



The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Character Profiling IV: Profession

By Bret Funk

Sometimes stories take place in one country, or among members of a single species. When this happens, Race and Nationality become ineffectual as a means of showing differences between characters. Authors are forced to use more common place systems to classify characters, and Profession ranks among the most popular.

Unlike Race and Nationality, Profession does not need a fancy definition to be applicable to speculative fiction. It is what it is: the job a character has chosen as a means of survival. Profession can range from fighter to diplomat, from industrious thief to lazy, ne'er-do-well heir, and it encompasses just about anything in between or combination thereof.

People in similar professions tend to have the similar concerns. Within a town or a region, economical factors will affect most members of a profession equally. A blight on the land will make all farmers nervous (unless some poor fool has earned the wrath of the Gods or upset a wizard specializing in crop plagues) and the threat of imminent war should

bolster the trade of all the blacksmiths in a region, not just a select few. Of course, there are exceptions, but if exceptions are noted, then they are probably integral to the story and should be treated accordingly.

Profession can be used to give characters individuality. Is a character lazier than his competitors or more ambitious? Does he want everyone to work together or is he resistant to the idea of an organized Cartwright's Guild? Are the merchants in the town honest or unscrupulous, and how does their attitude jive with that of the character? How deep-seeded is the rivalry between

the Society of Potion Preparers and the Organization of Scroll Scriveners? By contrasting Profession A with Profession B, an author can add intricacy to his world while simultaneously adding dimension to his characters. Showing differences between members of a single profession adds an extra level of detail and makes even minor players seem like real people.

When a story takes place in one particular community, Profession is often the best method for showing difference, but even when the story spans long distances and wide cultural gaps, Profession can be a useful tool. Because they do the same thing and are affected by the same factors, people of a given profession tend to have similar outlooks on life, no matter where they're from or how different their upbringing. And even when cultural differences prevail over vocational ones, Profession gives characters something to talk about: *You're a blacksmith? Me too! What's that you're doing? The metal end of the hammer? That's ingenious! We've been using the haft for decades, but you're way seems to work a lot better.*

Talking shop may bore the spouses of your characters, but it's a good way to find commonality in an environment freakishly different from the one a character is used to. In fact, it is often used as the anchor in fish-out-of-water scenarios. In many tales of wandering heroes (those who aren't set on some particular quest, that is) the character seeks out those who share their trade, be it butcher, baker, candlestick maker, or some other, more common SF profession.

There is a price to be paid, however, if an author wants to use Profession successfully and without raising the ire of readers. Attention to detail is of the utmost importance. In many cases, a general description will suffice, but some authors like to delve into specifics, and when they do, proper procedures should be followed (unless it is integral to the story that they are not). Few things upset readers—those in the know, at least—more than realizing an author has no idea what he's talking about. If the forging of a sword is discussed in great detail, the appropriate procedure should be used, and unless the author also happens to be a blacksmith, it might be prudent to do

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RPG Corner v4.0: Game Master Liability

by Doug >!< Roper of EPIC Gaming

Game Master. Just the name implies unlimited control over every facet of the entire Role-Play Gaming experience. He is all powerful, able to ignore or modify dice rolls at his whim, able to change basic laws and truths without batting an eye, and able to reconstruct the world around the player-characters without them even being aware of it. The Game Master is all knowing, having either read the entire scenario through and through or written it himself. There is no question he cannot answer, no bit of information he does not know. The Game Master is omniscient and omnipotent.

Or is he?

Because Role-Playing Games are almost universally played by small groups of friends, it can sometimes be hard to keep the external social relationships from intruding into the fantastic world of the game. Taking on the role of Game Master means that a person is accepting a great deal of power, but also a great deal of responsibility, and that the power and responsibility has been granted by the other players, who are more likely than not close friends of the new GM. It's not an easy job to have all of the time, and sometimes it can be a very difficult position to hold. If a GM is running a game for a group of friends, how can he allow bad things to happen to them? How much responsibility should he take if bad things do occur?

For a GM to be able to run an effective scenario, there must first be a great deal of trust between player and GM. Without trust, the player will be suspicious of every setback or failure, wondering why the GM is "out to get them." He will often be frustrated with unanswered questions about the plot or characters, and will more often than not quit, or find a way to sabotage the game to get out of it. Players have to believe that the GM has not given the player-characters an insurmountable task or foe, and that despite the initial frustrations, there will be a payoff. Outside of a preexisting social group (a circle of friends) this trust must be built over time, but within it, the GM is granted that trust almost right away, until he does something to potentially damage it.

To be able to balance the setbacks with the promise of victory, and then find a way to make it all pay off in the most dramatic fashion possible is a tough thing enough thing to do without having to worry about whether the players are fundamentally having a good time, but that is exactly what a GM is doing.

The responsibilities of the GM include running

the story fairly and dramatically, and catering as much as is possible to the player-characters to ensure that the characters have the opportunity to enjoy themselves. Additionally, he may be responsible for the design of the scenario (or world), and many times, the physical space in which the game takes place (i.e., the GM's apartment or house). He does all of this on a volunteer basis. GM's don't get paid, and they find their enjoyment of the game in setting up the player-characters for the "wow" moments. The Game Master's enjoyment of the game is vicarious; he appreciates and is satisfied with the work he has done if the players are happy and satisfied with the scenario. What happens if the players are not having fun? What happens if, for whatever reason, the players are fed up and ready to bail out of the game? Is this the fault of the GM entirely, since it's his job to run an entertaining game?

While the GM is responsible for a great deal, he cannot accept responsibility for everything, including player enjoyment. Assuming the Game Master has done all within his power to make the game appealing to the players, the rest is up to them. If the GM has selected an appropriate Model to operate in and has taken steps to give each character a compelling reason to journey down the path he has designed, and the player is unhappy, the first thing a GM should do is examine why the player may be upset. Bad dice rolls are often a common source of stress for a player. If his character isn't shining like he envisioned, there can be some disappointment in the player, but this should pass with a few subsequent successes. Something even further from the control of the GM is poor player choice. If a player chooses to send his character down a path that he knows could be dangerous and something bad happens to the character, the player may feel that the GM failed to warn him in some way of the danger, or failed to present a clear alternative. Novice GMs may feel that they are responsible for bad things that happen to the characters, after all the GM did design the poison dart trap that took the life of his best friend's character. However poor player choices, or unlucky dice rolls, are beyond the control of the GM, and he should not be expected to shoulder the guilt for a bad outcome to an adventure.

Players who are inattentive to descriptions, or dismissive of NPCs will not have all of the facts, it's true, but any GM worth his stripes will not force important facts down the player-character's throat

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Prophecy or Science Fiction?

by Terry Crotinger/montanasings

It was the repairman's fault. Idly waiting for the copier to be fixed, I asked the repairman if he thought we'd ever *really* have a paperless society (thinking I was being witty since he was working on a device that used a lot of paper). At first I thought his answer was as glib. But over the course of a year we discussed the topic when we'd meet up with each other in the teacher's workroom (we had a very busy copier and with forty-six teachers, it was often ailing). He would cite example and instance where technology had reduced the workload, or detail how instruments and equipment were compacted and compressed to be more applicable on the job or for the task. At the time, I figured his information akin to gospel since he worked with "technology". I had to laugh at some of the ideas he'd confront me with, often offending him.

The biggest laugh, which I held privately, was the roll of computers. The Repairman led me to believe that a paperless society was possible and that computers would be so commonplace there would be no need for *manipulatives* (meaning things for little kids to play with to learn manual dexterity, eye-hand coordination and other learning skills). "Not for art? Not to learn to write?" I asked, incredulously. His negative reply always ended up with the computer being the savior of our trees and world peace. "No backed up documents in an underground vault? No hardcopy in the Library of Congress?" But for each example I tested him with, his answer was the same. Children would no longer need to write using awkward objects forced between pudgy fingers; art would be digital and the canvas a graphics program. Manual dexterity would be learned via joystick and keypad.

Try to imagine a society, nay, an entire world with its myriad of societies and cultures with the computer as our constant companion, uniting us as one people, young and old in blissful communication with each other. I periodically pondered his predictions might prove prophetic with each new discovery in science, medicine, technology and education. Each seemed hell-bent on utilizing the amazing processing features of the microchip to their advantage. I saw little evidence of the need for paper; every idea, document and drawing was stored, safely, we assume, on a floppy, hard drive, flash pen or server somewhere in cyberland. Could The Repairman be right? Can we really have a paperless society? I still couldn't endorse this concept and was frustrated that I was unable to adequately express just why.

Computers. I build custom computers and teach the young how to use them and struggle with the old who think their learning curve is out of their ballpark. Convincing them it really *is* user friendly, with practice, fights many long-held beliefs and neural pathways. I love technology. But I see a frailty with *this* technology as typing skills are now utilized as command skills few would have dreamed of a hundred years before.

I liken our computer technology to the first attempts at making a rounded object into a device we know as the wheel. I look back at our ancestors, in the birth of our humanity, struggling with this new concept—discovering how it can be made uniform, and how to use this strange invention. The evolution from the first log or stone tool to landing gear on a spacecraft is an amazing advancement. In order for our humble little microchip to become something as common with such possibilities may take longer than The Repairman realizes; it may be science fiction.

Star Trek started us thinking in this direction. In the sixties, Americans watched our coming technological future on a consistent basis in their cozy living rooms; setting the stage for the shift in thinking that technology will be commonplace. But we aren't there yet. The future of technology—computers, the microchip, processors and the like—is still in its infancy, in my opinion.

But will humanity really embrace this to the point that paper is unnecessary, or worse, in my imagination, a commodity frowned upon like fur coats and protected like dolphin-safe tuna? I hope not. We can, and do, replenish our forests; we're getting smarter about how we use/abuse consumables.

The Michelangelo's and manga-makers still need a free hand to experiment with texture, color and shadow on the medium of their choice. As impressed as I am with Veggie-Tales, science fiction movies with their spectacular and implausible special effects, and how great my picture looks after it's been touched up using some nameless photo-program on my computer, I just cannot imagine not writing my name and feeling friction of pen on paper.

As a writer-wanna-be, I use my souped-up computer to record my thoughts, but not exclusively. I need to experience erasing and drawing arrows to thoughts on a different part of the page. I like having all my documents within reach on my desk. I like cut-and-paste, but, it doesn't give me the feeling of satisfaction of sitting under a tree with the ants trying to capture a

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The Writer's Block: First Words

by Charles Gramlich

Personally, I've always enjoyed looking at a blank page and then marking it up with my scribbles. When I was in college I loved getting new notebooks. The snowy white expanse of all those pages was an invitation. Each new sheet held promise. Maybe I'd write something really cool on this one.

Today, I write on a computer, but when I open a new file and see...nothing, I still get that same little thrill. Perhaps this time I'll write the perfect story, the one that I can see in my head but never quite capture.

A lot of people don't seem to think this way, though. They don't like the blank page. I won't say it makes them afraid, but they don't feel comfortable with it. They need stuff on that page, something to distract the eye or draw the mind. And some people go blank themselves when they are faced with emptiness. Where do they start? *How* do they start? Below are some suggestions that might help.

1: Let yourself write ugly. You probably wouldn't get up from a night's sleep and go directly out on a date. You'd fix yourself up a bit first. But you don't *blame* yourself for your morning face, morning hair, morning breath. Treat your writing the same way. It doesn't have to be perfect, or even presentable, when it first comes out of your head onto the screen. Get stuff down and then worry about making it look and sound good.

No one in the world has to see the first words you put down. You can try out anything you like, use any word that pleases you, make any argument you want to make, and no one can deny or contradict you. No one can tell you: "That sucks!" Who cares if what you put down is ugly? You can always fix it later.

2: Don't read as you write. Some folks put down a sentence or paragraph and then spend the next few hours proofing, checking, and polishing that paragraph. Don't try to "fix" things too early or you'll lose track of how a piece is developing. Do you ever get interrupted when you're talking and lose your train of thought? Well, stopping too early to correct errors can cause the same thing. Your masterpiece could disappear like a morning fog.

How do you avoid reading when the screen is right there in front of you? If you're writing on a desktop computer you could just turn the monitor off. If you're using a laptop you might not be able to do that, but you could cover the screen or simply write in white on a white background (which works well for me if I'm taking a typing test). Later, when you're ready to

polish, do "select all" and turn the words black. The point is, if you can't see your errors you won't be tempted to fix them until later.

3: Conclusions. Taking a piece from a bare idea to publishable form requires two steps—writing and editing. Both steps are necessary, but before you can combine them to produce a finished product, you first have to be able to separate them in your head. You learn to write, then to edit. Publication will follow.

Lost Truth Dawn Cook



Ace, Dec 2004

\$7.99, Paperback, 368 pp.

ISBN 0441012280

Review by Harriet Klausner

The hold once thrived as a place where raku masters taught human keepers how to use their magical skills. A map showing a lost colony of masters split the hold with Useless staying behind while and his wife Keribdis led the rest of them across the sea to

see if the colony actually existed. They never returned and the rest of the keepers were killed by a rogue with a grudge. Alissa defeated the renegade keeper and freed Useless.

Now Alissa is a human born Master who can shapeshift into a raku (a dragon) and dreams of a raku named Silla. When Useless finds out about her dreams, he realizes that the Masters and Keepers who left the hold are alive. Alissa and her two suitors Strell and Lodesh and the Master Conner-Nute take a ship to an island cluster, where they find the Masters and the Keepers. Keribdis believes she should take over Alissa's teaching and when the younger refuses her, Keribdis uses force to bow her to her will, almost killing Alissa in the process. Alissa's only hope to survive the attack is the help of someone who supposedly died

Lost Truth is an appealing fantasy that will charm fans of Elizabeth Scarborough and Tonya Huff. The heroine breaks all the rules that the masters thought were set in stone but does so in naive innocence. It is her ability that gives hope to the rakui who pray that she can discover the solution to their dramatically decrease in numbers. Dawn Cook is a talented fantasist who is a creative world builder and a genius on creating complex characters.

Reviews

Babylon 5 Season Four DVD Box Set Warner Home Video 2003



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

Series creator J. Michael Straczynski, in an effort to make sure that this season, as well as the one before, remains internally consistent and moves at a pace he considers appropriate, pens all 22 episodes of the fourth season

of Babylon 5. The season's title, "No Surrender, No Retreat," reflects the position of the characters within the show, and the people behind the cameras as well, as the fourth season of Babylon 5 was very nearly its last.

The thrust of the show deals mainly with the close of the Shadow War and the war for Earth. The characters fight with their backs to the wall to defeat the seemingly invincible Shadows, and discover that their list of enemies will grow larger before it vanishes. The pacing of the fourth season is carried over slightly from the previous episodes in season three, with a brief lull in the action that mimics a lull in the fighting within the show. When things do get cooking again, though, hang onto your socks. Once again, shocks and surprises abound, as well as a few tears along the way. This is the season that delivers on all of the promises made during the previous three seasons.

The season ends with what looks like a good resolution, and actually would not be a bad place to bid farewell to the characters. This was done because at the time of the production, Straczynski was told to wrap up the season that year, because the studio was eager to close the book on the show. The fans of Babylon 5, and some ninth inning heroics on the part of TNT, got the show its fifth and final season, but it was not without a cost.

Anamorphic widescreen presentation makes sure you won't miss anything visually, and cast and crew commentaries on selected episodes will offer great behind the scenes info and trivia for fans. There is a featurette about Christopher Franke, the composer who scored the entire series, as well as the "Universe of Babylon 5" information area where you can look up certain aspects of the show. There is a gag reel, but for the first time it isn't "hidden" as an easter egg, but accessible directly from the menu.

Season 4 of Babylon 5 is an excellent set of episodes, and a brilliant conclusion to most of the major plot threads introduced in the earlier programs. It is also a great bridge into the 5th and final "miracle" season.

Path of Honor Diana Pharaoh Francis



Roc, Dec 2004
\$6.99, Paperback, 354 pp.
ISBN: 0451459911
Review by Harriet Klausner

Reisil is an ahalad-kaaslane (a witch) bonded with her goshawk Saljane, a powerful magical pairing that allowed her to kill one hundred rogue wizards at Mysane Kosk and caused the surviving wizards to flee into

hiding. In the realm of Kodu Riik, Reisil thinks she will be accepted by the ahalad-kaaslane because she stopped the wizards, but the nobles fear her power as a threat to theirs.

To make matters worse, the people who she saved have turned against her when she fails to prevent the plague or heal those who caught the dreaded disease. Nokulas, magical creatures once human, are running loose and locals know first hand the danger they can cause. The ruler has become a Nokulas, locked away so he can do no harm, but causing a leadership power vacuum that his evil son wants to fill. A man from another dimension finds Reisil hoping she will heal his wounded land, a by-product of what occurred at Mysane Kosk. The countries that border on Kodu Riik blockade the nation so that no one can cross into their countries bringing the plague into their lands. Reisil must locate the hiding wizards to make them undo the damage they have caused to two realms in different dimensions.

Path of Honor the road that Reisil walks even when the trail proves life threatening. Starving for affection and a need to belong, the wizards almost destroy Reisil by shamming how valuable she is to them. She knows she must save her beloved land or watch the destruction of those she cherishes. Diana Pharaoh Francis provides an appealing magical fantasy tale featuring a stubborn independent heroine whose self esteem is extremely low as she desperately needs someone to love her.

Reviews

Magic Time: Ghostlands

Marc Scott Zicree and Robert Charles Wilson



Eos, Dec 2004

\$25.76, Hardcover

ISBN: 0061050709

Review by Harriet Klausner

The experiment Source devastated nature by destroying electric energy and changing people by enhancing their key traits into a caricature like magical essence. Many have died, including those who

have trusted weary former attorney Cal Griffen; he feels he failed them all in the end though none would fault him. Still he has no time to mourn as his evanescent younger sister Christina the ballerina vanished to wherever the storm floated her like a bubble.

His quest to find Tina took him from New York to Chicago where Magritte, one of the people Cal feels he failed died. The journey for Cal and his pilgrims continue westward through deadly cities where the Source holds sway with magic that threaten to destroy the earth. Cal's band of brothers, sisters, and other essences enter the dangerous Ghostlands reaching Mount Rushmore, pivotal foci of the Source. The troupe faces their worst magically enhanced customized nightmarish fears in this last stand to save human existence on this plane; to succeed against the overwhelming powers of the enemy, they need Tina on their side and not part of the Source.

Fantasy fans will devour the final Magic Time tale that is a terrific confrontation between the remnants of metamorphosis humanity vs. the offspring Source. Interestingly the theme is not a simplistic good vs. evil scenario, but instead is more along the lines of the Frankenstein warning. The story line is action-packed from the first pyre to the final fire, but never neglects the key characters as their characteristics remain critical to the entertaining story line. *Magic Time: Ghostlands* can stand alone, but is further enhanced with reading the previous two novels, *Magic Time* and *Magic Time: Angelfire*.

Schism

Catherine Asaro



Tor, Dec 2004

\$25.95, Hardcover, 464 pp.

ISBN: 0765309513

Review by Harriet Klausner

Humanity has colonized thousands of worlds; technology and medicine have made incredible advances; yet war still exists. The Skolian Empire is based on democratic ideals while conversely the

Aristo Traders Empire is built on slavery. Hostility seems imminent between these giants.

On the planet Lyshriol, seventeen years old Soz has gone behind her father Eldrinson's back to take the preliminary exams to enroll in the Desham Military Academy where her brother Alhtor is a fourth year cadet. Due to her high scores on the tests and the upcoming need for warriors, the Academy waives the age and parental requirements enabling Soz to enroll. Soz's father angrily disowns both Soz and Alhtor.

Their father regrets his words almost immediately but before he can do anything about it, his as his fourteen year old son has run away. As he looks for the lad, an Aristo capture him. Somehow the Traders have bypassed security on this Skolian planet. The Aristo cripples and blind him; when he recovers he withdraws from everyone even his beloved wife. Meanwhile Soz amazes everyone as she learns at an accelerated pace, but now she knows what happened to her father and vows to be the avenging Jagernaut.

Soz is a very interesting character, who, if she lives long enough, will probably replace her half-brother as the Emperor when Korj is unable to fulfill those duties any longer. Like her sire, she is a strong independent warrior who refuses to accept any weakness as she expects to be more than just the best soldier the academy ever graduated. Her father has a long recuperative road to journey, but like Soz stubbornly refused to allow his captors the victory they expected. *Schism* is filled with adventure, intrigue and drama on personal and galaxy levels that makes for an obvious Nebula nomination.

Reviews

The Black Company by Glen Cook



Tor, 1984
Paperback, \$6.99, 320 pp.
ISBN: 0812521390
Review by Scott H. Andrews

The success of gritty, realistic fantasy like George R. R. Martin's *Ice and Fire* saga and Jacqueline Carey's *Kushiel* novels has left the idealized Tolkien clones of the early 80s seeming extremely dated. Yet from that same period,

Glen Cook's *The Black Company* stands out as a prototypical example of this style.

The Black Company follows one campaign in the multi-century history of a mercenary unit. Cook writes in a brusque first-person narrative from the point-of-view of the company's physician, Croaker. Other members of the company, identified by first names or nicknames, are only introduced when they have a role in the story. Cook's fantasy world is similarly used only as a backdrop – cities are mentioned and briefly described when Croaker rides through them, but the culture is never detailed.

The narrative is stripped down to only those things necessary to advance the plot. The novel opens at the end of one campaign and moves quickly into another, with no long introductory phase like in most epic fantasy. Characters are developed through their actions, not through pages of backstory. Various characters perform magic, but the narrative never stops to explain the magic system. Only the final battle is detailed – others are summarized in one or two lines. The legend behind the Lady and the Taken is only outlined, from the scant information that Croaker and the Black Company know.

This wildly innovative approach, compared to other early 80s fantasy, produces a novel that is unique yet flawed. The lack of development of the society leaves the novel feeling rushed. The focus on Croaker slights the development of several other main characters. The conclusion ends one plot arc, without resolving most of the overall conflict. *The Black Company* ends up as more a soldier's diary than a traditional fantasy novel. The world and experiences that shape Croaker and the other one or two major characters are fantasy, but their moral struggle to stay honorable while surrounded by evil is universal.

After reading *The Black Company*, it's obvious where Steven Erikson, a leading writer of modern realistic fantasy, got many of the ideas in *Gardens of the Moon*. The gritty military company, the consistent but unexplained magic system, the novel starting at the end of one campaign and moving into the next one, humans interacting directly with the semi-divine, and the lack of stark "good" and "evil" are all ideas right out of *The Black Company*. Erikson expands them to fit his hyper-epic scale, but in many ways they read better in Cook's simpler original form.

It's a testament to the realism of Cook's vision that *The Black Company* still holds up twenty years after it was first published. This novel offers a unique early 80s fantasy read that perfectly fits the current trend of realistic fantasy.

Nightside City Lawrence Watt-Evans



Ballantine Books, April 1989
\$13.50, 188 pgs.
ISBN 0970971117/0345359445
Review by Terry Crotinger

There is no doubt—this novel was written by a man. Careful skill must be utilized when writing a character not of the same gender and sadly, Lawrence Watt-Evans makes a valiant effort but fails with his female detective, Carlisle Hsing, as a believable main character. "Carlie" thinks like a man, not a woman. Her investigative skills are masculine. For a male, those tactics make perfect sense. For a female with such behaviors, she would be accused of having lighter roots. I feel sorry for Carlie because it's not her fault.

Watt-Evans puts his character on a planet that for eons has been in darkness. That is the draw for tourists—eternal night. Well, almost. The entire culture has been built on the idea that "eventually" the planet would rotate enough to throw the city into lethal daylight. But that event is in the future as the terminator moves centimeters closer to the main city every day. Until then, the Vegas-type tourist nightlife and accompanying slimy citizens call it home.

Carlie is hired by the less-than-pretty squatters (translation: trailer trash) on the West End (the side slowly being exposed to daylight and eventual doom) because someone is buying the buildings—very

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cheaply—and kicking them out of their homes. But the question that fascinates Carlie is, who would want worthless property?

The questions Watt-Evans has his detective muse are appropriate for any gender, and he does a believable job in covering all the angles without boring the reader. However, he has Carlie barging into homes and asking direct questions in a manner no self-respecting PI would. Her methods have no subtlety and end up counter-productive. She is like a guy with a can of beer in his hand trying to solve a mystery. While a female detective does not need to emulate the epitome of a *lady*, the tactics used in this investigation would make sense for a *novice* male or SpongeBob; but not even a butchy female would choose methods so unlikely unless she was just stupid.

So how did the author err? If he had written Carlisle Hsing as a male character, it would make perfect sense and be a better story. Even attempts at explaining the science of why the planet is slowly turning to permanent daylight is from a man's perspective, trapped in a woman's body, trying to explain to another woman how it all works. This premise is crucial to the story but explained to death—as if it needed to be re-explained every so often because a female reader wouldn't "get it".

Watt-Evans is a published author with several novels and a series, *The Lords of Dus*, to his credit; so he's no novice to the printed page. *Nightside City* had a believable plot and a twisted ending—though I was disappointed with it. But this novel lacked the grace of how a woman would behave as a detective. If Lawrence Watt-Evans edits this with a male character, he's got a winner, otherwise, this reads like Nancy Drew's cross-dressing older brother at work on a case making *Nightside City* hard to enjoy—even with a beer in my hand.

Science fiction is the search for definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mould.

—Brian W. Aldiss

Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction

Women and Cats will do as they please.
Men and dogs had better get used to it.

— Robert Heinlein

Time Enough for Love, Lazarus Long

Dog Warrior Wen Spencer



Roc, Oct 2004

\$6.99, Paperback, 300 pp.

ISBN: 0451459903

Review by Harriet Klausner

Aliens live among us with the Ortongard and the Pack being two ET species at war with one another because the latter believes that if they don't stop the former, the planet will be transformed into an Ortongard orb as humans merge into a single cell group mind. Ukiah Oregon is the only known soul on earth who is half human and half Pack. The Ortongard want him to breed more of their kind, but he is captured by a cult.

Atticus Steele smells blood and opens a truck to find a dead person, his unknown brother Ukiah Oregon. He knows that with rest and feeding the man will regenerate because he is just like him only he doesn't know his origins and thinks he is a freak". They are tracking the cult for different reasons, but are on the same side as the Ortongard from the cult has stolen weapons that could destroy humanity. Atticus and his new ally and Ukiah and the Pack search for these WMDs before the pandemic occurs.

Wen Spencer writes an exciting science fiction thriller that is especially innovative in a series (this is book four) that has a reputation for originality. The author keeps his tales fresh by introducing an intriguing new character with new developments in the theme that insures the story line is not simply reiterated. The differences between Atticus and Ukiah adds depth as the newcomer is a product of the foster system so he is wary of love while the half breed showers his brother with love. The action is fast-paced and filled with adventure and likable aliens trying to save the earth.

Reviews

Prophecy or SF (con't)

feeling or event hastily scribbled on a greasy napkin or sitting at a stop light writing an idea on the back of my water bill.

Mind you, I do not miss the days of manual typewriters—the non-electric kind from the dark ages (though, I just realized that I pound my keyboard as if I'm trying to get the correct tension on those hard-to-press keys of my past!). Being able to print a document with the tiny push of one mouse button is quite an improvement; I do enjoy the outcome. But, it is the *process* I enjoy most.

The need for creativity will not change, just how it is accomplished. Often, change is good. Getting used to new technologies needs that rare paradigm shift toward acceptance in order to be fully integrated. *That*, I can accept. So, when The Repairman prophesied I would no longer need him in a mere decade to come, I balked; but I may quietly lay in a stash of notebook paper, just in case.

Character Profiling (con't)

a little fact-checking before sending the book to press. Similarly, if an author uses profession-specific jargon, he should make sure he uses it correctly. Were I to ever read 'Unfurl the rudder and batten down the mizzen mast!' not only would I stop wasting my time on the book, I'd have half a mind to hunt down the author and beg him to stop writing.

Speculative Fiction readers are a nit-picky bunch, and most are more than happy to point out mistakes, often cruelly and excessively. If an author doesn't want the criticism, he should take the time to do a little research before putting his pen to paper. As an aside, this is one of the few areas of SF writing that affects science fiction writers more than fantasy writers; far more people have a general understanding of physics than know the intricacies of boat-making or arrow fletching. That does not, however, give fantasy writers *carte blanche* to make up facts indiscriminately; there are more than enough tradesmen and history buffs out there with a penchant for the fantastic.

If used properly, Profession is a valuable tool for helping round out a character's identity. By paying attention to detail and making an effort to understand their characters' professions, authors can add yet another level of realism to their worlds. And by combining Profession with other style of grouping, an almost limitless number of unique characters can be created.

Next month, we will wrap up the topic by touching briefly on some of the other classification methods often employed in SF.

RPG Corner (con't)

unless the story calls for such an action. Look at any popular suspense or thriller movie as a guide. The clue that seals the doom of the villain (or the hero!) is often tiny, and easily overlooked or forgotten. Is it the director's fault that the clue was so small? Perhaps he was arranging the shocking twist at the end from the very start, and didn't want to tip his hand too early. Inevitably, the protagonist in the movie remembers the clue, or discovers it in enough time to end the film in dramatic fashion. GMs are no different than directors or screenwriters in this instance. The clue may be small, and may not even make sense until much later in the scenario, but players who overlook it or shrug it off will not have the opportunity to make the connection later. As long as the clue was presented, the GM has done all he can do. Forgiving Game Masters may have events to remind characters of important clues, but they aren't compelled to. The players have to meet the GM halfway, or it stops becoming an interactive event and the players are just listening to the Game Master tell a story.

There is also the issue of character death, which could be treated in a column of its own. It is a game, and though the object is to have fun, there can be no joy in success without the omnipresent threat of failure. Sometimes, through bad dice rolls or through mistakes, characters expire. It is a risk everyone takes when they agree to play. True the GM has ultimate control over the effects of the die rolls, but 0 Hit Points is always 0 Hit Points, and in some instances the GM can do little (aside from blatant acts of "God") to preserve the character. A lot of GMs who run Simulation or Immersive Models will not have provisions for *deus ex machina* in their worlds, and thus will literally be just another spectator to events as they unfold.

All of these instances could endanger the preexisting social relationships between the GM and the player away from the game. The people involved should have an open dialogue about what is happening, and above all should realize that Role-Play Gaming is an immediate, communal interactive situation, and that no one is responsible for so much of it that they can be blamed when something bad happens. The position of GM is unique in that empathic or highly compassionate GMs will tend to assume responsibility for events that are in fact out of their control. The purpose of this article was just to touch on these elements and point out to beginning GMs that not everything can be hung on your head. It's a tough job to begin with, and there is no reason to make it even more difficult by assuming too much responsibility.