



The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Batman Returns... With A Vengeance... And This Time It's Personal...

By Bret Funk

After reading a number of reviews for the newly released *Batman Begins*, I wonder if the critics were even watching the same movie. Many, if not going so far as to pan the film, gave it a lukewarm reception, complaining about the pacing, the acting, the dark undertones, the plot, and just about anything else they could think of to ridicule. I found the film to be another stellar addition to the recent string of comic book crossovers.

Batman Begins tells the tale of Batman's origins. It also severs all ties with the franchise of the late 80s and 90s (hooray!). This is not the happy-go-lucky Bruce Wayne of the early comics or the 60s TV show, nor the ridiculous, merchandizing-focused Batmen portrayed by Val Kilmer or George Clooney. This Bruce is haunted by his past, the murder of his parents, and his inability to take revenge on their killer. Goaded by one of Gotham's darker denizens, Bruce disappears to seek a better understanding of the criminal mind. On his quest he meets the mysterious Ducard (played by Liam Neeson) who takes Bruce under his wing and teaches him the way of the ninja.

Years later, a different Bruce returns to Gotham. With the help of the Wayne's long-time employees Alfred Pennyworth (Michael Caine) and Lucius Fox (Morgan Freeman), and a young Lieutenant James Gordon (Gary Oldman), Bruce develops the Batman persona and proceeds to restore order to his city. To do so, he must face not only Gotham's old villains, but a new string of adversary's, including the Scarecrow, a man who uses fear as a weapon, and an enemy whose ultimate goal is the complete destruction of Gotham City.

The casting was superb, and the acting left little to be desired. Christian Bale (of American Psycho fame) was perfect for the role of a dark and troubled Batman, and he managed to add something to the Bruce Wayne role that even Michael Keaton could not attain. Caine and Freeman added just the right combination of talent and humor to keep viewers laughing, and Neeson played the part of Ducard spectacularly. The majority of the supporting cast, including Oldman and Cillian Murphy (as Scarecrow/Dr. Crane), captured their roles perfectly. If Katie Holmes' character seemed flat and uninspired at times, that was as much the fault of her role in the movie as it was that she was acting outside her league.

As for the pacing, some critics seem disappointed that the film didn't start with a fist flying out of the shadows, punching the screen and leaving a bat imprint in its wake. *Batman Begins* is not an action movie; it's a drama. It's the story of how Bruce Wayne becomes Batman and of all the hardships and tragedies he has to go through to get there. Action abounds in both halves of the film, enough so that those not satisfied should probably rent *Hardboiled* or another John Woo kill fest.

The best parts of this film are in its details, the subtle interplay between characters, the hinted relationships, the undertones of understanding. The film also addresses a number of factors previously ignored or worked around. How did Bruce find the Batcave, and how did he build it? Where does he get the costumes? The gadgets? And how is it that there's no paper trail, that no one says 'I bet this order for 50 Bat-suits might be for that crazy guy in Gotham!?' How can he do it without anyone else knowing who he is? (He can't, by the way!). And why a bat? The handling of these minor facets of the Batman mythos take this film from good to excellent, and we can thank director Christopher Nolan (of Memento fame) for the good work.

All that being said, *Batman Begins* does suffer from a few flaws. The character of Rachel Dawes (Holmes) is underutilized and underplayed

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RPG Corner v4.42: Lost in Translation

by Doug >!< Roper of EPIC Gaming

Last month I started addressing concepts and dramatic devices that work great in other media, but not so well in the world of RPGs. Last time, I discussed the concept of the chase; this time we look at the dramatic element that is perhaps the toughest to get right in an RPG.

Romantic Love

While the problems with chases are basically rooted in the weaknesses of using dice to resolve non combat-oriented action sequences, the problem with romance and love in RPGs is that they have nothing to do with any system. This makes them powerfully seductive but bitterly difficult concepts to work with.

I don't think there is a person over the age of seventeen that would not agree without protest that the dramatic potential for love is on a scale that outstrips any other category. From the first tittering flirtations, through the small gains and minor setbacks of courtship to the final revelation of a love so profound that planets will fall from the heavens at its mere mention, the opportunities for drama and conflict erupt from every angle of romantic love. Love's loss, love rekindled, love expressed and love unrequited all make for marvelous devices for the introduction of plots and themes that can fill out character's backgrounds and make many games come to life for individual Players.

So why is it such a mess to include these elements in a Role Playing Game? For starters, love isn't everyone's cup of tea. It is unlikely that the Recreational gamer will bother with love, because it creates a great deal of subplot and distraction from the main plots of the GM's design, and when you are gaming for a pure good time, no one wants to waste one second on something so subjective and slow to develop as love. Likewise, younger Players and GMs may flirt with the concept of love, but I think it's used more like a MacGuffin in those instances, serving only to move the plot along (i.e. The PC's must pursue the sinister blue van, because the lovely Princess Tiffany, who has professed her love of one of the Characters, is tied up in the van's passenger seat).

When attempting to develop a love story in an RPG, you are more often not dealing with the more sophisticated models of Role Play, Immersive and Self Exploration. You may run across things like this in a Hobby game, but the chances are small, and so too will be love's role in the story. Since the games are played by more sophisticated (not to be confused with better) Players, the opportunities for developing love are there. Using love in an RPG format is solely dependent

upon the maturity and willingness of the Players. No matter the GM's desire, if the Players don't want to explore love in the game, they won't.

The only real condition in using love boils down to maturity and trust within the gaming group. Obviously, real romantic love requires a great deal of maturity. The Players must be able to discuss meaningful concepts without having to watch what they say in front of their friends or reducing the noble and deep meaning of a love relationship to something as basic as sex. There must also be an understanding that while the Characters in the fictional game-world may be falling in love, the Players are not. It sounds like a basic distinction in all Role-Play Gaming (and it is) and it may seem funny, but I've seen many instances where Players, who have no problem distinguishing between their Character crushing a Goblin's head with an enchanted axe and reality, have real problems when another Player Character starts making googly eyes at his hulking barbarian. These problems are most common in younger players of opposite gender. Duh.

There are three kinds of love interaction that can occur in an RPG. Player-Player love, where two Players have Characters who for whatever reason wake up one day and decide that there is an attraction, or maybe the attraction has been there for years, and is only now coming to the fore. Player-NPC love, where a GM controlled NPC and Player Character begin to develop feelings for one another, and finally, a Player Love without outside involvement, meaning that the Player himself designs the love interest of his character. In this last case, the love is more often simply a device, since the NPC is not likely to appear for any extended period of time, even though the GM could use the character from time to time. This last kind isn't really a concern for most GM's. It provides a handy leash on the Character, but little opportunities for Role-Play and drama.

The really big hurdles lie in the first two kinds and fall back to the issues discussed above; willingness, maturity and trust. The people involved have to respect and trust one another to explore the relationship without having to worry about the lines between fantasy and reality blurring. This is paramount. Many instances of a promising love-oriented relationship have been destroyed (along with the games in which they occurred) because a line was crossed between two Players. Fantasy is fantasy and real is real, and there must be a clear boundary defined before the game can continue. This goes for Players and GMs equally. Players may be more willing to trust a GM,

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Special Effects (FX, F/X or SFX) used to impress us. Now, we expect it—better, bigger, realistic and high definition. Movie goers (science fiction fans among them) enjoy these tweaks to our viewing pleasure and encourage this billion-dollar industry to develop more dazzling effects. It started with experiments using film (as opposed to still pictures), chemical processes, and using different lenses to get an effect that enhanced the story being shown on the white screen. Stop-motion photography, rear-screen projections, miniatures and use of the blue screen are now standards in the film industry. As viewers, we hardly give them a thought; we just enjoy. And yet, some of these techniques are like fashion—arriving with a lot of foo-foo hype, then fizzle like unused dailies on the cutting room floor to be salvaged now and then.

An entire industry evolved around special effects, largely due to visionary George Lucas; and an entire workforce was relieved of duty when the next, albeit impressive, development in FX occurred, leaving ninety year old techniques like stop-motion photography for second-long scenes using miniatures, short programs, and commercials. One new technique, though over twenty years old and still being developed, uses computers to alter a photo or cel to make it appear life-like. It is often referred to as Hyper-Real.

There are many spellings—HyperReal, Hypereal, hyperreal, hyper-real—and it is a term occasionally gracing everything from raves/drugs to computer programming a la MS DOS. In the special effects industry it refers to “photo-realistic” graphics, but the development from photography to graphic art impacted science fiction as only science could. Other than audio books, what is not literary is graphic. Be it gashopan (Japanese anime characters in figurine form) to the latest blockbuster movie, it’s all visual. And fandom loves it; we beg for it; we demand it.

HyperReal fuses graphics with mathematics. To science fiction fandom, it is more noticeable in feature films and computer/video games as a surreal lifelike presentation of a person or object that at times blurs with reality. The “Is it real or is it Memorex?” kind of thing. When graphics are well done, it can be hard to tell.

Not a believer? Look at the latest car commercial—can you spot where the real countryside stops and the virtual begins? And that’s just a commercial. Compare that with the one that sells prescription toe-nail fungus killer—the girl in front of the mirror is NOT hyper-

real. That one is an example of non-photo-realistic rendering (NPR). Crudely stated, it is a cartoon with an animated ending.

The earliest example we had of hyper-real is Young Sherlock Holmes (1985—the stained glass window knight who comes to life and attacks the priest in the church.), according to movie/film expert and science fiction collector, Dennis Lynch. Dennis cites other examples of hyper-real computer generated images (CGI): The Great Mouse Detective (1986) used computer generated outline drawings to generate reference material for the clockwork backgrounds inside Big Ben, Willow (1988) the first example of Morphing, changing animal to animal to human, and The Abyss* (1989) the amazing transparent water snake [the *water weenie*] that formed the face.).

“There are more [examples] and the gates were wide open for full human figures and stunt replacement by the mid 1990s. Sky replacement, wire removal and touch up has been going on at least 20 years. There’s so much of it, we are unaware of it,” Lynch explains.

But fandom and gamers may be more familiar with hyper-real in the form of video or arcade games that ranged from 2-D isometric (cubic) perspective like what we saw on those huge, money-eating arcade box screens to 3-D photo-realistic graphics on everything from arcade-style games to internet. A well-known example of early hypereal graphics is Myst; a more recent one is the movie for Final Fantasy XIV: Advent Children (2004). But it all has to do with graphics.

How far will artists, movie makers and game developers take this concept? Apparently, as far as possible, or at least until the next special effect develops. When that occurs, the hyper-real or photo-realistic technique will go in the producer/artist’s bag-o-tricks and simply be mundane, no longer awe-inspiring, but expected. On the other hand, photo-realism may be around for a long time now that programs and tutorials are available for graphic artist wannabes.

The stop-motion technique viewers first saw in King Kong (1933) is commonplace. We see stop-motion work in commercials, yet according to Anthony Mark Viverito, a special effects artist who worked on all three Matrix movies and is no stranger to stop-motion photography, those men and women who were hired to use the technique ended up unemployed when CGI rose to a new level: hyper-real. What happened to the artists of special effects like stop-motion photography that brought us Saturday morning serials like, Jason of

Eats, Shoots, and Leaves

by Danielle Parker

A few more years ago than I am prepared to admit, I found myself the only student who survived to take twelfth grade German on the chin. Given that it was a class of one, the putative German teacher, Herr Lubeck, took on other duties and more or less left me on my own with a German grammar book that I still own. Day after day I struggled with convoluted sentence constructions and the accusative and the genitive and the dative cases and whether the wonderfully simple word “the” should actually show up as *der die das dem* or – *damn!* – before the noun. I went on to write my high school scholarship exam in German and pass but was hard put not to celebrate the event by torching that yellow grammar book. Years later I met a native speaker and told him of my grammatical agonies. I failed to elicit the expected sympathy. Why, it was *simple*, he replied. *He* had never bothered to learn any of those maddening rules himself. He just learned the whole *sentence*.

The point of this little tale (my Germanic acquaintance survived his heartless confession, by the way, although for an instant, as I remembered the agony of those *an auf hinter neben* lists, I thought of braining him with the nearest heavy object) is that native speakers rarely approach their *own* language with the same attention to grammar and punctuation that they would apply to learning a *foreign* language. We native speakers learn through a process of osmosis more than anything else. Starting out as baby parrots imitating noises, we absorb the rules, and unless we make a career of teaching or writing, we probably never apply the same care to understanding our own language as we would to another.

But many of our readers *are* writers too, of course, though no doubt we should all hold on to our day jobs. Writers should *care* about the correct or at least the deliberate use of language just as a painter should care about perspective and color. The language is the tool of our trade, and if we want to graduate from finger-painting to Da Vinci imitations, we need to know how to use our *tool*.

So how to learn the fine points of the English language without resorting to something like that yellow grammar book that still incites a flash of hatred in me? Have I got the book for *you*. Since the cover of “Eats, Shoots and Leaves” tells me the book is “The Runaway #1 British Bestseller”, readers across the pond may be nodding their heads in familiarity already. But for the rest of you, keep reading. Confused about how to use the apostrophe? When should a colon or semi-colon be used instead of a comma? What’s the difference between hyphens and dashes? It’s all here.

Lynne Truss reminds me strongly of the history teacher I had in the same school who managed to make

history *really* interesting for a class of thirty initially ho-hum students. Mr. Steinson approached history like it was the world’s most lurid gossip. Napoleon conquered the continent? *Far* more interesting if you knew how, when the short guy was about to come home, he wrote Josephine to beg her not to bathe because he just *loved* that natural aroma. So too does Lynne Truss liven up the apostrophe with its lurid history and the sidesplitting misuse it’s been put to and the tale of the Apostropher Royal. The comma gets its due with a side-tour into the contributions of Aldus Manutius and how Lynne Truss would have loved to have his babies. Famous writers and editors from Shaw to Harold Pinter are quoted for the uses – famous or infamous – they’ve made of punctuation, and some of *those*, believe me, are sidesplitting too.

And I can’t resist quoting the book’s most famous joke. If someone in the British House of Lords couldn’t resist it, neither can I, so *there*, so those of you who have heard it before, groan and get it over with and shut up. Here it is, word-for-word:

A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and fires two shots in the air.

“Why?” asks the confused waiter, as the panda makes toward the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses it over his shoulder.

“I’m a panda,” he says, at the door. “Look it up.”

The waiter turns to the relevant entry and, sure enough, finds an explanation.

“Panda. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves.”

Sobeware, Ye Who Mangle Commas and Apostrophes. Next time this humble part-time editor sees a horribly punctuated submission come my way, I shall write you back and ask if you have yet read that punctuation stickler and world-class authority, Ms. Lynne Truss. There is no excuse. Read it and *learn*, or I shall *stickle* at you.

P. S. Here’s a challenge for you. *Quick!* Tell me what characteristic punctuation styles the following authors are quoted for? A) Harold Pinter, B) George Bernard Shaw, C) Gertrude Stein, D) James Thurber, E) Charles Dickens, and – adding a few of my own, here! – F) ee cummings, G) Ernest Hemingway, and, last and sure least, tongue-in-cheek, H) Barbara Cartland?

Eats, Shoots, and Leaves

Lynne Truss

Gotham Books, 2004

\$13.95, Hardcover, 208 pgs

ISBN: 1-592-40087-6

The Writer's Block: Hemingway - A Writer's Life and Death

by Charles Gramlich

For my next few columns, I thought I'd look at some of America's most famous dead writers in hopes that we not-so-famous living scribblers might find some clues to their success. My first choice is Ernest Hemingway, who is one of my favorite authors even though he never wrote SF, Fantasy, or Horror. But hey, even mainstream writers get it right some of the time.

Ernest Miller Hemingway was the son of a doctor, a man named Clarence Edmonds Hemingway who much enjoyed fishing and hunting. His mother was Grace Hall, a strong willed woman who had shown early musical talent and who always seemed to feel as if she had given up a promising singing career to become a wife and mother. Mama Hemingway was "high-strung" and had minimal domestic skills. Her six children (four girls and two boys) were placed in the care of a succession of nurses and nannies, hardly an optimal situation for the development of a mother/infant bond. Fortunately, Ernest was an independent and precocious child who learned to walk and read early.

Though Hemingway was born and grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, a Chicago suburb that was filled with more churches than saloons, he later rejected the lifestyle embodied by Oak Park. The single "place" that shaped him most was his family's summer vacation home on Walloon Lake in northern Michigan. Hemingway was only one when his parents bought land on the Lake and had a cottage built, and there he first learned about hunting and fishing and camping. Many of his earliest professional stories were set in the Michigan woods of his childhood. In fact, the character Nick Adams, who appears in these stories, is only a thinly veiled surrogate for Hemingway.

The young Ernest showed an early interest in and talent for writing. He wrote for his school newspaper and became an editor for it as a Senior. Some of his earliest writings were comedic pieces filled with a rather broad but satirical humor. He did, however, write dramatic fiction as well, often dealing with the Ojibway Indians of Michigan. His father occasionally treated members of the tribe and often took Ernest along with him.

Hemingway graduated high school during World War I and wanted to enlist. His father forbade it, and Ernest ended up working for a time as a journalist for the *Kansas City Star*. It turned out that Hemingway's

eyesight was too bad to let him enter the army anyway, possibly because of injuries from boxing. But by mid-1918 he had joined the Red Cross and made it to Italy by that route.

Hemingway quickly got himself to the front where he could be involved in the fighting, and there is no doubt that he proved his personal courage in battle. He was wounded badly while carrying an injured soldier off the field, but still got the man to an aid station before passing out from blood loss. While in the hospital, Ernest met and fell in love with a nurse who was later to figure prominently in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

After Ernest's return to the United States, he continued to work at writing, but with little success. This strained his relationship with his parents, particularly his mother, who asked him to leave the family home and not return unless he was invited. Though the feud soon ended, it left a lasting mark on Ernest.

Soon, Ernest got married to Hadley Richardson, and the couple moved to Paris, France. Ernest met many other writers in France and traveled extensively over Europe. He was selling newspaper features but struggling to get his stories published. Eventually, he managed to sell a couple of short story collections, but it was a 1926 novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, that established him as a major talent. The book was a bestseller and received critical acclaim in America and Europe. From there, Hemingway's fame rocketed upward.

It wasn't long, however, before Hemingway and Hadley got a divorce and Ernest married Pauline Pfeiffer. With his new wife, Hemingway returned to the States and settled in Key West, Florida. Then, he was punched squarely in the face by tragedy. On December 6, 1928, Ernest's father committed suicide by shooting himself in the head with a Smith & Wesson revolver. Though Ernest seemed to take the elder Hemingway's death in stride, it is notable that he also asked to be given the pistol with which his father had killed himself.

Over the next decade, Hemingway lived the prototypical life of the famous writer. He fished off Cuba, hunted in Arkansas and across the western United States, took in the bull fights in Spain, and went on safari in Africa. He wrote such books as *A Farewell to Arms*, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), and *Green Hills of Africa* (1935). And always there was the

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KeyCOMMENTary: Fondly Fueling the Fan Fiction Debate

by garrie keyman

Recently, several websites snagged my attention, each bemoaning the evils of fan fiction. One site went as far as equating fan fiction with the rape of an author's mind. Hmm. Strong imagery.

As an aspiring novelist and published writer of shorter works, I can commiserate to some small degree with such a stance – the operative word, there, being *small* – although I am here to take up the opposing view.

That means if you hate fan fiction, put on your gloves and step into the verbal ring with me; we're about to spar.

To my way of thinking, writers who fear fan fiction fear phantoms (*go ahead and say that three times fast!*). Fan fiction, on its face, is not about theft of intellectual property nor is it about intimate violation of another writer's worlds. Fan fiction is about tribute.

Imitation: the Highest Form of Flattery

Let's start by defining – or refining – our terms. Fan fiction is *not* another word for plagiarism. Nor is fan fiction an attempt at financial gain (documented accusations to the contrary notwithstanding). People who write fan fiction are neither usurping another writer's work because they're too lazy to create their own characters nor dredging another writer's creative stores because they're too dull witted to build their own worlds. Indeed, writers of fan fiction are – as the term more than implies -- first and foremost one thing. They're *fans*.

Writers who diss fan fiction diss fans, and that can be a fatal flaw in a writer's career. Stick with me and I'll tell you why.

Fans admire. Fans pay homage to the things that move them internally... sometimes eternally. Fans who also happen to be aspiring writers write fan fiction. It's logic, not libel.

Should I ever be fortunate enough to see my *spec fic* novel series published, I would not be dismayed if readers penned adventures of their own using my worlds, my characters, my languages. I'd be honored; fascinated, in fact, that others felt so engaged by my creation that they longed to encounter it on a prolonged and personal basis.

Think about it. It takes a lot of time and interest to write a story, even those incorporating the characters and universe created by another. Why do fans do this? Evidently they've been captivated at the deepest level. Any writer of novelized fiction or televised drama ought to recognize this as good, to see fan fiction for

what it is: an attempt by fans to interact with beloved characters and to perpetuate the worlds they view as meaningful and worthwhile.

Now, that's a compliment if I've ever heard one. Writers with sufficient sway to inspire fan fiction should not consider themselves insulted. Far from it. They should consider themselves among a favored few.

Some fan fiction is pretty good. Occasionally writers who initially hone their skills on fan fiction go on to create worlds of their own and do eventually get published in legitimate markets using original material. Truth be told, there are more than a few famous writers out there today with secret fan fiction pasts of their own.

Fan fiction should neither be negated nor discouraged. It proliferates precisely because it feeds a need of many fans to further explore the possibilities of the places and people they come to love and with which they fiercely identify. Furthermore, fan fiction existed long before the Internet gave it broad audience. Countless closets around this globe hide treasures that reveal the secret dreams of youth.

Personally, some of my earliest writing centered on Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer and it didn't destroy Mark Twain one bit. Others write the further adventures of their own favorite TV, film and literary characters, usually without sharing their work with more than a handful of faithful and like-minded friends. It's common.

Enter the Internet

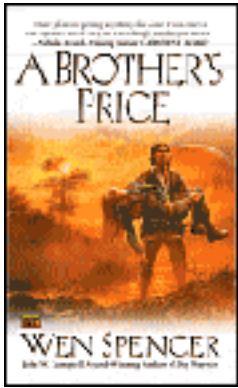
To a large degree, the Internet, in its pervasive, peculiar way, has forced fan fiction into the limelight. Ready audiences devour one another's creative meanderings through familiar worlds: *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Bonanza*, *Planet of the Apes*, and on and on. And it ain't a-goin' away simply because a handful of hooty-tooty authors who think they've cornered the market as "real writers" say it oughta.

Fan fiction authors don't write for fame or money and their writing doesn't detract from that of the authors they seek to emulate. And hey, even "bad" press is advertising after a fashion, right? Any business owner versed in the basics knows that. No, fan fiction authors are in it for the rush; fan fiction is the literary equivalent of a participation sport. That's because authors frequently write themselves into their work, usually by way of new characters that -- in their minds, at any rate -- represent themselves. In this way, writer fans get smack dab in the middle of the fray.

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Reviews

A Brother's Price Wen Spencer



Roc, July 2005
\$6.99, Mass Market, 320 pgs.
ISBN 0451460383
Review by Harriet Klausner

Imagine a world where women have trouble giving birth to male children. Women rule the world, run the factories and farms, and keep the males hidden to protect them from desperate females who are husband thieves. Men are considered property with no rights. They are sold to wives of their family's choosing.

Jerin Whistler is luckier than most because his family loves him and want to make a match for him that will make him happy. That chance comes when he helps rescue a female on his property who had been attacked. It turns out she is a royal princess and her sister Ren comes to find her. Ren falls in love with the handsome Jerin who shares her feelings. Because they have royal blood flowing through their veins, Jerin is eligible to be the prince consort. When they get to the capital, all Ren's sisters agree to the match but there is a plot to overthrow the crown and Jerin is caught in the crosshairs.

When it comes to fresh, innovative storytelling, almost nobody is better than Wen Spencer. In a world where men are cosseted and hidden away because they are so rare, the hero accepts his lot in life as the norm since that is how it has always been. Feminists are going to take this book as their symbol because the author proves women can do what are traditional male roles in our world. Once the audience starts this novel, they will find it absolutely impossible to put down.

Academ's Fury Jim Butcher



Ace, July 2005
\$23.95, Hardback, 472 pgs.
ISBN 0441012833
Review by Harriet Klausner

The realm of Alera has stood for over 1,000 years, pushing back barbarian hordes behind a shield wall to keep out the icemen on one of its borders and guarding the other with well trained legionnaires. The people are able

to control the furies, elementals who do the bidding of their master. The only person in the entire realm who doesn't have a fury is Tavi, a young man who saved the realm from being overrun by the Marat horde.

Now the realm is in trouble from within and without. The First Lord is old and has not named an heir. He falls into a coma leaving the realm in the hands of his most trusted people. Two noble families plot to overthrow the First Lord while an old enemy from across the sea is plotting to plunge the realm into civil war. The vord, an intelligent species that takes control of an individual, have woken after a long slumber and is busy multiplying and taking control of people in the capital and in Calderon. If they are not stopped, the whole realm will be one hive mind.

Jim Butcher is a brilliant world builder who has created a place based on the Roman Empire, complete with political intrigue, treachery and determination to keep out the barbarians at the gates. Tavi plays a critical role as he learns to be a spy for the realm while helping to protect the secret of the First Lord's illness. He has grown since the events in *Furies of Calderon* took place and his strength and loyalty makes him a valuable asset to the realm even though some consider him a freak because he can't control a fury.

Curse the Dark Laura Anne Gilman



Luna, July 2005
\$13.99, Trade Paper, 400 pgs.
ISBN 0373802277
Review by Harriet Klausner

In a world where most people don't believe in magic, there is a group of practitioners who have talent to use the current from electricity to perform magic. Wren is a Retriever, a lonejack (a Talent not affiliated with the Mage Council); a person who finds and returns missing objects to the client. Her partner Sergei convinces her to take a contract from the Silence an organization who keeps the world from imploding.

Their first assignment is to retrieve a manuscript that was stolen from the House of Legend a church in Sienna, Italy. When they arrive there, they learn that the church is not wired for electricity because the monks are guarding a library which contains malevolent manuscripts, texts and books. These guardians know that whoever reads

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the manuscript disappeared. Information sends them back to New York where the book is now in the hands of a private library that they are unable to gain access to due to spells. If they don't find a way to return the book to the Silence, the tome will wreck havoc on the city and then the country and if not unchecked, the world.

Curse the Dark is a great romantic fantasy that will appeal to readers of Laurell K. Hamilton. The heroine is blacklisted by the Mage Council, is trying to keep the lonejacks from battling the council, and is trying to adjust to the consummation of her relationship with Sergei. She also wants the fatae (the non-human magical creatures) protected by Talents who see them as an unfavorable species. Laura Anne Gilman is a master at characterizations, a great world builder and a gifted storyteller.

Dragon's Egg

Robert L. Forward



Del Rey Book, 1980

\$8.25, 308 pp.

ISBN 0-345-31666-5

Reviewed by Terry Crotinger

Robert L. Forward is a scientist and he writes like one, but any reader would enjoy *Dragon's Egg*. Forward makes it palatable and easy to read for readers not scientifically minded; readers who enjoy hard science

will doubly enjoy his speculation. Having written several science-based articles in *Analog*, Forward was well respected in the science fiction community. Authors came to him for verification of facts; two decades later, his science still works. So how did he come to write about the unlikely development of life on a tiny neutron star? Originally, *Dragon's Egg* was to be co-authored with Larry Niven, but Niven, finding himself too busy with other projects, urged Robert Forward to go ahead and complete it.

Robert Forward uses two timelines to indicate the passing of time: one for humans, one for the cheela, the beings that live on the neutron star that human scientists dub *Dragon's Egg*. The cheela evolve in a way similar to humans, and if there is anything disappointing about this book, it is the fact that the hot, adaptable cheela parallel mankind's development just a bit too closely. Having upheavals of power-hungry officials is not surprising, using references to Christ being killed is; the reader immediately spots

Alexander the Great—cheela style. The uncanny resemblance to events in Northern Hemisphere history cheapens the effect of this remarkable Race's adaptability from survival to supreme beings.

When the cheela discover how to communicate with humans, they freely share information and technology. The more fascinating aspects of the cheela are revealed toward the end of the book when the reader understands that the cheela have surpassed humanity's most far-reaching knowledge of science and know that the humans they have briefly enjoyed communicating with are not ready, by many hundreds of years, for what *they* could share. Because of the time differential, (thirty human seconds equals a year to the cheela) the cheela gained advancement, but more importantly, wisdom.

(Forward admits the cheela are one of his favorite inventions and mentions that the only thing he would change is the name of one of the cheela, North-Wind because there is no wind on a neutron star.)

The one part the editors could have cut is the human involvement in the first chapter. Other than the discovery of the neutron star, there is so little relevance to the story that other than setting up the science and plausibility of the discovery (and giving a little insight into how government grants really work), it would not be missed.

From a scientific standpoint, *Dragon's Egg* is a mini-tutorial on what a neutron star is, how it behaves and various attributes of time differential. A reader looking for hard science fiction will enjoy Forward's speculative creation and evolution of the neutron star that briefly grace's Earth's orbit, and the introduction of the cheela. A moderately paced story, it is peppered with humor and pathos along with tangible science—an unusual combination and worth experiencing for yourself.

A science fiction story is one which presupposes a technology, or an effect of technology, or a disturbance in the natural order, such as humanity, upto the time of writing, has not in actual fact experienced.

— Edmund Crispin

Reviews

Every Which Way but Dead

Kim Harrison



HarperTorch, Jul 2005

\$6.99, Mass Market, 512 pgs.

ISBN: 006057299X

Review by Harriet Klausner

Rachel Marianna Morgan worries about the ever-after as a familiar to Algaliarept, though the deal she struck with the demon to save her family enables the witch to keep her soul. When Al realizes that Rachel still has free will, he rages in frustration and warns her that she is still his familiar though he cannot force her into his realm. Thus she must show caution or else Al will come back sooner than later.

Still that does not stop her from protecting the thousand year old elven child from her 'master'. When Al comes for her Rachel expects at a minimum she will turn back into a *Dead Witch Walking*, but most likely worse. Rachel also deals with more mundane problems like her boyfriend dumping her, her roommate Ivy a vampire falling off the bloody wagon, and Kisten another vampire wanting to share a bite or two with her. Life or is that un-life is normal for Rachel as she deals with *The Good, The Bad, and The Undead* of otherworldly and human drug lords and howling insurance salesmen.

The latest Rachel Morgan tongue in cheek tale is a bewitching story that grips the audience from Al's first demand ignored by our heroine until the final altercations with combatants like Al, family members, and vampires. The story line is action packed, but as with the previous dead and undead tales, readers believe in the supernatural as the norm. The only criticism of this magnificent Morgan adventures is staying up all night to read it as Kim Harrison beguiles fans not to put down her latest thriller in spite of 500 plus pages until they finish.

Magic Street

Orson Scott Card



Del Rey, July 2005

\$24.95, Hardback, 400 pp.

ISBN 0345416899

Review by Harriet Klausner

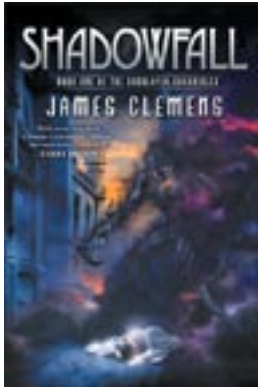
One day while driving home, Dr. Byron Williams acts totally out of character by picking up a homeless person he dubs the Bag Man. This creature tells him his wife is pregnant, and when they arrive home, he finds his spouse who wasn't pregnant giving birth to a baby boy. The Bag Man puts the baby in a paper bag and orders them to forget what happened. A few hours later Cecil 'Ceese' Tucker finds a baby in a bag by the drainpipe.

The child called Mack Street is taken in by Una Lee Smitcher who with Ceese raises him will love and the whole neighborhood of Baldwin Hills, an affluent black community, takes him into their hearts. Mack has odd dreams, the ability to see another person's deepest desires and give it to them in a perverted way. For years he does his best to suppress the dreams or cut them off before something bad happens. However, he finally learns who and what he is and who he will have to fight if he doesn't want true evil, the opposite side of himself to be let loose on an unsuspecting word.

This is Orson Scott Card's first contemporary urban fantasy and he demonstrates his considerable talent with a work that is sure to win him an award nomination. Readers see Mack mature from a baby to an adult who begins to understand he is the essence of all the things good and bad. It is impossible not to care about him and we root for him on when it is time to face his real enemy, himself. *Magic Street* is a spellbinding tale that engages the audience.

Reviews

Shadowfall James Clemens



Roc, July 2005
\$24.95, Hardcover, 480 pgs.
ISBN 0451459946
Review by Harriet Klausner

In the Nine Lands of Myrillia, the hundred gods reside side by side with man offering their Grace (blessings) to the Shadowknights and their chosen handmaidens and

men. They are rooted to their part of the land and cannot leave it, and each god and goddess has its own distinct personality and quirks. On Punt Island, disgraced Shadowknight Tylar, broken in body and spirit, holds the dying goddess Meeryn in his arms. With her last breath, she fills him with her Grace, heals his body, marks him, and utters the word Rivernscyr.

Arrested as a godslayer, Tylar escapes his prison with the help of a thief and they make their way to Tashijan to learn what Rivernscyr means. Tylar dreads returning to his former home because Kathryn, his former betrothed who testified against him at his trial, is there as is the warden who presided over his trial. He doesn't know that Kathryn has learned that he was set up to protect the secrets of a cabal that is working to sever the gods link with mankind. When he and his allies arrive, Kathryn is waiting for him, ready to help him in his battle with the warden and a corrupted god who can destroy the world if he can lay hands on a certain weapon.

The author of the Witch novels has started a new series, the Godslayer Chronicles, and the first novel *Shadowfall* is a fantastic fantasy that is epic in scope. The hero fights on the side of the righteous even though he has every reason to be bitter because everyone he cared about turned against him and the system that was supposed to protect him was perverted so that he became a broken in body and soul slave. He is a true hero, a character readers will treasure. James Clemens once again sets the standard of excellence for high fantasy.

Batman Returns (con't)

as Bruce's childhood love interest. At times, the cinematography leaves something to be desired (Frantic, close-up cut shots during fight scenes work for minor battles, but when the hero battles the villain, I'd like to be able to see them a little bit!) And the ending is preposterous in the way that only a comic book weapon of mass destruction can make something preposterous. To my discerning eye, a little more effort could have been used to make the climax a bit more believable.

Even with these gripes, *Batman Begins* is a great film and an excellent telling of Batman's origins. It is dark and a little disturbing, though, so don't take your toddlers to see it (like the people in front of me did!).

Fan Fiction (con't)

Do us all a Favor and Lighten up

Fanfic can be fun. Unless you're reading it with the critical eye of a New York Times op ed columnist, what's the deal? *Fanfic* is typically written by fans for fans.

I once read (most of) a piece of *Planet of the Apes TV Series* fan fiction that was near publishable quality. It portrayed the characters accurately and believably, had dialog with snap and wit, all neatly wrapped in good story line at a fine pace. I only fell away when the piece got a little lewd; I don't happen to like reading about my endearing Peter J. Burke getting it on with another woman (the author apparently wrote herself into *that* little scene, I'd wager -- and I know darned well what character *she* was). Sheesh!

But the point is the work was well handled and for the most part written better than the series of paperback *Planet of the Apes* novelettes put out in the '70's by Dell or Bantam or whoever the hang that was.

Then there's the goofy cross-over style *fanfic* in which characters who could never meet go adventuring together: James T. Kirk meets Ben Cartwright, for instance -- or some such silliness -- and it truly can be a hoot. You'll never find that in a Barnes and Noble's. Imagination is the key, so long as you don't let that key lock you in or lock possibilities out.

And speaking of locking possibilities out, what's this nonsense known as the Mundane Manifesto? Come back next month and we'll dissect that malarkey together.

garrie keyman loves to hear from readers. You can reach her at Jsolus@hotmail.com. If you wrote to her last month she hasn't forgotten you. Your reply is coming... just as soon as she figures out how Scotty will explain warp drive to Hoss and Little Joe.

Original Fiction

Galen the Deathless by Danielle Parker

First published at www.bewilderingstories.com

"GALEN! GALEN! GALEN!"

I have lived this moment too many times: the sky, azure; the giant white-hot sun with its cornea of scalding blue; the tidal roar of the crowd and its beast-body of a million faces. There are the smells, the floury dust of the swelling pellicles beneath my sandals and what they hold, fluids and sweat and blood, many kinds of blood. It is with experience that one can distinguish between the smells, strongest the musky choking odors of the chimera-wolves mingled with the lesser metallic tang of their victims, the ever-dying Penitents. Here and there are the splattered feathers, the bitten beaked heads of the panicked fowls that ran from the joyfully pursuing dire-ferrets in today's Comedia. And I have smelled the last, the exertion and blood of my body and of Aquila's many times before, just as I have seen the expression in his eyes, though he himself never remembers these moments.

I wait. The glassine floating eyes drift near, and the crowd grows frenetic in their anticipation. It is the women who always scream the loudest for the blow to fall. But the choice is *his*, and I wait, and slowly, slowly, his distant hand rises, flashing in the sunlight with its many rings, and signals. It is the expected signal. He is not known for mercy.

"Aquila," I say to the man at my feet, "You always die too well." He has never answered me.

Afterwards I went down to the apodyterium by the hidden egress and its ancient stained stairs, finding, as I always do, my trainer Marcus awaiting me. I saw Tacitus on another stool, his naked leg outstretched before him. He had this time survived his round, but there was a physician treating the ugly triple gouge in his thigh. He was long of face, for such a wound stiffens and impedes one, and he could only look forward to his death at next week's games.

"I saw," I said to him. "I warned you. Cillius is a cunning one. Beware his reach even when you think he is done for." Cillius had pretended death, and in his moment of happy triumph, Tacitus carelessly allowed himself within the reach of the trident Cillius so aptly wields. He paid for his negligence. Cillius died with a blood-bubble burst of laughter on his lips, knowing he had taken his enemy with him, and knowing also that Tacitus would have a bitter week to brood upon his coming end.

"Galen the Deathless," he retorted, sour with defeat and pain. The physician wrapped new pink flesh around his thigh as he spoke, but it would not be enough to save him next week, as we both knew. "I will live to see that name changed!"

"You will not remember it," I told him, which left his mouth pursed thin as a sword-edge. He knew the truth of my answer. This Tacitus was already the thirteenth of that template, and many unremembered dyings lay behind him. I saw his envious eyes burn upon me as I took off my kilt and sat down on my stool amidst my trio of body slaves.

Marcus said, "You'll have another scar from this one." He was not pleased. We looked at our images in the long mirror that forms the facing wall of the apodyterium. We were not alike. Marcus is old and heavy of belly and short of stature, like the contented kitchen god that housewives pour out their cooking wines for, except I have never seen his swarthy face smiling or jolly. I am giant and alabaster white, and my body as hard as adamantine. The new mark along my left arm showed its thin line of red starkly against my pallor. There were other, older marks, many of them, here and there upon torso and limbs, white thin seams of past encounters. Aquila does indeed die well.

"You are thirty," he muttered, his mood sour even for Marcus. "There are too many scars now, Galen. *Too many.*"

That the body was no longer perfect in its fleshly covering I knew displeased him greatly, though where there are no scars I am still as smooth and lustrous as that great platinum statue of Zeus-Arcturus in the Emperor's private garden. One of the body slaves was shaving me then, so I did not answer. Marcus sat scowling, a sour squatting lump of dissatisfaction, as he watched the physician smooth the long narrow rectangle of nova-flesh across the new cut.

"There is another party tonight," he said at last. "Your patron Lucullus begs your attendance."

There was no need to answer that aloud either. I shrugged. Lucullus could not be refused: he was the patrician aedile of the Great Games. It was customary for him to display his most prized protégé to his friends after a Game: they were gay and high-blooded then, and the wine and the food and the dream-sticks sweet until other pleasures distracted them, those that were not too drunk for lust. I remembered vaguely that once I too had enjoyed the pleasures of such evenings, but I had been as another man then. Now it was only hollowness to me: the plump aristocrats trembling with daring lust for the tall white killer; the sly soft hands of those with more sickly desires; the many unremembered pleasure-slaves of no name and no self-will, offered as casually as a cushion. There had been too many such nights in my ten years of service. All my memories had blurred into a chaotic endless stream of open mouths and naked torsos and animal noises, as repulsive as the vomit the over-sated lords spewed upon their tables as the dawn came.

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"Tomorrow," Marcus said finally. "I will see you in the training ring when the bell tolls mid-day."

I nodded. I watched him feel for his cane and get to his feet, a slow and effortful rise, and discreetly motioned to the nearest body slave to help him. There was a new one among them this time, besides my old Argus and silent tongueless Cleius. This one was a pretty beardless youth with long dark eyes too knowing for his age and curled thick hair flowing down past his shoulders like a girl's, and he helped Marcus up deftly. I looked at the boy more closely as he did so. I have been offered such before and refuse them always, which Lucullus knows. This one perhaps had offended, and had been turned out of his soft love-nest to attend a less indulgent and less illustrious master for his shaming. "You," I said to him, "who are you? I have not seen you before."

"Theo, master," he said with the soft pure accents of a Delian, and bowed low: a pretty flourishing court-bow, one he had been taught. "Lucullus sends me to attend you."

"And how have you offended Lucullus, young scamp?" I demanded.

The youth grinned wide suddenly, as unrepentant as a thieving squirrel. He had fine sharp teeth, white against his dark complexion. "I put a fire ant's nest in Cratan's bed," he answered. "He tripped me when I served wine, and I wanted to get even with him."

"Well," I said, "do what Argus tells you, and if you are obedient, he will not beat you. You will not need to serve me as you did Lucullus; I am not one for children. If you are dutiful, Lucullus may forgive the fire ants' nest."

"I do not care," the boy said, and his dark eyes glowed. "I would rather serve Galen the Deathless."

"All die," I said. "Even Galen the Deathless will perish. Fool, think not to honor one with the blood of hundreds upon his hands. You would do better to honor the Penitents. At least they die guiltless!"

"They are *weak*," the boy retorted in contempt. He was an impudent one; I saw why Lucullus had thought to rebuke him, in spite of the long-lashed eyes. "They can do nothing but die and die and *die*. You are *strong*, master! I have seen you in the Games, as mighty as a god!" He waved his thin arm in imitation of a sword-thrust. "Like Hercules! Like Mars!"

"Fool," I said again, unreasonably unsettled by his childish praise, and cuffed him lightly. He fell to his knees and looked up at me wide-eyed as he cupped his stinging jaw. "You tempt my fate by such blasphemous praise. I tell you again: it is not the killing or the killer that should be honored, but the willing sacrifice made in praise of the gods. Go, young imp, and attend to Argus, or you will feel my fist again!"

But the young never heed until life teaches them its lessons in their own pain and blood and shame. I felt his gaze upon me as I rose to my feet, bright with childish marvel at my naked size. The taste in my mouth was flat and salty, the taste of the blood I had swallowed. "Go," I said to them all. "Go!"

Afterwards, when I had bathed many times and dressed in a new linen kilt, I went to pay my respects. Down below the churned floor of the arena are the workrooms and quarters of those of us who serve the Emperor in the Great Games; yet below, where the ancient stairs wind down, and down, and down into the heart of Nova Roma's earth, are the deepest rooms of all. The sun is but a warped fantasy of Tartarus here. Yet there is light of a kind, which never ceases night or day, and an unvarying cold more draining than the waters of a frigidarium. Servants too this Underworld has, those they name the orpheusites: soft silent beings whose faces are as worm-pale as their bodies and whose torsos are garbed in the blinding sterility of their realm. It is well said that Death has a white face, though I know some have said it of me.

And there, like the Conqueror of old, we lie unchanging in our coffins of crystal, waiting our turn to live or to die. The young man too lies there, perfect in his form as a sleeping panther, with his strong sinewy arms crossed across his smooth bared chest. I have aged ten years in the service of the Emperor, but *he* has not. Eternally twenty he is, and never does he remember me. *Aquila*, I say to him, *Aquila! Forgive me again.*

I stood there for a long time. Often I seem to forget other things in the world, even the world itself, while I am there. Then as at last awakening I turned to go, I felt suddenly the presence of another beside me. There stood a tall old man with long gray hair that swept the shoulders of his plain brown robe and straight ditches graven beside his mouth. His feet were bare, and his hands, resting beside mine on the smooth metal bar that ran outside the glass, were large and knobby, the hands of a man who has worked with them as tools to earn his living and not merely as instruments of pleasure.

"You are a Penitent," I said to him in my astonishment. Never had I spoken to one in my ten long years of service to the Emperor. Indeed though I knew this one, for almost every Game I saw him die: usually by a chimera-wolf, whose great gaping mouth needs only two bites, one for the upper, and one for the lower body. Sometimes it is the

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legs the chimera-wolf devours first. Then have I seen this same noble face lying looking upwards from the shining pool of its own blood, waiting for death with that sad dignity that dooms his kind to their eternal cycle of the Games. Yet as I thought back I remembered that I had not seen him today. Only the women had fed the chimera-wolves this time, to the noisy delight of the crowd. It is a fickle beast, and grows bored even with the spectacle of martyrdom, and shows less mercy than a Maenad in the throes of her madness.

"Socrates is my name." His voice was deep and slow, deeper than I would have expected coming from that gaunt chest, and the accent was as his hands, that of a commoner in its thickness. Yet it was a voice that had a quiet power in spite of its coarseness. "You are Galen the Deathless. I have lived again only one day, but already I have been told of you."

I gripped the metal bar with my hands. Even my strength could not warp that unspeakably crafted metal, though I saw my knuckles blanch as the bones thrust through the skin. "You mock me, old man," I said. "You of all people should know that none are deathless. Even Galen the Deathless will one day die."

He nodded slowly. The lines in his cheeks were slit deep as sword-slashes, and his aging eyelids dragged at their corners, weighted down with the unyielding pressure of a longer life than I had yet known. Only his mouth and his shoulders did not sag, and I saw that for his pride he was accustomed to making an effort he would one day lose in spite of his will.

"You have come to visit your victim," the Penitent said. "To ask his forgiveness, I think."

"He has died by my hand one hundred and twenty-four times," I said. "Tell me, Penitent. Will any god besides mad Mars accept the stained hands of Galen when he is at last no longer the Deathless?"

He did not answer me at once. There down the aisle was another glass-fronted room, and there they dreamed, all the templates of the women who had fed the chimera-wolves this day, until they woke to their weekly nightmare. He must have known them, or at least some of them, in the days of his true life. He looked toward that room with such longing in his face that I, even I, turned away. It was like seeing a face look up from the bottom of a well to unreachable light.

"There is no help to be found in the gods men worship here," he said at last. "You may only offer what appeasement lies within your power in the hope of one more merciful than they. Perhaps it will be enough. I do not know."

"I never knew any god but bloody Mars," I said. "I was never told of any else who had power in the world. Go, old man, and pray also for me, to whoever you pray to." I left him then and went up the long stairs once more. I was late already for Lucullus's party, and however drunken he is, *that* is one who never misses a slight, nor fails to repay an insult with less than its full measure.

The mismatched pearls of the moons were all three visible as I walked in the drugging sweet air through the parallel lines of the fascination trees. Deformus, last moon of the three, sat upon the horizon like a gouged eye. The white-blossomed boughs bowed in the slight breeze and cast their morphetic perfume to the nostrils. A man, if he were unwary, might succumb to them, and dream of decay until his body softened to the texture of his dreams. Yet there is no more heavenly scent engendered by any flower, not even the rose of Old Earth. Mordant bats sported in the wisps of clouds, graceful at a distance that spared the eye their monstrous faces. There, too, does beauty lie in the embrace of horror.

"Galen." There was a deep-buried spark in those eyes when I found Lucullus at last, lying on his couch with a scant drape of silk across his loins. It was a glint I could see even through the thick smoke of his dream-stick. The music of distant gongs tinkled through the clouded air. A slender blonde girl, perhaps fourteen, knelt at his feet, anointing his limbs with salve. I recognized the indescribable licentious breath of it and felt its slime in my nostrils. The dream-sticks kill other pleasures when used too often, and of late even Lucullus has needed aid, lest he lose another of his precious pleasures.

"Do we bore you, Galen?" he said, and smiled at me, that tight small smile he gives to those who should be wise enough to fear it. There fell a sudden listening silence from his companions; I saw many glittering speculative eyes through the smoke, avid with anticipation. It seemed not even the Game had whetted their taste for blood. "You were not timely in your attendance tonight. Even my lord Kratur has come, and asked for you, and I was shamed to tell him of your neglect of us."

I knelt. Even then he needs must look up, which I knew deeply displeased him. He is not a tall man, in spite of the platforms he wears secretly beneath the cover of his fine purple-edged togas in the Senate chamber. "My lord," I murmured, and no more. I could not bring myself to ask his pardon.

He looked at me unspeaking for a long moment as the boy beside him offered up another dream-stick. The boy's pale thin nape remained bowed as if for the sword even when Lucullus, without looking away, took the stick from his small fingers. The child trembled at his brief touch, a fine faint all-over quiver like a twanging string. I saw then the boy was too young to have hair upon his loins. I was sorry for him, though Lucullus is too shrewd to be needlessly cruel to his slaves, not unless there is true provocation. Others, like Kratur, are not so lenient.

"You were cut again," he commented at last. For all the intoxication revealed in the widened pupils and the

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fluttering pulse in his throat, those were calculating eyes, eyes as hard as those in the fresh bloody head of the chimera-wolf trophy stuck upon the pole behind him. He reached out and touched my arm with a finger as soft as down, there where the nova-flesh lay pink against my milk-white skin. "I do not like that. You are no longer perfect in that body, Galen the *Deathless*. Perhaps a gladiator should not reach thirty. Beware I do not tire of your naming."

"I live to serve the gods and the Emperor," I answered steadily. I could not feel fear of his threat, though I knew it was real, and deadlier than the mace and spear that Aquila had used to inflict today's wounding. When a man is so familiar with death that he no longer fears it, perhaps Death is moved to rise to his challenge: I remembered that, fleetingly, and felt deep within the cold breath of that presence. I said, seeking to divert that thought, "Thank you for the loan of Theo. He is an impudent one!"

His mood changed abruptly, with that erratic untrustworthy swing imparted by the smoke he drew into his lungs. He laughed. "Cratan is still wailing his stings," he said. "Treat the lad gently. I will have Theo back when he has learned not to trouble my peace with his pranks." He smiled and twisted his free hand lightly in the curls on the bowed head of the slave. "After all, he is wasted on you, is he not? *Go*, Galen. I think that young slave Julia has been holding out for you. She was hiding behind a curtain, trying to escape old Demetrius, last I saw her."

There was a dutiful laugh at that from the circle of those who sprawled on couches around him. They were too much afraid of Lucullus, all of them, except for Kratur, whom thankfully I did not see here, not to match his moods. Anthony Flavius called teasingly, "You're out of luck, Galen. I saw Demetrius drag her away. She'll not be fit for a goat after *that* old satyr is done with her!"

It seems more and more I seek not to remember these nights, and it is a goblet that is my companion more often now than a pair of dark eyes. Yet I remembered dimly a small lithe form, sweet breath and a chain of silver about a delicate ankle, wrists thin and breakable as strings yet unexpectedly strong in their grip upon my shoulders. The image of Demetrius hovered before me in all its vileness: splattered broken nose and coarse yellowed teeth, thick sour-smelling body, toga bespattered with his dinner and his vomit. Foulness should not embrace a flower, or an ape a sprite. The slime I felt in my nostrils choked my throat. I rose to my feet. "My lord," I said. "I beg your leave."

He waved his free arm negligently in dismissal. But I felt his eyes as I made my way across the courtyard, and I felt that other smile...the one that shows the teeth. I felt those teeth upon my nape now, as promising and as possessing as his hand had been upon the neck of the child.

I caught a serving girl carrying a tray and took her three newly opened bottles from her. My mood was too black for anything then but a goblet and all the bottles of Lucullus's potent Lydian wine I could carry away. I went out the archway with them under my arm, into the dusky shadows beneath the fascination trees that perfumed Lucullus's fine large garden. The great central fountain threw out revolving red and blue and purple lights, making the marble statues of the god (Lucullus favors Bacchus, even in appearance, as well he should) seem as if they moved in a dance. Sounds I heard, those who sought the shadows and the thickets for their own purposes; some of pleasure, others of laughing unmeant protest, once stifled panting cries of pain crescendoing unheeded into a cut-off scream. Those made me think of Kratur again, whom I did not wish to think of, tonight or any night, and I moved away quickly.

Against the wall I found the place I had sought, a dense thicket of bushes adorned with twining vines with drooping small fruits and purple flowers. I was told once this is a vine brought from Old Earth, rare and precious, called nightshade, and that its tempting fruits are poisonous. I did not care. It was hidden enough for my private purposes, and here the drug of the trees was less potent than elsewhere. I sank to my knees.

It was when I had drunk the second bottle, and was thinking, in the coldness of my continued sobriety, that my release seemed as unattainable as a eunuch's orgasm, that I heard the voices, and the crunch of gravel under shod feet. There was a laugh I knew, a soft yet somehow raspy sound, like a knife-edge drawn lightly along a whetting stone. There are some things a wise man knows instinctively to fear, though they may be a smile from one man, and a laugh from another. I drew up my knees beneath the thick covering of vine.

"You have my blessing," the voice said, and laughed again (I was not drunk enough not to be chilled by the sound, because I know what makes Kratur laugh, and someone, tonight, would lose blood). "I have been patient, Agonistes, very patient; you must admit it. See for yourself how he avoids me. Have you ever known me to lavish such patience upon another, my friend?" The heavy crunch passed me by, and I saw the edges of a silk kilt, and the silhouette of a thick-shouldered powerful man through my lattice of limbs and leaves. I could glimpse the sandaled feet of his slighter companion on the other side. "Perhaps I shall have better luck with the new one. Especially," and the laugh too moved away from me, "when I remind him how he lost his name. Even *that* one can be taught fear."

Original Fiction

"We waited only for your blessing, Kratur," replied his companion with obscene deference, and as their footsteps faded I heard hushed intense whispering, until I could hear no more.

I lay still for a long moment, painfully sober in spite of the empty bottles that lay discarded by my side. The breeze rustled the branch limbs and brought me again the tantalizing stupefying perfume of the fascination trees. The third bottle lay warmly within the crook of my arm, sweet as the promise of sleep, yet I knew it could not help me. How is it that one may be certain, absolutely *certain*, that Death has finally accepted one's challenge? His answer was there in the smile of my patron and the laughter of the man who so long pursued me for the solace of his dark stained bed and thin long knives.

When I had drunk the last bottle the moon Deformus too had disappeared, and dawn light, pale and ghostly faint, shone on the edge of the horizon. I took a long slow way home, wandering through streets where sweepers and early risers stared in fear at the great white giant that moved among them. The arena had been swept and prepared for today's lesser games already, and its surface gleamed like the face of a great smooth sea. Its tides would rise red again by evening.

I do not know why I expected *him* to be awake also, in this hour before true dawn. But I found him almost as I had left him, with his large knobby hands upon the bar, looking through the crystalline panel again. Only the face within this room was his own, and in sleep it seemed nakedly sorrowful, more sorrowful even than that of the one who watched.

"Why do you not sleep?" I said to him. "It is but an hour of dawn."

He did not look up. "I have had years of sleep," he whispered. "Should I not stay sleepless to pray for him, he that will wake to but one short hour of pain and death? Perhaps mercy will be granted to him, if not to me. Seventy-eight years ago, a night to me but yesterday, Socrates the heretic was condemned to eternal death by the Emperor. His flesh has fed generations of chimera-wolves since. Should I not pray, then, for that man?"

"To whom do you pray, then, old man?" I asked him. But he turned his face away from me, and what I could see of his profile was as remote and sad as the old wrinkled face of Deformus.

"I cannot tell you his name," he replied. "You seek for a name and a man's image, like the statue of Zeus-Arcturus upon Pallatine Hill. Such images are hollow delusions. I cast my hope upon another. It is not by man's carved image that one knows *that* one. I trust that one day he will have mercy upon us all." And he nodded to the image that lay sleeping inside its glass chamber.

"That is a fool's hope," I said. "I am told that in three hundred and nineteen years the resurrection cycle has failed only three times. The wheel will turn again, old man, and you and I will be bound upon it."

He looked up at me at last with his tired dark eyes. "So Galen the Deathless senses mortality at last, does he?"

"Death is always here," I said. One of the orpheusites passed behind us then, its thin white robe fluttering in the cold moving air. "*You* will die in a week, old man, and your successor will wake soon after for his own hour of terror. One day I too will be no longer Galen the Deathless. *He* will not remember my ten years of life, or know yet that women and wine are props only the weak lean upon. And Kratur will eat him. Will you pray for us as well? I would be grateful."

He was silent for a long time. I thought, *he will not*. "I believe I can," he said at last. "But if there is an appeasement you can offer, my son, think on it. Perhaps it will be acceptable."

"I am grateful," I told him again, and left him then, brooding upon the sleeper with the sorrowful face. I went slowly up the old, old stairs. Ten years of my own footsteps lay there in the deep dust before me. Would *he* see them, one day? I turned wearily to my quarters.

There was a shadow lying upon my bed: as I lit the lamp it uncurled into long thin arms and legs like a colt's and a tangle of hair like a girl's and huge dark agonized eyes. "You should not be here," I said to it. "I told you I am not for boys."

He fell to his knees again, though I had not yet cuffed him. "Master," he whimpered, knotting the hem of my kilt with both fists. "I heard! *I heard!* Kratur and Draconius and Agonistes have placed secret bets against you. They're going to kill you!" And the boy fell to piteous weeping and wailing as he clutched the edge of my kilt. "You will *die!*"

"I have heard," I said, and bent to prize his fingers free of my clothing. "So do we all, in time. I told you not to tempt the gods. Come, child! Have you been here all night?" But I could not pry his fingers free without hurting them, and at last I had to lift him up, with his tears still falling upon us both, and my kilt riding up in his grip because of his ridiculous stubbornness. "Leave off! Here is bread and wine and dried apricots; you may have my own breakfast. Then go. Lucullus told me he would accept you when you repent of Cratan's stings. Cease this crying, or I will have to disappoint him."

But he would not be comforted until I made him drink the wine, and then at last he consented to eat the apricots, diverted like any child by the sweets. I put him on the bed and he fell asleep there at last with a bitten apricot still clutched in his fist. I put on my training kilt and went out again. There was Marcus to appease. Somehow it had become morning.

Original Fiction

I do not remember the passage of that week except in snatches and bright isolated images, fractured like those of a man who has drawn in too much smoke. Faces came at me like vengeful harpies, teeth white and sharp, grinning like bears with their pleasure. Tacitus said to me, "I will live to see it now," and grinned as he hobbled upon his stiffened leg. Marcus watched my daily practice from his stool, an old sour saddened frog, and never corrected me once as he usually did. I did not seek out the Penitent again. I did not know to whom I might pray, and I could not think of a suitable appeasement, though I besought one with all my might, long into my wakeful nights.

Lucullus sent his servant in the middle of the week to take Theo again into his service, which relieved me, for the child would not leave me even when disciplined by a half-hearted cuff. He spent the nights sleeping at my feet like an old familiar dog. I had not the will to beat him for it.

Then the day of the Great Game dawned bright and fresh: a fair day, one of those blessings of early autumn, and the air like a taste of cool water as one drew it into one's lungs. The trees dropped their blossoms suddenly and stood naked and ebony above the splendor of dying white flowers. I went for a walk, and stirred their scented snowfall with my sandal. Then there were the long hours of cleaning and sharpening of weapons, which I had done before so many times; though it seemed another's hands did it now. I ate, and did not remember the taste in my mouth, and I waited for the hour.

I dressed early and waited in the antechamber. I could hear the great roaring of the chimera-wolves as they slavered and leapt howling at the bars of their prison: this is the day that they wait for every week, for they eat fresh meat. Men brought a vast tangle of netting past me with much yelling to each other, and shortly thereafter, with thick gloves and chattering fear, pairs of great silent mordant bats hanging upside down from poles and wrapped in their wings like rotting brown fruit. One man, holding the bar too carelessly, screamed as acid drool pierced his glove. After them came the gay unsuspecting goats, victims to be of this week's Comedia, and soon a great tumult from the crowd that I heard even through the thick ceiling above me.

Cillius, smooth as a snake and smiling behind the faceplate of his scaled murmillo, went past me holding his trident. *This* Cillius knew me not, though I had known him for more than a year. I heard the orgiastic roar of the crowd again, though not as loud as it had been for the Comedia. *Now* it was almost the time.

Someone darted toward me then, a small spindly form, racing through the widespread clutch of the old soldier who guarded the door. I heard a yell and curse, but the boy had already cast himself at my feet, gasping like a greyhound and seizing my kilt in two desperate fists.

"The knife," he panted. "Master, the *knife*. It will be poisoned!" He looked up at me. The eyes were painted this time and his lips rouged, but it was a child's love and a child's terror that glared out of those kohl-rimmed orbs.

"Here," grunted old Horatio, stomping forward. "You're not allowed in here, boy!"

"Be easy with the child," I said to him. A tall slim young man came through the door then, with the smooth easy beauty of a panther in his movements, and looked long upon me with his coldly thoughtful eyes. It was at that instant I understood what I must do. I felt a great rush of emotion, so strong my body trembled with it, and all my breath fled my chest. Yet I could not name what it was I felt.

I bent and picked up the child and kissed him on his hot wet cheek. "Go," I said to him. "Do not fear, Theo."

Horatio took Theo's collar with an old soldier's gruff kindness. "He's the Deathless," he explained with rough simple comfort. "Don't ye fear, boy. Ye'll see your master agin."

"Be brave," I called to him as the old soldier bore him away. "Be brave, Theo!" He no longer wailed. But his eyes looked at me over Horatio's shoulder, huge, frightened, doubting eyes in twin rings of black. Water was still leaking from the corners, smearing the oily rings of kohl, but he did not seem to know it. I picked up my weapons.

The sky is azure. I have seen that sun with its throbbing ring of blue many times before. I hear the great and mighty voice of the crowd, the millions who ring us about in their baying circle; far away, sitting like a white grub upon his throne, I glimpse the tiny chubby face of the Emperor. Aquila and I turn together and salute him with our raised weapons in the ancient way: *We who are about to die salute thee Caesar!*

We turn and face each other. We are too close this time, of his intent. The poisoned knife flashes in the sun like a light-shot icicle, and I allow my bare arm to meet it. Cold it is, more bitter than the edge of the metal, and I feel its morphetic chill poison my blood. Yet for an instant longer there is still great strength in me, and with all the might of my body and my will I hurl the sword high, high, in the air. As it rises the blade twists and spins like a glittering snake, until on its downward arc the blue lightning flashes upward from his throne to seize it and suspend it in the heaven. *You are beneath its point, Caesar. Another shall see it fall.*

RPG Corner (con't)

who usually spends a lot of time as many different characters, rather than a Player who only handles one Character, that happened to be in love. If the GM does decide to pursue a NPC – PC relationship, he must take care not to abuse the trust of his Player, and not to abandon his other Players in the process.

Falling or being in love takes tremendous energy (ask anyone who has ever been in love, if you don't believe me) and accurately portraying it in RPGs requires almost as much of a commitment. If an NPC is the one in love with a PC, the Player Character is going to demand that a lot of time be spent with that NPC, meaning that the GM may get trapped in the relationship, unable to slip into someone else to interact with the other Players. My advice to GMs facing down this problem is simple...pick your conversations carefully. Have a good idea of where you want each interaction to end, and what result you hope to gain from the conversation. Sitting around idly while you wait for the spark of romance to hit is boring for just about everyone, and negligent to the other players. Love should be kept down to quick but intense bursts, and used in moderation, like everything else that's really good to have but ultimately bad for us (he he).

Because love is emotion, and because emotion is the sole province of the Player, there is no way to force the affection onto a Player, and to do so is unfair. Love at first sight doesn't exist in RPGs, unless it's been worked out in advance between the people involved. Should a Player request a love interest for his Character, he and the GM should sit down and have an honest discussion about the reasons for, and the consequences of, such a request. A Game Master should never bludgeon the PC over the head with an emotion that the Player neither wants nor is capable of empathizing with, no matter his intentions. Assuming the Player is mature and trusting enough to handle the advances of an amorous NPC, the GM can only do what the NPC he is portraying is able to do to woo the target. The rest is up to the Player Character.

I believe that romantic love is an amazing dramatic element, and it can enrich most RPGs greatly by its inclusion, but to get it right requires just the right mix of conditions. Many times it either fizzles out or ends up destroying the game by overpowering it. Finding the right balance is tricky, and it requires a great deal of work on the part of the GM. It can be worth it if you get it right, but the potential for disaster is so great that I don't recommend it for beginning GMs.

That's about all we have room for this month. Next month we'll look at more difficult dramatic behemoths, and I don't mean your last prom date.

Special FX (con't)

Star Command and Land of the Lost?

Anyone with a computer, camera and a still hand can make stop-motion movies. Like stop-motion photography, the secret to photo-realism is now taught in classrooms and can be found online via free tutorials. Software programs for photo-realistic photography and effects are on the market—though not cheap. What will become of Anthony Mark Viverito and his colleagues of today's Hyper-Real special effects industry? What will the next spectacular development in S/FX look like or is the industry maxed out on ideas? Perhaps hyper-real effects is the best that will ever be developed. Science fiction fans sincerely hope not.

The future of special effects is the topic in next month's *Illuminata*. Thank you Dennis Lynch and Anthony Mark Viverito for input and accurate information.

* The Abyss won the Academy Award for Visual Effects. Industrial Light and Magic in 1989.

Writer's Block (con't)

drinking, the wine in Spain and the cold beer of his fishing trips, harder liquor in the evenings after his writing was done.

The Spanish Civil War came and Hemingway went, to cover it rather than fight it. Hemingway seemed fascinated with the fierce excitement of battle. He was soon to get further tastes of war by covering the Japanese invasion of China, and then World War II.

Between the Spanish Civil War and World War II, Hemingway got his second divorce. Another woman was involved and Ernest married *her* barely two weeks after his divorce was final. This marriage was to Martha Gellhorn, but their relationship lasted less than five years. Though the two were sexually compatible, Martha was far too intent on her own career for Hemingway's liking. He needed more support than she could give. In 1946, he married Mary Welsh with the hope of finding what he needed in a wife.

By the time of his fourth marriage, Hemingway had been living in Havana, Cuba for a number of years. There, after World War II ended, he picked up the pace again on his writing. He churned out *Across the River and Into the Trees* (1950), which many critics called a failure, then turned around and wrote his best work and one of the great classics of the English language--*The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). This book won him the Pulitzer and paved his road to the 1954 Nobel Prize in literature.

Con't on page 18

Writer's Block (con't)

Though Hemingway had reached the pinnacle where his writing career was concerned, he was in poor health after years of heavy drinking and from suffering through one injury and illness after another, including gunshot wounds, broken bones, an air crash, and sicknesses of many kinds. He was diagnosed with diabetes, a mild case, and began increasingly to suffer bouts of depression in which he despaired of his ability to write. On July 2, 1961, Ernest Hemingway killed himself with a shotgun.

Hemingway's personality traits included that, 1) he showed frequent, severe depression in his later years and may even have attempted suicide by engaging in risky behavior, 2) he was clearly an alcoholic who had been warned frequently by doctors to stop drinking, 3) he showed occasional signs of paranoid thinking, 4) he insisted on being the center of attention, 5) rather than embellish his exploits, he seemed intent on living up to the wildest expectations people had of him, 6) he read voraciously, 7) he took frequent risks with his own life and seemed careless of danger, 8) he was accident prone, and 9) he had, at times, a strained relationship with his mother.

In looking at Hemingway's beliefs we find that, 1) he was an extreme individualist, 2) he placed strong emphasis on personal courage, 3) he seemed to accept a standard view of God and never completely rejected organized religion, 4) he was fascinated with death and the "honor" to be found in dying well, and 5) he believed deeply in love even though he was unable to maintain a long-term relationship with a single woman.

Finally, in examining Hemingway's writing we find that, 1) his gift for storytelling appeared during his teen years, 2) he was very disciplined in his approach to writing, 3) he glorified man in savage conflict with other men, or with such animals as the bull or the big game animals of Africa, 4) his stories and books were descriptive in a pure and austere way, and 5) he created a spare and lean prose that has made him one of the most, if not the most, imitated and influential American writers ever.

As a major element of Hemingway's life, we should particularly consider his enjoyment of what might be called "blood sports." This was illustrated clearly in his love of the "corrida," the bullfight. Hemingway was known as an "aficionado" of bullfighting,

meaning that his knowledge and love of the sport was respected even by matadors themselves. Hemingway had many bulls dedicated to him during his time in Spain, and he wrote two non-fiction works on the subject, *Death in the Afternoon* and *The Dangerous Summer*, the latter of which was not published in complete form until 1985.

Bullfighting was not Hemingway's only blood sport, however. He enjoyed both watching and participating in boxing (see his short story "Fifty Grand"), and he was a dedicated fisherman. His best non-fiction book, *Green Hills of Africa*, was an unapologetic ode to big game hunting. Finally, Hemingway's fascination with the greatest of all "blood sports" led him to involve himself directly in three wars, World Wars I and II and the Spanish Civil War.

For such a successful person, there are a number of ways in which Hemingway showed immaturity. He married four times before finding a woman he could live with for more than a few years. And the children that he had from his marriages never seemed to figure prominently in his thoughts. His enjoyment of war was another example of immaturity, as was his habit of shooting lit cigarettes from the mouths of friends stupid enough to let him. Hemingway always had to out drink, out fish, and out *do* everyone. It was as if he poured all the maturity he could muster into his writing.

It seems to me that the most characteristic features of Hemingway's life were, 1) pride in his physical abilities and his writing, 2) a love of life, of food, drink, and adventure, 3) an ability to experience the world with passion and intensity, and 4) a radical individualism. These very characteristics may have made it impossible for him to tolerate the gradual loss of his health and talent. The thought of killing himself may, even, have comforted him. The fact that many would have loved to accomplish what Hemingway accomplished doesn't matter. Objective reality is nothing. In Hemingway's mind, he was losing a world that he had made his own, and a shotgun shell was his way to avoid final and inevitable defeat.

If you haven't read Hemingway, let me suggest places to start. For novels, try *The Old Man and the Sea* before you read any of his others. Two of his best short stories, from the collection *The Short Stories*, are "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber."