



The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Fantastic Four

By Erik Goodwyn

Rather than write a rave review of “Batman Begins”, which has already been done admirably in a previous issue, I decided it would be fun to unleash my charm and wit upon “that other” comic book movie that is showing this summer, “Fantastic Four”. In short, I think it would have been a really good film, almost half as good as “Batman” if it weren’t for four minor flaws: Plot, Characters, Acting, and Story.

As if you didn’t know already, “Fantastic Four” is an origin story, and in this incarnation it is about 95% origin and 5% story. As other critics have pointed out already, this comic book foursome has just about the lamest origin story of them all, so why put so much time and effort into it? Strike one.

Then there are the actors, the only one of note being Michael Chiklis as Ben Grimm, aka the Thing. If they’d have made a movie about just him, the whole affair might have been worthwhile, but as it stands he is relegated to a scene-chomping co-star among a sea of fashion-model twenty-something

ciphers. Whose idea, was it, for example to star Blonde Bimbo-du-Jour clone Jessica Alba as a bespectacled bio-nuclear-genetic astrophysicist, who by the way must have graduated high school before Doogie Howser in order to get her multiple PhDs and become “chief of genetic research”? Then there is Chris Evans as the “Human Torch”, who seems to think he is in another movie just about himself, and Ioann Gruffud as the Science-Geek-Stereotype-turned-Milquetoast Superhero, and I use the term loosely, as Mr. Fantastic. Strike Two.

Then there is the villain, Victor Von Doom. Ok, could you have a cooler name for a villain than that? I mean, that ranks right up there with Darth Vader or Lex Luthor for coolness. This guy is *supposed* to be an insane zillionaire who owns his own country and is trying to take over the world. What is he here? A jealous boyfriend. And, correct me if I’m wrong, but since when did Dr. Doom become living steel-electro-guy? Strike Three.

All of this nonsense is used to serve a plot that raises mediocrity to a new level of dullness. Nobody seems to think any of this is even the slightest bit amazing. The enthusiasm is more of the “hey, that’s kinda neat” variety. Funny me, I just thought that if I could turn invisible and create indestructible force-fields, or create flames hotter than the sun that could “burn up the entire atmosphere” (or something like that) I would be just a little fascinated by that. Or maybe even flabbergasted. But what do these knuckleheaded characters do? Invisible Woman pouts about having to take her clothes off to be completely invisible. Human Torch tries out for motor cross in a fit of boredom. And worst of all, Mr. Fantastic forces the others to stay in his “apartment”, which looks like a duller version of Aughra’s laboratory from the Dark Crystal, so he can *de-super-ize* them! Meanwhile, The Thing mopes about because he looks weird, which by the way is the only one of these pointless sub-plots that is even remotely interesting, and it is resolved in the most deus-ex-machina method possible, so as not to take any time away from more explosions. Strike . . . well, you get the idea.

Oh, and don’t get me started on the finale, to which the term “underwhelming” just doesn’t quite do justice. Take it from me, if you want to see how a “superhero team” movie, especially one based on the Fantastic Four, should be done, go out and rent The Incredibles. And if you just *have* to see two superhero movies this summer, I have a prescription for you: watch Batman twice.

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ORIGINAL FICTION

RNA by Gary Beck

RPG Corner (v4.43): Lost in Translation

by Doug >|< Roper of EPIC Gaming

For the past couple articles, I've been looking at tough dramatic devices from the Role-Player's point of view, and how many of the more attractive action and dramatic elements are in fact nightmarish to work with in a Role-Play setting. We've done chases and romantic love, now it's time for some smaller, but no less important devices.

Death Scenes

I will assume that everyone reading this column has read *Lord of the Rings*, or at least seen the movies. Remember at the end of 'Fellowship, when Boromir nobly sacrifices himself trying to save Meriadoc and Pippin? Remember the heartache of Aragorn watching his companion slip away, and the surge in hope we felt with the valiant resolve that the future King of Gondor displayed as a result of that death? It was a great death scene, one of the best in any book I've read. So what would have happened if Legolas had walked up and said, "Hang on Aragorn. I have this here scroll of 'Return to Spiffiness' and it should plug all those holes in 006 with no problem." Legolas makes his skill check to do his Elven mumbo jumbo, and poof! Boromir is healed. The characters, having said all of that deeply meaningful stuff to one another a moment ago, now just kind of stand around and kick rocks till someone decides to chase the Uruk-Hai.

Not quite the same, is it?

Sometimes, a GM will really want an important NPC to die, and to deliver a great speech just before the end. Sometimes, a Player plans on leaving the game, and wants to go out in a memorable way. He hides his departure from the other Players, and has the GM reward his play with a great death in which the Player is able to say goodbye and go out a hero. In a Player's mind, these things should never, never happen. No one that the PCs like should ever die in their presence, and under no circumstances should a PC ever die if there is anything, and I mean anything at all, that the PCs can do to stop it.

It's tough for a Game Master to force the death of an NPC onto his Players, because they are desperately going to attempt to stop it. For most GMs, the death of a major NPC is never arbitrary, and the GM will have a good, dramatic reason for doing it. The PCs will not see the larger picture; all they see is that a favorite character is dying, and they have the power to stop it. Unless the GM intends to automatically fail any kind of healing magics or render impotent any potions or scrolls, the chances of the PCs reviving the characters are good. The damage negation systems in RPGs are

there to keep characters alive, and they ought to work on NPCs as well as PCs. So, while the appeal is there to mortally wound an NPC for dramatic impact, doing it right in front of the PCs is usually a bad idea.

There are some tricks to pulling it off, like placing all of the meaning in the death of the NPC, and making sure that he is very dead before the PCs can get to him. Instead of an impassioned plea to the PCs as the NPC lay dying, having him make his request or farewell before being brutally and quite thoroughly slain. That way the gut punch is still there, and it can't be cheapened by a last minute curing spell. If you must have the slow death, as the PCs watch helplessly, you can separate the characters from one another. Force fields, restraining magics, even good old-fashioned rope handcuffs can accomplish this. Maybe the NPC is dying in another room and the PCs are forced to watch through CCTV. Anything that can prevent the PCs from using their healing abilities will do, just make sure it's internally consistent, and as fair as you can manage.

Monologues

There is a similar problem with long monologues on the part of villains and other NPCs. PCs, generally speaking, don't enjoy monologues. The villain usually attempts to do this near the final confrontation with the PCs, and by this point the PCs are usually done with talking. Unless they are physically restrained, the PCs are going to act out, no matter if their enemy is ready or chatting about the weather. Monologues are ways to establish character and deliver exposition, and unless there is a point to his speech (aside from the villain's need to gloat) the time for all of that is passed. Monologues can allow PCs to temporarily recover, or plot an action, but the dramatic flow of the speech is usually destroyed when the PCs have to interrupt the Game Master to let him know that their characters are taking some kind of action. While this is usually how the heroes take advantage of a monologue...it sucks for the GM, cause he can't deliver his lines and arbitrate at the same time.

The cures for these problems are identical to the ones for death scenes. If you want the PCs to just sit down and listen, the easiest thing to do is just prevent them from acting out. Of course, no one wants to wallow in helplessness while the bad guy shoots his mouth off, and no self-respecting villain is going to get himself stuck in a position where he has to listen to all the do-gooders flapping their gums about justice and right and wrong and blah, blah, blah. You get the idea.

Special Effects: An Interview with Anthony Mark Viverito

by Terry Crotinger/montanasings

Years ago, I stumbled into websites that explained how the special effects were created in my favorite science fiction movies and television series. I discovered tutorials and how-to's on many of the effects that were, at that time, trade secrets—some guarded jealously. The technical terminology was daunting and I soon realized few outside the special effects or production industry would understand what morphing is or how traveling matte, in-camera effects or the Shufftan Process works. Besides these techniques, there are wide-screen, 3D, IMAX and HD (high definition) formats to consider. The SFX industry has exploded from the garage workbench crowded with homemade, Duct-taped gadgets to billion-dollar warehouse workshops with the latest advances in camera and editing equipment available for use. Even seasoned professionals dream of working on a project with the “Great Houses”: *LucasFilm's Industrial Light and Magic* (*Star Wars*—all six movies will be converted to 3D format), *Silicon Graphics Inc.* aka SGI (*Lord of the Rings*, with Weta) or *Weta Digital* (*LoTR*, *King Kong*) corporations—all big time companies that do nothing but special effects.

When a newer, fancier effect was created, the movie houses (MGM, Fox, Tri-Star, etc.) wanted that effect and considered the others to be, now, just a standard effect, some more expensive to make than others. For example, when *Matrix* came out, the “frozen in time”/surround-the-object camera angles that truly looked surreal became the rage in Hollywood—and the price tag was no slouch, either. Producers and advertisers wanted these effects and would sacrifice their writing or prop budgets to accommodate them for their commercials, television series, “shorts” and full-length features.

While this trend lasted, the special effects artists and editors who developed the carefully guarded techniques had a job. However, before the current project is wrapped up and “in the can”, the exhausted crew has already been hitting the pavement, looking for their next project/job in order to feed their families. Some end up living like Gypsies, while those fortunate to be employed by the Great Houses of special effects work steadily.

The reason I had been looking at SFX websites is because I have an ongoing research project: a *Filmation* produced Saturday morning kid's show called, *Space Academy* (1977). *Filmation* employed

several new special effects for that time: videotaped exchanges, stop-motion effects for their version of the space shuttle called, *Seekers*, a monster and pyrotechnic scenes that used flames (in space? Okay, it was science fiction for kids and the producers had only a vague idea that many? any? kids enjoyed science and would be able to nit-pick their program to shreds). *Space Academy's* spin-off show was a comic-book-like serial called, *Jason of Star Command*, featuring monsters and the same effects (*and props and sets, and in some cases, actors*) as *Space Academy* (SA). Bottom line: I remember that the effects were cool-looking and I wanted to know more. Hence, in my search, I came across *PharosPro.com*, a website that features stop-motion and special effects artists. I ventured to contact one of the men who worked on SA and instead, met the website's designer, Anthony Marks. Anthony goes by several names (it's Hollywood, it's expected!) and can also be found online as Anthony Marks Viverito. During email exchanges, I realized I had stumbled onto a very nice guy who had just finished editing special effects on his *third Matrix* film. Too tired to even attend the *Matrix* wrap-party, he was going to visit relatives in Puerto Rico, but agreed to let me interview him for *Illuminata* when he returned.

Anthony, who has a delightfully exotic Latin accent, (Okay, I admit—I was drooling all over the phone.) patiently educated me about types of special effects, some not-so-trade secrets, and gave me a glimpse of the challenges of being an animator/special effects/graphic artist. He boldly told of back-stage fun and hi-jinx on one of the movies he worked on, how the movie/special effects industry has changed from her early development, and the heartbreak of the SFX pioneers who no longer work because few movies required techniques like stop-motion.

Originally from Puerto Rico, Anthony lived in New York in the early 1990's while attending night classes at the New York Institute of Technology, earning a degree in Communication Arts. At the time that *Laurel Entertainment* was working on their CGI movie, *Monsters, Inc.*, across town, Anthony was employed with *Troma, Inc.*, as an intern and working on a film called *Sgt. Kabuki Man*.

“We got to do all kinds of things [while working for *Troma, Inc.*]. I saw how other people did their work. I got to see how the costume people created

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The Writer's Block Jack London: Two Fisted Writer

by Charles Gramlich

In this edition of my column, I'm looking at Jack London. Like Hemingway, he's an icon in American literary history. He also is one of my favorite writers, and definitely not a "kid" writer as some claim. Of course, you know about *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, but try *The Star Rover* or some of his short stories if you really want to see him rock.

Jack London was born in California in 1876 to Flora Wellman and W. H. Chaney, a writer and scientific astrologer. Chaney never married Jack's mother, however, and some eight months after the boy's birth Flora took John London as her husband and the father of her son. London was a quiet man, a talented farmer who was no match for Flora's ambitions and spendthrift ways. (She would almost certainly be considered "neurotic" today.) The family was often broke and moved frequently, living sometimes on farms and sometimes in the cities of Oakland and San Francisco.

Young Jack was an independent child, often spending his time alone. By the age of thirteen he'd saved enough money from working odd jobs to buy a small boat and had learned to sail it in the sheltered areas of the coast. He'd also discovered books and he read for long hours.

At seventeen, Jack took his first sea voyage, on a fast schooner bound for the far east. For the next several years, Jack alternated periods of steady labor as a "wage slave" with other periods of wild adventure, including a stint riding the rails as a hobo and a journey to the Klondike territory during the gold rush of 1896.

London's "adventures" provided fodder for the stories already bubbling in his brain, but it was the months of back breaking labor and thirty days spent in jail for vagrancy that made him a socialist. For the rest of his life, Jack London was to combine a powerful sense of personal individualism with an intellectual desire to see capitalism replaced with a system fairer to the working man.

Through hard work, an iron determination, a willingness to skate the edge of dangers both physical and intellectual, and a talent for words, Jack London powered himself into a position as one of the best known and most widely respected American writers of the turn of the century period. He wrote everything, from poems and stories, to scholarly articles on grammar, to informed tracts on socialism. His breakthrough to fame came in 1903 with the publication of *The Call of the Wild*, which was widely hailed as a triumph. *The*

Sea Wolf in 1904 and *White Fang* in 1906 cemented London's position atop the publishing heap.

But while London's fortunes as a writer were increasing, the ship of his personal life had sprung its first leak. He left his wife of just three years (Bessie Maddern) and his two young daughters to marry Charmian Kittredge, who was often to prove more of a stress on his life than she was a balm. Charmian was better able than Bessie to share the adventures that Jack craved. She joined him in sailing, in riding, and in hunting, but she was also immature and seldom tried to make Jack's writing life easier. As an example, for many years she resisted Jack's wish to hire a secretary, probably out of fear that another woman might steal her husband away.

Still, Jack London wrote well, turning out a thousand words a day despite whatever adventures, illnesses, or entertainments came his way. He wrote *Martin Eden* (1909), *Burning Daylight* (1910), *John Barleycorn* (1913), and *The Star Rover* (1914), all of which stand as important American novels, and he turned out short stories that changed the way readers and writers looked at the short form.

By 1914, however, London's health, spirit, and career were flagging. A series of emotional and economic catastrophes took their toll. After years of work and immense cost, London's dream home, called the "Wolf House," burned down just before he could move in. Arson was suspected. And, despite earning many thousands of dollars a year he was always in debt, partly because of the generous nature that saw him give money away like water, and partly because, like his mother, Jack was prone to making poor investments and having bad luck.

Even the debts might not have hurt London so badly if he had not begun to realize how people were taking advantage of him. The periodic bouts of melancholy that had occasionally plagued him over the years began to occur more frequently. He started to drink heavily, and for the first time since his youth began to drink alone and to show signs of drunkenness. His health deteriorated and he lost interest in those things that had once given him pleasure, including his writing. Finally, on November 21, a Tuesday night in 1916, Jack fell into a coma, and despite heroic efforts to save him he died late the next day.

For years it was believed that London died a suicide, from an overdose of sister morphine. This myth seems to have gotten started, perhaps, from the fact

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KeyCOMmentary: The Mundanity Insanity

by garrie keyman

Some months ago, in reading another writer's blog, I encountered a link to the *Mundane Manifesto*, a pompous imposition of several people's opinion as the definitive take on what science fiction as a genre ought to be. Although it immediately rankled me, it's taken considerable thought to pinpoint why.

My use of *pompous* and *imposition* undoubtedly hint at the conclusion I've drawn.

Let's look at some of the words at play: mundane, manifesto, science, fiction; but first, let's peek at the opening lines of this arrogant little diatribe, ask a few questions that beg airing, and talk about the asinine restrictions these individuals feel justified in placing upon what ought to be a broad arm in the alluring embrace of speculative fiction.

The Mundane Manifesto commences thus: *The undersigned, being pissed off and needing a tight girdle of discipline to restrain our SF imaginative silhouettes, are temporarily united in the following actions:*

An interesting and telling opening, wouldn't you say? While wanting to align themselves with the scientific intelligentsia they clearly admire, they aren't too intellectual to use the earthy term *pissed*. I suppose that's mundane enough. But then, who, precisely, has pissed them off? Apparently it's the authors who understand the operative word in *science fiction* is *fiction*.

Admittedly, their opening doesn't state that science fiction as a genre needs a *tight girdle of discipline* (presumably referring to all the restrictions they're about to require if a story is to be considered worthy), but that *the undersigned* do. And what is it they need to girdle? Why, their imaginative silhouettes. Okay, so what is that vague mumbo-jumbo? What is an imaginative silhouette? Are they contritely placing themselves in the shadow of writers heretofore considered bright stars of science fiction literature, or is their use of *our* intended as collective, including all of us in their unnecessary club?

To say they have *SF imaginative silhouettes* would seem to imply they too are writers of science fiction – or plan to be – yet no mention is made on their website of anything these mysterious *Undersigned* have penned. In fact, they are identified rather

nebulously as “some members of the Clarion East class of 2002.” It seems to me if one is going to issue a statement as strong as the term *manifesto* implies, one ought not to be so pale as to refuse to sign it.

Okay, so what, then, is eschewed by the so-called Mundanes? Here's a partial list: aliens of any persuasion, interstellar travel, Area 51, devices that can translate any language, radio communication between star systems, alternative universes, parallel worlds, warp drive, time travel, teleportation, magic (this is an element of *fantasy* fiction, anyway), and supernatural elements (I trust, then, the *undersigned* are all card-carrying atheists).

On the face of it, nothing is terribly abhorrent about trying to define science fiction. After all, that debate has cropped up time and again since the genre first writhed into existence (thank you, Jules Verne) and grew exponentially in popularity (speaking of which, I'll stick my neck out here and warrant the scientific attributes of science fiction were never what made the genre popular anyway, but that the *imaginative* ones – those fathered by the attributes of *fiction* – did).

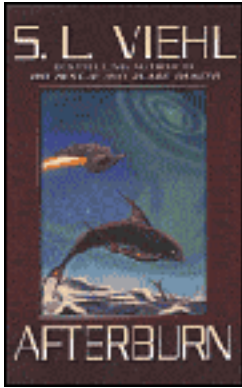
Anyway, what *is* abhorrent is the pejorative plank the *Undersigned* have perched upon to deliver their manifesto, which is to say they stand on a platform of condescension (since I don't plan to reprint their manifesto in its entirety, you'll have to read the work for yourself at www.mundanesf.com to decide if my annoyance is justified).

I call their plank pejorative not only because of the manifesto's overall tone and the fact that it refers to any writing outside their parameters as fodder for their “bonfire of the stupidities,” but also because of its ridiculous assumption that via their self-important limitations they will set the rest of us free: to wit, on a proper human course. Specifically they will open us to “awakening bedazzlement,” offer an “imaginative challenge” (more like imaginative stagnation), discourage our “wasteful attitude” apparently driven by the “dreams of abundance” inherent in any broader approach to science fiction, and – in the final analysis – rescue the bulk of us idiots from frittering away our lives by *enjoying* literature heretofore labeled as science fiction.

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Reviews

Afterburn S.L. Viehl



Roc, August 2005
\$23.95, Hardcover, 320 pp.
ISBN 0451460294
Review by Harriet Klausner

On the planet K-2, the dominant life form is the 'Zangians who live mostly in the air but can exist for brief periods of time on the land.

K-2 is part of the Allied League of Worlds, who is at war with the Hskstkt, slavers who objected to the league coming into their territories to establish colonies. The Hskstkt were driven out of K-2 and the SEALs, surgically enhanced altered life species who can live for longer period out of the water than their brethren, patrol the skies to make sure their enemy doesn't return.

The species who live in the same sector of space as K-2 are holding a peace summit to iron out problems between their peoples. The Skaresh, who are living on K-2, demand their own place preferably a moon of K-2 while the Ninrana need water, which is running out on the planet. The aquatic Yldii want to expand their empire while the 'Zangians desire all the worlds form a peace pact. However not everyone wants the peace summit to succeed and one of the delegates will do whatever is necessary to see it fail.

S.L. Viehl is a fabulous world-builder who invented a planet where the dominant species isn't humanoid and most of the sentient people that live there are not terrans; most species hold terrans in little regard as xenophobic idiots with the exception of a few who work for the betterment of the planet. It is fascinating to watch the different species survive in their environs while also interacting with one another. This is one of the best books the author has written with several characters deserving their own story in future novels.

Cast In Shadow Michelle Sagara



Luna, August 2005
\$13.95, Trade Paper, 400 pgs.
ISBN: 0373802366
Review by Harriet Klausner

In the Kingdom of Karaazon, in the capital of Elantra, the river Abalyne separates the fiefs from the rest of society. In the fiefs, warlords rule

over their own domain and have their own laws and armies. Surprisingly, the sentient species on both sides of the river, human, avian, immortal, etc get along with one another. Now there is a crisis brewing that has its roots in a series of killings that happened in the fiefs years ago when children were killed over a period of three years.

Now the killings have started only this time there are only three days between killings and the victims, like the ones three years ago have strange tattoo like markings on their bodies. Kaylin, who originally came from the fiefs, also had the mysterious markings on her body before the killings started. Now she works on the right side of the law and is determined to find the killer before the magical ritual is completed and more lives are lost.

Cast in Shadow is a magnificent fantasy filled with plenty of suspense, a terrific who-done-it, and a wonderful heroine sacrificing her own needs to provide selfless service to end the killing in the fiefs. Michelle Sagara provides a fantastic realm in which the audience will believe that diverse sentient species exist and live and work in harmony at least until the murders occur leading to everyone pointing fingers at anyone different. Ms. Sagara smoothly has combined mystery and fantasy in this terrific tale. She has the talent to become a star in the fantasy genre.

Reviews

Black Brillion
Matthew Hughes



Tor, 2004
#23.95, Hardcover, 272 pgs
ISBN 0-765-30865-7
272 pages
Review by D. L. Parker

I have something to say to those people who make up the jacket and back covers blurbs for hardcover novels: stop quoting famous names of the past in vain. When, especially in the speculative fiction genre, did it become de rigueur to quote (usually inappropriately) the name of some giant of the past on every new printing? What's wrong with just admitting, "This is a new author and you should read him (or her)?" The back cover of *Black Brillion*, the third book of Matthew Hughes, an author I admit I'd not previously encountered, enthuses that Hughes goes up against Vance and Gene Wolfe and holds his own in their turf. Have we turned into cannibals in the latter age of the genre that can do nothing but turn and consume the reputations – and the sales figures – of the glorious past? What's wrong with letting a new author stand on his or her own two feet? What's wrong with the words new author in the one genre that should appreciate new talent the most?

Yes, yes, the stylistic resemblance to Jack Vance in *Black Brillion* is so obvious and smack-in-the-face in the early part of the book the reader can't avoid it... and doesn't know whether to wince or enjoy such shamelessly accurate mimicry. It has to be intentional. Later in the book, of course, as it usually does, the true voice of the author emerges. Not many writers can sustain a stylistic tone that is adopted from another writer without a wrong note for the length of an entire novel. Hughes doesn't manage it either. (He does not get the booby prize for his attempt, though: the author who wins that one, in my opinion, was the clueless soul who penned the Sherlock Holmes imitation that ended with Holmes marching down the aisle into the shackles of happy-ever-after matrimony. Egads! Sacrilege!)

But the Gene Wolfe – and, ultimately, even the Vance reference, because it doesn't long hold water – on the back cover marketing blurb quite incensed me. There is not a shred of Gene Wolfe in this novel. The man is quoted because he is a respected (deservedly respected) giant of the speculative fiction genre. His name is being used to sell the book, pure

and simple. So, to the car salesman who bumbled such opportunistic pap on the back of *Black Brillion*, I have an assignment for you: read the *Island of Dr. Death*. Do it again. Read the cannibalistic scene in the *Shadow of the Torturer* series until you get the point. Read my lips. Know Thy Authors or Shut Up.

So... calming down a little here: what about Matthew Hughes' book? Well, I have mixed feelings about it. We start out with a lively and very Vance-like character, the fascinating, gluttonous, pleasure-loving shyster, Luff Imbry. I wish the author had stuck to Imbry's viewpoint, because not long after Imbry makes his sly appearance on the scene, we switch to a totally humorless, not-especially-intelligent fellow named Baro Harkless who spends most of his time standing at attention. Imbry, as if the author couldn't sustain the intended Vance-imitation, takes a back seat. Instead we find ourselves praying Harkless, poor narrow-minded duty robot, will just unbend enough to smile, (and we pray the shock of it won't crack him up).

Harkless, being, quite explicitly, *The Hero*, does, indeed, learn to unbend a little by the end of the book, but I wouldn't invite him to the dinner table even as the reformed character, to tell the truth. Give me the abandoned Imbry instead, who might steal my silverware... but with such a fascinatingly Falstaffian character, who'd begrudge him a spoon or two?

The rest of the story is an action-adventure using the classic those-scary-insects archetype. Harkless is a Bureau agent who is teamed with the unlikely Imbry in order to investigate a known charlatan who claims to have the cure for a mysterious and incurable disease. The disease has something to do with some mysterious invaders of the past, the Dree, who might just be still around somewhere. There's a Jungian twist (so I'm told: how is this different from a Freudian twist?) to the story that is intriguing, though Roger Zelazny did something similar in his more visceral story about the psychologist who delves into his patients' inner psyches and goes horribly astray.

Black Brillion isn't bad in terms of an action-adventure story. It can stand on its own. It should stand on its own. It sure isn't Gene Wolfe, and it isn't, ultimately, (even though I cannot but be convinced the author tried very hard), Jack Vance. Read *Black Brillion* if you want a competently but not exceptionally done fantasy with a few intriguing twists (and if can endure our humorless, steel-spined hero).

So, Tor - rein in those car salesmen. Your marketing department needs to do its background reading before it starts warbling those catchy names in vain... or Jack Vance and Gene Wolfe ought to be calling on you any day soon.

Reviews

Dragonmaster
Chris Bunch



Roc, August 2005
\$15.00, Trade Paper, 416 pp.
ISBN 0451460308
Review by Harriet Klausner

On his way home Hal Kailas saw the lord's son Nanpean torture a baby dragon; he punches the boy and takes the kit back to his mother. Hal's

family is in danger of losing their tavern for Hal's actions so he leaves the village of Caerly in the Kingdom of Deraine. He becomes a vagabond, wandering from job to the job, never finding anything that interested him until he becomes the gofer for a traveling troupe that sells dragon rides.

Hal knows he wants to do something with dragons on his own. However, the Queen of Roche uses a land dispute to go to war with Deraine and Sagene. Hal is conscripted and rises to the occasion to become a leader of men. When his troops are massacred, Hal enlists to be trained to fight on dragons in a new unit. His exploits and daring earn him the hearts and admiration of the populace but the war costs him that what he treasures most. When he is injured, instead of mustering out like the king expects him to, Hal volunteers to lead a new dragon unit as their Dragonmaster.

This book is filled with plenty of action and will appeal to readers who love military fantasy. The use of dragons and magicians to aid in the war effort is so much a part of the storyline that readers will find themselves believing that such things are really possible in wartime. As the hero matures, he and the audience observe the toll of war as humans and dragons die at an alarming rate. Chris Bunch is a talented storyteller who entertains his audience with a fantastic sword and sorcery epic.

Drive to the East
Harry Turtledove



Del Rey, August 2005
\$26.95, Hardcover, 608 pp.
ISBN 0345457242
Review by Harriet Klausner

As World War II explodes, the Confederate States of America attack its neighbor to the north the United States of America; General Patton leads his

armored divisions towards the Great Lakes in an effort to split the USA in half before driving to the east. Japan launches an assault on the Hawaiian Islands. Finally Occupied Canada and Mormon Utah see an opportunity to toss out the USA and regain their respective independence.

However, the four prong attack that has caused a multi front war for the USA not only fails to break the morale of the Americans, but actually provides a common resolve to repel the invaders. Even the death of President Smith in a Confederacy bombing raid over the capital Philadelphia fails to deter the Americans as Vice Preside Charles Lafollette takes over. In the Confederacy, President Featherstone continues his campaign to dramatically eliminate the freed slaves by making the blacks build concentration camps for their containment and death. USA War Secretary Roosevelt sanctions devastating reprisals against the Mormons and Canadians with the goal to keep them from the conflict. War is all over North America once again.

Book two in Harry Turtledove's alternate World War II trilogy, *Settling Accounts*, is an action-packed saga that grips readers from start to finish. As always is the case in a Turtledove novel, fans will try to find the comparative real event that the author brings into his universe. The story line is fast-paced even when the descriptions of past events that were described in book one, *Return Engagement*, are provided. The sub-genre audience will appreciate this appealing entry that makes the Turtledove universe seem like the real one.

Reviews

In The Ruins

Kate Elliot



Daw, August 2005
\$25.95, Hardcover, 544 pgs.
ISBN 0756401925
Review by Harriet Klausner

Three millennia ago, the Horse People (centaurs) and seven sorcerers from seven different human tribes wove a spell that sent the Ashioi (elves) into the aether. Now that Liath, a half-human, half daimon of fire has stopped Anne and her agents from renewing the spell, the Ashai and their land has come back to Earth causing a cataclysm of epic proportions. Millions died in the resulting earthquakes, flooding of the seas and volcanic eruptions. The sun doesn't shine very much or as brilliantly, making it almost a certainty that famine is coming. The only reason Liath stopped the spell from being re woven is that if it was; the very earth could have been destroyed.

She makes her way back to her husband Sanglant who is now the king regnant of Wendor. They travel through lawless, lifeless and unstable lands making Sanglant realize that he wants to make Wendor a haven of peace and stability in a world gone mad. The old alliances are gone as rulers vie for even more power and land; there are those who would like nothing better to see Sanglant and Liath gone from the political scene.

This book does not end the Crown of Stars saga but readers will find themselves glad of it because there is still much of the story to be told. Series fans will want to know what the Ashai will do and how Sanglant and Liath will deal with their enemies including the church who regards them as a heretic because of her use of sorcery amongst other dangling threads. Kate Elliot, an excellent fantasist, writes lush and lyrical scenes and uses her characters to scale down cosmic events to a human scale.

The Destined Queen

Deborah Hale



Luna, August 2005
\$13.95, Trade Paper, 400 pgs.
ISBN 0373802439
Review by Harriet Klausner

When Maura Woodbury started on her quest to find the Waiting King she was destined to marry him as she was *The Destined Queen*. She is accompanied by outlaw Rath Talward. They fall in love but it is not until the Sacred Glade that Rath is revealed as the Waiting King, the reincarnation of King Elzeban who is destined to return to help Umbria in the darkest hour which is now as the cruel and oppressive Hans rules with an iron fist.

A small bird carrying a message tells them to go the Vestan Islands. When they arrive, the islanders, who fled Umbria when the Hans invaded, give Rath an army to free his countrymen. As the rightful king returns to the homeland Maura must find the staff of Velarken which will grant Rath one wish he must use wisely if he is to defeat the Hans without turning into a tyrant like them.

The Destined Queen is romantic fantasy at its very best. The love between the two protagonists gives them the strength against overwhelming odds to believe they can defeat their enemies if they listen to their hearts as well as to their heads. The common people rally around this legendary king but more is needed to oust the enemy from their homeland. Deborah Hale's romantic fantasy is a moving and beautiful tale showcasing two characters who capture the readers interest because they are flawed people trying to do the right thing even when they are not sure which course that is.

It is by herring alone I set my penguin in motion.
It is by the oil of skate that flippers acquire speed;
the beak acquires fish;
The fish become a dinner.
It is by herring alone I set my penguin in motion.

Douglas "Penguin Boy" Berry

Original Fiction

RNA by Gary Beck

As I rounded first base I felt a tear in my hamstring that shot up my leg with a stab of hot pain. It forced me to slow down, but I had to keep running because I was on the edge of the bubble and was afraid of getting cut from the team. I risked a glance to right field and saw that the ball would get to second before me. I tried a desperate hook slide into the bag, but the second baseperson blocked me and came down hard on my legs when she tagged me. A streak of fiery pain that made the hamstring feel like a tickle seized me in an agonizing grip and I writhed in anguish. I heard the second baseperson's hoarse voice through the haze of shock: "Your season's over, old man."

The team treated me as I expected: abrupt removal to a third level med-center, since I only had a tier three contract. I was very lucky to see an intern, since tier three didn't entitle me to a doctor. The most I could normally hope for was a med tech. Tier three didn't include x-rays, but after moderately careful manipulation the doc informed me that the anterior cruciate ligament was definitely torn. So second base was right. The team's HMO representative had accompanied me to the med center to ensure that I didn't exceed my benefits. He announced my options: laser surgery and three days care in the open ward, with appropriate medications, then departure by public transportation; or laser surgery, transport to my residence by ambulance and one week of home care by a licensed nurse's aide. All veteran ball players knew what open wards were like, so I didn't even think about it before opting for home care.

The HMO rep was already indignant that the team would have to pay for a doctor and had me sign various forms exonerating the team from any liability. I had to sign, or risk losing my meager pension. The HMO rep had more power than the coach. He tucked the documentation in his bizzac, authorized the doc to provide laser surgery and spoke into his comphone. A few minutes later a nurse's aide entered and properly identified herself according to guild requirements. "Hello. I'm nurse's aide Felicity, guild registration number 672, reporting for assignment. The HMO rep gave her the care restrictions. While she listened attentively I had a chance to look her over. She was tall, about 5'9", with an athlete's body and looked as if she could handle any kind of emergency thrown at her. She was around thirty years old, but her untroubled face, bright blue eyes and blonde hair cut in the short lezzie style made her seem much younger. I had worse caregivers over the years.

Nurse Felicity looked at me reassuringly while she drew a hypo. The HMO rep hovered fretfully and verified that she used the minimum Demerol dose. He was beginning to annoy me almost as much as my aching leg. The injection started to take effect and although it didn't remove the pain, it made it bearable. I had nothing else to do while I waited for the doc, so I began to take stock of myself. I was a thirty-eight year old professional ballplayer with a body going on sixty. I had lasted years longer than most players because I still looked young on camera, the prime career determinant now that ball games were no longer played in front of live audiences. If I recovered from this injury, if another team wanted me, if a little hair dye could fool the judgmental camera, I might eke out another marginal season. After that I didn't know what else I could do.

It felt like centuries ago when I graduated from George W. Bush High School, in Amarillo, Texas, as a star football, baseball and basketball player. I wasn't college material because of poor academic performance, so I opted for a professional sports career. Fortunately the pro teams will take anyone who can play well enough, despite the lip service they pay about the necessity for education. Then I made the most intelligent decision of my life. I knew even then that I couldn't do much besides play ball, so I chose baseball, because it was less of a contact sport than football or basketball. I thought I

Original Fiction

might be able to extend my career longer, if I didn't get knocked around every time I played. It turned out to be the smartest move I ever made.

I didn't often think about the past. I had some good years as a right fielder, including five with the Hiroshima Dragons. I had been very popular with the local fans, who easily recognized a distinct American from afar. My only regret was that I didn't learn Japanese so I could talk to people. It would have been fun to jabber away in their language, but I never could remember enough words. I did like their manners. They still showed some respect for others. I would have stayed in Japan for the rest of my career, but they got a younger, faster token American. After that I came back home and moved from team to team, sometimes on the field, sometimes on the bench. I hung on when younger and better players were cut, because I could play any outfield position and first base in an emergency. It also helped that I could still manage to hit close to .250.

So here I was in a grubby med-center with at least a season ending injury, probably a career sign off, with no ideas for the future. I didn't have a nest egg. I never managed to save, despite a meager life style. I was an ancient journeyman in a young profession, without name or fame that could be traded in for civilian security. I had no skills, no credentials and no experience, except as a marginal pro ballplayer. I wouldn't even be desirable in a low life sports bar, because I lacked sufficient celebrity. I guess I had to start thinking about what to do with my life, but I wasn't well-equipped for making a life plan. Too many years of just being a hit and fetch ball dog had worn away most of my thought process. I sort of accepted whatever came along, without worrying too much about the future.

Nurse Felicity brought me back to the present with a gentle pat. "We're ready for surgery now." She lifted me onto the gurney with surprising ease and wheeled me to the laser room. Despite all my injuries over the years that included broken fingers, toes, sprains, strains, as well as innumerable aches, pains and other ailments, I never required surgery. I was scared and it showed. Nurse Felicity crooned soothing sounds that were supposed to reassure me. The HMO rep kept getting in my face, babbling about how grateful I should be for receiving generous extra contract services. All I wanted to do was look at strong, shapely nurse Felicity, but the HMO rep kept blocking my view. I couldn't insult him because he controlled health benefits, so I drifted into a fantasy, where I picked up my tungsten bat, swung for the fence and blasted the chub's head clean out of the ball park.... I idly wondered why they called it a ball park.

Nurse Felicity looked at me as if she could read my mind. I instantly forgot about the HMO rep and tried to look innocent, because I wanted her to think well of me. I didn't have a girl and it had been a long time since baseball groupies chased me. The thought of a week with a pretty nurse who could haul me around made me forget my fear for a while. At least until the doc came in. He looked too young to be an intern and I suspected they could be pushing a med student on me, but I didn't dare say anything. If I offended the HMO rep he might cancel my treatment and I'd find myself on the street. So I carefully bopped my tongue stud on the roof of my mouth so it couldn't be seen and didn't say anything. A tier three contract didn't allow piercings.

The procedure itself didn't take long. Nurse Felicity curled me on my side, the doc adjusted my position with a clumsy hand that gave me a jolt of pain, then zapped the torn spot with a beam of light. He looked me in the eye for the first time. "Don't put any weight on that leg for two months, then carefully begin to walk on it. I think we can give you crutches until then." He looked inquiringly at the HMO rep, who consulted his handbook, then begrudgingly nodded yes. "With any luck you'll be good as new in six or eight months," the doc said. Right. Good as new. I wasn't good as new when I was new. "Can you give me some pain pills, doc?" The HMO rep was there like a shot. "Your benefits package doesn't entitle you to painkillers. You'll have to manage with neurodumps. Now let's conclude the treatment session and get you on your way." This chub was really ticking me off, but I didn't dare offend the power structure, so I gave him the same conciliatory smile that had worked for me for years.

Original Fiction

The doc condescendingly waved goodbye. I guess he was a little miffed at treating a lowly tier three patient. Nurse Felicity lifted me back on the gurney and we headed for the ambujit. The HMO rep had me sign the fair care release, the med center doors closed, nurse Felicity stowed me in the back of the ambujit and we pulled away from the curb. The ride to my crib seemed to go on forever. Every pothole reminded me of the current state of urban decay with a jab of pain. My only consolation was that at least the injury happened at a home game. If it happened when the team was on the road I would have really been torqued. I don't know what they would have done with me, but they probably would have dumped me at the nearest tier three med-center and left me on my own. My only option then would have been a dubious appeal to the players union, which like most other American unions, had been worn down over the years, or bought off by the bosses.

The neighbors didn't bother to look when nurse Felicity rolled me into my crib. They were more accustomed to seeing people carried out than brought in. She quickly and efficiently organized the small space so I could get to the bathroom on my crutches and easily reach the kitchen unit for meals. She adjusted the couchbed so I could watch the large wall TV, my only luxury. She was the first woman who had ever come into my crib. Well I guess the landlady counted as a woman, even though I thought she was a nasty old bag. One of my neighbors, a rabid sports fan, once told me she had lost all her assets, except this building, in the big technology crash of 2001. Well, no wonder she was bitter, living in a dump like this, if she was used to better.

As I watched nurse Felicity do things around the crib, I had an unaccustomed feeling of well-being. I wasn't used to a woman's presence, especially in this little room that I never thought of as home. The last real home I could remember was a foster home when I was five or six. The ortho parents wanted a bright, artistic child to enrich their lives. Instead they got a morose brooder, who they quickly tired of. After that I shuffled from one group home to another, until I finally graduated from high school, where I was never the life of the party. In fact, except for time on the ball field, I was pretty much invisible for most of my life. Well it just made me feel worse when I felt sorry for myself, so I just enjoyed the treat of nurse Felicity fussing around, trying to make me comfortable.

She finished her chores and got ready to leave and a well of loneliness rose in me. I urgently snatched at a reason for her to stay a little longer. "Could you just show me how to make a freezemeal?" She looked at me with an understanding twinkle in her serene, sky blue eyes and my heart raced. She knew I didn't want to be alone. It only took a few moments to prepare the meal and she was ready to go again. I wouldn't shame myself by pretending to be in worse condition and I couldn't find another pretext to keep her with me, so I said the only thing I could think of: "Do you want to have something to eat with me?" She smiled sweetly: "No thank you." I got a pang of rejection. "Is it because I'm black?" "Oh no. Only the Chinese don't like black people and you know they don't like any Americans. In fact they have their own med centers and I've never even had one as a patient."

I was getting desperate for her to stay and asked plaintively: "Then why won't you eat with me?" "I don't really eat." "What do you mean? Everybody eats." She shook her head. "Enhanced sentients don't. I take liquid nutriment." I didn't know what she was talking about. "What's an enhanced sentient?" "A flesh and composite being with A.I." I looked at her, uncomprehending. "You mean you're not a real person?" "Of course I am, even though the nurses union wants to prove that we aren't human in its class action suit. I don't think much about it though. I'm too busy taking care of my patients." I was stunned. Was I being turned down by an android? After this, what was I supposed to do, ask the ball boy machine for a date?

I was at a complete loss for words as she headed for the door. She turned with a bright smile. "I'll see you tomorrow for your first day of home treatment." I felt like laughing or screaming, but I did neither. I watched her leave with a feeling of despair that plunged me into a pit of self-pity. The only thought that kept racing through my mind was that I couldn't ever seem to connect with anything real.

Writer's Block (con't)

that the initial doctor on the scene as London lay dying diagnosed the cause of London's coma as an overdose of morphine, two empty vials of which were reportedly found by the writer's bedside. When other doctors arrived, that diagnosis was changed—with agreement from the first doctor on the scene—so that on London's death certificate, the cause of death is listed as "uremia," which is produced by the inability of the kidneys to remove toxins from the bloodstream. London had been suffering from kidney problems for some time.

Despite the death certificate, many later biographers accepted and promulgated the theory that London had died a suicide. In fact, London's "suicide" became "common knowledge," so much so that many reference texts simply "assumed" that the suicide was a fact. The resulting myth became widespread. There have been people who have tried for many years to correct the error, but until the late 1990s relatively few biographies consistently espoused the view that London died of uremia.

There are a number of important points about Jack London to be remembered for later discussion, including aspects concerning his personality, his beliefs, and the recurrent themes found in his writing. Among his personality traits we find that, 1) he suffered from periodic bouts of moodiness that got worse during the later stages of his life, 2) he had a problem with alcohol, 3) he showed occasional paranoid thinking, 4) he often proved generous to a fault, 5) he was physically promiscuous, though capable of showing great emotional loyalty, 6) he would occasionally exaggerate or embellish his own exploits, 7) he had a strained and difficult relationship with his mother, 8) he was a voracious reader, and 9) he knew that he was, literally, a "bastard."

Among London's beliefs we find that, 1) he was politically a socialist, 2) he was personally an individualist with a strong sense of his own abilities, 3) he was an atheist, and 4) he accepted Darwin's theory of evolution and believed in taking a scientific approach to civilization.

Finally, in looking at London's approach to writing and the themes that he investigated, we find that, 1) his gift for words and storytelling revealed itself in his teenage years, 2) he was extremely disciplined in his approach to writing, both in doing the necessary research and in putting words on paper, 3) he often glorified the savage in conflict with other savages or

with the violence of nature, 4) he explored the concept of reincarnation, 5) his stories were richly descriptive, and 6) he essentially created a new form of realistic and passionate fiction that changed the way later writers worked.

Much like Hemingway, who I considered in my last column, Jack London was an aficionado of the "blood sports." He was a boxing fan, for example, and he wrote one of the best boxing stories ever put on paper, a tale called "A Piece of Steak," which appeared in *Best Short Stories of Jack London* (1945). Undoubtedly, London also witnessed dog fights in the Klondike, though there is little to suggest that he enjoyed such sport. In fact, London appears to have been rather soft-hearted where animals were concerned. This didn't stop his race to cover the outbreak of war between Japan and Russia in 1904. His biggest complaint about that trip were the Japanese government's attempts to keep him away from the front where the killing was going on.

Jack London was a master of diversity in writing. He wrote novels, incredible short stories, scholarly articles on grammar, and essays and books on socialism. He wrote quality literature that earned him a lasting reputation, and he churned out pot-boilers to make money. His novels explored such diverse fields as human evolution, savage man against savage nature, and thinly disguised autobiography, the last especially in his books *Martin Eden* and *John Barleycorn*. The former was a sailor, the latter a drunkard, both of which London had been.

Also like Hemingway, London often revealed an immature side to his personality. His most immature act was leaving his first wife after barely three years of marriage, effectively deserting two daughters who were both younger than three. Though he did offer monetary support to his children, he took little part in their lives until, not long before his death, he tried to make some amends.

Like Hemingway, London was also quick to dash off on an adventure without worrying much about those he left behind. A war might attract him here. The sudden urge to sail around the world might grab him there. He picked up and went. And despite the large amount of money he made from his writing, London still spent more than he made, often on spur of the moment purchases or ill-conceived speculations.

Again, like Hemingway, Jack London was an immensely proud man who lived life with passion and intensity. And he also possessed a radical

Writer's Block (con't)

individualism. He, too, at the time of his death, was experiencing increasingly poor health, partly because of drinking, and he seemed to have despaired of his ability to continue to write well. Even if he did not literally commit suicide, he certainly took little care to stave off his decline.

I suspect that in both London and Hemingway, there existed a darkness and violence in the depths of their souls. Both were, in their way, death lovers. They wrote about it, thought about it, tempted it. I believe that death was no enemy to these men. It was a fate they had been writing their way toward throughout their entire lives.

Special Effects (con't)

their things. We got to be extras in the movie... and drivers—picking up the actors and crew from the set and taking them home or to other locations. I had to call companies, like Coke, you know, potential advertisers, and ask them to send stuff in exchange for credit in the movie.

Troma had a whole building for pre-production in Manhattan. We learned [how to do] special effects because you are doing so many parts of the project. I started with doing script breakdown. Everywhere there was an effect, it was written down: what kind of effect, how it could be done in the cheapest way possible, what materials would be needed, how much it was going to cost.

I did sculpting on the creatures. I had to make this cocoon using liquid components that are mixed together so it creates malleable foam that is used to sculpture with. [Our department] made props, too. One was a baseball bat that had to be a break-away*. We drilled through the bat, and then chopped it into segments. A metal rod was inserted and when someone off-camera pulled the rod out, it fell apart.

I learned a lot. Now, I'm looking back and think, 'Yeah, Monsters would have been fun to work on, you have some famous actors doing voice-overs and stuff. But, I still enjoyed Sgt. Kabuki Man.'"

Find out more about Anthony and his experience as a special effects artist next month in *Illuminata*.

*A break-away prop is one that crumbles or breaks with only a little force (to protect the actor); when someone gets hit on the head or falls to the floor, it breaks easily and, usually with a lot of mess.

KeyCOMMENTary (con't)

Shame on us; we ought only to be educating ourselves and sticking to cold hard reality, albeit conveniently we can now segue into the core definition of *fiction*.

Dictionary.com had this to say about the matter (all emphases courtesy the columnist, hereafter to be referred to as the *Rankled*): *Fiction: an imaginative creation or pretense that does not represent actuality; a lie; a literary work produced by the imagination and not necessarily based on fact; something untrue intentionally represented as true by the narrator, a deliberately false or improbable account.*

Dictionary.com elaborates thusly: *to most people "the latest fiction" means the latest novels or stories rather than the most recently invented pretense or lie. All three senses of the word fiction point back to its source, Latin fictiō, "the action of shaping, a feigning, that which is feigned." Fictiō was derived from fingere, "to make by shaping, to feign, to make up or invent a story."*

The Mundanes, as they like to be called, might be likened to little clones of Sgt. Friday of Dragnet fame saying, "Just the facts, Ma'am. Just the facts." Of course that'd leave these folks with what they truly want: non-fiction; so then why don't they just read their textbooks and leave novelization alone? Good question.

Okay, so, having defined *fiction*, what of *science*? That's half of the equation, right? In short, science defined is *the observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of phenomena* (emphases once again added by the *Rankled*), while a phenomena is *an unusual or unaccountable occurrence; a marvel*.

I wouldn't argue for a moment that reality is marvelous. It certainly is, and perhaps in many ways more so than any fiction. But what the Mundanes seem so quick to forget is that many things aptly dubbed *reality* today were not seen as even *remote* possibilities from the vantage point of the past. When Jules Verne wrote of submarines, traveling to the moon, or knowing anything about the center of the Earth, few people would have said his works were other than sheer fantasy. But as reality caught up with imagination, submarine and supersonic adventuring

became topics not of fantasy but of science ... and science fiction.

Who dares rein in the imagination? These naysayers who declare that any of the “wilder,” more broadly imagined ideas in popular science fiction can never come true are descendents of the shriveled minds who declared the world flat, scoffed at automation, and equated the first thought of launching the human genome project to little more than an unattainable byproduct of our fantasy-generated delusions.

Yes, even the title of this document speaks volumes. Let’s look at it. What is it to be mundane? What nuance does *manifesto* lend our process of evaluation?

The best I can say about the title is that it is entirely apropos. Mundane is an adjective meaning ordinary and commonplace. To be mundane is to be quotidian, routine, and of an *everyday* persuasion. More relevantly, Dictionary.com states the following:

Mundane: n. [from SF fandom] 1. *A person who is not in science fiction fandom.*

Hmm. Now that’s certainly interesting. Even more interesting (and funny) in the definition of mundane are the references to the work-a-day world of computer programming: 1. *places where programs do commercially necessary but intellectually uninspiring things*; and 3. *a bizarre dimension in which standard dress is a shirt and tie and a person’s work hours are 9 to 5.*

Of course, in all fairness we realize (and the Mundanes do clearly state as such) that the term was chosen for those nuances of meaning defining it as: *of, relating to, or typical of this world*; *secular* [from the Latin *mundus*: world.]; *practical*; *terrestrial*. Still, it’s fun to look at the totality of meaning in words people choose to define themselves.

And then what of *manifesto*? Try this on for size:

n. pl. **man-i-fes-to**: a public declaration of principles, policies, or intentions, *especially of a political nature.*

Why draw such a line in the literary sand? Why align oneself with political implications (especially Marxist ones) by using this term, when more than 200 synonyms presented themselves, among them: *acclamation, act, advice, allegation, announcement, article, assertion, attestation, avowal, bulletin, canon,*

charge, circular, comment, communication, credo, creed, critique, declaration, decree, memorandum, notice, notification, observation, outline, party line, plank, platform, presentation, principle, precept, proclamation, profession, pronouncement, protestation, recitation, resolution, rundown, soapbox, statement, statement of belief, stump, tenets, utterance, vent, verbalization, writ, and my ever favorites (and perhaps most apt): *poop sheet* and *ejaculation.*

Why? Because the term *manifesto* carries didactic overtones and the Mundane Manifesto is nothing if not didactic. Yet, given all this stolid opinionated rhetoric, the Mundanes leave themselves an out, their publication closing with this promise: *to burn this manifesto as soon as it gets boring.*

Since this happened paragraphs earlier, we can only hope they have already fulfilled their final promise. If they haven’t, perhaps we ought to see to it they do.

Visit us next month when we offer our un-girdled response to The Mundane Manifesto: *The Extraterrestrial Ejaculation.* Meanwhile, garrie loves feedback; readers are invited to leave personal poop sheets at Jsolus@hotmail.com.

Science fiction is story-telling, usually imaginative as distinct from realistic fiction, which poses the effects of current or extrapolated scientific discoveries, or a single discovery, on the behavior of individuals of society. Mainstream fiction gives imaginative reality to probable events within a framework of the historical past or present; science fiction gives reality to possible events, usually in the future, extrapolated from present scientific knowledge or existing cultural and social trends. Both genres ordinarily observe the unities and adhere to a cause-and-effect schema

— John Boyd