



The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Character Profiling (Part V): Conclusions

By Bret Funk

In my last few articles, I discussed some of the more common classification methods authors used to group characters. Before wrapping up the topic, I wanted to assure readers that the systems I listed were neither complete nor definitive on the subject, and I wanted to touch briefly on some of the other grouping systems that can be employed to invest a world with dimension and characters with pizzazz.

One of the most powerful grouping systems, and one employed by many authors, is religion. Religion allows an author to instill a moral code, belief system, and default attitude into his characters. Not every citizen of Goodwillia need be pleasant, but one would not expect a disciple of The Church of the Friendly Handshake to go around slapping everyone he meets.

In many works, religions are used to contrast good characters with evil characters, but braver authors realize that it is (generally) not a religion that is good or evil, but the people who practice and interpret it, and they work that knowledge into their

writing. These authors often have complex religious paradoxes as backdrops or subplots of their works, and in those works, each practicing religion tends to have both dangerous fanatics and lovable saints.

Religion is often tied closely with Nationality (Character Profiling: Part 3), for even in today's enlightened age, religious tolerance is often little more than an interesting notion or a begrudgingly-accepted term. Most countries tend to have a primary religion, one that is practiced by the majority of the people in that country (and may even be mandated by the state).

This bond between God(s) and Country is reflected in the many works of fiction.

To round out characters, and yet still give them a way with which to bond to others, an author can utilize Hobbies. Hobbies can be used in much the same way as Profession, with the simple addition that the characters should invariably enjoy their hobbies (they choose to do them, after all) but need not be so enamored of their vocation. If a character is a Dragonknight because his father and grandfather before him were, then the author has the option of making the character a reluctant hero (or no hero at all), but if the character chooses to hunt dragons in his spare time, he should do so with gusto (though how he reacts when he actually meets a dragon is a different story).

Groups can be based on abilities (Magic-users versus scientists), lack of abilities (Powerful Magic-users versus boring non magic-users), ideologies (Magic-users for the betterment of society versus Magic-users for the benefit of themselves) or technique (Rune magic-users versus Spell magic-user). A group can be based upon something as simple as a disability (We don't mind the lepers, but tell that club-footed fella he's got to wait outside), appearance (Only purple-skinned, black eyed Elves need apply!), and composition (We don't serve droids here. Tell them to wait outside.).

Groups can be large or small, and the group or groups a character belongs to can be the mainstream of his society, a fringe group of freaks, or better yet, some combination of the two (if the character belongs to more than one group, that is). By adding a character to a number of groups, an author can create the kind of individuality that leads to the development of a unique and enjoyable universe for readers to play in.

When using groups, there are a few things writers should keep in mind. The first is that there is no harm in experimentation. If a group hasn't been used in fiction before, don't be afraid to use it. If a Race has never existed, don't be afraid to create it. It may take a little longer for you to find an audience if you have

In This Edition

**Character Profiling
Part V: Conclusions**

**RPG Corner 4.1
Exchanging Information**

White-washed Technology

Term Paper Blues

REVIEWS

Babylon 5: Seasons Five

Chill Factor

CUSP

Frankenstein

Heir of Stone

The Golden Compass

The Myriad

Future Sports

RPG Corner v4.1: Exchanging Information

by Doug >!< Roper of EPIC Gaming

GM Knowledge vs. PC Knowledge

In last month's column, I listed several things which GM's should not take responsibility for, and this month I'm jumping to the other foot to look at one of the most basic and important things that Game Masters must do if they are to run a successful game: disseminate information. GMs who can effectively communicate images and textures to their players will succeed, while those who have trouble with this will ultimately suffer for reasons that will become clear by the end of the column.

Characters are limited in their exploration of the fantasy world that they can get from the Game Master. On him falls the responsibility of describing everything that the characters can see and taste and touch. Of course, a lot of information can be assumed, such as what water or wine tastes like, what dirt looks like and how a cool breeze feels on bare skin. Other times, such trivial details as these become massively important, and a good GM will know when to mention details like this, and when to let them go. Characters depend on description and interaction with NPCs to explore their world, and also on a more basic level, to navigate through the plots that have been carefully crafted by the Game Master. The only inkling the characters have that the shopkeeper is up to no good is the sly looks he keeps shooting to one of the customers, the only way the characters know where they can escape the deserted mansion is the cool breeze from the broken window, and the soft whistle of air every now and then in the stark silence.

Before I go too much further, I have to talk about one of the biggest problems (in my opinion) with RPGs, and that is the difference between what the character knows, and what the *player* knows. What the character knows from experience or interaction with other game elements is called "in-character" knowledge (IC), and what the player picks up from outside conversations, or from watching what the Game Master is doing is called "out-of-character" knowledge (OOC). An example of this would be two players, Sam and Beth, have their characters, Inspector DeGaulle and Lady Wellington, in different parts of London looking into the Hillschester robberies. DeGaulle is near Buckingham, while Wellington is in White Chapel. Of course, Sam and Beth are sitting next to one another, and Beth spots the Game Master slip something to Sam, meaning that his character has found a clue. Beth knows that there has been a development out

of character, but Lady Wellington does not know that anything has happened and won't until the two characters meet to discuss what they have found. This ignorance must be role-played, and while it isn't hard when the two players are cooperating and sharing all of their information, it gets much more difficult when one character decides to withhold information from the others, especially when the other characters need the information.

So, now that we are starting to see how much stress information can cause just between players, we can look at how it affects the relationship between Game Master and Player. GMs function in a world of absolute certainty. They (if they have done their homework) know all of the people that the characters are going to run into, he knows all of the encounters they will stumble across, all the battles they will join, and all the clues that these events will reveal. The GM knows that if he needs to, he also has the power to change any detail he needs to, big or small, to accommodate the characters or a move that they make. This makes the GM comfortable, and above all, secure. Nothing is a surprise to him, except what the characters may do in a certain situation.

Meanwhile the player-characters are wholly in the dark without the lifeline of information provided by the Game Master. They are rarely ever in a position where they can relax and feel secure when they are away from established "safe" areas (and perhaps even not then, if the GM has a habit of surprising the characters when they drop their guard). What the Game Master reveals and describes about a person or setting in the moments before something momentous happens can literally make or break the game. Assuming the GM dutifully reports all aspects about the silhouetted NPC now standing at the far end of the alley, including the billowing cape, top hat, feral sneer and the fact that one of his hands is tucked away behind his back, the PCs may not boldly walk forward to greet him, indeed they might suspect that the man is armed and hostile to the characters. If the GM purposefully misrepresents the NPC, by saying he's a non-descript guy leaning against a post, and the characters don't pay much attention to him until he whips out a Tommy gun and mows them down, they are going to cry foul, and in my opinion they would be right.

The GM is honor bound to describe things accurately, and openly. If the hostile NPC really wanted to sneak up on the characters, he would not have stepped

Con't on page 10

White-washed Technology: Is The Joke On Us?

by Terry Crotinger/montanasings

The mother's helper society that was promised fifty years ago and considered science fiction has finally arrived! No more will the harried housewife of this century, if such an archaic term exists, manually plug-in and drag a heavy upright vacuum cleaner over the rug, empty dusty bags or rinse out germy receptacles full of hairy grim, gum wrappers and spare change.

Remember the House Model? This type of vacuum lives in the floor and sucks all unwanted, and some accidental, matter through enough ductwork to stretch across a football field and dumps it all, hopefully, in one large bag to be tossed in the trash. This modern invention is now reduced to a relic. (Though the strange looking wall receptacles are difficult to hide and that ductwork, with unknown substances and valuables not fully purged, remains lurking behind innocent walls).

That retro-round canister with a generous eight-foot hose lumbering behind the Mr./Mrs. as he/she pushes a power nozzle over every inch of the floor has been reduced, retooled and reborn! Streamlined and smart, this new techno-mecca vacuum cleaner makes cleaning any floor in your house a truly hands-free experience. In fact, lift up your feet when it comes by and forget about it. The floors will be sparkling and the dog amused. Technology has arrived!

Or has it?

That technology is based on the same science that launches probes into space and keeps worldwide communication lines operational via satellite and fiber optic cable lurking on the floor of our oceans. Is a little round sucking machine with a sensor the best science can develop to clean our floors? Can this little, dust bunny-confronting vacuum that can find its own docking station and recharge itself be considered true advancement?

Hardly. Some lucky inventor took advantage of technology and created a moneymaker—good for him or her or them. And yet, this current trendy convenience makes one pause and ask: Have we maxed out our technology? Is this our future? Will technology feed on established ideas; give us 'New and Improved!' products similar to what the entertainment industry is doing with classic movies, radio shows and commercials by reinventing them as Reality shows or even worse movies than the original? (*Alfie* comes to mind, but *classic* is not the category it deserves!) Is the news of a new vacuum the best thing since an automatic bread slicer? Is nothing truly new and fresh and original in the engineering world? Is this as good as it gets!?!

That should hit a nerve.

Science constantly realigns itself through research by challenging theories and testing existing ones to find new applications and publishing the results. Professionals glean what they can and look for ways, hopefully, to better mankind, though, more likely, they are looking for a way to make a buck. Cyberspace, television, and old-fashioned magazines offer a dumbed-down version of these results and commonize it for the rest of us mere mortals—the food chain of research.

So who is responsible for these fantastic and frivolous applications? Engineers—the practical and persnickety thinkers who bring water to the desert and put Global Positioning Systems in our cars. Engineers, along with various visionaries with financial backing, are partly responsible for the advancements we so enjoy.

That does not mean that every new product with a microchip is bad. Engineers have made advancements in medicine, the space program, and bridge-building, and they improved the efficiency of so many items in our society, it would be like counting stars to name them all. They are a noble bunch, attacking a problem with the gusto of a college student searching for the best pizza and the amazement of a thirteen-year-old girl who realizes for the first time that she has hips. There is a certain satisfaction that the problem will never be truly solved so that 'New and Improved!' becomes a welcome by-product. But it's still an idea someone else developed; the result simply has a new look.

For instance, the creation of the submarine is attributed to Dutch inventor Cornelius Drebbel around 1620, and thanks to Jules Verne and his vision in print, our military copied this self-contained wonder because it met certain requirements. The designs submitted to replace our aging space fleet look suspiciously like the shuttle idea NASA used, though smaller, and the winner sported a lot of little windows to appreciate the view coming and going through the atmosphere—a nice touch. But, like the wheel, the form was just another variation. Musicians understand form. They would label current trends, Theme and Variation because little is authentic or original; it's just jazzed up a bit.

Even Theoretical Engineers—people who theorize the theories using the most accurate and advanced science—find themselves in a box (a theoretical one, of course) of their own making. Their thoughts are lofty and fantastic, but limited to a standard of what we know—seldom what could be. As gifted a writer and scientist Isaac Asimov was, even his *Robot* ideas were

Con't on page 10

Term Paper Blues

by Charles Gramlich

At first glance, one might wonder what this article has to do with writing fantasy or science fiction. The fact of the matter is, many of the principles and techniques used to write good papers is equally applicable to fiction. For instance, the better researched and better edited your manuscripts are, the more likely they are to catch the eye of a publisher, editor, agent, or reader.

- *The Management*

Periodically, I teach a class at Xavier University in New Orleans on "Writing in Psychology." It's a non-fiction course, largely about how to write scientific articles and term papers in the field. Late last semester, I challenged my students to write a "tip" article to help new students traverse the mine field of college writing. I actually got some pretty good pieces that I thought deserved wider exposure. So, without further ado, I give you four articles instead of one on writing, all produced by students in my Fall 2004 "Writing in Psychology" class.

HOW TO MAKE AN "A" ON ANY PAPER

By Lacey Bailey

Would you like to make an "A" on all your term papers? Impossible, you say? Well, it *can* happen, for every paper you write. However, there are some necessary steps involved.

First, when your teacher assigns a paper it's important to ask yourself what about the topic interests you. A topic that you find interesting will lead to a better paper. Then, before determining the exact focus of your paper, pre-write. Pre-writing is a crucial step and can be done in a variety of ways, such as brainstorming, outlining, free writing, or clustering. Pre-writing helps you organize your ideas, and organization is the *key* to a good paper.

After pre-writing, research is your next task. You must find the facts to support your paper. Don't be afraid to touch actual books and journals in the library. That's where you'll find the best stuff. The internet is convenient, and can be useful, but internet sources aren't always reliable.

Once you've gathered the books and articles you need, read them thoroughly. Highlight important information and write it out in your own words. Return to these notes when crafting your paper, which will help you avoid plagiarism.

Let your thoughts flow during the draft phase of writing. Then go back and rewrite for organization and clarity. Finally, proofread, proofread, proofread! Always check carefully for grammatical errors. Anything you are unsure of, look up.

Once you've proofread thoroughly, have someone else do it too. Make the necessary changes from that reading, and repeat with someone else you trust. If your teacher allows, submit a rough draft. Then, don't just change things on which the teacher commented. Go further to see if the teacher missed anything. Before turning in your final paper, read it out loud to yourself to help catch any last errors.

Although time consuming, these tips will help assure you an "A" on any paper. If you put in the work, you *will* reap the rewards.

LET YOUR WRITING EVOLVE

By Zoi Andalcio

Good writing consists of well-organized thoughts and ideas expressed in well-written language. Such writing takes time and effort, but there *are* guidelines to help ease the burden. Although I'm no expert on writing, I've learned a few things that I'd like to share.

The initial step involves just getting your ideas down on paper. Don't worry about grammar or spelling, at first. Rather, focus on recording your thoughts in a stream of consciousness style.

After your ideas are down, then the hard work of rewriting begins. Find the focus, the central idea of the writing, which is the thesis statement. This provides the framework for the rest of the paper so make it clear and concise.

The thesis statement should usually be in the opening paragraph, and that paragraph should also grab the reader's attention. All following paragraphs should support the opening.

Each paragraph's topic sentence needs to clearly introduce the point of the paragraph. Not every paragraph has to have a new point, but each should build upon what has gone before.

The conclusion should briefly recapitulate the paper's major points, and leave the reader with something to think about. It has to complement the opening and the body, just as the icing complements the cake.

Con't on page 11

Reviews

Babylon 5 Season Five DVD Box Set Warner Home Video 2003



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

The fifth and final season of the greatest sci-fi show of my generation, is frankly not as good as the previous two seasons but by itself is still excellent television. Picking

up right where season four ended, the final year of Babylon 5 very nearly never happened. As a result, many of the massive plot and character arcs were taken to a satisfactory ending at the close of season four. However, as Straczynski often said of his characters and his creation, there is no true end, because the stories continue.

The main characters all return with one exception. Claudia Christian wasn't able to set up a contract in time, due to the hectic events around the series' renewal, and her presence is missed. Her story is resolved, along with all of the principle characters, in the touching finale, filmed at the end of season four when it seemed like a good idea to officially wrap things up. This early shakeup and change from what we are used to serves as a prologue for the whole season, as the world of Babylon 5 changes and characters move on with their lives.

The main plot thrusts of the season deal with the telepath problem, and some dark happenings on Centauri Prime. Along the way, we see characters preparing to move ahead with their lives and careers, and towards the end of the season, the time for preparing ends, and characters depart. The final three episodes of the series are simply astounding. They are a series of goodbyes, both between characters, and between the actors who realize that they are saying goodbye to friends they have known for five years, leading to some incredible performances. The series finale, "Sleeping in Light," takes place twenty years after

the end of the Shadow War, and neatly ties off both Sheridan's and the space station's threads in such breathtaking fashion that there isn't sufficient space in the column (or this newsletter) to adequately describe it. It is gut-wrenchingly touching, and at one point, even made this tired old curmudgeon tear up a bit. It closes the story of Babylon 5 beautifully, and with a tremendous amount of satisfaction.

The extras include three commentaries by cast and crew on selected episodes (including a moving commentary by Straczynski on "Sleeping in Light") as well as two featurettes. "Digital Tomorrow" details the usage of computer animation in Babylon 5, one of the first programs to rely so heavily on the technology. "Beyond Babylon 5" is a program about the fans of the show, and lastly there is the "Universe of Babylon 5" information area, where you can check up on various people and places from the series.

If you have been reading these reviews, but still haven't decided on whether or not to watch this show, I will implore you one last time to get out there and see this program. I believe that this was groundbreaking television, full of jaw-dropping revelations, surprises, great humor and emotional performances that created a vibrant and sometimes almost tangible world. Babylon 5 has had a tremendous impact on me personally, and I can't push hard enough for everyone out there to give it a shot. You may not like the show as much as me, but I doubt seriously that you would regret having seen it.

"In the beginning the Universe was created. This has made a lot of people very angry and been widely regarded as a bad move."

— Douglas Adams

Reviews

Chill Factor (Weather Warden, 3)

Rachel Caine



Roc, Jan 2005
\$6.99, Mass Market, 352 pgs.
ISBN 0451460103
Review by Harriet Klausner

After turning from a Weather Warden to a Djinn and back to a mortal Warden again, Joanne Baldwin is on her way to Las Vegas. Accompanied by her Djinn

lover David, she seeks Kevin to take away the bottle that holds Jonathan, the most powerful Djinn in the world. The wardens want Kevin dead because thanks to him several of the top leadership is dead and he has power enhanced by Jonathan to destroy the world.

Joanne and David are locked out of Las Vegas by magical wards so Lewis, once the most powerful warden in the world until Kevin stole his powers, devises a way for Joanne to momentarily die and be revived inside the city. She finds Jonathan and Kevin, but it is Jonathan who manipulates the troubled teen to find the Djinn that have gone missing for the last six years. Joanne is kidnapped by the Ma'at, whose members are dedicated to freeing the Djinn from their human masters and destroy the warden organization for endangering the earth. They try to convert Joanne to their cause but she escapes and with the help of some allies fights the real mastermind behind all the troubles.

Book three in the Weather Warden Series is an action packed urban fantasy. There are many surprises and unexpected plot developments to keep this series fresh and interesting so that readers will continue to read future books to find out what happens next to the ethical, moral and vulnerable heroine. David helps Joanne in so many ways that readers will be in awe of the Djinn's power to love a mortal. Rachel Caine has written a novel worthy of an award nomination.

CUSP

Robert A. Metzger



Ace, Jan 2005
\$24.95, Hardcover, 528 pgs.
ISBN 0441012418
Review by Harriet Klausner

In the year 2031, two events change the earth as we have known it. The sun moves into a different position and two rings made of photonic energy encircle the earth

from the north to south poles and around the equator. The geography of the earth changes as land bases are torn apart and sent into a sea that is vastly depleted due to the rings. Billions die.

By 2051, with food in short supply, much of the United States population is indentured to the agricultural collectives. Many of the remainder are Tools, people that are part machine. General Sutherland effectively runs the country and is responsible for integrating his daughter to CUSP (Controllable Universal Sentient Plasma) causing her to go post point (the next step in evolution). The general knows that the rings are firing up, as is the jet in the sun, so that the journey to Alpha Centaury can be made. The hope of earth surviving what is coming rests on the shoulder of a woman who is no longer human but something much more.

Anyone who likes hard science fiction reminiscent of the works of Arthur C. Clark and Mike Resnick will definitely enjoy CUSP. There is a lot of advanced science research used for some of the concepts in the book but readers will understand it because the author smoothly explains them through the voice of his characters. General Sutherland is portrayed as a Machiavellian manipulator but readers don't get turned off by his arrogance because he does what is needed to save earth and its remaining inhabitants. Robert A. Metzger has written a fast-paced action packed work that will keep readers turning the pages to see what happens next.

Reviews

Hallmark Channel

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (2004/I)



Alec Newman, William Hurt, and Donald Sutherland.

Review by Erik Goodwyn

Having grown up seeing the 'bolts in the neck', flat-headed Frankenstein's monster that has been filmed, screened, parodied, etc. since time immemorial (or at least 1931), I finally was able to sit down

and actually read Shelley's *Frankenstein* one August evening several years ago. I was unable to put it down. Shelley's story of Gothic hubris, love and tragedy—note, not much horror, really—totally captivated me. I was driven to read the novella in one night. So, naturally, when I found out Kenneth Branagh did a version of the tale in the 90s I was excited. Then, unfortunately for me, I watched it. What an over-the-top, overblown mess! The pacing hurtled us forward at such speed I thought I was watching the RD version of the story, taking pause only long enough for Branagh to wrestle naked with The Creature for 5 minutes in a vat of slime, causing me to utter an involuntary 'what the ****?' The acting was ridiculous as well, with otherwise fine actors all cranking up the volume to 11 and doing nothing but either shouting uncontrollably or whispering menacingly and nothing in between.

The only saving grace of that whole affair was DeNiro's monster—but he still wasn't quite right... ugly, bald, and short. Not what Shelley described. Shelley didn't describe a flat-headed bolt-necked mumbling hulk either, but I have yet to see the Boris Karloff version so I withhold judgment on that film until I see it. This probably puts me in the minority of Frankenstein viewers (meaning people who read the novel before seeing any film adaptations—except maybe 'Abbot and Costello meet Frankenstein').

Which brings me to this Hallmark adaptation. Finally, I feel, Hollywood has gotten it right. Go figure—it's because this version actually stays close to the source material, and it is excellent because of it. The Creature, for one, looks exactly as I pictured him in the novel, probably because... he looks the way he

is described. Is this so difficult to accomplish? It must have been, because nowhere has it been done right before. Other commentators have complained that the Creature in this version is too sympathetic, too well spoken, too well read, etc. My comment to this is—read the book! The Creature was not a hulking horror or a twisted goblin. He was tall, gaunt and creepy (like he is here), but also tormented emotionally and highly self-educated. It is easy to sympathize with him here, just as in the novel.

To anyone unfamiliar with the source material it may be a surprise: Frankenstein is not a horror story. It is a Gothic melodrama, a Greek tragedy, an early science fiction story (that has been mimicked a zillion times, Jurassic Park is a good example). In fact, the subtitle for Shelley's classic is 'Frankenstein, or, A Modern Day Prometheus'. But Hollywood has taken the atmosphere of the novel and insisted that this be a horror story (for a horror story, read Poe, or perhaps Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, another novel that has been poorly interpreted dozens of times).

Everything is done well, from the excessively beautiful home of the Frankensteins to the smoky, brooding laboratory. The acting is fine throughout, with no missteps, if no brilliant performances, although the lead has several good moments of madness. But overall, the spirit of the book shines through everywhere in this adaptation—it isn't perfect, but it is the best so far to capture the moral ambiguity, the tragic darkness and the psychological horror (secondarily) of the novel. And the Creature looks just right, with his flowing rags, scarred and moribund presence, and tortured soul.

My only quibble is the 'science' of the story. Shelley made a point of not revealing how Victor Frankenstein accomplished reanimation. Here it is explained that simply shocking a dead body will reverse death. Shelley omitted the scientific explanation with good reason: she was not a scientist, first; and second, it really is not the point of the story. In a movie, however, you must show *something*. It just would have been more effective had much less been explained about it. But that is a minor point. Overall, I highly recommend the Hallmark Channel's version of *Frankenstein*, which is currently available on video to rent.

Reviews

Heir of Stone

S.L. Farrell



Daw, Jan 2005
\$24.95, Hardcover, 468 pgs.
ISBN 0756402549
Review by Harriet Klausner

Lamh Shabhala is the master cloch (a magical stone) that gives its wearer tremendous power. Jenna MacEgan is the First Holder and the queen of the Irish Thuaidh hated and feared by the royals who resent the

power she wields over them even though they possess clochs albeit weaker ones than Jenna. The aristocracy also detests her daughter Meriel the healer because she heals many commoners instead of her own kind.

Jenna's brother Doyle believes he should be First Holder and King; he enters into a conspiracy that successfully kills Jenna and Meriel and other family members—except Sevei, Kayne and Ennis. Sevei wears Lamh Shabhala while her uncle is crowned king. The commoners revolt because they know he killed their beloved Meriel. While Civil War threatens the kingdom, the Arruk—sentient monsters with powers equal to the cloch wearers—are ready to attack the humans. If the humans fail to band together under the command of Kayne who wields the power of a strong Cloch and has fought the Arruk, they will suffer death and an end to their empire. Sevei joins the battle but it is hard for her since Ennis fights on the side of the Arruk.

Heir of Stone is an action-packed swords and sorcery novel and the best of the marvelous cloud mages series. The battles scenes are every bit as exciting and imaginable as those found in *The Lord of the Rings*. Kayne is the character that is most dynamic as he changes from a warrior to a great leader of armies. The political intrigues and plots are a different kind of warfare where everyone loses. S.L. Farrell has written a series that rivals the works of Terry Brooks.

Boundary's Fall Update:

Jewel of Truth, Book Three in the Boundary's Fall series, is ungoing its final stages of editing. Look for a preview of the book on our website, and check in regularly for additional release information and preorder specials.

The Golden Compass

Philip Pullman



Bantam, May 2001
Trade Paperback, 399pp
ISBN: 0440418321
Review by Scott H. Andrews

The Golden Compass blends the giddy childhood adventure feel of novels like Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* with a brilliantly original setting, resulting in a novel of sparkling detail and subtle depth.

Precocious Lyra is Driven by the mysterious abductions of children and the vanishing of her uncle. She passes through different settings and characters on an idealistic rescue quest. Each new locale presents interesting characters, particularly the exiled polar bear Iorek Byrnison, but the settings and foils rarely reappear once Lyra has moved into the next phase. This constantly changing backdrop gives the novel the feel of a journey, but it prevents the development of any long-term character relationships. Lyra's bond to Iorek comes the closest to such a connection, producing the gripping section where she bluffs through polar bear politics to help him. Lyra's character grows but always within her child's perspective, never more delicately crafted by Pullman in the climaxing encounter.

Pullman's original world bursts with imagination, in armored polar bears and religious metaphysics blended from fantasy ideas and actual theology. Perhaps his most genius stroke is 'daemons,' companion creatures accompanying every human. They provide an animal personification of character traits and emotions, and Pullman works their vital importance into the core of the plot. The ending of *The Golden Compass* may seem light on action, but the conversations and the reactions of the three main characters ingeniously develop Lyra's character, flesh out the major villain, and turn Lyra's childhood idolation on its ear.

Pullman's writing brilliantly straddles the line between young adult works like *A Wrinkle in Time*, that can appear thin from an adult perspective, and more erudite adult fantasy like R. Scott Bakker's *The Darkness That Comes Before*. *The Golden Compass* is an adventure story about a young girl, but Pullman's subtly drawn intellectual conflict provides plenty of meat for adult readers.

Reviews

The Myriad R.M. Meluch



Daw, Jan 2005
\$23.95, Hardcover, 320 pp.
ISBN: 0756402794
Review by Harriet Klausner

The Roman Empire never really died; it just went underground, waiting and gathering its forces so that when it emerges it will be a power to be reckoned with.

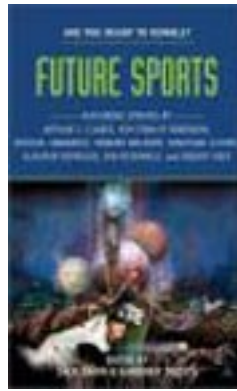
That time came when FTL space flight became a reality and the Roman Empire reemerged on the distant planet of Palatine. Earth and Palatine engaged in an on and off again war for almost two centuries until a common enemy united them in an uneasy truce.

The Hive is sweeping across the galaxy, eating everything that crosses its path and actually seeking inhabited planets for its meals. The U.S. Merrimack is charged with finding the Hive home world and destroying it. While on its mission the crew finds *The Myriad*, three inhabited worlds in a globular cluster; colony worlds settled by a non-Terran humanoid race. The inhabitants of these worlds travel through space using wormholes where time and space are twisted.

After making first contact, the Merrimack leaves and is attacked by a swarm of the hive. After two very intense battles, the Merrimack is called back to the Myriad because their use of the wormholes is causing the cluster to collapse; a planetary leader's plan will mean the destruction of the three inhabited worlds.

The Myriad, the first book in the tour of the Merrimack, is terrific military science fiction. The crew of the Merrimack are believable and likable especially Captain Farragut, who care about the men and women under his command. R.M. Meluch provides intense battle scenes and vivid descriptions of their aftermath in such a way that readers feel for the man and women risking their lives against an almost unstoppable enemy while also eagerly awaiting the next book in this series.

Future Sports Jack Dann, Gardner R. Dozois



Ace Books, July 1, 2002
ISBN: 0441009611
272 pages
Review by Terry Crotinger

From Solar Sailing to Sumo Wrestling, *Future Sport* makes one pause to consider how science and time might effect activities like sailing, running, wrestling and just about anything to do with balls (sorry, no golf). This short story anthology features "heavy hitters" like Arthur C. Clarke, Ian McDonald and Kim Stanley Robinson so it smacks of quality from cover-to-cover.

Robert Reed has a piece about football using genetically enhanced and pre-selected fetuses while R. Nuebe offers a look at the politics of wrestling aliens. We might wrestle aliens someday; we might refashion runners to the point their bodies are not their own, instead, they are owned by the conglomerate who surgically implanted enhancements for better performance. It could happen.

Remember Michael Jordan? In *Vanilla Dunk*, Jonathan Lethem offers us a look at basketball and what might happen if the best natural players could *inherit*, by means of the draft, the genes, off the court personality and on-court moves of Jordan or Larry Byrd.

With ten stories to choose from, one of them will pique interest. Religious, cultural and racial issues are included and nothing is sacred. Jack Dann and Gardner Dozois have edited several (twenty-three at last count) short story collections with topics that are self-explanatory like, *Hackers!* There is one called, *Dragons!*, a *Mermaids!*, one named *Dogtails!* and an anthology curiously titled, *Little People! Space Soldiers* (without the !) looks promising featuring stories from Joe Haldeman, Fred Saberhagen and Alastair Reynolds. Gathering top author's short stories and putting them together by topic seems to be what Dann & Dozios do best—a "winning" combination.

Future Sports is available at the usual online bookstores, though not likely on the self of chain book-sellers. The Dollar Store shelf "sported" this anthology. Can't "beat" the price for a "sell-out" read!

White-washed (con't)

not original. However, can the Three Laws of Robotics be improved? Likely not.

There is no reason to reinvent the wheel. But The Second Law of Thermodynamics reminds us that entropy results if there is no evolution. Surely this applies to both practical and theoretical ideas. Will our thinkers and visionaries keep us moving forward, or will they give us the same products with a coat of high-tech whitewash? Will inventors, engineers and artists give us the future, or just what is expected: something that makes them a little cash and sells easily at Christmas?

What if all invention stopped, and we had only improvement to look forward to? There is an old saying: There is nothing new under the sun. What if it were true?

Character Profiling (con't)

the Achoos fighting the Hiccups, but at least no one will say "Not another Elf and Dwarf war!"

Secondly, it is important to base the actions and reactions of your groups and characters on experiences and parallels in the real world. Just because the setting of a fantasy is not real doesn't mean that the people shouldn't be. If you have a religion who considers the Golden Egg of Pacif their most holy of religious artifacts, they should probably be a little more than upset when the Egg-Eater of Oma Leytte pays a visit to the temple. However if the God Pacif advocates love and tolerance under all situations, it probably wouldn't do to have the Pacifists tear the Egg-Eater limb from limb. That is, of course, not to say that they can't do such a thing, but if they do, it should have grave consequences to their spirituality and their religion.

Finally, when experimenting with groups, writers may have to come to terms with criticism. Not all readers may be fond of your new creations, and if you sail the dangerous waters of the Sea of Political Correctness, you run the risk of hitting the Shoals of Affront or being attacked by Terminology Sharks. On the other hand, controversy sells books (write about a wizarding school, for instance, and religious fanatics the world over might make such a fuss make that millions of people will buy your books), so maybe we should encourage the use of controversial groups.

No matter how many or how edgy the groups are, when properly employed, they will help to make characters stand out and the world they are used in come alive.

RPG Corner (con't)

into their path at the end of an alley. He would have crept up behind them. Likewise, the GM should mention details that the characters would interpret as dangerous in the descriptions of the environments into which they walk.

Player characters must expect to be in the dark about some things, otherwise there would be no point in playing to unravel the plots of the GM, but to make the basic facts of their surrounding inaccessible or incorrect is either the sign of an inexperienced, or just plain bad Game Master. The player-characters are there to uncover the mystery, and to stop the villain. To do that they will constantly nag for details and information, and they may even demand it from unlikely sources. If the information does not come quickly enough, there may be some frustration among the players who aren't privy to the big picture. Just so, a GM has to be careful with the dispensing of his careful clues, or he will over expose his hand, and spoil the plot by giving up too much, too soon. The line between not enough information (meaning not enough progress through the story for the characters) and ruining the scenario by giving away too much is very fine.

One of the best ways for beginning GMs to make sure that the information comes at a rate that will challenge but not frustrate the players (too much) is to break down scene by scene what information the characters can find and have access to. Meaning the GM can transport himself outside of everything he knows, and place himself in the shoes of his players to try and understand what information they have, and what conclusions they can make from what is provided. I would recommend this even for more experienced GMs, as stepping away from the massive information pool that they have can reveal flaws in the clues that he has laid out, and even point out vital tidbits that were omitted in error.

Incidentally, the exchange of information that I've detailed a bit here for RPGs is also something to be considered in more traditional writing, such as novels and short stories. An author must be careful not to tip his hand too early, lest the book be put down and left; however, the big difference is in the fact that the author (hopefully) has an editor to catch pacing problems, while the GM has only himself and his audience, who wait patiently in the same room as the GM for him to get on with it. No matter the medium, the exchange of information from one party to the other is vitally important to the success of the project.

Term Paper Blues (con't)

Finally, remember to have fun. Let the paper evolve naturally through multiple drafts so that your thoughts and words come together in a pleasing style that carries your own special touch.

ORGANIZING YOUR TERM PAPER

By Latoya Walker

Organization is the key component to writing a good term paper. It allows ideas to flow in a sequential order and lets the reader better understand the subject. The best way to organize a paper is to outline.

An outline consists of thoughts placed into a coherent pattern. It provides the writer with a visual summary of what is to be produced. It also serves as a general description of the ideas that will be used to develop the term paper.

The first step in outlining is to determine the purpose of your paper. What is the message you'd like to convey? Next, list your ideas. This gives you a sense of direction for your writing. Cull unsuitable ideas from the list until you get to the core concepts that are necessary for your article.

Next, organize your outline by linking related ideas together into subsections. These should be developed from the general to the specific. The more general the idea, the higher its level in the outline. Once this is complete, you can create titles for the subsections that will be used as headings in the body of your paper. Thus, the outline will serve as the skeleton for your paper, and from that skeleton you'll grow the body.

TERMINAL TERM PAPER

By Shanell N. Robinson

Sooner or later it happens to every college student. The professor decides to add more stress and sleepless nights to your life by assigning the dreaded term paper. You think about the hours of research that lie ahead. How will you pull it off? Will you excel, or be "term paper challenged?"

Well, with the right planning the term paper can be a great way to learn new and stimulating information, all while getting the good grade that you deserve. Here are some guidelines for writing that "A" paper.

First, narrow your topic or you'll be overwhelmed. Don't pick something like "international relations."

There's just too much information available. "US-Iraqi relations" would be a better choice, and much easier to handle.

Second, collect the appropriate data for your paper. Opinions must have facts to back them up. The library is a great place; learn to use it.

Third, develop an outline, which helps ensure that all your thoughts and ideas are connected. You must have a clear thesis statement. That statement can make or break your paper, so it is important to grab the reader's attention with it and to defend it in the rest of the paper.

Forth, at this point you are ready to write. The hard work of organizing is completed. Now you must put your thoughts together formally and coherently. Do not stop at first to fix errors; the first "write" requires a rewrite. The polishing comes after the initial draft is done. Make especially sure that you transition from paragraph to paragraph smoothly. No one wants to read a choppy paper.

The final step is to make sure the paper is clear, coherent, and in the correct format. Remove all spelling and grammatical errors, and remember, just because you have spelling and grammar check on your computer does not mean that it caught *all* the errors. Keep a dictionary nearby. Make doubly sure of your references.

If these steps are followed, you should see an improvement in the quality of your papers and find them less threatening to write. Good grades will follow.

As its best, SF is the medium in which our miserable certainty that tomorrow will be different from today in ways we can't predict can be transmuted to a sense of excitement and anticipation, occasionally evolving into awe. Poised between intransigent scepticism and uncritical credulity, it is par excellence the literature of the open mind.

— John Brunner