



The Illuminata

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda

By Bret Funk

Good writers strive to improve their writing all the time, to their own eyes, at least, if not to the eyes of the greater reading public. They revise and reword to iron out inconsistencies in plot, develop plausible explanations for errors in continuity, and merge intangible elements into powerful, world-shattering themes. Writers also strive to master the elements of writing, those sometimes subtle facets of pacing, word choice, and style that suck readers into the story and hold them fast. It is a tiresome, tedious process, but one whose fruits may bear great rewards.

Paramount to improving writing is the elimination of weakening elements. Weakening elements sap the strength from a narrative; they dilute its power and make it that much harder for readers to fully enter the author's world. They are the difference between watching an excellent movie and having someone describe it to you.

Passive voice and constructions centering around forms of the verb "to be" represent the greatest threats to active writing, but they are far from the only ones. Not far down on the list is "misuse of modal constructions."

One might wonder what a modal construction is. A modal verb is an auxiliary verb that modifies the main verb in such a way as to express the possibility, probability, or conditionality of the action. If that doesn't help, then think of a modal verb as a verb that adjusts the "mood" of the verb, explaining the likelihood of the action taking place.

The most common modal verbs in English are 'could', 'would' and 'should', but others exist (will, may, might, can, shall, etc.). In many cases, the style of narration requires their use. In dialogue, in narration that requires conditionality, or when viewing a character's internal thought process, modal verbs are often accurately and properly employed by writers.

Problems arise when modal verbs are used in descriptions. In some cases, they provide conditionality in situations that do not require it. This dilutes the prose.

While any modal verb may be used improperly, 'could' and 'would' are the most frequent offenders. Take the following passage as an example:

Adolph woke from his restive slumber. He could hear the thunder of the bombs above. Behind the thick bunker door, he could see moving shadows and smell the fumes from an acetylene torch. A curtain stood off to one side of the room, behind which Eva would be sleeping.

His finger danced on the pistol's trigger. He could stand their defiance and endure their torture, but he doubted he could stomach their smug superiority, their 'ha-ha-ha, look what's become of the mighty Fuhrer'. He called to Eva, when she looked, he shot her. Then he pressed the gun against his temple and deprived them of their victory.

In the first paragraph, modal verbs are used to describe the scene, but to what effect? Is it possible that Adolph *could* hear the bombs, but choose not to? Does our irascible ubermensch have any control over what he can or cannot see behind the door? Would Eva be sleeping somewhere else, and even if she might be, is it important to the narrative? Usages like these, though a blatant abuse of modality, have obtained a certain prevalence in contemporary writing. Rewording such constructions to make the descriptions more active will yield more powerful prose.

In This Edition

Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda

The Practice of NonWriting

Average Lifetime of an Intelligent Species

USF: Science Department

**The Writer's Block
Physical Side of Writing**

REVIEWS

Deepwood

Kushiel's Justice

Gridlinked

The Fire Opal

Valentine's Resolve

The Practice of Non-Writing

by Doug >|< Roper of EPIC Gaming

I've been absent from these pages for a while. In deciding that my hiatus was in danger of becoming retirement, I made a concerted effort to get something done for my beloved newsletter, but words have been reluctant lately. It's not only in the realm of article writing that I seem to have lost touch with the words. Each time I sat down to work on a new story, or a story already in progress, or even just to jot down notes or brainstorm, I spent an awful lot of time staring at a blank page, and it seems to stare back at me with a malevolent glee, daring me to mar the smooth white surface with ideas or phrases or characters. The notes or snippets of writing that seem to flow so freely when there is nothing on hand to record them all vanish at the sight of that pristine, empty page.

With free time at a premium in my life, as it is with any writer who has not had the luck of being "discovered," who is still struggling to become a professional (or really, any adult on the planet, but in particular those with time-intensive hobbies), it has been increasingly difficult to make the time to write. There is hardly any time left over at the end of the day for anything, and trying to use those late night minutes for writing has become something of a cat and mouse game with myself. There is always something that seems to be more pressing than finishing the next section of my book, or more important than getting to work on that sweet horror story I've been nursing for a year. The demands of real life (read: non-creative life) seem to have forced my love of fiction writing into a frame of reference that makes it seem silly, frivolous or even a waste of my oh so precious spare time.

The blank page, with all its possibility and potential, and all its terrifying qualities, has led me to reconsider the act of writing. I've begun looking at it less as an endeavor that could one day support me, and more like what it was when I began; a hobby. I've been bullied by the real world and my own reluctance into forsaking something that used to bring me such enjoyment, because I no longer think the products I create are destined for anything other than circulation among a small

group of friends. The dream of selling "the big one" is being (or may already have been) crushed beneath the iron boots of day to day life. The noble act of creation for creation's sake has been subsumed by more materialistic or even survivalist desires and needs, as well as the minor successes I've had, and my continuing education into the writing and publishing process. The carefree act of creation has become tempered by the pressures of market endurance and saturation, editing and usage of language. Where before I'd write with reckless abandon, I now look at my ideas with the unyielding criticism that I aim at Hollywood movies and things I'm asked to review.

This feeling has led me into the practice of not-writing. I have come to see it as a practice, an endeavor, and not as a condition or slump. I've been intimidated by the concerns of modern living, but deeper, I think I've been intimidated by the scope of the projects that I want to pick up. I've fallen out of the old habits of note taking and character sketching in my spare time, and begun to focus on all the reasons why I *shouldn't* write. Any distraction seems to be enough to keep me busy enough to avoid sitting down to the contest of wills with the empty page. Not writing is hard, writing seems to be harder and harder, and the energy that I once devoted to writing is being either subconsciously or willfully applied to other avenues. Sometimes, if I catch myself wanting to write, I'll put the breaks on and try to let my ideas stew or settle, judging them on whether or not they can coalesce into something ultimately worthwhile, or if they will likely turn into something destined for the "in progress" folder, where unfinished and less than stellar pieces of writing go to ferment and maybe putrefy on my hard drive. Questioning the work, doubting the words before they are written is essentially the practice of not-writing.

The question that I wrestle with now and I assume one that every writer has had to enter a dust up or two (or three or four) with in their own time and own way, is whether or not I can allow writing to sink into the realm of pastime. Can I let

Con't on page 9

The Average Lifetime of an Intelligent Species

by Joe Vadalma

Suppose that an intelligent, technological savvy species existed somewhere in the galaxy at some time, how long could such a species last? A million years? A hundred million years? A billion years? The only thing we have go on is our knowledge and experience of life on earth. There are many things that could wipe out a species. I'm going to list some that threaten our own species.

1. A large meteor could wipe out most or all of the species on the planet. Several large meteors have stricken the earth and destroyed most existing animal species. One of the latest is the destruction of the dinosaurs. A 16 Km meteor large enough to destroy us came within 48,000 miles of earth in 1997. It is due to return in 2008.

2. A pandemic, if it did not kill everyone on the planet, could set civilization back to the dark ages. But you say, we have flu shots and antibiotics nowadays. Nonetheless, antibiotics are essentially useless against viruses, and germs and viruses have mutated to make older vaccinations obsolete. In 1347 A.D., a great plague swept over Europe and ravaged cities causing widespread hysteria and death. One third of the population of Europe died.

3. Atomic war. This is not a great threat, as it once was during the cold war. Nonetheless, there are enough such weapons in arsenals around the world to destroy all life on earth.

4. Pollution. The effects of this are already being felt, with global warming and the disastrous climate changes that it causes (the hurricanes of 2004 and 2005). Water is hardly fit to drink anymore. Many species of animals and plants have become extinct. Mountains of trash and industrial waste have ruined the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the earth itself.

5. Overpopulation and the increasing overuse of natural resources. The present increase in the price of oil is simply a harbinger of what is to come as we use up the natural resources of the earth.

There are probably many more ways that the human race could come to an end. The same would be true of any other technological intelligent species. Human beings have been around for about a million years, give or take a few hundred thousand. Yet, it is only in the very recent years, since the invention of radio, that we have had the ability to communicate with possible species in other parts of our galaxy. At the same time we have invented several ways to destroy ourselves. It may be that the lifetime of intelligent technological-advanced species may be short indeed.

Science Fiction is speculative fiction in which the author takes as his first postulate the real world as we know it, including all established facts and natural laws. The result can be extremely fantastic in content, but it is not fantasy; it is legitimate—and often very tightly reasoned—speculation about the possibilities of the real world. This category excludes rocket ships that make U-turns, serpent men of Neptune that lust after human maidens, and stories by authors who flunked their Boy Scout merit badge tests in descriptive astronomy.

—Robert A Heinlein
from: *Ray Guns And Spaceships*,
in *Expanded Universe*, Ace, 1981

I grew up in a rigid, Engineer-fathered household. Being the middle child of three girls, somehow I accepted the role of tomboy; my parents fondly called me "Bruno". I mowed the lawn, killed the snakes, learned to lathe wood without slicing off my own hand/fingers, and grew to understand the principals of "doing things right". That meant doing things in a logical, methodical sequence. (Translation: dad's way.) Since I had a learning disability and was *the* Special Ed poster child, it wasn't always easy to please the male parental unit. Science was never a strong subject for me because of said learning problems. I enjoyed it, understood the underlying principles in the lectures, but never could pass the tests.

When I stumbled on Isaac Asimov's writings, I realized I no longer felt dumb, and by damn, I understood what he wrote! I didn't turn into a brianiac, but as his writings were based on real-time, real-life hard-wired scientific fact, those same concepts expanded logically into speculation of new applications. It made sense and I reveled in it, finally validating that I *was* listening in science class, Ms. Cassini! Asimov will always be one of my favorite authors because of this teaching gift.

Not the most advanced sapient being like some I've met on the University campus, I sit and absorb and hope to ask enough questions to get the point and not look too stupid at the same time. It's my learning style, I guess—auditory learner. It's how I've survived school and life. Some of the science classes I've taken at Sci-Fi U were in person, at conventions. Several little gems were picked up in the student lounge as I eavesdropped on the brainiac table discussing base elements or DNA, throwing a whole list of vocabulary words around like stardust: introns, alleles, cytosine, guanine. A surprising turn found me face to face with a recent doctoral grad I was actually working with, eager to explain the Homunculus Theory and why the character in my novel really could have developed from a chimp to an advanced humanoid. My gift to myself is to listen and question, question, question! I've found most science people are only too glad to have someone who takes an interest in their interests. So I not only gain that precious knowledge, I also add a new name to my buddy-list.

I knew I could hold my own at SFLIS (Science Fiction League of Iowa Students) meetings since I

understood electronic equipment fairly well. At least once a month, Doug Hamer would launch into the mechanics of satellite feeds and cable problems, as he was the main technician at one of the local television stations. He would humorously bring his work to our meetings and tell about the science of High Definition television, equipment quirks and stupid human tricks to make said items work correctly. If I had an electrical or technical question, I went to Doug.

Marty Milder was fun, too. One of the brainiacs, he'd test us all by bringing high-tech toys to our meetings. We learned obscure and practical science: magnetic pulse, jet propulsion and computers. Marty claimed to have terabytes of data, and some of that I'm guessing is not just on a hard drive but hard-wired in his head. So, I re-learned a little math along with being able to hold my own on computer building since it's a side-hobby of mine. Occasionally, he'd bring a stumper to the table in the form of a piece of equipment (or a piece of a piece of equipment—like one piece from inside a 12-speed gearbox) and let us all guess what it was and speculate on its function. He'd bring prizes, too. Science with Marty and Doug is something I miss, here in the Sci-Fi Desert.

At conventions, I picked up military theory and practical science from David Drake and Joe Haldeman (patron Saint of SFLIS-amen). Military theory is a science and includes not only war tactics, but high-tech weaponry, body-armor advancements and naval and air-space crafts and the principals they are based on. Bill Johnson and a little spunky gal who plays semi-professional hockey, Tracy, often chair convention panels on the science subject—expounding on hard vs. soft science in books and movies. Tracy is a math teacher brainiac, while Bill works at Rockwell-Collins as an engineer and real-life scientist (meaning, he gets paid handsomely for his knowledge).

Mike M., another Rockwell-Collins brianiac, offhandedly taught me the difference between fuse vs. fuze during one of my first forays into science fiction in Iowa. As he and his wife are voracious readers and gracious hosts for the local Sci Fi Book discussion club, my education took a twisted turn into fiction-land as they exposed the poor use of science allowed to slip through editors and proofreaders

The Writer's Block: The Physical Side of Writing

Writing is generally considered mental work, but there's much more to the physical side of it than people think. In the summer of 2007 I took off from teaching and for the first few weeks I poured most of my time into writing, spending anywhere from eight to ten hours a day on the computer. I made great progress, but I also had to pay a physical price for it with back aches, neck cramps, numbness and tingling in the legs, a stiff shoulder, wrist, and hand on my mouse side, and eye strain. In fact, while my mind reveled in the work, my body made periodic threats at a strike. Fortunately, I began to find some ways to appease my body without losing a lot of time from my writing. If you're going to write long hours then you need to think about some of these things for yourself.

1. Stay hydrated. Everything works better when it's lubricated. Instead of a soda, I keep a bottle of water at hand and refill it as necessary. If I want a change of pace I drink something like Powerade or Gatorade. You don't want a lot of sugars and caffeine, but you do need fluids.

2. Take frequent mini-breaks and stretch your body. Just a minute of bending and moving helps me, and I never have to move more than a few feet from the computer. My mind never leaves the problem at hand. Even while sitting at my desk I'll take a moment to roll my neck and stretch an arm or a leg.

3. Switch positions in your chair frequently. I have a habit of sitting with my left leg curled up on the chair and my right leg over it. I'm trying to alter that pattern on a more regular basis, although it's hard because the position has become a habit. Stiffness often arises from maintaining the same posture for too long.

4. Have your eyes checked. I've given in and admitted that my eyesight isn't what it used to be and have used my word processor's zoom capabilities to significantly increase the apparent

size of the font. I've also gotten a new prescription for my glasses and I've found out that they make specific prescriptions for those who work on computers a lot. I also keep the lights on bright.

5. Watch what you do in your off hours. Try to avoid requiring the same things of your body when you're off as when you're writing. For example, I've cut way back during my off periods on playing any computer game that requires a lot of repetitive mouse work. I also don't read in an upright chair anymore, which is what I write in. I sit or lie where I can take the pressure off my legs and my slowly flattening posterior.

Like any job, writing takes a physical toll. But if you keep yourself hydrated and move frequently you can minimize the aches and pains that come along with the words. Stay loose!

You couldn't get hold of the things you'd done and turn them right again. Such a power might be given to the gods, but it was not given to women and men, and that was probably a good thing. Had it been otherwise, people would probably die of old age still trying to rewrite their teens.

— Stephen King

Reviews

Deepwood

Jennifer Roberson

Daw, July 2007

\$25.95, 336 pgs.

ISBN: 0756404185

Review by Harriet Klausner

Alisanos is a separate world with two suns and no moon that exists in the *Deepwood* separated by a no man's zone. The inhabitants consist of devils, demons, monsters and benevolent creatures as well as 1,000 gods jockeying for position in the pantheon. Two dioscuroi, the products of a mating between a god and a human, are in the mortal realm on a journey that will give them their best chance to be considered worthy of becoming gods.

Rhuan tried to save as many humans as he could when the *Deepwood* moved, but he and an adult pregnant female are trapped in Alisanos; Audrun gives birth four months early, but she's a full term infant. Alisanos claims her other children as part of that realm, taking the offspring away from their mother. Audrun, with Rhuan's help, seek the children two of which are in danger while two are raised by a lonely woman who explains that once in Alisanos a person can never leave because they begin to change and are not accepted by humans. Audrun needs to find her children including the infant that was taken by a flying demon but first they must meet and accept the judgment of the 1,000 gods.

This second novel in the Karavans series is filled with action, pathos and spellbinding drama. Audrun's husband Davyn is desperate to find his family, and though he is a supporting character he looks like he will be a major player in the next book in the series. Audrun is one of the strongest characters to grace a fantasy novel because she endures so much hardship in her desperate search for her missing children. Jennifer Roberson has written an enchanting high fantasy family drama.

Kushiel's Justice

Jacqueline Carey

Warner, June 2007

\$26.95, 703 pgs.

ISBN: 0446500038

Review by Harriet Klausner

Imriel was an orphan, a slave, and a goat herder until he learned he was Prince of the Realm. He is engaged to Dorelei of Alba, the niece of Drustan the Cruarch of Alba, who is husband to Queen Ysandre of Terre d'Ange. It is a marriage of state; Imriel's heart belongs to the Dauphine Sidonie, heir to the Terre d'Ange throne. Sidonie loves Imriel with the same passionate intensity that he feels for her.

They embark on an affair that intensifies their feelings, but they are too afraid to admit their love to the queen and cause chaos in both realms. Imriel marries Dorelei and when he moves to Alba, he spills his seed on that soil and an Old One who is a bear shape shifter makes a manikin out of it. She can use it to control him, but she takes a binding oath that she won't. Imriel's relationship with Dorelei is sweet but not passionate. When she becomes pregnant with his child, he is elated until the Old Ones strike; Imriel begins a journey of vengeance that will take him to many lands but hopes to reunite with Sidonie when his quest is finished.

Kushiel's Justice is historical fantasy at its finest. Readers who like the works of Judith Tarr will thoroughly enjoy this romantic fantasy. The Old Ones act out of fear and that causes Imriel to learn how to cope with his feelings and change and grow to be a person worthy of being loved. He travels a hard road because his mother was a traitor to the realm and almost caused Terre d'Ange to be conquered. Many people don't trust him although those who get to know him find him an honorable man. Readers will enjoy this long epic saga.

Reviews

Gridlinked

Neal Asher

Tor, 2001, 423 pgs.

ISBN-13: 978-0-765-34905-7

Review by Danielle Parker

What happens when James Bond becomes so blasé he can't cover a yawn when the *thug du jour* threatens to eviscerate his innards beginning at his belly-button? Or, worse yet, when he's so uninterested in the seduction at hand that the beautiful lady really, truly believes he's a – gulp! -- artificial life form? (Of course, we all know what happens in *movie* land – they replace that winky-winky, self-consciously-coy fellow with a jug-eared, rough-edged thug of their own. Much improved!).

Dead inside is more or less Ian Cormac's condition at the start of this story, too. Cormac's a suave and violent Bondian agent of Earth Central Security gone blasé and cold. He's been tied into the "gridlink", the huge electronic network that veins this future universe, for so long, even his A.I. Masters worry for the state of his humanity. When an undercover Cormac blows apart the lady love convinced he's a spy and an artificial life form, Cormac's computerized master asks him if he's injured. Cormac (who's not particularly upset about his recent act of decapitation) replies that all systems are functioning normally. Right then and there, we *know* he's got a problem.

Cormac's not convinced, himself, but then, he's more or less an addict to the glorious rush of electronic communication. His masters (who, in this future world, are themselves artificial intelligences) know better. They cut the umbilical cord just when Cormac is in the midst of a dangerous investigation: someone – or something – blew up a runcible on the icy world of Samarkand. A runcible is the device that this future civilization (called the Polity) uses for instantaneous interstellar travel (*smile* at this charming use of Edward Lear's nonsensical *runcible spoon*).

This, however, is serious business. Not only does he have a disaster to investigate, the vengeful

brother of Cormac's terminated lady love and the bereaved's deranged mechanical servant, Mr. Crane, are hot on Cormac's heels. He also has a cantankerous and highly dangerous Jabberwocky of sorts, in the form of the alien Dragon, to try to outmaneuver.

Can Cormac out-Bond them all... and still get his mojo back? You'll have to read it to find out.

One final comment: I read the sequel, *Brass Man*, before I managed to get my hands on its prequel, *Gridlinked*. I loved both books, but *Gridlinked* is definitely the better of the two. *Brass Man* suffers even more, in retrospect, from its lack of focus on Cormac. The deranged mechanical man (Golem) who plays a more-or-less bit part in *Gridlinked* gets more action than he deserves in the sequel. That's apparently because some fans wanted more squash-them-flat, pound-them-into-powder, mindless action from the non-speaking (non-thinking?) Mr. Crane.

I, on the other hand, have different advice for the author. *Please*, Mr. Asher, *don't* listen to fans who want more of the Monster Mech. The character that really holds our (at least *my*) attention here is Ian Cormac. I tend to prefer heroes with enough brains to speak their own lines. Mere massive muscle doesn't get my attention, at least in its *literary* form. (Of course, if it's walking down the street, that *might* be a different matter -- for a few appreciative seconds).

So, Mr. Asher, tell those fans who howl for more Mr. Crane to go back to Mortal Combat or Doom to slake their lust for brainless gore, and give us more – *much* more -- of that sexy Bond super-agent, Ian Cormac, instead. Now that he's got his mojo back, I quite like the fellow.

The stakes in conflict do not change. Battle determines who will control the wealth or its equivalent.

— Frank Herbert

Reviews

The Fire Opal **Catherine Asaro**

Luna, July 2007

\$14.95

ISBN 0373802773

Review by Harriet Klausner

As a priestess in the Dragon-Sun temple, Ginger-Sun serves the villagers of nearby Sky Flames. She provides them with comfort and leads them in prayer honoring the Sun that lights up the sky and the world. However, Ginger-Sun also conceals from her parishioners a dark secret. She possesses a fire opal given to her by her grandfather that enables her to perform spells of heat and light during the night; no one else can perform this heresy, and she thinks it might be a form of worship to some night God.

Villager Harjan and several miners from the ore flats arrive at the temple. They disturb the evening rest of the Priestess because someone stabbed a man, and they want her to perform the Sunset Rites so his spirit can move on. Sending the men away, Ginger-Sun uses her fire opal to heal the soldier Darz Goldstone. By performing "witchcraft", Ginger-Sun knows she must burn at the stake. Darz rescues her, and Ginger-Sun leaves behind all she treasured to begin anew with her beloved Darz at her side. The Dragon-Sun mentors her to use her magic to save the land of Taka Mal from the darkness that threatens to turn off the Sun.

Returning to the realm where *The Misted Cliffs* and *The Charmed Sphere* takes place, Catherine Asaro provides the audience with a character driven beguiling and enchanting romantic fantasy starring a courageous Priestess who knows the cost of using forbidden magic but does so to save a stranger's life. The gripping story line is fast-paced as Ginger-Sun saves Darz, which makes his assassins her enemies and hopefully prevents the darkening of Taka Mal. Sub-genre fans already know that Ms. Asaro is one of the top RF wizards, but *The Fire Opal* is her best work to date.

Valentine's Resolve

E.E. Knight

Roc, July 2007, \$23.95, 336 pgs.

ISBN 0451461460

Review by Harriet Klausner

It is the fifty second year since the Kurians divided up the earth into zones with a Kur as lord of his zone. They look upon humans as cattle, because through their avatars, the Reapers, that they animate, they siphon off the life energy of a person, leaving a dead host. The resistance has made some inroads, taking back land from the Kur by accepting the help of the Lightweavers. These beings are the same species as the Kurians, but they turned against their race and changed the physiology of certain people, so they have much needed powers to help win the battles against the alien occupiers.

David Valentine, formerly of Southern Command, is brought in from the cold when the Lightweavers disappear. If they don't return, the southern command will collapse, and all that was regained will be lost. Valentine is told that some Lightweavers are in Seattle, being held by a powerful Kurian Lord, but the resistance there, led by Adler, won't help Southern Command. David is told to infiltrate Adler's resistance, dodging quislings, Reapers, and other alien species called grubs. During his travels, David discovers something so horrific that he does something he never thought he would do, and if his agenda does not go exactly to plan, he will be killed in a very ghastly manner.

E.E. Knight brings excitement and interest to his Vampire Earth series as readers get a close look at a Kur, and know, despite the media spin of being saviors they put on their occupation, they are evil beyond imagination. David makes a good guerilla fighter who is at his best when he acts on his own, as he doesn't trust orders that might contain a personal agenda. This makes him dangerous, and there is a bounty on his head from aliens and humans. He also is raising a baby Reaper to see if scientists can find a way to use them against the Kur, but he treats the alien child with love and kindness. He is an extraordinary character who turns the Vampire Earth war into a compelling tale.

Nonwriting (con't)

writing become what it was ten years ago for me, a hobby or an occasional flash in the pan when the mood strikes, or can I somehow correct the seemingly wayward track my writing “career” seems to be on, getting it back into place in my life where it is work, but *good work, productive work*. I think the decision to return to the Illuminata with this commiseration is a small and manageable crucible, where the answer to that basic question can be forced to the surface, above all the doubts and frustrations that have clouded the act of creation recently.

The better part of my nature already has the answer to this question, and I imagine it could just be a matter of getting the rest of me to fall in line.

Maybe there's a book in there someplace.

USF (con't)

(writers and publishers, producers...). I wouldn't have known the difference between fuse and fuze, but several in the club hooted and howled at the high science being bantered about by the equivalent of kitchen chemists proud that they could read a recipe and have something that looked edible to show for it at the end. I admit, at those times, I smiled politely and when it was safe, might take Mike aside and ask, “Huh?” He always took the time to help me understand terms and applications. When it wasn't safe, I went to my Mentor and inquired.

My own Tyrannosaurus Press, Editor (and new daddy), ***EDITOR'S NOTE: I am not Terry's new daddy, but my wife did just give birth to our second child. BMF***, Bret Funk, no slouch in the science department with two Masters in real science, is a source of education. His red pen slashing wildly when needed, Bret is always available for impromptu discussions. *Last thing I want* is to get by with my Asimov-wannabe-ideas of speculative science application and have it torn up by my friends in the discussion club! Yeah, I have a problem with being shamed. On the other hand, I do like to be accurate... a trait my father instilled on the sly.

When opportunity presents an open door, I'm lurking at the entrance hoping for osmosis of science fact to complete the pieces of data I have to expand my understanding. I'm not stupid; I know this as a fact. My conclusions are not always accurate, and as

one friend chuckles, my “creative” use of the Laws of Physics is at least entertaining enough to not get me heckled out of the room. As a sometimes science enthusiast, anything that helps me bridge, swim or Evil Knieval the chasm of my science deficit to reach practical speculation is immensely appreciated.

One thing I've notice about the science crowd is that they tend to fall into two categories: some are rigid and scornful of less-than-gifted in the intelligence department; others are teachers. I've been lucky to meet the latter, like my high school teacher, Ms. Cassini—gracious, patient, and able to explain theory with practicality. So as I search for fellow students in the Sci Fi Desert, I'm fairly confident I can hold my own with either group because I may not be the son of an engineer, but I am the daughter of one.

(Quick and Dirty on fuse vs. fuze. *Fuse* is electrical and used as a protection device—like the *fuse* you replace in your car. *Fuze* is a device that activates a weapon)

Coulda Woulda Shoulda (con't)

Adolph woke from his restive slumber. The bombs thundered over his head, shaking the bunker with their fury. Shadows danced across the narrow crack at the base of the door, and the smell of acetylene wafted through the room. A curtain divided the bunker, and Eva's breathing—so annoyingly peaceful, so frustratingly ignorant—filled Adolph with rage.

The second paragraph in the initial example has better usage of modal constructions. In it, the cantankerous Kaiser mulls over which humiliations he is capable of enduring, and which he is not. The conditionality of the thought process is what makes the use of the modal verb appropriate.

During the initial phase of writing, the use of modal verbs should be ignored. Worrying over such minutia will stifle the creative process. However, once a completed story enters the editing phase, writers must focus a very critical eye on modal usages. Eliminating unnecessary modality and the weakness inherent in such constructions adds an extra nudge of force to one's narration.

Sometimes a nudge is all you need.