



The Illuminata

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Reflections

By Bret Funk

On the sixth anniversary of the Illuminata's creation, I'm having trouble believing I've been working on the ezine for this long. I'm not sure where the time has gone. I'm certain I haven't accomplished everything I wanted to since 2002, but I'm equally certain that I've accomplished many things during that time that I never intended to, with this project and in other aspects of my life.

As I look back, I try to remember what made me want to do this in the first place. First and foremost was the desire to promote myself, my writing, and T-Press in general. That still remains a goal, but I've had to accept that fact that the trickle of new readers we get every month is not likely to rocket me to the bestseller list any time soon. That's OK. Giving up the dream of becoming rich from my writing has freed me to pursue the craft in the manner I want to, and not in the manner which is currently selling well.

Don't get me wrong, I'd like to see my stuff read, and I'd like to see it become popular enough that I can quit my day job; I just don't count on it anymore. Nor do I tailor my writing to appeal to the general readership. I let my fans find me, and while they are doing so, the process is laboriously slow. It would be nice if I had a semi-captive audience capable of spreading the word and bringing in droves of readers with every new edition. (Hint, hint, trickle of readers...).

More than advertising for my books, I think I wanted a forum to voice my thoughts, and a method of honing my writing, both through my own labors and via articles written by others. Necessity forced me to find contributors for the Illuminata (though the blogging phenomenon may have proven me wrong, I originally suspected that people wouldn't want to read an entire magazine written solely by me), but in a very short time I found myself looking forward to receiving the articles and reviews, not only to fill out the pages of each edition, but because I genuinely wanted to read them. From its inception, the Illuminata had gathered an eclectic group of talented and intelligent SF fans. Some have gone and others have arrived to take their place, but throughout it all, my team of contributors has kept me amused, informed, and not regretting the hours I put into the tedium of formatting and layout.

Finally, I wanted the Illuminata to be a gateway for other burgeoning writers, an avenue for them to crack the door, if only an infinitesimal amount, of the publishing world. We are always open to new writers and new contributors, and I do my best to include original fiction when and as it arrives in my Inbox. Moreover, the Illuminata was the platform by which the Illuminations Contests sprang, and from those contests our anthology series, *Beacons of Tomorrow*.

The Beacons anthologies are the Illuminata's crowning achievement to date. I've read some incredible stories in my position as editor of the anthologies, stories that could hold their own with those published in any of the "real" magazines and anthologies. Nothing would make me happier than to see one or more of those contributors hit the big time, so that I might congratulate myself on the minor role I played in

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University of Science Fiction: The Dorm Room

by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

Feng Shui is the ancient Chinese practice of placement and arrangement of space to achieve harmony with the environment. I do this with everything, including my office, but I seem to keep the sci-fi spin no matter how soothing or appropriate my décor is placed—there's always a little green alien peeking out from somewhere. (Right now, I have a life-size, orange-yellow, "Alien Crossing" sign by my printer.) Can't help it. It's what I love. Why shouldn't there be a rhyme and reason to add the speculative at my workplace? I spend a majority of my life in this cubby, it should be mine and sometimes, it's even in good taste.

The USF student body adorns their world and work with mementos of their travels, experiences and dislikes. I've seen them—some of my fellow students have bad taste, some have no taste at all. Usually, what I've seen is bookcases crammed from floor to the heavens with books, rpg manuals and anime/manga. An occasional miniature or costume piece tends to hide behind a stack of comics and used glassware is parked and never seems to make it to the kitchen. How do I know? The ring of dust never moves unless I bump it.

This is an important subject for me because I've moved—sigh—again. I'm still in the Sci-Fi Desert, but now a few blocks from my last humble hovel. My new home office is wall-to-wall bookcases and white walls. No curtains; little wall space for displays. The challenge is to be "me" with this office without alienating prospective clients, friends or family. What to do? What would a college student do to their dorms? What would a computer geek do to their cubby, computer, floor and ceiling? I'm drawn to display—and display some more. I've got tons of things I'm proud of, but how do I find that oh-so-important balance of work-space and "me-ness"? Feng Shui—finding balance.

It's soooo tempting to drag out my collections. A buddy in Canada has all his miniature Star Wars and robots prominently displayed in his home/office. His wife is not thrilled and the kids can't touch. Where's the fun in that?

Denny Lynch has a cave for all his collections. He doesn't need an office. He's got his own

museum just down the hall and down the stairs. But his wife doesn't care that he's got sci-fi (insert favorite term here...) all over the house. She's out numbered. It's just Denny and his Lego-maniac teenager who shares the same collector gene his dad does. Now Denny's house is the ultimate Feng Shui experience for the Sci-Fi/Speculative Fiction person.

I think back on other sci-fi people I've known and had the opportunity to glimpse into their crazed minds and abodes. Many just had stacks of books everywhere; there's no reason or order to the reading material chaos. A few still live in their mom's basement, but they've got their cozy cave going for them and it is comforting to have everything they own on display. It's a sense of safety for them (I justify). What they would do in a fire, however...

I'm at a crossroads. In the past, I too had anything sci-fi proudly exposed to the world—and the kids didn't give a rip and just thought mom was weird. Hubby, however, shook his head and declared, "I'm not buying a bigger house for all your stuff. I'm not giving up the garage. And I'm not hauling it all over the country. You've got to get rid of some of this stuff." Stuff. He calls it "stuff". It's a treasure. A memory. A link to the past that was more than fun, it was fulfilling and nurturing and creative. Not stuff. Serious Stuff, that's what it is. And it's mine. Question being, I have *lots* Serious Stuff. Now what? Where does it all go?

I have movie posters and only have part of one wall that isn't already spoken for by some bookcase or file cabinet. I have Star Trek Christmas ornaments all strung and ready to be hung. Last time I had them out, they framed my only window. From outside, it looked like a kid's room, but inside was a wondrous place framed by star ships and characters. Before that, curtains were made of Halloween black and orange witches and brooms. (Before that, pointy little wizard hats and metallic, multi-colored stars.) I've displayed (and not dusted) plates, dolls, autographs, models... the list is finite, but the desire is endless. How do I choose to display my sci-fi-ness without announcing that I'm a freak.

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What Would Extraterrestrial Beings Be Like?

by Joe Vadalma

As a long time science-fiction fan, I've often speculated on what an intelligent extraterrestrial being would really be like (if they exist at all). Would they be similar to human beings "with warts" as many movie and TV shows such as Star Trek, Star Wars and Babylon 5 depict them? Or would they be completely different, perhaps big fat grubs like Jaba the Hut, have octopus heads such as the writer H. P. Lovecraft's stories pictured them or have long skinny humanoid bodies, big eyes and no nose as many UFOologists claim? In this article I'd like to give my opinions based on the latest scientific information.

First let us consider all the diverse types of life that have existed on our own planet throughout the three billion years since life first appeared. In size, living things vary from the microscopic to such gargantuan forms as whales, mastodons and brontosaurus. Life is everywhere, in deserts, seas and forests, even in volcanic vents, arctic climates and underground; each form adapted to its environment. Also, as conditions changed, the forms changed. For example, some animals whose ancestors walked on solid ground have evolved into sea creatures. It would seem then that life on a planet with completely different parameters would evolve into completely different forms. Or would it? Under different conditions, similar types of creatures have appeared. One example is a one horned thick legged herbivore such as Rhinos and Triceratops, one being a mammal, the other a dinosaur.

But what are the chances of a creature evolving that would be as intelligent as us or perhaps even more intelligent? Animals such as dolphins and whales have larger brains and may be as intelligent. Nonetheless, they are not capable of producing technology and probably never will.

The question remains. Would aliens be animals, plants or have characteristics of both? Would they have arms and legs and walk upright as we do? Would they depend upon vision as their primary sense or use another way to gather information about their surroundings? Would they "breathe" oxygen or some other gas?

First let's take a look at how evolution by natural selection (Darwinism) actually works. The basic rules governing whether species arise, live, remain unchanged or become extinct are those of evolution by natural selection as proposed by Charles Darwin. Darwin's theory of evolution. According to the Theory of Evolution, similar organisms reproduce similar organisms – a dog reproduces a dog, a dandelion reproduces dandelions and a fish reproduces a fish. Often, the number of offspring are overproduced such that the number that survive is fewer than the number reproduced. In any population, individuals vary with respect to any given trait, such as height, skin color, fur color or shape of beaks, and these variations can be passed on to the next generation. Some variations are favorable, in that they make those individuals best-suited to their environment, and some are not. Those organisms with favorable variations will survive and pass those traits on to their offspring; those individuals with unfavorable variations will die and not pass on their traits – this is natural selection. Given sufficient time, natural selection will accumulate these favorable or neutral traits. A new species will evolve.

Using what we have learned from life on Earth, what can we say about alien life? While it may be vastly different from life on Earth, alien life must follow certain universal guidelines dictated by the laws of physics and chemistry. It must consist mainly of some sort of solvent. On Earth, the solvent used by life forms is liquid water. Other chemicals, such as ammonia, methane, hydrogen sulfide or hydrogen fluoride, could be the solvent in an alien life form.

Living things require temperatures and pressures at which its solvent remains liquid and need energy to remain organized. Most things on earth are powered by sunlight either directly or indirectly. An alien world, in order to sustain life, must have a source of energy, whether it be sunlight or another energy source.

On Earth living things are made of complex, carbon-based molecules that carry out biochemical functions. In Earth organisms, DNA

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The Writer's Block: Endings - What's At Stake?

by Charles Gramlich

A professionally written story will not necessarily sell. The prose can be good, the characters interesting, the plot possibilities mysterious, and the ending can kill it all if it's cliché, or goofy, or only offers a low stakes payoff for the reader. From TV, consider the infamous *Dallas* fiasco when a whole "season" turned out to be Pamela Ewing's "dream." Consider the miniseries *It* where the monster turns out to be a "giant spider." From print, consider the story where the protagonist realizes at the end that he's been "dead" all along, or the tale where an abusive husband seeking to cheat on his wife meets a woman at a bar who turns out to be...wait for it...a vampire.

There's no decent "payoff" in these endings. Only an incredibly adroit writer or filmmaker has any chance of pulling off such a climax without losing an audience. (*The Sixth Sense* did it but that was an extremely well done movie.) The "it was all a dream" ending is actually an insult to those who have invested their emotions in a work; you realize you've been toyed with. The guy who "discovers that he's dead," or who cheats on his wife only to meet a "vampire," is a cliché. Such endings are too easy. As for the "giant spider?" Well, that's just lame. Modern readers, especially, want more.

I wrote a tale a couple of years back called "A Curse the Dead Must Bear," and I still haven't sold it. I think it's because the ending doesn't pay off. A man falls down the stairs, breaks his neck, and is declared dead. But his consciousness continues. He is aware of everything around him. He can hear and see (until his son closes his eyes), but he cannot communicate with the "living" and cannot escape the decaying prison of his body. Once he's buried he finds that every other "dead" person in the cemetery is exactly like he is. He can hear them murmuring, cursing, crying, begging, but no one above ground hears a thing. He begins to *hate* the "living" and is comforted by only one thought: that they will soon be in the same boat. The end.

Big deal! I thought the idea that every dead person's consciousness would be trapped within their deteriorating shell was interesting, but

that point is revealed midway through the story and other than that what is the reader's payoff? The protagonist cannot *do* anything about his situation. He can only hate, and the target of his hate is perfectly safe. The ending turns on the fact that we're all going to die someday. Now there's a news flash. This is "low stakes," not necessarily for the story's protagonist, but for the *reader*.

The cheating guy who meets the vampire is low stakes for the reader, as well. We can see that ending, or something like it, coming a long way down the tracks. True, the guy is getting what he deserves, but other than a little "he had it coming" feeling the reader isn't experiencing any emotional kick. The ending doesn't surprise us. It doesn't give us a smile. It doesn't leave us particularly happy, sad, disgusted or afraid. It leaves us flat.

Here's another example, from a story that I discovered on a new author's website a year or so ago. A guy plans to commit suicide because he can't stand his life. He wants oblivion. But when he finally gets up the guts to do it he finds that his consciousness continues and he's in Hell. End of story. And low stakes.

How do you avoid endings that don't provide the reader with a payoff? One way is to consider the low stakes ending as the tale's *beginning* instead. Cheating guy meets vampire at the *start* of the story, and gets turned. He goes home to torment his wife, thinking how much fun he's going to have now that he's a supernatural abuser. But he finds that his wife has been having an affair, too, with the female vampire who turned him. They planned to turn him all along, because now they just want him to watch and suffer. Forever.

It doesn't matter how big a story's stakes are for the characters, only how big they are for the reader. Plenty of great stories have been written where what's at stake for the characters is only the success or failure of a relationship, not stopping a terrorist threat or saving the world. But if the reader is emotionally involved, if he or she is surprised, or if she laughs or cries, or if he just says, "cool," then you've done your job as a writer. You've made your ending worth the effort that the reader put in getting to it.

Reviews

King's Property

Morgan Howell

Del Rey, August 2007

\$6.99, 396 pgs.

ISBN 9780345496508

Review by Harriet Klausner

Dar is not happy living at home with her hateful stepmother or her sexually abusive father. They give her the creeps, but she doesn't expect to be given to the king's army when they need the women from her village. The soldiers tell her she is going to be a cook up until the time they brand her so that if she runs away, bounty hunters will return the slave for a fee. When they arrive at the place where the army groups she learns that she will have to help serve the orcs food.

She has heard the stories about these monsters that eat humans but she finds them quite civilized beings with a rich matriarchal culture that fight for the king only because their queen orders them to. When Murdant-kol tries to have sex with her, she turns to the Orc she befriended Kovok-mah for protection and for a place to sleep. Once she does this, the female slaves and the solders treat her like a pariah but she will do whatever is necessary to watch out for her orcs, who are more humane than humans.

King's Property is about one woman's struggle to survive as she learns about orcan culture and language. She also learns the rule to survive in the human only camp and thinks it is the height of hypocrisy that women have to sell themselves to get what they need from their partners to survive. Dar finds she loves the orcs and turns on most of humanity because she finds so many of them bullies. Morgan Howell is a bright new fantasy author whose tale holds up against the genre's writing wizards.

Milestones: They mark time and growth. The *Illuminata* has both, and I'm proud to align myself with Tyrannosaurus Press. I send warm wishes to the staff and many readers who give their interest to this endeavor. And to you, Bret Funk, a might chorus of cheers!

Happy Birthday, *Illuminata*!

— Terry Crotinger / montanasings

Happy Birthday *Illuminata*! Hope you're around for at least another six years.

— Joe Vadalma

The Innocent Mage

Karen Miller

Orbit, Sep 2007, \$6.99

ISBN: 9780316067805

Review by Harriet Klausner

The youngest son of a fisherman, twenty years old Asher dreams of being much more than someone without a room of his own. Asher does not look down at his father's vocation that has provided him with food and shelter; he just thinks he can make a fortune so he can buy his own fishing fleet if he takes the risk of sneaking away from home and traveling to Dorana, the capital of the Kingdom of Lur.

However, he arrives at a time of unrest as the native Olken populace object to the strict rule of the warrior mages who control the use of magic by executing anyone without their permission who yields it. Asher finds work, but is unaware that the preservers of the ancient magic, the Circle have been expecting him having seen him in a vision. He may have come to earn the money to purchase a fleet, but the first stage of an ancient prophecy has begun with his appearance; for the Circle believes he is the Innocent Mage who will turn the order of centuries upside down.

The story line is fast-paced yet filled with twists that will keep the readers' attention throughout, wondering what comes next. The worldbuilding (mostly inside the capital) is cleverly developed by the actions and reactions of the reluctant hero who is awed by the thriving market place, Prince Gar and his retinue and the Circle (especially enjoyed the "deference" by Dathne and Matt to "him" being here). Thus, the first entry of the *Kingmaker, Kingbreaker* series is driven by the changing relationships between the strong prime characters. Epic fantasy fans will appreciate this deep opening saga and look forward to the conclusion, *The Awakened Mage*.

Reviews

The Queen of Wolves

Douglass Clegg

Ace, Sept 2007

\$23.95, Hardcover, 320 pgs.

ISBN 9780441015238

Review by Harriet Klausner

He is called the “Anointed One”, the Maz-Sherah, named so by Merod the Priest of the Blood. He feels no different than any other vampyre as he flees with Pythia—a mortal vampire since she put on the Gorgon Mask—from a land torn apart from feuding vampires who want to take over another vampyre’s land and believe they have the right to do so. Although Aleric doesn’t trust Pythia, she is carrying his child and so he keeps an eye on her knowing she can turn on him at any second.

The veil between the worlds is thinning, and Medya, The Dark Mother, is trying to return to the realm she was exiled from and lay waste to all that opposed her. On the battlefield where the sorcerers fight the crusaders, Pythia and Aleric raise an army from the dying who choose to accept the Sacred Kiss. Aleric, with another vampire, travels to the city of Myrrad. There the serpent God gives him the weapons needed in the upcoming battle against Medya and the Myrrydanai priests at Taranis-H, also called White Robes. Inside the city are Pythia and his two mortal children. If Aleric loses the war, all he loves will be destroyed.

This is the last book in the Vampyricon Trilogy and it ties up all the loose ends and ensures all the key questions not addressed in the previous two books are answered. Although more action oriented than the first two books (see *The Priest of Blood* and *The Lady of Serpents*) in this fabulous series, the characters are fully developed and readers get a better understanding of what motivates them. Douglas Clegg is equally a good storyteller in the horror realm as he is the fantasy area and readers who like him in one genre will also like him in the others. His world-building is so magical that spellbound readers find themselves transported into the Clegg realm to trek alongside Aleric.

Winterbirth

Brian Ruckley

Orbit, Sep 2007, \$14.99

ISBN: 9780316067690

Review by Harriet Klausner

After the failure of the one race during the First Age, the Gods created five races when they rebuilt the world. Everyone prospered until the Huanin and Kyrinin attacked the brutal wolveren Whreinin; the Gods are upset and, concluding that their creation is flawed, abandoned their children, ending the Second Age and beginning the Third. After years of open hostilities, a truce exists between the High Thanes of the True Bloods though their direct report Thanes still somewhat fight.

However, in the Third Age, war explodes when irate High Thane Ragnor oc Gyre, the Thane of Thanes of The Bloods of the Black Road, still outraged over the exile in 942 for heresy, sends his Gyre forces to conquer the lands of the Haig True Bloods south of the Vale of Stones. The war expands beyond Anlane as the Dargannan Haig Blood revolt against the Haig High Thane. All sides in the complex dispute believe they have a noble cause, but for most of the Godless World honor or not means simply their death. By 1102 the Godless World has become a hellhole with death everywhere. In this maelstrom on the southern side of the Veil of Stones Orisian nan Lannis-Haig begins an odyssey filled with bleak hope and plenty of blood.

This epic fantasy is grim with no magical last second heroics as Brian Ruckley paints quite a dark realm. The story line is fast-paced and filled with non stop action that traverses much of the Godless World. Yet the key to this excellent fantasy is the cast as the leaders of the various armies seem genuine in a Machiavellian way; for instance some see terrific personal profit in the war. Orisian and his accompanying warriors are not your typical heroes as they understand war is hell and act accordingly. Readers who enjoy a powerful enthralling thriller will appreciate Brian Ruckley’s aptly named *Winterbirth*.

USF (con't)

If I was old, I could play the "Age Card" and be as eccentric as I want to be. But I don't qualify for the Senior discount yet.

What to display? To have only my green, pointy chinned alien peek out from the hollow I've hidden him in? Astro-Boy curtains? Enterprise model suspended from the ceiling? I absolutely must have my Star Trek Barbie and Ken displayed. Decisions...

Like my friend and fellow student at USF, BillyJoe, I want it all to surround me, comfort me and remind me that while I still live in the Sci-Fi Desert, at least I am not alone... Fen Shui be damned.

ET Appearance (con't)

molecules contain genetic information and direct the formation of other molecules to allow life to reproduce and function. Alien life forms must also have some type of informational molecule. Carbon can form bonds with up to four other atoms, in many shapes, to make many types of molecules. Although not as versatile as carbon, silicon can also form up to four bonds with other atoms and has been proposed as a basis for molecules of alien life, if the environment were such that silicon was more abundant than carbon. Alien beings larger than microbes would be multicelled.

The physiological make-up of a multicelled alien must be suited to its environment. Internal systems would be adapted to environmental conditions such as temperature, moisture and gravity. The alien must bring solids, liquids and gases inside its body, distribute them to every cell and remove waste products.

The alien would have senses to obtain information from the environment and respond to stimuli. They must also have the equivalent of a brain and a nervous system to process information and have a means of reproduction.

Alien organisms would probably have similar ecological structures to life on Earth. Population sizes would be limited based on the amount and type of food, predators, disease and other environmental factors. Like life on Earth alien life forms would exist in food chains and food webs in their native environment. Life forms similar to

plants will create food that other life forms such as herbivores and omnivores will eat. There may be carnivores that eat other animals. Life forms such as bacteria are needed to recycle dead organisms into the environment.

As you can see, life of any kind is intimately tied to its environment, so the characteristics of the planet would be extremely important in determining the characteristics of the life forms existing on it..

Now let's talk about the life form we are most interested in, an ET intelligent enough to use and create a high-level of technology. In the long evolution of animal life on earth, some characteristic are universal and appear in many species, such as limbs and eyes. Other characteristics such as hair, hands with fingers, skin coloring, the mechanics of sex, and so forth are arbitrary and appear in some species and not others. One of these are brains with the capability to produce advanced technology. In three and half billion years of evolution, such intelligence has appeared in a species only a couple of million of years ago, a very short time ago in evolutionary terms.

The design of any animal is toward survival in its environment. These designs can be arrived at via different evolutionary routes. For instance, predators in the ocean have a survival advantage if they swim fast. Consequently many of them have a torpedo shape, simply because this streamlined form gives them a better chance at snagging a dinner. Dolphins and barracudas look similar in silhouette, although they evolved from very different forebears. Their shapes are the result of convergent evolution.

Some biologists have suggested that the same may be true of humans and extraterrestrial life – that the human body plan is a good design for an intelligent creature. We have arms terminated by little hands that are useful for writing and using tools. We also have two eyes with overlapping vision, providing 3-D views of the world. Such vision aids in the use of tools. The eyes are located high up, which allows us to peer over grass and

brush to find a mate or a meal. There are many more such traits. Humans, in many ways, are a reasonably functional design for a technically sophisticated creature.

I cannot conclude that humans are the best design (although some people insist that we are). An intelligent, technologically advanced ET may resemble us, but not exactly. After all, an extra set of arms might be useful, as would an eye in the back of our heads. A double spine might allow faster and easier walking, and a few extra digits on each hand could make for better tool use or piano playing. Any technologically advanced ET would probably have some features in common with us (two eyes, instead of one, for instance). Intelligent extraterrestrials may look vaguely humanoid, but no more than vaguely. So, perhaps the TV show and movies have it right. ETs will probably resemble humans with warts.

Reflections (con't)

helping them receive recognition as a writer.

Has it all been worth it? For me, it has. If nothing else, it kept me writing when life, nature, and children conspired to steal all of the precious hours I once so blithely devoted to writing. Many of my contributors have also had success as authors. Charles Gramlich had his novel *Swords of Talera* published, and the other two books in the trilogy are ready for publication. Joe Vadalma recently had a new anthology of his works, *Hearts Among the Stars*, published by Renaissance eBooks. And Danielle Parker is under contract to have her novel, *The Infinite Instant*, published as well. While I and the *Illuminata* can not take any credit for their success, I'd like to believe that we provided them with a community that nurtured their talent, and maybe even helped them through a rough patch or two along the way.

Has it been a success? Tougher question. I rarely hear from our small international readership, so I can only presume you don't just hit the delete key when the new edition shows up in your Inbox. Web site hits jump following each release, and I imagine visitors don't just want to take a gander at the new link I've added to the archive page but

are more interested in where that link takes them. The anthology still sells, but it's neither bankrolled me to great luxury nor garnered acclaim for the publishing house.

Will the *Illuminata* be here six years from now? Who knows. I have a lot of opinions, so I guess as long as a few of you want to hear them, I'll try to keep it going. Thanks for reading.

The touchstone for scientific fiction, then, is that it describes an imaginary invention or discovery in the natural sciences. The most serious pieces of this fiction arise from speculation about what may happen if science makes an extraordinary discovery. The romance is an attempt to anticipate this discovery and its impact upon society, and to foresee how mankind may adjust to the new condition.

— James O. Bailey

Thanks, *Illuminata* & Bret, for being one of the few to show new writers an open door. Happy B-day!

— Danielle Parker

People want to know why I do this, why I write such gross stuff. I like to tell them I have the heart of a small boy... and I keep it in a jar on my desk.

— Stephen King