



The Illuminata

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Useless Words and Weaker Writing

By Bret Funk

Keeping prose focused is important in any type of writing, but it takes on special significance in short fiction, and ironically, in epic works. Short stories demand brevity, while the flowing nature of epic fantasy lends itself to wordiness and archaism, but editors of both forms insist on separating the wheat from the chaff. Words serving no purpose are the easiest targets for the delete key.

Superfluous words dominate many of the stories I am asked to critique, but wordiness plagues more than just the amateur writer. Despite near-heroic efforts, weakening words wriggle their way into the prose of many professional authors, slipping past editorial roadblocks and insinuating themselves into the body of literature. Stopping them at the gate requires great discipline on the part of a writer; eliminating them after the fact demands as much from an editor.

One might wonder why such effort should be spent on what might amount to a handful of words per page. To that, I defer to those with far greater fame and experience. In *The Elements of Style*, William Strunk has the following to say about brevity:

“Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same

reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline.”

Similarly, the *American Heritage Book of English Usage* claims: “Most of us are busy and impatient people. We hate to wait. Using too many words is like asking people to stand in line until you get around to the point. It is irritating, which hardly helps when you are trying to win someone’s goodwill or show that you know what you’re talking about. What is worse, using too many words often makes it difficult to understand what is being said. It forces a reader to work hard to figure out what is going on, and in many cases the reader may simply decide it is not worth the effort. Another side effect of verbosity is the tendency to sound overblown, pompous, and evasive. What better way to turn off a reader?”

How does one identify superfluous words? They come in many guises, so a categorical approach is best when searching for guidelines in regards to their removal, and few of the most common categories are outlined below. “Limiting words” comprise the first major group, with examples including *a bit, a little, approximately, close to, even, exactly, mostly, nearly, practically, really, slightly, somewhat, truly, utterly, and very*. These words place restrictions on the words they modify, but often in non-essential ways.

1. **Exactly** five napkins sat on the table.
2. Sherlock Holmes was **very** clever.
3. When his pants ripped in front of the guests, Watson was **slightly** embarrassed.

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Rooting for the Bad Guy

by Doug >|< Roper of EPIC Gaming

I like bad guys. The nastier they get, the more I love to read about them. Enjoying the exploits of the bad guys is an act of pure recreational escapism, because as much as I would love to actually be a bad guy, I can't. I like them because I like dark characters, who seem to share so many qualities with typical protagonists, and but for a few key differences could be heroes themselves. When the line that divides the good from the bad is thinnest, I can't get enough of them.

I don't think I'm alone in my admiration for the villains either. In modern writing (whether it be for books, movies, comics or TV) more and more time is being spent with the villains. The rise of this anti-hero has brought a host of interesting characters into the various media, and their emergence is a direct result for popular hunger for them. The fiction consuming population has created a powerful desire for flawed characters which they ultimately cheer for, and they have stated that it's kinda cool to be a little bad through their support of this type of character.

While I do like some anti-heroes, who eventually save the day (and no matter if their reasons for doing so aren't the best), my heart belongs to the villains. How come? What attracts us to villains and villain-like heroes? I suppose it starts at the beginning. I mean to say that if there were no villains, no bad guys, there wouldn't be a need for the heroes that oppose them. The protagonist is traditionally forced into his role as hero in response to something the villain has done, leaving behind (usually quite reluctantly) his peaceful life to take up the cause of justice. Nine times in ten, the circumstances that led to the creation of the villain are more interesting than the heroes' "Well somebody ought to do something about that nasty git" usual creed. Villains need to come from high caliber dramatic circumstances, something has to affect them in a profound enough way to not only sour them on humanity or whatever institution he chooses to hate, but also powerful enough to drive them to destroy those things.

In most instances, villains are more complex and deeper characters than heroes. The basest example of this is in the DC comics universe, which I often call the BW universe (BW standing for Black and White. The DC universe is all melodrama...good is good and untouchable, bad is bad and unredeemable), is the Superman book. Superman, as a character, is boring, let's face it. He's always good, he always fights for his creed, and he never really doubts himself or his

purpose or has deep emotional problems. He always does the right thing. ::yawn:: Look at his nemesis...Lex Luthor. He still suffers from the DC iron clad evil, but Luthor is smart, evil and devious...he always does the wrong thing for the wrong reasons, but if you think about Luthor, he at least holds the promise of change. Maybe the only change is the type of trap or calamity he concocts to destroy Superman, but at least there is something new, something fresh and something that holds our attention. Villains in fiction tend to be more interesting on the whole than their goody-two-shoes opposites, and at the very least they are proactive, forcing the heroes to be reactive.

Readers understand that the hero will ultimately triumph over the villain. We all need the reinforcement that good is truly stronger than evil, that the positive in life can overcome the negative. We like to back a winner, and we feel better when the winner is a person we wouldn't mind knowing, or in some way aspire to be like. Established heroes are tested by villains, and don't we as consumers of all things good vs. evil, salivate over what caliber of villain our hero will face this time? Don't we look forward to learning about this new character, seeing if he has what it takes to knock off the hero (while at the same time knowing he doesn't)? Aren't we more interested in him and what he's doing than the hero, who has either been doing nothing special or the same old stuff since the last time we saw him?

Bad guys usually have a charm and swagger that the heroes lack. This could be an attempt on the part of the author to infuse the villain with interesting qualities because they want to keep the reader's attention while the focus is momentarily shifted away from the protagonist (usually the heart of the story). I find this interesting, and as an occasional writer myself, I often have to remember to develop my heroes as much as my villains, otherwise I run the risk of making the bad guy more realized and perhaps more sympathetic than the protagonists. Bad guys appeal to the deviant in me, and make accessible to me the schemes and plots and dastardly deeds that I'd love to do when I'm stressed out and angry at the world for whatever reason. Bad guys have the witty one-liners, the zingers and the barbs that stick in the heroes' skin. Bad guys aren't afraid to do anything, and they pursue what they want with verve and tenacity. If they weren't up to no good, it would be so easy to admire them.

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Art in Advertising: As a kid, what piqued my interest in science/speculative fiction was the artwork. Movie posters, book covers, special effects and even commercials caught my attention. The University of Sci-Fi art and technology department is a billion dollar business. Somehow, I picked up an advertising and marketing course at USF as well. How else would I look so critically at this kind of artwork?

Since my sister was the real sci-fi buff in our family, I would periodically sneak in her sacred room to peek at the Heinlein and Asimov books and Superman comic books (I believe she was in love with the caped crusader). So, I'm more familiar with the ocher tinted and monotoned cover art from the 50s and 60s. Bug-eyed monsters and saucer ships with heavy-hardware spacesuits and twisted space-scapes were familiar friends—I was used to the campy look, though would not actually open a book until much later.

The first sci-fi movie I ever saw, tagging along with my sister and her pimply-faced geeky boy "friends", (now Microsoft and NASA execs—one of which was almost an astronaut) was *The Andromeda Strain*. I hated the movie poster, though the flick was okay. Tri-colored posters with bubble-headed spacesuit people just didn't grab me like a Tor book did. Based on that lackluster experience, sci-fi movies were ho-hum affairs and if someone bought me a ticket and popcorn, I'd go.

Newcomer, George Lucas, blew me away with the *Star Wars* (1977) original movie poster—Luke daring the Dark Side, Leia at his feet. I compared everything I'd seen with his sword bearing, futuristic cowboy with his love-slave on the poster and did mental somersaults. I've been an armchair fan of poster/cover art ever since.

Star Trek: The Motion Picture came out in 1979. The poster art was stylistically *Star Trek*, but modernized for the 80s. It was bright and bold, but lacked depth or character—even with Spock stoically shining through the Skittles rainbow. I never did figure just what was missing. Compare the *Star Trek* poster to *Star Wars*, and the dramatics are hands-down in the Luke and Leia corner. Why? There were several versions of the *Star Wars* posters for that first movie, and the one mentioned above is rather color-less. Dark and Light—if you will. A sure giveaway to the plot once you know the epic struggle of the Dark/Light Side. Still, it fits in the old book style—without being your grandfather's epic sci-fi book. No stuffiness to this—just plain, noble fun.

Book cover art, at that time, was actually (gasp) drawn by hand! The paper wore down quick and dog-eared corners were generally accepted and ignored. Saucers, bugs, people dismembered or weird alien creatures poured forth, but seemed flat. The advent of the computer (alms and genuflecting) and graphics software rendered clean, dimensional seeming images.

Used to more, ah, "technical and science-based" novels sister had, browsing through the local library and spying half-naked slave/babes on the front of a Gor/Tor book was a shock, and at the ripe old age of 13, rather titillating. I had to study this further. What I found was a whole plethora of these themes. Growing up in Houston, I had no idea such things existed, except in Montrose, of course—the Berkley of Texas—nothing surprised me there. The bra-burning and Women's Rights movement was in the news, so I was exposed to a new type of sci-fi book cover: spaceman-must-have-a-beautiful-woman-to-fawn-over-him (in various stages of dress). Grabbing a few of these paperbacks, looking for adolescent lust, I was disillusioned! The woman on the cover served no function in the story at all. What gives, I wondered? Much later, I realized I was getting a juvenile look at soft porn—a nothing-thought by today's standards.

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Movies (Phil Hardy, 1984), a dated but lovely and informative coffee-table-book-romp through movies up to the mid-80s, states that the first sci-fi flick was made in 1895. Brothers, Louis and Auguste Lumiere, produced *Charcuterie Mechanique* (The Mechanical Butcher). It was likely not a real thriller, but began the science fiction movie as we know it. With a bit of dramatic leeway, (okay, a lot of leeway) it could be considered the precursor to mecha/anime by using machines as the subject matter. My all time favorite is *Metropolis*, in all its forms (1927 black/white and 2002 anime versions). Both movie posters are superb—for their times and genre.

One reason I go to the movies... animation and special effects! I'll continue Art Appreciation at USF in September.

Beacons of Tomorrow Update

The revision process is going well, with a number of stories already in their final format. At this point, we are still on track for a release of *Beacons v2* in early 2008.

SF, Fantasy and Horror in Pulp, E-Zines, and E-Books

by Joe Vadalma

When I was young and first started reading Science Fiction, most genre fiction was published in what were known as “pulp” magazines with titles such as *Amazing Stories*, *Thrilling Wonder*, *Astonishing*, *Fantastic*, *Planet*, *Terror Tales* and *Unknown* to name but a small sample. They had garish, brightly-colored covers, usually featuring a scantily dressed woman in some sort of peril by a Bug-Eyed-Monster or a robot with a spaceship in the background. They were printed on 8½ by 11 blotting paper and were about an inch thick. The interiors were filled with marvelous stories written by such legends as Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, H.P. Lovecraft, Robert Heinlein, and Arthur C. Clarke to name but a tiny fraction of authors whose careers started with the pulps.

In addition to the stories, they contained art by Earl Bergey, Virgil Finley and Chesley Bonestell and many other great illustrators. They had fact articles and massive letter columns where the fans argued about everything faintly associated with their favorite genre. Although they paid their contributors little in the way of cash, they were a great place for a genre author or artist to get published. If they were very good and lived long enough for the paperback explosion, many graduated into the world of published books where the real money was.

But sometime in the nineteen fifties, the pulps disappeared to be replaced by paperback books and smaller slicker magazines such as *Analog*. But these medium were more expensive to print. As a result, their editors were less likely to take a chance on new authors. In order for a genre author to get published, he or she had to be known from the pulps or be exceptionally gifted. Hence, from the late fifties to the nineteen nineties it became more and more difficult for a new author or artist to break into the publishing world.

In the nineteen nineties, a new method of publishing came into being due to the Internet and the prevalence of computers in people’s homes. It was Electronic or E publishing. As it turned out, the electronic magazines or E-Zines returned to the days of the pulps. Although they paid even less (many pay nothing) than the pulps in terms of today’s dollar, a new author, if he or she was any good at all, could finally get a break and get his or her stories published.

The same holds true of the E-Book publishers. Most of print publishing is done by a few major publishers who are mostly interested in publishing books by celebrities and well-known authors. Most will not even accept a manuscript from an unknown unless

it arrives through an agent. Ah, but since publishing E-books and print-on-demand is a cheaper process, budding authors have a much better chance of getting published. Again, because quantities sold are much less than printed books, royalties are minuscule. Nonetheless, small paychecks are better than none, and the author has the satisfaction of knowing that his work is being read by someone.

Who knows. Perhaps the E-Book authors of today will become as famous as Stephen King. I sure hope so.

The Mirador

Sarah Monette

Ace, Aug 2007, \$24.95

ISBN 9780441015009

Review by Harriet Klausner

At the court of Melusine, master wizard Felix Harrowgate knows he has plenty of peers who want him dead, but does not care. He knows how far he has come back from the insane abuse of his former master to reclaim his seat in the ruling Mirador. His half brother Mildmay the Fox, a former thief and assassin, has perhaps even more enemies with only the mystical and blood links to his sibling mage keeping him alive; ergo where Felix goes, Mildmay follows.

The Cabaline wizards are part of The Mirador, but the Bastion wizards, just as adept with magic, have plans to destroy their rivals, and if Melusine is devastated too, so be it.

Within the Mirador, the impossible has occurred. The enemy has a mole, Mehitabel Parr, who collects and reports information to her Bastion masters. She learns from Mildmay that Felix is the source to defeat the Cabaline from within. If she reports this to her masters, she will betray friends; if she fails to report to her masters, she betrays loved ones.

The third Melusine fantasy (see *Melusine* and *The Virtu*) is an exciting character driven fantasy that has the audience wondering who Mehitabel will choose to save as she accepts that she is expendable and cannot save herself. The complex cast, especially the slightly crazy Felix, the eccentric oddly moral Mildmay, and the beleaguered Mehitabel make the tale fun as fans of the series will believe Mehitabel is caught between a rock and a hard place. Although nothing earth-shatteringly new in the Monette universe occurs, fans will enjoy reading the further adventures of the half-siblings as this escapade is more personal than epic even if a way of life is at stake.

The Writer's Block: Writing With Attitude

by Charles Gramlich

There are as many ways to write as there are writers. Some writers are morning people. Others work in the evening. Some writers take off on weekends; some find those days to be their most productive. The important point is that they all *do* write. There is no easy button for writing. You've got to hit the keys and keep on hitting until you beat the piece that you're working on into shape.

Writing takes both skill and discipline, and, of the two, discipline is probably more important. In fact, almost everyone has the basic verbal skills needed to write; most humans grow up with language and use it every day. Why, then, do some people find it easier to write than others? At least part of the answer has to do with discipline. Disciplining yourself to write requires a few basic attitudes, which are discussed in the paragraphs that follow. See if you agree.

Attitude 1: Make "writing" important in your life. I'm going to say something a little harsh here, but I think it needs saying. If someone is reading this article then we might assume that writing is important to them. But is it? I know people who talk and read incessantly about writing but *never* write. I don't really think they want to *write*. I think they want to *have written*. If you're serious about this writing thing then you have to set aside time to actually put words on paper. Talking about writing is fine; reading books and articles on writing is good. But neither can be allowed to replace the *act* of writing.

Attitude 2: Know that writing is hard. Writing well requires effort. Sometimes the words *flow*, but more often you have to drag them kicking and screaming into the phosphor light of the computer screen. Don't let the effort involved discourage you. And don't forget that you may have to sacrifice watching a few movies or playing a few video games if you want to find the time to write.

Attitude 3: Don't compare your productivity or successes to anyone else's. It's very tempting, and I've done it myself, to compare one's writing production and successes to another writer's. If you're like me you usually end up feeling negative about your own work. Why haven't you written more? Why haven't you sold more? Well, tempting or not, the comparison is useless.

Every writer is on the same road, and if someone

is further along that road than you are it probably only means that they started earlier, or that they walked faster because they had fewer obstacles. I know a lot of writers who are younger than I who have sold more and to bigger markets. Some of them started writing at a younger age. Others got jobs that let them focus big hunks of time on writing while my time was split in more ways.

And, of course, luck always has a role to play in what any writer accomplishes. If someone has more writing success than you even under similar circumstances, maybe they were lucky in making the right connections, or having the right work to offer at the right time. Even if they have done more with the same level of luck, it still doesn't matter. What matters is what you do from this day on. There are no age restrictions in writing, no mandatory retirement age. The page is forever young.

Attitude 4: Learn to use time to your advantage. The best thing about writing, the most powerful tool that you have, is that you have time to work your words over until they are just where you want them. In a spoken conversation people are impatient, sometimes rude. Any pause that you take to think is met with facial expressions and eye movements that demand a response from you *now*. Quite often, people won't even let you finish speaking before they interrupt to add their own thoughts.

Writing happens in private, between you and the computer, and no one knows what words you've used until you let them. No one can jump in and interrupt your argument or story before you even decide what it is. No one can force you to consider their opinions before you've had time to consider your own. Take the time to ponder and tinker. If you've ever said something in speech and then wished you could take it back, you should appreciate writing. Up until your piece is submitted to a market, you *can* take it back.

Attitude 5: Remember that, for fiction, writing and editing are two separate steps. Some writers edit as they write, finding themselves unable to move forward with a new paragraph until the previous one is polished. If that works for them then there's nothing wrong with it, but such a practice may obscure the fact that writing and editing are separate processes in your mind.

Writing fiction is primarily an emotional act. Logic and rationality have little to do with enjoying a good

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Reviews

Settling Accounts: In At the Death

Harry Turtledove

Del Rey, Jul 2007, \$26.95

ISBN: 9780345492470

Review by Harriet Klausner

Confederates States of America Brigadier General Potter knows the war they began is over, although his superior George Patton thinks they can still turn it around; Patton's last thrust fails to stem the invading tide. Atlanta, which survived the War of Succession, the Second Mexican War, and the Great War, is not much more than rubble as their "neighbors" to the north continually bombs the key southern cities while their armies advance with brutal efficiency. Potter sadly realizes he will soon see the death of the CSA.

The United States of America with the help of their German allies has won WWII. Eight decades ago the CSA forefathers set forth to create a new great nation after winning their independence from the Union; now the CSA is no more unless President Featherstone, who egotistically started the war, uses his last weapon of mass destruction, the uranium bomb. As Featherstone ponders his legacy to bomb or not to bomb, the winners claim the spoils with the beginnings of an abusive brutal occupation while local insurgents turn to suicidal car bombings that in turn lead to even more atrocities. The Northern Army of occupation punishes anyone southern as the victors claim that God is on their side. There is a rationalized retaliation for the mistreatment of Negroes (even as blacks up north are treated as secondary citizens).

The tenth and apparently final book in the Settling Accounts alternate history saga is a fabulous conclusion to a great series. The story line is fast-paced throughout even with the various perspectives (a trademark of Harry Turtledove). But which ending will occur as Featherstone debates using the bomb? Fans of the series will marvel at the creative exciting conclusion, but also plead with Mr. Turtledove not to stop in the 1940s; as Occupied Canada, CSA, and Utah remain fervent hotbeds for another round into the Cold War era.

The Fox

Sherwood Smith,

Daw, August 2007

\$25.95, Hardcover, 704 pgs.

ISBN 9780756404215

Review by Harriet Klausner

Exiled unfairly from home, Indevan makes a life for himself at sea and eventually becomes the leader of a mercenary company that guards ships with valuable cargo. One day his luck runs out, and he is captured by the pirate Gaffer Walic. He pretends to be stupid until the time is right for him to lead a mutiny. He is a natural born leader and commander, and most of pirates in Gaffer's mini armada agree to follow him although he trusts only the people who were captured with him.

He decides to be a pirate who hunts other pirates, something his former clients are thrilled to hear. He goes after the most brutal pirate leaders and then takes on the Brotherhood as a whole. His homeland is at war with the Venn, who want land to feed their ever growing population, so he goes hunting Venn and eventually goes into the Venn empire as a spy to learn what their invasion plans are. Back at home, his older brother is murdered, and Indevan is the next heir to the principality of Chored Elgaer. The royals and his friends from home find it impossible to find him as Indevan doesn't have a clue about all the changes that have happened and the different players in power since he left the kingdom.

The Fox takes up exactly where *Inda* left off and readers will be thoroughly transfixed by Inda's adventures. Although young, he leads a group of sailors into fighting using military strategies people decades older than him would not think to employ. Sherwood Smith is a great world builder who makes the kingdom, the Venn Empire and the other places Inda travels seem very real. There is plenty of action but not at the expense of creating believable characters who make for stirring high seas adventures.

Reviews

Fugitives of Chaos

John C. Wright

Tor, 2006

Hardcover, \$24.95, 319 pgs.

ISBN-10 0-765-31496-7

Review by Danielle Parker

I suppose most of my readers know the Promethean myth. It is, I suspect, John C. Wright's personal favorite. At least, he has written two unrelated fantasy series whose moral themes touch closely upon the Promethean celebration of human free will and choice (that is as opposed to obedience, whether voluntary or forced, to divine will). Prometheus, of course, was the rebel who gave man secrets of the gods, including fire, and suffered Zeus's frightful punishment without repenting. One of the lessons of the myth was that not even the gods can compel man's inner spirit. We, as Prometheus, can make *choices*, even if those choices have to be paid for.

In *Fugitives of Chaos* (see my earlier review of its prequel, *Orphans of Chaos*), we once again have those four pubescent teenagers, hostages of the Olympian gods, trying to break for freedom. Amelia Windrose, the pulchritudinous blonde babe among the two boys and two girls, has managed to regain her memories of their previous attempt at escape in spite of the sinister ministrations of their captors – Dr. Fell, Grendal the peg-legged monster, and the witchy Erichtho, a. k. a. Mrs. Jenny Wren. And there's also the questionably motivated Headmaster Boggin to contend with, who moonlights as the powerful and sexy god of the North Wind. (I confess I wanted more Boggin in this sequel, but alas, I didn't get it. I'm afraid I found the muscular, duplicitous Headmaster sexier than Victor-The-Robot).

The four students represent four enemies of the Olympian gods: Amelia is a Greek goddess from hyperspace; Victor, an advanced, ultra-scientific, Spock-ultra-rational from outer space; Quentin, a magician from the underworld; Colin, from dreamland; and Vanity, the last, harks back to Homer's Nausicaa. Each views the universe through a different paradigm. (This can get confusing, I'm afraid).

Separate, they are vulnerable. Together, the four hope to stand off both the Olympian gods and, if need be, their own kind, in order to stop the war that will destroy what they grew up in and now consider home: the small world of mortal man. Unfortunately, there are factions on both sides clamoring to start the War to End All Wars. In fact, there's an unknown party, one of the Olympian gods, who wants to completely erase

everything and just start over from his divine throne...

This is, as I mentioned the second fantasy series where Mr. Wright has drawn heavily from Greek mythology. I can understand why. Besides his favorite Promethean myth, the Greek gods are wonderful actors on any stage: pride writ large; ambition, ego, jealousy, and (all too often) cruelty run amok. Mr. Wright's take on them is sly and amusing.

Yet Mr. Wright's series is set in, and of, our time, and there's no convincing explanation as to why the Greek gods and other creatures of ancient mythology are still kicking in a world that has turned its collective back. What all gods seem to require is worship (the one unforgivable sin against any Greek god, punished by the most horribly out-of-proportion cruelty, being failure to properly acknowledge their prideful godhead). So how are they getting that worship nowadays? Mr. Wright implies that lust serves Aphrodite; war, of course, Ares, and that is their relevance to modern man (i.e., how they are worshipped). The gods, then, are merely expressions of human emotions? Or *inspirations* of such emotions? Eros comes into the room, and humans get lusty? Where's Mr. Wright's free will in *that*?

Such seems a weak explanation to this reader. Alas, there is no reference to Christianity, except the contempt, mockery, and dislike all the protagonists feel for it. There's a scene in *Fugitives* that still has the power to shock, when young Colin goes on a rampage during the (Christian, of course) service. His young peers are no more than amused by his taunting blasphemy. I was not.

Mr. Wright's preferred universe is clearly the human, not the divine. That, I can understand: Wright celebrates a human will free of all divine intervention, and considers us prisoners of religion. But a humanity who turned its back on paganism for something greater deserves more than to have its choice singled out for ridicule and contempt. It's an easy out to simply dismiss the entire practice of Christianity (Islam and Buddhism don't get a mention here) with a sneer. Mockery requires no effort from anyone. If you want to write about moral, spiritual and ethical issues, (which I think you do, Mr. Wright), I expect a little – a *lot* – more from you than that.

I've been a fan of Mr. Wright since his wonderful *Golden Age* science fiction trilogy. To my mind, he's not yet matched the brilliance of that work in his later writings. Still, if you can overlook what feels like some unfortunate authorial prejudices, the *Chaos* series has a sense of slightly naughty fun and sly humor that distinguishes it from Wright's other works. Enjoy!

Bad Guys (con't)

My interest has always been, and probably will always be, firmly focused on the bad guy. I want him to succeed, I want the villain to wipe out the good guys for once and just take hold of his dreams. I want these things in fiction because it's entertainment and fantasy. I can put the book down or turn the movie off, and it's done. It was a good story and it's over now. It's too bad that there isn't more of what I want on the bookshelves, and far too much on the streets I call home.

Writer's Block (con't)

scary novel or a space adventure with starships and bizarre aliens. Even literary fiction is about what characters *feel*, not what they think. If authors don't write with emotion then readers aren't going to read their work with emotion either.

In contrast, editing is a rational, thinking act. You have to have your emotions under control; you have to be ruthless. Does every word serve a purpose? Is that beautifully constructed sentence really necessary? Do you really need that character who you loved creating? Emotions *enhance* a story, but *obscure* the meaning of individual words and sentences. Editing must focus on exactly those elements that emotion obscures.

In the end, both processes are required to work a piece into publishable form. You write it, you edit it. You feel it, you think it.

Useless Words (con't)

In the first example, the word 'exactly' serves no purpose; removing it changes nothing about the sentence, its meaning, or even its tone. In the second, the use of 'very clever' tells more about the writer than it does about the character. One might wonder about the vocabulary of a writer who favors expressions like 'very clever' or 'very small' to words like 'ingenious' or 'tiny'. In the final example, while one might argue the existence of gradations of embarrassment, removing the word slightly has a minimal effect on the meaning, and if the level of embarrassment is essential, one would be far better served by finding an alternate word that means "slightly embarrassed" or by describing the character's reaction in such a way as to convey the degree of embarrassment without taking the easy way out.

Useless Words (con't)

"Qualifying words" such as *seem*, *think*, *feel*, *appear*, *kind of*, *practically*, and *truly* make up a second group of superfluous words. I call these "apologetic words" because writers often use them when one of their characters gets the facts wrong. For example:

1. After Lion-o made a cheeky remark about Cheetara's leotard, he **thought** that she **seemed** angry with him.
2. Tygra **appeared** chagrined by the entire exchange, even though he **seemed** to peek at Panthro from time to time, when he thought no one was looking.

Though the sentences above are exaggerated, similar lines appear in many works. One can see the apologetic aspect in the first example. Though Lion-o *thinks* his comment has offended the lovely Cheetara (because she *seems* angry), the author has hinted that such is not the case. Lion-o's perception of Cheetara's anger is contrary to facts, and our conscientious author fills his readers in on the deception before they get confused. In the second example, is Tygra chagrined or not? (The sentence would imply not). Does he peek at Panthro or not? (The sentence is ambiguous, but I suspect he does).

Problems arise because sentences like these violate one of the fundamental rules of writing: show, don't tell. And depending on the PoV and focus character, these sentences may also violate the style of the work. If Lion-o is the PoV focus, then either he believes Cheetara is angry, or he thinks she isn't; there is no *seems*. The narrative (with occasional exception) should describe the world as the PoV focus perceives it, even if that perception is wrong. If something needs to be cleared up, it should be done through dialogue or description, not via omnisciently delving into the minds of a dozen different characters.

A third group of superfluous words are "flavoring words". These words serve no real function. They are often included as filler, to "spice up" the prose, or out of habit. A few examples

Useless Words (con't)

(though many more exist) are *about*, *actually*, *so*, *sort of*, and *that*. Though situations exist where these words are necessary, flavoring words are often just thrown into the mix.

1. Papa Smurf was **so** important **that** he was **sort of** in charge of the smurfs.
2. Gargamel was **actually** a metaphor for capitalism, while the Smurfs **more closely** represent communism.

Without the flavoring words, you get the following:

1. Papa Smurf was important; he was in charge of the smurfs.
2. Gargamel is a metaphor for capitalism, while the Smurfs represent communism.

An even better rewrite would eliminate the 'to be' constructions.

1. Papa Smurf's importance put him in control of the smurf nation.
2. If taken as an allegory to the real world, Gargamel represents capitalism, and the smurfs, communism.

As with everything else, these guidelines do not apply to all situations. Sometimes limiting words are required to properly describe a scene. Similarly, it is impossible to eliminate all "qualifying words", and one should not want to. One's style will sometimes demand an internal discussion on the part of the PoV character, and words like *seem*, *think*, *feel*, and *appear* can accurately convey the character's uncertainty. However, care must be taken to ensure that the qualifying words function as the style and PoV demand, otherwise one risks giving away information that the character has no right knowing, and that the reader would be better off left to figure out for himself.

Far from a comprehensive list, this article should be taken as the tip of the iceberg. Any word can be superfluous (though some are abused more

than others), and the goal is to develop the ability to spot them and eliminate them before passing the story on to an editor. If every word counts, if every turn of phrase drives the reader toward the climax, then the work will gain far more praise than a mellifluous but verbose version.

Does the story tell me something worth knowing, that I had not known before, about the relationship between man and technology? Does it enlighten me on some area of science where I had been in the dark? Does it open a new horizon for my thinking? Does it lead me to think new kinds of thoughts, that I would not otherwise perhaps have thought at all? Does it suggest possibilities about the alternative possible future courses my world can take? Does it illuminate events and trends of today, by showing me where they may lead tomorrow? Does it give me a fresh and objective point of view on my own world and culture, perhaps by letting me see it through the eyes of a different kind of creature entirely, from a planet light-years away?

These qualities are not only among those which make science fiction good, they are what make it unique. Be it never so beautifully written, a story is not a good science fiction story unless it rates high in these aspects. The content of the story is as valid a criterion as the style.

— Introduction
SF:Contemporary Mythologies
(New York, 1978)