



The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Character Profiling (Part 2): Race to the Heart of the Matter

By Bret Funk

To make one's characters real, to make them enter a reader's heart, a writer must make them unique. Few readers want to read the same story retold a thousand different ways, and similarly, few readers want to see the same trite character types in the stories they read. Characters that too perfectly fit a mold quickly grow tiresome, while those who demonstrate individuality jump off the pages and into the imagination.

Through groups, a writer is able to highlight both a character's similarities and differences. On the macro level, a group demonstrates the physical and spiritual traits which bind its members together and make it different from other groups. Additionally, variation within a group shows individuality and can be a great tool in making one's world more realistic.

Hundreds of grouping methods exist, but the one most commonly used in speculative fiction is Race. Some Races are all but universal (Elf,

Human, Orc, Martian); others are more obscure (Efreet, Garun'ah, Draconian, Rigelian). No matter how often used, Races generally serve two purposes: to separate characters into distinct classes that readers can quickly identify, and to incite conflict. Pitting one Race against another or having a revolutionary idealist struggle against an entrenched orthodoxy serves as the focal point of many novels and the background to many more.

But what, exactly, is Race? Its primary

definition is "a population distinguished as a more or less distinct group by genetically transmitted physical characteristics." This definition closely matches the way Race is used in speculative fiction. Each group has a distinct genotype that determines appearance, attributes, and to a certain extent, behavior. Elves are typically tall, thin, pointy-eared, and long-lived; Orcs are stockier and uglier with nasty dispositions; Giants are, well, giant; and so on. Regardless of where the character lives and what he does, genes determine Race. An Elf raised in Elfville may act nothing like an Elf who grew up in Humantown, but no matter how 'human' the second Elf behaves, his neighbors will likely only see the ears and resent the fact that he'll outlive them by centuries. An Elf is an Elf.

Yet genetics alone do not a Race make, and the above definition is not inclusive enough; there's a cultural and sociological aspect integral to Race that it does not touch upon. Humantown Elf may try his best to blend in, but similarities in attitude between members of the same Race often exist even when their backgrounds are drastically different. This convention is not entirely groundless. If Humantown Elf has Elven parents, they may have come from Elfville and would have passed along the sum of their experiences and shared history to their offspring, which would, in turn, influence his own beliefs. Even if Humantown Elf is an orphan, genetics could still play a factor in his behavior. A predisposition toward claustrophobia might make him prefer the outdoors to the Humans' cramped housing, and an inherited intolerance to mutton may make him choose a vegetarian lifestyle despite his adopted family's love of lamb-chops.

Thus, the second definition of Race: "A group of people united or classified together

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The RPG Corner (V3.5): The Evils of Railroading

by Doug >!< Roper of EPIC Gaming

A key element that many beginning GM's may neglect to include enough of in their scenarios is choice. It sounds strange that players would demand a great deal of decision making when they have agreed to participate in a clearly scripted scenario crafted by an individual with a clear vision about where his adventure should begin and end, but they do. Game Masters need to be aware of this desire (and it may not be something a player ever articulates specifically) for freedom, and they need to accommodate their players at every opportunity. Forcing the characters to travel down a predestined path by providing no alternatives makes for rather boring games and unhappy players. This is called railroading, because the players are essentially trapped on the "rails" of the Game Master's plot, unable to escape except by abandoning the scenario altogether. Railroading strips the characters (and the players) of their freedom and changes the focus of the story from the characters themselves to the plot of the scenario. As we remember from past rants, the scenario needs to star the characters and little else.

Players hate feeling forced to do stuff, but they must concede that from time to time, their options will be limited or nonexistent. It is the job of the GM to make sure that even if he has a clear goal for the characters and only one way to get there, that he creates, at the very least, the *illusion* of free will. Creating the feeling that the players are choosing the paths their characters will take, even if there is only one path to go on, isn't as hard as it sounds.

The characters should first have a clear goal in mind, even if they have no idea how to achieve that goal. Without an ultimate end in mind, the PCs will wonder why they are being subjected to enemy encounters and traps and all the hardships that characterize RPGs. For example, if you have a character standing at one end of a corridor filled with crocodile pits, dart traps and deadfalls, the character will never run through all that just to see what is on the other side. If he doesn't know what's there, he's probably content to let it alone. If he knows, on the other hand, that the man who killed his father, married his mother and shot his dog is on the other side of that corridor, good luck trying to stop him. Personal goals and objectives make the PCs easier to coerce into plots and dangers. All that is required is the promise of the opportunity to achieve one of those goals and the PCs will go anywhere and do anything.

The GM also needs to plan for PC ingenuity. That is to say, there should rarely be one path to a goal. The GM will undoubtedly have one pivotal scene or encounter that the PCs must experience in order for

them to proceed with the scenario. There should never be just one way to get there, however, or the PCs may cast about for hours of real time (and who knows how much game-time) looking for the one lead that will take them where they need to go. Players can be surprisingly ingenious from time to time, and the GM should always be open to the PC's own plots and plans, and evaluate them fairly. If the PC's can find their own way to the important scene or encounter, then the GM should not take that away from them because it will circumvent some clever twist or snare that the GM devised for his Players. The Players don't know about the trap, so the GM can always insert it later or in another story, and the Players can congratulate themselves on "outsmarting" the GM, even though every GM knows such things are impossible.

I'd also suggest that the GM (within reason) allow the PCs to move at their own pace. Pushing them into plots before they are ready or allowing them to flounder for too long can create a lack of interest and a lack of trust in the GM on the part of the Players. There may be times when the Players are stumped, and have overlooked some important clue or haven't realized its importance. The GM must decide at some point whether or not he is going to help his Players to help their characters. I will say that such help should come before too much time has passed, but there should always be a price tag.

The same can be said of pushing too hard. Players will be able to tell when they are being led by the nose, and they will resist after a certain point. The GM has to be aware when he is throwing out too much information and pushing the characters forward too hard. The balance will be decided by the Players, and the GM should accommodate that balance by giving the PC's just enough information and letting them take their own time in acting on whatever they uncover. The GM knows that there is only one correct way to interpret the evidence the characters have found, but telling the characters that, in the hopes that they will get to the end of the scenario quicker, spoils the mystery and makes the game (in my opinion) far too easy.

This hasn't been a discussion about a good design element, but by being aware of these pitfalls you can design more open-ended scenarios and hopefully be more flexible and responsive to PC impetus, which will make the game a more communal endeavor, and, hopefully, increase everyone's enjoyment.

In the next column I'll wrap up this volume by addressing some loose ends and capping it all with my final thoughts on designing scenarios.

Dennis Lynch Interview (Part 3)

by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

[In his typical style, Dennis Lynch practically wrote his own interview responding to the budgetary and security questions I posed via email.]

Crotinger: *Denny, do you have a budget?*

Lynch: I usually spend around \$200 a month at Alter Ego on planned purchases. These are the orders from the "Previews" catalogue. That covers comics, magazines, books, some toys and occasional t-shirts. It's about \$50 per week. In addition, I subscribe to about *fifteen* different journals on topics from film to entertainment to stamp collecting to computers, etc. So there's another \$25 per month fee.

I always find other unusual items, especially on eBay. I do find that most items are offered more than once, so I don't feel compelled to get into bidding wars very often. I have bought many eBay items from overseas: Egypt, Australia, India, Belgium, Italy, Ireland, France, etc. I've had a perfect experience doing so, always getting nice items at reasonable costs, plus I have received many cool foreign stamps that way. A model airplane came from Saskatchewan and the box had over 30 different Canadian stamps on it, making it collectible, too!

I always am looking for other items everywhere I go: antique stores, malls, garage sales, etc. But it is harder to find things I am interested in, and newer things that are available, like Transformers toys, date from after my field of focus.

Crotinger: *In the last year, how much would you say you have spent?*

Lynch: \$3,500-4,000? More than is probably necessary, but I don't think I overpaid for any single item. I am more selective as I get older. Part of that is for storage bags and boxes and shelving, too.

Crotinger: *What is the most you've ever spent on something? Would you do it again?*

Lynch: I have bought a few books and stamps in the \$100 - \$150 range. I paid \$100 for the sheet music for *DER FUHREK'S FACE* once. (Note: This is a parody by Spike Jones which uses Donald Duck on the sheet music cover taken from the Disney cartoon, "Donald Duck in Nutziland" circa 1942.) My LP for the score from *BODY HEAT* was that much, too. I bought a collection of 400 LPs of film music and Broadway musical scores once that was about \$750, but I turned much of that around instantly to help pay for part of the house.

I don't regret ever buying something. I have regretted passing things up. Those losses will eat at

you until you either give up on an item because it's too expensive, or redouble your effort to find another identical item.

I've been really fortunate a couple of times, buying things for which no market existed, while they were cheap. I've been able to watch several collecting fields develop around them since. I still have the items so there may be a nest egg there.

I've also seen the markets drop out of some things, too. LPs dropped off when CDs became available. Oddly, there has been a steady increase in prices over the last few years for older records, partly for the warmth of analogue sound, and partly for the cover art. Covers used to be big enough to look at, to read. Nobody collects CDs that way.

My mother's persistent response has always been, "If it's worth so much, why don't you sell it?" I don't collect to be rich. I collect because the ownership is fun, the use of the product is fun, the learning from the product has value, and because the chase is so exhilarating. If you are actively looking, you might find what you want, or you might find something completely unexpected. I have an antique foot pump organ because I stopped at an estate sale looking for comic books.

I usually don't have a good business sense about things like this. I did recommend to a friend once to buy 20th Century Fox in the spring of 1977. He bought a bunch at \$8/share and sold it 2 months later at \$40/share, after *STAR WARS* came out! Unfortunately, I had no money of my own to invest at the time.

I do keep a computerized listing of the various collections that I can carry with me. It is divided into Magazines, comics, recordings, books, toys, etc. As I collect, I add notations about new purchases or new items I want. Every year or so, I go through and do the data entry updates and reprint the lists for future searches. I've become pretty proficient at spreadsheets and database program utilization.

[Recently, Denny showed me his latest find at a library book sale in a neighboring city. For a tiny investment, he acquired several copies of a beautifully illustrated hard cover book-featuring Superman. Within a few days, every copy of Mythology: The DC Art of Alex Ross, (c2003/35\$) was sold or spoken for. His profit was well worth the search and travel time.]

Crotinger: *Have you ever had concerns about someone stealing your collection?*

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The Writer's Block: Pro Versus Amateur

by Charles Gramlich

A week or so ago I had a flame war online with a "pro" writer. I'd actually consider him more of a pro as a personality than as a writer, but he does make some of his money from writing, as well as from TV appearances, talks about famous dead writers, and literary tours. I took issue with his arrogance and we proceeded to bash each other mercilessly back and forth until we ran out of insults.

One thing that kept coming up was his reference to me as an "amateur," which started me thinking about the differences between pros and amateurs when it comes to writing. What are those differences? And, in the writing game, is being a pro necessarily better than being an amateur?

The terms professional and amateur each have two different meanings. One definition of professional is of someone who is highly skilled at what they do. Another definition is of someone who is "paid" for what they do, especially if they make their living at it. Peyton Manning is a professional in both senses of the word. So is Stephen King. On the other hand, the guy who fixed my roof a few years ago was paid for it but he certainly wasn't highly skilled judging from the number of leaks we have.

The two meanings of amateur are exactly the reverse of those for professional. One use is of someone who has little or no skill in what they are attempting. Another use is of someone who is not paid, even though they might be talented. When it comes to singing, I am the rankest of rank amateurs in both senses of the word. My singing takes the term caterwauling to new lows, and no one, *ever*, has offered to pay me to sing. But there are plenty of people who sing beautifully in church choirs all over the world, people who are highly practiced and highly skilled but who do not get paid.

I make my living as a teacher. That's my "profession." But I also write, and most of the time I sell what I write for money, even though it's not enough to pay my bills. Am I professional or an amateur? Well, I certainly don't make my living at writing, so in that sense I'm an amateur.

I also write a lot of things for free, either because someone has asked me for it or because it's something I just want to write. In this way, too, I'm an amateur. But since I don't *have* to make money from writing I can afford to do what I want.

However, whether I'm writing for free or for pay, I still require the same level of commitment from myself,

the same level of hard work. I refuse to let myself "toss" something off just because I'm not getting paid for it. Only in this way can I consider myself to be a professional.

The elements of professionalism that are important to me in the field of writing have little to do with "being paid" or with "making my living." (Although I certainly like money as much as the next person.) They have to do with the attitude and approach that I take to a piece of writing.

I know "professional" writers of both fiction and non-fiction who have turned out absolute junk because they were under a tight deadline or because they *had* to make a sale to pay their rent. I don't condemn them for that; all of us have to feed our families and ourselves. I just don't want to be in that position myself. I want to take professional pride in the *quality* of my work, not in the paycheck I get from it.

In writing, it's not necessarily true that the "pro" inevitably produces better work than the "amateur." In fact, the talented amateur who has worked hard at his or her craft and who can afford to take the time to perfect a story or article can often create superior prose. And from among such "amateurs" comes the next generation of pros. Even Stephen King was an amateur once upon a time.

Definitions of Science Fiction

Science Fiction is a controlled way to think and dream about the future. An integration of the mood and attitude of science (the objective universe) with the fears and hopes that spring from the unconscious. Anything that turns you and your social context, the social you, inside out. Nightmares and visions, always outlined by the barely possible.

– Gregory Benford

KeyCOMMENTary: Tripping the Lite Fantastic

by garrie keyman

Living the Future and its Effect on Fantasy as Genre

This month, following my recent hiatus from the *Illuminata*, I'll get back into the game by tossing out for consideration a philosophical query about the nature of speculative fiction as it relates to the era in which it was written.

In other words, as yesteryear's science fiction becomes today's reality, how – if at all -- is the scope of the *fantastic* being affected? Let's start by going back in time.

When Jules Verne (1828 - 1905), often considered the father of science fiction, penned his visionary fiction, airships (*Around the World in Eighty Days*), submarines (*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*) and spacecraft (*Journey to the Moon*) were yet to be invented. Verne lived in a time that – by today's standards, one might say – writers did not need to stretch their imaginations very far to touch upon truly outlandish notions that were easily classifiable as *fantastic*. In Verne's early days, even the principals behind Louis Pasteur's germ theory or those underlying the forthcoming inventions of Bell and Edison were yet to be firmly established.

Once upon a time, science fiction was a field of gaping potentiality.

Does the unique age in which contemporary sci-fi writers live, then, make the task of touching upon genuinely fantastic elements for story an *easier* task than it was for Verne, or one considerably more challenging? After all, in our lifetime most of us have already witnessed more scientific realizations of what was once pure fantasy than have all prior generations combined. Progress – at least from a technological perspective – is traveling at warp speed.

A prime example of what I am talking about can be extracted from the creator of the *Prime Directive*: the communicators we watched James T. Kirk and his *Enterprise* crew use in the 1960's are in our hands today as the photo-ready GPS-equipped folding cell phones we tote around with near-unblinking awe as if to say, *Of course Gene Roddenberry knew; who didn't?*

Thus, when one decade's sci-fantasy becomes the commonplace technology of the next, what remains to startle the imagination? Has the quixotic lure of the incredible devolved into mere prescience of next year's technological trends?

Regardless what view any of you might take in such debate (and regardless of the fact that I raised the question in the first place), I'm here to say that I

sit squarely atop the fence on this matter. Teetering to neither side, loudly I proclaim the issue moot.

The debate is moot because, truth be told, what's best about speculative fiction of any ilk is now - - and always has been -- what's best about *all* story matter, to wit: the characters and their relationships. Prime speculative fiction isn't popular because of the elements it contains that classify it as genre, but rather because of the elements it contains that qualify it as great fiction.

In the end, no matter in what galaxy they live or what technology they use, characters need to be engaging enough for us to want to go on reading about (or watching) them and involving ourselves in their dilemmas and adventures. The magic isn't about dreaming up untried technologies – that's just setting. The magic remains in the real-time unfolding of human (or alien) interaction.

In short, great characters (and therefore great stories) span the time-space continuum.

Go ahead and try a little experiment. Take characters you've either created (if you're a writer) or those you've cherished (if you're a reader or perchance a sci-fi channel fan) and snatch them wholesale from their usual environs. Now, transplant them. Go ahead. Place them in brand new surroundings. You may wish to provide them with a whole new set of subordinate characters; you'll definitely want to dress them in an alternative wardrobe. Can the story still work?

If it can, you've discovered an example of winning characters ensconced in durable relationships that fans will care about. Shows like *Star Trek* began playing with just such a premise decades ago: Kirk, Spock, McCoy and Chekov at the O.K. Corral, for example. In some cases, the premise of an entire series was based on changing environs (*The Time Tunnel*; *Quantum Leap*) in which *only* the main characters and their relationships remained steadfast.

Alas, the point I'm trying to impart in my usual cumbersome way is this: it is unimportant whether the technology used in speculative fiction is barely beyond our reach or light-years away in terms of realization. The charm of speculative fiction still hinges upon the same solid storytelling prowess necessary for success in any genre. Whittled down, the speculative elements are merely the clothes in which the tale happens to be dressed.

Look at it this way: even the circle in which you run would still function just as it does now, regardless

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Reviews

The Knight (Wizard, Knight, 1)

Gene Wolfe



Tor, 2004

\$25.95, Hardcover, 430 pgs

ISBN: 0-765-30989-0

Review by D. L. Parker

I don't know how many readers of this column are themselves writers: judging from the number of entries in our story contest, maybe a lot of you. It doesn't matter whether you're published yet or not; you're still a writer if you're doing it. There are

probably plenty of you out there like me, working hard on *The Novel*. In my case, that's a futuristic noir mystery-thriller, combining elements of two genres I love: science fiction and mysteries, the hardboiled kind.

Recently, in the spirit of background research, I caught up with a famous detective that I'd never really gotten acquainted with before... Ross MacDonald's Lew Archer. I wasn't quite sure I was doing the right thing at first. Would such a heavy dose of another writer influence my own style too much? Would my prose sound too derivative under the recent digestion of three Archer novels and a collection of Archer short stories? But when I reached the short story collection, a comment by the author himself reassured me. He noted that early in his own career, he himself was very influenced by Chandler (a writer I can almost quote verbatim) and Hammet. He commented it took him time to find his own voice, and reading those early short stories, I could see what he meant. But today Lew Archer stands tall on his own gumshoes right next to Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade (I'd add Travis McGee to the Mystery Mt. Rushmore list, but that's another coffee-shop argument). In any case, I thought, maybe it's part of the learning curve for any new writer: out of those writers we admire and ingest, from our own nature and our own experiences, from trial and error, we somehow blend our own brew.

But I don't think the process of influence ever really stops. When I picked up Gene Wolfe's new tale, *The Knight: Book One of the Wizard Knight*, there was a dedication to Yves Meynard, author of *The Book of Knights*, a story I previously reviewed in this column. Gene Wolfe's new story re-uses a key idea of that earlier work: a boy becomes a physical man instantly, but remains the child within. From there the two stories diverge unrecognizably from each other, but they share that one key idea, as well as a spiritual and emotional exploration of what truly constitutes a knight. Gene Wolfe, one of the acknowledged masters of the fantasy and horror genres, found inspiration at

the fountain of another writer just as we novices do. It was a discovery that made my day, I must admit.

In *The Knight*, a young boy from America is transported into a universe of magic. There is much that feels Wagnerian in this new realm, and any fan of the Ring will recognize the layered worlds of sky-father and hero and fire-breathing dragon and Norn. The wandering boy who is named Able of the High Heart by the old woman who spins the threads of fate is hired to guide a knight, Sir Ravd. But he is lured away by a queen of the fairy Aelf, inhabitants of Aelfrice, the world below. There, for her own pleasure, she causes the boy to become a man, and he returns, like any victim of fairy, remembering little, and finding years have passed in the upper world of man.

Though Able is adult of body he is still no more than the boy inside. But he has been knighted by the deadly queen he scarcely remembers yet worships, and though he has no horse, no sword, and no liege lord, his queen of air and darkness has knighted him with her own sword and bade him, like the doomed hero of the Ring, to seek a magic sword that will be proved against a dragon. His quest will take him over and under the sea, into a tower in the sky, into the realm of the giants, and at last, on the wings of a griffin and the kiss of a Valkyrie, into the sky-father's castle.

I need not belabor the quality of Gene Wolfe's writing for those who have read his previous works. His heroes are never ordinary, I might say almost never normal men, and Able is no exception. I remember the jolt I felt when I first read Wolfe's *Shadow of the Torturer* series: that frisson that occurs when one realizes that the speaker whose thoughts echo in one's mind is in fact a very, very strange man, and not someone that one would really like to meet in his flesh either. Able, who worships the queen of the Moss Aelf and at one point offers to kill a child for her sake, is another eerie but thoroughly real Wolfe protagonist. The book itself is a complex spin of myth, magic, Wolfe's usual moral and religious themes, and it bears reading more than once to grasp its subtleties.

The most jarring note in the story was the childish American boy slant (gee that's swell sort of thing) interleaved with Wolfe's more normal poetic writing style. It was unusually annoying to find in something written by this author, a little like reading *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* all over again (and I don't know about the rest of you, but by the end of that one, I was getting more than a little weary of that chipper Yankee). The boy-in-a-man's-body theme worked much better in Meynard's *The Book of Knights* because that boy was a man of his own world, and a serious, direct child at that. His innocent purpose translated naturally into knighthood. Able is not a boy of the world he inhabits,

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neither is he, in many ways, what I would call innocent. The scattered Americanisms stick out like a bump in the floor that the reader keeps hitting a toe on. It's obvious why the author inserted such passages, but I really wish he had not. I suppose I may see in Book Two just what was the value-added of the American-boy-in-exile spin, but I don't find it here.

I look forward to reading the sequel, *The Wizard Knight*, as soon as (and I mean as soon as) it comes out. In the meantime, buy, borrow, or check out a story that will reward you with multiple readings and a fantastical journey with an eerily strange knight. Enjoy!

Rite of Conquest

Judith Tarr



Roc, Oct 2004

\$16.00, 384 pp.

ISBN: 0451460022

Review by Harriet Klausner

In 1047, William the Duke of Normandy tries to ignore the magic that flows through his veins as he battles pretenders and contenders who wish to replace him. The old magic thrives in Normandy with

beneficial spirits who want to help mankind. Powerful sorceress Mathilda, daughter of the Count of Flanders, is sent to the French King's court where William has come after winning a decisive battle abetted by King Henry.

When William meets Mathilda, she lectures him on the use of his magic so that he does not inadvertently hurt himself or others. Fearing the magic that is the antithesis of Christianity, William flees to his duchy, but cannot forget Mathilda. He proposes marriage and she accepts. They may forge a dynasty across the Channel where the Church has thrown out the magic, but William must first defeat King Harold.

The story of William's rise to power, consolidation of that power, and his marriage to Mathilda are part of the history books, but also cleverly interwoven into a spellbinding historical fantasy that once again shows why Judith Tarr is the mistress of the sub-genre. Her unique slant on the events leading to 1066 makes for a fun and fascinating read. The use of magic as a benign tool while the battles provide a more mundane (though interesting) look at William's claiming of the throne with church approval makes for a fascinating juxtaposition. *Rite of Conquest* is a definite keeper.

The Dark Tower (Dark Tower, VII)

Stephen King



Scribner, Sep 2004

\$35.00, Hardback

ISBN: 1880418622

Review by Harriet Klausner

In spite of shifting time and place, Roland the Last Gunfighter knows he is nearing his destination and thus the final confrontation of

his quest. The center of the time-place continuum, *The Dark Tower* beckons just beyond the horizon. However, as he has learned through his dangerous journey time is not linear and his path still has detours and setbacks as Roland and his ka-tet battle vampires in New York City's Dixie Pig.

That takes a bite out of his compatriots, but Roland knows the real adversary is Mordred, Mia's offspring from him and the were-spider Crimson King. Mordred, the essence of pure evil, confronts Roland to stop him from completing the mission. Though experienced with killing his own blood, Roland has no prayer against his superpowerful antagonist. As members of his ka-tet fall, Roland needs the help of a talented, somewhat befuddled individual to attain any chance of victory. Will Roland realize his necessity in time, and will this being leave his personal tower to fight alongside the last gunfighter?

Over two decades in the making, the climax to thought-provoking Dark Tower series is an exciting epic fantasy that ties together much of the previous novels in an intriguing ending that readers will either love or hate, but not feel indifferent toward. The key cast members remain consistent to their personalities, especially Roland as the silent hero (from the 1960s spaghetti westerns). The story line moves at a frantic pace still leaping about in time and place until "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (Robert Browning's poem) for the final unification of Stephen King's opus.

Reviews

The Year's Best Science Fiction

Gardner Dozois, Editor



St. Martin's Griffin, 2004
\$19.95, Trade Paper, 665 pgs
ISBN: 0-312-32478-2
Review by D. L. Parker

It's when I picked up Gardner Dozois's Twenty-First Annual Collection and my arm sagged under the weight that I realized the speculative fiction genre must be doing well – *quite* well

– in 2003. The book runs to 665 pages, with an eleven-page list of “Honorable Mentions” that *didn't* make it into the anthology. If I doubted the sheer bandwidth of the genre, reading Dozois's very intriguing summary of the genre in the introduction to the anthology stilled all doubts. Science fiction, fantasy, and horror are still alive, folks, and doing quite well.

Dozois's 2003 Summation was in fact one of the real treats of the book. Dozois covers the state of the union for speculative fiction presses, small and large, and notes trends in the publishing business (a rash of Young Adult and the so-called “Paranormal Romance” lines, for example... and I'll have more to say about the latter in a future review). He covers the magazine market, which was apparently bad overall and not just in speculative fiction, and lists subscription addresses for those who are interested in supporting the genre with some much-needed hard cash. He addresses the wild world of the Internet (e-zines), a truly heroic effort for a medium so volatile and broad, and even touches on conventions, general interest sites, and just about everything Science Fiction and Fantasy related (the horror genre is not really covered here, as the editor himself notes). Both readers and wannabe writers will find his summation extremely useful. Great job, Mr. Dozois! And we'll forgive you – this year *only* – for not mentioning the *Illuminata* at all.

So, now to the stories, which are a very mixed bag indeed, with a few real gems, a lot of one-theme thin forgettables, and a mix of both fantasy, science-fiction, and (light) horror. Let's get the worst out of the way first. Some of the stories are extremely thin, and don't speak well of the overall quality of this

year's offerings just by their inclusion. I wavered between chastising Mr. Dozois for including such weak efforts in a “Best” anthology and thanking him for offering such an overflowing cornucopia of reading on the other. Let's see, do we really need that thin story about the homosexual who manages to birth babies in his butt cheeks? Or, to give heterosexuals equal dissing, the masturbatory adolescent offering that opens the anthology? (It does have the most explicit sex in it, which, if I were a cynic, I would suspect to be the main reason for its starting position, but of course, that's just me). Well, there's a simple solution to the problem of those stories that don't hit your fancy: turn to the next one, and at 665 pages, there's plenty of *next* ones.

The two stories that proved to be my personal favorites were lost in the middle of the anthology, so I want to single them out for readers who might otherwise give up after wading through some of the slimmer offerings. First, *do not miss* reading John C. Wright's *Awake in the Night*. The story was inspired by William Hope Hodgson's *The Night Land*, and I have yet to find another writer who comes close to reproducing the genuine strangeness and thrill of that unique novel. There are few stories that I read that I rate worth a second or third perusal, but this is one. It's definitely one of the best horror/fantasy stories I've read in many years.

My other favorite was more of a “hard” science fiction story. Don't miss Vernor Vinge's *The Cookie Monster* either. The story combines technology and human factors – and humor – wonderfully. This is the kind of story that makes me a fan: innovative ideas, humanity, and a bonus of wit. Tied for Grand Prize with what is still my personal favorite, *Awake in the Night*...

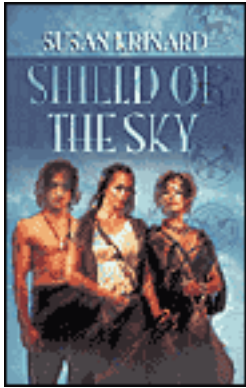
Honorable mentions should also go to Paul di Filippo's *And the Dish Ran Away With the Spoon*, a sly and very funny story; Nancy Kress's *EJ-ES*; and John Varley's murder mystery *The Bellman* as well. Readers will be sure to find others to their personal taste in Dozois's vast offering. And at least two of the stories are definite “must reads”, so *don't* fail to do it.

Thanks again, Mr. Dozois! And my sincere admiration for the incredible amount of reading *you* must have done in 2003 to winnow this collection.

Reviews

Shield of the Sky

Susan Krinard



Luna, Oct 2004
\$12.95, Trade Paper, 400 pgs.
ISBN 0373802110
Review by Harriet Klausner

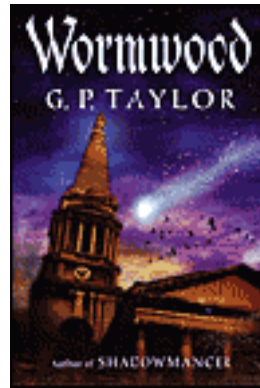
The free People of the Shield of the Sky are all women, a self-sustaining community that only uses males to get pregnant so their community will have fresh blood. The chosen ones mate with the Aliuri, shapeshifters that are children of the Deva spirits of the sky, water, and earth. Rhenia was not called but went up to the mountain anyway where a shapeshifter permanently scarred her cheek. When Rhenia came down from the mountain she was sent into exile until the powers of the Aliuri weaken and many of the Devas disappear, leaving the Free People without any protection.

Rhenia is recalled and assigned to find out what happened to the Devas and the Aliuri. Along the way she meets the seer Tahvo and she rescues the Aliuri Cian. They cross paths with Qustus; together they make Four, a fighting unit that travels to Karchedon, the heart of the evil Arrihidaean Empire where the worship of the Stone is at its strongest. Each member of the quartet has a different reason to go to Karchedon, but when they arrive, they discover it is their destiny to destroy the evil entity that is in the stone which seeks to bring all mankind under its domination.

Shield of the Sky is epic fantasy unlike other works this author has written as the shapeshifting romances that made Susan Krinard is only a small start of this work. Four individuals are on a quest to destroy the stone and bring down the empire; although they doubt their worthiness, all of them agree to play their part even if it means their death. Character driven but with plenty of action scenes, this romantic fantasy will give the reader hours of enjoyable pleasure.

Wormwood

G.P. Taylor



Putnam, Sep 2004
\$17.99, Hardcover, 272 pgs.
ISBN: 0399242570
Review by Harriet Klausner

Dr. Sabian Blake is an astronomer and a student of the kabala. He is euphoric when the tome *Nemorensis* mysteriously falls into his hands. Inside are prophecies of the future. It says that the comet *Wormwood* is coming and "many will die from its bitterness". Sabian calculates when the comet will appear in the sky, but when it actually arrives night becomes day until the world is briefly engulfed in total darkness.

Simon wants the honor of being recognized for discovering the comet. He discusses this with a friend, but is overheard by his servant Agetta, who steals from him whenever she can. Agetta meets with Lady Flamberg, a woman who is more than she seems. Flanders arranges for Agetta to steal the *Nemorensis*, which the servant does. The forces of good and evil mobilize as the comet comes closer to earth. If evil wins, the comet will strike the planet. Only the common thief servant Agetta can decide the fate of humanity.

This work is targeted for young adults, but older readers will gain much pleasure also especially those who enjoy the *Chronicles of Narnia* and Lewis Carroll. G.P. Taylor is a wonderful storyteller who makes the unbelievable seem real while combining science fiction and fantasy into an action-packed yet character driven tale as the two key players learn life lessons. Sabian discovers that wanting power at the expense of his humanity makes him a magnet for dark forces while Agetta finds out that thievery is not the best way to survive especially since those same malevolent souls claim her as one of them. *Wormwood* is a fabulous urban fantasy with strong sci fi elements.

Reviews

It's Good to be the King A Review of *Bubba Ho-tep*



A movie directed by Don Coscarelli, and a short story by Joe R. Lansdale.

Review by Sherri Craig

Every once in a while, something just reaches out and grabs the attention of the masses in a way nothing else has ever done. It is something

that a reader or an audience member just looks at and says, "What the hell is this?!" It is something that is so different, so totally unique, that it must be appreciated for its creativity alone. *Bubba-Ho-tep* is such a thing. It was originally a short story by the crass and hilarious Joe R. Lansdale, but did not get universal fame until Don Coscarelli took it and made a movie out of it, and even then, it did not reach its cult classic status until it was released on video in early 2004.

The story is the legendary stuff of late night, half drunk, everyone sitting around the room telling "What if" tales. In a nutshell, Elvis is alive and old (he'd swapped places with an Elvis impersonator back at the height of his career, and it was that person who'd died). He's living in a nursing home in Texas, which is haunted by a mummy in a ten-gallon hat. With the help of an elderly, black JFK, Elvis decides to save the nursing home from this "Bubba Ho-tep."

With such an outlandish plot, this book could not be anything other than a cult classic when it became a movie. Who better to get to play a geriatric Elvis in a cult classic than the enigmatic Bruce Campbell? It was a role he was born to play, and he pulled it off with style. The wonderful Ozzie Davis plays JFK, and is the perfect sidekick to Campbell's Elvis.

The movie was based on a short story, so, of course, there needed to be parts added to make the movie into a feature length film. However, the screenplay is remarkably faithful to the book. The additions flowed very well and were unobtrusive to the story. With the plot the director was working with, it could have easily snowballed into a cheesy

"B" movie, but the Coscarelli loved this story, and this came out in the movie.

Lansdale, as his fans know, is not afraid to say anything. In "Bubba Ho-tep," his obscenity-filled metaphors are truly a work of art. The terminology may not be for the squeamish, but the reader needs only remember where the story is set. Nursing homes are all about body fluids and bodily functions, regardless of what the general public chooses to believe. These metaphors translate well to the screen via Campbell's interior dialogue. In the beginning of the story, Elvis does not leave his bed and there is much that is conveyed to the audience through these interior dialogues.

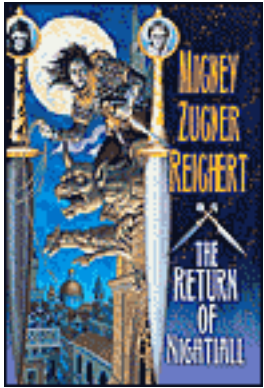
One of the movie's best features is that it is genuinely funny throughout. Once again, with this plot, it would be easy to fall into "B" movie slapstick, but this movie masterfully avoids that trap. Part of the reason that this is accomplished is that the characters themselves know that the situation is ridiculous, yet with heroic determination, they carry on. Elvis cracking his hip while taunting the mummy with his kung-fu movies was just one of those scenes that had the audience howling.

The story, though zany and off the wall, still contains within it a universal truth that speaks to readers and viewers. It shows the helplessness of the elderly, and the fears that this helplessness causes. The issues Elvis raises in his dialogues are meaningful, and it is his and JFK's overcoming of this helplessness that truly makes them the heroes in this story. The act of destroying the mummy is symbolic of these two elderly men getting their dignity back.

Oddly, this story touches a diverse audience. Elvis fans will enjoy Campbell's spot on impersonation and the various trivial details. Older people will like the theme of empowerment, and the younger generation will just get a kick out of it for its campy humor. It is just as popular among the academics as it is with the convention goers. This is just a fun film. It is not a kids' movie, the language and themes are a bit too strong, but it an experience that will stay with the viewer for a while, and it is addictive in that once people have seen it, they simply must share it with someone else. Both the short story and the movie are well worth the time.

Reviews

The Return of Nightfall Mickey Zucker Reichert



Daw, Sep 2004
\$24.95, Hardcover, 464 pp.
ISBN: 075640218
Review by Harriet Klausner

Once he was known as *Nightfall*, a man feared by sane people. Now he is the Lord Chancellor Advisor to the King of Alyndar. To his surprise, Sudian as he is now

known, likes King Edward and even regards the monarch as a friend. The King and Nightfall journey to Schiz to meet Burke Varasch so that Edward can make restitution for breaking out of prison after vowing to his jailer that he would reside there until matters involving his daughter were resolved.

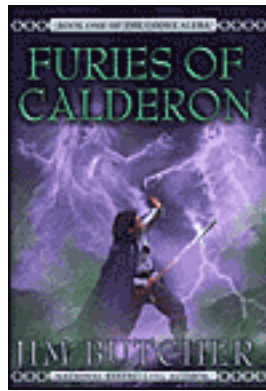
Before they meet with the aristocrat, Nightfall assists a mage in finding out whether a child has a natal talent. When he returns to the inn where he left his monarch, Nightfall finds dead guards and the king missing. Thinking Edward is held hostage for ransom, Nightfall returns to Alyndar where the King's Council proclaim him a murdering traitor responsible for the death of King Edward. He is incarcerated, but escapes with the help of Captain Volkmeir, pledging his life to find and free his friend.

Nightfall is one of the best antiheroes in years as he is baseborn and spent much of his life as a feared master criminal until he befriended the king and fell in love with Lady Kelryn. They brought about his redemption by seeing beneath the criminal outer layer to the honorable decent soul inside. The terrific action is fast-paced hooking the audience from the start, but the heart of this novel is the characters who keep readers riveted to learn what is happening to each of the significant players as Mickey Zucker Reichert proves this author is a first class world-building fantasist.

“Brainpower is the scarcest commodity and the only one of real value.”

– Robert Heinlein

Furies of Calderon Jim Butcher



Ace, Oct 2004
\$23.95, Hardback, 448 pp.
ISBN: 0441011993
Review by Harriet Klausner

The realm of Alera has been at peace for centuries, having pushed the barbarian hordes back behind the borders into lands that the realm does not claim. Yet for its entire

serene surface, civil war appears imminent unless one of the high lords manages to become First Lord by ousting the aging and heirless Gaius Sextus from power. So far, the First Lord has refused to name his replacement.

Amara is unprepared when her mentor Fidelias asks her help in overthrowing the First Lord. When she refuses to aid his quest, he tries to torture her into giving him the response he needs in order to make an assassination attempt. The student uses magic to learn what is going on and escape. Next, the First Lord sends Amara to Calderon Valley on the outskirts of the realm where she learns Fidelias meets with his mercenaries and the Marat, the barbarians who killed the First Lord's son. They overrun the valley to persuade people that the empire is crumbling and new leadership is needed to save Alera.

In Alera almost everyone has at least one elemental spirit to aid them in their daily lives, especially in times of danger. The few without an elemental are considered freaks. In that environs Jim Butcher has created an epic fantasy reminiscent of Tolkien and Brooks, yet it has an originality of its own. Book one of Codex Alera is an enchanting and riveting work due to the ordinary people (mundane in this realm) fighting to do the right thing; ironically the villain believes he is doing the right thing too. Mr. Butcher provides a deep saga filled with a deep cast in which ordinary citizens must save the realm.

Original Fiction

In addition to her great talent as a reviewer, the *Illuminata's* very own Danielle Parker is an accomplished short story writer. The following selection, "Rock Bottom and Up" is one of her many works, and one that we hope you will enjoy as much as we did. Danielle has the following to say about her story:

I wrote "Rock Bottom and Up" after finding a vampire fiction magazine on the Internet. The idea of a whole magazine devoted to vampire stories got me to thinking, WHAT could one do that was fresh with that

tired old genre? "Rock Bottom and Up" was one of the results. The story also touches, lightly and hopefully in good humor, on themes of diversity and tolerance. I hope readers enjoy Tootsie's fight for respect! After all, it's what's inside that counts... even if the outside is fanged. Enjoy!

P. S. Oh...and that vampire e-zine I wrote both stories for? It returned both unread three months later with a generic "Not Accepting Submissions" enclosure. Such is the life of a writer! :)

Rock Bottom and Up By Danielle Parker

Thursday at the bar in the *Nosferato's Nook* might as well have been Old Timer's Night Out.

By about two in the morning, after six pints of the red stuff sold by your average street derelict hoping for more booze, I was feeling worse than usual. It didn't help that from my perch on the last barstool of the row I could see almost all the usual crowd. I mean, after seventeen years of the same old, same old it starts to bore even a Vampire... The view hadn't changed since the Flamingo first flashed rhinestones. I was sick of it.

There was Frank, Francisco Monteverdi, I mean, at the other end of the barstools – he's the little guy in the funny clothes. It's too bad diet, not to mention dentistry, was so bad in 17th century Spain. And those pox scars, well, I guess he'll have to live with them forever now. Let's see... Becky was nattering on about some Cause as usual. You'd like her. For a vampire, Becky is about as sweet as we get – she matriculated to the immortal Undead in the 60s and can't seem to give up flower power skirts and off-the-shoulder peasant blouses.

Ugg, on the other hand, scares even me sometimes. He can't tell us when he earned his fangs, but given his sloping brow and the pretty impressive dentistry he must have developed as a breather, we suspect Stone Age – maybe even Neanderthal. And his buddy, the fellow who looks just like Pee Wee on the other side? Well, I haven't had the heart to tell Pinkie that bow ties and striped pants haven't been in style for eighty years, unless one's part of a barbershop quartet.

Yes, it was a Happy Hour like any other of the thousand and one I'd spent here. Except for one thing. Wilbur wasn't there.

Now, you wouldn't expect a proper gentleman from the high Victorian era and a former high-stepper on the Tropicana's cabaret floor to be friends, but Wilbur was my pal. Let's say I've always liked kind gentlemen, and all kidding aside, Wilbur was the genuine article. And who else was there to talk to, anyway? I couldn't even carry on a conversation with Frank, he was such a died-in-the-short-pants chauvinist, Becky was an artsy idealist, and Ugg and Pinkie – well, let's not go there. If it hadn't been for Wilbur, I'd have gone starkers long ago.

"No, he didn't call in, Tootsie." Artie mopped up the stray red spots off the countertop and pursed his lips. "He hasn't missed a night in seventeen years. 'Specially since you joined us, honey." Artie gave me his well-practiced lascivious wink and topped up my sinking pint. "Come on, stop worrying. The next one's on the house. Wilbur's probably just hung-over. He told me he'd found a new source. Probably the blood's too rich for him at his age."

Strange, he hadn't mentioned it to me. That wasn't like Wilbur either. I drained my free drink, thinking about it, and set it back down with a shudder. "Come on, Artie, you still buying Red Cross rejects for your bar supply? Didn't I tell you what I was going to do to you if you served me eau de hobo one more time? Even if it's free." I leaned across the counter and fixed him with my mesmerizing stare. He giggled.

"I love it when you do that, Tootsie. You must have been an eye-popper in your day."

It was no use. I gave up and scowled at Frank instead. Ever since the vaccine was discovered, we vampires hadn't been respected. It was bad enough to learn a microorganism related to leprosy – leprosy, mind

Con't on page 13

Original Fiction

Rock Bottom (con't)

you! – caused vampirism. But after the general population got inoculated, the cachet went away entirely. I still remember how sexy, suave, and sinister I thought Bernie was when he seduced me the night I became a vampire. When your intended victim thinks of you as one sick Mama instead, it just doesn't have the same effect.

"Anyone seen Wilbur?" I said loudly to the room in general.

Pinkie stopped adjusting his bow tie and shook his head. Ugg made his characteristic sound. Becky, of course, instantly abandoned her latest Cause for the new one... I was almost sorry I'd set her off.

"It's not like him." Her big blue eyes widened, and she looked worried. "Do you think something happened to him?"

Frank sneered in his broken English, "'E iz vampire. What could 'appen to 'eem?"

"Shut up, Frank," I said. It was just about my automatic response to Francisco, I'm afraid. I was 5'11" off my stilettos to Frank's 5'5", and he hated me too. "I think you're right for once, Becky... Don't let it go to your head too much. Wilbur hasn't missed a night in seventeen years."

I had everyone's attention by now. Pinkie creased his brow (which was dead white, of course, but he wouldn't let us change his name). "Maybe we should go check on him," he suggested doubtfully.

"You're right, pinstripes. I think I'm going to do just that." I got to my feet and dumped my coinage out on the countertop. "Thanks for the swill, Artie."

"I'm closing up," he said, squinting at the clock on the wall. "Want some company?"

After that somehow we all ended up in Artie's decrepit, original Beetle, with Pinkie and Becky sitting on Ugg's knees and Frank, sulky as a pinched crab, on mine. With Ugg in there, I'm not sure how that sputtering contraption got moving, but we bumped and backfired through the night until we made Wilbur's. There was no light on, naturally – Wilbur lives in a moldering Victorian mansion that he's too poor to fix up, and of course none of us are rich. We can't work days, and the disease thing still bothers a lot of potential employers. Wilbur was probably saving on his electrical bill like the rest of us... the only folks in Vegas without neon at night. No wonder we were regarded as weird.

Artie got out and stood squinting at the falling post on the porch. "Cheerful sort of place," he said. "Hey, any of you got a light? One of us can still break a neck, you know."

I tossed Frank off my lap, got out, turned on the porch light and banged on the door. No answer. The rest of the crew came up and stood awkwardly around me. Even Frank was starting to look a little interested by now, and Becky was on the edge of having nervous fits. I had to agree with her. It wasn't like Wilbur not to answer the door for his old friends.

So we went in uninvited. Vampires never bother to lock doors – I mean, who's going to rob one of us? It's not like the public feels *completely* protected by that vaccine. And Wilbur didn't have anything worth robbing, for that matter. Lots of clutter, of course. But florid red wallpaper, purple horsehair couches and porcelain figurines went out a couple of centuries ago. I could take it better than most, I mean you can't get much more lurid and tasteless than Las Vegas was in my day, but I saw Artie shield his eyes as he followed us in.

Well, of course Wilbur was in the basement. We could see his shoulder over the edge of his box as we tiptoed in, so I knew he was there, but... Well, it was clear the moment we stepped in something was really, really wrong. That sound – a sort of inchoate gulping and gasping, and Wilbur's shoulder, in its tweed jacket, was heaving. Worse, as Becky's shaking finger pointed out, there was something oozing down through the cracks of Wilbur's coffin – it was a trickle of mud. There was no doubt about it. Wilbur was crying his eyes out, enough to turn some of the precious dirt of his native Old England into streams of genuine mud.

We were stunned, but I took charge as soon as I could. "Artie," I said, "That flash-frozen pint of sweet sixteen you were saving for Pinkie's UnDead Day, go back and get it right away." And I wanted Artie out of the way for a few minutes until we could calm down Wilbur. There are some things that should be kept private, and for all Artie's the sweetest bartender I've never actually tasted, he was still a breather – I just felt Wilbur wouldn't like being seen at his worst by an outsider.

Artie pulled his jaw off his chest and took off running. I heard a crash from the porch, but after that I heard the Beetle putt-putt into life, so I knew he was ok.

Meanwhile, we crowded around the coffin and tried to get Wilbur to talk to us. He wouldn't look at us at all, and his handlebar mustache was a ruin with all that mud he was creating, so finally I just told Ugg to lift him out of there. Poor Wilbur was so limp and wrung out, he didn't even argue with us.

Con't on page 14

Original Fiction

Rock Bottom (con't)

By that time Artie, bless him, was back with the emergency resuscitation, and though it was still too cold, it seemed to revive Wilbur. We made him drink it down to the bottom, and Becky wrapped him with his favorite paisley shawl. Between Pinkie, who couldn't stop patting Wilbur's hand and saying "There, there old boy", and myself, telling him to get a grip on it, we finally got him calmed down. He still looked like a drowned walrus, and there was mud all over him – well, I suppose for Wilbur's sake I should stop right there. Let's just say I never saw a vampire who looked worse at that moment.

"It's my new job," he said, hiccupping a little over the tears and the drink – it was too cold, we like our blood warm, of course, but that couldn't be helped right now. Becky tucked up the shawl sympathetically. Wilbur started crying again and had to be braced up by Ugg. "It sounded so nice too."

If I tell it the way Wilbur did, it would take all night. It was getting light by the time we got it out of him, but none of us would go away. You just don't leave a friend in that sort of condition. Even Artie, who was yawning with every breath, wouldn't leave.

The long and short of it was a nice little man named Professor Matthew Anderson, out of the University of Nevada, had offered Wilbur a job. The job came with some nice perks, including a fresh supply of our favorite stuff, and enough of a salary to pay for some of the repairs on Wilbur's decaying house. (It's almost the only Victorian in Las Vegas now, and Wilbur was embarrassed, because it was on the tour group loop and the porch was just completely falling in). Wilbur was so pleased he wasn't even going to tell us about it until this evening, after he'd spent his first night on the job. He only had to work Thursdays from ten to twelve p.m., and it seemed tailor made for him.

Only it didn't turn out to be what he expected. Wilbur showed up in his best Harris Tweed jacket with his tightly-folded brollie under his elbow, and found 204 anthropology students waiting for him. It turned out that Professor Anderson, who was a member of the Anthropology Department, had had this brilliant idea... Study a living fossil. Wilbur was just the ticket. For two humiliating hours, he stood on that platform, an Undead example of the high Victorian era from bowler to boot, a mustached Lab Rat in Tweed.

I think even Ugg felt the insult (after Pinkie had patiently explained it a few times). I knew what *I* felt. I was furious, humiliated, and ready to pierce Prof Anderson's throat with every fang in my mouth. My eyes were flashing enough to scorch off the false eyelashes. Becky started ranting and crying, and Pinkie kept patting Wilbur's shoulder nervously and looking sad. Artie himself was so embarrassed he hardly knew who to look at.

"Look," he said, "We're not all like that... I mean, I *know* you guys. You're my pals, and not just because you tip me. Don't pay any attention to this stupid professor. He's just an idiot. I don't think you're... odd. Honest!"

I grabbed hold of Becky and shook her until she stopped crying and looked up at me. "Becky," I said, "Do you want a *real* Cause to take up? How about Vampire pride? How about Vampire *rights*? Don't we deserve to be treated with *respect*?"

I could see Artie brighten up immediately. "Hey," he said, "I've got a lawyer friend who runs the local Rainbow Coalition... I can see if he'll help!"

Becky had heart, I have to say. I could see her eyes get that look... And you know, she has done a better job than I could have ever hoped for. I think we owe most of our success to her, even if we did all fight fang and fang for it. I voted for her again last time, and she deserves that seat on the City Council more than anyone else. Thank goodness Vegas is a city that lives at night. We've turned that daylight aversion handicap into something to be proud of here.

As for me, I've been at the head of the Halloween Vampire Pride Parade every year since. Vampire Poster Queen, that's me. It's a job I think I'll hold on to for another few centuries before I let one of the younger generation see if they can step into my stilettos. I have to admit, it's an advantage that these 36DDD's are never going to sag... Roxanne and the rest of my old Tropicana crowd haven't been so lucky, of course. I lead the parade, high kicking all the way in my rhinestones and fans and feathers, and even if I'm an Old Timer now, there's still fire in the old showgirl.

So now you know how we got started, and don't forget it. It pays to remember your history, fangy boys and girls. Don't forget who paid your dues next time you run for office and win.

Lynch (con't)

Lynch: I suppose one always is aware of theft possibilities. The house is always locked and the alarm on when we're gone. I'm not too worried, because what I have is not stuff that you can pawn instantly or fence. The value is in having the collection intact and accessible; a million cheap items is really hard to process. And thieves are not interested in doing that much work. My storage system is too confusing for the casual thief to find a specific item.

Crotinger: *Have you ever wanted to put something in a safety-deposit box?*

Lynch: I do have one, and it contains a number of \$200+ items. It would be nice to have a vault for everything, but I think Fort Knox is still in use. And besides, if *Goldfinger* could break in...

Crotinger: *Have you ever thought about taking out insurance on your collection?*

Lynch: I did have insurance for a few years, but it was almost \$400/year for a rider on an inland marine policy. I don't know what it would run now. Anyway, few insurance people really know the worth of this kind of collection. Collectibles, books, art, stamps... the problem of having stuff is that you must protect it, sort it, process it, shelve it and maintain it. I'm finding it hard enough to keep up with simple house maintenance, and a 2.5 acre yard and woods. I don't have nearly enough time to work with my stuff.

My only regret is that I haven't figured out a good way to make money from all this effort!"

– Dennis Lynch, August 2002

In November's issue of *Illuminata*, I conclude my interview with collector, Dennis Lynch.

KeyCOMMENTary (con't)

of how the individuals dressed, right? Go grunge, Goth, retro, Arthurian, ninja. Picture your pack in all these ways and five'll get'cha ten that the basic social structure already in place remains. Who leads now would still lead. Whoever currently bucks the status quo will buck on.

Fashion particulars do not a functional family make. Either you already click or you don't, and if you're clicking, that fact ain't gonna change when ya change your clothes.

Now, excuse me, but this black leather's suffocating me. Here, hold my whip. I think I'll change into my spacesuit.

Illuminations Contest Winners!

First of all, we would like to thank everyone who took part in this year's writing contest. We received a far greater number of submissions than expected, and the high turnout means we will likely repeat this contest next year.

A panel of six judges read each entry and assigned it a score from 0 to 5. After all scores were entered, the sums were tallied and those with an overall score of 24 or greater were declared winners. Winning authors should expect to be contacted in the next few weeks with information pertaining to the anthology and a contract to license the print rights to the story.

So, without further ado, here are the winners of the 2004 Illuminations Speculative Fiction Writing Contest!

The Prisoner	by A. Christopher Drown
A Dream Within	by Danielle Parker
Labor Day	by Patrick Tucker
Nirvana, Inc.	by Mark Hardwidge

Because a number of stories scored just under 24, it was decided that an additional 'Runner-Up' category would be created for stories with overall scores of 21-23. Authors of these stories will be contacted with the judges' notes and given the opportunity to revise their work and resubmit it to the anthology editor for consideration. There is no obligation on the part of the author to revise the story, and it should be remembered that the suggestions of the judges are intended to be constructive and should not be taken in a negative way.

The following are the Runner-Up winners:

Intersections	by Scott Andrews
Return to Arthanas	by Sean Bradley
Isolation	by George Carpenter
Intelligence	by Jennifer Graham
Over A Cup of Hot Chocolate	by Gary Murello
The Spider	by Simon Todd

Thanks again to everyone who participated or helped with the contest. We look forward to reading your submissions to our next contest!

Characters (con't)

on the basis of common history, nationality, or geographic distribution." This definition isn't quite right either; at least, not for speculative fiction. It implies that an established community of Humans, Elves, and Dwarves would be considered one Race, when that is clearly not the way Race is used in the genre. For our purposes, Race will be defined as the culmination of social and physical characteristics universal to members of a particular genetic group. When those characteristics span genotypes, or when they are determined more by location and a shared system of law, we will use another common form of character classification: Nationality.

The term Race—as used in SF—is actually something of a misnomer, since the definitions imply that members of a Race are part of the same species, while it is generally understood that Elves, Humans, and other fantasy 'Races', even when they share a common ancestor, are not. It would perhaps be appropriate to rename this classification 'Species', which would have the added benefit of applying more aptly to Science Fiction, where Aliens take the place of fantasy Races. For the sake of continuity and simplicity, we will continue to use Race when defining these groups.

But how, one might wonder, can unique characters be created using groups that define a specific set of attributes and attitudes? And how, in a genre flooded with time-honored traditions and entrenched character types, can new ground be broken without raising the ire of readers?

The solution to the problem lies in remembering that groups, racial or otherwise, should be stereotypical in nature rather than absolute. Not all members of a Race should look exactly alike, and they certainly should react differently to a given situation, even when that situation touches on a core belief. Thus, the more attention a writer gives to a certain Race, the more differences he should note in describing its individuals.

As an example, imagine sitting in a tavern. A cursory glance around shows four Dwarves drinking ale at a table, acting gruff and unsociable and admiring the axes they forged with their own hands with ore mined beneath the Mountains of Mohrtahl

Peyhrl. To the right, a small cluster of Elves sips wine and stares haughtily and disdainfully at the Dwarves. Humans line the bar, laughing raucously and doing whatever it is that Humans do.

That casual look might show three separate groups, each having far more in common with itself than with the others. But under closer scrutiny, more details should appear that shift the balance. One of the Dwarves may only be feigning interest in his buddy's axe while he ogles the gnomish serving wench delivering his ale. Perhaps one of the Elves isn't staring disdainfully at the Dwarves, but shyly, or with fear. In the end, it may turn out that a Dwarf and an Elf have far more in common with each other than with their companions, or that none of the Humans particularly like each other, but they're stuck in the tavern attending a Dragon-killer convention and feel uncomfortable approaching other Races under the prejudiced eyes of their barmates. By creating such variation within Races, a writer opens the door to infinite possibility.

To avoid the trap of falling into pre-existing molds, writers should be willing to offer their own interpretation of a Race. That is not to say that one should create a race of cowardly pacifists and call them Klingons—possible legal troubles notwithstanding, the decision would make no sense!—but subtle variations from the formulaic model breathe new life into a potentially overused Race. However, no matter how far one deviates from the norm, it remains essential to justify the decision to do so. If one creates a Race of Elves, they should bear some resemblance to traditional Elves, and any changes should be documented in the text. Whether that documentation is spoken outright or subtly hidden in the prose is left to the author, as is the decision to base the new Elven Race on Tolkien's Elves, Santa's Elves, or the Keebler Elves.

Writers also need to be willing to design their own Races. Many stories draw heavily on Tolkien's vision or on the Races designed for the *Forgotten Realms*, *Dragonlance*, or other gaming systems. And while there's nothing wrong with creating stories that utilize those Races, there reaches a point when a reader feels like he's seeing the same

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Characters (con't)

characters repeated *ad infinitum*. By designing a new Race, a writer makes it more difficult for critics to claim he's just stealing from someone else, and a certain amount of pride goes hand in hand with bringing a new Race to life and hearing readers talking about them like you've talked about Wookies... As if they're real.

Why, then, do writers ever use the same Race? Expediency. Creating a new species is not an easy task, not if you want to do it correctly. Any Race that factors into a storyline as more than window dressing requires a great deal of time, and the pre-existing Races have their backstory prepared in advance. If an author decides to create his own Race, he has to do all the work himself.

But where to begin? Sure, the new Race will look different than Humans, but the author must figure out how and to what extent it differs. And appearance is only one part of the puzzle. Equally important is figuring out how the new Race acts and what it believes, where it came from and where it's going.

Only a portion of those beliefs and attitudes are directly related to genetic peculiarities and shared history; the rest will be determined by Nationality (which we will talk more about later) or some other group that members of the Race belong to. It is impossible to completely segregate the groups when designing a new Race, but writers must be willing and able to approach their creations from all angles. The goal here is not to simply create an enemy or an ally for your heroes, but to create an entire society that lives and breathes within your world.

Only by answering questions (and the more questions, the better!), will a writer be able to design a believable Race, one that can stand the test of time. And sometimes, it's the tiniest detail that makes or breaks a reader's attitude toward a Race and its writer. Take procreation, for example. In many SF stories (including some hard science fiction tales I've read that have doggedly attempted to remain faithful to other scientific disciplines) it is commonplace for members of different species to have offspring. As an allegory, this is fine; but in an attempt to create a realistic world, it is not. The more dissimilar two

species are, the harder it should be for them to procreate. In a fantasy tale where Elves, Humans, and all the other Races have a single, common ancestor, then it *may* be possible for them to have children. In alien settings with creatures who developed on different worlds, it takes a stretch of the imagination just to believe that so many are humanoid, and the idea of procreation....

In the end, it probably isn't important if Hobbits and Orcs can have children together, and my stubborn refusal to not completely forget the laws of nature when reading doesn't negatively affect my enjoyment of most books, but the point I'm trying to make is this: To create a believable Race, one that can survive the close inspection of a highly-critical and detail-oriented readership, writers must put a lot of thought into the backstory, the hows of a Race's origins and the whys that explain what makes it different from humanity.

These guidelines apply equally to works of Fantasy and Science Fiction, though writers seem to have far less difficulty creating new aliens than creating new Races. Maybe it's because fantasy draws heavily on Earth's own mythology, while space is by and large an unexplored and open realm. Or perhaps it's because many of the aliens that writers would use are copyrighted and off-limits without special dispensation. For whatever reason, aliens abound while fantasy Races tend to stagnate, but the rules for designing either remain the same. By tweaking the Human model and focusing on details, any number of new Races can be created, and by instilling variations within members of a given Race, writers can better mimic reality, showing difference and similarity in one fell swoop.

"Plasma weapons may lack precision, but their dandy combo of kinetic and thermal energy is perfect for really effing up both human and mecha targets. Plus, the sheer, messy spectacle of a major plasma discharge really puts the fear of God into the bad guys... Or the fear of ME, anyway."

– **Dirty Pair: Fatal, But Not Serious**