



The Illuminata

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Catch the Eye, Catch the Wallet (Part I)

By Bret Funk

A Cover Does Not A Novel Make

I love to read. And even though I don't have as much time to do it as I used to, I still like to occasionally sit down with a book (hopefully a good one!) to expand my horizons and escape this reality. But which books to choose? Should I stick with a tried and true favorite, continue reading any number of ongoing, never-ending epics I've begun, or find something fresh. Stay with the major houses or peruse the smaller but often edgier catalogs of the smaller ones? With the explosion of independent publishers this past decade, a number of them specializing in speculative fiction, how can a reader determine which books are the best to read? Add in ebooks and other online fare and the process become more daunting.

In looking over my collection, many of the books I read come from two sources: authors I've read before and enjoyed, and recommendations from friends. The former generally provides me with something I like, if not love; the latter can go either way. Depending on the source, I find that I either really like the work or I really hate it. The difference is friends who recommend books they think you'll like versus

friends who recommend books that they, themselves, like.

I do, from time to time, stray from safe waters and try out a new author without any kind of expectation or foreknowledge. When doing so, I began to wonder what it was, exactly, that caught my eye and made me choose one title over another.

The book design gurus would have everyone believe that cover art is the sole factor (other than an established name) that sells a book. Numerous websites, design guides, and (surprisingly) cover artists claim that without a phenomenal cover, your book will never be read, even at gunpoint, and that without a trained eye, excellent colors,

and a picture that, by itself, whisks a potential reader into the realm of the unknown, you might as well close your laptop, break your pens, unsharpen your pencils and go back to your day job.

Personally, I'd like to believe that I'm slightly more aware of my surroundings than an infant, blindly reaching for the book with the brightest colors and most flashy imagery. I will, however, concede that a good cover is important in gaining a reader's attention. If your name as an author isn't good enough to do it on its own (please note the size of Stephen King's and Issac Asimov's names versus those of Robin Hobb and Trudy Canavan), then your cover has to be good enough to at least grab the reader's eye, right?

I'm not so sure. That's not to say good cover art won't help sell a book, but show me a bookstore that places any but the hottest pop culture and/or most famous authors' books face out, and I'll show you a man eating crow. Shelf space is too valuable to waste it by displaying books in such a manner. Online bookstores generally show a front cover image, but seeing those covers is a gamble weighted in the favor of the more famous authors. For an unknown author's books to hit the top of a search, that search has to be pretty specific. (By way of example, a BN.com search for "Jewel of Truth", my most recently released title, does indeed find my book, but it is fifth behind Nora Roberts, V.C. Andrews, and a couple others, all of whom have books NOT named *Jewel of Truth*.)

For the time being, most people still claim to be buying books at the bookstore. Or they're at least shopping for them there and then going home to order them online. Which means that if cover art is the most important factor in the process, it's the cover art relegated to the spine and hidden behind all the spine information that people are interested in.

To me, this implies that title is the most important eye-catcher. If a title catches my eye, I'll pull the book out for a closer look. I glance at the cover art and then flip to the back cover, because I *know* that cover art is generally dictated by marketing factors completely unrelated to the story and in many cases has only a tangential connection to the actual work.

Back cover copy, on the other hand, might still be an attempt to sucker me into a purchase, but it's often a good gauge of what is going on in a story. I can get

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RPG Corner v5.0 - The Art of the One-Shot Story

by Doug >|< Roper of EPIC Gaming

As a long-time gamer myself, and one who spends 99% of his gaming life as a Game Master, I have very clear ideas about what I want in a game. Usually those ideas create the need for long term plots, slow reveals and gradual builds in tension and excitement. I prefer a series of linked and interdependent stories, what has been referred to in this column before as a chronicle or campaign. Unfortunately, these things tend to become monsters, gobbling up time and creative energy in amounts that would drive the faint of heart into the hills. Imagine the effort and personal time placed into writing a novel, now spread that out over two or three (or four) years, and involve the wants, desires and unexpected moves of characters that you cannot control, and you can see how the terms 're-write' and 'revise' and 're-arrange' become curses in the mouths of GMs. Campaigns, relying on subtle details and slow builds, are very rewarding in the long run, but require very long runs to pay off.

If however, you find yourself without the time to invest in either the planning and constructing or running of these massive stories, the alternative is the often belittled One-Shot scenario. These are simple stories that are begun and resolved in one session. The lack of slow and overly-complicated plots, and NPCs who need to be worn down make One-Shots a breeze to design and run. They may not satisfy gamers in the higher concept models, such as Immersive or Internal Exploration, but for the other three, Pure Recreation, Hobby and even Actor, One-Shots can still be a rewarding way to spend your game time.

There are a few ways to handle One-Shots. The first is just to do whatever the group wants, jumping from one setting to the next from session to session. Unless you have a group of highly experienced players, familiar with many different systems, you have to stick with a system that everyone knows. There is nothing preventing a GM from taking a familiar system, and applying it to different settings (as GURPS, the Generic Universal Role Playing System developed by Steve Jackson has done). If the group of players wants to play pirates one week and star fighter pilots the next, a simple basic system is the best way to handle that jump. This type of play allows the group to really cut loose and have a good time, as there is a smaller investment in the characters and story, since ultimately everyone knows that there is almost no chance of playing the characters again. This type of play can lead to some seriously hilarious situations, and is ideal for a purely

recreational game. There is no stress, no attachment and no angst whatsoever.

The next type of One-Shot consists of a series of games within a single setting. These games use the same setting, though not necessarily with the same characters or time periods. It can be fun to game in a world where the actions of the PCs in one time setting set down the history for the new PCs in a later time setting. There can be a substantial change in the physical setting if the group decides to play in vastly different periods of time. Was earth in 1200 the same as earth of 2000? Of course not, and there is no reason to think that a fantasy world wouldn't evolve and change as time passed. Of course there's no reason to think that it would, either.

The last type of one-shot (so far as I consider them) is a dangerous middle ground for those GMs who don't want to spend too much time preparing games, yet do want a little more investment on the part of their players with their characters. This is running a series of stories in a single setting with the same characters. It's like episodic television, or a series of books in this respect. The stories are contained, but connected by familiar characters and settings. This provides a reason for the PCs to invest more in their characters, but it doesn't prohibit the use of other characters from time to time. The danger comes from the very intimacy that the GM wants to create with the PCs. Long term investment tends to create subplots, recurring characters, and side-quests...the very things that differentiate the long term games from the One-Shots. There may not be an overall story arc to all of the individual tales spun by the GM, but with each adventure the PCs build a history for themselves. From that history comes a certain amount of depth and richness which is nice if the GM doesn't allow it to get out of control. By out of control, I mean the PCs using past experiences and encounters to explain current situations, making connections that the GM may not intend. This can lead to the PCs creating a large overall plot in their minds that the GM will ultimately have to take responsibility for or risk severely letting the Players down. So long as the GM is reasonably careful not to leave loose ends dangling, these things can be avoided, as PCs won't ask questions about resolved problems.

The One-Shot story also serves the GM who runs the longer, more involved stories, but in different ways. I can give you an example from my own experience. Over the past four years I have run a long, intense

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All Things Anime

by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

"Anime", animation, specifically Japanese animations (aka—"those cartoon things, right?") are a facet of speculative fiction that fandom has embraced along with manga (Japanese version of comic books—but on newsprint and usually at least an inch thick). The animation industry has blossomed from the widely popular manga to full length movies that even caught the attention of the Disney moguls. When Disney gets involved, it may not be blockbuster news, but it will succeed. They have the backing: marketing, budget and a ready-made and eager following of anything they distribute.

The manga-to-animated program-to full-length movie spawned a host of other collectible merchandise. The usual book bags, pencils, key chains, ball caps and even software, not to mention the must-haves like DVDs and boxed sets of the show, are expected and for a portion of fandom, hoarded like gold. This includes miniatures of the characters. In Japan, these miniatures are collectible and are called Gashapons. Often, they are graphic in nature, bordering on soft-porn.

Fandom, not to be excluded from the fun and creativity, has developed a few niches of it's own in the animation genre. Included are artwork, resin models of characters, equipment—similar to gashapons and action figures, and an emerging creation: Kisakae (kiss-Ah-kay). Electronic paper dolls. Yes. That's right. Fandom adults are turning to cyberspace to create characters and outfits for their favorite shows to use as avatars or on their own websites. So taking a look at all things anime, here's a few more things I discovered while dressing my InuYasha kisakae characters...

Hentai, Echi, Dojins—basically Japanese porn with anime characters/themes. One of the not surprising things about anime is how graphic and sexual some of the fandom creations have become. Hentai has a fandom following and embraces gashapon and kisakae—a natural progression. Dojins are stylishly drawn comics that parody popular anime characters in extremely explicit sexual situations.

Cosplay—almost every anime convention features a Costume or Masquerade fashion show. (Think Halloween costumes for grown-ups.). These are elaborate costumes that are chiefly designed and sewn at home. Dealers rooms often have at least one table who offers exquisite fabrics and accessories. While many conventions have a Masquerade Ball, Cosplay is pretty much strictly for anime lovers. Much of anime is themed around school, so it's not surprising to find

those oh-so-hated school uniforms. However, somehow anime creators make even uniforms look sexy! The most recent offering from anime is *The Count Of Monte Christo*. This series has even more stylized creations that anime already offers. Each character's clothing is a different type of pattern or material. Finding these clothes in a Cosplay should prove outstanding since the creators of COMC have clothed the characters in Andy Worhol rejects.

Action figures—Like Gashapons, these are money makers for the copyright owners. However, while Gashapons tend to be character driven, Action Figures are more super-hero types.

Monsters—Think action figures that eat Tokyo.

Trading cards—Baseball cards inspired this collectable. Sets (without the Bubble Gum) are available at WalMart, but the best selections will be at game or book stores. Browse through these and you'll find everything from Lord Of The Rings to Xena. (Okay, you won't find Xena cards at Wal-Mart. But Yu-Gi-Oh and Pokemon are still favorites.)

Gaming cards—Like trading card sets, but for tabletop games and RPG (roll playing games). My favorite is Munchkins and Cheez Geek. A friend of mine sold me part of his Magic: The Gathering collection, but I've yet to be able to use it fully.

CD-Anime series sound tracks—Cruise eBay for these. Most music stores might have one or two selections, but best bet are gaming stores.

DVD and "booster boxes"—Same as above. Gaming stores, video stores and eBay carry these. Beware of eBay sets, however. Pirated sets with very convincing graphics are not uncommon.

Toys and dolls—Remember Transformers and G.I. Joe? Everything from laser rifles to Barbie Star Trek (really, I have one. Ken is included!).

Lunch boxes/Bento box—Bento is the Japanese version for lunch pails/boxes. It's a big thing for the school crowd. These are "essential" items for those who can afford it and a minor status cymbal if you have one. In American, anime themes are available, but hard to find. In Japan, anime is more common, so try to find a Brady Bunch Bento Box and you've got a real collectable!

Memo pads—pens, pencils, rulers... school supplies sell and coveted anime characters featured on these are available. For Christmas I splurged so I could get a book bag... a "Gamers" carry pouch/bag I got from SunCoast (black haired InuYasha!).

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The Writer's Block: The First Rule of Endings

by Charles Gramlich

People who write fiction most often revise their openings more than they do any other part of their work. They may even tell a new writer that the beginning is the most important part of a piece. They may particularly stress the opening sentence as the hook upon which all readers turn. I think they're telling it wrong.

I don't mean to downplay the importance of strong openings. They are absolutely essential to selling any individual piece of writing. Unless you can catch the reader's attention quickly, perhaps instantaneously, that reader is going to move on to one of the many other sources of entertainment in their sensation-rich world. Reality shows and X-boxes. DVDs and I-Pods. They're all waiting and willing to steal your readers.

So why aren't openings the single most important part of a tale? It's because they only help sell the immediate piece that the reader has in hand. More important than the beginning is the "ending," which not only helps sell the immediate piece, but is the only thing that sells your *next* piece. And surely most writers would prefer to have more than a one story career.

I recently read a collection of short SF stories from the 1930s and 1940s that was entitled *Strange Ports of Call*. There were a few excellent pieces in the anthology, including Ray Bradbury's "The Million Year Picnic," but what struck me about many of the tales is that if they were submitted to the big SF magazines of today under my name, or probably yours, they wouldn't sell. They wouldn't sell because they had no real endings, just a sort of... "trailing off." They finished with a whimper rather than a bang, and endings *need* that bang.

It is the *endings* that people remember about a tale, whether it's in written form or in the movies. Who remembers the *start* of *The Sixth Sense*? But if you saw that move then you remember the end. Who can tell you the opening lines of *King Kong*, but who can forget "It was beauty killed the beast?" Beginnings may capture our attention, but it is endings that send us clamoring for more.

I'm going to spend my next few columns talking about endings and how to find the good ones, but I'll finish this immediate piece with the first rule of

endings, a rule that many writers don't realize *is* a rule. This is that the opening of any piece of writing *makes a promise* to the reader, and the ending's first and foremost job is to fulfill that promise.

This rule is easy to see in action with non-fiction. Suppose you pick up an article that opens with: "Recent research suggests that Mars was once a wet planet." Don't you want the author of such a piece to tell you about the "research" and why it suggests a wet Mars? Just so.

Now consider a short story that begins: "The three men fled Mars aboard a stolen rocket." This is just as much of a promise as the opening of the non-fiction piece. At the very least the readers must be told who the three men are and why they stole the rocket, and, of course, what happens to them as a result of their theft.

The best endings do more than just fulfill the promise of their openings, of course. They stay with us even after we close the book or turn the last page of the story. But that's a discussion for another column. This one's at its end.

"Hard" science fiction... probes alternative possible futures by means of reasoned extrapolations in much the same way that good historical fiction reconstructs the probable past. Even far-out fantasy can present a significant test of human values exposed to a new environment. Deriving its most cogent ideas from the tension between permanence and change, science fiction combines the diversions of novelty with its pertinent kind of realism.

— Jack Williamson

Reviews

Beacons of Tomorrow and Jewel of Truth **On Sale Now!**

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Micah

Laurell K. Hamilton

Jove, Mar 2006

\$6.99, Mass Market, 272 pgs.

ISBN: 0515140872

Review by Harriet Klausner

As a favor to a friend, Vampire Executioner and Federal Marshal Anita Blake takes time out from her St. Louis Pard (pack) and her lovers (two ordinary vampires, two were-leopards, one were-wolf, and one master vampire), to fly to Philadelphia. Her were-leopard lover Micah accompanies her. The FBI wants to raise the Zombie Emmett Leroy Rose who died before he could provide testimony in Federal Court. It is considered strong evidence, the testimony of a zombie, because they cannot lie.

The night before their appointment at the cemetery, Micah and Anita enjoy a sex filled night exchanging confidences. When they arrive at the cemetery, Anita realizes this old place contains forces that send magical vibes from the graves to her. Anita completes the protective circle, but struggles with controlling all that is engulfing her from the other side including the arisen Emmett amplified by living humans wanting her stopped.

In previous tales, Micah has been a murkier background character, but this time he plays a major role, enabling the audience to learn how he became a shapeshifter and how much the trauma affects him. The audience also sees his true feelings for Anita. The mystery involves the zombie

testimony, the tactics of a sleazy defense attorney, and the unknown human in the graveyard. Laurell K. Hamilton writes an exciting erotic and evocative paranormal romantic suspense thriller that will thrill her fans and send new readers scrambling for her backlist.

Cadmian's Choice

L.E. Modesitt Jr.

Tor, Apr 2006

\$27.95, Hardcover, 512 pgs.

ISBN 0765315289

Review by Harriet Klausner

On Corus, Majer Mykel, commander of the Third Battalion, a rifle unit, hides his psychic "Talent" similar to that of the ruling Alectors because he fears the reaction of the Alectors hierarchy learning a human shares their abilities. However, he may have to expose himself for the good of his people. He has learned that renegade Alectors plan to use forbidden weapons to prevent the transfer of people especially those in power from the Alector dying home world to Corus.

He turns to Myrmidons-West Submarshal Dainyl an Alector though he has misgivings about this or any official; Dainyl reciprocates his deep distrust of the major. However, Dainyl knows he must act now to prevent the rebels from using these weapons, but to do so he needs Mykel's help. While both the Alector and the human ponder the risk of trusting one another, the mysterious Ancients, assumed extinct, contact both of them with a message saying each group must cooperate to survive.

The key to the delightful fifth *Corean Chronicles* is the powerful cast who make Corus seem genuine and more important the relationship between the ruling Alectors and the human natives real. Interestingly, it is the appearance of the Ancient Ones, the original natives of the planet who everyone assumed died out ages ago that adds a fantastic twist to this exciting tale. The distrustful uneasy peace between Dainyl and Mykel add to a fabulous science fiction fantasy saga.

Reviews

Arena

Karen Hancock

Bethany Press, 2002

\$12.99, Trade Paper, 393 pgs.

ISBN 0-7642-2631-2

Review by D. L. Parker

Having been a librarian now for several years, I admit one of the great pleasures of the job is simply seeing what other people read. Many of my discoveries have surprised me. There's a reason Nora Roberts and others of her ilk are chronic squatters on the best-seller lists: there are people who come into my library who read nothing but the same romantic suspense authors, week after week, year after year, book after book. Others have surprised me in different ways. There are the two brothers living rough with their outhouse behind the cabin, who read history and political science and biographies of generals and presidents and poets; there are the slightly sheepish bearded gentlemen who check out romances. There was the woman who came in asking for J. D. Salinger for her shy young daughter, who should have been reading Harry Potter and Robert Louis Stevenson. Every day, people astonish me.

But I admit one of the biggest surprises has been just how many people read what I suppose I'll dub Christian SF. Elderly couples pester me for the latest Tim LaHaye and soberly press me to read the books myself when they return them. I've often wanted to ask these readers, but never dared, what is the appeal of these books to them. Are they reading them simply as entertainment? Do they perceive Tim LaHaye and his co-authors as genuine prophets of our time? Don't they perceive a possibility of blasphemy in these might-be speculations, these thrillers that re-grind and regurgitate Revelations through a pop cultural lens? *Why* do they read them? *Why* do they take them so seriously? What symptom of our time is the great popularity of these books, from LaHaye to Dan Brown to Anne Rice?

A patron at the library recommended a Christian SF book entitled 'Arena' to me, and I finally decided to break down and read it. It began promisingly. Callie, our protagonist, is a woman with an obsessively self-protective nature, a walking collection of phobias and fears. But she's trying to do something about it. Her recklessly adventurous friend Meg talks Callie into participating in a scientific trial that claims it can help Callie overcome her fears. Strangely, the young men

who seem to manage the experiment are all young, good-looking, and beardless (I suppose angels are not supposed to be hairy).

But Callie and Meg have been drastically tricked. As soon as the ink dries on her authorization, Callie finds herself on an alien world, with scant instructions, cannibalistic Troglodytes – who used to be human exiles like themselves – and woman-eating vegetation all around. (It does not pay to enter into angelic contracts of *any* kind lightly, it seems). She's in trouble, and right off the bat, she gets into worse trouble by not following instructions and giving into her phobia of heights. A young man who's not seen any good baths lately comes to her rescue, but he's got fears of his own to overcome... and he's been fighting for his life for five years. That promised Gateway to redemption seems a long way off to both Callie and her new friend.

I actually enjoyed the first third of the story, as Callie and her fellow exiles struggle to find their exit, overcome their personal demons, and stay alive in harrowing circumstances. But then we get six straight pages of information dump, and the author rears up and hammers us in the forehead with her blatant religious metaphors. God is the alien Elhanu, and the Aggillon, his people, are the good angels. There's trouble in this peaceful galaxy-spanning empire, of course, and in a thinly disguised metaphor of Lucifer, there's Prince Cephelus, who envied good Elhanu, and fell from grace with his fellow sinners. Now there's the Arena, where the kidnapped humans give Elhanu a chance to show his goodness and how well they can follow his instructions to stay on the white path, and where, of course, the exiled followers of the fallen Prince get *their* chance to tempt and obstruct.

So *this*, then, is Christian SF? God as an alien? (Elhanu shows up later in the story in person, as a white-haired gentleman with a knack for giving good self-help and tough-love advice). I almost put the book down, but decided to slog through to the end of Callie's adventures.

All the while, though, I could just see our modern Christian SF writer explaining matters to those old time martyrs who insisted on dying so messily and unnecessarily in the real, that is, Roman, arenas. *There's no problem; Jupiter is simply a metaphor for Jehovah, so go ahead and bow; yes, I know that sounds confusing, but just read this story about a lion who's really God, and this story about an alien who's really God, and you'll start to get the picture...what's in a name, eh?*

'Arena' is actually a fairly interesting book, in terms

Reviews

Arena (con't)

of entertainment, although we pass from a dark first half (which includes almost-rapes and cannibalism) to a second half whose Got Pseudo-Christian Religion may be equally hard to take for many people (including myself). But there's plenty of action and tension in both halves.

Still, I think I'll stick to the source for my further religious instruction. Anything I need to know about the interaction of God, Man, and the Devil I think I can find in *The Book of Job*. I think names *do* matter. Jehovah is not interchangeable with Aslan the Lion or Augustus the God Emperor or Elhanu the Alien – or Allah either. Not *my* God, anyway.

Once Upon an Autumn Eve

Dennis L. McKiernan

Roc, Apr 2006

\$23.95, Hardcover

ISBN 0451460693

Review by Harriet Klausner

The knight with blood pouring from his wounds enters Autumnwood in the magical land of Faery. Goblins pursue him until he falls from his horse as if dead. Princess Liaze quickly chases the goblins away from the fallen warrior. Realizing he still lives, she takes him to her home to heal while shocked that somehow he already has entered her heart.

Sieur Luc and Liaze fall in love at first sight. However, someone abducts Luc from the safety of Liaze's demesne. Clues provided by the Fates point towards Liaze's enemy the Wizard Orbane and his three witches Hradian, Iniquí and Nefasí though why Luc is taken makes no sense to Liaze. She begins a quest to rescue her beloved with only the limited help of the Fates and the true love connection between their hearts to guide her.

The third once upon a season fantasy (see *Once Upon A Winter's Night* and *Once Upon A Summer Day*) contains a delightful gender bender heroine coming to the rescue of the captured knight rather than the other way as happens in the somewhat similarly plotted fairy tale Glass Mountain. The story line is fast-paced, but the villains seem more like caricatures than fully realistic evil people. Still with a terrific twist involving Luc and a fabulous female champion, young fans of feature length fairy tales will enjoy Dennis McKiernan's latest trek into the land of Fairy.

Red Lighting

John Varley

Ace, April 2006

\$23.95, Hardcover, 336 pgs.

ISBN 0441013643

Review by Harriet Klausner

Over two decades ago Ray Garcia-Strickland's parents and his Uncles Travis and brilliant scientist cousin Jubal flew to Mars using old railroad tank cars and the Squeezer energy-drive to make a safe landing. Jubal invented the Squeezer as a free energy source that defies the laws of physics and can only be produced by him. Now Earth has a clean cheap source of energy which allows "Earthies" to visit the colony of Mars and see the sights. One day something going at a phenomenal speed hits the ocean causing a giant tsunami that wipes out the eastern seaboard of America.

Three months later an invasion fleet from Earth lands on Mars looking for Jubal who escaped his hosts in the Falkland Islands where he was heavily guarded against kidnapers from other governments. They torture the Stricklands because whoever is behind the invasion believes the couple knows where Jubal hides. The invaders eventually free the Stricklands hoping that Jubal will contact them; when he does it is up to seventeen year old Ray to figure out how to free Mars and keep Jubal safe and happy.

Readers get to see what damage a tsunami can do when the Stricklands fly to earth to rescue Ray's grandmother. This is an action packed space thriller in which one man is so valuable, governments, businessmen and politicians will go to any lengths to find and keep him. Jubal is an endearing child-like man who is heartbroken to see that his discovery has a dark and evil downside. Ray is the narrator and the story is told in the first person, which gives readers a ringside seat to the tsunami and the after-effects as well as the ethical dilemma Jubal finds himself in. *Red Lightning* is filled with action and populated by characters readers will care deeply about.

Reviews

The Protector's War

S.M. Stirling

Roc, 2005

ISBN 0-451-46046-4

Review by Terry Crotinger

The Protector's War takes up several years later from *Dies The Fire* (2004) the book that started this set of sagas. (This is the second trilogy the S.M. Stirling has given us that dovetails with the *Nantucket* series. This series is a prequel to *Dies The Fire*.) In *The Protector's War*, *The Change* started nine years before. Engines no longer work; gunpowder does not spark. Society has no access to computers, networks, databases, medical records or fingerprints. Standard garb of the business world is obsolete, replaced by armor, chain mail and swords. What Twenty-First Century strived to achieve, shriveled when *The Change* occurred. Suddenly plunged into the Dark Ages, historians, craftsmen and people who belonged to the Society for Creative Anachronisms are commodities—sought after for their knowledge of ancient weapons and metallurgy. Continued survival now hinges on communities who possess people who have the ancient skills.

The Protector's War fast forwards nine years and focuses on the same characters that struggled to set up a community in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. However, an added element is the introduction of a handful of men who travel by way of the great sailing ships with a mission to check on various civilizations to see how they fare worldwide. When they arrive on the Pacific Coast, they interact with Norman Arminger, Protector (slave owner and Lord) of Portland and surrounding areas. He entreats them to help locate and dispose of the contents of an arsenal and a known repository of mustard gas. While most of it was destroyed just after *The Change*, some remains and Arminger has plans to use it on his enemies. However, before he realizes how little is actually available, his British visitors escape and head eastward to the Willamette Valley and into the territory of Juniper Mackenzie, a Wiccan Priestess and leader of Clan Mackenzie and the Bearkillers, led by ex-veteran and pilot, Michael Havel. By heading east, the group finds new allies and possibly, a new life.

Information on survival and warfare techniques was outstanding in *Dies The Fire*, and *The Protector's War* is not disappointing. Insight about how children adapt to having no conveniences, malls or television gives a rare sociological look at what is timeless, what is not.

It's amazing to think that within a span of a decade that a culture would not hunger for shopping malls, the Internet or speedy travel. In fact, these icons of the modern world become myth; a whole generation of children has never been exposed to such marvels. Mr. Stirling presents a logical look at how adaptable humans are to new challenges. I'm running out to get the next part of this series as soon as possible. You never know when a Change might happen!

To Serve and Submit

Susan Wright

Roc, April 2006

\$14.00, Trade Paper, 304 pgs.

ISBN 0451460685

Review by Harriet Klausner

At birth Marja was touched by the Otherworld growing up able to see the tiny magical beings the olfs and being able to commune with the water spirits. One day, Lexander the slave procurer and trader, who teaches young folks to give pleasure in Vidaris, spots Marja and offers two cows for her. A year later he returns and the deal is made with Marja's agreement. Marja takes to the exotic arts like a duck in water. On the day she graduates, a winged boat comes for her but Lexander stops her from boarding.

He tells Marja he loves her and he wants to be with her forever away from his evil consort Helenas. He sends her to stay with Silveta in Markland until he comes for her. Silveta owes Marja because she was raped by Birgin who wants to have relations with Silveta and would have if the two women hadn't changed places. When she arrives at Silveta's estate, she is the reason that Birgin and Silveta's husband dual. Her husband dies and Birgin becomes the leader of Markland, but Silveta is determined with Marja's help to find a band of warriors who will fight on her side in return for land. Marja is reunited with Lexander and together they seek to defeat Birgin even though Marja fears him. He admits though he walks among man, he is not a man but an entity more powerful and intends to put a stop to the buying of slaves for his masters.

Although there are many graphic sexual scenes in *To Serve and Submit* they blend in nicely to the storyline and are sensual rather than pornographic. This spellbinding fantasy has plenty of political intrigue and battle scenes. The heart of this work lies in the characters of Marja who accepts her sensual nature as a normal personality trait and Lexander who realizes what he is doing is wrong and hopes to rectify it in the second of this two book romantica fantasy series.

Catch the Eye (con't)

a glimpse as to whether it's something I've read before (different place, different people... same old story) or something new. I can also sense whether it is a story up my alley or something liable to leave me bored. It may not always steer me true, but back cover copy is a far better compass than any picture could be.

But if all I've said is true, then why are the bulk of my books fantasies? I really enjoy hard science fiction, on some levels even more than fantasy, so where are all the science fiction novels? Do their titles not appeal to me, does the cover copy (written by advertising and marketing people) not adequately capture the intriguing scientific and/or social imagery of the author? Or is it really that most science fiction books have boring spacescapes while fantasy books are ripe with color, fire-breathing dragons, and the occasional buxom damsel in distress?

Over the next few months, I'll explore some aspects of cover design and try to decipher what, exactly, makes a reader eager to hand over his hard-earned money.

Anime (con't)

Puchi Samples—These feature ethnic oriented edibles, albeit plastic, like: Teriyaki and egg rolls with the required chopsticks. (Think McDonald's Happy meals toy sets for kids.)

Chopsticks in bento box—You'll find anime characters on these too!

Movie/character posters, flags, banners—big consumer demand for these and Shitajiki

Shitajiki—(she-ta-gee-key) Literally it means underlay. They are thin, but not so flexible plastic with a flat surface for writing letters, etc. like movie posters or pencil boards

Cell phone cases and ringtones—So I'm in the Minneapolis/St. Paul airport... in the ah... ladies room... getting ready for my next flight last summer. In the stall next to me the cell phone goes off and I realize it's playing the theme song from Ranma ½. I got all excited and shouted over the stall wall that I just HAD to know where that ringtone was purchased. But I guess too excited because next thing I know I hear the stall door fly open, slam against the wall (deafening me) and high heels running out the door. I've tried to find anime ringtones but they have eluded me.

Hand puppets—kid's toys.

T-shirts/purses/hoodies, headbands, and baseball caps—I own a black InuYasha cap that I'm very fond of!

School Girl Uniforms: the ever-popular schoolgirl uniforms.

So from Kisekae to Barbie, there is plenty to collect and enjoy!

RPG Corner (con't)

and very detailed game set in White Wolf's World of Darkness setting. In the main it is a story about a singular group of individuals, my PCs. However, as the game trucks on, and as I add detail, and characters and plots, I realize that there is no hope of exposing my PCs to everything I create to fill in the world that their characters inhabit. There is simply too much for one group of PCs to be involved with. As a GM, I have had to decide which plots and NPCs to focus on in my story, and which I have to relegate to the sidelines, and which I have to abandon as 'unreachable' by the PCs, with their main characters. It's a shame to waste all that work, but how can PCs busy in the U.S.A. possible experience what is happening at the same time in Australia? Well the short answer is they can't, but the better answer is, their *characters* can't, but the *Players* can, through the One-Shot.

Allowing the Players to set down their main characters, and pick up new characters in a totally different place can be a wonderful tool for GMs to use. I spoke earlier of using the same characters to create a history, and this is another facet of that gem called richness. By allowing the Players to experience a part of the overall story that their regular characters would have no way of seeing or doing, the GM is allowing his world to become much more accessible, and is showing the Players more of the big picture, which will make later discoveries using their regular characters so much more powerful. While the characters will have no knowledge of a certain connection, the Player will, and the Player ultimately is the individual who the GM wants to entertain, not the character. One-Shot stories are great for explaining certain details, or setting up back-stories for characters, places or items that the regular PCs will encounter, or have already encountered. Because the success or failure of the characters in the one-shots won't necessarily impact the Players' regular characters, the Players can be more focused on the story and the intricacies of connection that the GM is presenting, leading to a more rewarding experience. Thus the once maligned one-shot becomes spice for the meal that is the long chronicle...the crispy bits that everyone denies liking so much.

Those people who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do.

— Issac Asimov