



# The *Illuminata*

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

## CON-fessions of a Dangerous Mind

By Bret Funk

Earlier this month, I had the privilege of attending Crescent City Con XIX, a regional science fiction convention held in New Orleans, LA. I had a wonderful time. It allowed me to take a break from the day to day grind, reunite with some old acquaintances, and meet some fascinating new people.

Cons can be a daunting experience, even for a guest. I can remember the first time I sat at a table as a guest, with 'real' professionals all around me. I felt like a charity case, an orphan sitting at the adult table because no one had bothered to prepare a kiddie section. Now, I'm the old pro (at conventioning, at least; only a handful of people outside my circle know I'm a writer!) and I can see the terror in the new kids' eyes. I try to make them feel at home, just like I try to encourage the people who come to my panels and workshops. Seeing their determination, the knowledge that success is right around the corner, is so refreshing, it renews my own spirit and restores my faith.

Those were the days! How I yearn to be so young and naïve, when writing was a world waiting for me to enter it, when publishers had been pacing in frustration because I had yet to send them my manuscripts, and when bookstores cleared out entire shelves (or at least made room for a book or two) when a new title was announced.

I had the pleasure, at Crescent City Con, of meeting Bill Fawcett – professor, corporate executive, college dean, author, editor, and book packager. What's a book packager, you ask. He and his company, Bill Fawcett and Associates, pitch ideas to publishers and then produce the works. Packagers are like

rogue editors, roving around from one house to the next, working on whatever project suits their fancy. Fawcett and Associates has roved through virtually all of the major houses, packaging over 200 titles. Consequently, Bill knows just about everyone in the business, from publishing executives to authors to book sellers. I attended many of his panels, held several additional conversations with him, and listened whenever I could.

His news was not encouraging, but it was illuminating, and I wanted to share some of it with you.

**1) When submitting a manuscript to a major house, under ideal circumstances, your work will not hit bookstore shelves for approximately three years.**

This is not as much a startling realization as it is a depressing confirmation. Most major houses average seventy queries a week, and each book goes through a rigorous review process. Scanners look at the book and then pass them on to pre-readers, pre-readers to assistant editors, and assistant editors to editors, all before the book is accepted for publication. After that, there is a several week lag while they contact you. Then content editing, which can take several months, copy editing (several more months), pre-production, cover design, book production, and then release. I've glossed over the steps involved, and probably skipped over others entirely, so you can see why the process might take a while.

My lack of patience is what drove me to co-found Tyrannosaurus Press, and as an obscure speculative fiction publisher who does not do much in the way of advertising for submissions, I can tell you that we receive an average of five queries a week. With a small, mostly volunteer staff, it's difficult for us to review those few submissions in a timely manner; I can see where larger houses, who often do not employ more than a handful of full-time editors, might find it difficult to keep pace.

And remember, three years is under ideal conditions. If something goes wrong, it will take longer.

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# RPG Corner (v3.32): Allies, Neutrals, and Villains

by Doug >!< Roper of EPIC Gaming

What makes a Non-Playing Character interesting to your Player-Characters? Aside from an NPC standing with the object of the PC's desire in his hot little hands, what makes Non-Playing Characters truly stand out in the player's memories? The short answer is characterization. Details and expansive backgrounds will create NPCs that the playing characters can imagine and interact with easily. Any character created by the GM has the capacity to become a major NPC in the course of a game. It depends on the PC's actions and the ability of the GM to make up enough of a background on the spot to satisfy the needs of the PC's and the story, but it does happen. These happy accidents I mentioned above are usually the exception to the rule. This article is more about trying to design a memorable and important character on purpose, so that the GM will be prepared from the get go to present a NPC that the characters are going to want to interact with.

There are universal details that all characters will need if you want them to truly stand out. They include detailed backgrounds and personal histories, good physical descriptions, occasionally focusing on one trait above all others, avoiding stereotypes, and always keeping clear focus on NPC motives and goals. These must be applied to every type of major NPC, regardless of where their allegiance lies. What follows are simply my thoughts on the three areas into which major NPCs can fall, and how best to handle them.

## Allies

Obviously, these are going to be the characters that the PCs interact with the most, and should therefore be the most fully realized of the bunch. Allies are usually easily recognized, and they can pop up at any time. Allies can be friends, family, or strangers thrust into the line of fire beside the Playing-Characters. They provide knowledge, companionship and support to the heroes, but are usually in the background during the times of high action or plot advancement. Allies are there to help the PCs, not do the work for them.

There does need to be a balance, however. I mentioned that Allies should be background, but I don't mean that they should be static and unmoving. Undoubtedly the NPCs have lives away from the heroes, and just this fact can make the PCs curious about what it is the Non-Playing Characters do with their spare time. Exploring the life of an NPC can lead to revelations about a friend the PCs thought they knew well, and possibly some conflicts as well. It's easy to fall into the habit of using Allies only to

support the heroes, but always keep in mind that the Allies need motives of their own. Not all Allies are such because they genuinely want to help the PCs accomplish their goals. NPCs with their own goals can create some minor conflict with the PCs, and this enhances the Role-Playing experience.

Last month when talking about Extended Interaction Characters, I explained that these guys need large, detailed backgrounds and significantly developed personalities. As the GM interacts with the PCs, more personality traits may develop, but they should remain consistent with the NPC's background. Consistency with the manner of speaking and habits of an NPC will create a sense of familiarity with the character and allow the PCs to relate to him or her much more quickly.

Personality quirks and physical traits go a long way toward making the character seem more real and thus be easier to remember, but with allies it is best to avoid gross deformities or injuries. Allies, as a generalization, tend to resemble the protagonists. Since few of the Player-Characters are likely to be very ugly or seriously scarred, it's not likely that their allies would be. This creates an easier bridge between the PCs and Allies, since even in RPG's there is a lot of emphasis placed on appearance. If the NPC looks like a good guy, the first impulse of the Player-Characters is to consider him a good guy.

One of the big hooks in creating memorable characters is to find a way to create a link between the Ally and the PCs themselves. Perhaps they know or knew some of the same people, or have visited the same places. A common point of reference can create oodles of dialogue and role-playing between the NPC and PC's, and this interaction will build up the character in the memories of the Players. Likewise, if the Ally profoundly affects the lives of the Playing-Characters in some way, they will surely stand out. GM's should be careful with this type of thing, as it can become too easy to allow the NPCs to rule the show. As I have said before, NPCs aren't the stars of the story, the PCs are. Allies should only be used sparingly to ride in and save the day, and on the other side of that coin, the heroes shouldn't have to spend all of their time recovering friends and loved ones from danger.

## Neutrals

A truly neutral character is very hard to play in a RPG, simply because the truly neutral character would have no reason to get involved with the PCs or their predicament. Neutral NPCs are neither on the

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# The Writer's Block: Rewrite, Rewrite, Rewrite!

by Charles Gramlich

Others have said it before, but truths bear repeating. Good writing is rewriting. Whenever I finish a piece, whether it be fiction or non-fiction, I assume that it's not good enough to be published and I start going through it again, and again.

Something that happened to me in graduate school taught me a little bit about why multiple drafts are a good idea in writing. It occurred when I said to a female friend that she must hate getting up in the morning and having to take time to put on makeup. It seemed a bit unfair to me, since most men just comb their hair, and, maybe on a good day, put on some deodorant before leaving the house.

My friend's response was enlightening, however, not really about the fairness or unfairness of putting on makeup, but about the reasons why a writer should always do more than one draft of a piece of work. She said that she liked to put on makeup. She'd get up in the morning, look in the mirror, and go, "Yuck." Then she'd fix her hair, put on a little of this and a dab of that, follow it all with a touch of lipstick, and by the time she was done she could look in the same mirror and say, "OK, not so bad."

This is actually a pretty good analogy for writing. First drafts are our early morning face. They have at least a little bit of that "yuck" quality. But then the polishing starts. We get rid of a few excess words, what writers call "fat." We break that long sentence into two shorter ones that are more clear and to the point. We try to figure out what in the world we were thinking when we wrote that first paragraph. By the time the polishing is finished we have a product that is more likely to evoke "OK, not so bad" than it is to call up "yuck."

How many drafts should a writer do? The only answer is to keep rewriting until the work is finished. When asked point-blank, I usually say something like "three." But any number is inaccurate if accepted as a rule. The number of drafts depends on the writer and on the piece being written. It probably even depends on what section of the piece is being considered. For example, most writers reword openings and endings much more than they do middles. This is because they know how imperative it is to catch readers' attention quickly, and to give them something at the end to engage their emotions.

There is a tremendous amount of written material in the world to choose from. Readers don't have time to twiddle their thumbs while a writer figures out what he or she is going to say on a topic. They don't want to be distracted by poor grammar and punctuation, or have to strain to get the point. They want an immediate sense of what the writing means, and they want to feel it is important to them. Rewriting until every word and sentence is both easily understood and accomplishes an important task is the best way to get and hold any reader's attention.

## Illuminations Contest Closed

As of August 1, 2004, the Illuminations Speculative Fiction Writing Contest was closed to new submissions.

The judges and I would like to thank all of the writers who participated in the contest. The sheer number of entries exceeded our expectations, and though judging is far from complete, a number of exceptional works have already appeared. We should have no difficulty selecting sufficient stories to fill out our anthology of speculative fiction.

We plan to announce winning entries in the October 2004 edition of the *Illuminata*, but if judging proves difficult, we reserve the right to announce winners in November. The anthology will go into pre-production as soon as the winners are announced, and we hope to have the book ready for publication in early 2005.

After much discussion, we have decided to include two categories of winners. Winning entries will have their stories included in the anthology, as indicated in the contest rules, but we will be adding a 'Runner-Up' category. Entries which fall into this category fell on the border of winning. The judges will submit their impressions on the stories and a few suggestions on how to improve the work. The writers will then be given a chance to revise the story and resubmit it to us for consideration. Writers are not obligated to rewrite, and Tyrannosaurus Press is not obligated to include revised stories. Runner-ups will be notified by e-mail, and may direct questions to:

[Info@TyrannosaurusPress.com](mailto:Info@TyrannosaurusPress.com)

# Dennis Lynch – Science Fiction Collector (part 1)

by Terry Crotinger/montanasings

Collectors, like their collections, are diverse. There are no qualifications to be a collector, though there do seem to be common attributes of “serious” collectors of science fiction items, versus the more casual collector. There are no education or zeal requirements – but usually monetary ones separate the serious from the casual. Some developed the collecting bug in an accumulative way, purchasing merchandise that corresponds with a movie or interest and then realizing that they actually have more than a few scattered items; they have a collection. Others start earlier with the expressed purpose of gathering (assembling, amass, accumulate, harvest, obtain, garner) items to intentionally begin a life-time interest in collecting. Dennis (Denny) Lynch is such an enthusiast.

What started as an innocent discussion after a science fiction book group meeting Denny and I attend only created more questions and the desire to experience the wonders he described. So, bravely, I requested an interview, which was graciously accepted. I got goose bumps. I was about to discover science fiction *history*.

When I witnessed the bulk of Denny’s collection for myself, I realized this man was animated about his collection because it was a passion! Now armed with information gleaned from our delightful discussions, prior postings at a Yahoo interest group, the interview and subsequent email, I’d like to introduce, Dennis Lynch – a systematic, dedicated individual who is, “optimistic about the future” and “interested in things that are out of the ordinary” type of collector. This man deeply hopes he can pass on his enthusiasm about collecting and the life-lessons one can learn pursuing this activity to his students, friends and colleagues.

Denny collects because he enjoys it. That seems simplistic, but in fact, it is very complicated, and let me add, costly. While money may be a determining factor in Denny’s approach to collecting, it is not the only factor. He is a careful, serious collector.

At the tender age of five years old, Denny was already interested in space and referred to himself as a “space buff”. He can remember the Sputnik launch and avidly watched the Mercury missions. Then came comic books, (“The Classics”) specifically DC comics. “Fantasy television was off limits at home, but heavily analyzed at school. I think my interest in the genre was piqued by hearing the stories from *Twilight Zone* and *Man In Space* and *Hitchcock* for years before I ever got to see them. I didn’t see a monster movie until I was 13! *Gorgo!*”

“Although we lived in the country on the edge of Cedar Rapids, we lucked out because the bookmobile visited our neighborhood every week. Norton, Heinlein, Asimov and everyone else in their collection became my guides to literary SF. I challenged the librarians to get everything the library carried. They didn’t have E. R. Burroughs, though. Tarzan and Carter were considered sub-literature. When I learned you could buy books then keep them, my life course was set. I built the early Aurora monster models and started collecting a few other trinkets in the mid-1960s. I found my first copy of *Famous Monsters* in 1969 and started collecting those immediately. It only took about six years to collect them all. Try to do that now!”

Dennis Lynch collects almost everything having to do with science fiction in all its various forms and genres. He collects other things like stamps and coins, and surprisingly, sheet music, but his main focus is on science fiction—and movies. With a BA in Film from the University of Iowa, it was only natural that anything made for movie entertainment became part of his collection or on a wish list. The Silent Movie Era holds a special interest and of course, this is reflected in his collection.

He has seen over 18,000 movies—and has a record of each one! In order to see as many movies as he can, he “time shifts”. He will record a movie during the week and then while working on cataloguing his collection, will listen to it later or save it to view during the summer. Yes, I did say listen. As an Industrial Technology instructor, his school year is filled with educational activities, so his free time centers on his family. In order to fulfill this desire, he will *listen* to movies while working on his collection, but of course, he will stop to watch the good parts.

“As a film major at Iowa from ‘70-74’, I was able to start a Fantasy Film Series at the Bijou which ran for five semesters and made a ton of money for the University. The series was the ONLY regular fan gathering place in Iowa City from ‘72’-’74. Through that series, I accidentally discovered fandom.”

“We received an invite to a conference in LA: Filmcon I in November of 1972. I earned a grant from the Bijou and took a long bus trip. I saw fifty-five movies in four days and met hundreds! (really!) of celebrities. At the

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## Reviews

### Frek and the Elixir Rudy Rucker



Tor, April 2004  
\$27.95, Hardback, 476 pgs  
ISBN: 0-765-31058-9  
Reviewed by D. L. Parker

One of the disadvantages of living in a Stickville without a MegaBookStore within a hundred miles is a dependency on the local library. In my case, that's just a one-room establishment about the size of a trailer. That deprivation has both its advantages and its disadvantages. Given more choice, I probably wouldn't have picked up a book entitled "Frek and the Elixir". The corny UFO-like saucer on its colorful cover didn't help make its cause. But stretching the bounds a little by picking up a new author, instead of just looking for the next release from a favorite, can be a good thing. It's true I flung another such previously unknown writer across the room in disgust this week, unable to finish a garbled tale featuring a knife-wielding heroine (heroine!) who tries to gut-slice an old man in the course of one of her frequent muggings. I may have failed in my duty as reviewer by not warning my fellow readers to avoid something that should be buried in mud, but one can suffer too much for duty – I couldn't finish the book. Fortunately, "Frek and the Elixir" proved to be a happier choice: win one, lose one!

In "Frek and the Elixir", twelve-year old Frek lives on an Earth controlled by NuBioCom and Gov – the latter a ubiquitous intruder who just might be a parasitic worm-brain. The year is 3003, and nothing exists that isn't engineered by NuBioCom or spied upon by Gov. Inconvenient rebels either escape to the retro cult group on the hollowed-out asteroid Sick Hindu, or suffer the 3 R's: that is, **R**emoval, **R**ecycling, and **R**eplacement of one's inconvenient brain.

As the story opens, Frek is temporarily fatherless. Carb, dear less than reliable old Dad, has fled off-world to join the cult Crufters group on Sick Hindu. That may be one reason why an alien soon comes to call on young Frek: a friendly green cuttlefish just like the image of the Merry Mollusk 'toon that plays on his bedroom wall. Professor Bumby, as he calls himself, seems to know exactly what young Frek longs to do. Frek wants a Magic Elixir that will restore Earth to

its lost diversity. Bumby, who soon proves to have a sneaking resemblance to certain snarky Hollywood deal-makers of our time, has a can't-miss deal of his own in mind...and young Frek starts on a wild, wild ride to save Earth and humanity!

Mr. Rucker is a professor of computer science and mathematics, and his blending of physics and mathematical concepts (branes, branelinks, speromaks and qubits, just to mention a few) make for a good deal of the fun of this book. It would be a great story for a teenager who has some scientific leanings, because while the book covers a great many advanced (to me at least) concepts, it's never didactic or dull. Rucker has fun with language too, and in that I think he's less successful, though I give him high marks for trying. Um, anyone still remember the old Heinlein term "grok"? *Not* a great success in the English language. I think I've made my point.

One of the gushes on the back cover mentions Lewis Carroll, and there too I must disagree. Carroll truly was a subversive writer. He kicked the rules of society in the face in his own deadpan way: Humpty-Dumpty, for example, slyly subverted one of the most fundamental rules of language, that of common (shared) meaning. Rucker, on the other hand, is really a sweet writer. In style he reminds me most of the old Doris Pischeria stories I read as a teenager...there's a similar streak of wild invention. It's an imaginative, happy story told from the viewpoint of an adolescent, and a great one to share with a smart, curious teenager, especially one with a budding interest in the sciences. Enjoy!

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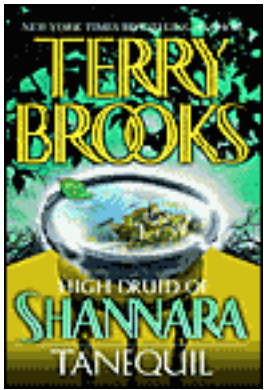
## Writers Wanted!

The Illuminata is looking for talented writers to submit articles, reviews, and original fiction to our newsletter. Positions are available for both regular and occasional contributors. Regular contributors should be willing and able to supply at least one work per month, due on the first of the month, for inclusion in the forthcoming Illuminata. Occasional contributors may submit when and if they have material for inclusion.

The Illuminata is a free newsletter and cannot compensate contributors financially. We do, however, have a rapidly growing readership that spans four continents and over ten countries. Interested parties should fill out the contributor form available at the T-Press website.

## Reviews

### High Druid of Shannara: Tanequil Terry Brooks



Del Rey, Sept 2004  
\$26.95, Hardcover, 368 pgs.  
ISBN 0345435745  
Review by Harriet Klausner

The dark creatures of faerie were banished to Jarka Ruus, otherwise known as the Forbidding, which is warded by the Elven tree the Ellcry to prevent the creatures from coming into the world of

Shannara. Grianne Ohmsford, the rightful High Druid of Paranor, was betrayed by a Druid who coveted her power position. With the help of Sen Dunsidan, the Prime Minister of the Federation, the traitor opened a portal and sent Grianne into the Forbidding. Shadea, the new High Druid is using Druid magic to become the ruling force in the Federation.

Shadea's ally Sen is using the same tactics to become the ruling power in the land. Grianne must come back to bring peace to a troubled world, and the only one who can find her and bring her home is her nephew, Pen Ohmsford. To enter the Forbidding, he must find the sentient tree Tanequil and persuade it to give him a branch so he can finish a dark wand that will allow him to enter through a portal at the Druid home of Paranor. Time is running out, because Grianne is turning back into the Isle Witch in order to survive the evil that surrounds her.

Terry Brooks has once again created a fantastic fantasy set in the world of Shannara as well as in its evil twin the Forbidding. The contrast between these two worlds is the difference between dark and light, with each a fascinating creation from the author's creative imagination. Terry Brooks is a brilliant world builder who is one of the premier fantasists around today with protagonists that claim a unique place in the reader's heart.

The best measure of a man's honesty isn't his income tax return. It's the zero adjust on his bathroom scale.

– Arthur C. Clarke

“Babylon 5! A five-mile long cement mixer of truth, pouring out the Concrete of Nice-Nice in a long, grey ribbon into the future, to form a **SIDEWALK OF JUSTICE!!**”

– The Tick, on Babylon 5

### The Green and the Gray Timothy Zahn



Tor, Sept 2004  
\$27.75, Hardcover, 446 pgs.  
ISBN 076307170  
Review by Harriet Klausner

In 1928, extraterrestrials that looked human went through Riker's Island to become citizens of their new home. The Greens were chased off their home world by the Grays in a war that started over a simple misunderstanding.

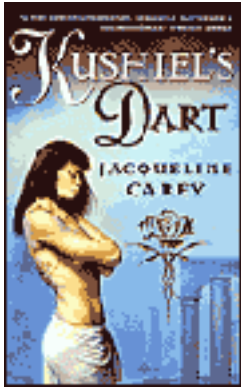
The Greens did not know that the Grays, in order to escape the Others, followed the Greens to earth. For decades neither group knew of the other's existence, until a boy from one group and a girl from the other became friends.

Their elders found out, since both live in New York City, and the Grays try to shove the Greens off the island until they agree to a truce if the Greens kill Melantha Green, who can destroy the city with her mental powers. Innocent bystanders Roger and Caroline Whittier take Melantha and try to hide her. Melantha disappears and no one knows which group got her. The Whittiers are determined to save Melantha and their city, yet also forge a truce between the opposing camps.

There are many aliens who live among us in science fiction stories such as the Men in Black, but Timothy Zahn has a unique and original way of taking a tribe plot and turning it into a fantastic storyline. This is an action oriented story where it is almost impossible to figure out the characters motives and nobody knows who is a friend or an enemy. This makes for a lot of suspense and the onus is on the reader to figure out who is friend or foe. There's a surprise twist at the end of the story that makes *The Green And The Gray* a very exciting work of speculative fiction.

## Reviews

### Kushiel's Dart by Jacqueline Carey



Tor, Mar. 2002  
\$7.99, Mass Market, 928 pp.  
ISBN: 0765342987  
Review by Scott H. Andrews

Kushiel's Dart masters court politics and barbarian customs before rambling through an unrealistic conclusion.

The orphaned heroine Phedre is raised as an indentured courtesan.

Carey's detailed social structure for this organized prostitution feels completely natural. Early chapters drag with exposition, but they reveal the meticulous depth in Terre D'Ange, Carey's alternate-history Renaissance France. The backstory also establishes Angeline theology, a strong element throughout the novel.

Phedre glides through the opulent society as a courtesan and spy. This section of the novel flourishes in Phedre's relationships. She learns from Delaunay and Cecile, she shares with Alcuin, and her service begins. Carey shows high society clothing and behavior in vivid detail. A jarring shift yanks Phedre into the second section, an exile among barbarian tribes. She uses her courtesan skills to survive and she uncovers a scheme for the throne.

The third section of the novel turns Phedre into a royal agent. Here, Kushiel's Dart stumbles. Phedre seducing barbarian chieftains and a provincial lord feels completely appropriate. Phedre convincing two foreign monarchs to launch an invasion, devising the plan that stops a rebel army, and infiltrating siege lines feels ridiculous. Carey's realism and detail also falter. The sea god feels inconsistent in such a realistic fantasy novel. Sailors fight land combat for no apparent reason other than to name a military unit "Phedre's Boys." Carey's subtle alternate history stumbles when she can't name Greek fire without lapsing into French.

Carey's narrative is dense. Antiquated words and verbose phrasing set the Renaissance mood, but they also impede the flow. Some paragraphs contain only one huge sentence of independent clauses linked by semicolons. At approximately 300,000 words, the novel runs extremely long.

The plot also handles supporting characters inconsistently. In the first section, Hyacinthe is an unnecessary commoner foil. In the second, he's gone,

along with the entire urban setting. In the third, he starts in a prominent role and is then cast aside. Joscelin, introduced at the end of the first section, becomes a major character. He could have been introduced sooner. Melissade grows into a delicious villainess in the first section, but plays only a minimal role in the third.

Despite these flaws, Carey's debut is the most rich and original fantasy since George R. R. Martin. Her alternate-history Renaissance France and her realistic characters are a welcome departure from stock medieval settings and epic quests.

### Sinner Sara Douglass



Tor, Sept 2004  
\$26.95, Hardcover, 464 pp.  
ISBN 0312870469  
Review by Harriet Klausner

In the land of Tencendor, peace was finally won when Axis destroyed the monster Goragael and the power of the Acharites (humans) was broken. Their land of Achor is now a part of Tencendor, and the people pay homage to Caelum SunSoar, Axis's son. Axis and his wife went on to be with the Sun Gods, the next step in the evolutionary process for immortals. On the surface, humans, the Avar (tree people) and the Icarii live in harmony, but ugly undercurrents flow in this paradise, ones that Caelum is not aware of because he is closed up in his castle unaware of his subjects' desires.

The humans want their own king and self rule, and they rally behind Zarad, the Prince of the North as their leader. Civil war breaks out and many lives are lost but there is a bigger threat to the realm, and the leaders of the civil war temporarily put aside their differences in the hope of finding a way of preventing evil beings from entering Tencendor through the Star Gate. If they fail, life in Tencendor will become unbearable.

Sara Douglass has written another great installment in her Wayfarer Redemption series. There are enough loose threads dangling that readers are assured of at least one more book in this magnificent saga. Magic is a way of life in the land and it is a part of everyday life. The two subplots of the civil war and the invasion are interwoven so that it merges into one storyline. *Sinner* is a powerful epic fantasy that fans of Tanya Hoff, Mercedes Lackey, and, of course, Ms. Douglass will love.

## Reviews

### The Shadow Within

Karen Hancock



Bethany House, August 2004

\$12.99, Trade Paper, 400 pgs.

ISBN 0764227955

Review by Harriet Klausner

After renouncing the Holy Brotherhood of the Matis, Abramm, the Prince of Kiraith, was sold into slavery by his brother Gillard who wanted the throne for himself. At

Abramm's lowest point, he reached out to the god Eidon who accepted him as one of his own, and he now proudly wears the shield that every true believer of Eidon wears. It has been six long years since he has been to Kiraith, but he returns to take the crown he never wanted because Gillard is leading his country to ruin. His return is a dramatic one as he kills a spawn in a ferocious sea battle with the help of the Light of Eidon.

Abramm openly challenges the council for the throne, not showing them he wears the shield of Eidon. The members of the council are so impressed by the man that he becomes the ruler of Kiraith, leaving Gillard as only the heir-apparent. Abramm knows war is coming from many kingdoms who think Kiraith is weak and open for a takeover, but before he can deal with that problem, he must come to terms with his younger brother Gillard, who would rather plunge the country into civil war than see his brother rule. Abramm must battle religious fanatics, creatures of the shadow and the duplicity of man if he wants to keep the kingship. He must have faith in Eidon's plans for him and acknowledge his faith if he is to become the man he is meant to be.

In Abraam's world, his god is close to his followers, speaking to them, and if their faith is strong enough, obeying their instructions. This is the second installment in the Legends of the Guardian King and it is every bit as good as the prequel, Light of Eidon. Evil takes many forms in this story, and one must believe in the light to see the darkness. Karen Hancock is a great world builder who has created a fantasy series that is reminiscent of the Arthurian mythos.

The protagonist is a true hero because he takes on a kingship he never wanted because he believes his people need him to fight both magical and mundane wars, battle shadow creatures and human enemies, and in time win the hearts of the people who once rejected him. There is a sub-plot involving the beginning of a romance between Abramm and the second daughter of the King of Chesdeh instead of the first daughter that everyone believes he should marry. Karen Hancock has written a beautiful adult fairy tale that readers will find delightful.

### Farscape: The Peacekeeper Wars

The four-hour event starts Sunday, October 17

"This special television event would not be a reality were it not for the tireless, unwavering efforts of the Farscape fans to bring the series back. Like all of us at The Jim Henson Company, they believed that the epic story we were telling was something special and deserved a proper ending. We are thrilled to respond to their dedication by creating this miniseries, thus resolving many of the unanswered questions from the final episode and giving fans their just due."

– Brian Henson

And a special thanks from us to groups like Save Farscape, which lobbied continuously for the return of this fantastic series. Be sure to tune in to the miniseries, and then demand more!

### Dennis Lynch (con't)

con I learned that these things happened on a regular basis! And that there were other fans! [After that] I spent many years at cons projecting films in 16mm, plus doing panels, won some costume awards and dragged my family into fandom, too." He told me that he had been to over fifty conventions and four WorldCons in the last thirty years. Since film/movie collecting is a main interest, film magazines, publicity stills, sound tracks, lobby cards and posters help round-out his ever growing collection going so far as to purchase sheet music/score if it is a popular song or theme from a movie or show he likes.

Dennis Lynch has much more to say about how to store and categorize collections as well as budget considerations. Come back in September to learn more about what is in his collection in the next issue of *Illuminata*.

## RPG Corner (con't)

PC's side, nor do they stand against them. They are simply in between, trying to get by. The overwhelming majority of the NPCs the characters see fall into this category, but as most are Background Characters there is little interaction. However, just because a NPC is not an Ally or Villain, it doesn't mean that they are simply dialogue in a body. Neutrals that have a significant part to play in a scenario that a GM writes needs to be fleshed out, because sooner or later, all Neutrals must decide what side they are on, at least for today.

A recurring, Neutral NPC will often vacillate between the realms of the protagonists and the antagonists. They must be played with an eye out for themselves and only themselves. This does not mean that they will act only selfishly all of the time, and it's up to the GM to decide who has the bigger voice in the Neutral's ear during a given scenario, the angel or the devil. This compulsion to either help or hinder the PCs will manifest in subtle ways, but appreciable ones. This compulsion need not be terribly consistent from scenario to scenario, but within a given adventure, the NPC should not shift back and forth too often, or the impact of that dance along the edge of the knife will lose its novelty, and erode the PCs patience.

True Neutrals can be more challenging to play than either Allies or Villains, and if the PCs encounter your Neutral NPC too often, a firm choice may have to be made (at least in the minds of the PCs) as to what side the NPC leans to. Many Allies and Villains have sprung from the ranks of Neutral characters. Should you decide to move a Neutral out of his native camp, always keep in mind his basic nature and remind yourself (as a GM) that this character was formed as a Neutral. While he may be helping the PCs now (and professing his total commitment to their cause when they're around) he will always look out for himself first. It's in their nature and is inescapable.

## Villains

These are my very favorite NPCs. Villainy could be subject to a whole column in itself, and while I'm sure that I'll have more to say on the subject later, for now I just want to cover the basics about creating memorable Villains.

The main difference between a Villain and a thug or random brawl-starter is that a Villain has a brain and motives and plans and plots. Any punk can start a fight or simply kick over the PC's cereal bowls in the

morning, but a Villain is someone who takes the time to make the PCs suffer, and will go to any length to further his own plans, usually at the expense of the PCs. Villains work best if they are revealed slowly, over the course of several game sessions. It's much more impressive to let the PCs discover slowly what it is that they are up against, than to just toss the Villain out at them after a brief plot. GMs need to keep this in mind when creating a Villain. True Villains, the NPC who will eventually set his will in direct opposition to the PCs, should never be glossed over.

The number one rule is to not allow the Villain to be a stereotype, or cardboard cutout type of Villain. All too often in RPGs, the Villain only serves as a target for the PCs to attack or pursue, and I hate this. Good Villains, just as much as any other good character, needs proper motivation for doing his evil work. He needs a detailed background and reasons for doing the things that he does. As an example, Hannibal Lector, Gollum and Darth Vader are Villains, while Predators, the Balrog, and Storm Troopers are merely antagonists or monsters, and while they two groups sometimes act very much alike, fundamentally the monster has only one dimension. Villains need their own history and back story at least as much as any PC or Ally.

Usually, Villains stand out in a crowd. There is always something that sets them apart from the ranks of mere antagonists. Sometimes it is a physical flaw or defect, many times it is a mental one, but however it manifests, the first time the PCs spot it, they should be aware that this character is not their friend. Insanity is often used in conjunction with Villainy, and while one does have to be disturbed to attempt the mass extermination of Detroit, one need not be insane to do it. Chalking all of the Villain's actions up to insanity is just another stereotype.

A Villain will not usually involve himself with the minutia of his plots, that's what Henchmen are for. Villains operate behind the scenes and in the shadows. They are a presence that the heroes should feel at work, but not be able to see clearly. Villains thrive on anonymity and secrecy. They are careful and patient creatures who are very often extremely powerful in some way, either financially or physically.

While they must be daunting and intimidating to the heroes, Villains should not be defeated after one scenario. Having a Villain linger and dish out a series of defeats to the PCs will make them hungry for his demise. After one or two setbacks at the hands of

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## RPG Corner (con't)

the same Villain, the PCs thoughts will turn toward him more and more, and a type of familiarity will develop between you PCs and your Villain will become a personal demon for the PCs. Any time your Player-Characters hate someone that much (or for that matter, have any sort of powerful emotional state attached to someone), the NPC will be blazed into their minds (all the more vibrant and memorable if the Villain was a good character, as well as a good Villain). It will be much more powerful and satisfying to defeat a Villain who has already defeated the PCs on several occasions.

As with Neutrals, occasionally the best Villains are the ones who seem to be something they are not. Either posing as an Ally, or as someone totally unconnected to whatever mischief is afoot, this class of Villain will hide in plain sight until popping out at the moment of greatest impact.

These guides will hopefully help you to appreciate what it takes to make a good character, and with good characters comes good scenarios. The best inspiration is always what you see around you, either in books or film or the real world. Villains, Neutrals and Allies abound in the current events page of most newspapers; unfortunately there seem to be too many of the first, and not enough of the last. What it all boils down to is the creation of an emotional investment on the behalf of the PCs into the NPC you have presented, achieve this and you have a memorable character.

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## CONfessions (con't)

**2) If you receive any type of handwritten note, or anything specific to your work, take it as a compliment.**

Whether your reader jots down a single line or offers you pages of insight, this means that your story impressed them on some level. Editors do not get paid to offer free advice, so if they take the time to make notes, you know that they see something worthwhile in your writing. Take it for what it is, consider revising, and then submit it again (to the same editor).

**3) Learn how to write.**

I've mentioned this before, but many authors feel that they do not need to know the rules of grammar or punctuation, that their editors will fix those problems for them. Well, that is true, to a degree, but you have

to get an editor before you can force him to fix your mistakes, and they, like the rest of us, have no interest in making extra work for themselves. The better your writing, the more likely it will pass the army of readers who must approve it.

That's not to say that the rules of grammar can't be broken, but if you don't know when to use them, how can you know when to break them?

**4) Don't bother with an agent (yet).**

As a first time published author, you have no bargaining power. Whatever deal the publisher offers, take it. If it sounds crappy, it is, but too bad. If they want all of your subsidiary rights, give them away. If they want to offer you a small advance and a smaller percentage, take it. If they want to lock you into a multi-book deal... Well, in that case, get ready to do a little bargaining, but remember that they have the advantage, and you don't want to upset them too much.

Publishers stand to lose a lot of money on an author's first book. Thus, they want to get access to all the rights they can, so that maybe, just maybe, they'll break even. That's not to say you won't get a dime from subsidiary sales; standard contracts split subsidiaries 50/50. Make sure you read your contract thoroughly, but don't get too power-hungry.

After you've published a few books, you'll have a little more clout. At that point, an agent may be a more reasonable investment, and they might actually be willing to represent you. The best reason to get an agent is not to place your works, though they can help you do that; it's to negotiate your contracts. This is what they do for a living, so one can only guess that the good ones can do it well. But if you feel comfortable doing that yourself, why give someone 15% of your earnings?

**5) Earlier this year, Barnes and Noble Corp. announced that it will no longer stock books longer than 350 pages, unless those works are written by best-selling authors. Expect the other bookstores to follow suit.**

The rationale for this move is simple, so simple it makes my writer's blood boil: twice as many 350 page books can fit on the shelves as 700 page books. From a business standpoint, I can understand their problem. It coincides with publishers' hesitation to publish long works, which are far more expensive to produce and print than smaller titles.

## CONfessions (con't)

As a writer of epic fantasy, this move concerns me, as I know it concerns others. My books tend to write themselves, and I'm not really sure how much direct control I exert over the final product. Who am I to force my craft into a specific form, and why should I be bound by the constraints of the business world? The answer is, I shouldn't, and neither should you, but if you casually shrug off the concerns of the business world, don't expect to see your books lining the shelves of your local stores.

Now, this is not to say that all hope is lost. Barnes and Noble will still make longer books available for order at all of their stores, and they will still be available online as well. What this does mean is that new authors, now more than ever, will be responsible for marketing themselves, for making their name and their works visible to the reading public. Once that happens, and enough people start buying your books, then the bookstores will start stocking them again.

I asked Bill what could be done about this. His advice: write shorter books. When I suggested that writing shorter might not be as simple as it sounded, especially for my current series, he looked skeptical, but he suggested that I write a book as long as it needed to be, then split it in half, rework it a little, and publish it (or pitch it) in two parts. This seemed more reasonable.

For you writers out here, here are a few numbers to put things into perspective. Using easily readable leading and font size, a publisher can fit approximately 400-500 words per page in trade paper or hardback books. To meet Barnes and Noble's requirements, the manuscripts you submit should be no more than 160,000 words.

But I should warn you now, I sent a memo to Barnes and Noble, advising them that compared to 300 page books, three times more 100 page books can fit on their shelves. Bear that in mind when preparing your next submission.

### **6) Ingram no longer accepts books from small publishers.**

Ingram, the largest wholesaler to bookstores, no longer accepts books directly from small presses or self-publishers. They will accept titles from those independent presses that use distributors, but many small presses are hesitant to do so, as distributors require very restrictive agreements and demand 60-75% off the cover price of each book, a discount too steep to make many sales profitable.

This means that if you decide to use a small press, it may be even more difficult to get your books shelved in bookstores. Most mom-and-pop bookstores and small chains order exclusively from Ingram. Larger companies also order from Baker & Taylor, who does, at the moment, still work with small presses, but that may change in the future, now that Ingram has made the move. If it does happen, small presses will be effectively shut out of the bookstore market, unless bookstores themselves become more willing to buy directly from small presses.

### **7) Expect rejection. Expect frustration. Do NOT expect money.**

Rejection is a part of this business. A very big part. Do not let rejection discourage you.

Something like 80-90% of published authors hold full time jobs. Writing will become a full-time career for only a few of us. Do not enter this business for the money; do it because you love to write, and you want to share your thoughts with others. If the money comes, all the better.

### **8) Keep cover letters brief.**

Don't regale the reader with pages of accomplishments and long-winded explanations about how your story is better than everything else out there. Cover letters accompanying submissions should average three sentences, Bill tells me. A brief introduction to the title of the work, any *relevant* life experience that makes you an authority on the subject matter, and a thank you. Anything more than a paragraph will probably be ignored, and anything more than a sentence on how great you and your writing are will earn you a quick place in the narcissist's trashcan.

My conversations with Bill were very sobering, and they should serve as a warning to all. It is essential that writers understand the business they are entering from all aspects; I encourage you to skim through texts on publishing, editing, and even book selling (if such texts exist). The better you understand the business, the better you will be able to market yourself to the people you will be dealing with.

Don't let his advice turn you off to writing, though. Your ideas are still as valid as anyone's, and with patience, practice, and persistence, you will succeed. Even if you don't end up a best-selling author, even if your works influence only a handful of people, you are still a successful writer.