a non-English speaking woman is singing this. Her diction and pronunciation is flawless, but her voice was not suited to this piece, and I kept thinking how cheesy it sounded. The second selection, which was used for the television opening theme, *The Forbidden Pense'e*, sung in Japanese, was well sung but not outstanding because of the composition of the song—your typical anime opening theme song (which it was for the movie) but I kept thinking AdultSwim's *InuYahsa* instead; other than a driving rhythm section, there's not much difference.

This CD was hard to find on the Internet at a price I could afford. Even the top booksellers did not have this listed. I found it at a local computer game/music shop (independently owed) but my local music store (national chain) doesn't have it either. I borrowed it from a friend.

Using a mix of vocal, orchestral and synthesized treatments gave the entire work a futuristic feel and urgency, the title name, however, is a bit of wishful thinking. It is a nice listen; anime collectors will want this one.

Reviews

King of Foxes

Raymond E. Feist



Eos, Apr. 2004

\$24.95, Hardcover, 337 pp.

ISBN: 0380977095

Reviewed by Scott Andrews

After several sub-par collaborations and video game novelizations, Raymond E. Feist returned to epic fantasy in 2003 with "Talon of the Silver Hawk," Book 1 of the Conclave of Shadows. The boy Talon saw

his tribe slaughtered and was raised by the Conclave, founded at the close of Feist's earlier Serpent War Saga. After learning typically Feistian lessons in swordplay and boyhood love, Talon extracted revenge on his tribe's executioners, but without any sense of the greater evil that necessitated the Conclave's founding.

"King of Foxes" sees Tal swear fealty to Duke Olasko, the noble who ordered his tribe exterminated, and Tal must mesh his thirst for revenge with his Conclave directive to investigate Olasko's magician Laso Varen.

The novel starts with plodding court intrigue, but the story quickens as Tal enters Olasko's service to match wits with the Duke and the Duke's sly sister.

After Tal suffers a reversal, Feist rushes through a predictable detention and escape sequence and Tal easily assembles an army of thousands for his personal revenge, as the Conclave's barely mentioned goals coincide with his own. A Conclave leader finally makes a rare appearance to offer some explanation of the big picture, but any satisfaction is yanked out from under the reader when the Conclave leader later admits that the whole story was just a cover.

The predictable endgame effortlessly thwarts the supposedly powerful enemy, with scant explanation of the Conclave's interest in him and no hint of the greater evil that the Conclave was founded to fight. Tal redeems his clouded heart, but his character oddly ends the novel in a state of complete resolution, as though Feist plans to switch to a new main character for the third book of a projected five.

Feist's novels have always relied on plot rather than narrative, but the prose in "King of Foxes" rings particularly wooden, and none of the new settings, such as Olasko's city Opardum, feel as real as the grit of Krondor in past novels. Tal's plain thirst for revenge and his cold manipulation of fencing opponents and

women alike render him dull, and his isolation from the Conclave's motives saps any overall tension from the story.

In the Serpent War Saga, Feist took bold risks: multiple interesting new characters, one of whom spent half a book in conquests financial rather than military; an invasion that razed Feist's core city; the heroes deliberately destroying the relic they had been guarding for five books; and the emergence of a huge new evil. In the Conclave of Shadows thus far, neither the sole major new character, the sparse eastern settings, nor the predictable plot have the bold flair of the Serpent War, or the charming freshness of Feist's original Riftwar novels.

"King of Foxes" plants the Conclave of Shadows in the dull realm of average fantasy.

Pandora's Star Peter Hamilton



Del Ray, March 2004

\$26.95, Hardcover, 768 pp.

ISBN 0345461622

Reviewed by Harriet Klausner

Commander William Kime's whole life was geared to be the first man to walk on Mars, and the day it happened was the happiest day of his life. Moments after he stepped foot on the red planet and said a few words (a la Armstrong) a wormhole gateway opened and Nigel Shelton and Ozzie Isaac ruined his big moment. Their wormhole technology changed the course of human development.

Instead of long flights in spaceships, wormhole generators were built so that humanity could transfer from one world to the next via a train-like apparatus. Mankind spread out through the galaxy and colonized hundreds of worlds. The few sentient beings they encountered were peaceful, if inexplicable to human thinking. Rejuvenation is so advanced that mankind can live for thousands of years; if someone physically dies, a clone can be grown and the memory data that is stored for that reason is inserted into the new body. It is the golden age of mankind where war is non-existent and humanity is slowly but steadily expanding throughout the universe.

One night, astronomer Dudley Bose is looking through his telescope when he sees a force field envelope the Dyson Alpha star system. Nigel Sheldon

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Reviews

Pandora's Star (con't)

convinces William Kime to take a ship to the Dyson Alpha solar system to see what the barrier consists of and if they and his crew can discover anything about the beings locked inside. When they arrive at their destination, they examine the shield and it disappears, exposing the ship to hundreds of alien vessels that are using nuclear weapons on each other. They leave the area before they are spotted but are forced to leave two of the crew behind.

When the ship returns to commonwealth territory, Kime tells officials that some alien race closed off the Dyson Alpha system because the inhabitants were too warlike and eager to conquer populated worlds. It is postulated that a second alien race lowered the barrier for unknown reasons.

A second expedition is mounted, and it is clear that in a very short time the Dyson Alpha aliens have created wormholes and have launched a trap for the human ships. It failed, and the ships return to base. Mankind has a new enemy and is preparing for war by building up a navy and making sure that if it comes to hostilities some part of humanity will survive.

This is space opera in the tradition of Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein. Peter Hamilton is the next generation of science fiction giants who can create a populated galaxy filled with colonized human worlds and alien races that are very believable. One such race is the Sileen, what old earth called Elves who walk the roads between planets in a way that is totally unbelievable to humans until they are caught in one of the Sileen's roads. Ozzie, who hoped the Sileen could provide some answers, finds himself working the roads between worlds hoping to survive and get out of the maze.

Another world is made up of SI's, AI's that become sentient and they also are interested in the situation of Dyson Alpha. On the planet Far Away, a cult led by Bradley Johansson believes that an alien is living in commonwealth territory secretly guiding human development and the situation of Dyson Alpha is linked to this alien.

This is just a few of the many subplots that seamlessly flow into the main storyline. It should be noted that readers will commonly enjoy this galactic epic novel and wait eagerly await its sequel *Judas Unchained*.

Moral indignation is jealousy with a halo.
– H. G. Wells (1866-1946)

Web Warriors: Dimension X (Book 2)

James Luceno



Del Rey; Oct 2002

\$1 -\$6 Mass Market, 208 pgs

ISBN: 0345444728

Review by TerryCrotinger

Another cyber-punk, good-guy vs. evil in the web book you ask? Pretty much. Worth picking up? Definitely! The Web Warriors series updates the cyber-punk image, softening the edge that made cyber-punk risky, dark and appealing. *Dimension X* adds 'cyber-punk for

dummies' with an artificial intelligence, several layers of cyber-speak and graphic images necessary for the reader to keep up with all the action—shoot 'em-ups, races to arrive at a destination before having to perform a 'hard delete', which apparently is very hard on the human managing the icon through the net, and various types of vehicles that can be quickly altered by adding or deleting part of the program. So a program in this universe could start out looking like a racecar and end up morphing into raindrops as the program code disintegrates. The writing is very clear and clever. And it should be as it was written by James Luceno, an internationally known writer with over thirty publications to his credit including several in the *Star Wars* series. Remember *Robotech*? He co-wrote the series with Brian Daley, a close friend.

At first, I thought this might even be a chapter book intended for younger readers; the layout and type size was larger than most paperbacks. With only two hundred pages, and the larger type, this could have been a short story with a little slash editing. The cover threw me; it looked unprofessional and childish, almost like someone's first attempt at playing with a graphics program. After I finished reading the book, I realized it was a stylized look of what the characters might look like in their cyber-alter-ego. Since my final selection is often based on the cover, I would not have bought this for current online prices. Del Rey's cover artists could have done better.

It took me awhile to understand all Luceno's version of cyber-speak, but it was worth enduring; the names for some of the programs are amusing. I'm looking for the first book, *Web Warriors: Memories End*. So far, only these two books are published in this series, with another promised. I found this at my local dollar store (when it says 'Mass Market', I believe them!) but online booksellers have them, though I did like the price I got mine for. *Dimension X* is a quick read with no objectionable language or even sexual connotations. Hey, maybe it is a chapter book? School Librarians, take note!

Reviews

The Boy Who Could Fly

Warner Bros. 1986



To Affinity and Beyond a review by garrie keyman

As a rule, where cinema is concerned, I find what's bad rarely gets better, while what's good rarely gets worse. The 1999 Warner Bros. release of *The Boy Who Could Fly* remains true to the formula, this Nick Castle (*The Last Starfighter*;

Dennis the Menace) family film as poignant and as delicately powerful today as it was upon its original 1986 theatrical debut.

While this well-balanced and sensitively penned feature was both written and directed by Castle, the movie's ten-star rating owes a great deal of its appeal to two of the best (then-)teenage actors I've ever had the pleasure to watch. As the 14-year old Millie Michaelson, Lucy Deakins offers a superbly layered performance depicting a girl shadowed by the loss of her father to cancer and her family's subsequent move to a new home and neighborhood. As Millie's mother (aptly portrayed by Bonnie Bedelia) struggles to cope with a husband's death and the stress of re-entering the workforce, Millie faces a loneliness sharply deepened by the rejection of her catty new classmates and the necessity of picking up an understandable parental slack.

One of Millie's new neighbors is the curiously mute Eric (Jay Underwood), a lad steeped in a private world that no one is able to penetrate. Eric has lived with his soft-hearted amiable alcoholic uncle (Fred Gwynne) since the age of five, when Eric's parents perished in a plane crash. Since then, Eric has not spoken; his primary pastime consisting of perching in his bedroom window and staring skyward with his arms extended as if he were, himself, a plane. Underwood proves so convincing as Eric that not only can the audience easily forget he is not genuinely autistic, but they are gently transported into his world so faithfully that Eric's conduct makes absolute sense.

At school Millie is paired with Eric in gym class, where her efforts at tossing a ball to the unresponsive boy – a teen normally scorned and ignored by his peers – begins to crack his seemingly impenetrable shell. Later, on a class trip, Millie imagines falling from a bridge while straining for a blossom just beyond reach. Like so many moments in this film, it is a

beautiful piece of cinemagraphic artistry: a gorgeous visual depiction replete with sub-textual meaning. Hitting her head on the bridge rail, Millie is knocked unconscious and awakens in the hospital. She is no longer certain that her fall – and her subsequent rescue by Eric -- was a matter of sheer imagination, for after the doctors have departed, there stands Eric: lurking mutely by the billowing curtains just inside what appears to be a sixth-story window.

Soon Eric's budding emergence is threatened; the pall of institutionalization further crippling his psyche when his uncle's drinking calls into question the man's fitness as Eric's guardian. Meanwhile, Millie's martial-minded younger brother, Louis (Fred Savage), is having troubles of his own: from facing territorial bullies who won't let him circle the block, to recovering toy soldiers for whom he has been conducting backyard funerals as a private coping device following his father's death.

At every turn, this film proves both tender and realistic on the level of human hurts and the everyday variety of inner struggles that people encounter. The characters herein cope with pains so ordinary – so common to us all – that clearly these are the truest killing fields of the human heart. These are *our* silent battles, too: the loneliness of social rejection, the inexorable way life pulls us on following the loss of loved ones, the fight for the right to fearlessly navigate our world – be it the block on which we live or the planet at large.

As the movie moves toward its climax, we have become convinced that the title is allegory: that this is, in fact, a movie about a boy who *wished* he could fly. This carefully orchestrated fooled-you structure of the script is partly what makes the movie soar. Sparing use of special effects does not detract, but heightens – making *The Boy Who Could Fly* one of the most down-to-earth flights of fantasy ever brought to the screen.

This fit-for-the-family fare is polished to a fine sheen by strong supporting-cast portrayals, including Colleen Dewhurst (*Anne of Green Gables*) as the teacher who first pairs Millie and Eric in gym class, and Mindy Cohn (*Facts of Life*) as a bold, talkative neighbor who befriends Millie. While Underwood appears to have gone on to enjoy a long list of small-role and guest-shot appearances, it remains our loss, I'm sure, that there have not been more leading parts to this likeable actor's credit. Likewise, Deakins appears to be lower on the leading-player radar screen than she deserves, although I did have the pleasure of seeing her off-

Reviews

Flyboy (con't)

Broadway the year before last in *The Women's Project* production of Julie Jensen's *Cheat*.

In any event, *The Boy Who Could Fly*, is an uplifting tale ranking among the few movies I can watch again and again. A keeper, this film is winningly underscored by Bruce Broughton's perfect-companion soundtrack. But be forewarned: settle in with a tissue or two before you pass the popcorn.

R2D2: Beneath the Dome

DVD Release 2002



20 minutes, mockumentary

*Mal-a-Droid:
To Avoid or Not to Avoid
a review by garrie keyman*

Admittedly, I'm on the fence about this one – partly because I'm out of the ubiquitous *Star Wars* loop these days and not at all certain about the history behind this little piece of film-mocking. Apparently this 20-minute, well-made 'mockumentary' is an inside job; not at all the piece of clever fanfiction I'd first taken it for when I originally heard about it from others.

From what I can discern, *Beneath the Dome* was written and produced to be aired on the web in small segments at www.starwars.com (where else?) by Don Bies, together with Paul Ens, Mary Beth Bresolin, Kim Bromley and Nelson Hall. Bies, touted as the *most experienced R2D2 operator in the world* on his namesake website, has an impressive filmography which includes work on *The Fly*, *Starship Troopers*, *The Mummy*, *Galaxy Quest*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Return of the Jedi*, *The Phantom Menace*, and *Peter Pan*.

As a member of Lucasfilm's *Industrial Light and Magic* crew, Bies has credits both on (he portrayed numerous stormtroopers in *Star Wars* fare as well as the Bith musician -- *Barquain D'an* -- seen talking to dancers in Jabba's Palace) and off screen (ILM Senior Model Maker). Bies has also been involved in numerous other ventures, including work for Dorling-Kindersley books (*The Star Wars Visual Dictionary*) and LucasArts video games (*Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II*).

I happened upon a DVD release of *Beneath the Dome* at a local video store, the work as stubby at twenty minutes' length as its subject matter; but at \$6.00 a pop (on sale), I thought I'd give it a go. After all, equipped as I am with computerware dating to the Paleozoic

era, I'd never be capable of viewing it online.

What I liked about this tidbit was the dry sense of humor employed in supposedly clueing fans in on the life and times of R2D2 as if he were an actor in his own right. Executed in perfect insider-profile documentary styling, the work includes interviews with *Star Wars* notables Anthony Daniels (C3PO), Natalie Portman (Queen Amidala), Ewan McGregor (Obi-Wan Kenobi), Hayden Christensen (Anakin Skywalker), Carrie Fisher (Princess Leia), as well as Samuel L. Jackson, Richard Dreyfuss, Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, and – of course – Lucas, himself.

What I didn't like about the DVD was its obvious nepotism, as that sort of thing never does sit well with me. Call it a personal quirk. Scanning the list of credits I encountered two other 'Bies' as well as four supporting cast members by the last name of Hamilton-Lee, and three with the same last name of Eblan – all who worked on the film. Well who knows – maybe if I ever got the chance to poke fun at George Lucas with his blessing (and perhaps his funding) I'd get all *my* friends and family in on the gig as well. It'd be a hoot.

In any event, the DVD offers nothing beyond what I imagine the website does. There are no added features or bonuses for making this purchase and it's only dryly humorous the first time through. About the funniest bit is in the shot of the touched-up movie poster from "The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly," which one can see, as the camera pans down, has been aptly re-named, "The Good, The Bad and the Oily" – with R2D2 purportedly having co-starred along with Clint Eastwood.

What would have made this DVD release wholly worth while would have been out-takes. I can't speak for others, of course, but I've always favored out-takes. Especially funny would have been shots of these various actors' failures to maintain straight faces while speaking about Artoo as a fellow actor – at times a struggling one, at that: facing down the demons of a distant father and the inebriating effects of fame.

Score this one at three stars out of a possible ten. As it is, *Beneath the Dome* remains just one more obsequious bow to the implacable throne of Lord Lucas.

Writers Wanted!

The Illuminata is seeking regular and occasional contributors interested in sharing their opinions or original fiction. Visit www.TyrannosaurusPress.com for more information or to fill out a contributor application.

Original Fiction

Trent Urness is a writer of growing talent and exposure. He has written a number of stories, several published here in *The Illuminata*. Urness has the following to say about his current submission, *As Dreams*:

During a marathon of *Twilight Zone* episodes this last New Years Eve, I saw an episode about a man who keeps reliving the same dream over and over. It's a good episode. And it got me thinking about dreams.

What are they? Why do we have them? *Where* are they? Questions like these are, in the world of fantasy and fiction, ripe with the tendrils of imagination. So during the next few days the idea kept tugging at me, and I started to get that writer's need to explore things on paper, and after it was all said and done this story is the culmination of that seed of curiosity.

As Dreams

By Trent Urness

There is darkness. A pitch that breaks only as a suggestion, a visual cue from what's known as fact, the imagination casting lines and shapes on top of nothing. The two stare.

"She's dreaming again."

"How do you know?"

"Don't *you* know?"

"What.... Know what?" In the other, a slight chuckling begins. It's carried off and off into the distance, then brought back again as an airy echo, which makes the ears and nose twitch. Then, in the ether far below, there is a slow tilting, and the darkness is overcome by the shapes of people. Some of them walk and others sit. The sitters move along nothingness, their bodies flying by at different paces and in different directions. Some walkers disappear and reappear. This mass of people talks to each other, as if the nothingness around them were simply normal and they were actually acclimated to such strangeness. Or perhaps it wasn't normal at all, and this bastula of oddity had just accepted fate.

This unnatural scene continues for less than five minutes, and suddenly, around the two men standing off and above the masses, a room begins to appear. A door and a long table fade in, a floor and walls, a rug, and a window that the two look out of. The whole city begins to take shape. Cars trap people inside of them as they float and move, roads form underneath them, interstates, and in the distance, a true horizon with a sun that's just kissing the sky from underneath the earth. Other buildings rise up and around the people, suffocation underneath hundreds of thousands of pounds of steel and flourecence. Clouds in the sky, birds, an airplane.

"Is this it?"

"*This* is it."

"You'll have to excuse me, but I still don't understand."

"You will." And with that the man exits, leaving his confused partner to simply stand, musing and guessing for himself what it is that is happening.

There is stirring down below. The people on the sidewalks are slowing down, creating the area for a circle in the middle of them. The man squints his eyes to clear his vision, but to no avail; it's too far and he's too old. A surprising weight begins to snag his arm and, looking down, he sees that a pair of binoculars has appeared in his hand. Quickly jostling them to his face, he spies why the people on the sidewalk part their paths. A little girl walks in between the countless many. Her face is obscured and meaningless, but still it radiates a perceptible aura on her surroundings. She wears a bright yellow dress that reaches down to her tiny blue shoes. She's smiling and talking to the people, touching them on the foreheads and holding frail, shaking hands.

The man watches from atop the high-rise as the girl enters.... Could that be right? Could a *cave* really have just appeared from where a building once stood? It must! It must be right! That *is* what has just happened. An entire building has turned into a mountain! Right in the middle of downtown, an entire building, now a globual of flowing rock that makes its peak somewhere above a small hole at its base. And that little girl had just entered it, just strolled right in, and the people around her, why, they didn't even seem to mind! They just waved and said their goodbyes and that was the end of it. The old man, hundreds of feet above, reaches back towards the table and finds a chair, which he doubtfully sits down in. He notices that the binoculars have disappeared and, tightly closing his eyes, he sits as still as possible.

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Original Fiction

As Dreams (con't)

Electric buzz and car horns from the miles of slathering city blocks that form the abstraction that is this new world. A voice, from behind the old man.

"You're dead, you know. You know that, right?" It's the other man, again. He stands in front of the open door smoking a cigarette that he casually ashes into a tray he holds in his hand. The old man, unknowing at first, squints his eyes at this character from the mysteries that's perched in front of him. "It's true. You're dead. So am I. So am I. Such a shame, don't you think?" An exhalation makes its way out of creaky lungs and permeates the space between the two. "I don't know what you mean. I'm obviously dreaming, sir."

Again, that same chuckle of knowingness, and then, "Oh? Is it so obvious? Why is it that you think you're dreaming?"

"Well, well, look at this place! Look down there, at the street and the people and the mountain that has replaced a building in the middle of downtown! These kinds of things only happen in dreams, sir. *This* is a dream." The man puts the ashtray onto the table, stamps his cigarette into it, and in a tone of voice that completely mocks the other says, "It is a dream, old man, but I've already told you that. I want to know why you think it's *your* dream."

A pause. The newcomer doesn't understand. He squints his eyes and folds his hands, fumbling one finger over the other. The other begins again, letting his gusto supersede the supposed courtesy of the situation. "See, old man, I've already told you, it's *her* dream. Not yours, not mine, not any of those people down there. This is *her* dream, her dream space, so to speak, her dream world. And you..... are *quite* dead!" Such a laughter erupts in the man that it leaves the newcomer flinching and turning his face away, back towards the window.

"What do remember, old man, of your life? Hmmm? And how you got here? What is the last thing you can remember before you were here with me?" Bits and pieces, slow motion video behind the eyes. A car, snow and, and, yes! Of course! A crash! The metal and glass, a sound like an animal screeching. Blood, carmine tainted vision, the world upside down. Pain! In the legs and the lower torso, climbing pain, numbing pain. A cut on the head. And one on the neck! Oh God, is this it? It can't be! Then the darkness.... No! Wait! What was that!? Can't remember, not clear, just the voice. The man. The man sitting, from across the table. He's smiling and smoking again. Could he be right?

"You're dead, old man. I'm dead too. Those people down there, see, some of them are dead. Some of them are just dreams, but some of them *are* dead. People, right, like you and I? It's true, it's true. It's the little girl. This is her dream. It's where we go. Here's the great hereafter, if you get me, bub. You've finally made it."

The old man holds his neck and stomach. His eyes search as he looks for an explanation in his mind. There was a crash. Must've died. Had to've died. Couldn't have made it out alive. Now, here? The great hereafter? A little girl's dream? The question is quietly dismissed, "*This* is the afterlife?"

"Well, yes. And no. What I mean to say is that you've ended up with me, and us, here. But, there are many people in the living world, you know, and all of them dream too. And what is a dream if not the staging ground for the greatest fantasy of all? The afterlife! Just think of it, my friend, think of the things and the places and the *experiences*! You can be young again, with women and fast cars and summer days - forever! My God, anything you want! Ha! Just let it be thought and it will be so. And don't worry about the future, the future is as good as the present, and will never succumb to the tides of age. I am old and old, much older than you are, and have been a part of many worlds before this one. It just so happens that here I am now in this girl's dreams, like you. And, of course, she will grow older and her dreams will with her, become adult dreams and responsible dreams. It won't always be mountains and big cities and things that make her feel small. But there's always going to be a space set aside for us, you know, the dead, no matter what she dreams. And she will die, eventually, and we will go somewhere else."

The old man stands, his brow furrowed and his breath short. His eyes scan dubiously over the room, over the man sitting at the table, the window behind them, the walls, the floor, the door, and then they stop. "What's past that door?" he asks. The man at the table looks to the door, and chuckles, mocking the other's question and asks, "What's through the door?"

"Yes. You heard me. What's through the door?" The other folds his bottom lip and shakes his head. The cigarette in his mouth falls onto the table and his eyebrows rise innocently. "Nothing. Nothing important. Look

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Original Fiction

As Dreams (con't)

out there, my friend, that's what's important." Fingers motion towards the window. The old man begins to make his way around the table, towards the grey opening of the door. "Stop! Please. You don't need to go in there. Want to go down to the street? We'll go down to the street. Now, come on, please, you don't have to do that." The old man reaches the door. "Okay! Okay! Alright, now, don't go past there. Don't! Please. Do you think that all dreams are happy ones about big cities and adventures in caves!? Do you think, I mean, don't you know that she has *nightmares!*?"

A sudden rush of air blows past the old man and the door slams itself shut with a loud thud that makes him jump backwards. He cocks his head and asks, "Are you saying....?"

"People are largely independent of their dreams, you see. A character created is never lost, a person made is never forgotten, not really, not in dreams. They stay just as they were, to be dreamed again, perfectly the same, in case it's necessary. But such is it the same with the monsters and ghouls and demons and witches and on and on and on. An endless supply of nightmares. Right behind that door and a little ways to the left."

"Then how can it be that, with age, the girl's nightmares won't become too many, and take over? Won't we eventually be flooded with them? The monsters?"

"Hopefully not. I mean, our dreams are everything we know of the world. If with age she only knows horror then that's what we'll be a part of. But if she develops like a normal and well-adjusted person, there should always be enough room for us to live without the nightmares."

"So it may happen that we're swallowed up, so to speak, in the nightmares of this child?"

"Yes. It may. But probably not. I've been in worlds like that, where the dreamer has had some terrible experience that won't go away from them, and they aren't good places to be. Indeed, sadly, in those situations, all you can do is hope for the person to die, so that you may be relinquished of such awful things."

"That's a terrible thing to say! Hoping for someone to die."

"You just wait until it happens to you, old man, and then you'll see who you hope dies and who you hope lives."

The old man paces back and forth in the office. He rubs his chin and purses his lips. It's all so hard for him to accept as the truth, the whole lot of it, and as he makes his way to the giant window he asks, "So, what happens now? How do we get down there, with the people?"

"No, no, no. *You* can go, but I have to stay." A quick shake of the head from the old man, a mental brushing of suspicions, something nagging his mind. "Eh?" he says, "Why's that?"

The other gets up out of his seat and says, "Well, I *did* come from the nightmare door, didn't I?" The razor in his hand reflects a clean scythe on the back of the old man's neck and shoes click audibly on the hardwood floor.

"Mommy! Mommy! Oh, Mommy!" Constance raises her voice before her eyelids and lashes her head on her pillow. "Mommy! Daddy!" Opening her crusted lids she sees that she lies in a hospital bed, the room around her all blue and white. Outside she can see the city as it sprawls beneath her, the people move and go about their business. She can see mountains in the distance, reaching past the lid of her windowsill. There is an I.V. hooked into her arm and her clothing feels like paper. "Mommy! Help!"

Her mother runs into view of the hospital window on the other side of the room and opens the door quickly, banging it on its hinges against the wall. The noise of the hospital rushes in, scaring the girl. Constance's mother cries and hugs her daughter tightly. Her father soon after runs into view and joins the embrace.

"Mommy, daddy! I had a nightmare! Grandpa was in it and he was in this-" Her mother cuts her off, covering her mouth with a hand and saying, "Please, hun, please don't." Her father pats her head and looks into her eyes. He's crying, she sees, and he tells her, "Honey, Grandpa's dead. I'm sorry, honey. There was a car accident, on the way back from school. He died on impact. I'm so sorry. I know how close you two were. I'm so sorry, honey."

RPG Corner (con't)

Another point to consider when thinking about the accessibility of magic is the ease with which it can be used. Traditionally, magic requires years of study and meditation, and this usually prevents a lot of people from even attempting to learn magic. If the magic is easy to learn, or if learning magic isn't even a requisite to using it (as in the magic scroll example above), then magic will literally be thrown about all over the place. However, if learning about magic takes time, and if using it is either mentally or physically taxing in a meaningful way, then it will reduce the number of people willing to use it, and lower the occurrence of wizards in the game world. Make the wielding of magic downright dangerous, and you could create a massive availability of magic, and still have its appearance in a game be a rare and tension-filled thing.

Before one can settle on the accessibility issue, however, the Game Master must think about magic's potency.

Potency of Magic

What can characters in your game do with the magic available to them? Is there a wide range, or does magic deal with specific elements, such as plants, water, fire, mind control, etc.? The potency of magic can be tied in with the type of magic that you choose to utilize (see the previous column for details on Types of Magic).

The more regimented and ritualized magics lend themselves better to a limited potency, because the effects of the magic are always the same, no matter who is using it, from novice to master. The fact that the magic does not vary (except perhaps to fail), and operates the same way over and over again means that entire lines of magic can be developed that deal with or take advantage of a particular element, let's say fire, and everything from the most basic spell to the penultimate magic can be detailed and presented to the Characters. One can do almost anything with fire, but good luck conjuring a wind (unless you make a fire to create convection in the air, and thusly make wind, but for now lets just leave applied spell-casting alone, shall we?).

Likewise, the other magic systems, the high or conceptual magic, has the ability to be much more powerful though the upward limits of the wizard's power must be held in check by his understanding of the magic he intends to employ, and his ability to control it. With a high cost for the use of the magical power available to them, it is not likely that the wizards would carelessly toss trivial spells about. They wouldn't want to waste their power.

System vs. Drama

Lastly, it's difficult to maintain a sense of mystery around magic when it has to be broken down into tables and charts and percentages for use by the Playing-Characters. To include magic as something that the characters can use requires a systemic solution to the question of magic. In the middle of a narrative piece of description however, it is terrible to stop the slow buildup of tension as the Ogre stalks along the column of soldiers smashing them aside with a broken tree trunk, to begin a prolonged series of dice rolls to see if the group's wizard can toss a fireball at the brute to send him packing. Magic systems need to be as simple as possible to keep the game moving forward, and to help to allow the characters to feel the power and mystery of the thing. A lot of the wonder at magic must be role-played, as the players obviously know what has occurred and are eager only to see the results of the dice roll. Their characters are not so jaded (one would hope) and should see the wizard and his craft as an exotic and aloof thing that they themselves could never understand.

It's easy to infer from my slant on things that I prefer a lower availability of magic in my games, as well as a severe limit to who can work magic. True wizards in my game world would be rare things, and they would have nearly unmatched power if they studied long enough. Players would be able to select magic use as a skill, but they would be limited to very minor incantations in the early parts of the game, and it's not likely that they would go on to become true wizards. To me, the place of magic in a role-playing game is very much like salt on a favorite dish. Without enough, the food just seems bland and you can definitely feel the lack of flavor, but too much and the whole meal is spoiled and inedible. Just enough, though and the whole thing comes alive.

This closes my look at the creation of a RPG world. I'll be the first to admit that there are about a gazillion things that I left out or forgot to mention, some of them pretty important, and for that I ask your forgiveness. I hope, though, that I've given you a good place to start thinking about how to pull together a fantasy setting. The tools and techniques that I discussed can also be used in creating fiction worlds. In the next series of columns, I'd like to take a look at how to create stories and adventures to run in your new fantastic setting, and how to string several stories together into one longer tale.

Fandom Onion (con't)

made a startling discovery... like throwing chocolate or cinnamon in your stew: It wasn't *individuals* that made me feel uncomfortable, because I could deal or choose not to deal with that person on my own. It was the *they*, the group experience, that saddened me. The groups I hang out with and hear about from other friends, in all parts of the country, seem to be composed of nice people, normies and extremies, but often so focused inward they do not remember to incorporate others in a *seamless fashion*. I hear so many times that this or that group wants to add new members, but when they show up, the group doesn't know what to do with them. And, from my research, there are far fewer groups who have mastered this inadvertent problem than I had hoped. Part of the answer is that they need to give out warm fuzzies.

I tried to explain it to a co-worker: If someone acknowledges you in a positive way, you get warm fuzzies, feelings of acceptance and worth. If they acknowledge you in a negative way, you get cold fuzzies, but at least you get fuzzies. If no one acknowledges you at all you get no fuzzies, not even cold ones. I cringe when many of my friends report they get no fuzzies in their groups (some they've attended for years!). They walk away, and the group's apathy has pretty much killed further enthusiasm to join them any deeper than being silent observers and soaking up that sci-fi goodness. They feel invisible, a non-person.

I personally experienced this numerous times within my own chosen groups! I have to stop and explain: I feel that I have a pretty strong self-image. But being ignored hurt *my* feelings too. I cannot imagine a newcomer, hoping to join and commune with like-minded souls, with less fortitude than I, leaving such a meeting and coming back for more neglect. Using the government's rule that one complaint to a Congressman equals ten to fifteen who actually feel the same way, but never feel that picking up the phone or writing that letter would do much good, I applied the same numbers to those who might feel the same way I do week after week. How many possible converts turn away simply because the group itself has no idea they project such an exclusive, almost snobbish, image? My presence, as I faithfully attend week after week, sitting on the fringe because everyone already had 'their place' and seating is limited (just like at lunch time in high school), was seldom acknowledged with eye-contact from the inner circle while they whined for

new members. No wonder I, and how many others, feel a bit betrayed by fandom? No fuzzies. Like the onion I was peeling, it made my eyes water.

So, as I peeled that vegetable layer by layer, I had to remember that *I like onions*. And though my eyes watered while peeling it, in the right venue, or pot, it can mingle with other flavors and become very tasty! So, I need to keep looking to find ways to make my sci-fi experience rich and savory for anyone who likes sci-fi stew. There are ways to fix this little problem, I've discovered. I'll let this simmer awhile and get back with you next month. I can already taste the answers. Needs salt...

Writer's Block (con't)

In psychology, the term unconscious represents memories, feelings, and urges that we cannot become aware of easily, but which still can affect our behavior. For example, a child who was abused may not consciously recall the abuse when they are an adult, but they still may have trouble in relationships. The problems come from their unconscious memories of the abuse, which still influence their behavior.

Conclusions

There are many other words or expressions that give writers problems, and two particularly good sources for help are *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White, and *Dictionary of Problem Words and Expressions* by Harry Shaw. Their advice, and ours, is to choose your words carefully and use them precisely.

Crossing Lines (con't)

of literature. Most schools realize that with changing attitudes and a new breed of college student, the choice to accept genre fiction may soon be a choice between a successful or dying English Department. Personally, I think that embracing popular fiction is the way to go. Students will be more open to the act of thinking if they are studying something that interests them. Once they are caught by genre literature, it will be much easier to introduce them to academic literature.

The charm of history and its enigmatic lesson consist in the fact that, from age to age, nothing changes and yet everything is completely different.

– Aldous Huxley
The Devils of Loudun

3-D Characters (con't)

Without the original players and the intricate web of relationships formed between them, relationships that oftentimes shape the future of those characters and their societies, these shows would never have enjoyed their current level of fame. However, once realized, Depth can exist without the help of the original cast, and in some cases, the potential of a universe can even transcend the original story. In the case of *Highlander*, the original movie told the end of the story. There was only one surviving immortal and the prize had been won. But the idea was sound, the possibilities endless, and the money green, so a few tweaks were made to the mythos and two shows, which added far more depth to the franchise, were born.

It is far more difficult to find Depth in movies. In part, this is due to the format. Television is defined in terms of seasons, while most movies are singular units that tell of a particular event; there is little chance to establish and then adapt a character. And since movies are often crammed into several hours, viewers have less opportunity to acquaint themselves with the characters' personalities and the universe's minutiae. Additionally, when viewers watch a TV series, they like to see their favorite characters adapt with the storyline, but at the movies, viewers want to see the same characters they fell in love with in the first place. If those characters change too much, they no longer maintain their hold on the viewing audience. With rare exceptions, characters in movies remain strikingly similar between the first and last installments. The Ripley from *Alien* is almost the same as the Ripley from *Alien 3*, and any changes found in *Alien Resurrection* are due to cloning and genetic manipulation, not her interactions throughout the series.

The majority of films that do exhibit Depth are based on books. The protagonists in *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *Dune* all grow from their experiences and their interactions with others, but this growth was predetermined in the literary form. And those original movies that do add some Depth often do so at the expense of their characters. For example, the roguish Han Solo of *Star Wars* was far more enjoyable to watch than the responsible, civic-minded Han in *Return of the Jedi*.

Authors often attempt to incorporate Depth into their works, but there is no direct relationship between the number of words in a book – or books in a series – and successful use of Depth. For example, in Terry Goodkind's *Sword of Truth* series, the protagonist and

his allies have faced a number of challenges, each of which has helped determine their paths; but while this is an excellent series, it is not a work of great Depth. The hero in the first book of the series was already a good and moral man, and his experiences, while reinforcing his beliefs, have not redefined them. Similarly, the Brian Herbert prequels to *Dune* detail the history of his father's universe, but the characters themselves do not exhibit a great deal of change from beginning to end, or even from prequel to original work.

Depth comes in many degrees, and it is through writing that Depth at both the individual and universal level can really be seen. Some works – several of the *Forgotten Realms* books come to mind – showcase the rise or fall of a main character, as he is pushed and pulled by the world around him; while others demonstrate Depth by having the major players affecting changes on the world around them. Robert Jordan is quite skilled at the latter; not only do the main characters in *The Wheel of Time* show some development, but most of the secondary and tertiary characters have had opinions, attitudes, or ingrained beliefs changed through interactions. Brian Jacques' *Redwall* and L. E. Modessit Jr.'s *Recluse* series do not even consistently follow the same characters, but the subtle interweaving of ideals and incorporation of past characters helps to define their worlds and make them come alive in the minds of readers; they are prime examples of Depth at the universal level. But perhaps the greatest example of Depth in modern speculative fiction is George R. R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* series. Each character has a defined personality at the start of the series, but the events that determine their fate also change them, some for the better, some for the worse.

When writing, the proper balance of Depth must be found. Too little results in a static world; too much, and an author risks losing his focus. It is a risk that even famous authors sometimes face, and one that Robert Jordan may, himself, be facing now. *The Wheel of Time* has become bogged down in details, and the latest book spent so much time explaining how everyone felt about everything going on that it barely managed to progress the plot. Once a world begins to come alive, it is easy to lose sight of the original goal; once lost, it may be impossible to regain the story's proper flow. It is the author's duty to stay on target despite his world's increasing attempts to drown him in details.

Adding Depth is not as easy as adding Width and Length. The first step in the process is to ask the appropriate questions. Will being saved by his mortal

enemy make the white knight recognize that the black knight is not evil, or will he become even more impassioned in his hatred since he had to rely on his foe for help? Will hearing from the wise, one-armed veteran make Jack more cautious when approaching a Maroovian appendage eater, or will he ignore the ramblings of a silly old man? A character's perception of the information's source, as well as the number of different sources saying the same thing, will greatly affect how receptive the character is to it.

Even still, it is not simply a matter of saying, 'Lord Lecher needs to have a change of heart. He likes women; I should have those pretty young barmaids tell him he's wrong.' Far more thought must go into the process if the author wants to convey a sense of realism in his writing. For one thing, does Lord Lecher like women because he respects their ideas and opinions, or is the character really interested in their other assets? How ingrained is the idea that needs to be changed? Would the words of a casual passer-by be sufficient to bring about the appropriate change, or would it take a team of wise monks and all-knowing seers months to compile enough data to convince our hero? And it should be noted that, for some, there can be no salvation; some ideas are ingrained to the core.

The flip side of creating Depth is in deciding how a character's actions will change those around him. Will Jack's impassioned speech make the townspeople stand up and fight, or will they flee for the hills when the black riders approach? Why should they care what that young fool has to say anyway, he was selling cows for beans not too long back? To make a world seem realistic, an author must show all possible variation. Some listeners will be receptive, some indifferent, and some adamantly opposed. Some speakers will inspire loyalty, other derision. A character that gets exactly what he wants or needs is just as hard to swallow as one who is constantly stepped upon by fate. As will all things, equilibrium must be established.

As this list of questions grows, one might wonder how to keep one's writing concise. It is not an easy feat, but it is important to remember that many of these questions do not need to be answered directly, nor do they have to be explained away in detailed description or dialogue. Emotions played across the face or in the eyes, a subtle description of a character's demeanor or bearing, or even a gut feeling can convey

volumes of Depth. A casual reference to a grassroots movement ten chapters later can show whether or not a given word or action had any effect.

Depth cannot exist without Length and Width; if a work has no form, it is a waste of time to try breathing life into it. But if Length and Width already exist, the additional of Depth may make the difference between a good work and a great one. If used properly, Depth will help a work transcend the realm of story, and make an author's creation as real to readers as it is to him.

KeyCOMMENTary (con't)

he's given succeeded in sculpting a decent work that he didn't want to agent into a *breakout* novel that he does? It would be very interesting to see what his advice generates on a practical level and whether or not he appreciates the difference; available now is a weeklong workshop (for the independently wealthy) in which Maass purportedly provides a more personal touch. I wonder: since I've re-drafted my own novel based on having taken his seminar, would it now pass muster in his view? I guess we'll just have to do a little experiment and find out. I'll be sure to report back when I get that contract.

Illuminations SF Writing Contest

The Illuminata is happy to announce its second speculative fiction writing contest. Winning entries will be included in an anthology published by Tyrannosaurus Press. This is an excellent opportunity for budding authors and seasoned writers alike!

A one-time fee of \$5.00 (per entry) is required to submit a story; multiple entries are allowed. This fee will be used to help finance similar future projects. Once the anthology is published, copies will be made available to all entrants at a discounted price. Our goal is to help talented but unknown authors gain some exposure for their work. Both digital and hard copies of each entry are required. Send correspondence to:

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