



The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Character Profiling (Part III): Nationality

By Bret Funk

In previous articles, we have discussed the use of groups as an instrument to add depth to writing. Groups allow authors to instill layers of complexity in characters without exhaustive narrative; simply mention a group that the character belongs to and the character in question automatically acquires all of that group's attributes, history, and idiosyncrasies. This predetermined set of characteristics can then be used to contrast the character to those from different groups. Conversely, deviation from the stereotype allows an author to contrast his characters with more hard-line members of the group.

When the group in question is determined in part or in whole by genetics or by the culture of a single genotype, it falls into the category of Race. Yet Race is only one of a myriad of classification methods, and in some cases, it is impractical to use. If the work takes place among an isolated population or focuses upon only one species, then Race cannot enter the equation. And even when Race can be used, it is foolish to think that all the differences between

characters will be based upon Race. Every group that a character belongs to will affect its behavior, so to truly create characters that mimic real people, an author must factor in the effects of all groups.

Another classification method often used in speculative fiction is Nationality: a population determined by common language, location, system of law, and everything else that goes hand in hand with being part of a particular country. People from the same place tend to have the same concerns; they act the same way, talk with the same dialect, and generally

believe the same things as others in the community. These commonalities form bonds between members of a nation, and these ties are often far stronger than those built by Race or many of the other groups a character can belong to.

It is important to note that Nationality need not specify an actual nation; it can just as easily be used for localities within a single nation. People in the real world tend to have an affinity for those they consider as part of their home, but how one defines 'home' is dependent upon the situation. The people in Suntown may have a long-standing rivalry with their neighbors in Moonville, and no self-respecting Suntonian would so much as raise a hand in greeting for those night-loving fools across the river. Except, that is, for the time those barbarians from Lavaland tried to take over. That summer, all the towns in Astrologiland banded together to repel the heathens and their earth-loving ways!

In the real world, rivalries run the gambit from small to big, starting at the level of the individual and progressing incrementally from communities (downtown versus uptown), to towns, regions (north versus south, city versus rural, etc.), states, and nations. And if we are ever fortunate enough to build an extraplanetary colony, I'm sure 'worlds' will quickly top the list. When writing, authors should take care to implement that type of incremental commonality in their works. If those jerks over in Pygmykil think they can come to this town and smack around our Hobbits, they have another think coming; roughing up the little people is a right reserved for the Humans who live *here!*

Some people reading this article may be thinking, 'I don't understand. Communities of [*insert Race here*] always stand against [*insert opposing Race*]. There's no commonality or support for other Races, so Race must be more important than Nationality.' The key word in the previous statement is **communities**. As I have mentioned before, it is often difficult to separate the effects of one type of group from another. In this case, as is the case in the real world, people from the same Race tend to live in the same community, or Nation, if

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RPG Corner v3.6: Elements of Good Scenarios - Final Thoughts

by Doug >!< Roper of EPIC Gaming

Over the past few months I've tried to give as many tips on generating good role-play gaming scenarios as I can, yet still allow you room to explore the process and discover some tricks of your own. I've hopefully been able to guide without creating a formula, because ultimately the creative process should be unique to each individual GM. For beginning GMs, a personal style will emerge from the creation of the plots, as well as their execution. It just takes time and trust from your players to develop that style, but it will ultimately start with your design process.

This month's column is for my final thoughts and reminders on writing scenario. After all, despite the focus in this past series of columns, the real flash point of gaming is the interaction between the players and the GM. The scenario is the background for that interaction, and while at times the plot shines brightest, it shouldn't do so too often. However, the marvelous dynamic that exists between Player Characters and Game Masters has to come from the scenario.

The most important thing to remember when designing scenarios is to remain consistent within your chosen model. This is especially true in protracted scenarios, where there are more ups and downs within one plot. Variations and small deviations from your original model are okay, but remember why you and your players chose to game. If your players enjoy brooding mysteries and long slow progressions, a sidetrack combat romp might be fun (as well as being a great tension reliever), but it shouldn't become the focus of the game. Also, be attentive to the changing desires of the players. As much as we pretend it doesn't happen, games shift in tone and content over time. Players come and go, and even GM's are replaced from time to time, but the game may continue, even existing plots can continue within new models to accommodate the changing needs or tastes of the people playing. Stick with the models and remain consistent and your players will be happier longer.

Always incorporate as much flexibility into your scenarios as possible. Player-Characters have a strong tendency to lay your careful plots to waste. This isn't on purpose and certainly isn't malicious. It just happens, that's all. As a GM, you can prepare for this by making sure you have provided as many reasonable ways to approach key scenes and characters as possible. Attempting to outguess the

actions of the PCs can actually be quite entertaining, and an interesting challenge when designing and writing scenarios. Only a novice Game Master would expect the characters to progress exactly as he has foreseen while scripting the encounters, so you must plan ahead. It's great fun to see over the course of running the scenario whether or not you can predict the actions of the PCs. When you do, it can be pretty rewarding; and when you don't, the surprise and quick thinking make Game Mastering challenging and fun. It's tough to lose.

The experience of writing and designing a good role-play gaming scenario should be pleasant. It should not be the dominant experience, though. Running the design should be the most fun you are having. Attaching too much importance to the scripted plot can cause a reluctance to deviate from what you have written, and it can lead to railroading. There are few things that can destroy a game quicker than forcing PCs down paths that they did not choose. The GM should be careful to create the illusion of free will. The easiest way to do that, and a method that I don't recommend be used too often is what I call the bad case / worse case choice. You can provide the PCs with a choice that will lead them down the path you want them to take, or another path that looks so much worse that there is really no choice at all. This is the most basic method for creating the belief that the PCs are choosing their own path, instead of marching along the path the GM has set out for them. There are other tricks that new GMs will discover, and some work better than others with certain models of games and with certain players. Finding the right tools takes time and practice.

As a GM, you need to look for inspiration for new plots and scenes everywhere: movies, TV, book, comics; anyplace from where you can draw a character or event. Anything that makes you say "wow" when you see it can be tapped to add those moments to your scenarios. Remember, even role-playing games rooted heavily in reality can have weird and magical moments inserted into them. By drawing from as many sources as possible, and with careful and restrained application of the elements that you see, a GM can keep his game fresh and interesting for his players and their characters.

Finally, I think that the single most important element of good scenario design is the excitement

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Dennis Lynch—Science Fiction Collector (Part 4)

by Terry Crotinger/montanasings

*"I don't regret ever buying something.
I have regretted passing things up."
Denny Lynch, 2004.*

Dennis Lynch may typify the zeal of the common collector of science fiction memorabilia, but I am positive, as an individual, his motive shines brighter. He is a unique fan in the science fiction universe. Searching worldwide to add to his collection, he is creative, purposeful and successful. For a collector, this is not unique. However, in return for actively collecting, he passes on his fervor to others (rather than protect his horde in a private vault to be appreciated by himself only). The man is quick to share rich detail about an item or fact, trend or event, which makes one pause. Dennis Lynch speaks with authority—he has done the research, invested his time and spent his money. His collection speaks of a thoughtful, purposeful intent that even Number One Fan, Forest Ackerman, finds impressive.

In the process, Denny admits he is impacted by the graciousness of fellow collectors and fandom alike. Nestled between towering book and display cases, in what I jokingly refer to as his "Collector's Cave", he explains how his hobby, his passion, affects him as a man and as a fan. He starts by telling me with an awed, humbled voice, how lucky he is to meet many of the prominent science fiction actors of our time—a dream of anyone pursuing an education as a film major,

"I've met all the major stars from Classic *Star Trek*, including Roddenberry—twice! I've had supper with Ray Walston, and got to escort Lindsey Wagner around the U of Iowa campus years before she became the Bionic Woman. Or walking into Christopher Lee, the only actor I've ever had to look up to. And I was in the very first fan waiting line for a *Star Wars* presentation, nine months before the first film even opened! I guess that means I've been a fan for over forty-five years. Now I teach high school and am delighted to let the students learn about fandom. I hope I am the teacher I would have wanted in high school."

Relating what he collects to the "real world" seems to be an imperative pursuit for Denny. I never came away thinking that he needed to "get a life" as people uncomfortable with science fiction discussions, might silently wonder. Denny *has* a life. Collecting helps him *relate* to his interests, dreams, fantasies, and desire for an intense life-experience. He seems to attack everything he does with the same energy whether it

is observing his son masterfully assembling *Star Wars* Legos, proudly watching his daughter perform and succeed in various endeavors, or supporting his wife in her quest for excellence in education. Nothing seems taken for granted or trivial. Rather, I walk away from every conversation thinking that everything in Denny's life is savored. Hence, his interests, including collecting, are unsurprisingly pursued with the same intent: the experience of the chase, thrill of ownership and better understanding history—understanding the world.

For example, he attended WorldCon when the *Galaxy Quest* cast went from table to table thanking fans after winning a Hugo award (for Best Dramatic Presentation, 2000). They knew it wasn't their brilliant performance or tricky marketing that got them the award. It was fandom taking the time to see the movie and give feedback. "The cast was grateful; humbled. They were sincere." As tears came to Denny's eyes, he explained that it was *that* kind of heart-felt response in the science fiction community that touched him—people relating to people. Denny finds it exhilarating.

Looking back from the roots of Denny's passion as a child, with only the Library Book Mobile to whet his interests, to the present, I see a parallel with the maturing of science fiction. Science Fiction fans, "fandom", started with an interest in the unknown, and they wanted to understand this void, experience it and explore it. Often, they collected it, and found in doing so a pleasure that fed some inner need along with others who had similar experiences. I think back at the visionaries in our past who pondered the future using the only mediums at the time that would endure—the printed word, a few art sketches and story-telling passed on generation after generation. I wonder if they could see how such beginnings evolved into art, science, medicine, exploration and social commentary?

Denny has evolved from his eager pursuit of comic books as a child to exploring his world through collecting science fiction memorabilia throughout his life just as visiting a museum would help us understand and appreciate our history and the boldness of other's daring to explore and create. Denny collects because it demonstrates that evolution of art, science and a host of other benefits, including being able to share that very personal experience with others. He uses his collection to invite other "fans" into his world and enjoys it all immensely.

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The Writer's Block: Dream Stories

by Charles Gramlich

I've always been cursed, or blessed, with nightmares. And they are often relatively coherent, with usable story lines. Several of my published stories originated as dreams; others are waiting to be turned into tales. Let me relate one to you.

In this dream, I'm hunting in the woods and it starts to rain. I find an old cabin, half fallen in, and go inside out of the weather. After a bit, lulled by the rain, I fall asleep.

A voice wakes me, a woman's voice calling me to supper. I find myself lying on a couch, and the house is warm with lights. I look around, confused, but then a woman opens the door to the room where I'm resting and tells me again to come on for supper. She is smiling and I realize she is my wife.

I follow her into a dining area where she's set a table with candles and food. She is quite young, maybe nineteen or twenty, with long blond hair. She is very beautiful.

She smiles and kisses me on the cheek, and we sit down to eat. She is vivacious, happy, full of conversation, and soon my confusion is forgotten, and I'm laughing and talking with her easily. She touches my shoulder or my arm as we talk, and I feel very comfortable. Then, suddenly, from the room above us comes a loud, thump, thump, thump.

I jump, look up, then look at my wife. She's suddenly as pale as death and it seems as if she's physically aged several years. I see lines in her face that weren't there moments before. I start to get up, to go see about the sound, but she grabs my hand. Her eyes are bright. She tells me that it's nothing, that she'll go and see.

I settle back into my chair and she leaves the table. But she comes back a few moments later and sits down again. We resume our meal. Again we start to laugh and joke, and the sound is forgotten. Until it occurs again: thump, thump, THUMP. This time it's louder.

I jump up from the table and start for the stairs, but she rushes from her chair and grabs my arm. "No, no, no," she says. "It's nothing. Just ignore it. Please!"

She is pleading. I can see it in her face. And again she seems to have aged a few years, more than the first time.

Reluctantly, I let her talk me into going back to the table. We sit and begin to eat again, but we are both subdued. Finally, we begin to smile a bit, though my wife's smile seems wan at first. But our mood lifts until we start to laugh again.

For a third time the sound comes tolling from upstairs, much louder now, rattling the ceiling above our heads,

startling us. Thump, THUMP, THUMP! Again I jump up and rush for the stairs, determined that I won't ignore it any more. My wife comes shouting after me, and halfway up the stairs she catches me, grabs my arm desperately. She begs, pleads again and again with me not to go upstairs, and now she seems much older, middle aged. Her blond hair even has gray strands in it, and her eyes are puffy and a little haggard. It is for her sake, for the naked terror in her eyes, that I allow myself to be led back to the table.

Again I sit. And I eat. But I'm waiting. There is no laughter in either of us now. And of course the sound comes again. THUMP, THUMP, THUMP! Loud as thunder now, loud enough to shake the house, loud enough to make my wife scream.

I leap up with an oath and run to the stairs. My wife grabs me but I shake her off. This time I will not be stopped. I rush up the steps, ignoring the cries behind me. She falls silent just as I reach the top of the stairs. There is a single door there, no landing or hallway, only a door. I try it and it's locked, but I put my shoulder to it. I burst it inward, throw it open.

A woman stands there, an ancient and decaying crone. Her hair is dead white and sparse as winter straw on her head. Her eyes are like boiled eggs in a face of rotted and liverish flesh. I scream and stumble back. She speaks, in the voice of my young and beautiful wife.

"I told you," she says. "I begged you not to come up the stairs. But you just had to. You *had* to. And now you see what you've done! You *see* what you've done!"

I back further away as she steps out of the doorway and onto the top of the stairs. She reaches out to me. She says, "But I still love you."

I turn and run, and run, and run, down the stairs, out the door into the woods. Only once do I glance back, and the house is again the half ruin that I'd first seen when I came seeking shelter from the rain.

Only at that moment did I wake up, sweating and shaking, half expecting to see something ancient and smiling leaning over me. When I told my wife about the dream, she regretted that she hadn't been able to wake me. I told her: "No, no. Don't *ever* wake me up when I'm having a nightmare."

She looked confused, as do most people when I tell them that I never want to be awakened from a bad dream. But where else can I have an experience that is both safe *and* more terrifying than any horror movie I've ever seen? And it's free! Plus, there are the direct

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Reviews

Banewreaker Jacqueline Carey



Tor, Nov 2004
\$27.95, Hardcover, 432 pgs.
ISBN: 0765305216
Review by Harriet Klausner

The Seven Shapers worked in harmonious unity using the power of the Souma to shape the world and its races to their images. After a time, the eldest Haomane did not

like what he observed; he felt his brother Satoris gave too much to the subservient. He demanded that his sibling extract his Gift to mankind, but an outraged prideful Satoris refuses, as he insists he is no underling. The Shapers' War explodes with the world as its victim.

The battling brothers reside on opposite sides of the Sundering Ocean with the other siblings living with Haomane while Satoris resides in underground Darkhaven. Haomane would confront and kill Satoris, but knows that his foe possesses the deadly Godslayer. Instead he uses innuendos and rumors amongst the people that Satoris, the Father of Lies, caused the sundering destruction and spreads a prophecy of good times once Satoris dies.

Satoris must prevent the prophecy from happening because the end state is his death. He sends loyal immortal General Tanaros Blacksword to kidnap the also immortal Cerelinde to stop her from marrying a royal mortal, part of the prophecy. At the same time Malthus leads Haomane's forces on an assault of Darkhaven.

This opening act of the Sundering tales is an exhilarating epic war of the gods' fantasy. The fast-paced story line grips readers because the non-stop action makes believers of readers that the Seven Shapers especially the two antagonists are genuine with powers beyond mortals. Similar to the Tolkien mythos, genre fans will appreciate Jacqueline Carey proof that she has plenty to offer readers beyond Kushiel with this fantastic tale in which good and evil is blurred except for a tremendous public relations campaign.

Dark of the Sun Chelsea Quinn Yarbro



Tor, Nov 2004
\$27.95, Hardcover, 464 pgs.
ISBN: 076531102X
Review by Harriet Klausner

Twenty-five hundred year old vampire Count Saint-Germain uses the name of Zangi-Ragozh in Yang Chou, China where he heads a

shipping and trading business. With him is loyal ghoul, five hundred year old Ro-Shei. When Emperor Yuan Bou-Ju summons Zangi-Ragozh and other merchants to come to Chong'en; none realize that half a world away Mount Krakatoa erupted and will change the world for several years afterward.

Zangi-Ragozh gets his first inkling of the change when the sun fails to rise above the volcanic ash that seems to be all over the atmosphere. Being out in daylight does not bother the Count as much, but along with this benefit comes the downside that travel to Chong'en is impossible. Crops fail and famine becomes the norm. Zangi-Ragozh returns to his place of birth by joining the caravan of the Desert Cats. He earns passage by bartering his medical skills, but is tossed out when the clan bans foreigners. They meet again in Tak-Kala where a magician who he trusts betrays him even as danger from the famished survivors mounts.

Never in the long running series has Saint-Germain come closer to the True Death than he does in this time of the *Dark of the Sun*. He has lost much of his native earth, willing donors are rare, and he has a potentially lethal wound. The Krakatoa effect on the world adds depth and turns the novel, in many ways in spite of a vampiric protagonist, into more a historical than a supernatural tale. Chelsea Quinn Yarbro provides another fantastic reading experience for her fans.

Reviews

The Darkness That Comes Before

R. Scott Bakker



Overlook Press, June 2004
Hardback, \$25.95, 589 pgs.
ISBN: 1585675598

Review by Scott H. Andrews

“He is less. And he’s more.” This line of dialog perfectly sums up R. Scott Bakker’s debut novel, *The Darkness That Comes Before*.

Bakker’s knowledge of ancient languages and his doctorate in philosophy give his epic fantasy a unique flavor. His

world exudes a harsh authenticity, imbued with feudal politics and religious fervor. Competing factions of sorcerers and theologians debate philosophical quandaries. Character and place names stumble with accent marks like diaereses and circumflexes.

The novel begins with whispers of a two-thousand year old apocalypse and the emergence of the eerily manipulative Kellhus. Then it shifts to the sorcerer Achamian and bogs down in scholastic debates. The pace quickens in the political intrigue around the Emperor, then slows again in Esmenet’s section. The plot finally awakens when Kellhus returns, after a 300 page absence, and the main characters converge on the Holy War. The political machinations reach a crescendo, interrupted by philosophical flashbacks from Kellhus’s youth, and an ancient evil resurfaces.

Darkness mixes three major struggles—Kellhus searching for his father, for unknown reasons; Achamian and the Mandate hunting for the ancient evil; and the political machinations surrounding the Holy War. Any two of these could have anchored the plot, but the inclusion of all three leaves the novel jumbled. Characters are ignored for long stretches. The spy murdered in Chapter One isn’t mentioned again for 500 pages. Esmenet features prominently in the first three sections, then fades into a foil for gratuitous drama. Serwe appears as a new character in Part Four, slowing the plot with her backstory. The unresolved ending leaves the novel feeling like a 600 page introduction to the saga.

Bakker seems caught between depicting a non-human evil, like most fantasy, or focusing on the evil that humans can visit upon each other, like George R. R. Martin. He ends up doing both, and his plot meanders between them. The non-human evil is frighteningly portrayed, but it makes so few appearances that the human conflicts steal most of the attention.

The narrative spends most of its time inside the characters’ heads, winding through philosophical discourses. This type of argument is essential to establishing Bakker’s three main conflicts. However,

once they have been established, the repeated discourses feel like ponderous doubletalk.

In the descriptive passages, Bakker’s prose drips with lyricism. At many moments of tension or confrontation, it crumbles into awkward sentence fragments. The philosophical tone, the poetic language, and the political conflicts combine to give the novel an erudite feel that borders on snobbish.

Bakker aims high with *Darkness*, a novel of complex language, intrigue, and plot. However, he lets the complexities overwhelm the plot and characters. The best popular fiction contains deep levels, but also provides an easy entry point for readers who don’t want to delve into the complexities. Bakker plunges straight into deep waters, which will leave most readers sputtering on the surface.

Offspring

Steven Harper



Roc, Nov 2004

\$6.99, Mass Market, 400 pgs.

ISBN: 0451460014

Review by Harriet Klausner

Most of the Silent can no longer enter the Dream, a telepathic place of existence that allows instantaneous communication between worlds spread all over the universe. On the planet Bellerophon, Kendri and his life mate Ben are regarded as heroes

because they saved part of the Dream and can enter at will. Bellerophon is electing its first governor in centuries because without the Dream, the Confederation that saw to Bellerophon’s safety no longer exists. Ben and Kendri’s grandmother is a candidate, who advocates a strong military to prevent pirates from raiding the planet.

During the campaign, Kendri actively supports his grandmother, but someone tries to kill him. While trying to figure out who in their inner circle wants him dead, someone kidnaps the Silent and the Silenced (those who cannot enter the Dream any longer). Although Kendri and Ben do not know it, there is a link between the murder attempts and the abductions; the dynamic duo must figure that out for failure means loved ones dying.

Readers who have followed the previous adventures of Kendri and Ben will see they prepare for parenthood using surrogate mothers and frozen embryos, which are genetic siblings of Ben’s. Their relationship is beautiful to behold as they battle a maniac who wants every Silent dead and the Dream buried. They make the tale into a fantastic science fiction who-done-it that fans will revel in because Steven Harper turns his audience into believers that the planet Bellerophon exists in a physical solid state.

Reviews

Cerulean Sins

Laurell K. Hamilton



Jove, 2004

\$7.99, Mass Market, 547 pgs

ISBN: 0-515-13681-6

Review by D. L. Parker

I really hate picking up books that are part of a long-running series and finding out that to make sense of (at least number 10 in this case) I must read *all* its prequels. Never having read an Anita Blake story before, I was almost at sea in *Cerulean Sins*. Anita's a vampire hunter but seems to be *more* than cozy with the old bloodsuckers? She's a federal agent, but a licensed shoot-'em-in-the-face executioner as well? What the heck is an Ulfric? Progressing to stronger expressions of frustration, what the #\$*! is a Bolverk? Or a Nimir-Ra? (All of which Anita apparently is). And why, oh *why*, does Anita just *have* to have sex with all those men?! *What* a life the poor girl leads.

Only, Ms. Blake isn't the sort of gal one would feel sorry for even if she were hanging from thumbscrews. On a spectrum that includes Xena and Buffy at its far end and Shrinking Violet at the other, Anita's in a class of her own. The woman out-swears all the pants in the story, punches big fellows in the guts and makes them fold like letters, totes a gun and flashes it like Wyatt Earp, all that and she manages to sexually satisfy her own private harems, both the breathing and non-breathing varieties, at the same time. (Actually, I lost track of the harem... who she was Doing It with, who she had Done It with, and who was probably going to be Doing It with her by the next page or so). At one point, Anita has a young punk inching away from her in fear—with good reason, since she's about to eat him...literally. No wonder a member of her harem, a male stripper (there are quite a few male strippers in this story) asks her briskly, "Sex, blood, or flesh?" Thank goodness Anita's in an amorous mood!

The principal character of this story was so beyond Terminator tough, in fact, that by the middle of the book this very odd feeling began to creep up on me. I felt like... well, I felt like *Anita Blake must really be a man*; I felt like the whole story was one

vast homoerotic fantasy. I mean, there *are* clues, I'm not just nuts here. She participates in anal and oral sex! And most telling of *all* - the woman *despises* embroidery (and yes, real women *do* embroider little useless floral thingamajigs, trust me). OK, so I'm tongue-in-cheek... but not by much. When Virginia Slims points out *You've Come A Long Way Baby*, they have *no* idea how far we're talking about here.

I confess that the main reason for my original interest in the story was the private investigator fantasy (remember, I'm trying to write that sci-fi spin on the P. I.), but here I was vastly disappointed with *Cerulean Sins*. The little bit of detective business in the story remains a distant second to the vampire politics/sex plotline. It's just there as a place holder, something Anita seems to do to keep her hand in, like the necromantic raising she does at the start of the story (I tell you, this gal's resume must run to its own ten-thousand words horror story). I finished the book and could scarcely tell you that any detecting went on at all. What little there was didn't seem to sink in to my brain, because of course it's secondary to the main thrust of the story... the kinky stuff.

The vampires, for example... trite as it is, after Anne Rice and others have done it to death, all the bloodsuckers in this story are absolutely gorgeous, even the villainous ones. Anita's main squeeze, Jean-Claude, vamps around (sorry, I know puns are low humor) in sexy leather boots (thigh-highs, of course), tight leather pants, gorgeous long hair and frilly blouses. Asher, the second pair of pants in Anita's ménage-a-trois, is a blonde as beautiful as - well, those Fallen Angels. In case any reader misses the point, he's actually painted that way, wings and all, in the story. The main plotline of the story has Anita and her vampire lovers up against a wedge of French invaders (vampire, of course) who want to take the beautiful Asher back into a form of vampiric slavery. Interestingly, the villains here are almost all female... there's the Undead version of Barbie, Musette; her possessing mistress, Belle Morte, and - setting the stage for another sequel, of course - the ultimate Bad Mama, the Mother of All Darkness, who makes the rest of the matriarchal monsters look like sweetness and light and knock in their kitten-heeled shoes.

I'm not saying titillating trash isn't something

Reviews

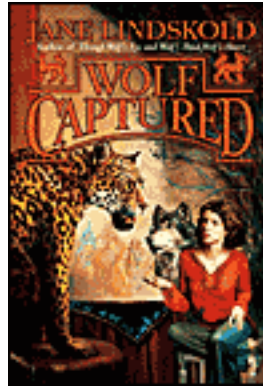
one shouldn't enjoy now and then. A balanced diet has to include some junk food as well as occasional runs of haute cuisine and home cooking. I'd say the non sequiter ending of this story sums up the whole nicely, though. The book ends with Anita and her lover Jean-Claude on stage with another male stripper (one of the harem members she *almost* does it with), indulging in a little playful bad-kitty flogging show for the audience. Yes, this book is a homoerotic/heterosexual Chippendale show, with something for almost all sexual persuasions (but not *quite* all: I'm sorry, no girlie to girlie action, at least in *this* book). Myself, as a detective story, I think it's a dead loss, and I personally think Anne Rice does the Gorgeous Immortal Sex God Vampire business better in her early Lestat stories, and that Buffy makes a more sympathetic Slayer. So I'm afraid I have no plans at this time to read prequels one through nine. I'd rather re-read Barbara Hambly's far superior Edwardian vampire mystery, *Those Who Hunt the Night*...which I highly recommend, if you can find it!

Of course, if I don't read those prequels I'll never find out what the heck a Bolverk and an Ulfric really *are*, and that's a pain, of course. But I don't *dare* ask Anita for any explanation. No ma'am, I'll just sit here with my hands in plain sight, doing my harmless embroidery, and you won't need that gun or that whip at all. No offense, Ms. Blake, but you've got this reader *perfectly* terrorized!

"Is it any wonder that a new generation has rediscovered science fiction, rediscovered a form of literature that argues through its intuitive force that the individual can shape and change and influence and triumph; that man can eliminate both war and poverty; that miracles are possible; that love, if given a chance, can become the main driving force of human relationships?"

—Dick Allen, Poet and SF Editor

Wolf Captured Jane Lindskold



Tor, Nov 2004

\$27.95, Hardcover, 528 pgs.

ISBN: 076530936X

Review by Harriet Klausner

The Royal animals, sentient beings that use language to communicate with one another, are thought to exist only in myths and legends.

Firekeeper knows that is not true as she was raised by wolves who loved her and treated her as a pack equal. She believes that she is one of them trapped inside a human body. When people find her in the western lands, they take her and her wolf friend Blind Seer to Darien Carter, who teaches her how humans behave. She is adopted into the royal family and given a noble title.

In the south, the Liglimoshti people know about the Wise animals; Members of their priest caste kidnap Firekeeper, Blind Seer, and Derion because she is the only known human who can speak with the sentient animals. They want her to teach them to do so too. Derion must find a way to stop a blood sacrifice cult from flourishing. Firekeeper must refuse the one thing she wants most in the world—turning into an actual wolf—because that requires blood sacrifice. At the risk of her life, she must also stop an old enemy from revealing truths that could harm the Wise animals.

Jane Lindskold has written a fascinating fantasy about a land where humans and animals, sentient and non-sentient, live for the most part in harmony with one another. The wise animals play an important role in human society, as they communicate portents and omens to the priest caste, whose superegos of importance prevent them from allowing Firekeeper to teach the commoners besides leading to unemployment. *Wolf Captured* is another great installment in this fine series.

Reviews

“Increasingly, the lines between science fiction and fantasy are becoming blurred, and vanish at the hands of adventuresome writers and fantasy gamers.”

— S. John Ross

Shadowmarch Tad Williams



Daw, Nov 2004
\$25.95, Hardcover, 800 pgs.
ISBN: 0756402190
Review by Harriet Klausner

Before humans settled the land, the immortal Qar, creatures of fairy, lived there. At first humans and fairy lived together, but as mankind multiplied, seemingly like rabbits to the Fairy, the Qar

were forced to relocate onto unpopulated lands. When plague struck, humans blamed the Qar; they killed many and drove the survivors back into the wastelands of the north. But as the humans try to expand northward, they run into the shadowline, a line put their by the Fairy to prevent mortals from entering their land. Residents of Southmarch, the realm closest to the shadowline, guard the wall to warn their brethren if the humans penetrate.

The Southmarch ruling family is the Eddons, but the patriarch is held hostage in the Southland and the Prince Regent is mysteriously killed, leaving twins Briony and Barrick in charge. In Qar, the Fae Hesemnez is ready to take back the land stolen from her people, especially Southmarch. Meanwhile the co-regents worry about the Autarch to their south whose growing empire poses a threat and internally someone is willing to and has killed to rid the land of the Eddons.

Shadowmarch is fine fantasy on an epic scale in a world in which those wielding magic must battle those who vastly outnumber them. Briony deals with court intrigue to include betrayal by those she trusts while preparing for war; her brother is haunted by nightmares but insists he must head their army against the Qar. Readers will hope that this heroic duo triumph over their enemies, though it looks bleak as Tad Williams once again creates a series that rivals the best fantasists.

Babylon 5 Season Three DVD Box Set Warner Home Video 2003



Six-disc Set
MSRP: \$99.98
Review by Doug Roper

The third season of Babylon 5, titled “Point of No Return,” represents some of the best television produced in the last twenty years, science fiction or otherwise. This is the season where everything that has been building up over that past

44 episodes finally breaks loose and rampages across the carefully constructed background of the series. From the opening episode through the final, almost unbelievable climax, the season does little except accelerate toward the end.

Written entirely by series creator J. Michael Straczynski, the intricate plots and vulnerable characters come together for a season full of shocks, surprises, sadness and alliteration (okay the last one was mine, and not a main element of the series, sue me). Characters come and go, entire worlds shift on their axis, the conflicts alluded to in the previous seasons spill onto the screen in full, horrific glory. There are no spoilers offered in this review, (or titles of key episodes) as I couldn’t bear to be the person who spoiled some of the series’ biggest surprises. I can offer tantalizing clues. Want to know what happened to Sinclair after “Chrysalis”? Want to know what really happened to Babylon 4? Want to know what happened to Anna Sheridan? Want to know who Morden really is? Want to know why the Shadows wage war on the galaxy? Guess you better get the third season; just don’t expect the answers to be nice, or simple, and don’t expect to be able to stop watching afterward. There is little else to say, other than “wow,” and chances are you’ll say it a lot.

All the episodes are presented in anamorphic widescreen, and there are cast and crew commentaries on key episodes. Also, there are three featurettes produced for the DVD release. “Behind the Mask: Creating the Aliens of Babylon 5,” “Building a Better Narn,” and “Designing Tomorrow: The Look of Babylon 5.” There is also the “Universe of Babylon 5” information area, where you can look up info on characters, events and places discussed during the run of the show. Lastly there is a hidden gag reel for season three, rounding out a great set of extras for a fabulous DVD set.

RPG Corner (con't)

of the Game Master. Without it, you're just going through motions, and your players will pick up on it. When the GM is happy and excited about the scenarios he is designing and running, the games will be better. In my experience, GM's who are writing and running just to pass the time will not produce good scenarios. I have been guilty of this, and I've seen the results. A lack of motivation creates loose plot structure, forgettable characters, and obviously contrived encounters and resolutions. As a GM, you are responsible for the lion's share of the success of the game you are running. It is a communal experience, but the Player Characters are limited in what they can do, and they must function with the characters, plots, and settings created by the GM. Your own enthusiasm is the key ingredient to good scenarios.

Lynch Interview (con't)

As an example, in October, we recently we found ourselves bidding on the same item—a stack of twenty *Star Trek Communicator* magazines at the Charity Auction at ICON29 (Iowa's oldest Science Fiction Convention). I ended up with the highest bid (no thanks to Denny ☺) and walked away with my prize. Later he apologized for bidding against me ("I didn't know I was bidding against *you*, I couldn't see who it was.") and graciously offered to buy them when I was finished reading them. With a wink, I informed him coyly that his offer was very kind, but these were for *my own* collection. We shared a good laugh over it that was loud and wonderful. I walked away poorer and richer at the same time!

"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." He smiles broadly. "If you are actively looking, you might find what you want, or you might find something completely unexpected."

For me, Dennis Lynch was completely unexpected and delightful. His students, friends and cohorts are lucky that they can learn about fandom and the evolution of science fiction from this gregarious, knowledgeable and patient instructor. Do they realize their good fortune? It is not only information about a few science fiction trinkets they will walk away with.

"The world is only as interesting as you are, and far more amazing if you're paying attention." Denny Lynch, 2002

In *your* quest to collect, may you find the unexpected!

Writer's Block (con't)

and indirect benefits to my writing. There are storylines and detail that I can use, and my memory provides me with emotions and images that help make my fiction more realistic. In dreams, I have been both detectives and victims. I've been children and adults. I've *been* the devil. And once I was a serial killer writing a novel in the blood of my victims.

If you want to use dreams to help your own writing, there are several things you can do. First, of course, you have to *remember* your dreams. Some folks believe that they seldom or never dream, but research shows that all humans dream every single night. However, people are only likely to remember their dreams if they wake up after they're over, *and* if they then spend a few minutes *thinking* about those dreams. I suggest getting a journal to keep by your bedside, and then take time to actually write your dreams down.

But how can you write them down if you don't recall them? Well, to help you in the act of recall, here are a few hints. First, don't drink caffeinated products—colas, coffee, teas—for the last few hours before you go to bed. Caffeine suppresses dreaming. Second, know that, on the average, typical sleep alternates with dream sleep throughout the night on a cycle of about 90 minutes, with 60 or so minutes of regular sleep and then 20-30 minutes of dream sleep. This means that your dreams should begin about an hour after you go to sleep.

People who remember their dreams best will usually wake completely up at the end of the dream period. This means that if you were to set your alarm for about 1 hour and 15 minutes after you lay down to sleep, the alarm should go off and awaken you during a dream period. Then you lay there and think about what you were experiencing. Of course, you might not want to do this on days you have to work, but try it sometime when you're on vacation, or if you plan to have a nap on the weekend.

It may also help you remember your dreams if you spend a few minutes *before* you got to sleep "ordering" yourself to recall your dreams. I've found that, with practice, I can set an internal alarm to wake myself up at certain times in the morning, and that I can convince myself to improve my recall of dreams.

There is another thing that I use to help my recall. If I can remember anything at all about my dreams, then I start to ask questions. "What time of day was it? Was the sun shining or was it raining? Was I inside or outside? Was there anyone else there that I knew?"

If you can improve your memory for the strange experiences that fill your sleep, then you may be able to tap into a rich new source of inspiration for your fiction. Give it a try. And, pleasant dreams!

Nationality (con't)

you will. Look at any major city, and you will probably find a Chinatown, a Little Italy, and/or other sections with high concentrations of a particular ethnicity. Similarly, in speculative fiction, members of a given Race tend to live together, either in their own nations or in isolated communities within a given nation.

This sad truth may harken back to a less tolerant time, when minorities were forced to live together, but it is just as likely that these communities form on their own, because people of the same Race—people often translocated from one Nation to another—seek the comfort of people with a similar attitude and history. Whatever the reason, clustering tends to intensify the differences between communities rather than alleviate them, leading to animosity and conflict (good for literature, not so good for reality).

Moreover, when groups of the same Race live in the same location, the lines between Race and Nationality are blurred. This is a common manifestation of the nature versus nurture argument. Genetic elements will certainly play a role in a character's development, but so will environmental factors. Which one will predominate? How much of any given character is based on genetics and how much on the environment in which the character lives?

There is no simple answer, and the final decision is left to the author and his interpretation of his Races and Nations. A good exercise, and a good way to figure out whether nature or nurture is more important in a particular scenario, is to transplant a character and see how his attitudes would be affected. By way of example, let's say there are two communities—Dogville and Catville—and each community is comprised of only one Race (the Byrds live in Dogville; the Phish in Catville). The two Races are very different physiologically, and the two communities have never gotten along. In particular, there is a character integral to the story, a young Catvillian named Guppy. His hatred for the Byrds in Dogville is legendary, and he is gathering a school of his buddies to wage war on the flocks of his mortal enemy.

But how much of Guppy's hatred is due to the fact that he is a Phish and they are Byrds, and how much is due to the fact that he lives in Catville and they in Dogville? To find out, transplant Guppy to Dogville. To make it even simpler, imagine that Guppy is accepted by the Byrds despite the fact that he is a Phish. Does he still hate Byrds—is there a predetermined element to his hatred—or does he now despise those idiots

over in Catville? Devise different scenarios. The Byrds don't accept Guppy, or they merely tolerate him. How does that affect the character? Instead of long-standing rivals, the two towns are trading partners. Is there any hatred at all, or do the Byrds and the Phish get along splendidly once the National element is removed. After running through a number of scenarios and noting the differences in Guppy's beliefs, it becomes easier to see how important Race and Nationality are to the work.

The last subject to touch upon is outliers. How should those in a Nation who do not believe the same things be treated? From the eccentric old kook living on the top of the hill to the radical religious extremists painting bloody symbols on their neighbors' doors, all Nations will be filled with those who do not conform to the ideal. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if realism is the goal of one's work (as opposed to symbolism or allegory) then no character should ever personify a given Nationality. A Nation is virtually a character unto itself, and its beliefs, ideals, and goals are rarely completely realized in any of its citizens. In the real world, each of us has preconceived notions of what it means to be American (or French, Iranian, Australian, etc.). Not only do those notions vary from person to person, but if you take an individual and compare him to the ideal, rarely do you find that the two match on the majority of points (and in my experience, never on all points). Determining if outliers are ostracized or tolerated, listened to or reconditioned by the other members of a Nation is up to the author, just as is the scope and extent of the differences between members of a community.

How much difference should there be? In my opinion, greater diversity is always better, though not always easier. My goal in writing is to make every character an individual, not merely reflections of a given character type. Other writers may have other goals, and diversity may not play as great a factor. Each work is unique, and thus these guidelines I have provided will vary in importance from one work to the next.

But no matter how integral to the work, by assigning a Nationality to characters, an author can bind them not only to each other but to the land as well. Nations are one of the most powerful groups in any fiction, for what is more important to a person than their home and the people they share that home with?

In my next article, I will explore another classification method often employed in fiction: Profession.