



The Illuminata

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Putting Bite In What You Write

By Bret Funk

By spending more time in my editor's cap, I have developed a greater appreciation for the rules of good writing, those dozen or so little "suggestions" crammed down our throats every time we read a book on writing, visit a website on writing, or talk to someone who knows anything about writing. Proper use of punctuation. Consistency of point-of-view. Attention to vocabulary and meaning. Don't even get me started on adverbs and dialogue attribution!

Eliminating weak constructions tops almost every list of 'How To Improve Your Writing'. The writers I know agree on virtually nothing, so seeing such universal acclaim for strong verbs and active wording gives the rule even more power in my eyes. Yet I must pause to wonder why, if everyone thinks weak constructions so onerous, do so many of us keep using them even when we know we should not.

The problem, I believe, stems from several areas. First, certain types of writing demand weak constructions and passive voice. Scientific writing, in an attempt to distance the procedure/experiments from the error-prone people who perform them, eschews the use of active verbs. One will invariably see 'The pot was stirred for 10 minutes to facilitate the reaction' over 'I stirred the pot for 10 minutes to facilitate the reaction'. Other academic and business writings also favor the passive voice, generally out of the somewhat ill-conceived notion that use 'I' or

'We' is unprofessional, or the more reasonable assertion that passive voice emphasizes results over procedures. Regardless of why society forced them to do it, authors with a scientific/professional writing background (like myself), find breaking away from the habitual use of passive voice difficult.

More importantly for the average writer, weak constructions dominate our spoken language. 'I went to the store with Frank' has a certain finality to it when compared to 'So, I was going to the store with Frank...'. The former implies the end of the story, the latter that the best part is yet to come. It stands to reason that one—especially one new to writing—would write the way one thinks (and talks). Separating one's speaking voice from one's 'writing voice' requires a paradigm shift on the part of a burgeoning author, one made more difficult by the knowledge that dialogue in writing should reflect the way people speak, not the way writers write.

Problems arise because readers want to see a story, they don't want it told to them. Movies exemplify this point. Visualize your favorite scene from your favorite action movie, then describe that scene to someone using only passive voice. Odds are, they won't like it as much as you do. For instance:

Han kicked Chewy into the garbage shoot, then fired a few rounds at the Stormtroopers before diving after him, has a great deal more oomph to it than Chewy was shoved into the garbage shoot by Han, who was forced to dive after him after a few more shots were fired at the Stormtroopers.

In my next few articles, I'll explore in more detail the various forms of weak constructions and try to establish some guidelines governing their use and misuse. I will also attempt to convince developing writers to adopt a more active writing style now, before occasional overuse of weak constructions calcifies into near-unbreakable routine.

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Spiderman 3: Spiderman vs. Everybody

by Erik Goodwyn

Hmmm. How can I describe this movie?

So, in this episode, Spiderman must face his one time friend Harry Osbourne, who now has a grudge against him. It's really heartbreaking to see the way the two best friends must now lock wills against one another, and plunge into a death-defying struggle, pitting brothers in all but blood, until--er, but before we get to that, Flint Marko has just recently escaped from prison, and Peter Parker and Aunt May are stunned to find out this is the *real* killer involved in Ben Parker's death. Not that other guy in Spiderman 1. Peter is shocked and angered, and burns with the fire of vengeance in his heart. But before Peter faces him, Marko falls into a nuclear test facility and makes an amazing transformation into The Sandman! These two super-powers now wage war across the city in a titanic struggle of good versus--oh, also as this is going on Peter and M.J. are having problems, as a new girl enters the scene and threatens to undermine their wedding plans, and—but before that happens, a meteor lands from outer space containing a mysterious biological life form that infects Spiderman's suit and enters his mind, awakening dark thoughts of aggression. <pause to take a deep breath> Now Parker must search his soul and combat the inner demons within, as he struggles to maintain his good heart against thoughts of aggression and hatred. This struggle threatens to tear Parker to the core, and traumatize his—but suddenly the life-form shifts to another character, who was introduced in scene 24: Parker's rival Eddy Brock. Brock, trying to undermine Spiderman's credibility, is humiliated by Peter Parker (who is Spiderman, in case your having trouble keeping up so far), and transforms into the monstrous villain Venom! Now Venom leaps to the fore, wreaking havoc and destruction, hellbent on destroying Spiderman and all he stands for. Now Spiderman must wage battle with Venom atop the spires of the city, oh and also Sandman is there, too, and, uh, M.J. is in peril—or I think she transformed into a cyber-mutant, no that was Harry Brock, or was it Aunt Jameson? Whatever the case--Spiderman's alter ego is fighting against

the venomous Sandman's symbiotic pumpkin bombs atop a super glider that Parker's new girlfriend must save from M.J.'s renegade hair dryer that is also a tactical nuclear warhead, when suddenly everyone gets thrown into a blender with three thousand watermelons, the space shuttle and a flaming trampoline before the parts get shipped to Bolivia in a yellow submarine.

Whew! I think that pretty well describes it. But I liked the movie, really. Only, as I watched it, I was reminded of a great story teller: Snoopy, atop his doghouse, who began one of his masterpieces: "It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly, a shot rang out! A door slammed. The maid screamed. Suddenly, a pirate ship appeared on the horizon! While millions of people were starving, the king lived in luxury. Meanwhile, on a small farm in Kansas, a boy was growing up." Part 2, of course, is where Snoopy ties all of this together.

Except that here, we don't get a part 2. This Spiderman, so rumors have it, is the last from director Sam Raimi. Maybe that's why Raimi decided to cram 4 movies into one, just so he could be done with the franchise. I don't know. Despite the problems, though, Spiderman 3 remains an entertaining—if quite odd—experience, especially scene by scene. If you try to make much sense of the overall structure, however, good luck to you. Numerous other reviewers have already made pithy analogies between the plot of this smorgasbord of mayhem and the sticky webs made by the title character, but I won't do that. Instead I think it's more like an overlong roller coaster that someone set to Ludicrous Speed. When you get off, you don't remember very much of what happened, but somehow it was sort of fun anyway. But to get back on? Nah, maybe some other time.

You can't deny laughter; when it comes, it plops down in your favorite chair and stays as long as it wants.

— Stephen King

What still amazes me is how exact the science of writing can be. Fan fiction creates opportunity for experimentation and illusion—but the topic is not original. It can be as exacting as the master class of writers, but still, it borrows from an already established framework. For the perfectionist, or even the exploring writer testing their creativity, Master Teachers offer advice and caveats. How to apply them is the real question, nay, the art! Whether novel or screenplay, believability is the goal, though approached differently.

Mickey Zucker Reichert (*The Renshai Chronicles*) and C.S. Friedman (*Coldfire Trilogy*) co-chaired a panel (ICON31) on how to write women in literature from a Medieval perspective called, “Feminism in Fantasy”. As established authors, their work carries weight of authenticity simply because they research the subject and time period and make it as realistic as possible. Even fantasy stays within the real-life framework of the time. Ms. Reichert and Ms. Friedman offered the following discussion on the subject...

The present day female reader may find it difficult to identify with the Medieval woman, but there are ways to get around it. The typical vehicles to introduce women in such a time period are: the magic god-mother, women dressing as men, the woman pirate who doesn't fit in—but gets away with it, or the Queen or Italian Renaissance woman whose husband dies and she inherits their place in the Guild. How compelling is a powerful character in such a time as they attempt to overcome the customs and limitations of their traditional gender roles? (Factoid: Viking women could forswear their role as wife/mother and be warriors.)

Watch the language/vocabulary of the time period, both authors admonished. Medieval times had very few real words or concepts. Complex ideas like psychology, germs, etc., had no vocabulary to have deep, philosophical discussions. Even Latin was a “secret” language. Is the slang too modern feeling? When a writer tries to explain ‘repressed emotions’, the time period doesn't have words to express such a thought. Ms. Reichert and Ms.

Friedman suggest that when writing in this time frame, to write as if you are translating. Victorian/Medieval era did not use contractions.

Both writers insist that good/evil is essential to the period. Religious issues are part of the conflict in every day life. *Ladies of Ham*, by Barbara Hamblin, was highlighted as an appropriate example as it was “well written and very true to the medieval setting”.

A discussion about the King Arthur ensued a bit later in the panel. C.S. Friedman did not think Arthurian legends were anything more than that. “Knighthood was purchased,” she said. “The Code of Honor is not real.” *Tales of Chivalry*, (Sir Walter Scott) likely added to the romance of the concept. Both authors agreed Fairy Tales were associated with this time.

The Puritan era was, in reality, a matter of survival. If something needed to be done, both the husband and wife did it, no matter what was required—especially, for the lower class. Clean division of labor is a recent concept.

This concept brought a side-note in the panel's topic—writing for a male audience. Mickey Zucker Reichert tries to “get into the character's head. Men physical-ize feelings.” She plays up physical sensations like sweating and pain in the stomach. “Females are more vague physically thought are easier to identify.” C.S. Friedman agreed and added, “Guys don't have feelings—they have reactions.” Both authors spoke about exploring the balance of power between the sexes.

Joe Haldeman, Patron Saint of SFLIS (Science Fiction League of Iowa Students) adds his slant on writing for a male audience. Joe's forte is military writing. He, too, admonishes to watch the use of slang when writing/reading and that poor usage is the fastest way to spot a “fake” veteran. His panel seems to be crowded with a dominance of males in the audience that seem to get his in-jokes. Funny and informative, his topic can be summed up quickly:

“If there's military action—there will *always* be mud.”

“Don't write about something you've never done.”

Fraction of Extrasolar Planets Having Life

by Joe Vadalma

This is a tough one, because scientists are not certain what caused life on the earth to appear. The age of the earth is somewhere around 4.7 billion years old. According to present planetary theories, this is when all the flying debris in our part of the solar system coalesced into the planet, more or less the size it is now. Perhaps our moon was also created around this time when a giant asteroid collided with earth and threw up the material that now comprises the moon. Anyway, the planet was too hot to have a stable crust until about 3.9 billion years ago. We now know that life appeared between 3.6 and 3.7 billion years ago. In other words, life did not appear on earth for two or three hundred million years after the crust formed.

But what caused it to begin at all? In 1953, a scientist, Miller, and his graduate student, Urey, performed an experiment that simulated conditions that were thought to have existed on the early Earth. The experiment showed that such basic building blocks of life such as amino acids can be formed spontaneously. This seemed to settle the problem. It seemed that life would form automatically whenever conditions were correct.

The experiment, however, was problematic. For one thing, the composition of the prebiotic atmosphere of earth is controversial. Other less reducing gases produce a lower yield and variety. It was once thought that appreciable amounts of molecular oxygen were present in the prebiotic atmosphere, which would have essentially prevented the formation of organic molecules; however, the current scientific consensus is that such was not the case.

The other problem is that simple organic molecules are a long way from a fully functional life form; however, in an environment with no preexisting life, these molecules may have accumulated and provided a rich environment for the spontaneous rise of living things. This is called the "soup theory". Nonetheless, the spontaneous formation of complex forms from abiotically generated monomers under these

conditions is not a straightforward process. Besides the necessary basic organic monomers, compounds that would have prohibited the formation of polymers, were formed in high concentration during the experiments. According to Brooks and Shaw (1973), there is no evidence in the geological record that any such soup existed.

Another theory postulates the evolution of biochemical pathways as fundamentals of the evolution of life. In this theory, the energy released from redox reactions of metal sulfides is available for the synthesis of organic molecules and for the formation of oligomers and polymers. It is therefore hypothesized that such systems may be able to evolve into self-replicating, metabolically active entities that would predate the life forms known today. The experiment produced a relatively small amount of dipeptides (0.4–12.4%) and a smaller yield of tripeptides (0.003%). Another criticism of the result is that the experiment did not include any organomolecules that would most likely cross-react or chain-terminate. (Huber and Wächtershäuser, 1998)

The latest modification of the iron-sulfur hypothesis has been provided by William Martin and Michael Russell in 2002. According to their theory, the first cellular life forms may have evolved inside spreading zones in the deep sea. These structures consist of microscale caverns that are coated by thin membranous metal sulfide walls. This model locates the "last universal common ancestor" inside a black smoker, rather than assuming the existence of a free-living form. The last evolutionary step would be the synthesis of a lipid membrane that finally allows the organisms to leave the microcavern system of the black smokers and start their independent lives. This postulated late acquisition of lipids is consistent with the presence of completely different types of membrane lipids in archaeobacteria and eubacteria (plus eukaryotes) with highly similar cellular physiology of all life forms in most other aspects.

Con't on page 8

The Writer's Block: Mechanics of Suspense

by Charles Gramlich

The strongest kind of suspense arises out of a story's characters, but there are some mechanical ways to increase suspense as well. The following are strategies that many writers have found effective in their stories and novels. Take them for a spin and see if they can work for you.

1. Condense the Time of the Action: There is a reason why so many movies have ticking clocks in them. When the bomb is about to go off, when the hero is racing against time, the reader's pulse starts to jump and her level of tension rises. In my novel, *Cold in the Light*, I had the action take place over a period of two days and three nights, yet one reader wrote to tell me that he would have preferred it to happen in one day. I told him that I'd keep that in mind for my next book.

Time pressure on the hero can lead to suspense, but remember that it will only work if the reader cares about the hero and about the people who the hero is rushing to save. No one is going to read a story about an empty building that is about to blow up in five minutes. They *are* going to read a story about a man who is going into a building before it blows up to try and save his three year old son.

2. Use Short sentences and Sentence Fragments: When someone is rushed, or feels rushed, their tension level rises. No reader wants to feel rushed through an entire novel, but when it comes to the suspense and action scenes they *need* to feel the pace of the story pick up. Short sentences and sentence fragments lead to physically rapid scanning on the part of readers. Their eyes leap to cover the page and this has a tendency to crank up their emotional level as well. Again, this won't work if the reader doesn't care about the characters. Given concern for the characters, however, this can be an effective technique, as long as it isn't employed too often. Sentence fragments, in particular, can be irritating when overused.

3. Use Short Paragraphs: Short paragraphs work much the same way that short sentences do. And by short I mean paragraphs of only two to four sentences each. Sometimes of only one. This will create a large amount of white space on the page over which the reader's eye will skip rapidly. Both the reading pace and the emotional pace will ratchet up.

Unfortunately, the trend in modern fiction is already toward shorter and shorter paragraphs. But, if you have a contrast of different paragraph lengths

in your work then shortening the paragraphs during the suspense and action scenes can add drama.

4. Pit Characters against Harsh Conditions: Heat, cold, earthquakes, floods, avalanches, storms, landslides, volcanoes. When characters are in a fight for their lives against a story's villains, it can only add to the suspense to throw in a tornado or two.

5. Cut the Fat and the Metaphors: Cutting out extraneous wording can significantly increase the pace of a story, and the level of tension in suspenseful scenes. Phrases like "it seemed that" or "she wondered if" are often unnecessary anywhere in a tale, and they can be the deadly enemy of suspense. Even metaphors and similes, which are great for scene setting and for creating atmosphere, will slow the pace in suspense and action sequences. Tight noun and verb sentences convey the pounding, dynamic rhythm that the reader wants when bad things are about to happen on the page.

6. Keep all nouns concrete: In writing fiction, concrete nouns are superior to abstract nouns because the reader can easily visualize them. This is especially important in a suspenseful scene. Too often, writers talk about a character's growing "terror" or soul-shattering "fear." Terror and fear are abstract nouns, hard to visualize. Instead, tell us about the character's stinking "sweat," dilated "pupils," quivering "muscles," and full "bladder."

7. Intensify your verbs: Strong verbs are needed throughout in writing, but they are especially important in suspenseful scenes. In such a scene, never write, "he went to the door." Give us, "he leaped to the door," "he threw himself at the door," "he fought the urge to run as he forced himself toward the door."

The *Illuminata* wants to take a moment to congratulate Charles Gramlich for the release of his novel [Swords of Talera](#), published last month by Wildside Press. One could claim his association with this newsletter created the buzz now propelling him to fame. One could also claim it was his provocative writing style, compelling plots, dozens of published short stories, and years of hard work. I'll leave it to the individual to decide which was more important.

Reviews

Seraphs

Faith Hunter

Roc, May 2007

\$17.00, 368 pgs.

ISBN: 0451461479

Review by Harriet Klausner

The end of the world didn't destroy all life on earth, but it did kill billions of people and created a new life form: neo-mages. They were born from humans in the first trimester of pregnancy when the first plague changed the fetus's DNA. They are said to be soulless, and when they die there will not go to the High Host but simply disappear. Earth is now in a mini-ice age, and Seraphs watch over humanity and the new mages. It is forbidden for a seraph to mate with a mage.

Thorn is a neo-mage who owns a jewelry store in Mineral City and was outed to the humans when she saved the town. She is put on trial, but the charges against her are proved false and she goes free. The town is invaded by shadow spawn, and she fights these evil beings. In the pit of the mountains of Trine, a Watcher is held captive by a demon, as is a cherub and another seraph. An evil is coming out of the Trine, and Thorn and her guardian must go down there to stop the dragon from escaping as well as rescuing the Watcher, Seraph and Cherub. It will take a miracle, even with a Seraph's help, to win a battle without dying in the attempt.

Faith Hunter has written her take on what happen after the apocalypse; the world she has created is unique and bleak. Humans fear Neo-Mages and most of them live in enclaves free from humanity and prejudice, but the heroine is an independent solitary creature who needs her space and chooses to be free of the gilded prison. She is stronger than she knows and has the courage to fight evil even though she will be ignored by the High Hosts. *Seraphs* is an action pick, exciting science fiction thriller.

Flesh and Spirit

Carol Berg

Roc, May 2007

\$15.00

ISBN 045146088X

Review by Harriet Klausner

In Navronne twelve years ago, fifteen years old Valen was abandoned by his companion Boreas to die (as predicted by the teen's mother). Instead he survived due to his "doulon sickness" addiction but vanished from his family of pureblood sorcerers renowned for

their mapmaking foretelling skills. Before he was left to die he took his grandfather's most sacred tome, Maps of the Known World, that many believe can guide the right mage to the realm of angels if the key can be found to unlock its secrets.

Valen lives in concealment amidst the Gillarine Abbey monks, who gave him sanctuary because of the volume he stole from his family; they believe he will eventually interpret the book so they can use it to reach the angels' realm. However, as he struggles with his addiction, his family and others have found his haven; they are coming for Maps of the Known World.

Flesh and Spirit is a terrific first entry in an apparent two book saga. This tale is a coming of age thriller as the beleaguered hero begins to understand what he possesses and the world converges on him. Everyone touched by magic wants to use Valen as their guide to the Angels or to kill him to take possession of the tome. Readers will appreciate this terrific opening gamut, whose only flaw is waiting for the rest of the journey.

The Well of Shades

Juliet Marillier

Tor, May 2007, \$26.95

ISBN 0765309971

Review by Harriet Klausner

In the sixth-century, bard and king's spy Fortriu Faolan of the Uí Néill clan has been assigned three complex and difficult tasks. Pict King Bridei orders Faolan to locate a cleric Colmcille, Faolan needs to go home to make peace with his family whom he left behind a decade ago, and he owes his late friend Deord the courtesy of informing the man's family that he died.

Faolan travels to Cloud Hill to deal with the most demanding of his chores, but finds an even more formidable task when he meets Deord's indigent sixteen-year-old daughter, Eile. He puts his personal quest on hold to escort the child and grandchild of his brother-in-arms back to the safety of King Bridei's court. Instead of returning to his mission, he and Eile become entangled in a scheme to destroy Bridei's half-fey son, Derelei. Bridei's enemies hope to end the ruler's dream of uniting the country under his rule.

Book Three of the exciting historical fantasy Bridei Chronicles is a terrific entry as the audience learns more about the pasts of Bridei and Faolan. The story line is fast-paced and will elate fans of the series. Newcomers will have no problem understanding the plot. Readers will enjoy Faolan's latest escapades.

Reviews

Brass Man

Neal Asher

Tor, 2007, 485 pages

ISBN-13 978-0-765-31731-5

Review by Danielle Parker

What constitutes *intelligence*? What is the relationship between intelligence and morality (if, indeed, there is any at all)? No one can read Neal Asher's epic *Brass Man* without pondering these questions. Indeed, the brass killer of the title, a mentally and emotionally crippled artificial intelligence known as a Golem whose narrative runs like a parable among the rest of the story threads, embodies these very questions.

In Asher's far future, humans no longer directly manage the affairs of men. Artificial intelligences who have stepped from the role of servant to mentor rule the joint worlds of the Polity, and humans are just one, often lesser, entity among the many in their charge. But both humans and their artificial partners are vulnerable to the killer technologies of the mysterious and long-vanished Jain. As advanced as the cybernetic and genetic sciences of this future age are, they are crude caveman arts compared to what the mysterious Jain left behind. Any being with the tiniest modicum of computing power – organic or non-organic – is vulnerable. To make matters worse, no one knows the goal of these alien artifacts... except it's clear that they *have* a goal of some kind, and it might just be to devour civilization as humans and AI presently know it.

The knowledge and power represented by the Jain technologies is, of course, temptation. As the story opens, an asteroid with Jain artifacts has just been found. Unfortunately, someone reached it before the representatives of the Polity, and a man that Earth Central Security agent Ian Cormac thought he had left for dead is now on the loose, infested with Jain technologies. The escapee, Skellor, is now a nearly invulnerable monster whose purpose – subverted by his infestation of Jain technologies – cannot be easily guessed. To make matters worse, he has a brass slave, a Golem called Mr. Crane, whose own killing powers are enhanced by the spreading infestation. The combination is a little more than Ian Cormac finds comfortable, even with a AI killer ship named Jack Ketch (who has a disquieting fondness for execution devices in his décor) as his partner.

Brass Man is a sequel to earlier works in the series, and if possible, I would advise beginning at the

beginning. Asher's epic is certainly complex, and the readers who start in with *Brass Man*, as I did, may find themselves struggling with multiple story lines and secondary characters. There are far too many plotlines and semi-independent threads to summarize here. The fact that the chief villain is first introduced off-stage in a previous book posed a problem, as we never see the character development arc – by the time we meet Skellor, he's simply a crazed ghoul run amok.

But don't let those minor difficulties stop you. Parts of *Brass Man* were good enough that I read them twice. The battle between the *Jack Ketch* and its erstwhile allies (raising again the question of the possible non-relationship between intelligence and morality) was one. There are more. Neal Asher was a new author to me, but I'll be on the lookout from now on. His next book certainly won't escape me!

All Together Dead

Charlaine Harris

Ace, May 2007, \$24.96

ISBN: 0441014941

Review by Harriet Klausner

Bon Temps, Louisiana psychic waitress Sookie Stackhouse feels her plate is overflowing. She has three weddings, and she's expected to attend the vampire conference in Rhodes. Two of her former lovers will be there, and vampire politics can be blood curdling even when everyone leaves their teeth shields home. On the plus side, her lover Quinn the were-tiger will accompany her to the convention.

Now Sookie finds a new catastrophe to prevent. With her powers weak, and forced to reside in Baton Rouge while New Orleans recovers from the hurricanes, Louisiana Vampire Queen Sophie-Anne Leclercq is at risk. This individual plans to insure the *Definitely Dead* attendees are *Dead To The World*. Sookie investigates before the vampire conference turns into *Club Dead*. Complicating her inquiry is a horde of male vampires offering their best dental side.

Though New Orleans was used in *Definitely Dead*, fans will enjoy the return of Sookie and the vampire horde. Vampires from all over the region converge with many using this opportunity for a coup d'état. Sookie is caught in the middle, but with her humorous asides, she tries to do what she believes is right for both the living and dead. Fans will enjoy her seventh entry as her past loves show up to cause havoc with her heart and a hostile takeover plan sends her sleuthing to prevent a tragedy. Sookie soars superbly in this post Katrina fantasy.

USF (con't)

"Bullets—if you are behind or holding the gun, the sound is very loud. If it goes by you, there's not much sound."

What about writing for the TV tube or silver screen? Script writing has a form of its own. Gino Dykstra, actor, miniature model-maker, scriptwriter (*Spin Cycle*), and instructor, (oh, and did I mention friend?) offers specifics about translating that action-packed military or women pirate novel into a script. He tells his students to write with an actor in mind and to "make it character driven, not action." (That just upped the difficulty of writing a wee bit.) He feels that writing a character's inner thoughts doesn't translate well to film. While your work must have a plot and a sub-plot, the approach to screenwriting is much different than writing a novel. "What is golden is the idea behind the story."

The screenplay format is very specific, Gino warns. Never put camera directions in the script. "They (agents, editors, producers) will immediately toss it!" Each scene must indicate the location (interior vs. exterior) and time of day (daytime, late afternoon). "Scripts must be between 111-125 pages. No more, no less. The ideal number is 120 pages." This, apparently, is a magic number.

When binding the script to send to an agent, it is 3-hole punched, but brads (yes, brads—the coppery little do-dads with two pieces of metal that fold down) are only placed in two holes. The cover must be clear. Joe Haldeman's wife, Gay, adds that "if you want an editor to read your work, it must be perfect. Typos are disrespectful. It needs to be professional."

Each page of script roughly equals a minute of film/air time. Gino laughed when he said that if your screenplay is accepted, "They will pay you to do a certain number of re-writes, but plan to collaborate. Your script will be unrecognizable when produced."

Gino gives advice on promoting your script. "You need a 'Log Line'. Condense the entire script into two sentences. For example, 'A girl gets lost and finds new friends on the way home.'* And

use little sound bytes/common references. 'This is about Mad Max meets Andy Griffith.'" He advises talking to producers/agents if there is an opportunity when attending workshops or conventions. If a producer gives you their card, expressing interest in your work, "SEND IT IN!" And send it with a cover letter. Mention your background—why you are able to write about whatever the topic is. Include previous sales, expertise and name drop! Joe Haldeman suggests, "Find someone who just died."

Finally, show who might be interested in reading the work—what audience? Fantasy? Romance? "Publishers want a pigeon hole to put it in. If a publisher wants to buy it—RUN to an agent. Try an agent who is NOT taking new clients, and wave the contract from the publisher. They might change their mind." Lastly, Gino insists that if your script is purchased, never sign away your rights—"EVER!"

In June—sociology class—of fandom.

*Wizard of Oz

Extrasolar (con't)

The question "How do simple organic molecules form a protocell?" is largely unanswered. However, there are many different hypotheses regarding the path that might have been taken. Some of these postulate the early appearance of nucleic acids, whereas others postulate the evolution of biochemical reactions and pathways first. Recently, trends are emerging to create hybrid models that combine aspects of both.

As you can see, scientists are closing in on the answer, but are not there yet. As mentioned previously, one of the stumbling blocks is that the actual composition of the Earth's early atmosphere is unknown.

Since at this point we are not sure what conditions caused life on Earth to come into being, it is difficult to estimate on how many extrasolar planets, even given all the right conditions, life would generate spontaneously. My own guess would be around ninety percent, but I'm an optimist. Many would disagree and put the number much lower, even zero.