



# The *Illuminata*

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

## Thoughts on Lemony, Harry and Landing an Agent

By garrie keyman

Over the past few months while I've been playing hooky from the *Illuminata*, I have not been totally absentee from the broad sphere of which speculative fiction is comprised. Speculative fiction, after all, is the fiction of ideas, and I've been chock full of ideas. I just haven't put any to paper and sent them to my esteemed editor.

Sometimes, though, ideas can weigh a writer down. Frequently there can be so many of them, all clamoring at once to be scribbled down, that none of them are. It's the antithesis of having nothing to say, an affliction that perhaps we should call *anti-writer's-block*. Many writers suffer from this peculiar illness, possessing a remarkable ability to run-on at the mouth and run-on at the keyboard. In fact, many of these motor-minds are given columns to write. Keeps 'em sated. For editors it may be like the tigress they want to tame; give her a steak so she won't gnaw your arm off.

Trick is, of course, not just having plenty to say but having something to say that's of value. We all want more bling-bling for our bucks.

Having something valuable to say is purportedly the key to landing Agent A (for those of us out there in the literary trenches trying to accomplish this task), which is allegedly the key to landing a deal with Publisher B. But the funny thing about value is it's weighted a bit differently by everyone. For instance, I recently bid eleven grand for a Ford Torino "Starsky car." You know the one: candy-apple red, white racing stripe? My husband thought I was insane. I mean, he does that a lot

(think me insane), but this time he *really* thought I was floating in the deep end of the ocean without my rubber dinghy.

Value is relative.

I'm sure, like me, you think the novel you've written has value. It certainly has value to you. But if you're gonna land an agent (I'm sure agent's love that term – sounds more like I'm trying to pick up a hooker than strike a business deal) your novel needs to have value to others. A lot of others. First to the agent, then to the publisher who the agent persuades to print and market the book, and finally to the general public who will make or break your career as a writer.

Not long after Al Gore invented the Internet, I wrote a blog or two on a site featuring an innumerable variety of wanna-be writers. The majority of them seemed to think that's where their fame and fortunes would be made, that their great talent as writers would be "discovered" via blogging. That was bad enough. What was worse was the attitude of many that the most essential thing is to "write only for yourself" and "not for an audience."

I have news for my former friends in blogging: if you ever plan on being published (legitimately\*\*) sooner or later that means recognizing you have an audience. Otherwise, go write in your diary. Keep a journal. Scrawl on outhouse walls. Anything but call yourself a writer. Please.

Once you think you've created a product of value the trick is introducing your novel to the larger world. I don't need to go into how that's done, even though I've been ensconced in that effort for some years; there's a plethora of information available about how to break out as an author and the Internet is making this information ever more available. So go do some research. I've certainly been doing mine. And if my efforts pay off you'll surely be one of the first to know.

From my experience, however, I can say this: finding an agent is like speed dating. You don't have much time and it's gotta be love at first sight or guess

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# RPG Corner v4.31: Villany

by Doug >!< Roper of EPIC Gaming

Having touched briefly on the topic in the past, I've decided to take a longer look at my absolute favorite class of character: villains. During the *Elements of Good Scenario Design* series, I talked a bit about villains, but now I really want to sink my teeth into them and talk about creating and running villains in Role-Playing Games, and ultimately, why I believe that Game Masters tend to feel a certain camaraderie with the villains they create.

So what goes into making a memorable villain? Well, mainly that depends on the preferences of your players. If the PCs prefer a thunderous melee to finish off their campaigns, it won't do to have a Machiavellian manipulator opposing them. They will require a potent physical villain who can stomp any one of them flat in a fair fight (as an aside, it would help the PCs in this event to have the GM provide a special means or method to defeat the baddie, so they don't get stomped at the end). Others prefer a battle of wits, and if you're as lucky as I am, you have players that are happy with either. So once you know the type of enemy that your players would most like to dispatch, how do you go about giving them everything they want (and a whole lot they don't)?

Assuming your players are somewhat more sophisticated than a group of 10 year olds and want more depth to their villain than how many houses they can knock down with one punch, the place to start is with the person who will become the villain. He should be created from the roots up, like any other major NPC, while keeping in mind that he will one day oppose your players. Think about who this person was and is, and decide early on how he came to be in a position to become your villain. Was it something that took the character young, or is he new to the whole thing? Is the character evil or simply a person of differing philosophies from the PCs? There is a major difference between a character that chooses to hurt people arbitrarily and one who is motivated by more personal reasons, which he fundamentally believes are right. The reasons behind the deeds of your villain can create compelling ambiguity and create moral dilemmas for the PCs. The more they have to struggle to decide who is right and who is wrong, the more they will ultimately enjoy having made the right decision or rue having chosen poorly. Either way the character that forced them into that choice will not be soon forgotten.

Will the villain be in the shadows until the end, or will the PCs have the opportunity to speak and interact with the villain before the final confrontation? I prefer to reveal my villains slowly, rather than have them out in the open all of the time. The slow reveal is more appropriate to mystery oriented games, while the villain who prances about in the open, constantly antagonizing your characters seems more suited to action oriented games. The third type of villain that I have used, though rarely, is the surprise villain. The surprise villain is just that, and if the clues are subtle enough, can lead to amazing scenes and reactions, as anyone who has seen *The Usual Suspects* can confirm.

The answer to these formative questions will go a long way to defining how the villain will interact with your story. Having mentioned story just now, it seems like a no-brainer, but I suppose I ought to mention it. Design a villain that will fit in with your game. A brooding, futuristic sci-fi game is no place for a spandex wearing supervillain, no matter how cool he may be. Also, avoid the classic stereotypes of villains. Mindless killing machines, megalomaniacs, evil for evil's sake, bumbling henchmen, the opportunistic lieutenant; these things have been done to death and are just as boring to Gamers as they are to audiences. There has been a surge in smart, capable and occasionally sympathetic villains in cinema over the past few years. We've even begun giving the villain his own feature film, *Hannibal*, *American Psycho* and *Payback* all focus on the villains, rather than the protagonists who want to stop them.

Villains do not exist in a vacuum. They should never be a fallback explanation for anything that goes wrong for the PCs. It is inconceivable that anyone would devote his life to simply making trouble for a bunch of Do-Gooders, for no other reason than he is evil. It's laughable and makes the villain and the GM look like a fool. Your villain should have real goals. Let the PCs worry about stopping him, never the other way around (unless the plot calls for it). On top of having achievable goals, rooted in the reality that you have constructed, make sure that the villain has plausible and executable plans to achieve those goals. For example, blowing up the world is not a very realistic goal, and how would he possibly accomplish it?

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# Fandom Who Filk: Creating A Filking Group (Part I)

by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

Filking is a big group sing-along, a concert, and a fairly non-invasive way to try out new musical material in front of like-minded science fiction fans. It can be a lot of fun, develop creative thought and bond groups together. However, it must be treated carefully. There are some groups that spontaneously bonded and have been filking for years who will think the following is bunk. However, lasting groups have developed certain guidelines that allow for flexibility and endurance through the years. Less lasting ones don't. It's your group so you get to decide.

There are many filk formats. Each one presents a different outcome and expectancy. Understanding the difference may alleviate tense moments. The two basic formats are *Concert Filk*—one or a few people or groups/bands perform and the others listen and enjoy. *Group Filk*—there are at least six types of group filk format. The most common is Bardic—each member has an opportunity to select a song, ask for a specific person to sing a song, ask for a group song everyone knows or *passes* and waits for their next turn. One thing to keep in mind is that most filk occurs in the evening and depending on the group, may see the twilight of morning before everyone parts!

*Concert Filk* can be found at conventions, and even conventions centered around filking have occurred. Is it possible to have ten different filking rooms with open admission for instrumentalists and singers? Can everyone possibly know the same songs with the same musical style? Since filking embraces many kinds of music and content, anything is possible. Conventions centered on filking offer everything from open group filk, instrumentation styles and demonstrations, vocal coaching, parody tips, and of course, concerts throughout the convention. A typical sci-fi convention may have a FilkSuite for daytime use and a concert with group filk afterwards in the evening.

Usually, concert-style filk is just that, a concert, held in a place large enough to provide seating—everything from private homes to concert halls. Admission may/may not be charged depending on how famous the singer is and the venue. Sometimes concert and group filk are mixed. When a concert filk occurs in a private home, usually a special artist has agreed to filk for a few hours and then the seating is rearranged for an open group filk.

From reports by concert filk goers, no one leaves disappointed or uninspired.

A few concert, or professional, filkers to watch for are: Leslie Fish, Steve MacDonald, Judith Hayman, Bill and Gretchen Roper, Robert Asprin, Julia Ecklar, Alan Theisen, Valerie Housden and Gary McGath.

*Group Filk* can take several variants in style. Since the most common is the Bardic style, it will be explained and other styles will get their turn in a later issue. In the Bardic style, when someone *passes* it means they give up their time for that round or turn and later inserts themselves back into the group by exercising their right to take their turn out-of-order in that same round. This can be confusing in groups of ten or more and may be one of those gray areas that could harbor trouble if someone feels slighted or the flow of the group is interrupted.

*A word about filk dynamics*—One of the tenets of basic group dynamics is that often a flow, or unofficial agreement, occurs where each member conforms to an unspoken type of content or style—either in speech or behavior. Filkers are no different. If the type of song being sung, typical of Themed Filks, requested or performed is melancholy or quiet, someone suddenly bursting that group feeling, or dynamic, may be seen as grandstanding which in some groups is perfectly acceptable, though not very polite to an outsider or first-time filker.

Hurt feelings and egos can easily be bruised. Some may choose to diminish how it affects them, but it does affect them. Maturity levels are revealed when this occurs. And, with luck, any hurt feelings are quickly dealt with and everyone continues filking and enjoying. Rough feelings within groups are not necessarily a bad thing; they can bind people together, if handled carefully.

The main responsibility with Bardic filk rests with the organizer of the filk group to be sensitive to the needs and dynamic of the group. If the purpose of the filk group is to give each member an equal chance of selecting a song or singing it solo or with someone else, the host/hostess may need to be slightly assertive when one member takes the majority of the time. Hurt feelings and embarrassment can be avoided, but the reality is that there may be a time when it just can't be helped in order to give each member an equal chance.

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# The Writer's Block: Fun With Fear

by Charles Gramlich

Stephen King once said: "I recognize terror as the finest emotion and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find that I cannot terrify, I will try to horrify, and if I find that I cannot horrify, I'll go for the gross-out."

Most of you reading this article probably understand the "gross-out," though I'll tell you that different people have *very* different levels at which they'll be grossed out. I'm not going to give examples, though I easily could. And unless you are a horror buff you should be thankful that I don't. It could get really nasty.

What I want to talk about instead in this column is the difference between fear, horror, and terror? What do these terms mean? And how can the emotions that they label be important in writing? Well, here is how I define the terms, and why I think this trilogy of dark emotions is important, not just in writing straight horror but in all kinds of fiction.

**FEAR:** Fear is a physical response to a threat. It is a reaction from the gut. It is built into your biology to enable you to cope with danger.

**TERROR:** Terror is psychological. It is the expectancy of HORROR to come, the expectancy that at any given moment the feared thing will *jump out at you*, and that it'll be beyond your capacity to deal with.

**HORROR:** Horror is where FEAR and TERROR meet. It's when the physical and psychological come together and are united in the face of something... well... horrible. That is, something that stands, or shambles, or crawls, right there in front of your eyes and is: *coming for you*. Or may be coming, at least.

One night my wife and son and I were having dinner when all of a sudden from the back of the house came the slam of a door. Now, we were alone in the house. Or at least we had thought so.

I remember looking up, seeing Josh and Mary looking at me, and how wide their eyes were. I remember how hard my heart was pounding. We were all experiencing intense *fear*. This kind of immediate biological response involves a part of the brain called the "limbic system," and a connected set of nerves known as the "sympathetic nervous system," which is sometimes called the "Fight or Flight" system.

But there was more than fear to the experience of the slamming door. I realized that I had to find the *maker* of that noise. I told Mary and Josh to go stand by the door and *not* get in my way if I came running. And then I glanced down the hallway toward the back part

of the house. I had to go down there. My fear began to give way to *terror*. Because now my imagination was running wild. There was no telling what might be waiting for me.

I started down the hallway very carefully, and just as I reached the end, from right next to my ear, the door slammed again. I came very close to needing fresh underwear and a new pair of jeans.

Fortunately, for me in that situation, there was no *horror*, no monster under the bed, no alien in the closet, no... clown laughing maniacally on the pillows. Our heater was in the hall, hidden behind a half-door, and it wasn't working quite right. A little gas was building up before the heater ignited, pushing the door open a bit, and when the system did ignite the door would slam. That was the source of the sound, and for that reason I never got to any *horror*. I was grateful. Because this wasn't a movie or a book, and real life horror is *not* fun.

There was another time when I *did* experience real life horror. Briefly. I was seventeen, living at home on our farm in Arkansas, when one night we heard an absolute roar from the fields below the house. It sounded like I imagined a lion would sound, but this wasn't Africa and I was no great safari hunter.

Whatever made that noise, it drove our cattle wild, sending them stampeding across the field, bawling as if their tails were on fire. My older brother and I grabbed our guns and took off in the truck for the source of the commotion. Both of us were afraid, and I'm sure I felt the beginnings of *terror* because I had no idea what that roar could be. As far as I knew, *nothing* in Arkansas could roar like that. But I'd read about cattle mutilations and could easily imagine something that *might* make that sound.

We reached the field where the cows were and they had quieted down a bit. I had to open the gate for us to drive through, and that was terrifying in itself because I kept thinking of what might come out of the darkness. But I got the job done and lived to get back in the truck.

There was a little hill awaiting us, and as we crested it and started down the other side the lights flashed out over the field and for a moment I saw--literally--hundreds of little glowing purple balls floating in midair in the darkness in front of us, floating a few feet off the ground. Paul David, my brother, slammed on the brakes and we slid to a stop. I looked at him. He looked at me. I could feel the hairs curling on my neck,

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## Reviews

### Mystic and Rider Sharon Shinn



Ace, March 2005  
\$23.95, Hardcover, 448 pp.  
ISBN: 0441012469  
Review by Harriet Klausner

King Baryn orders the mystic Senneth to journey through the realm of Gillengaria to find out how the nobles feel about his rule because rumors persist that the aristocracy is unhappy. Accompanying Senneth is Riders( soldiers loyal to the king) Tayse and Justin and Mystics Kira and Donnal. Along the way they pick up Cammon, an indentured servant who isn't even aware he's a mystic until Senneth shows him how to use his powers.

The journey is fraught with danger as a cult, the Daughter of the Pale Mother, headed by Conralinda Gisselness has amassed a large following of women who declare that Mystics are evil and must be destroyed. She whips the populace into a frenzy and has her soldiers kill the Mystics wherever they find them. Senneth and company also learn that several heads of the twelve houses are worried about the succession since the king has only a rarely seen daughter. Rumors that his queen is a mystic also upsets the people who think those who wield magic are evil. Civil war on a religious and politic front seems inevitable.

Sharon Shinn demonstrates her amazing writing talent in *Mystic and Rider* the first installment in a great new fantasy series. Senneth risks her life to save a baby from its grandfather who wants it dead because the infant was born with mystical powers. Readers will adore this vulnerable heroine who is one of the strongest mages in the land and is completely devoted to the king. Riding through the realm, the riders and the mystics observe how much the common folks detest those with magic even killing their own children. The world of Gillengaria is so realistically portrayed; readers will be convinced that this world actually exists.

### The Necronomicon (Cthulhu Cycle, 12) Robert M. Price, Editor



Chaosium, 1996  
ISBN 0-56882-070-4  
Paperback, \$22.00  
Review by D. L. Parker

How could a fan of those old horror classics, those overwrought, shivery gems of the classic pulp era of the 1930's, resist a book entitled *The Necronomicon*? Those of you who are H. P. Lovecraft fans will recognize the name instantly. Lovecraft always claimed the name of The Book came to him in a dream. Upon awakening, he set about at once to determine its meaning, which he then translated from its Greek roots as, roughly, "An Image of the Law of the Dead". This imaginary tome of forbidden knowledge was purportedly written by the mad Arab, Abdul Alharzred, and later translated into both Latin and the vernacular (the latter ascribed to the Elizabethan magus John Dee). Lovecraft himself was far too astute to actually try to invent his sinister tome out of whole cloth, but others could not resist making the attempt. Such is the power of Lovecraft's imagination that there are living persons even today who believe there truly *is* a *Necronomicon*: who, despite the warnings, continue to search for the mysterious occult work... while the dread book, like the mysterious wall described in one of the stories in Price's collection, continues to swim away from them in space and time, forever elusive.

Robert M. Price's selections for this twelfth issue in Chaosium's Cthulhu Cycle are, to put it mildly, eclectic. Part of the collection includes stories from pulp's early days of glory ("The Terrible Parchment", from the August 1937 edition of *Weird Tales*; "The Settler's Wall", from the March 1942 edition of *Stirring Science Stories*; etc.). Most of those stories, while mildly interesting, read dated to the modern eye. We have too Lin Carter's tales of the mad Arab, Abdul Alharzred, which, though indisputably pulp in all of its over-ripe purple glory, belong to the wearisome *yea and verily* school of writing; I need not say more, I hope, because I could not read all of them, either.

## Reviews

The bulk of the book, unfortunately, is wasted with various writers' attempts to actually re-create the *Necronomicon* itself. Worse, much worse than Carter's baroque prose, is Fred L. Pelton's attempt, supposedly from the Latin translation made by Wormius. I am afraid I must dub it unreadable. I quote the first line so you can get the idea: "*First Book of ye great al-powerful Lord Cthulhu and of his legions, and of ye mighte Old Ones which cam down with our master from dark Yuggoth...*" Well, I won't quote more, because that sentence, and many of his other knotty Ye Olde English sentences, run to full paragraph lengths or half-pages all on their own before allowing the breathless reader the mercy of a period.

Fortunately, several stories do redeem the collection, and at least one is a "don't miss" for Lovecraft fans. Who would have suspected that John Brunner, famous for his classic sci-fi gems, would unexpectedly produce a Lovecraft story? Yet he did, and his story, "Concerning the Forthcoming Inexpensive Paperback Translation of the *Necronomicon*", is one of the gems of the collection. Anyone who has read the original Lovecraft canon knows that HPL wrought his effects by adopting an apparently dead-earnest pseudo-scientific tone, recounted by a seemingly impeccably reliable narrator. His stories build slowly, as the reader is lulled into *believing* the narrator and his rationalistic approach. Brunner, cleverly imitating the exact tone of a typical Lovecraft narrator, turns this device on its head. His story is side-splittingly humorous to those who understand exactly what he's doing and how he subverts Lovecraft's pseudo-real verisimilitude. I quote an example below, where the narrator, a socially inept, reclusive academic (he's a fellow librarian, actually, I reluctantly admit), is forced to travel from his native England to that bastion of the crude and uncouth, America, which he refers to as "our former colony":

*"Over the yet further agonies inflicted upon me once my passport and visa did at last arrive, I shall pass lightly. Let me no more than animadvert upon the aeons that I spent among folk more devoid of hope than even I, trapped in the uncertainty of an anteroom to Hell, awaiting with sad countenance and weary limbs the call that would release them from one captivity to another; the succeeding prison-close confinement that I feared would never end, or if it did would terminate in tragedy; the*

*strange unwholesome food, the cold and bitter drink that were the common lot of all us pitiable souls – surely such torments could only be hatched amid the primal source of evil in whose nature I and I alone in modern times had been vouchsafed a glimpse!"*

Those of us who travel, of course, instantly recognize how he nailed confinement on a plane and subsistence upon airport food and drink as, indeed, an Evil Greater than Nyarlathotep!

Also worthy of mention is Robert Silverberg's "The Demons of Cthulhu", which, in spite of its title, is another humorous gem about a boy who calls up the Forbidden Gods to order a steak and onion dinner. The other modern story, Fred Chappell's "The Adder", is also good. Read those and enjoy them; skim lightly over the dated historic offerings, such as "The Settler's Wall", "The Howler in the Dark", and as much of the purple-prose of the Long offerings as you feel inclined to. Skip, though, the annoying "The Terrible Parchment". (What does holy water have to do with the thoroughly non-Christian cosmos of H. P. Lovecraft? Especially holy water that is actually supposed to *work* to exorcise a Lovecraftian horror. *This* writer didn't get it, not at all).

And then... *chuck* the rest of the book, unless you want to read Price's mostly worthwhile if knotty Introduction. And if you have the time and inclination, write Robert M. Price a letter chastising him for filling his collection with so many unreadable offerings. H. P. Lovecraft had it right: what is hinted is more chilling than what is revealed; the mysterious Shadow more alluring than the illuminated object that proves to be nothing more than pure old... awful writing. *Necronomicon*, Be Ye Elusive, or you will lose your power!

Science fiction represents the modern heresy and the cutting edge of speculative imagination as it grapples with Mysterious Time — linear or non-linear time. Our motto is *Nothing Secret, Nothing Sacred*

— Frank Herbert

# Reviews

## Empire's Daughter Simon Brown



Daw, Mar 2005  
\$6.99, Paperback, 432 pp.  
ISBN: 0756402832  
Review by Harriet Klausner

With the death of Empress Hetha Kevleren, regions of the powerful far flung Empire of Hamilay see an opportunity to use the magical force of the Sefid to

secede. However, to be successful at Wielding the magic, sacrifice must occur; the closer the Wielder cherishes the victim, the more powerful the usage of the Sefid. The Kevleren have been the most powerful practitioners, but many believe that the Duchess Yunara is the strongest magician today though her sister Lerena is the new Empress.

General Third Prince Maddyn Kevleren is unable to work the magic of the Sefid as his relatives can especially his former lover and second cousin Yunara. He tries to make up for his inadequacy through military prowess, but knows that in spite of his being the top general in the empire he remains an embarrassment to his friends. As he angers Yunara, Maddyn knows he must flee to protect loved ones from her wrath. He accepts an opportunity to strengthen the empire's stronghold in the New World, knowing that the unknown is less dangerous than the known.

Simon Brown, renowned for his Keys of Power trilogy, provides fantasy fans with a terrific new series with the fabulous Book One of the Chronicles of Kydan. The well written story line moves on two fronts as Maddyn tries to serve the new Empress while keeping his loved ones safe from retaliation; the two royal siblings have troubles starting with a Rivald revolt and massacre aided by magic that seems impossible to have occurred the way it apparently did. Because the key powerful cast seems real, they make magic appear normal so that epic fantasy readers will enjoy Mr. Brown's latest saga.

## The Scepter's Return Don Chernenko



Roc, March 2005  
\$14.95, 448 pp.  
ISBN 045460146  
Review by Harriet Klausner

In the realm of Avornis, two monarchs rule; after years of mutual distrust, Kings Grus and Lanius co-exist peacefully. Lanius is married to Grus' daughter, but resents

sharing the crown. Both rulers are determined to retrieve the Scepter of Mercy that was stolen by the Menteshes tribes and now resides in their heavily fortified city of Yozgat.

King Grus leads a military campaign into Menteshes freeing the thralls of the sorcery that left them as beasts of burden. He regains lands that once belonged to Avornis but cuts short his invasion with winter coming. The following year, Grus places a siege on Yozgat but it is Lanius who comes up with a daring plan to steal the Scepter from under the nose of the Prince Korut who is inside the besieged city. If Lanius' plan works, they won't have a protracted battle with many lives lost, but the evil Banished One abets his followers the Menteshes in efforts to destroy Grus and his army.

Combine sword and sorcery with family drama within the castle in Avornis and one will have an idea of what THE SCEPTER'S RETURN is all about. Lanius has really matured over the three books in this series and is wise enough to rule in his own right. Grus is a heroic figure who had to fight to get where he is but once he accomplishes all he set out to do, he wonders if his life will ever be as rewarding as it is when his goals are met. This colorful, entertaining and enchanting work is epic in scope. Don Chernenko is a bright star in the fantasy horizon.

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## Writers Wanted!!!

The Illuminata is looking for regular and occasional contributors. If you have opinions (and want to share them), fill out the contributor form at:

[www.TyrannosaurusPress.com](http://www.TyrannosaurusPress.com)

## Reviews

### IN LIEU of HEAVEN by Kevin Archer



X-libris Books  
ISBN: 1-4134-2186-5  
Hardcover; 155 pgs, 2003  
Review by garrie keyman

#### *Conversations with God's Executioner*

Kevin Archer's first-person allegory of disenchantment with his spiritual journey is an ultimately enjoyable tale,

drawing in the reader with smooth prose and accessible protagonists. Interest is sustained by thought-filled examinations of biblical precepts all of which are artfully couched in an entertaining fictionalization of what might be called an atheist's apologetics.

A lone drifter, wandering a parched desert, happens upon an oasis occupied by a single inhabitant we soon discover is no other than the original Adam. The ensuing conversations between Adam and our drifter become a veritable deconstruction of biblical teaching, Adam insisting all the while that our drifter's quest to encounter God will never be met, since God is dead. Adam knows; he claims to be the one who killed Him, committing the murder as revenge for His having allowed Eve to die.

Exactly why Adam never died is not made clear, but the crux of the tale – aside from pointing out many of the ironies and hypocrisies of biblical teaching – centers around our waiting to have Adam explain precisely how it was he murdered God.

Enter the book's main flaw, stage left.

Archer's dénouement involves Adam and Judas being one, a resolution that had a difficult time gelling in my brain. Perhaps if Archer's Adam had conspired with Judas and claimed complicity in the death of Jesus I might have found *In Lieu of Heaven* slightly more cohesive. Of course, reading any manner of speculative fiction requires that the reader applies a hefty dose of what in drama has been dubbed "suspended disbelief." This doesn't mean, however, once the speculative fiction author has established the parameters of her "universe," that she can change them at any turn – or toss them wholesale out the window – without losing the reader's acceptance of said universe.

The other problem is, of course, that we all know Jesus died, but His death has never been equated with the death of the triune God. In Archer's work, the concept of the Trinity is not first deconstructed, as is so much else in biblical teaching, and therefore to accept the death of Jesus as equivalent to the annihilation of God requires a leap of, shall we say, faithlessness, that Archer has not wholly prepared us to accept.

He has, however, set us up to accept much, and has done it well. As a former missionary, his knowledge of the bible would seem fairly thorough, and he footnotes his references (citing chapter and verse) for the reader's convenience.

I first selected *In Lieu of Heaven* because I mistakenly thought it was going to be a scholarly approach to biblical deconstruction; I didn't realize I had ordered a novel. But if anything, *In Lieu of Heaven* was better than I anticipated precisely because it *was* a work of fiction. I say this because, in fictionalizing his thoughts, Archer's appeal becomes accessible on multiple levels and his intellectual acuity proven the keener for his approach. And yet by no means is to characterize *In Lieu of Heaven* as a scholarly work off the mark. Archer knows his subject well and evokes in the reader frequent and introspective thought-provoking pauses. I suspect this was one of his goals and he achieves it almost poetically.

*In Lieu of Heaven* is a brief 155 pages that will give readers more than 155 pages worth of impact, at least for those valuing well-written prose packing a punch that teeters on profundity. Over all well done. Earns three out of five possible stars.

I don't believe in an afterlife, so I don't have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse.

— Issac Asimov

# Reviews

## Hotaru no Haka (Grave of the Fireflies. 1988)

Isao Takahata (Director)



Anime, 1 Hour, 28 Minutes  
Review by Terry Crotinger

“Grave of the Fireflies” is an animated, full-length movie about the life of two orphans in Japan during WWII. It is based on the true story of, Akiyuki Nosaka, who wrote the Japanese book, *Hotaru no haka* (A Grave of Fireflies, 1967) as a tribute and to help deal with his feelings of

failure as he watched his own sister die of malnutrition during the war.

Director Isao Takahata, takes the viewer from watching Seita (Say-tah) and his toddler sister, Setsuko (Set-Sue-koh), play as normal children shortly before an air raid, to the end of the war where Seita is seen against the backdrop of the city, beautifully alight in the evening as he stumbles toward it. As the film closes, viewers understand they have been witnessing Seika’s final thoughts, as he lies dying in a train station among other young and hopeless victims of the war.

This is one of Isao Takahata’s earlier anime so special effects are unspectacular in comparison with twenty-second century graphics. Other than terrific flash-fires from the bombing raids, the quiet treatment he gives the fireflies is just the right touch. Floating fireflies in the evening become the metaphor for the quiet existence of the two main characters and accurately captures the delicate balance for frail humanity. Takahata gracefully kept special effects respectful and understated with such tragic content. .

“Grave of the Fireflies” reminds viewers that war does not spare the small or the innocent. Roger Ebert says, in his March 19, 2002 review in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, “But these films exist within safe confines; they inspire tears, but not grief. “Grave of the Fireflies” is a powerful dramatic film that happens to be animated, and I know what the critic Ernest Rister means when he compares it to “Schindler’s List” and says, “It is the most profoundly human animated film I’ve ever seen.”

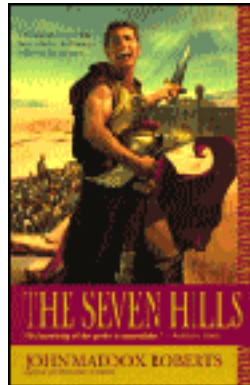
Others agree with Roger Ebert, who lists the award winning “Grave of the Fireflies” on his list of must see movies. In 1994, The Chicago International Children’s Film Festival awarded First Prize to this animated film in the “Rights of the Child” category. Akiyuki

Nosaka’s book received the Naoki Award in 1968 in Japan (*ANIMAGE Magazine*, June 1987).

According to Internet Movie Database (IMDb), this is the only Ghibli theatrical feature film not part of the *Disney-Tokuma* deal. One reason may be that this movie may be hard to watch for any age. Who knows how veterans of war would experience this glimpse of war’s aftermath? Many feel this is an anti-war film; Roger Ebert would disagree. But all would agree it is a reverent addition to the fluffy school-girl and mecha offerings of current anime. “Grave of the Fireflies”, also known as “Tombstone of the Fireflies” in Australia, deserves a place on anyone’s must see list.

## The Seven Hills

John Maddox Roberts



Ace, Mar 2005

\$23.95, Hardcover, 352 pp.

ISBN: 0441012450

Review by Harriet Klausner

On an alternate earth, Hannibal gave the Romans a chance to surrender and go into exile or he would destroy the city. Most chose exile traveling beyond the Alps to create a new empire, Rome Norricum. They

conquered the Gaul, Franks, and Germans; and over a century later they took back Rome.

The Romans control all of mainland Italy and look forward to regaining Sicily from Shofet Hamilcar, a descendent of Hannibal the Great of Carthage. Marcus Scipio has placed Queen Selene in power and formed an alliance with Egypt. However, Titus Norbanus and his four legions make other alliances, conquers new territories that once belonged to Rome, and has earned the loyalty of his troops. He plans to destroy Carthage and use the victory to become the ruler of the neo Roman Empire. Only Marcus and perhaps Carthage stand in the way of this upstart achieving his ambition.

This is a fantastic sequel that returns Rome to the power that she had lost. Readers obtain a lucid picture of what the senators think of the unfolding political and military events and how they regard the two competitors Marcus vs. Titus. John Maddox Roberts, writer of the terrific SPQR Ancient Rome mysteries, with *The Seven Hills* and its predecessor (see *Hannibal’s Children*) is the Harry Turtledove of an alternate Roman Empire.

## Thoughts (con't)

who's not getting to second base tonight. So you primp a little. Get to know what attracts the opposite sex. Dress your query for the occasion. And remember, you wouldn't offer your wares to just anyone, right? You aren't going to date Godzilla. So read up on agents and send to those who appeal to you and whose lists contain clients among whom you'd be honored to be numbered. If possible, read what your dream agent has had to say. Their attitudes and outlooks can be very telling.

Some of the best articles I've read are by Russell Galen of Scovil, Chichak & Galen. He gets my literary salivary glands going, and his list is a veritable Who's Who of highly respectable writers of speculative fiction. Now, there's an agent to query. There's an agent to whom my initial contact was a little red dress of a letter with its slip showing.

Meanwhile, I have heard from three other agents. Actually I've heard from more, but who wants to mention fellas who didn't even want a first date? Two of the three who have asked me out so far are conservative: a night of dinner and casual conversation (as in, *please send a partial*). The other was either more confident in my qualities or more cavalier about his; he asked for the full manuscript up front (let's just get in bed, baby, and see how we feel, come morning).

And so I wait.

Time will tell if I find a blissful partnership to usher in the next phase of my wanna-be writer's career. Meanwhile, I'll finish book three.

Besides my annual pre-occupation with finding an agent, other thoughts on spec fic have certainly been swirling through my mind since my last KeyCOMMENTary some issues ago. One was, *Gee I really wanna get around to writing that review of Kevin Archer's In Lieu of Heaven*. Another was, *Lemony Snicket writes better than JK Rowling*. This last I'll touch upon today.

Now, first of all, don't poison my latte. I've noticed Rowling has become a bit of a Holy Heifer in the publishing world and to take issue with her talent in any way is to risk death. So I will come to my point first, and extrapolate later, my point being thus: *while both Rowling's and Snicket's are good stories, Rowling's is a tale which translates better to screen, but Snicket's is a far more captivating read*.

There. I said it (\*checking for snipers who target critics\*). *Whew*.

In my own defense, I've just finished reading Rowling's *Goblet of Fire* (Harry Potter IV) as well

as Snicket's *A Bad Beginning* (his Book the First) to my sons in 6<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grades. They're homeschooled, and this is what we do for English class when they aren't reading the encyclopedia (that actually wasn't a joke; you should try it sometime – it's very enlightening). We have also seen the recently released movie version of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and have seen all the *Harry Potter* movies (the first pair numerous times). So, if nothing more, I've done my research.

From the first time I picked up *Harry Potter* some years ago I was unimpressed with the writing. Neither did I comprehend the hoopla (which was probably largely manufactured by the media together with some really clever publicity agents) over the supposedly 'dangerous influence' the novel would have on children, unless of course the worry was that children would grow up trying to write like Rowling. Now, that would be scary. Only when the first book came out in film version did a true cohesiveness of plot and character emerge. Until then they were so deeply buried in convoluted sentence structures that getting excited about the *Potter* books was a bit like getting excited about the prospect of wading through tar. We weren't even going to continue reading the series until we all saw the first movie.

Admittedly, Rowling's writing improved with time. Maybe she got a better editor; I don't know. I do know we found the second book in the series a little more readable than the first, although they haven't been improving exponentially since then, which has been disappointing. At this point I, for one, would be just as happy to wait for the movies to find out what happens in Books Five through Seven, thank you very much. But that's just me, apparently.

What else I know is that a sort of reverse phenomena occurred with my kids and the Lemony Snicket (don't you just love that pseudonym?) stories. We saw the movie first and it was okay, but it didn't send any of us into paroxysms of delight (it did, however, quite possibly have the best end credits of any movie in film history). I think I know why this is, too, and I'll get to that in a moment. But what I want to say first is that following the movie, when we finally began reading the books my sons had received as holiday gifts, an interesting pattern emerged. To wit, they didn't want me to stop reading. They smiled, they laughed, they rocked on their haunches at my knee, which was quite unlike when I read *Potter* books to them and they'd be

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sitting across the room on the sofa playing Legos. In brief, Snicket's works are far more engaging. His is a non-tarry voice.

As to the reason his books didn't fare as well cinematically, I believe it's a simple matter of adventure. Rowling's stories are adventures, though you'd never know by merely reading the novels. Snicket's tale is less active, but at least we aren't forced to slog through thousands of unnecessary sentences just to find that out. *Unfortunate Events* is interesting, however, as well as fun and funny and you immediately want to run out and buy the next book in the series. What's more, you'll be able to afford it.

When reading *Potter* books to my kids, half a chapter was always more than enough in a single sitting. Their minds would grow too weary to bear more, and often so did mine. Unlike they do for Snicket, they weren't habitually begging for more. Oh, they wanted to get through it, all right, but they were willing to wait. Not exactly what I'd call a page-turner.

So while I wait for the slings and arrows of outrageously inflamed readers to reach me, I'll quietly slip back into my own peculiar universe where my technologically-impaired heroes meet hyper-modern foes in (what I hope are) highly adventurous exploits of great literary value.

Agents please note my e-mail address and be sure to put the words "Fame and Fortune Knocking" in the subject box when writing.

\*\* This is a highly-charged subject best left to an entirely different issue of this column. Self-published writers be forewarned: load your slings and arrows. I'll go warm up the generator to my forcefield.

### RPG Corner (con't)

On the other hand, if the heroes have made themselves a nuisance one too many times, the villain may turn his attentions to them directly. If this happens, the GM has an excuse to make the PCs lives as uncomfortable as he likes, and the best way to do that is to make it personal. Allow the villain to get into every aspect of the PCs' lives, affecting their home, their friends, and their family. Everything from attempted murder to hiring some kids to kick the PC's pet dog can fall into this example. Anything that personalizes the relationship between the villain and the PCs will make the NPC memorable. (A NPC need not be loved to be remembered)

(continued next month)

### Filking (con't)

Also, not everyone agrees with content in a song. What may be perfectly acceptable in one group may be offensive to another. If children are present, everything must be PG13-able (or for elementary aged children, G—as in General Audience), and that can put quite a damper on an evening filk. It all comes down to common sense and courtesy—something, unfortunately, science fiction fans don't always shine at.

But that would not describe your friends or you! You like to share and sing and get together with other science fiction fans. You'd like to filk! What if there is no filking concerts or groups where you live? Then start one! April's issue of *Illuminata* offers questions to consider when starting your filk—like copyright issues. Once you and a few friends decide on the particulars, you're off filking! Your homework is to do a web-search on Filking. Have fun!

### Writer's Block (con't)

and I've always had a lot of hair to curl. I could hear the cows moving about, right in the midst of those purple floaters. But then I wondered. *Was* it the cows? Now *that* was horror.

My brother was a braver man than I was. He let off the brake, inched forward, and as the light from the headlights struck further into the field we saw suddenly that the floating purple orbs were eyes. But not alien eyes. It was the cows, their eyes wide open in terror as they reflected the headlights. I'd never seen them that scared before, nor have I since.

So what made the sound? We never found out. There were no tracks, but we were missing a calf the next day and we found its mother with her ears stripped to threads by the teeth or claws of... something.

Before that night I often walked the farm in the darkness. After that night I seldom did again. Fear can go away, but horror and terror linger.

Emotional experiences cling like burrs to a person's mind. And fear and its offshoots are among the most powerful emotions. Creating such experiences and feelings in your readers will make sure that they never quite forget your tales.

In my next few columns I'm going to investigate further the use of fear in fiction. I'll talk about some of the myths that dog horror writers, and about the reasons why people like to be scared. Along the way we'll discuss a few techniques for sowing your stories with darkness.