



The *Illuminata*

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

When I Grow Up, I Wanna Be Adam Cartwright

By garrie keyman

Thoughts on the Origin and Value of Fanfic

fan-ta-sy: creative imagination; unrestrained fancy; a capricious or fantastic idea; a conceit; an imagined event or sequence of mental images, such as a daydream, usually fulfilling a wish or psychological need; an unrealistic or improbable supposition; [from Latin *phantasia* and Greek *phantasiā*: appearance, imagination; from *phantos*, visible]

Despite the core truth that *all* fiction is fantasy, in literary circles the term *fantasy* has become equated chiefly with unicorns, magic, and caped protagonists engaged in swordplay. This is one reason the term *speculative fiction* has come into favor. Still, be it western or romance, horror or high seas adventure, fiction begins as a personal fantasy in the writer's mind.

Fantasies come in all shapes and sizes, yet have one major component in common: they serve a sound psychological function. Essentially, a fantasy is a pictorial conversation we have with our psyche, an avenue we

all use as a trial-and-error means to explore our external capacities without ever having to venture beyond the inner sanctum of our minds.

Replete with all the emotional impact of real-time experiences, fantasies are the creative fuel that force us to heal, help us expand, and permit us the power of pretense. After a fashion, fantasy is the year-round Hallowe'en of the Heart that allows one to strap on a holster when she needs to stand strong, or to sport a tiara when she needs to believe that she, too, can be as beautiful as a princess.

As tykes, our typical fantasy was apt to extended as far

as the commercial costume rack at the local five-and-dime allowed, or to have been neatly framed within the limited dimensions of Saturday morning T.V. As children of the Sixties and beyond, we grew up at a time when, in any given week, more fodder for the fantastic could be harvested from the fertile playing field of television than our parents in their youth could garner in a month of Sundays reading by lamplight and listening to Fibber McGee.

Fantasy, then, took on the shape of the times, becoming what I'll call *fan-tasy*: the propensity for television – and thereby television actors, producers, writers and directors – to construct the playground of the collective subconscious.

From the time I can first recall watching television, I experienced it not so much as a spectator sport as an invitation to interact, if only in my mind. I was never satisfied merely watching my favorite characters have adventures, suffer strife, and overcome challenges; I wanted to be there with them, offer my support, to march into the fray by their sides. To do this, I developed peripheral characters for all my favorite shows: a neighbor, a sister, a daughter, a friend. Then at night, as I lay awake in bed waiting for sleep and those other dreams that I couldn't control to claim me, I orchestrated my daydreams.

When I was in Kindergarten, Timmy wasn't the only kid on the farm who adventured with Lassie, and at seven, I distinctly recall being that *other* stowaway on the *Space Family Robinson's* sleek *Jupiter II*: a firecracker of a little girl conversing with Will and rescuing Penny from peril.

Till college days came along, I suffered under the lonely illusion that I must have been slightly deranged; surely no one else lived secret lives cavorting with pop culture heroes and heroines in the dark little corners of their mind? But with college came my good friend Mary, and with Mary arrived the sure knowledge that I was neither alone nor – at least not entirely – deranged. Soon our personal, peripheral characters to the number one sci-fi pop-culture icon of the Seventies had joined forces,

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The RPG Corner v4.5: Distractions in Gaming

by Doug >!< Roper of EPIC Gaming

Distractions, Distractions, Dis...uh...

What was I saying?

My sincere apologies to all of my loyal readers out there (both of you) for missing last month's *Illuminata*. Like Mr. Funk and Mr. Gramlich, I am navigating the post-hurricane trials as best I can, but discovered not long after the storm that one of my shelters, writing, was so much soggy kindling after the incredible emotional blow of the disaster. I wanted to record my feelings and thoughts about everything that was happening, but with so much to write about, I wasn't able to focus. I couldn't sustain anything of substance, and so I stopped altogether. It may not be such a surprise that the disaster scrambled my noodle to a point where I couldn't do something I enjoy, but as an aspiring writer...it's a little disconcerting to lose the ability, or desire, to create. There was too much going on for me to concentrate, which in hindsight led me to the subject of the first official post-hurricane RPG Corner (the September issue was written long before the storm): distractions in gaming.

Before I talk about the problems of distractions in gaming, I should preface this with what is becoming a standardized disclaimer. The problems I tend to talk about spring from my experiences in my own gaming group, and what I have observed or read about from other GMs, and they are from my perspective, i.e. they are from the point of view of a GM who enjoys running an **Actor / Immersive** model of game. I enjoy good role-playing, character and plot development, and exploring deeper issues through the medium of gaming. The single most important thing a GM can do for his sanity and his players' enjoyment is make sure that everyone wants and expects the same thing from the game that is being run.

My definition of a distraction is anything that causes a cessation or disruption of play. It may seem like I'm a bit of a tyrant in this respect, after all it's a game played among friends for recreation, so why worry if they chat about the new Harry Potter movie in the middle of a massive combat sequence at the climax of a WWII RPG? Well, I've noticed that as I get older, and as time for gaming shrinks and dwindles away, I'm really there to game and that's all I want to do.

Some GMs don't mind the little interruptions that occur, some refuse to allow them to happen, punishing players and characters if it does. The latter type of GM

probably shouldn't be gaming with other people. These types of micromanaging personalities are much better suited to channel their creative energies into a setting that they can control every aspect of, like writing. I'm a moderate, enjoying my serious games but not getting upset over the occasional brouhaha, despite my desire to remain focused. This column is more about understanding the distractions and disruptions than complaining about them.

I resigned myself to the inevitability of distractions and disruptions a long time ago. Otherwise I know that my enjoyment of the game would suffer. I have **Immersive** model players as well as **Hobby** and **Social** gamers in my group. While I myself prefer the **Immersive** model, I can't find many others who share my desire, and as a result I opened the current game to players that I knew were good, attentive players, but were also socially and recreationally oriented. If I were to be totalitarian in my governance and abolish all distraction, players would not have fun, and I'd be left with a game with no players. What good is that?

Disruptions come in both external and internal varieties. External ones are easier to deal with than internal ones. Ringing phones, interruptions from people not associated with the game, barking dogs, nosy cats, lawnmowers and anything else along these lines can lead to character breaks (moments where the players "break out" of their characters). A GM who wants to trim the external distractions to a minimum just needs to do a little preplanning. Make sure that the game takes place in an out of the way area if there are going to be non-gamers about. A private room or residence is great, and make sure that there aren't other potential environmental distractions about, such as televisions, Gameboys, or stereos. With the prevalence of cell phones nowadays, it may be hard to keep external distractions out of the game, especially if your players are a bit older, and professionals who have to be on call, or parents who are always on call.

Internal distractions are generated from the players themselves, and are rampant. Out of character conversations about non-game related issues are the most common, and harder to kill than roaches. It's just inevitable that friends are going to talk and chat, and that's fine, so long as they do it at appropriate times, and not in the middle of scenes which involve their characters directly. Usually a discreet request on the part of the GM is all that is needed to keep these

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Special Effects: Anthony Mark Viverito (part 3)

by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

From scratches on the side of a cave wall to glorious shades of pigment on canvas to computer graphic imaging (CGI), the desire to create and re-create what our mind sees is amazing, unique—illustrations of the mundane and fanciful that sends a message to humanity. We humans call it art. Sometimes the message seems for the artist alone, sometimes it combines to mural a warning or hope to others in symbols that bridge language barriers. The technological art form, HyperReal, uses symbols and pictures that are hard to misinterpret because the whole purpose is to recreate reality, sometimes as close as possible to the real thing, sometimes a caricature. But whether real or virtual, a table is still a table. But a table tends to be stationary. Still life art can have depth and dimension, but somehow we know it is still flat on a wall, a movie screen, television pixels or computer monitor.

However, when we see flying, yet stationary figures on that screen, it certainly captures our interest and beckons for a closer look. The Matrix movies did this for viewers. But, like most special effects, by the third movie, the sensationalism had already waned (like fashion) and by then, an industry given—if producers could budget enough money to be able to use effects like that, they did. Anthony Mark Viverito worked on all three Matrix movies and described some of the processes and terms, like “match moving” that are used in the special effects industry.

According to Anthony, any movie that has special effects in the computer has to do matching moving. Even in the real world, it’s the same; stop motion effects have to be matched so the models will “lock” into a plate. During our interview, he made it very clear that the special effects department has to study the effect carefully and take copious notes or viewers will notice that the effect is, well, an effect, and not real.

“In the computer, they create a camera movement that matches the same as the camera movement that was shot on the set. So in the computer using 3D programs, you have the ability to create a little camera. It’s like looking through the lens of a computer generated virtual camera—you can adjust the lens, the *f*-stop, focal length, etc., to match the notes taken by the special effects department when you’re on location about what the camera actually records.

“There are Locked-Off camera shots, and shots that move. Locked-off means it is on a tripod, it’s not moving. All you’re really doing is matching the position of the camera. It’s pretty easy; you place it with

a program and *solve* the camera to fine tune to make sure it’s dead on. Imagine you are shooting something on a blue screen and the camera is moving. There are orange track marks on the back of the blue screen, like cross-hairs, to mark where the action or effect should be. You can track it by hand, which is really hard, or you can use software, but even that [software] needs hand tweaking when you’re done.

“Camera notes and measurements are crucial; the camera is placed on the set in relation to the action. For example, you set up the camera five feet up from the ground because the camera notes taken during and after the shot note that the action or effect is seen by someone about five feet tall. The notes diagram how the camera was facing during the effect. If it is a fixed shot, it is better. But if you have movement, it’s harder and not a clear effect.

“In movies, it’s more difficult. You still have the blue screen background, and you also have a virtual one in the computer with track marks that are matched up. You’re making a little miniature set in the computer that aligns with points that match the model on the set. We use a special computer program that knows how to match these together, to *solve* it.

So, the pioneers in the special effects industry did it all by hand? Anthony assured me they did. I wished I had asked him just how long it took to do those painstakingly accurate effects without the use of computers. Anthony explained that it is different when you do stop-motion effects because you have to know how the camera was moving. “I’ve talked to Jim Dansworth and other animators and they agree: the camera has to slide around properly on the plate; it has to line up as if the object is standing on a table and the camera is moving around it.” Like match-moving, it’s done by hand and it can be tough.

“On the computer you create your environment that you try to match. You need dimensions to your objects in order to re-create a set or a room. You rely a lot on measurements, camera notes, track notes. The staff tries to give me as many track markers as possible, which sometimes you’re fighting because they don’t always give you enough. These people have to be on the set, on location, constantly taking notes and when things move very rapidly, they can’t always get you everything you need.”

I asked Anthony what skills he learned as a youth like literature, mathematics and science that he uses to do his job. He answered without hesitation that math

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The Writer's Block: By Example

by Charles Gramlich

It occurred to me that while I've talked at length in this column about issues such as punctuation, style, and grammar, I haven't really discussed an important element in actually submitting something for publication. That element is the "cover letter." It's generally the first thing an editor sees, and while it won't sell your piece on its own, it creates an impression that can either help or hinder you. If it's bad enough it might even get you rejected before the editor ever looks at your actual submission.

My best advice for the cover letter is to be clear, honest, at least semi-formal, and short. Even in this day of quick email contact, not everyone is your best friend and you shouldn't treat an editor as if he or she is a buddy. Remember that you are actually making a "business" contact with the editor. You want to sell them something. Do you like it when people who are trying to sell *you* something are long winded? Or cutesy? Don't you want them to get to the point? Don't you hate it when they try to trick you?

One way to get an idea for how to write a cover letter is to look at examples of ones that worked for another writer. Below are some that worked for me. I can't guarantee the same result for you, but I'll hope for the best. Note: my comments concerning the letters are in capitals. And remember that SASE is a "self addressed stamped envelope."

SAMPLE LETTER 1: FOR A POETRY SUBMISSION. IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANY PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS, LEAVE OUT PARAGRAPH 2.

March 24, 2000

Nick DiChario, Editor
HazMat Review
Box 507
Rochester, NY 14603

Dear Mr. DiChario:

I recently found the guidelines for *HazMat Review* in *Writer's Digest*, and I have some poems that I thought I would submit for your consideration. Any attention that you might give to them would be appreciated.

Some of my poetry has been published in magazines such as *Star*Line*, *Midnight Zoo*, *Rouge et Noir*, and in the anthology *Once Upon a Midnight*. A poem from the anthology received honorable mention in the 1996 *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*.

A SASE is enclosed and I ask that you please drop the pieces back in the mail to me if you find that you can't use them. I can also submit by e-mail, if that would be convenient. Thanks very much for your consideration and time.

Sincerely yours,
Charles A. Gramlich

SAMPLE LETTER 2: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF AN ACCEPTANCE. THE EDITOR HAD CHANGED SINCE THE GUIDELINES APPEARED IN WRITER'S DIGEST. I WOULD HAVE DOUBLE CHECKED ON THE WEB BUT AT THE TIME THIS MAGAZINE DIDN'T HAVE ANY WEB PRESENCE.

April 3, 2000

Norm Davis, Poetry Editor
HazMat Review
Box 507
Rochester, NY 14603

Dear Mr. Davis,

I'm glad you liked "Border." No problem from my end for you to hold onto it for a while. I appreciate your interest. I'll also be happy to see a sample issue of *HazMat Review*. I'm always looking for good magazines for myself, and to recommend to folks who read the kind of stuff I do.

Thanks again for accepting "Border," and for sending me a sample copy. I look forward to it. Good luck with everything.

Best wishes,
Charles

SAMPLE LETTER 3: FOR SUBMITTING A STORY. AGAIN, IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING PUBLISHED JUST LEAVE THE SECOND PARAGRAPH OUT.

January 20, 1998

Joe Monks, Editor
Agony in Black
CFD Productions
360-A W. Merrick Rd. #350
Valley Stream, NY 11580

Dear Mr. Monks:

I recently found the guidelines for *Agony in Black* in the *Gila Queen's Guide to Markets*, and enclosed is a story that I believe may fit those guidelines. I would like to submit it for your consideration. It's called "Wall of Love," and any attention that you might give to it would be appreciated.

Some of my stories have been published in magazines like *After Hours*, *Strange Days*, and *Dead of Night*, and in anthologies like *Dark Terrors*, *Dark Voices* and *Prisoners of the Night*.

An SASE is enclosed and I ask that you please drop the story back in the mail to me if you find that you can't use it. I can also submit on disk or by email, if either of those would be convenient. Thanks very much for your consideration and time.

Sincerely yours,
Charles A. Gramlich

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Talent: A Natural Ability of a Superior Quality

by Gary William

Recently, I researched a few of the speculative fiction greats, whose writings silenced the cynics and firmly established its literary value. Not their novels, novelettes and stories—I've already read them a number of times—but what they wrote and said outside of their genre and profession. As a result, I was reminded of something I witnessed years ago...

I had been asked to speak at an AMFI fundraiser in Georgia. After I and a few other speakers were finished, a heavyset, middle-aged woman, named Avilla, took the stage and began to sing. She chose gospel music. And she was incredible! She was Aretha Franklin, Whitney Houston, and Selena, all at the same time. Everyone—I mean, everyone—great and small alike, were on their feet whistling and clapping. When the thundering accolade had exhausted itself, an elderly woman's words rose above the dying clamor. "Lady," she yelled. "If I see you in Hell, I'll pour gasoline on you!" For a moment the silence reigned so completely you could have heard an angel's feather flutter. Then the crowd—recalling Avilla's heavenly voice—clapped again: softer, but longer.

No one had ever heard of Avilla, and no one ever would. For all her innate ability, her life-circumstances had closed the door on that sort of success. And she didn't seem to mind. Many of those who applauded her, spent their lives scrambling to make their talent pay ... and there was Avilla; doing it for free!

I think Avilla already understood the double edge of the old woman's praise. If you have a special ability, a gift in any particular field, its only real value is in sharing it. In allowing others to appreciate it. When, instead, the gift becomes the main source of appreciating yourself—you devalue and demean it.

The word talent denotes a superior endowment ... but it doesn't mean you're superior to everyone in everything. Just because you have a remarkable way of saying things, doesn't mean you have anything remarkable to say: or that suddenly, having attained success and adoration (which is more accurately, envy), you hold the final word on politics, religion, childcare and cooking.

If you have a real talent, use it and share it, but retain your perspective, your humility. Don't get carried away with yourself ... Or tell yourself that you had something more than Avilla and that's why you're at the top. There are six and a half billion people on our planet. No matter how famous you are, at least five

billion of them never heard of you *either*; and never will. And there are thousands of Avilla's out there: as good as, or even better, than those who receive the awards and acclaim ... Talents in every field who are never noticed or commended. Perhaps—for the rare few who do make it—it would be wise to remember that.

I've stopped researching my 'heroes': it was making it hard to appreciate their extraordinary ability to turn words into an actual experience. I have, however, been watching the hardhat outside my office—in the fifteen-ton, twenty-four by eight, Caterpillar backhoe—tearing up a section of the parking lot. There are no less than thirty-two cars parked there, with a glass-fronted office building at the back end and two extensive mailbox peninsulas in the front. The Caterpillar has barely eighteen inches of clearance on any given side; yet, time and again, the man makes that giant bulk dig through the asphalt and turn to drop a massive portion into a construction dumpster just beyond the mailboxes, as though he was taking out the trash after dinner. I stare: flabbergasted by the skill and confidence revealed in every move. Amazed that this construction worker can give a fifteen-ton piece of equipment the grace and fluidity of a Thoroughbred.

Yesterday, when I left, I nodded at the guy in appreciation.

I don't know his name ... and I probably never will.

T-Press Update

We are happy to announce that pre-production on *Beacons of Tomorrow* has resumed. In fact, we hope to have the anthology ready for press by its original release date of February 1, 2006.

Pre-production on *Jewel of Truth* has resumed as well, but there will be some delays while we finalize the cover art and give the text a final proof. We had more work to do with this project than we did on the anthology, and it's been hard to get all the necessary people together since Hurricane Katrina. As SF fans, we appreciate how frustrating it can be when readers must wait indefinitely for the next title in a series to be released. We ask for your patience and thank you for your understanding. The Boundary's Fall series will continue, and rumor has it that Mr. Funk is already working on the next installment, *Forge of Faith*.

Reviews

The Last Guardian of Everness

John C. Wright

Tor, 2004

\$25.95, Hardcover, 332 pgs.

ISBN 0-312-84871-4

Review by D. L. Parker

Nowadays we tend to lump science fiction, fantasy and horror under the generic umbrella of "speculative fiction", but it still seems to me that the three genres, at their respective bests, have different objectives. Science fiction, as its best, expresses *ideas*, whether expressed in the form of the "hard" sciences (the physics or mathematics of an Asimov or Greg Bear work, for example) or the "soft" (sociological visions such as those crafted by, say, George Orwell). Horror is there to tweak our gut, to shake us out of our complacency, to rattle the curtains and to show us there *is* something out there in the primeval darkness.

Fantasy, on the other hand, is probably the hardest to define in terms of its objectives. My Webster's Dictionary defines *fantasy* with phrases such as *imagination* and *unreal*. Perhaps the best definition of it *is* exactly that. Fantasy is the pure expression of the imagination, the opening of our eyes to those scenes that never will be or never can be, the immersion of the reader in the highly detailed world that they and the author alone create between them.

Given that definition, John C. Wright's *The Last Guardian of Everness* is, indeed, fantasy of the highest order. Some fantastic worlds are small and cozy: Oz, for example (a world that, as a child, I was *determined* to visit). Others are too familiar. Too many of the genre's fantastic worlds are built out of component parts so stereotypical they should evoke only wincing by this time: elf... dwarf... smart-ass thief... old but powerful wizard (a stereotype that has been around since Malory wrote about Merlin and Shakespeare about Prospero, in fact). I could go on, but there are too many pseudo-medieval, pseudo-knightly fantasies around to name, (even though some have been done by good writers, Tolkien not the least of them).

But Wright's fantasy is a little different. Its world has a breathless depth and scope. It gives the sense, as some of Lord Dunsany's, or Alan Garner's, or William Hope Hodgson's writings do, of a universe where the world of men is a small part of an incomprehensible vastness; of strangeness on the dark side of the moon; of infinite voids and beings too alien to comprehend. Dream-colts and shape-changers and storm-kings inhabit this world. The description we read is marvelous and fantastic indeed, and one of the pleasures of reading it is the new spin Wright gives on some of the old archetypes. Yet the story also connects to our time, which is, from reading Wright's comments on the back

of the book, certainly deliberate. The heroes of this story are people who share our values and culture.

Humanity is, indeed, the hero of this story. If I had to pick one myth that I suspect inspired Wright's story, I would suspect the Prometheus myth. Prometheus was the Titanic savior who gave fire to mankind. One does get the impression from reading the early myths that the gods were rather *too* happy with a dependant and backward humanity. The gods might punish those mortals who reach too high and call it *hubris*, but mortals were pretty happy to build their own fires, all the same, without having to petition Zeus for a convenient lightning bolt to cook the latest porker. Wright poses us a story of a humanity posed between unspeakably powerful forces of good and evil. One's going to drive the Earth into a horror of misery and darkness; the other's going to wipe the slate clean and start over with a pretty new world for a few lucky loyalists. Is it any wonder humanity starts thinking of pinching a few fires for themselves in this tale?

In *The Last Guardian of Everness*, *hubris* abounds. Young Galen is the still-weedy, rashly brave scion of a family that has kept a seaward eye peeled for the rise of the Evil One for generations. His house perches on the seashore in modern Maine, (due to a few miscalculations his ancestors made, which resulted in their eviction from Olde England), and one night, Galen gets the Sign. The monsters are on their way. The faith has gotten thin, and there's just young Galen and his crusty old grandfather holding down the beachhead, so Galen decides to do something bold and foolhardy. As his grandfather remarks to him, no good ever came to a hero who ignored his grandfather's advice. Galen finds out the hard way, of course, that *hubris* gets punished, and sometimes trusting someone is your own death warrant.

One of the things I enjoyed most about this story was the sense that magic, and decisions, have their own costs; that whatever we decide to do, we must abide by the consequences of our own deeds and decisions. No one *thinks* of him or her self as evil, perhaps; but when we do evil deeds, we will certainly, in one way or another, pay for those deeds. There's no free lunch; there's no perpetual motion machine; there's no action without its fateful consequences, from heeding reptilian advice on eating apples on down through history. More than Galen learn that in this story.

I need to recommend this story to those of you who have read and enjoyed Wright's *The Golden Age* trilogy. I'm not given to hyperbole in my reviews, but certainly, I never intend to miss any John C. Wright story I see on the bookshelf. Since *The Last Guardian* ends in a very annoying cliff-hanger, you can bet I'll be looking for the sequel!

Reviews

Children of the Serpent Gate

Sarah Ash

Bantam, Oct 2005

\$23.00, Hardcover, 528 pp.

ISBN 0553382128

Review by Harriet Klausner

The Emperor Eugene is Drakhaoul (daemon) possessed a situation he wanted to happen so that he would have all the power of his most bitter enemy Gavril Nagarian who is also possessed by a daemon. He tries to keep the daemon in check for when it is in control someone dies because it needs to drink human blood. Now that the King Enguerrand of Francia has the five Tears of Artamon, he lays claim to the entire Rossiyan Empire, but Eugene is not about to give up his throne without a fight.

He offers Gavril and his men pardons if they recover the most powerful magus in the world Kaspar Linnaius from a Francian jail. Gavril rescues the mage in his dragon form and take him to the home of his lover Kirkiu, However the magus behaves like a senile old man. Kirkiu is now an old woman after traveling too long in the Realm of Shadows. She and Kaspar must bathe in the Jade River to recover her youth and his mind providing that the Guardian grants them these gifts. Eugene must battle Enguerrand's forces if he wants to keep his throne and then he must join forces with Gavril to make sure the serpent gate doesn't open and let the most powerful daemon of all out. If they fail, hell will come to the mortal plane.

Book Three of the Tears of Artamon series ties up all the loose ends, explains the origins of the daemons and gives the reader a chance to see two mortal enemies work together for the good of the realm. Sword and Sorcery fans, high fantasy enthusiasts and readers who want to be enthralled in the tradition of Mercedes Lackey and Robin Hobb will find *Children of the Serpent Gate* a memorable reading experience.

Poison Study

Maria V. Snyder

Luna, Oct 2005

\$13.99, Trade Paper, 350 pp.

ISBN 0373802307

Review by Harriet Klausner

Yelena has been locked in the dungeon under deplorable conditions for almost a year, waiting for her execution. Even though she killed Reyad

in self-defense, the Code of Behavior punishes the murderer even though there is cause for the crime to be committed. When Yelena is brought before Valek the Commander's chief spymaster and assassin, he gives her a chance since she is the next prisoner due to be executed. An opening for a taste tester for the Commander is available and Yelena eagerly accepts the position.

Valek has poisoned her and she must take the antidote each day thus preventing her escape. Reyad's father, General Brazell wants Yelena dead but Valek prevents numerous attempts on her life. Meanwhile Brazell sends candy to the commander that he eats several times a day; over time Valek and Yelena notice a change come over their leader but are unable to find any evidence that Brazell is poisoning or enchanting the Commander. When they travel to Brazell's home, a trap is sprung and the outcome will determine who rules the realm. Yelena, now aware of her magical abilities, must fight a trained magician who has had time to strengthen his position and see his plans come to completion.

The heroine, an orphan who doesn't know her heritage, is a strong willed person able to take the pain life throws at her and remains a good hearted person giving love and loyalty to those who deserve it. *Poison Study* is rich in character development and action scenes and many of the battles take place in the magical arena. Valek is an interesting character, more so then Yelena, because he hides behind a mask so that readers wonder what motivates him while Yelena wears her heart on her sleeve. Maria V. Snyder makes readers believe in her world and the characters she creates, a writer's form of magic.

We are alone, absolutely alone
on this chance planet: and, amid
all the forms of life that surround
us, not one, excepting the dog,
has made an alliance with us.

— Maurice Maeterlinck

Reviews

Masterpieces of Terror and the Supernatural Ed. by Marvin Kaye

Doubleday & Company, 1995

\$15.95, Hardcover, 622 pgs.

ISBN 0-385-18549-9

Review by D. L. Parker

Do something nice for yourself this Halloween (*Sorry folks, lack of an October newsletter made this review come late – Bret*). First, confiscate half the kids' candy collection: chocolate is more appreciated by adults. Next, get hold of Marvin Kaye's monster collection of horror stories, kick the fire into wake-up, and cocoon in your oldest and most comfortable chair with said monster anthology in one hand and your favorite libation in the other fist. Don't come back up for air until it's after midnight. Go to bed with visions of monsters dancing in your head. Or maybe you should leave all the lights on and wait until morning... Well, actually only a few of the stories in this collection are *truly* shivery, but there's plenty to keep you absorbed until the wee hours, all the same.

First we have the famous writers who were not always known for their forays into the horror genre. Ogden Nash contributes a typically humorous, take-ye-heed story of a sinister thirteenth floor. Dylan Thomas contributes a subtle, religious-themed, poetic story entitled *The Tree*. Tennessee Williams's story *The Vengeance of Nitocris* was written when he was only sixteen (to my delight, Williams apparently went through a purple prose phase).

Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Bottle Imp* is funny and tightly written, though probably over-used in anthologies. Damon Runyon contributes his usual tough-guy tale, *The Informal Execution of Soupbone Pew*. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Christmas Banquet* is a little hard to get through for modern readers from just the dated style of the prose, but *The Flayed Hand*, Guy de Maupassant's brief story, is quite readable.

Patricia Highsmith, who is a modern author with plenty of practice writing suspense novels, contributes humorous *The Quest for Blank Claveringi*, which will give you a different outlook on snails altogether. Stanley Ellin, another modern suspense author, contributes *The Question*, one of the most thoughtful in the collection. Jack London does a sort of *Cask of the Amontillado* spin between country neighbors with *The Moon Face*. Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Black Wedding* is a psychological horror story and one of the most effective in the collection. There are more by famous authors, including Saki (H. H. Munro) and others, but they're too numerous to itemize.

Of course we have the well-known giants of the horror genre, too. Bram Stoker's *Dracula's Guest* rightly kicks off the anthology. (This story, for those of you who are Dracula connoisseurs, is the one that originated the famous phrase *the dead travel fast*). Edgar Allen Poe's *Hop-Frog* is sinister, sly and blackly humorous, a combination not many writers could carry off. The famous ghost-story writer LeFanu contributes a long-winded but atmospheric lesbian vampire tale, *Carmilla*. *The Music of Erich Zahn* represents Lovecraft's usual over-wrought but effective monstrous-and-mysterious universe theme. Mary Shelley's story *The Transformation* plays mind-games with its readers and its hero-villain. Robert Bloch is a well-known horror genre writer who contributes *The Hungry House*, one of the more standard-horror-shtick stories in the group.

Science fiction and fantasy authors are well represented here as well, which was one of the pleasures of this collection. The anthology includes works that I at least was mostly not familiar with from Theodore Sturgeon, Tanith Lee, Orson Scott Card, Craig Shaw Gardner, Robert Aickman, Parke Godwin, Richard Matheson ("*Twilight Zone*") and M. Lucie Chin.

The focus of the anthology is certainly more on psychological horror than blood-and-guts. I do wonder why Kafka, the absolute master, is not represented. I at least find his works the most disturbing I have ever read. Nor is Gene Wolfe represented among the modern science fiction writers, although his *Island of Dr. Death* stories, as well as others, are chilling masterworks. But many of the stories in this collection have a humorous slant to them. I suspect Kafka and Gene Wolfe were just too chilling for this editor. I can't say I'd like to read *In the Penal Colony* before bedtime either: surely the greatest monsters wear a human face, and no one shows us that more effectively than Kafka.

So, which stories get the prize here? Singer's *The Black Wedding* and Orson Scott Card's *Eumenides in the Fourth Floor Lavatory* are tied for the honor of the most chilling in the collection. Crowding on their heels are Robert Aickman's enigmatic but compelling story *The Hospice*, *Graveyard Shift* by Richard Matheson, and *The Question* by Stanley Ellin. Except for Singer, who is, of course, one of the greatest short story writers of all time in my opinion, all of my remaining best-of authors listed here are relatively modern. There's no doubt modern authors do it as well... or better... than the old-timers.

This is not a new book, but it's a good one to check out or to buy for your home collection. At over 600 pages, you have a lot of reading. Recommended for Walpurgis Night or any other. Enjoy!

Reviews

Song of Unmaking

Caitlin Brennan

Luna, Oct 2005

\$13.95, Trade Paper, 400 pp.

ISBN 0373802323

Review by Harriet Klausner

Euan Rohe, a Caletanni barbarian almost brought the Empire and the Emperor to its knees during the Great Dance. Valeria, a rider of the wild stallions who are gods made flesh, finished the Dance with her own and seven other stallions and for a time war was averted. Valeria returns to the mountain for more training while Euan escapes to his homeland and allies himself with Gothard, the baseborn son of the Emperor who wants to Unmake his father's empire.

War is coming and the Emperor, his warriors and his mages are at the border waiting for the right time to strike out at their enemy. Gothard has a stone that has the power to Unmake, once he knows how to use it. Valeria and her lover Kerrick, with their stallion gods travel to the battleground to stop Gothard before he starts using the stone's power to crush the Emperor's forces. Partners in love and battle Kerrick and Valeria perform a Dance unlike any dance the stallions performed, one that will determine the fate of the Empire.

This is the second book in this magnificent romantic fantasy series (See *The Mountain's Call*) and it is full of more action, romance and drama than its prequel. The love Kerrick and Valeria feel for each other is tested by secrets he keeps from his lover and the wounds that refuse to heal, both magical and physical, inflicted on him by his half-brother. The battle scenes are magnificent, the characters are realistic and the storyline is pure magic; readers will eagerly await the next book in this tantalizing series.

The Narrows

Alexander C. Irvine

Del Rey, Oct 2005

\$13.95, Trade Paper, 352 pp.

ISBN 0345466985

Review by Harriet Klausner

During WWII in Detroit, Jared Cleaves is unable to serve in the military due to a hand injury he suffered as a child that leaves him 4-F. Jared is embarrassed to stay behind among mostly women and children as he feels healthy enough to fight in spite of his hand and wants to help his home country in the war.

The Office of Esoteric Investigation selects Jared to work on the Top Secret Ford golem project aptly dubbed "Frankenline". However, he still remains depressed that he cannot enter the war zone as he desperately wants to share the dangerous load most males and the golems must bear. Pushing to become deeper involved, Jared soon realizes he may have leaned too hard on a weird door when he becomes a key player in a scheme to tap into the supernatural power of imps that "live" underneath the Motor City. However, he soon concludes that these supernatural creatures are impossible to control and will run rampant throughout Detroit unless Jared can stop them.

The Narrows is a fabulous alternate historical fantasy that provides a wild ride through 1943 Detroit as the Nazis look like kindergarten students when compared to the imp storm troopers. The story line is action-packed from start to finish, but driving the plot is the wonderful Jared who just feels he must do more than he is doing. When he gets his wish and meets up with the underground and some weird Feds, he learns plenty of lessons about receiving what you ask for. The supernatural creatures seem natural adding to a fine thriller, but the besieged Jared keeps the fabulous tale together.

King's Blood

Judith Tarr

Roc, Oct 2005

\$16.00, Trade Paper, 384 pp.

ISBN 0451460456

Review by Harriet Klausner

When the Saxons converted to Christianity, the Old Magic of Britain that kept it alive started dying. When the Norman conquerors came, Britain for a time began to heal because William and his wife followed the Old Ways. When Mathilda died, William turned his back on magic and with his death, a king sits on the throne who can see but wants nothing to do with magic.

The darkness is spreading again and the magic is dying out. The guardians are short one number because a priest denies the Old Ways and follows Christianity. The princess of Scotland, Edith, and Prince Henry, the English king's brother, are filled with and accept the magic that is a part of them. With England under siege from all sides the time is coming for a great sacrifice that if not made will cause Britain to suffer the same fate as Atlantis.

Judith Tarr weaves a web of historical facts and imbues them with a touch of enchantment so that a pivotal event in history is made possible by sorcery. This glimpse into a past that once existed comes about because many minor magical rites and especially one major one cause the essential moment that magic made history. This romantic fantasy is full of action, otherworldly creatures and the need for the champions to prove brave and victorious otherwise Britain will be destroyed.

Reviews

The Hallowed Hunt **Lois McMaster Bujold**

Haper-Collins, 2005
\$24.95, Hardcover, 470 pgs.
ISBN 0-06-057462-3
Review by D. L. Parker

Have you ever read a book where something in the story intrigued you so much you had fantasies of having a wonderful *argument* with either the author or a character in the story? Two of the characters in Bujold's latest book, *The Hallowed Hunt*, had such fun arguing with each other that they in fact, still wrangling, married and argued happily ever after. Good arguments require some philosophical meat, liquid lubrication (coffee or tea still being the best, as arguments sliding on alcoholic lubrication don't have steady legs), and a sense of humor – better yet, a lively sense of the *ridiculous* – all around the table. I love to picture those long-ago clerics who disputed so fiercely about the number of angels who could dance on the head of a pin around a table, waving their crosiers and their mugs of whatever the local Byzantine watering hole served as they made their point. No doubt it's wishful thinking on my part: I know from history that people died over theological issues as seemingly irrelevant as whether to bless with two fingers instead of three. But I can't help but picture us - myself, double-shot decaf latte in hand; fat, pregnant Hallana, the churchly Divine, wishing she could have a beer; her argumentative husband, Learned Oswin - seated around that graffiti-scored wooden pub table, while we thump the table and fervently disagree...

That's because very few writers bother to present a coherent moral, theological, or philosophical system in their stories nowadays. Oh, there's adventure and romance in Bujold's latest book, which features a mysterious sorcerer, power politics between both humans and gods, and a couple who are mad for each other when the hero *isn't* actively trying to kill the heroine (he's bespelled, of course). Normal stuff, I suppose. But the book's more unique aspect is its dense depiction of its religious systems. There's a feel of Catholicism, as if the story were inspired by Katherine Kurtz; there's also a feel of *voodoo* - animal spirits, possessions, and demons riders, no less – to it. There are moral issues of free will; there is a tormented, undying king who effectively defies

the gods (small “g” gods, who seem to need human intervention to just to steer dying souls to the right afterlife. Last Rites should be taken seriously in this story!). Even if some of it doesn't quite hang together by my books (remember my day-dreams of that coffee-house discussion) it's a novel and ambitious undertaking.

All of this provides background for a tale that begins with an almost-rape. Lady Ijada is abandoned by her jealous mistress, the Princess, into the lustful power of bad Prince Boleso. But it is a rape of a different sort the prince has in mind. He collects the souls of animals. But the leopard soul he intends to take into himself, via his dark rite, is diverted into the would-be sacrificial victim Ijada when she clubs the prince to death with a nearby war hammer. (Good for her).

Lord Ingrey kin Wolfcliff, who himself was forced to receive the soul of a wolf as a child, arrives to take charge of the defiant lady and conduct her to her trial. But something's not quite right with Lord Ingrey, either. He's surely smitten by the lady, but something keeps making his try to *smite* her, too... a powerful geas placed by an unknown sorcerer. Can Ingrey and Ijada survive to Live Happily Ever After? (Make a guess).

The book's most frustrating aspect, to me, was its failure to do more with one of the pivotal characters. I won't spoil the surprise (although it's not hidden long) by naming the actual character, but he is a king who intends to defy the gods and end the curse of his forced immortality at any price. His pride is almost Luciferan; certainly, he is at least a defiant Flying Dutchman, unyielding and tormented to the end. I wish the author had used such a clearly complex and intriguing person more effectively than she does. Our anti-hero gets far less showtime than he deserves. Well, I suppose the best villains are the ones we hate to see bow off the stage. Ms. Bujold, *couldn't* we persuade you to bring this unhallowed king back again for the sort of show he *really* deserves? (Sequels work for Dracula, dark hero of ten thousand Bram Stoker imitations! Just think what you might start here!)

The Hallowed Hunt is set in the world of Bujold's previous works *Paladin of Souls* and *The Curse of Chalion*, so if you haven't ventured there yet, you have some easy-chair-and-munchies reading time ahead of you. Enjoy!

Reviews

The Invisible Ring

Anne Bishop

Penguin, 2000

\$7.50, Mass Market, 398 pgs.

ISBN 0-451-45802-8

Review by D. L. Parker

One of the first science-fiction books I ever read was Jacqueline Lichtenberg's classic Sime-Gen novel, "The House of Zeor". It was issued in a cheap paperback edition which had enough editorial errors for even my teenybopper self to notice, and as far as I know, it's never won any awards. Most probably don't remember it now.

But there's a reason why Lichtenberg's stories of those tentacle-festooned characters have become cult classics for some people. I think it's because the Sime-Gen stories read like the author wrote them in... an *obsessive-compulsive fit*. Her characters suffer from a complex biological compulsion that makes drug addiction – or vampirism – sound sweet. Their physiology and its psychological ramifications are depicted with neurotic thoroughness. You can tell the author could have written her own medical treatise on their condition and well might have, as background material.

You might deduce from this little story that when a writer has a really complex, really *different* system to present to the reader, whether it's biological, ethical, technological or socio-political, it pays to approach the writing with that obsessive-compulsive *conviction*. Because if *you*, the creator, don't invest in your imaginary world with utter intensity, why should your reader?

Thus I give Anne Bishop's story, "The Invisible Ring", mixed marks. She gets points for hinting at a complex socio-political system of power and caste. She gets demerits for not being obsessive enough in the details. She gets points for the powerful start of the story, which then flops into turgid romance cliché and then tries, with only limited success, to get back on its knees again at the end. *Obsession*, Anne. That's your key word. *Try* for it.

The story starts out with promise. Jared is a powerful but enslaved Warlord (one of the aforementioned castes) who's been used and degraded until he's driven to murder. Having killed his former Queen and her Warlord Prince, he's no longer choice meat at the market. He's facing the salt mines in spite of his pretty face and buff bod, and as the story opens, he's seriously considering going out in a blaze of destructive glory as an alternative.

But his manacled self finds an unexpected buyer. It's a mysterious Queen, one who wears the powerful Gray

Jewel. There are rumors about her, one being that her slaves never seem to show up again. The man who killed another Queen is soon faced with the choice of deserting or saving his new lady at the extreme risk of his own life. But there's something, indeed, very mysterious about this seemingly disguised Queen, who *looks* old, but doesn't *feel* old, not to Jared...

Unfortunately the power of the characters – Jared and his Gray Queen – is diluted in the middle part of the book with what I can only describe as execrable lover-to-lover baby talk. The powerful Queen we met at the start of the story gets menstrual cramps and gets "pissy" (as the author describes it) and throws boots in a petty PMS fit. She loses her dignity and authority as Queen and turns into a babe. The coy exchanges where Jared cajols his "Lady Grumpy" to get her nightgown on and worries about back-rubs emasculate the intriguingly volcanic and defiant Warlord we met at the start of the story. We descend into romance clichés, right down to the inevitable sex scene embellished with nouveau paranormal flourishes, and we just can't seem to climb out of the rose-petal pit again.

There are hints here and there of what might have been. There's a fascinating character called the Sadist I wish we'd seen more of (though alarmingly, he, too, is longing desperately for the Perfect Woman who will one day suddenly appear on his lovelorn horizon. While he waits through the centuries he exercises his talents on various substitutes, honoring his love-to-be with his noble flaccidity – he refuses to Get It Up for anyone but Her. *Um*, what if she turns out to have squint eyes? Or thin hair?). There are intriguing hints about Warlord Princes and their knife-edge nature. The caste-Jewel system is interesting, if underdeveloped (that lack of obsession in the details again).

I'd be willing to read other stories in the "Black Jewels" series in the hope that the author can pull off what she almost-but-didn't-quite in this one. I would hope she manages to transcend the romance stereotypes next time, and that she does a better job with her villain (who is just so, *so* nakedly bad in this one that she isn't interesting: Dorothea, the All-Bad Witch, is your standard unredeemed sadist/tyrant. Who still thinks this makes an effective – or *interesting* – ruler?).

"The Invisible Ring" is a decent enough paranormal romance... I was just hoping for a little more, given that I suspect the author could pull it off. Lay off the wince-inducing man-woman byplay a bit, Ms. Bishop, burnish the details of your imaginary world, and remember that key word – *obsession!*

I Wanna Be (con't)

developed a life, a language, and adventures of their own – ones entirely distinguished from the universe which spawned them – and went on decades later to become an entirely independent series of sci-fantasy novels penned with professional publication in mind.

Yet, what of those characters we all create who never grow apart from the roots of their origin? They, my friends, populate a world we call fanfic. Of fanfic I have spoken before, defending what I perceive as its purity and devotion of purpose, if not exactly lauding its paucity of literary quality. But if college taught me I wasn't alone in my appreciation for *fan-tasy*, the advent of the Internet has taken this knowledge to new heights; *fan-tasy*, it seems – and the passionate proliferation of fanfic it fosters – is everywhere.

Because no man is an island, fanfic proves a logical progression from *fan-tasy*. People (fans) want to share. They want to share their insights about characters others know – whether those characters hail from movies, novels or television – as well as share new characters into whom they have lovingly breathed life and meaning.

The characters that fanfictionalists create for personal enjoyment – as well as those they create to share with others – and the choice of characters with whom they've been created to interact can surely speak volumes about the fanfictionalist's psyche. But more than anything they lend us common ground: a playground for minds long past Playdoh and Pacman yet never past *play*, itself. Yes, in the final analysis, fanfic is a form of play. And, as with any playing field, there will be those who play exceptionally well and those who can only ever aspire. There will also be bullies imposing their will and their rules upon others.

If the play's the thing, though, have at it.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I've a few chores at the Ponderosa that I can't put off any longer.

Interview (con't)

is always a good thing to know. "And, sometimes, it just takes a good eye. It's not easy for me. Match-moving was the hardest thing I've done; I still find it challenging because that match-move has to be perfect or the animation that is put into it will look like it is sliding around. It has to be dead on."

Next month Anthony reveals one of the true tricks to the success of an animator—software and how it is used in movies, gaming and animation.

RPG Corner (con't)

disruptions down. The second most common, in my experience is the interruption of a player whose character isn't currently involved in a scene. Both of these types of distraction seems to happen because of boredom. It falls on the GM to make sure that the players are as engaged as possible, for as much of the time as is possible. However, it can't all be put on the GM. Players should understand that they will not be involved in everything all of the time, and they should be respectful enough to keep the chatter down so as not to interfere with the other players. A player who habitually causes problems and will not stop even after a talk is not going to fit into the game, and despite being a great person, isn't the right player for you.

Another issue that can lead to distraction is player discomfort. Hunger, thirst or being uncomfortable with the temperature can cause players to lose focus and think of other things. Having refreshments on hand can help control this (but players shouldn't expect the GM to provide all of this himself). I have a player who is always cold, and having a sweatshirt on hand kept the environment from pulling her out of the game.

So, most GMs (I hope) have patience for the odd breakdown, because no matter the subject matter, no matter the level of player involvement or GM preparation, distractions will happen. Sometimes, a disruption can be necessary, and GM's should not worry if the players suddenly break into laughter or giggles during extremely tense moments. Laughter is a mechanism for dealing with stress that players use a lot, because there isn't usually a physical outlet for them. Take this nervous outburst for what it really means, that the players have an emotional investment in the game and are anxious to see how it turns out, and not for what it looks like, your players laughing at your carefully constructed climax. Of course, if the players are carrying on and laughing out of turn and basically ignoring your game, then perhaps RPGs aren't what your circle needs to pass the time.

I hope this will let other GMs out there know that a little goofing off is to be expected, and will let players know that too much goofing off really does damage the quality of the experience that the GM is attempting to create. Finding a good balance with the players and GM, as well as with the material, will go a long way to increasing the enjoyment of everyone.

I had a witty closing remark that was supposed to go here...but the phone rang and then the cat started clawing the couch and, well...you know.

Writer's Block (con't)

SAMPLE LETTER 4: ANOTHER POETRY SUBMISSION LETTER, TO AN EDITOR I'VE ALREADY SOLD SOMETHING TO.

September 26, 2000

Michael Pendragon, Editor-in-Chief
Songs of Innocence
PO Box 719
Radio City Station
NY, NY 10101-0719

Dear Mr. Pendragon (Michael),

I've been checking out your website(s) over the past few weeks and came upon the description and guidelines for *Songs of Innocence*. I thought I might submit the two enclosed poems for your consideration. They are free verse but I think they fall within the general "romantic" guidelines for the publication. Any attention you might give to them would be appreciated.

An SASE is enclosed, and I thank you very much for your time.

Best wishes,
Charles A. Gramlich

SAMPLE LETTER 5: THIS IS A REQUEST FOR GUIDELINES FOR A MAGAZINE OR CONTEST. IT'S OFTEN A GOOD IDEA TO SEND FOR THESE FIRST, TO CHECK AND SEE WHETHER YOUR STUFF FITS, AND JUST TO MAKE CONTACT AND SHOW YOU ARE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING THEIR NEEDS.

Guideline Request

November 27, 2000

Lori Fraind
11027 Becontree Lake Drive
Apt. 303wd
Reston, VA 20190

Dear Ms. Fraind:

I wonder if you might send me your submission guidelines. An SASE is enclosed and I thank you for your time.

Sincerely yours,
Charles A. Gramlich

SAMPLE LETTER 6: HERES A LETTER FOR A STORY SUBMISSION I DID BY EMAIL.

January 10, 2001

Jack Fisher, Editor/Publisher
Flesh and Blood

Dear Mr. Fisher:

I recently found the guidelines for *Flesh and Blood* in *Inklings*, and attached to this letter is a story that I believe may fit your guidelines. It's called "Haunting Place," and any attention that you might give to it would be appreciated.

Some of my stories have been published in magazines like *After Hours*, *Strange Days*, and *Dead of Night*, and in anthologies like *Dark Terrors*, *Dark Voices* and *Prisoners of the Night*.

Thanks very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Charles A. Gramlich

THEN THE STORY IS EITHER ATTACHED TO YOUR EMAIL, OR COPIED INTO THE BODY OF THE EMAIL ITSELF. MAKE SURE TO CHECK THE GUIDELINES TO SEE WHICH ONE THE MAGAZINE WANTS.

Now, just to help ease your worries, the first story I ever sold was to a magazine called *Twisted*, and I did everything wrong in the cover letter. Good material has a good chance of selling. Just don't prejudice the editor against you if you can help it.

A work belongs in the genre of science fiction if its narrative world is at least somewhat different from our own, and if that difference is apparent against the background of an organized body of knowledge.

— Eric S. Rabkin