



# The *Illuminata*

## Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

### 8 Simple Rules...

By Bret Funk

As my years and experience in the worlds of writing and publishing grow, I find that I am often approached by those seeking to learn the secret of becoming a successful writer. At conventions, by e-mail, or through contacts made via this ezine, everyone wants to know what they have to do to get noticed. Why they approach me is a mystery; in my opinion, I come nowhere near the definition of a success. But it *is* a reasonable question, and one that I have also posed when standing face to face with those I consider successful in the field. And so, I will do my best to share what I've learned.

The sad truth is, there is no secret to success. Breaking into this field takes one part talent, two parts connection, five parts perseverance, and a hell of a lot of luck. I have, however, developed a number of rules (guidelines, if you will) that I am happy to share. I can't guarantee that they will make you a published writer, and the odds are against them making you a wealthy one, but these rules will probably make you happier, and that's the most important thing.

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#### Rule #1: Read

This rule may seem counterintuitive – after all, if you're rereading someone else's work, you aren't writing your own – but reading teaches a lot about writing. Our opinions about the elements of writing – style, flow, plot, characterization, etc. – are formed far more by what we read ourselves than by definitions in a text or lectures given by our teachers. Reading helps us define our own styles, and it helps to develop the imagination, an essential ingredient in creating original works.

#### Rule #2: Write!

An obvious rule, perhaps, but one easily broken. Life has a way of stealing time, and when the pressure's on, one of the easiest things to do away with is writing. I mean, for those still unpublished (and for many of us who are published), what does it matter if we lose a week or two? It's not like anyone's reading our material anyway. It doesn't matter if we take a break, right?

Wrong. Only through writing do we develop as writers. The more you write, the better writer you will be, and the more you have written, the more likely someone will find a piece they like and ask to publish it. Publication is a lot like roulette. You spin the wheel and toss out the story, hoping that it lands on a winning spot. If you can only spin once, you're probably not going to win. But a hundred spins? A thousand? Each work not only improves your craft, it also increases the body of your work and the likelihood that *something* will be published.

Writing is like any other habit, far more easily stopped than started. There may be a few lucky souls who can write on a whim, but for the majority of us, regularity is the key to proliferation. Set yourself a goal: a page a day, a chapter a week, or something tailored specifically to your needs. Many authors suggest writing every day, even if only a paragraph. While I agree that this is a good goal to set, it may not be a realistic one for some of us. The important thing is to meet your goal once you decide on it.

#### Rule #3: Write Because You Love It

We all want our writing to bring us recognition, fame, and fortune, but none of those things should be what drives us to write. Writing must be a passion; it shouldn't be about who's reading your material or how much they're paying for it. To me, it's the difference between a Frank Herbert and a Brian Herbert; Brian's writing is adequate, but it lacks the power of his father's works.

Write for yourself, not for an 'audience'. I can assure you that there's an audience out there for every author. When you sacrifice your own vision to

# RPG Corner v3.2: Endings and Scene Development

by Doug >!< Roper of EPIC Gaming

When I said last month that the idea of the scenario should be envisioned as a film or short story, I meant for both that you should have a good idea about the non playing characters (what they look like, behave like and what they will end up contributing to the story), some of the particular events or scenes that you want to run, and most importantly, the ending. Knowing how the scenario ends before you begin the nitty-gritty of writing it will pay off in spades before the scenario is ready to run, because at their heart, most of the scenarios and adventures contain a healthy amount of mystery and investigation. Let's say you (the dashing GM) decide you are going to run a two part murder mystery set in a colonial American town in the early 1700's. You have a great idea about the main characters, and several surprise events to add a bit of confusion to the whole investigation. You sit down to write, but realize you aren't sure why soandso stabbed whatshisname to death on that hot summer night. You know he did it but don't know why, or what he may have done to conceal his crime. If you started writing at the beginning of this story without knowing the end, you've made two important errors. The first is that you have not answered the *Question of Why?* (If you remember way back to one of the articles on Game Design, I stated that every detail should have a reason for being there. The reason may be complicated or simple, far fetched or quite practical, but you must be able to point at the detail and say "This is there because (blah blah blah yackity-schmackity)") The second error will show itself in the writing process. Where do you leave your clues, and what are they, how did they come to be left or forgotten in a place where the playing characters can find them. Did any of the NPCs notice anything that can be passed on through dialogue (or intimidation) to the PCs? The characters can't solve the mystery unless the GM knows every last detail about the crime, the crook, the victim and the locations, and can describe what the characters will find if they look at those people and places. How the characters come to find these clues, as well as how any surprise events come to pass have to be decided upon beforehand by the GM to create the maximum tension and mystery, while at the same time keeping the mystery accessible to the PCs, and ultimately solvable.

This brings me all the way around to the main ways in which writing role-play scenarios differs from the writing of a story or movie. Writing for a story, the author prepares his work for his audience, who will sit back and simply follow along with the characters

and plots described. In a Role-Playing scenario, the audience also happens to *be* the main characters, and instead of simply writing about the discovery of a vital piece of evidence, the GM must arrange the story around the characters so that in the course of their investigation, they come across the clue in question. To the PCs, the finding of this clue may seem like dumb luck, or good fortune, but the GM knows that the adventure cannot progress unless this clue was discovered, and thus was inevitable. The trick to writing a good game is to write it in such a way that the Playing characters do not know that the finding of this information was designed.

So how does one write something like this? Believe it or not, it's pretty easy. First of all, as stated above the GM should know the details, and it can't hurt to write these all down. It doesn't have to be anything more advanced than an outline, but it should include the reasons behind actions and conversations, and it should contain the characters and places that the PCs will visit in the course of their investigation.

The next thing that the GM needs to do is supply a reason for the PCs to become involved in the plot. Why are they investigating? What's in it for them? Perhaps the PCs are professional investigators, or some college kids with a big dog and a cool van. Maybe they have personal or financial reasons, or maybe the investigation falls into their laps and can't be ignored or diverted to other people.

Once the GM has supplied the hook event, he needs to detail the investigation itself. This is the heart of the matter, and you will use this next sentence almost every time you design an adventure. The way to control the characters, and guide them along the proper paths is to control the information that they have access to. The careful placement of the right information will have the characters moving along any path that the GM wants. How is this done? Anyone who has read a book or short story knows that the action is broken down into smaller units, scenes. These individual encounters are vital to writing role-play game scenarios, because they limit the information and characters that the PCs have access to at any one time. You should be starting to see how this works now. The GM can break apart the mystery, and arrange it so that certain clues can be found right away while others remain unknown until much later. NPCs can make their appearances, and talk with the characters and help or hinder them as the needs to the scenario (or the whims of the GM) dictate.

Con't on page 12

# Matter/Antimatter

*The following is a new feature, something I hope to include on a regular basis in future Illuminatas. Done in the tradition of Point/Counterpoint format, Matter/Antimatter will explore various topics in speculative fiction, pitting editor against editor in a fight to the finish. In this war, words are the weapons, ideas the battleground. This month's topic: Fantastic Fantasy vs. Realistic Fantasy*

## Fantasy as Savior:

Why The Truth Won't Set Us Free

by garrie keyman

There's a trend in the field of speculative fiction to imbue our heroes with flaws and soften to a mitigating gray the once-pitch hues in which villains used to be dressed. The theory behind such moves is that, in so doing, we create characters who are more believable – more accessible, as it were, to our readership.

But fantasy as a genre wasn't created to reflect real life. It was created to escape it.

And while it's true the canvass upon which authors of speculative fiction often choose to paint their worlds and characters is one closely mirroring the backdrop of our own lives, I believe this is less an effort to draw educative comparisons than it is a mere condition of having limited scope of imagination. That thought aside, let's talk about good versus evil.

Archetypes tend toward the pure rather than the composite. The tendency giving rise to good guys and bad gals, who look and act a little too much alike, is a movement away from archetypal norms. If we wish to slosh through the muck of confusing personas all we really need do is look to real life. Life is already full of sin-flecked heroines and mafiosos with hearts of gold hidden beneath the breath of larceny.

What fantasy does for us – or should do – is iron all that out. In fantasy, readers want most to have the good guys rewarded and the bad guys (often easily recognizable by the scowls on their faces and the inky color of their clothes) get their come-uppance. The mother of a family who has just lost their life savings to the unscrupulous CEO, in what she thought were well-intentioned business dealings, doesn't want to dwell on how he kisses his children at night or tithes at his local church. She wants to escape this dank reality where shysters come out on top and she wants to tumble head over heels into a novel in which the bad guys are clearly identified and really *get it* in the end.

The kid growing up feeling neglected at home and

bullied at school doesn't want to think about his parents' unmet psychological needs from when *they* were kids, nor does he want to empathize with his playground tormentor – regardless of how much they may in fact have in common. No, this kid wants to be whisked away by a fantasy novel in which the hero deftly dodges the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and triumphs over every odd set against him. That's fantasy.

Fantasy heals. It lifts us out of the confounding swirl of good and evil of which reality is comprised and promptly transports us to a place where our vision is clear. Life mayn't be any easier in fantasy novels – where characters are hung halfway between the worlds of men and make-believe – but at least we know that if we stick with the good guys somehow we'll get through.

In fantasies, CEOs who've gotten rich off the backs of the working class via unjust conduct don't skirt the authorities and evade the prison cell forever. Sometimes in reality they do. Sometimes in reality the sleazy mafioso lives out the high life on the Riviera, while those who crossed him rot at the bottom of the river currently floating his multi-million-dollar yacht. In reality the neglected, bullied kid grows up an ineffectual self-pitying alcoholic. In fantasy, the abused orphan winds up ruling the planet, meting out justice with unparalleled wisdom. That's the way it's supposed to be, you know.

Fantasy writing, when done well, represents the flowerbed of all human hope. It is the fertile ground in which dreams are planted; the rich loam out of which the necessary strength to meet reality head-on is most apt to blossom. Fantasy feeds us – both as readers and as writers – at the deepest juncture of our mind and soul.

In the name of better, more realistic writing, let us never lose sight of what is best about fantasy and some of the other forms of speculative fiction: their ability to bear us, raft-like, across the troubling waters of reality – a place where truth, in fact, will never set us free. What frees us is a jaunt through the fantastic.

See ya on the other side.

## Answers to quiz on page 11

1. Witch World, 2. Chronicles of Narnia, 3. The Hobbit, 4. A Princess of Mars, 5. Swords and Deviltry, 6. Dragon Riders of Pern, 7. Tarnsman of Gor, 8. Jirel of Joiry, 9. Mists of Avalon, 10. The Broken Sword, 11. Elric of Melnibone, 12. A Spell for Chameleon, 13. To Your Scattered Bodies Go, 14. Hour of the Dragon, 15. The Worm Ouroboros.

# Matter/**Antimatter**

## Facing Facts:

### Using Realism to Augment Fantasy

by Bret Funk

Fantasy has long been a domain of absolutes. The innocent farmgirl triumphs over the wicked witch. The noble knight and his brave companions protect the realm from the vicious warlord and his barbaric army. The forces of Good duke it out with the minions of Evil. A reader barely has to pass the prologue before the outcome is glaringly obvious, the resolution tediously predictable.

As a genre, Fantasy is defined as 'fiction characterized by highly fanciful or supernatural elements.' Unselfishly virtuous heroes and despicable villains with no redeemable characteristics certainly fall into the realm of the highly fanciful, but fantasy should embody more than just stereotypes. These archetypes do serve a purpose: they teach us morality, ethics, and virtue – as well as their antitheses – and instill in us the beliefs that good always triumphs over evil, villains get what they deserve, and the righteous will be rewarded.

Sadly, life teaches harsh lessons, not the least of which is that reality is not black and white, and what once was amusing soon becomes passé. At adolescence, readers begin to find the tried and true formula of fantasy clichéd; they yearn for more substantive stories, ones which reflect their growing understanding of the universe. The days quickly fade when noble knights – the ones who know no fear and always do the right thing – impress us; evil wizards with no remorse and no justification for their faults cease to frighten us. These creations are more fictitious than Elves or Dragons, and as such, they may belong in fantasy, but do they *deserve* to be there?

Readers want their heroes to be tempted; they want heroes to be challenged. After all, without the risk of failure, a story can never truly inspire. Characters with flaws, failings, and fears who stand up against insurmountable odds and may even sacrifice something along the way, those are the ones worth reading about, the ones worth emulating. I am reminded of a scene from the Superman cartoon of the late 1990s, an episode which contained one of the most poignant moments in animation. Earth is invaded by otherworldly beings and Superman is captured (don't ask me how, he's invulnerable and unstoppable, the paradigm of goodness), paraded before the alien

warhost to show that even Earth's most powerful hero cannot stop the inevitable. Humanity flees in terror, all but one man, who rallies his brothers, frees Superman, and leads mankind to victory. He dies in the process (something rare in children's cartoons), and in the final scene, at the funeral, Superman eulogizes, "In the end, Earth didn't need a Superman, just a great one."

Now that's a hero! Just thinking about it chokes me up.

Villains who remind us of real people may not be as much fun to dethrone, and admitting that evil actions might be justified – or at the very least have causes outside of unconscionable greed and a desire to be cruel – may not jive with the concepts of good and evil taught by the more simplistic forms of fantasy, but they do add a level of believability. This realism becomes especially important when scenes or chapters are written from the bad guy's perspective. With a few sociopathic exceptions, no powerful wizard or conquering warlord will think himself evil; only his enemies think that. Ask Hitler if he were a bad guy, and he'd probably tell you that he did what he did for the greater good; it was the rest of the world that was evil. Stalin? Torquemada? Osama bin Laden? Kublai Kahn? Saddam Hussein? All of history's greatest villains styled themselves heroes; only defeat and history labels them differently. In the end, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

The trend in fantasy to muddy heroes and polish villains is a welcome one. It allows for epic battles on multiple levels. We still get the satisfaction of seeing good triumph over evil, though often at a cost, but we have the added satisfaction of the internal struggle, watching each character's personal goodness do battle with his inner demon. Some characters win this war, some lose, but whatever the outcome, these are the battles worth watching, for they mimic the war within us all.

The problem with designing something completely foolproof is to underestimate the ingenuity of a complete fool.

– Douglas Adams

# Science Fiction Collections: Preserving the Past

by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

*Sci fi is bold and fanciful, Sci fi encompasses it all,  
Sci fi claims worlds of wonder, And someone collects it all.*

Why do people invest in science fiction memorabilia? It can be a ghastly habit that drains the checkbook, clogs living space and can be addicting. Poll your friends and ask if they collect scifi “stuff”. If they claim they do not, ask specifically if they have a few old Star Trek novels buried somewhere or a Star Wars Lightsabre (they got it for the kids... right...), a scifi video/DVD (Independence Day, Matrix, Harry Potter) or comic books. If you get a negative response, then you have met one of the few who don’t own scifi ‘stuff’. How much “stuff” constitutes a collection? Likely you will discover that, with only a few exceptions, science fiction fans are eclectic collectors with a wide range of collecting habits. You will also discover few like to part with their treasures. Why is that?

Is there a latent need to preserve what once was considered an incomprehensible and obscure hobby? To be sure, collectors’ reasons for amassing memorabilia are as varied as the items in those collections. Their documentation and storage preferences reflect this. Scott, a university student, declares, “I’m not a collector. I accumulate”.

Some people accumulate a lot! Amy, a high school junior, collects anime, horror, sci-fi, comedy, romance and martial arts VHS/DVD/Manga and does so because she became aware that, “there was much more available than what was shown on TV”. Scott owns computer games, roll playing systems, anime, Lovecraft, and several television shows on VHS or DVD. He has “accumulated” over thirty game systems. Amy and Scott might be considered small collectors even though she reports that she probably spent up to six hundred dollars in the last year on acquiring her interests and Scott won’t say what he has spent in the last year.

Jim and his friend Don live in Canada, several hours drive from each other. They collect specific items. Jim collects models of almost all the space ships used in television or movies; Don collects die-cast planes, cars, and boats with space ships as a secondary interest. Both are model makers with an express interest in creating resin models, and both use the collected pieces in their work. For Jim, it is not just a business expense, but also a passion that is reflected in his exact replicas of spaceships. Is this a costly passion? It is—and Jim reports, regretfully, “I am hindered only by my finances.”

Pat, another of Jim’s friends, shares similar collecting patterns. He, too, uses what he collects in his business—making blueprints of space ships used in the entertainment industry, often collaborating with Jim to ensure accuracy and detail. Jim, Don and Pat not only collect science fiction items, they produce them as well. They make their own collectables—a unique twist in the world of memorabilia.

Dennis has been a collector ever since the Book-Mobile brought the world of science fiction to his doorstep. “Simple toys weren’t enough anymore. I wanted my mind to be challenged into adulthood.” Exposure to books he normally had no access to sparked a sense of need—he wanted “his stuff” and shamelessly admits he works for money to “collect stuff”. “His stuff” now fills an entire room from floor to ceiling with bookcases.

Amy admits that since her father no longer subsidizes (buys) her DVDs, she, too, works for cash in order to collect those things she is interested in. Once, the *Evangelion* DVD box set she wanted burned a whole through her entire paycheck. Like Dennis, she admits this proudly; her stuff is hers, though her father borrows from her collection.

What do Scott, Amy, Dennis, Jim, Don and Pat have in common? No one claimed they had enough shelf space to store or display their treasures, nor unlimited financial ability; though Dennis’s passion may be the strongest of the six with more than twenty years of collecting that impressed major science fiction icon, **Forrest Ackermen**.

Another thing these six collectors do not share in common is how they have categorized their collections. While Dennis appears to have a more complete record of “his stuff”, he admits it is hard to keep up with. Scott, Amy, Jim and Don have no formal record of what they had in their collections. Pat, however, keeps meticulous records using Excel with hyperlinks to jpegs of each item. To each of these collectors, whether formally catalogued or not, what they have is precious.

Just how precious were these collections? Were any of them insured or in a safety deposit box? No. Dennis has formally declared who-gets-what in his will. Jim and Pat verbally stated his collection goes to his children, but this is not stamped with an official seal. The others had no plans until asked.

Would they consider insuring their collections? Most said that the cost would be prohibitive. Dennis voiced

Con’t on page 13

# Gothic Literature: Defining It and Finding It for Free

by Charles Gramlich

## The Nature of the Gothic:

At the heart of gothic literature is the decayed and decaying past, often physically represented by the gloomy pile of an ancient castle, or by a shunned house or a moldering tomb. And from that past old secrets rise. The murdered do not lie quietly, and evil deeds pass from generation to generation, claiming new victims across time. Here is a literature of dark rather than light, of emotion rather than reason, and the emotions that are portrayed and evoked are often considered the negative ones – lust and loathing, fear and hatred and sadness. Yet, within the rot and melancholia there is contained a strange and erotic beauty, which is as much an element of the gothic as is the horror.

Ghosts and vampires and monsters are common in gothic literature, and in the earliest novels and stories there were often wicked monks and fallen nuns. But whether the evil past surfaces through supernatural or non-supernatural means, the suffering of the characters is most potent in the psychological arena.

It is easy, and many have done it, to draw parallels between the buried secrets found in gothic works and the concepts of the subconscious and the unconscious as delineated by Sigmund Freud. Gothic writing is often about excess and anxiety, and it is precisely such desires and fears that roil below the surface awareness of an individual in the theories of Freud. For Freud, the unconscious Id is the main source of power for the human personality, just as the hidden sins are what drives the action in a gothic tale.

But one must remember that literature, including gothic literature, had an influence on the development of Freudian theory in the first place. And while there are interesting parallels between the Freudian unconscious and the emphasis in gothic literature on secrets that will not stay buried, Freudian theory has limited explanatory value because its concepts are themselves so subjective and vague.

Clearly, there is a powerful psychological dimension to gothic literature. The best stories are about monsters and haunted houses only on the surface. Beneath that surface is the fundamental human conflict between reason and emotion. Humans both revel in and are afraid of their emotions. Beauty and sorrow, awe and terror, love and hate, are all inextricably mixed within the human psyche, and they are mixed in the works of gothic writers as well. It is this quality of the sublime that makes such stories so intense and so lasting.

## A Short History of Gothic Literature:

The gothic movement in literature is generally considered to have begun with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, which was reissued in 1765 with the subtitle of "A Gothic Story." The first major follow-up, which closely followed Walpole's model, was *The Champion of Virtue* by Clara Reeve in 1777, although it is better known under the title *The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story*, under which it was re-released in 1778. By the end of the eighteenth century, gothic literature had become one of the very first "popular" literatures, and Ann Radcliffe's 1794 gothic tour-de-force *The Mysteries of Udolpho* may have been the first "bestseller" of the modern age.

Numerous other gothic works could be mentioned. One that was considered largely pornographic at the time of its publication was *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew "Monk" Lewis. Another that influenced a wide range of writers was *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Robert Maturin. Many of these are rather difficult to find in print but all can be had as free downloads on the internet from Project Gutenberg, [www.gutenberg.net](http://www.gutenberg.net).

Con't on page 13

## Illuminations SF Writing Contest

*The Illuminations* writing contest is nearing its deadline. All entries must be postmarked no later than August 1, 2004. Hurry to get your submissions in before the rush. Winning entries will be included in an anthology published by Tyrannosaurus Press.

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 finance similar future projects and compensate the judges for their time and effort. Our goal is to help talented but unknown writers gain exposure, and hopefully start them on what will be a long and prosperous career. Digital and hard copies of each entry are required. Send correspondence to:

**Illuminations Writing Contest**  
**Tyrannosaurus Press**  
**PO Box 8337**  
**New Orleans, LA 70182-8337**

Help support a good cause! Encourage your friends to submit an entry to the Illuminations Contest!

For full contest guidelines and details, please visit  
<http://www.tyrannosauruspress.com>.

## Reviews

### Luck in the Shadows by Lynn Flewelling



Bantam Spectra, Aug. 1996  
\$6.99, Mass Market, 496 pp.  
ISBN: 0553575422  
Review by Scott H. Andrews

One original and intriguing character trait barely carries *Luck in the Shadows*, Lynn Flewelling's debut, through hackneyed fantasy archetypes. The wrongfully imprisoned orphan Alec teams up with the

dashing thief Seregil after they escape a dungeon. They flee to Seregil's home city under the pursuit of evil necromancers, but upon their arrival this plot vanishes in favor of political intrigue. The thief characters blossom in the urban setting and the scheming plot, although the conspirators feel so distant from the main characters that the plot lacks suspense. Alec begins to grow into his role as journeyman thief, but the harried narrative as the book rushes to a conclusion dilutes the earlier focus on his growth. The political intrigue ends abruptly without resolving the necromancer plot, creating obvious fodder for the sequel, "Stalking Darkness."

Fantasy clichés abound: the rural orphan boy hero confused by adult and urban ways, the venerable wizard Nysander drawing chalk circles on the floor, centaurs prancing about with no relevance to the plot, and evil necromancers seeking ancient artifacts. However, Seregil's ambiguous sexuality provides a brilliant spark of originality. Flewelling subtly builds this trait with Seregil's scheming in *Wolde* and his manipulation of the riverboat captain, and she appropriately omits it from direct dialog until Seregil reunites with friends like Nysander outside of Alec's hearing.

Flewelling's prose clanks along with only rare flashes of vividness, even for a first novel. The early chapters drag with info-dumps on geography and history, yet combat is glossed over with scant detail. Flewelling's dialog sputters with modern colloquialisms like "you got that right," and the dialog attributions drag with callow overuse of adverbs. The prose often shifts to a new paragraph when inserting a sentence of description into a character's dialog, jarring the reader when the same character continues to speak in the new paragraph.

*Luck in the Shadows* straddles a line between the racing plot of stock fantasy like Raymond E. Feist and

the character-focused, introspective style of Robin Hobb's *Farseer Trilogy*. The unique relationship growing between Alec and Seregil could have formed the ideal core for a character-focused work, although this approach would have faltered without a subtle narrative hand. A ripping yarn of the political conspiracy might have provided a more entertaining and lighter read, but *Luck in the Shadows* strikes a balance between these extremes and produces an average fantasy debut with above-average potential for the sequel.

### Song of Susannah (Dark Tower, VI) Stephen King



Scribner (Grant), Jun 2004,  
\$30.00, 432 pp.  
ISBN: 1880418592  
Review by Harriet Klausner

Instructed by the Crimson King's Low Men thugs and applying the power of the Black Thirteen, the demon-mother Mia, using the body of the body of Susannah Dean as her host, travels to Midtown Manhattan

in the summer of 99. Mia understands that she must give birth at the right time at the right place to begin the end of the Dark Tower. Trailing her in order to prevent the event at the Dixie Pig are adolescent Jake, his talking pet Oy and Father Callaghan.

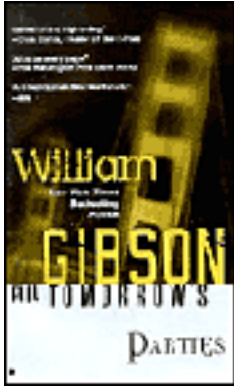
Meanwhile, in 1977 Enrico Balazar and his goons have traveled to East Stoneham, Maine where they plan to kill bookstore owner Calvin Tower. Gunslingers Roland and Eddie arrive at the bookstore also seeking Enrico as bullets fly and a frightened young author of a bestseller called *Salem's Lot* wonders when his fantasy world turned to deadly reality.

The sixth tale of the Dark Tower series continues the path towards the finish with two prime exhilarating subplots that will enthrall the audience. The ironic technique of King placing King inside the novel comes off as chutzpah that works especially the ending. Still the key to this rendition and the previous sagas remain that the characters hold true to their respective essence throughout the adventures. With the finale in this saga to be published soon, fans of Stephen King will rejoice this epic series maintains its' high standard throughout, but newcomers should start with the first novel.

# Reviews

## All Tomorrow's Parties

William Gibson



G. P. Putnam, 1999, 278 pages

ISBN: 0-399-14579-6

Available from \$.77 up

Reviewed by D. L. Parker

I felt a certain sense of trepidation when I started this review of William Gibson's "All Tomorrow's Parties". I mean, this is Mr. Cyberpunk himself, the man rumored to have envisioned the Internet before it was a gleam

in the eye of Al Gore's campaign manager. There's a hard core of readers out there to whom Gibson is The Guru, spoken of in reverential terms and argued over in Internet chat rooms. Those fans have already read this book and everything from "Neuromancer" on. Well, they can help me spread the word. For all their bleeding edge futurism, Gibson's books represent an old-fashioned virtue of speculative fiction, one that's been there since Mary Shelley dreamed of the scientifically-created monster and Jules Verne of an undersea ship. These are books of *ideas*. Uncomfortable stuff that's supposed to make the reader *think*. They are, in short, what separates speculative – science – fiction from the rest of the genres and what makes me, at least, a fan.

I suppose "All Tomorrow's Parties" is a fairly typical Gibson. It's not for everyone. It's raw, and not just in the language. Its vision of the near future has nothing to do with Middle America Comfortable. There are drugs and muggers. The ruined Golden Gate Bridge has been colonized by the desperate. One of the key characters lives in a cardboard box and survives on cough syrup and an alcohol-caffeine-nicotine concoction. Philip K. Dick would recognize the territory. So would modern city planners, in their nightmares.

Colin Laney's body is sick, but he doesn't really care. He's not into his body much. In his cardboard box below Tokyo's streets he lives through his virtual reality eye phones and the DatAmerica flows that flood his head. Laney's mind isn't normal either. Clinical trials of a drug called 5-SB have done...*something*...to him. Laney sees the End of the World As We Know It coming. There's a quantum shift ahead, something on the par with the dawn of the Machine or the Atom. He doesn't know exactly what it is.

But he knows the shift is going to happen first in San Francisco. Laney's got to move his players there fast.

Because there's someone else, someone with the 5-SB gift of sensing the convergences, who sees it coming too. And Harwood wants to be sure he's still a kingpin in the New Order. If it takes violence to wrench the change to his benefit, well, he's up to it. He's bought the best.

But sometimes the unexpected happens. The kick of a cow transforms Chicago from wood to stone. The death of Madame Curie's husband helps usher in the Age of the Atom. And in this future San Francisco, a homeless man, a failed cop, a damaged boy and a lone killer who lives in an endless moment might help launch Laney's new paradigm in a way that Mr. CEO Harwood doesn't quite anticipate.

*All Tomorrow's Parties* delivers the bleeding edge futurism that will thrill hard-core Gibson readers. There's nano-technology and virtual humans; information inversions and a futuristic Internet grown by accretion to something a little bit outside human control. Those who suffer head-aches from high-tech can read it for the sort of fast ride that, say, A. E. van Vogt's "Null-A" series provided readers in an earlier era: i.e., not sure what's happening here, but it's a heck of a fast ride! And both kinds of readers will find, like the rainbow beauty of an oil slick in a dirty street puddle, that there's a gleam of something bright at the end. It's strange to discover, at the end of this painfully raw vision, that this is an essentially hopeful story.

I don't really know how well Gibson's books will read, say, five or ten years from now. They may date. Right now, though, they form a sort of mythos for the age of global information technology. And I suspect, even if the world changes in ways Mr. Gibson hasn't anticipated, the Guru will still be out there riding the crest of that endless wave into the future. Ride on, Mr. Gibson!

## Summer Sci-Fi Movie Releases

June 4	Harry Potter (Prisoner of Azkaban)
June 11	The Chronicles of Riddick The Stepford Wives
June 18	Around the World in 80 Days
June 25	Kaena: The Prophecy
July 2	Spider-man 2
July 9	King Arthur
July 16	I, Robot
July 23	Catwoman Donnie Darko
July 30	The Village

## Reviews

### The Book of Knights

Yves Meynard



Tor, February 1998  
\$1.98+, Mass Market, 256  
ISBN: 0-312-86482-5  
Reviewed by D. L. Parker

Quick! Mention a French-Canadian writer. Oops. Mention a French-Canadian anything. Those of you from western Canada are probably mumbling something about separatism right now. South of the border, some of us are thinking dourly about that Hamas-handshaking Chretien. Does it sound like we need some happier associations?

Thank goodness for the positive side, though... Yves Meynard is now writing in English. I hope he keeps it up, because I'd hate to have to work on my schoolgirl French just to read the rest of his books. But it might be worth it. "The Book of Knights" is Meynard's first fantasy novel in English, and thank goodness he decided to bust out of the Gauloise Ghetto. He has six previous French-language books to his credit, and after I finished *The Book of Knights*, I picked up my dusty French dictionary and pondered...

In *The Book of Knights*, little Adetrune is a foundling, an original sin he'll never quite shed in the rigid, Puritan-like constraints of Faudace. His step-parents have done their best for him. They've ensured Adetrune knows the Rules, Commentaries, and Precepts by heart, and that the rod is applied with stern measurement, never too much or too little. Adetrune knows how to sit without fidgeting or interrupting. He understands a found toy might lead to temptation and should be removed. Outwardly, he's dutiful enough that his step-parents dream he might one day become a deacon.

But unknown to them, two events de-rail Adetrune from the straight and very narrow. First, in his step-parents' dusty attic, he finds a magic book – the Book of Knights, of course. There is Sir Tachaloch, naked and tormented by monsters. There's a giant in the teeth of an even larger beast. Mystery, terror, and concepts the Rules never really explain – honor, valor, sacrifice, and chivalry – are there to intrigue little Adetrune. Oh, it's too late for the step-parents' dreams of deaconhood. Adetrune is going to be a knight.

But a knight-aspirant needs a quest. What noble goal will convince Riander, the mystic teacher mentioned

in the Book, to accept Adetrune as his student? Fate soon provides Adetrune with his purpose. One day, lingering at the window of the town's sole toy shop, a ray of light illuminates a mysterious doll inside. The doll's face is stained with tears and blood; her expression one of horror and despair.

Adetrune is strangely moved. He dares to enter the forbidden sanctum of the toy shop and question the toymaker about his strange doll. But the toymaker's reaction is bizarre. Questioned about the doll, he rages; he even raises his fist to strike the boy. The frightened child flees the man's inexplicable anger. But it is the moment, all the same, that Adetrune has awaited: he has a quest, a purpose worthy of a knight. The doll must be rescued!

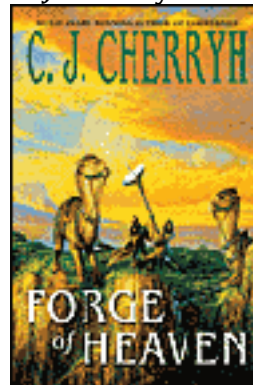
So Adetrune makes his long-planned escape from Faudace. Somewhere out there, over the hills and far away, is the mystical Riander. The Book says so. Like the knights in the stories, sacrifice, hard journeys, magic beasts, sorcerers and heroism lie ahead of him. But it is not until Adetrune returns to Faudace once again to fulfill his original quest that he truly understands what it is to become a knight: to reconcile both courtly ideals and fleshly temptations, honor and revenge, repentance and guilt.

Those, perhaps, are some of the reasons the archetype of the knight has lived on in our culture from Spenser's *Fairie Queen* to TV's *Kung-Fu Knight*. *The Book of Knights* is a worthy addition to the list. It should sit on your bookshelf next to Patricia A. Mckillip and Robin McKinley and after Mallory's flawed and tragic knights.

And Monsieur Meynard, if you choose to read this – do please get those other six fantasies translated into English. My French is terrible!

### Forge of Heaven

C.J. Cherryh



Eos, Jun 2004, \$24.95, 416 pp.  
ISBN: 0380979039

Review by Harriet Klausner

Two galactic empires overlap at the remote Concord Station that orbits a wasteland orb. Nanotechnical war between humans from Earth and beings from the Ondat Empire fought here and devastated this tiny seemingly worthless planet and

its station because the antagonists realize the strategic value of the outpost to observe the edges of the enemy.

## Reviews

Ages have passed since the maelstrom of *Hammerfall* ended in an uneasy 'cold war' peace, but not before rapid nanoevolution seeds were created.

Observers from Earth, the Outside, and the Ondat keep close tabs on the planet through implants to those made immortal by nanotechnology. Hero of the previous war, Marak tries to keep the fragile peace. He has succeeded with help from former Outsiders Ian and Luz, and Gene War refugee Ila.

The calm ends when an Earth ship carrying Ambassador Andreas Gide arrives. Rumors abound that the visit has to do with an allegedly leaked nanotechnology; a technology that Earth prefers remained quarantined to this orb while the Ondat are a bit looser on the research escaping the area. Is war coming once more with this barren rock again to suffer the consequences?

Fans of cerebral science fiction with numerous concepts to ponder will appreciate this deep look at a cold war on the verge of turning hot. C.J. Cherryh uses the first part of the novel to develop concepts involving the future of science, war, and to a lesser degree politics. The second half moves back and forth between action and further development of the author's message. Readers who enjoy contemplating complex concepts will appreciate this profound tale in which action takes a limiting role to Ms. Cherryh's postulations.

### The Taking Dean Koontz



Bantam, Jun 2004  
\$27.00, Hardcover, 338 pp.  
ISBN: 055380250X  
Review by Harriet Klausner

The rain keeps Molly Sloan indoors so she works on her book that she hopes to complete soon. However, she observes the oddity of the torrent pouring at over seven inches an hour and it has luminescent glow as if snow

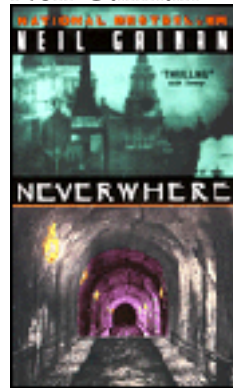
was falling. On her porch is a horde of coyotes acting as if they fear what is out there but they are friendly towards Molly. Her husband Neil awakens from a nightmare and joins her. From TV they learn that the storm is worldwide.

The Sloans see the probable cause when an UFO hovers in the sky and weird looking fungus and spores multiply at a geometric Malthusian rate. People vanish

into the ground or levitate into the air; corpses walk and decapitated heads talk. Special dogs congregate around the beleaguered couple as Molly and Neil search the nearby town for children of parents who disappeared. They believe that the children and their guardians cannot be touched. In less than thirty-six hours the world that the Sloans knew is gone and both wonder how the ETs will deal with the survivors.

This apocalyptic thriller is a chilling frightening tale as two scared souls fight back against overwhelming odds, but take the time to try to protect the children though being a good Samaritan can mean being a dead Samaritan. Dean Koontz is at his best with this sure shot New York Times best seller that deserves many kudos. The science of the invaders is so far ahead of humanity it compares to prehistoric man seeing TV or movies. Readers will never look at rain the same way as Mr. Koontz has subtle changed the rhythm.

### Neverwhere Neil Gaiman



Avon, Nov 1998  
\$13.95, Paperback  
ISBN 0380789019  
Review by Terry Crotinger

*Neverwhere* is a dark tale of chivalry, honor and overcoming biases. Is it time-travel or a gruesome wrestle in determining sanity versus reality? Neil Gaiman keeps the reader worrying this question throughout this dark tale that opens with a typical yuppie-like gentleman, Richard Mayhew, who moves to London and begins a relationship with a cultured, but shallow, fiancée. She seems mono-dimensional; a stark contrast to the rich and foul texture Gaiman paints of the altered state Richard finds himself in when he encounters an injured woman with the unlikely name of Door. As he assists her, he finds his reality fading, slowly seeping into the London underground where little can be taken at face value, including himself. In his real world, he is fading; few people in his own time/reality can see him. He has little hope of returning to his time, his reality.

There is a quest, and Richard tries to fulfill the requirements with the help of his companions/guides. These guides through this other-world, are often killed and replaced—seldom mourned as there is little time for regrets. Returning to his time seems twisted. It looks

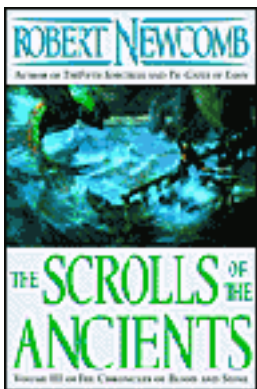
# Reviews

and feels like his time, but no one can see him. Another time, he finds his way up from the underground to the twenty-first century streets of London with all the sounds and sights he remembered. He is back in his own time/reality, but all his circumstances are better, unbelievably better. Should he stay and play out the new role he's always dreamed of or go back and finish the quest and possibly lose himself in the process?

So if you mention *Neverwhere*, or Neil Gaiman's name in a conversation with science fiction and other literary readers, animated conversation may result: he is a recognized international award winning author. Someone might mention that *Neverwhere* won the *Julia Verlanger Award* in France for best Fantasy/Science Fiction novel in 1999, or that this the book was also made into a Mini-series in 1996 in England. Though published in the late 1990's, it continues to be one of those novels one cannot completely forget; Gaiman's writing does not allow you to forget. *Neverwhere* is distinctive not only for this compelling story of long-ago London. Even the most corrupt individual Richard meets in this never-where-world is given a patina of virtue causing the reader to lean toward compassion as one would a homeless person. Gaiman spares no diplomacy in telling the reader how loathsome each character can be while keeping true motive elusive. Who can be trusted? Neil Gaiman keeps us guessing until the end of this brooding, lightless story.

## Scrolls of the Ancients

Robert Newcomb



Del Rey, June 2004  
\$26.95, Hardcover, 532 pp.  
ISBN 0345448960

Review by Harriet Klausner

Prince Tristan killed his father Nicholas to prevent his sire from opening the portal that would allow the Heretics to enter the realm, allowing the Vagaries, those who practice dark magic to wipe out those who work for

the good of mankind (the Vigors). The prince and his sister are the chosen ones who are supposed to bring into harmony the Vigors and the Vagaries, but because of his Azur blood, Tristan is not trained in the use of magic. Wizards Wigg and Faegan won't teach him until they find a way to turn his blood red.

Nicholas' legacy is being carried out by his acolyte

Krassus who is searching for Tristan's half-brother Wulfgar and the scrolls of the Vigors and the Vagaries. Using his magic he has conjured up an army of near invulnerable monsters to help him seek out what he needs to carry out his plan. When Wulfgar and the scroll of the Vagaries are brought to him, he is able to bring Wulfgar to the side of the Vagaries, setting up a confrontation between the two brothers for the future of the world.

Volume III of the *Chronicles of Blood and Stone* is the last book in an enthralling and memorable series. There are many otherworldly sentient who side with the protagonist and the antagonist and both sides are loyal to their individual masters. One has to put the villain who was transformed against his will into a power hungry man who wants to reshape the world in his own image. Robert Newcomb is a great worldbuilder who will be one of tomorrow's superstars.

## Fantasy Novel Quiz

Answers on page 3

What are some of the most influential fantasy novels of all time? And who wrote them? Can you match the author on the left with their famous works on the right? Zero to five correct is a good start on your way to magical power. Six to ten correct ranks you as a wizard, albeit of a rather bumbling sort. More than ten correct makes you a sorcerer. Please don't turn me into a frog.

- |                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Andre Norton          | The Broken Sword            |
| 2. C. S. Lewis           | Elric of Melnibone          |
| 3. J.R.R. Tolkien        | To Your Scattered Bodies Go |
| 4. Edgar Rice Burroughs  | Swords and Deviltry         |
| 5. Fritz Leiber          | The Hour of the Dragon      |
| 6. Anne McCaffrey        | The Worm Ouroboros          |
| 7. John Norman           | The Mists of Avalon         |
| 8. C. L. Moore           | The Chronicles of Narnia    |
| 9. Marion Zimmer Bradley | The Hobbit                  |
| 10. Poul Anderson        | Witch World                 |
| 11. Michael Moorcock     | A Spell for Chameleon       |
| 12. Piers Anthony        | The Dragon Riders of Pern   |
| 13. Philip Jose Farmer   | Jirel of Joiry              |
| 14. Robert E. Howard     | Tarnsman of Gor             |
| 15. ER Eddison           | A Princess of Mars          |

## RPG Corner (con't)

Individual scenes can be set up to accomplish specific tasks, from fact-finding to a chase to the final climactic confrontation. They should run together to make a scenario that is internally consistent; no random visitations or events with no bearing should be included. If the meaning of a seemingly random event is not immediately apparent, that doesn't mean that it is meaningless. From the PC perspective, the early part of most investigations can seem to be meaningless and without order. This is especially true of protracted investigations, and multi-part stories where deeper and more convoluted plots lines exist. It's later in scenes where the characters are allowed to see how certain clues and events connect with one another that understanding is achieved, and meaning applied.

Here is a simple example of what a one-shot, mystery-oriented story outline might look like:

**Opening** – Hook the characters by killing an old uncle that was a favorite to one of the group.

*(This creates a personal interest for the PCs)*

**Scene One: Scene of the Crime** – The characters investigate the scene of the crime, find a business card for a dubious real estate broker in town with a meeting date scribbled on the back, and a journal left by the old uncle that talks about a lot of time spent at a local antique shop. They also spot his collection of steamer trunks.

*(The characters now have two clues to follow up on. If the GM wanted, he could drop in a few more red herring clues here, to distract the PCs or give them more leads to follow up)*

**Scene Two: Real Estate Broker** – The PCs go to ask the broker about why he was meeting with the old uncle. The Broker, a crotchety old man who looks ancient, isn't talking, but drops enough hints to keep the PCs interested in what he may be up to.

*(This scene of heavy on the role-playing)*

**Scene Three: Antique Shop** – The PC's look to see what was so important in this place that the old uncle would write about it so often. Talk with the owner and find out uncle was partial to certain antiques, especially steamer trunks. The owner can direct the PCs to the town library, where the old uncle spent a good deal of time.

**Scene Four: The Library** – The PCs, through some role-playing, can convince the librarian to let them see the checkout card for the old uncle. They find the last dozen or so books he checked out were all about

Nazi war criminals who fled Germany under assumed names and identities, and who stole millions of dollars worth of gold and art. A handwritten note doodled in one of the books has a name and address of a man who lives in the next town over. The handwriting belongs to the old uncle.

**Scene Five: The Mysterious Stranger** – The PCs head to the address to see what connection it had to their deceased uncle. There is a "Sold" sign in the front yard, but a car is in the driveway and there is a good bit of noise coming from the house. If the PC's check to see who sold the house, it turns out to be the crotchety old real estate broker from scene two. The person in the house looks dirty and disheveled, and he tells the PCs that the old man who lived here before died a month ago, and he just bought the house, and is doing some remodeling. He is obviously hiding something. They might even try to sneak into the house to see what's going on, and what kind of remodeling is happening. If they do, they will see that he is digging up the floor in the cellar, and he has turned up a pair of steamer trunks.

*(The GM really has to sell the new homeowner as a shifty, untrustworthy character. The PCs are now left with a tantalizing connection, between the old uncle's research, his collection, and the real estate agent)*

**Scene Six: The Reading of the Will** – The PCs (specifically the niece or nephew of the uncle) head to the reading of the will, and see that they are to become the custodians of the uncle's estate. At the reading, the real estate broker is there, along with the mysterious stranger from scene six. When the will is read, the broker scowls, but lightning quick, makes the PCs an offer on the house, and all it contains. The offer is more than fair, and suspicious.

**Scene Seven: The Steamer Trunks** – If they haven't done so already, the PCs may elect to see what's in all of the trunks that seems to be so important, and maybe the reason their uncle was murdered. They find a trunk with a false bottom, and in it isn't a treasure, as they might have suspected, but the SS uniform, pistol and identification of a vicious war criminal who escaped the authorities and vanished. The real estate broker is the Nazi.

That's about it. The old uncle was first turned on to the broker when he began asking about the trunk collection. The broker was worried that one of his old trunks may have gotten added to the collection,

Con't on page 12

## RPG Corner (con't)

which could expose him. He went to the old uncle to arrange a meeting, and to find out how much the old man knew. When it turned out that the old man was onto the broker, he had the mysterious stranger break in and whack the old guy to keep the secret safe. The PCs can be allowed to find all of that out with further investigation and conversations with the broker.

The story can either be concluded with a confrontation of the old broker, or perhaps continued in some way left up to the GM. Additionally, extra "fluff" scenes can be thrown in to mix things up a bit. A break in at the uncle's house, a meeting with local police who are investigating the murder as well, etc.

These are the basics of how it works, and how I usually write them. This is a frame that needs to be filled with details and descriptions, as well as non-playing character cues and breakdowns so the GM will be reminded of how all of the characters behave and sound. I'm out of room, so the talk about characterization will have to wait till next time.

## Preserving the Past (con't)

the concern that finding someone who understood the real value of science fiction memorabilia would be difficult. "Most people have no idea what the real value is; forget about trying to replace anything."

What would they salvage if a meteor was going to hit their home and they had time to take one personal item to safety (other than pets, spouse and children—not in that particular order)? Most were physically horrified at the idea and declared they could not pick just one item. From their answers it was clear that these collections and "accumulations" of things that related to science fiction meant a great deal to each of these people. The question was: why?

Why collect? Dennis is collecting history with a philanthropist's fervor. Is there a desire to acquire and own an item that brings personal comfort or to have something with sentimental value that one can say with pride that they own? Objects Relational Therapy would espouse this theory. But, perhaps the reason is baser: the more one collects, the more that can be resold for a profit though most collectors seem resistant to parting with their collections. The Ferengi Rules of Acquisition explains this clearly: *Rule 049—Everything is worth something to somebody.*

Being a modest influence in the world of collectables, science fiction memorabilia is growing as a major player in the collectable market, though it has yet to reach the point where a store pops up in unlikely

places and frequencies like antique shops do. On the other hand, many of the things people like Dennis intentionally acquire *are* antiques, making science fiction collections/collectables a force not to be taken lightly because *someone collects them all...*

Would you like to talk about your science fiction "stuff"? What kinds of things do you collect? How much has it cost you in a year? Is there a favorite type or item that is more desirable? What is your favorite item? How do you store or display your items? What system do you use to track what you have? And, finally, what is the motivating force to collect? Copy/paste these questions with your response and send to: [collector@scififan.com](mailto:collector@scififan.com) Responses will be posted, without names or specific identifying information, in a later issue of *Illuminata*.

## Defining Gothic (con't)

Three other European gothic novels deserve particular mention. These are *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, published in 1818, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, published in 1886, and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, published in 1897. These three books, and the films made from them, have had, perhaps, the strongest influence of any gothic works on the modern twentieth and twenty-first century horror genre. These are also available at Project Gutenberg, but print copies are still easy to obtain.

The American gothic movement is often said to have begun with the book *Wieland* by Charles Brockden Brown, which was published in 1798 and which was based in part on an incident in which a New York farmer murdered his wife and children after he was told to by voices. The next two big names to appear on the American scene were Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Poe worked mostly in short story form; perhaps his most gothic work was "The Fall of the House of Usher," which he wrote in 1839. Hawthorne's classic gothic novel was, of course, *The House of the Seven Gables*, published in 1871. Poe and Hawthorne are easy to find in print, and some of their stuff is also available at Project Gutenberg. A print copy of *Wieland* can be found at The Invisible College Press, <http://www.invispress.com>.

Poe and Hawthorne represent early extremes in how they expressed the gothic impulse in their writings. Poe reveled in the dark emotional excesses of the field, in grisly murders and wild madness. Hawthorne's work was tame in comparison, with his revenants harnessed to literary and political ends. But it was Poe whose influence was felt most strongly in the development of the horror fiction that we know today.

## 8 Simple Rules (con't)

cater to the needs of a group of readers, you lose what makes your writing unique. Romance novel authors may make a lot of money, but in my humble opinion, what they do requires little talent, and I would hesitate to call them real writers. After all, a computer with an adequate Madlib program could spew out formulaic works of comparable quality.

### **Rule #4: Learn the Rules of Writing (and apply them!)**

In reading over stories for the *Illuminata* or submissions to Tyrannosaurus Press, I am surprised by the number of writers who appear to have no concept of grammar or punctuation. Even more mortifying to me is when I look over my own writings; no wonder my early works were categorically rejected! The rules of grammar, punctuation, and style are often boring and sometimes confusing, but so are the rules of everything else. That doesn't mean they shouldn't be learned. If writing is what you want to do, then you have an obligation, to yourself and to the industry, to do it well.

It is a common misconception that authors need only write a story, and then editors at the publishing house will fix all the mistakes. That may be true, to a certain extent, for well-known and money-making authors; but for unknowns and up-and-comers, it's complete and utter nonsense. It doesn't matter how good your idea is, if you cannot present it clearly and with proper grammar, punctuation and diction, your work will be fast-tracked to the trash can.

Mistakes *will* be made; they are unavoidable. Pick any book off the shelf, and you will find errors – and these are works which should have gone through at least one professional editing! It is impossible to catch all mistakes, and unrealistic to believe you can. Editors realize this, and they will let some mistakes slide, but a mistake every page and a mistake every paragraph are two very different things. When reviewing submissions, I discard most works that have more than a handful of errors on the first page, regardless of how intriguing I find the premise, and if I find one or two glaring mistakes (I mean big mistakes, not misplaced commas or controversial phraseology) per page, I am not likely to ask for more of the manuscript. My reasoning is two fold: 1) an author cannot be too serious about his craft if he doesn't even know the basic rules of writing and 2) the company would have to spend too much time and effort revising and fixing the work (and arguing with the author) to justify the expense of publication.

An interesting side note to this rule: when reviewing submissions, I also look for mistakes in query letters and synopses. If there are a significant number of mistakes in either of those documents, they get counted against the work even before I begin reading it, as I feel that these 'off the cuff' writings may be more indicative of the author's skill level than the actual story. When approaching agents or publishers, remember that you need to look professional at all times and treat each requested document as the most important thing you've ever written.

### **Rule #5: Learn the Meaning of Words**

This rule is more a corollary to rule #4, but I feel it is just as important. Synonyms do not exist just to give writers options; each word has its own meaning. Sometimes the difference is subtle, sometimes so subtle the words can and should be used interchangeably, but it is important to understand the differences and use each word appropriately. This goes beyond the 'problem words' of language; *frightened*, *scared*, and *terrified* all deal with the same emotion, but they mean different things. Leeway may be taken when writing dialogue, or when the narration is done from a character's perspective, but take care that the connotation and denotation of the words chosen match up with whatever you are trying to convey.

### **Rule #6: Learn to Take Criticism**

Not everyone is going to agree with your vision. If your vision is fine with them, they might still object to your style, wording, grammar, characterization, political views, religious views, magic system, wardrobe choice... You get the idea. And sometimes they may love the concept and think your writing is better than average yet still not want to publish your work for reasons varying from 'the market's not right' to 'it doesn't meet our needs' to my personal favorite 'it's too long for a first book; write something shorter.'

We artistic types are overly sensitive and prone to taking criticism to heart. Even when we ask for an opinion, we really don't want to hear what's wrong. Our work is great, we know it, and anyone who reads it should know it!

The truth is, no writing exists that could not be improved. To believe your writing has merit is justified, to believe it perfect is arrogant. If an editor, author, friend or otherwise offers advice, you would be wise to listen. Benefit from the experience of editors

Con't on page 15

## 8 Simple Rules (con't)

and authors; many have walked the path that you are walking now. Friends want only what's best for you, and if a stranger takes the time to tell you what they liked or disliked about your writing, it must be *very* important to them. If someone points out technical errors (see Rules 4 and 5) take note; if you don't believe them, look up the rule for yourself. If someone poses a stylistic criticism, you don't have to embrace it, but you should listen to it. Open yourself to the possibility that there may be a better way to express your views or write your scenes, and you will find new doors and new opportunities at every corner.

### Rule #7: Learn To Ignore Criticism

Humans are complainers by nature. Give me a book, a movie, a TV show, or an ice-cream cone, and I can find some fault with it, even if I truly love it. As a writer, you *will* receive criticism; some of it will be constructive, some of it destructive, and no matter how it is intended, it will sometimes hurt your feelings. You don't have to agree with the critics, even if you listen to them. Criticism often boils down to opinion, and while a critic's opinion is no less valid than yours, it is no more valid either.

When something I've written gets criticized, my initial reaction is defensive. If the critic is there, I will often argue or attempt to justify my choice, and if there is no justification, I'll occasionally just make up an excuse. This is more to soothe my ego than out of real anger or indifference. But, after my blood has cooled, I try to understand the rationale behind the criticism. What is their complaint? Did they cite specific problems or did they just want to call me 'a big fat stupidhead' (or something even less tasteful). If the latter, they are ignored as cruel, insensitive fools; if the former, did they offer alternatives or suggestions? I try to weigh their reasoning against my own, and in the end, I make a decision to keep things as is or change them appropriately. You'll be surprised how often you make concessions, at least minor ones, if you take the time to really try to understand readers' concerns.

Of course, sometimes you just have to acknowledge a person's right to be wrong and accept that not everyone can be as enlightened as you are.

### Rule #8: Form a Support Group (or Join One)

Rejection is a big part of this business, as is criticism, and a writer must develop a thick skin to deal with it. Writing something you are proud of is tough enough,

convincing an agent or publisher to love it is virtually impossible. Some statistics suggest that nearly 80% of books are never profitable. Even if that number is exaggerated by 30%, it isn't hard to understand why publishers are wary about taking on unknown talent. Big houses have the resources to publish anything they want, but they also receive tens of thousands of submissions a year, so your work has to impress someone to make it even partway through the system. Small houses may be more amenable to unknown authors, but their resources are far more limited (and they get a sizable number of submissions too). For an independent press to risk what could be a third to a half of their yearly profit on a project, they really have to believe in it. So a rejection doesn't necessarily mean that your writing isn't any good. Most of the time it just boils down to money.

Knowing that won't make you feel any better when your next rejection letter comes in though. What may help is knowing that you're not alone; all of us, published or not, go through the same anxiety when we receive criticism or submit new works for consideration. The encouragement I receive from friends, family, colleagues (and even a few strangers!) helps me trundle on when my confidence sags, and my team here at *The Illuminata* is instrumental in keeping me writing when I start to lose my faith (thanks, guys!). For my part, I spend nearly as much time encouraging others to keep writing as I do writing myself, and I can only hope that my words have been as effective as the encouragement I receive from others.

I'm certain there are a hundred more rules to writing. I'll be sure to tell you if I learn any more.

Or do you not like the idea of God at all? Molly absolutely rejected it. But then she hated anything without a molecular structure. She couldn't take it apart. Personally I'm a fence-sitter. But I not sure if the fence even exists.

– From *The Road to Mars* by Eric Idle