



The Illuminata

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

A Few Things Learned From Editing An Anthology

By Bret Funk

As many of you know, Tyrannosaurus Press and the Illuminata recently sponsored an anthology of speculative fiction. What you may not have known is that as a volunteer for both, I agreed to act as editor and liaison between the contributors and the judges from the contest. The experience, while trying at times, is one that I remember more fondly than not, and I thought this might be the perfect forum to share some insights I've had from the process.

1. Writers can be touchy.

I should have known this one already, since I, too, can be touchy about the things I write. The process for the anthology was simple: stories went through a round of peer review by the judging panel, corrections and suggestions were compiled, and I relayed the "edited" version back to the author. While spelling and grammatical corrections were required (unless they could be proved to be essential to the story) content changes were left to the discretion of the author. Our goal was not to strip the creativity from the creator but to share our thoughts and experience with the intention of creating a better story.

For the most part, we were successful, but in a few cases, ego, pride, and/or self-esteem made the road a little rocky. It's hard to sit there and read comment after comment about your story, even when the whole picture really boils down to a handful of problems repeated throughout a work. It's easy to think that the comments are personal, or that they are an attack against one's writing. Which, in the case of the anthology, could not have been farther from the truth. The stories that we had major issues with or that we thought could not be improved with a minimal amount of work never made it to the peer review process.

Authors need to expect and learn to take criticism, especially if they plan on letting other people read what they write. What I suggest is this: read a reviewer's comments, take a day or two to fume about how wrong the reviewer is, and then sit back down and take a serious look at your work. Really try to put yourself into the role of a reader and then see if you agree or disagree with the reviewer's thoughts. If you do, make the change; if you don't, forget about it. Even reviewers can be wrong!

2) Editors can be touchy.

This one was a new one for me, since it was the first time I stood on the opposite side of the coin (except for editing a few friends' works, that is). When I spent hours compiling a list of specific and general items that I felt could be worked on to improve a story, researched grammar rules and word definitions to make sure my suggestions were not flawed, set all of those complaints down in an orderly manner and not only stated what I thought could be improved but offered an explanation as to why I thought it needed to be, and then had to sit back and read rants about how I knew nothing about writing and how the publishing industry worked, it made me just as mad as if some stupid editor had criticized one of my works. (I didn't have to read many rants, by the way, but the few that cropped up haunted me). My point here is that a good editor (I hope I'm a good one, at least) has invested, if not as much as the author then at least a good deal of effort into the story, too. Maybe we, as writers, should take that into consideration before telling them off.

3) If you don't have something nice to say, offer a suggestion!

One thing we realized while editing the stories is that for those instances where we provided an alternative phrasing for something that bothered us, or at the very least offered an explanation as to why we didn't like something, the response from the authors was far friendlier than when we just redlined something and said "Doesn't work!" As a caveat, I should add

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The RPG Corner v4.6 – GM Burnout

by Doug >|< Roper of EPIC Gaming

I love potato chips. I know it's weird to really have a passionate affection for such a seemingly mundane snack, but I do. Some people have weaknesses for chocolate, or cheesecake, you know fancier stuff than sliced and fried potatoes, but not me. They are my number one, favorite snack. Plain, barbeque, honey mustard, salt and vinegar (oo ho ho...so good), jalapeno, you name it, I love it. Still...there have been occasions in my life when I could not stand the smell of a potato chip, and the thought of eating one made me sick. I had eaten so much that I couldn't stomach the idea of eating any more, and thought that I might have to give up chips altogether. How could I go back to chips after being so sick of them? What the hell does all this have to do with role-play gaming? Well, like chips or cookies or Aftershock (ugh), too much GMing all at once can create an aversion of gaming. The effects can be so severe as to cause stress related, physical problems for the unfortunate GM. GM Burnout is a serious business for gamers on both sides of the rulebook.

The number one symptom of burnout is a general feeling of lethargy and apathy towards the game. That initial creative burst of energy a GM feels when he is designing a new game or scenario is very much like a sugar rush. When the GM has a new idea for a game and begins it, things are fine, excitement and energy are high and interest is maxed out. The GM will probably not be able to do anything other than think about that game. However, after that first burst of creation he's left kind of flat and drained. Unless the GM had planned for this eventuality, lethargy can snowball quickly into full blown burnout.

The lack of creative push can lead many GMs to believe that their best effort has already been made, and that there isn't a point to continuing since they will never be able to top what they did in that third story with the flying copper balls of death and the chase across the boiling tar on tiny platforms. If a GM believes that he's already done his best work on a campaign, he won't want to continue. Additionally, his future work on the story becomes uninspired and forgettable. NPCs become one dimensional and plots seem to be more cookie-cutter as the GM struggles with out-doing himself. The depleted energy and half-hearted attempts at continuing may seem a lot like simple writer's block, and while creative doldrums can contribute to burnout, they aren't the same problem. The players pickup on the flagging

NPCs and plots, and may begin to act up if they aren't engaged. This can lead to frustrations with the players which only make the game even more distasteful for the Game Master.

The feeling that the game isn't so much a game as a chore is another symptom of burnout. GMs supply an enormous amount of energy for the game, and for as long as he has no problem doing this, all is well. When the minutia of character sheet updates and experience expenditures and designing NPCs and locations becomes something that the GM procrastinates on, and maybe even avoids entirely, you can bet he's burning out. If a GM takes to his game with the same enthusiasm he takes to the office, something is wrong.

The constant worry and anxiety over "the next session" can lead to all kinds of physical problems for Game Masters, including headaches, backaches, insomnia, nervous stomachs and irritability. For GMs running games for large numbers of people, like a big LARP for example, the pressures can be incredibly high, and the side effects debilitating.

All of these symptoms share a lowest common denominator; the game, played for recreation even in its most intense forms, no longer provides enjoyment to the GM. It's no fun to play anymore, and when that happens, GMs can sometimes turn away from gaming forever, not realizing that there may be ways to mend their attitude toward Role-Playing, or even prevent burnout from occurring in the first place.

Recovery

So, how does a burnt out GM return to the wonders of gaming and not slink off into darkness bitter and resentful? The simplest and often most effective treatment for burnout is to simply walk away from gaming for a time. Take a break, but *plan* on starting up again. Don't commit to stopping without a firm date or timeframe for starting up again. And while the GM is on sabbatical, do continue to do things with your gaming group. Go see a movie, have a video game night, or play some board games. Don't let the connections to the players atrophy while the GM recharges his batteries, or the compulsion to remain complacent might set in. Keeping your players around will also give you a chance to chat about the game from an outside perspective, and without immediate pressure to affect any kind of change.

Con't on page 13

Anthony Mark Viverito Interview Part IV

by Terry Crotinger/montanasings

I recently had the opportunity to see the original, 1933 version of *King Kong*. After speaking with Anthony Mark Viverito and learning about special effects, I learned this picture was the first real use of Stop-Motion photography in a full-length feature. *King Kong* must have taken *years* to film, one frame at a time; it did not, but that is the magic, and secrets, of the entertainment industry. Knowing how the action of Kong and the other creatures had been created made it even better, for me, as a viewer, to enjoy.

Once I learned how various effects were created, I understood, for the first time, why it was important to “lock” the camera or the scene in place. Anthony warned me the camera had to be “dead on” or else the animation would look like it was sliding around. Kong and various special effects did *shift* in minute ways throughout the film. Now I understood what he meant and what had happened in production. Still, for a craft in its infancy, Stop-Motion photography was pretty impressive!

Human animators did all the adjusting by hand. That was the standard procedure until software programs developed, and unless artists and animators learned to use this new tool, they were likely doing Stop-Motion photography by hand—for fun. Backyard animators like an e-pal of mine, Mike Johnson, from Birmingham, Alabama, uses the traditional, painstaking technique for small films, specific scenes for private filmmakers or an occasional commercial. Sometimes commissioned, he still has to buy his own equipment and that does not include animation software, which can cost several thousand dollars. Unfortunately, traditional Stop-Motion photography is developing into more of a folk-art, a novelty. Because? Animation software can do it faster, more realistically. In essence, it put the pioneers of the trade out of business.

I asked Anthony what one program should be in an animators’ toolbox. His answer was that though *LightWave 3D* has better modeling tools, *Maya* had to be included as well. “I wasn’t in the modeling department on the last two *Matrix* movies,” Anthony said. “I was in the matchmaking department. But, the modeling department used *LightWave* because they had more tools for sculpting in the computer which they would then convert the models to *Maya*. But, if you’re in the film business, then *Maya* and *LightWave* should be what you need. However, if you are doing animation in gaming, *3D Studio Max* is preferred software platform for film or for gaming. Even though

they are doing similar things.”

I tried to remember my first cartoon or show using animation. I asked, “So, we started with “Gumby”, “David and Goliath”-type animation using clay and stop-motion and now we’re doing computer graphics. What is the next logical evolution? What’s going to happen to the acting industry?”

Anthony laughed at me. “I don’t see anything that indicates actors will be obsolete for awhile! Computer animation has to be refined to the point until it is totally photo-real. It’s acceptable for movies right now, but somehow when I see a movie with computer graphic elements, it hardly ever looks photo-real.

“You can still tell?” I asked.

“I can tell. People still criticize stop-motion because it didn’t look photo-real. The computers *are* better, but I feel that computers still don’t have it quite perfect. Something else will come up, or computer graphics will get better so that twenty years from now and we look back...”

“What we do now will look “campy” in comparison,” I projected.

He agreed. “I think we’ve reached the dead-end until computers evolve and get better. When I see a fantasy film, I like to see stop-motion. It’s not about having it look photo-real, it’s about a feeling... the creatures... Stop-motion has a feeling that goes well with fantasy. When you look at the creatures in a Ray Harryhausen movie, you get a feeling you don’t get with a computer, though it looks photo-real. It still looks “cartoony” with computer graphics.

I mentioned he seemed to like monsters and his response was immediate. “I do, I do! I’ve always liked monsters. The reason I got into the movie business was because of Ray Harryhausen. I went to see those movies when I was little, five years old. The creatures had that feeling. I knew creature-features were the type of movie I really liked. And, it was the same people making them. I like O’Hara films. All the Ray Harryhausen creatures had that same look, same feeling. The Amica films... and the Hammer Films—as re-releases, because I’m not *that* old. I saw *One Million Years B.C.* in 1966.

I asked Anthony, “So, when you saw those films, those movies, did you say to yourself, ‘I can do that?’”

“No. I was just fascinated. It was like magic.”

“How did you get into the field of special effects?”

“To tell you the truth, my goal... I wanted to work for someone like Ray Harryhausen or *for* Ray Harryhausen!

Con’t on page 13

The Writer's Block: In Praise of the Net

by Charles Gramlich

I may be preaching to the choir but this month's column is written in praise of the internet—for research purposes at least.

I've been working mostly on nonfiction in 2005, not necessarily because I wanted to but because I needed the money. One project was an assignment for forty short author biographies, five a month, for Salem Press, which publishes reference works for high schools and colleges. Before the internet it would have been virtually impossible to complete these pieces on time. Using the web, I averaged seven essays a month and finished with time to spare, and to write other things.

Twenty-eight of my assigned authors were living, and through research on the net I was able to go well beyond just finding their webpages. I was able to make email contact with *all* of them except for one, Peter Straub, who I had enough information on without making contact. I was able to directly ask these writers questions about their childhoods and actually get them to read my rough drafts in order to check my accuracy.

For three of the deceased authors, I was able to make email contact with either relatives or agents, and for almost all of my assignments I downloaded—for free—copies of some of their books and stories. This was especially helpful for the foreign authors who I had been assigned. I don't read Hebrew or Russian, but I was able to find the translations I needed online. And even if I didn't have to see a complete book or story, I could use the web to locate reference details such as date and place of publication. Amazon proved invaluable for this, as did Fantastic Fiction (www.fantasticfiction.co.uk) and The Locus Index to SF.

The other project I've been working on this year is a book about Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection. One great thing about this job is that almost everything Darwin ever wrote can be found free on the net, mostly at Project Gutenberg (www.gutenberg.org). Even if I had hard copies of a particular book, I still downloaded a copy from the net because it was so easy to search within a work for a particular phrase such as "natural selection" or "survival of the fittest."

Darwin did not create in a vacuum, of course, but much of the work that influenced him is extremely rare as far as printed copies are concerned. I discovered that I really needed to read Jean Baptiste Lamarck's work on evolution, *Zoological Philosophy*, as well as another book on the topic called *Vestiges of the Natural History*

of Creation by Robert Chambers. I couldn't find either work in print, which wasn't surprising since they were published in 1809 and 1844 respectively. A few minutes online gave me both books in easily downloadable form, for nothing.

The internet has become much more for me, though, than just a source for hard to find references. When working on nonfiction I use it in my moment to moment writing. My modem went out the other day and I lost most of a day of work because I couldn't fact check important points with a click of my mouse. All I could do was rough draft some sentences with question marks where I needed information.

My topic at the time was the Amish, who most people know as the folks who still use horses and buggies instead of cars and who reject such modern marvels as TVs and video games. I wanted to know when the first Amish came to the States, and how many original settlers there were, and how many Amish are alive today. I also needed information on Ellis-van Creveld syndrome, which afflicts the Amish at a much higher rate than it does the general population, and which often causes polydactyly, the trait of having more than the usual number of fingers or toes. Once I got my new modem connected it took me about half an hour to get all this data and more.

To gather the print resources that I needed for my last year's work would have been immensely costly and time consuming. I would never have made my deadlines, and the process of writing the articles would have been much more tedious and much less fun.

The internet didn't do my job for me. In fact, I actually did *more* background reading than I would have before the web because of the wealth of easily available material that I felt I needed or wanted to look at. But, as a result, the finished products were more detailed, richer with examples, and just plain better than they would have been otherwise. All hail the net.

I'll end, however, with two warnings about using the internet for research. First, be careful not to get so caught up in online study that you fail to actually "write." The fact checking and the chances to learn new things are great, but they should be done in service of a goal, that of completing your project. Second, double and triple check every "fact" you find on the net. There's bad as well as good there. For my questions on the Amish, I searched and compared a dozen different websites before coming up with a consensus. Only then did I put anything into my own work.

A KeyCOMMetary by guest columnist hesso lizeo of the plaetod Lapso Major

Tols of the trade: every professio has them; ad, this beig the iformatio age, I suppose it's fairly safe to say oe of a writer's tols is her keyboard. Keyboards ca be mighty hady thigs for typig stories, articles, potry, ad the like, but they ca also be cosiderable sorces of frustratio, chiefly depedat upo two mai factors: 1) a writer's proficiency with the skill of typig; 2) the degree to which she possesses the ufortunate habit of imbibig copios quatities of spirits while sittig at her desk.

Alcohol, yo see, is a reletively sticky substace more akin to airplae glue tha to a refreshig beverage whe applied to computer keyboards, ad the results are rather predictable -- or shold be; that is to say, they *are* to writers who have't already enjoyed a eveig of merlot-fueled relaxatio.

To complicate matters, oe such writer with whom I am fairly well acquainted -- a certai writer who shall remai ameless, *thakyoverymuch* -- recetly fod her editorial deadlie had crept upo her before she had been able to remedy the itoxicated state of her keyboard. This created a dilemma.

Or did it?

After all, the writer mused, she did happe to work i the field of speculative fictio, a curios draw to people just edgy eogh that they might ot really mid. Hey -- we *are* talkig abot folk accustomed to creatig ad decipherig laguages as complex as Star Trek's *Kligo*, for Jupiter's sake, so what cold possibly prove ubearably bothersome abot a few missig letters ad a buch of stubborn "o's" that flat ot refuse to be followed by other vowels?

Yes, thoght the writer, *perhaps my readers will barely otice aythig is amiss, especially if I adopt a clever iterstellar pseudoyrn to make them thik a guest columnist is fillig i for me -- a columnist from a foreig world with a stragely warped yet oddly uderstadable dialect. That's it!*

Of corse, eedless to say, the writer-who-shall-remai-ameless was't i much better shape tha her keyboard at the time she made the decisio

to proceed with her colum as though othig was wrog. But she *did* at least have the god grace to offer a bribe...er, rather, a gift of appreciatio...to cox forgiveess from her readers, ad this is it:

The first reader who figures ot how to email the guest columnist (JSolus@juo.com) *ad* seds a correct (ad thorough) explaatio abot how the guest columnist's ame was derived, will receive a delicious sixtee oces (that's oe full pod) of world-class chocolates *FREE* (direct from Lititz, PA) i time for Christmas.

The clever wier will be aoced i ext moth's *Illuminata*, assumig keyma's keyboard dries ot.

"You may have heard the statement: 'One picture is worth a thousand words.' Don't you believe it. It may be true on occasion - as when someone is illiterate, or when you are trying to describe the physical appearance of a complex object. In other cases, the statement is nonsense... As soon as it becomes necessary to deal with emotions, ideas, fancies - abstractions in general - only words will suit... Nor is this likely to change in the future. You have heard that we live in an 'age of communication,'... (but) these changes... involve the transmission of information, and not its nature."

— Issac Asimov, 1986

Reviews

Brigid's Quest

P.C. Cast

Luna, Dec 2005

\$12.99, Trade Paper, 400 pgs.

ISBN 0373802420

Review by Harriet Klausner

The evil race of demon Fomorian kidnapped and raped the women of Partholon taking them into the Wastelands to bear their offspring. The Goddess Epona united the people of Partholon to defeat the demons and a century later touched Ephame who took as her mate a hybrid Falorian and drank his blood and took the madness that existed in the hybrids into her self. Now the descendants of the children of rape can go home to Partholon.

Cu, whose lover was killed by one of the hybrids, goes to the wastelands to check out the New Fomorian to see if they are as good and gentle as his sister's lifemate says they are. Brigid, the female centaur goes after Cu and finds the seventy children and handful of adults pure of heart. When they return home, Brigid's sister comes to the keep to tell her that the centaurs are going to war because their High Shaman, Brigid's mother was killed by humans. Brigid, who was running away from her legacy, knows she must drink from the chalice of Epona and become her High Shaman, and fight her brother and his allies before the land is bathed in the blood of battle.

Although Brigid is a centaur and Cu is human, they love each other and mate for life. Their marriage can only be consummated if Brigid drinks from the Chalice because then she will be able to shapeshift into human form. P. C. Cast has written a fascinating action packed romantic fantasy where true love can conquer all. Both hero and heroine go through many hardships and it is only through their love they feel they can overcome all their hardships. This is a special work that will appeal to a variety of readers.

Disappearing Nightly

Laura Resnick

Luna, Dec 2005

\$13.99, Trade Paper, 400 pp.

ISBN 0373802331

Review by Harriet Klausner

Actress Esther Diamond knows she should have had the lead of Venus in the play Sorcerers instead of Golly Gee but while she is the current understudy, she hopes that Golly will get sick and she will have the chance to play the part. During the latest performance, Golly steps into an ordinary crystal cage and when the illusion is supposed to be finished she is nowhere to be found. Esther anticipates going on stage as Venus the next day but she gets a letter warning her not to go in the crystal cage because "Evil is on the Loose."

She reports the note to Connor a detective who thinks it is just a prank. In Esther's dressing room Maximilian Zadok materializes and tells her that another female disappeared while performing the same magic that and tells her he sent the note to save her because he is a mage who belongs to the Magnum Collegium, an organization that fight evil. Other women in the same situation also disappear and once Esther believes him, she decides to help him find what happened to the missing women, who is behind it and why.

The sparks fly between the detective and the actress but he refused to give in to his feelings because he believes she is a fruitcake and a suspect. Combining elements from the romance, fantasy and mystery genres, *Disappearing Nightly* is an enchanting novel that will appeal to readers of all three genres. The mystery is well constructed leaving readers trying to figure out who is behind the disappearances. The heroine is at times funny and determined but always charming and believable.

Reviews

Living Dead in Dallas (Southern Vampire, 2)

Charlaine Harris

Wheeler, 2005

Softcover, 298 pgs.

ISBN 1-58724-935-9

Review by Danielle Parker

First, I have to admit right off the bat that Charlaine Harris's "Southern Vampire" series is a guilty pleasure of mine. The series starts off with *Dead until Dark*, carries on with *Living Dead in Dallas*, and runs right on through to the recently released *Dead as a Doornail*. So don't expect this to be an unbiased review. I've found myself impatiently checking the author's official web site to see when the next in the series will be out, contemplating joining the raging Bill-vs.-Eric discussion, and dithering over whether I ought to (on a librarian's pitiful salary) buy the books for my home library.

So are we talking Great Literature here? Sorry. What we're talking about is the literary equivalent of a box of Krispy Kremes -- you know, something addictive and probably unhealthy (guaranteed to bag your eyes, at least: you'll stay up late to finish it). Never mind. Get the whole series, lay a copy of *Moby Dick* or *War and Peace* or something equally high-brow on the side to assuage your conscience, and pig out. I've always felt reading was a bit like dining. Everyone needs the occasional stress-relieving junk food along with the home cooking and the high-falutin' haute cuisine. We can't read Kafka -- or even Shakespeare, bless his commercially successful genius -- all the time. Get the fat bombs while they're hot and enjoy.

Of course there is a reason why Charlaine Harris makes the old, old, done-to-death vampire chestnut work so well. Actually, there are *two* reasons why. The first is *characterization*. Plots are soon forgotten; even ideas (as we, who read in the speculative fiction genre, know only too well) can become passé, once they've changed the world. Great *characters* remain three-dimensional forever. This is what Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson and Shakespeare and yes, J. K. Rowling too knew so well. Long John Silver steps out of the page; Falstaff belches from the stage century after century; Snape glares from under his greasy hair. They'll never die.

Harris seems to have learned that lesson too. Sookie Stackhouse, the heroine of the series, is a thoroughly believable person: a waitress with both a waitress's innate toughness and struggles with self-respect; a woman who's got some emotional baggage and some

unusual problems, a few friends, a history. Harris's vampire characters, in turn, are real enough to inspire this reader with a sneaking crush on one of them (bad-boy Eric, of *course*: in Bill-vs.-Eric, there is *no* contest. Eric has a zestful sense of humor and a sharp wit. *Bill*, well, excuse the pun, he's just *dead*, as far as laughs go).

The second reason Harris' stories work is *authenticity*. The stories are set, mostly, in small-town Louisiana, and Harris (a native herself of Arkansas) nails southern culture dead on. Having once, in my time, lived in the land of the long draws, I can feel how true the settings of her stories are. There's the devotion to church on Sunday (regardless of what shenanigans happen on the other days of the week); the deep and sometimes incestuous interest in family and community; the ritualized courtesies that are exchanged by people who are still taught their old-fashioned manners, right down to the home-cooked cake delivered by a neighbor. It's *real*.

It's best if a new reader starts with the first story in the series, *Dead until Dark*, but it's possible to jump right in with the second, at least, if your local library doesn't have the inaugural volume on hand. Don't dive in later than that, though. The story is definitely a serial, and in any case, the first three in the series are the best. I have issues with the later ones: Sookie gets entangled with far too many extraneous suitors, being one (do we *really* need to channel Lauren K. Hamilton here? *Yes*, Ms. Harris, we *already* know *all* red-blooded males find Our Gal irresistible, but *let's* get back to Eric and Bill and even sexually frustrated but loyal Sam, if you don't mind...)

In Sookie's second adventure, *Living Dead in Dallas*, Sookie, who's become entangled with the vampires through her un-dead boyfriend Bill, finds herself on her first unasked-for assignment. Sookie is telepathic, and Eric, Bill's ruthlessly opportunistic boss, has hired Sookie and her unusual talent out to another nest to find a missing vampire nest-mate, in a sort of rent-a-tool deal.

But our busty blonde heroine finds herself caught between a sharp tooth and a hard place in Dallas. The local vampires who are supposedly on her side aren't used to thinking of breathing people as much more than appetizers, and the fanatics who've kidnapped the missing vampire are *quite* willing to off Sookie, too. Not to mention she's having a hard time fending off Eric's persistent attentions (why struggle with the inevitable and the enjoyable is *my* question, but then, Sookie has this *inexplicable* preference for the chilly Bill). *How's* a sexy blonde to cope?

Check out the *Southern Vampire* series and find out. Enjoy!

Reviews

The Decoy Princess

Dawn Cook

Ace, Dec 2005

\$7.99, Mass Market, 368 pgs.

ISBN: 0441013564

Review by Harriet Klausner

She grew up believing she was Princess Contessa of Costenopolie, but when her betrothed Prince Garrett, second son of the King of Misdev, arrives unannounced, her “parents” tell her the truth that she is not a royal only a foundling. They admit that their real daughter is safe in a monastery while Tess has grown up as the target of assassins. Garrett, coveting his own kingdom, kills Tess’ parents and sends his men to assassinate the real princess and Chancellor Kavenlow, who has helped keep Tess safe all these years.

Tess escapes to a tavern where she wins a stake at cards that she hopes to use towards warning Kavenlow whom she loves like a father and the real princess about the danger Garrett poses. One of the card players, Duncan is a cheat, but with no options, Tess teams up with him until Garrett’s man Captain Jeck captures her with instructions to bring her back to the castle. She escapes and meets up with Duncan again. Together they warn Kavenlow; who confesses that he and Jeck are the real powers behind the thrones and that he raised Tess to be his apprentice. However before she can make any plans for the future, she and her allies must dispose preferably without killing Garrett.

Dawn Cook is one of the brightest new stars in the fantasy genre. Her characters are believable which insures her otherworldly settings feel real too. There is plenty of action once Garrett sets in motion his devious plot, a touch of romance, and a ton of intrigue throughout the delightful *The Decoy Princess*. The feisty protagonist is determined to make her own decisions while doing what she believes is right for the people of Costenopolie. Readers will respect this fine woman while also anxiously waiting what happens next to the unroyal target.

The King Imperiled

Deborah Chester

Ace, Dec 2005

\$7.99, Mass Market, 368 pgs.

ISBN: 0441013538

Review by Harriet Klausner

Since the Grethori barbarian hordes kidnapped the two daughters of King Faldain and Queen Alexeika, the royal monarch of Nether has declared war on their foes though they rescued their children. In the latest battle, the clans of the Wind Tribe have united to smash the army of Nether and conquer the capital city as well as the rest of the kingdom. Dain has set a trap for them killing most of them and selling the rest of them as slaves. The sheda (shaman) curses the king with her dying breath. Only the water from the chalice of life keeps him alive until he reaches the palace so the chalice can heal him.

Dain’s daughter Tashalya who was in training to be a sorcerelle summoned the being Kaon from another plane but is caught by her teacher. Her mentor tells her parents that she must leave school. At her home Kaon convinces her that she can gain the powers of the ancients if she meets with him and gives up the powers of the sorcerelle, which she does. He has her steal it before Dain can use it and she flees to a place where the two realms meet. Her mother chases after her and her two brothers who she kidnapped as well as the royal heir of the neighboring kingdom in the hope she can persuade her hard-hearted daughter to give up her dream of power, release her hostages and save her father.

Princess Tashalya doesn’t know what Kaon is but believes herself in love with him and is willing to betray her family and kingdom to be with him. Deborah Chester has written a fantastic fantasy full of action, romance, and intrigue as the queen is the focal point who decides what course of action to take but it is Tashalya the antagonist who captures reader interest because she is so complex and hard to understand. Perhaps in future books, Tashalya can redeem herself. Deborah Chester is a world class fantasist.

Reviews

Rakkety Tam: A Novel of Redwall

Brian Jacques

Illustrated by: David Elliott

Philomel Books, September 2004

Hardcover, 372 pgs.

ISBN: 0399237259

Review by TerryCrotinger/montanasing

First, a word about *Rakkety Tam*; it is fantasy. If C.J. Cherryh can write about space faring cat-like beings that talk, or Anne McCaffery dithering on about unicorns and call it fantasy, why can't Jacques write about forest animals who talk and call it fantasy? But, more on that argument later.

The series of books about Redwall Abbey and Mossflower Country are similar, though, not necessarily above the likes of Richard Adams' *Watership Down*. However, it expands on A.A.Milne's *One Hundred Acre Wood* to the point of being unrecognizable—Pooh and Tigger wouldn't stand a chance unless they learn how to use a dagger or sword. The world of *Redwall* is grittier.

Human nature and the nature of creatures appear to share similar traits in Mossflower Country where the series takes place. Many woodland creatures are represented, though not all have the ability to speak. The author subtly exposes our human nature using the likes of Malanda McBurl, a sweet young squirrel who serves as Recorder of Redwall Abbey, or Martin, the long-dead Squirrel-hero and patron saint of *Redwall* (who warns the Redwallers of danger using dreams), to single-minded Wolverines like Gulo, who has murdered his father and is on a quest to kill his brother as well, and recapture the Walking Stone that had once been his. The *Redwall* series border on the violent side. Pilfering, stealing, hack 'n slash, death and cannibalism are common scenes. The food chain is still the food chain, after all.

On the other hand, it's well written; youth and older children love it, and adult readers are catching on quickly. Not fitting into science fiction in a traditional sense, it is fantasy, no different from C.S. Lewis' Narnia where certain animals can talk.

Redwall simply has no humans in it. It does possess human conventions and inventions like militia and weapons, in various forms. For example, the Longshore Patrol is a company of a hundred hares and officers (one wears a monocle and has a staff) that bandy about spouting British-sounding commands that end with, "wot-wot". This world of talking, ale-drinking and clothes-wearing creatures have metal, medieval-type weapons (references are vague as to how they were acquired), and quaint traditions reminiscent of quiet, country folk. Readers discover gallantry, honor and justice, not dissimilar to Tolkein's Middle Earth (and the maps are Tolkein-ish as well). The only real difference is that while the characters *act* human and often walk upright, they are not.

In *Rakkety Tam*, Gulo is hunting his brother, Astor in Mossflower Country. As luck would have it, two travelers on their way to Redwall Abbey hap upon Astor as he is dying. Astor, as nasty as his murderous brother, bragged that now Gulo will never find the Walking Stone, as he has hidden it somewhere in the forest. The two travelers repeat their tale, and the riddle Astor has told them once they reach the Abbey.

Gulo believes his brother is hiding in Mossflower Country and savagely searches for him and the Walking Stone. Rakkety Tam McBurl and his friend, Doogy Plumm learn of the riddle of the Walking Stone and of the murderous Gulo and join forces with the Longshore Patrol and several others to protect the Abbey from Gulo and his white fox and vermin army of almost a hundred.

Brian Jacques leads the reader among forest-folk and frightening-foe using creative new names and foods, poem and song. Several of the *Redwall* series have been converted to audio books; the cultural and military songs of this world are delightful to hear. Whether reading or listening to any of the *Redwall* series, the newest offering from Brian Jacques, *Rakkety Tam* is worth investigating. And who knows? Mossflower Country could be anywhere, including our own back yards.

Reviews

Science Fiction is the branch of literature that deals with the effects of change on people in the real world as it can be projected into the past, the future, or to distant places. It often concerns itself with scientific or technological change, and it usually involves matters whose importance is greater than the individual or the community; often civilization or the race itself is in danger.

— James E. Gunn

The Best Time Travel Stories of the 20th Century
Ed. by Harry Turtledove & Martin H. Greenberg
Del Ray, 2005
\$17.95, Trade Paper, 303pgs.
ISBN 0-345-46094-4
Review by Danielle Parker

One of the great things about being a librarian, of course, is that great books you didn't know about pass through your hands all the time. It's a bit like being invited to a free cheesecake testing – diet be darned. So of course when Turtledove's new *The Best Time Travel Stories of the 20th Century* fell into my hands, it was too good of an opportunity to miss. Bleep! Check out time!

Turtledove interprets "time travel" in the narrow sense, which is to say, he excludes alternate history stories, which are apparently collected in a separate Del Ray anthology (see the companion volume, *The Best Alternate History Stories of the 20th Century*). Hopefully, both Randall Garrett's classic *Lord Darcy* series and Orson Scott Card's excellent *Alvin Maker* stories are represented in that latter volume, as otherwise I would

seriously beg to differ with Turtledove's definition of "best". (I also highly recommend Andre Norton's classic *The Crossroads of Time* and *Quest Crosstime* adventure novels).

But *Best Time Travel Stories* liberally represents other famous names, of course, most from the classic "golden age" of science fiction. In fact, so few new writers are represented in the anthology that it raised the question in my mind as to whether the perennially-popular time travel theme has lost its appeal for modern writers -- or readers. Nancy Kress, Connie Willis and John Kessel are probably some of the more "recent" writers listed; others, such as Roger Zelazny, are already reposing in the crypt. Ah, *there's* a time travel conceit for you: go back and time and beg another story from one of those R.I.P. favorite authors. Roger, Gregory Betancourt *never* did Amber as well as you! 1970, *here* I come!

The best stories in the collection exemplify those old adages of superior writing: good characterization and tight plotting. In these stories, the time travel twist is secondary and certainly never used as a gimmick (as it tends to be, in many of the humorous spins on the theme).

No particular story was especially outstanding compared to the others to me, but I'd like to draw attention to *Fire Watch*, by Connie Willis, which is a tale of heroism and heart. Equally good is Poul Anderson's *The Man Who Came Early*, a bittersweet tale of a man who slips in the past and finds he really doesn't fit in at all. My last favorite was Nancy Kress's *The Price of Oranges*, which shows us that the real past is no more rosy than our apparently harsh present.

And of course any story by Ray Bradbury (*A Sound of Thunder*) has to be among the best in a collection; Bradbury also writes a dinosaur hunting tale, but it's far more evocative than de Camp's riff on the same topic.

Readers who like to sprinkle their fantasy with a little scientific leavening may wrap up their time travel expedition by perusing either J. Richard Gott's *Time Travel in Einstein's Universe: The Physical Possibilities of Travel through Time* or James Brennan's *Time Travel: A New Perspective*. Gott is a Princeton astrophysicist, and if *he* can envision time travel in the Baedeker or Mobil Travel Guide format with a straight face, so can *you*. Crank up the computer and start your imagination engine. And for those of you who are interested, there's a time-travel theme story contest coming up in January at www.bewilderingstories.com, where I also hang out as an editor. Hopefully, we'll see your submission!

Reviews

The Wizard of London

Mercedes Lackey

Daw, Oct 2005

\$25.95, Hardcover, 400 pp.

ISBN 0756401747

Review by Harriet Klausner

Her missionary parents send their twelve year old daughter from the Congo to England to attend the Harton School for Boys and Girls. Sarah Jane Lyon-White doesn't command Elemental Magic like her parents so she must learn from Isabelle Harton how to use her Talent (psychic powers). The mistress of the school, her husband and several students are talents that must have a teacher to guide them when their power manifest themselves.

Sarah shows signs of being a telepath but at a séance she exposes a fake medium while a spirit possesses her to communicate with another attendee. Sarah's untrained medium skills come to the attention of an Elemental Master who doesn't want the girl to discover the mage is using dead children as revenants. The killer sets a trap but Sarah and her allies defeat the haunt. Isabelle wants to know who is after her charge and she starts asking questions of the Elemental Masters. Her queries bring her to the attention of Elemental Master Lord David Alderscroft, who loved Isabelle before he came under the influence of Lady Cordelia. He then dumped Isabelle and anyone who couldn't be useful to him. His cold heart endangers England and if Isabelle and her friends can't show that he is heading down a dark cold path, it will lead to tragedy for the entire English Empire.

Book Four of the Elemental Masters is a magical, spellbinding adult fairy tale. The fabulous fantasy contains the wicked witch, a beautiful queen, her adoring court and a prince who needs to learn how to feel again instead of always manipulating people for his own goals. Mercedes Lackey never fails to write a book that will please her myriad of fans and her latest magical storyline and well developed characters will send readers into euphoria.

Valentine's Rising

E.E. Knight

Roc, Dec. 2005

\$7.99, Mass Market, 368 pp.

ISBN 0451460596

Review by Harriet Klausner

It is the forty eighth year of the Kurlian order and the invaders are firmly entrenched in strategic forts around the globe. They send out the Reapers, who they created and designed to drink human blood and send its essence to the Kur that controls it. The human population is down to ten percent of what it was prior to the invasion. A resistance group hopes to destroy the masters using the Ozark Free Zone as their base.

David Valentine has returned from the Caribbean with quickwood which acts on Reapers like silver does to werewolves. As he makes his way to the command, he discovers that the Ozark Free Zone is no more; its soldiers fled or were captured by the Kurs. Valentine and what is left of his men as well as soldiers he recruits must get the quickwood to wherever the command is. The overlords are getting ready for a massive battle and David is in the unique position to throw their plans into chaos if he can keep his real identity secret from the quislings (human collaborators). The most important part of David's mission is not keeping himself alive but making sure that the first weapon that can kill a Reaper gets in to the Free Territory for it is the last hope of mankind to take back their planet.

Fans of end of the world as we know it thrillers are going to love *The Vampire Earth* series and *Valentine's Rising* in particular. The protagonist is a true hero who doing ugly things which he hates doing even knowing it will further the goal of winning back Earth from the Kurlians. There is plenty of action in this exciting military science fiction novel and readers better understand what makes a reaper tick. E.E. Knight not only creates believable characters, he puts them in situations where they behave realistically so the reader believes their actions are natural. This is one series readers of alien invasions, vampires and an end of the world scenario must read.

Reviews

The Hidden Family

Charles Stross

Tor, 2005

\$24.95, Trade Paper, 303 pgs.

ISBN 0-765-31347-2

Review by Danielle Parker

There was a time when you could not spin the radio dial without hearing Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar". There were and are better anthems out there, (Aretha Franklin's "R.E.S.P.E.C.T." and my favorite, Annie Lennox's "Sisters Are Doing It For Themselves", among them), but however much it pains you, Reddy's has been the official ode to the female state ever since it debuted. (*Why*, by the way, are there no *male* anthems? The only thin candidates that come to my mind are both blatantly sexual and suspiciously tool-oriented – Peter Gabriel's "Sledgehammer" and that old chestnut, "I'm Your Handy-Man", for example. Guys, what is *really* going through your minds when you slaver over those super-sized power tool gizmos?)

But whatever woman-hear-me-roar anthem you prefer, *something* should be playing in the back of your mind when you read the latest book in "The Merchant Princes" series. The girls have really gotten it together in this book, and they are, indeed, doing it for themselves. Miriam, the ultimate tough-gal heroine of the first book, "The Family Trade", is back again, and she and her feminine cohorts are really kicking rear-ends in the newest saga.

When Miriam's previous outing ended in "The Family Trade", we had hints that there was another criminally-inclined hidden family around somewhere... one that had some real grudges against Miriam's newly discovered kin and kith. Miriam, who has acquired a medallion from one of these suspect hidden relatives, tries it out. Her new world-hopping medallion leads her to yet another Earth – one that is apparently unknown to her official drug-smuggling kin. But this new world, with more of an early Industrial Revolution vibe than either its medieval or high-tech alternates, seems to be tailor-made for Miriam. Miriam intends to reform the Family, and showing them a better way of doing business than smuggling small white baggies is her first step. Money *talks*, and Miriam knows she's got to prove that Good Pays in cold hard profits, or no one's going to listen to her.

It's fun to tag along for Miriam's answer to the what-would-I-do-if-I-had-a-million bucks and a turn-of-the-century-opportunity-to-invest-it fantasy. We meet a few new characters, but mostly familiar ones from the first book. Roland, Miriam's upper-class boyfriend from the

first story, is one of the familiar ones, but once again he's outclassed. Our tigress still gnaws Roland for brunch and spits out the exhausted remains. I hope I'm not spoiling the show for anyone by saying I'm glad he *won't* be making an appearance in future volumes. If this gal is to have a love interest, she should have a man who can hold his own. Strong women shouldn't be afraid of strong men.

I admit I *love* the way the gals hang together in this story, in spite of the fact that there's a sneaking suspicion in my mind that all this jealousy-free feminine togetherness is more of a fantasy than any alternate Earth could be. Does gender ever *truly* disappear as a factor in social relationships? Women have complained that men have only one thing on their minds for longer than bustiers have been around. However true (or untrue) that old canard is, the flip side of the stereotype must be that women, too, relate to each other in terms of gender. Any female who's ever been shafted by another woman – and I think all of us would own up to experiencing this at least once, if we're honest – knows that only another female *really* knows how to sink the knife in the most vulnerable spot.

But let's hope that Stross is right, and I'm wrong. You go, gals!

A Few Things (con't)

that this only worked better when we stressed that our suggestions were *suggestions* and not demands. An author who thinks you're trying to railroad him gets his dander up, but if you can convince him that you're trying to help, they seem to be a reasonable bunch!

4) Don't just stress the bad stuff!

When editing, many of us have the habit of only pointing out the things we don't like. That is, after all, why we're editing in the first place. But if a fancy turn of phrase catches your eye or if a plot twist or character really stands out as exceptional, I think it is incumbent upon us editors to say so. Peppering one's editing with the positive makes swallowing the negative a little more palatable.

5) Don't take it personally.

No matter which side you are on, try to remember that you're supposed to be on the same team, a team that is trying to make a good story a great one, or a great one an exceptional one. I encourage all of the writers out there to buddy up with other writers and share stories, and then get into a dialogue about what you do and do not like about each other's writing. Styles differ, as do preferences, and just because something doesn't work in your story or in *this one* of your stories doesn't mean it will never work. As a writer, try to open your mind to alternatives. Focus on what it is you are trying to

A Few Things (con't)

accomplish and see if there is a better way to accomplish it. As an editor, try not to force every writer to conform to your ideal writing style. Edit appropriately to the tone and style of the work.

I also encourage writers to look for (at least some) reviewers who prefer genres other than the one in which they are writing. If you can make a Tolkien fan admit that he loves your story *Governor of the Bracelets*, that's great, but if you can make a Romance Reader admit that he likes it, then you've either written a good story or you have way too many pointless sex scenes and flowery descriptives. Better yet, get a nonfiction reader to admit they like it: they're one of the toughest crowds. (I think it's their fascination with facts and reality.)

As for our anthology, *Beacons of Tomorrow*, the proof has been ordered, the contracts signed, the paperwork filled out, and the fingers crossed. We probably won't have any in time for Christmas, but expect to see ordering information in next month's *Illuminata*. Remember, this was our first attempt at an anthology, so if you like it, tell us all about it. And if you don't... Well, you try putting together a collection of short stories. If you can, or have, and still want to complain, I'm all ears.

RPG Corner (con't)

As a corollary to the "take a break" method, GM's can also have a meeting with players about the campaign, asking questions and finding out what the players like and don't like about the stories and game sessions. Talking to Players is a great way for the GM to learn about his performance and discover whether or not the problems he sees with the game are necessarily the same problems his players see.

If the GM can't or doesn't want to take a break from gaming, then he could try a radical reconstruction of his existing game. It happens in comics all the time, where the current plots all kind of wrap up, and the book takes off in a new, fresh and wholly unexpected direction. This huge shift in character or setting or timeframe can be just the boost the GM needs to regenerate the creativity and interest that he might have lost.

I mentioned way earlier in this column that GMs can plan for the gradual loss of creativity and enthusiasm in their game. This is what I have done with my current game. All of the ideas for cool characters and events and neat devices kind of all flood in to the GM at once. There is a very great temptation for the GM to go ahead and get as many of those things into the game as soon as possible. While this might make for a wonderful and very intense series of games at the beginning of the campaign,

RPG Corner (con't)

what does it leave for the rest of the time? If the GM is planning on running for a few weeks then stopping, this front-heavy planning is fine. If however there is a longer story that the GM is itching to tell, he needs to resist the temptation to use all of his greatest ideas at once. If the GM has the patience to do this, he should wait and sprinkle these great ideas and characters and gadgets throughout the long term story. By pacing himself, the GM keeps the players looking forward to the next big item, while he himself does the same thing. The anticipation of a big revelatory event or character can keep the GM interested and working throughout the run of the campaign, and the longer the GM can keep that high level of interest, the better the chance for new and creative ideas to come to him, and the longer a GM has good, workable ideas, the less chance he'll have of getting burned out.

Interview (con't)

I wanted to do that type of movie, but the industry has changed now. It's pretty much impossible. I'm working computers. It's not really my dream; not really what I envisioned. Now everything is pretty much an action movie.

"When you watch a Ray Harryhausen movie, it's got a story. It's paced out in a certain, deliberate way. It moves along in a nice pace. It has effects at key moments and the editing is like a real movie. Now, everything is caught on every two frames. Everything is so fast, it's kind of sorry—it's the same thing. So, I'm hoping that maybe things will go back to the traditional. For the last few years everything, whether a fantasy or a comedy, everything has to have the fast car chases... I'm hoping people will get tired of that. Go back to how the older films were made. Make a fantasy film a fantasy, not an action movie."

I wanted to ask if he was referring to the *Lord of the Rings* movies, or perhaps the *Matrix* movies he worked on? But, our conversation took a different turn and we spoke of his goals. Later, however, I mulled over his words. While the trilogy, *Lord of the Rings*, does have action, it tends to climax with action in the books. The film versions, now that I was aware of it, do sacrifice character development so the viewer is shocked with some kind of action or spectacular effect far more often than reading it ever came to mind. Perhaps, that was what he meant? It was clear that he had a different idea of how he would make movies and how he would use special effects, to enhance, not take over a movie. Next month, I'll *Illuminate* what some of those goals are.