



The Illuminata

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Illuminata in Review

By Bret Funk

Greetings to our loyal fans and sometimes readers. I want to open this letter by expressing my gratitude to all of you. I don't know how many of you actually read this ezine, nor do I know how many of the webpage hits actually result in a download from the archives, but I do know that each month sees a few more people sign up to receive the Illuminata, and our attrition rate is significantly lower. I like to imagine that means you like what you read here, and that you are desperate for more material from me and my motley troupe of contributors.

Which makes this announcement difficult: As of this issue, the Illuminata will be a quarterly publication. Other commitments have made it harder for many of my regular contributors to make their monthly deadlines, but the real driving factor behind this decision is my own lack of time. My new (that is, post Katrina) job, in addition to all

the demands fatherhood and homeownership put on a person, has made it more and more difficult to get the Illuminata ready for press on time, particularly if I want to write an article of my own. Once you factor in my work as editor on the Beacons of Tomorrow Anthology, my own somewhat well hidden writing career, and the fact that I occasionally like to talk to my wife, watch a movie, or read a book for fun, you can see that the leisure time I once took for granted has all but disappeared.

Bottom line: What started out as something fun has increasingly become a chore for me, and I don't want to remember the Illuminata as the stone around my neck that dragged me down. I have too many good memories associated with it for that to be its epitaph.

So, what's going to change for you, the readers? Nothing, I hope, except the frequency many of you receive email from me. All of my contributors are on board with the move to a quarterly schedule. I think it will provide me with the extra time I need to space out the formatting of the newsletter, write an article and review or two of my own, and perhaps even solicit more unpublished fiction to add to the mix.

Why not just scrap the whole thing? My goal was to create a forum for undiscovered talent to get exposure for their work. Blogs and social networking sites may have trumped me on effectiveness, but I still believe that we met our goal, at least in a small part. And I think the Illuminata can continue to serve that purpose in the years to come.

But the real reason I am reticent to bring the Age of Illuminata to an end is that working on this ezine has brought me into contact with a great number of talented writers and thinkers. If nothing else, the work I've done has helped me develop a small cadre of like-minded people without whom none of this—the Illuminata, the anthologies, perhaps all of T-Press—would have been possible.

Building that group is reason enough for me to keep the Illuminata going. So I hope you'll all bear with me, forgive my weak mortal desire to have some spare time, and see out what we have to offer in April 2008.

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Can You Imagine?

by Terry Crotinger/montanasings

I like those programs that show you how things are made. All the steps, automation and doohickeys feverishly and precisely constructing a car or doggy dish enthrall me. In the fourth or fifth grade (the dark ages), my class was treated to a rare event—a reel-to-reel film about making crayons. (Not because it was a reel-to-reel movie, it was that we got to see “A Movie”!) I’ve been hooked ever since. Since I like watching the construction almost as much as using the item, speculating on how it’s made or why it was put together a certain way rather than using a different format has been a bit frustrating. I’m not a scientist or an engineer. But having that early exposure of seeing something made step-by-step is like getting an Erector Set for Christmas. It’s something you use and use and use...

For example, Star Trek gadgets were invented because the show required futuristic props. Gene Roddenberry and crew speculated on what would be needed on a star ship in the future using part science, part imagination. Dream, plan, construct. It didn’t have to work, just look convincing.

However... What about speculating about the future, in the future? When we’ve accomplished our human-tasks, have world peace and a transporter, will there be anything *beyond* our imagination that will fit a need for inventors to invent? I once heard the question, how do you improve on the button? There’s lacing and zippers and Velcro, but a button is the best solution for certain things that need to be joined and un-joined. Noah built a boat; NASA built a space ship. A boat is still a boat no matter the construction, size or propulsion.

To give my clients a dose of reality yet foster creativity, I talk them through the following guided imagery exercise.* Feel free to try it.

...allow your eyes to droop as you imagine yourself sitting in a room with four pale-yellow walls. The soft leather of your chair creaks and you settle and sink into a comfortable position. As you start to relax, you can picture the walls in your mind. You imagine that they are now baby blue, then violet, then black. Thinking of changing colors feels good, so you decide to explore and wonder what it would feel like to let your mind wander. The firmness of the chair contrasts with the lightness of your mind, floating about. You see yourself sitting in the chair, in the pale yellow room as if looking down from the ceiling. Looking up, you imagine the roof is transparent with the night sky

twinkling overhead. Because your mind is weightless, you pass through the ceiling and hover over the roof of your dwelling. You observe yourself. Your body and the room look smaller as you move higher... and higher... Your body is just a dot because now you see the lights of your town, the next town, and even the entire state. As your awareness gently drifts into the stratosphere, you see the curve of the earth, storms and landmasses. You keep floating, up and into space. Once there, you are amazed at the emptiness between you and the Earth, turning stately beneath you. You become aware of the moon. It seems further at this distance. The sun is not so bright that it blinds you. Auroras around the poles catch your attention, as do a host of satellites that flash the sun’s reflection and alert you to their presence. Each dust cloud and chunk of rock is incredibly distant from your vantage point. Turning away from the blue and white ball, Jupiter beckons and you gaze past Neptune and out into the universe. Vision no longer serves you so you take yourself to that location in an instant—you wish to go there, so your mind aims your will and you arrive. It is that simple. The choice is whether to come back or to go further. You decide to return and backtrack through the planets and asteroids, wave goodbye at the sun and begin letting your mind drift back to earth, through the stratosphere and through the local clouds. Closer to the ground, you see your house zooming larger and can begin to see yourself calmly enjoying this journey. As you float closer, yellow walls come into focus and you spy minute movements of your body as it breathes for you in slow, relaxed breaths. Linger above yourself, you savor this moment, and then re-join your body. Warm noise and slow awareness greets you as mind and body are reacquainted. You take a deep, long breath, then another, and open your eyes...

(If you did this exercise, stop and write down what the edge of your universe looked like before continuing for comparison later.)

Some people chose to continue this journey, reporting on the color of dust clouds or the brightness of a nova as they venture into the darkness. Some of my clients are intimidated when leaving the safety of four walls and terra firma—sadly, their anxiety is palatable and I have to mentally shake off this experience—it is their fear, not mine. And on occasion (frankly, the secondary gain I usually hope them to grasp), they understand their real place in the universe—a single pixel in unfathomable aether. A precious, unreplicable

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What Would Intelligent 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 Jabba 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. According to Darwin's 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 before producing new individuals. Hence they would not pass on their traits. This is natural selection. Given sufficient time, natural selection accumulates favorable or neutral traits so that a new species evolves.

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, it 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 other energy source.

On Earth living things are made of complex, carbon-based molecules that carry out biochemical functions. DNA 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 silicon is not as versatile as carbon, it 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 must 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

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The Writer's Block: A Grammar Primer

by Charles Gramlich

There's no way this essay will explain every grammar concern that confronts you as a writer. But there are a few problems that are so common they need desperately to be addressed.

Subject/Verb Agreement:

Subjects and verbs must agree in number and tense. Consider, *short stories is easy to write*. This is too simple of an example, but it clearly illustrates a problem with agreement in "number." "Short stories" is a plural subject; "is" is a singular verb. Plural subjects have to have plural verbs. *Short stories are easy to write*.

Sometimes the situation is not so simple. Consider, *each member of the writing group are capable of brilliant prose*. This doesn't sound too bad but it isn't correct. "Each" is singular but "are" is the verb and is plural. The sentence should read: *each member of the writing group is capable of brilliant prose*. Some other words that require singular verbs are "either, neither, everyone, someone, nobody."

"Collective" nouns create a particular problem for subject/verb agreement. These are nouns like "jury, committee, faculty, team, army." Generally, these words are treated as a *unit*, making them singular. They need a singular verb, as in: *The jury is returning to the court*, or *The army is preparing for battle*. Unfortunately, you can construct a sentence that refers to the *individuals* within a collective noun. Here, the words become plural and require a plural verb too. *The faculty were confused over the proposed pay cut*.

A greater problem with subject/verb agreement comes when you introduce clauses into sentences. *A high blood pressure medicine, when used with a good cholesterol busting drug, exemplify the best medical strategy for preventing heart attacks*. Adding the clause, "when used with..." suggests that there are two subjects here and that you should use "exemplify" for the verb. The subject is still "a high blood pressure medicine," however, and it needs a singular verb like "exemplifies." Take out the clause and you can more easily see the problem. *A high blood pressure medicine exemplify the best medical strategy...* That doesn't sound right, does it?

Tense:

"Tense" means the time at which an action takes place. The basic tenses are: past, present, and future, illustrated by "I wrote yesterday," "I'm writing now," and "I'll write tomorrow."

Nonfiction generally presents more "tense" problems than fiction, but there are some simple rules to help keep the tenses separate in articles and essays. One, use past tense to talk about something that has happened before the time in which you're writing. *The Battle of the Bulge was... Gandhi spoke of... Hemingway wrote...* Two, present tense is used to define terms. *Metaphors are... Haiku is a style of poetry*. Three, future tense is best for writing of things that haven't happened yet. *Global warming could sink half our coastlines*.

For fiction, the problem seldom arises because most stories are told entirely in past tense. *"The evening arrived on a chilling wind. And there was sleet that sent the people of Locknaar scurrying from the streets as the sun failed. Shutters were locked, fireplaces lit. Families huddled together as ice thickened on the buildings. Only in the Temple of Silver had men and women gathered for a reason other than warmth."*

Here, words like "arrived," "was," "were," "huddled," "thickened," and "gathered" indicate the past tense. Alternatively, however, the same scene could be written in present tense. *"The evening arrives on a chilling wind. And there is sleet that sends the people of Lochnaar scurrying from the streets as the sun fails. Shutters are locked, fireplaces lit. Families huddle together as ice thickens on the buildings. Only in the Temple of Silver do men and women gather for a reason other than warmth."*

Words like "arrives," "is," "are," "huddle," and "thickens" show that action is occurring in real time here, unfolding as we read it. More stories and novels are being written these days in present tense, and some readers and writers like the unparalleled immediacy of this style. There are risks, however. First, the present tense is still uncommon and many readers feel uncomfortable with it because they aren't used to it. Second, most writers have been trained in past tense and may not be able to switch gears easily, and mistakes in tense seem more noticeable when prose is in present tense. Third, I've found that while action scenes really sing in the present tense, character development is harder. Present tense creates such momentum that any slowdown in story to address character calls attention to itself.

Past tense is the standard; it's probably what all your favorite books were written in. And it's hard to criticize the tense used by Ray Bradbury, Edgar Allan Poe, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway and Jack London. If you decide to use present tense, try it in a

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Reviews

Breath and Bone

Carol Berg

Roc, Jan 2008, \$15.00

ISBN 9780451461865

Review by Harriet Klausner

Valen the sorcerer does not want the role he finds himself in. He fears for the realms of the mortals and the Danae, and the beleaguered mage is convinced a new evil era is coming to both spheres.

Adding to his discomfort and uncertainty is his feeling that he is the focus of a dangerous pair of villains. He knows he must choose to ally with Osriel the bastard prince of Evanore or priestess Sila Diaglou; both believe that the end is near. His selection between the lesser of two evils, even if he chooses the right one, still could prove too late as doom appears the most likely outcome for humanity and or the Danae regardless of what he does.

This sequel to *Flesh and Spirit* is an entertaining character study as much of the fantasy saga is an introspective of Valen seeking to save the worlds while also redeeming himself for his past transgressions. Readers who prefer fast-paced action should look elsewhere. However, those in the audience who enjoy a doubting hero struggling to be a champion while hesitating at every step he takes will appreciate Carol Berg's intriguing *Breath and Bone*.

Modern science fiction is the only form of literature that consistently considers the nature of the changes that face us, the possible consequences, and the possible solutions.

— Isaac Asimov

Child of a Dead God

Barb and J.C. Hendee

Roc, Jan 2008, \$24.95

ISBN: 9780451461872

Review by Harriet Klausner

Magiere the dhampire and Leesil the elf have finally left the elven territories to continue their search for a hidden artifact. Wynn the sage, Chap the canine protector, and two distrusting elves accompany them. Master Sage Domin Tilswith asked Magiere to find the relic in order to keep the magical object from the times of Forgotten History from falling into the evil hands of those like her Noble Dead (vampire) half-brother Welsteil.

Welsteil believes the artifact will take away his overwhelming hunger for blood; he raises a pack of feral vampires to help him follow his adversary, his half-sister. When she retrieves the object, his squad will capture her and take possession of the object from her. Neither of the siblings is aware that a third party, the Most Aged Father, an Elven, plans to grab the artifact as he believes this is the only way to save his people from the increasing encroachment of the vile humans and their related evil species if war comes.

Readers who love vampire novels will appreciate the full works of Barb and J.C. Hendee as they consistently provide some of the genre's best. Each novel adds to the Hendee mythos yet stands alone as the story lines are complex in terms of furthering the adventures of Magiere and Leesil, but are also a complete tale onto itself. The lead duo is courageous and caring as they battle two enemy groups in which treachery and double crossing from your own team is expected. Except for trusting one another and to a degree Chap and Wynn, Magiere and Leesil knows betrayal can come from within as much as from blood kin. The audience will be want to read this novel in one sitting as the triad converges on what looks like a fatal confrontation, but for whom.

Reviews

The Man with the Golden Torc

Simon R. Green

2007, Roc, 393 pgs.

ISBN-13: 978-0-451-46145-2

Review by DL Parker

If I had to create a Simon R. Green alphabet, we would start, of course, with *A for Action* (although it could equally be *A for Attitude*, or *A for Anti-Establishment*), *B for Bam!* onward to *W for Wham!*, and, of course, *Z for Zombies*.

You might gather from this (especially if you've read Green's unique and somewhat better *Nightside* series) that there's plenty of slash, smash, crash, and burn in his work. His heroes have not just a chip on their muscular shoulders, but a whole mountain. They're *always* rebels. That's because whatever represents the Establishment in Green's novels is always hypocritical and hollow, masquerading as Good while in fact thoroughly Bad. The Bad Guys in Green's novels are really the Good Guys. Are you confused yet?

Green can, of course, carry this Good-is-Bad, Bad-is-Good switch much too far. In "The Man with the Golden Torc", we have Jack the Ripper (I ask you, *Jack the Ripper?*!) fighting on the side of the Good Guys. I should say, old Jack fights for the Bad Guys who are really the Good Guys. I'm afraid this didn't just stretch my envelope of belief. It burst the molecular structure of it into ten thousand little pieces. *Jackie Boy*, I never knew you were so sadly misunderstood. You're just a poor lonely laddie who likes to play with entrails.

But Green's enthusiastic embrace of the oddball, the bizarre, and the misunderstood rebel aside, his books are usually fun. They mix wildly colorful characters with black humor and horror; attitude with action; irreverence (downright blasphemy, even) with a rather touching affection for the iconoclastic rebel. The heroes are really romantics masquerading as cynics. They come right in the end, in spite of the company they keep (though I advise Eddie Drood, the hero of "The Man with the Golden Torc", to stay away from Jack in sequels).

As the story opens, we find Eddie, scion and agent of the Drood (deriving from "*Druid*") family, doing his job. His job, and the self-appointed mission

of the whole family since time immemorial, is Smash Bad Guys. Of course, Eddie *looves* his work.

Eddie's a bit of a rebel as the book opens, but not much of one (he *is* fond of clothes that say *Attitude*, like leather jackets, but that's about it. Why not safety pins in the nose, and pink mohawks, I ask you? As I said, his heart isn't really into the rebel deal, at least not yet). In fact, when the Drood Matriarch says Here's One for Smashing, Eddie goes right out without question and does the deed. Mommy Drood must know best. *Bam! Wham! SMASH!* Eddie's got plenty of fancy toys to help with the job, and of course, there's always the Drood super weapon – a gold torc that can turn into golden Super Armor.

But something goes terribly wrong in Eddie's fashion-rebel world. He's set up for an ambush while supposedly transporting a precious family heirloom, a mystic supernaturally powered diamond called the Soul of Albion, to a safe place. Everything but the kitchen sink tries to whack him en route. He has to fight off the whole caboodle: elves and dragons, UFOs, CARnivores (cars gone feral), and... well, there's too long of a list to mention here. More *bam, wham, smash*. Eddie finds out it was all a trick anyway -- he was never given the diamond. The box is EMPTY!

Without a doubt, Eddie's on the official Drood Bad Guys list. Now's he's a *real* rebel, not just a leather jacket one. Drood Mommy won't say what made him the black sheep, and his super-agent, Bondian-cool Uncle's gunning for him, as well as various spiteful cousins.

What's Eddie to do? He turns to the Bad Guys for help (Jack, a witch, a sort of neo-fascist lot, and other colorful characters). What deep, dark, dirty secret is the Family hiding? (Remember, the Establishment ALWAYS has a deep, dark, dirty secret in a Green novel). Is there a traitor in the Family? Has Eddie been on the wrong side all along? Did he *really* misunderstand poor lonely Jackie?

It comes right in the end, of course. You know that. In fact, if you've read Green's *Nightside* series, you just about know from page one how this is going to work out: the author has his fixations. But the ride's still wild enough to be fun. Get on board!

Reviews

It has yet to be proven that intelligence has any survival value.

— Arthur C. Clarke

Goblin War

Jim C. Hines

Daw, March 2008

\$7.99, Mass Market

ISBN 9780756404932

Review by Harriet Klausner

Jig the goblin is the runt of the litter who used to be picked on by goblins stronger than him which included the entire goblin civilization (if one can call it that since they fight between themselves and are backstabbers and sneaky beings who try to outwit one another – that sounds like Congress). For a slimy goblin (obvious oxymoron), Jig dealt with two malevolent princes and a dragon, fought against the pixie infection and though he doesn't realize it, the goblins are beginning to respect and look up to him.

Trouble comes their way when the goblin's lair is invaded by the prince and princess whose brother bled in the goblin's lair. They steal the Rod Of Creation and take the strongest goblins to shore up their defenses against Billa the Blood and her army of monsters including orcs, goblins and kobolds. Shadowstar, the god Jig worships quietly helps him because he want Billa defeated; apparently the goddess Isa abets Billa with an objective to kill the god of death Noc who happens to be Shadowstar's son just as Isa is his wife.

Readers who want some fun and laughs in their fantasy should read Jim C. Hines' Jig the Goblin books due to the appealing hero. Jig is an amusing cynic who has no confidence in his ability to make things right as he assumes he is too cowardly to do so; no one else in the goblin or readership communities believe that after his recent escapades in *Goblin Quest* and *Goblin Hero*. His pathos, which sounds at times like chick lit goblin style, will have readers laughing out loud at the lament of a couch potatoes creature whose prime wish in life is not to be the greatest goblin hero.

Marseguro

Edward Willet

Daw, Feb 2008

\$7.99, Mass Market, 400 pgs.

ISBN: 9780756404642

Review by Harriet Klausner

In some unspecified time in the future all the scientists agreed that Earth was going to be hit by a meteor and destroyed. Genetic sculptor Victor Hansen created a race of modified humans known as Selkies, bioengineered to live in water as they had gills and webbed feet and were faster and stronger than unmodified humans. They escaped from the religious leader the Avatar and his religious regime the Body Purified who believed all beings that were genetically modified were abominations.

The asteroid ended up being deflected by another asteroid and he consolidated his regime's hold on the people of earth. The unmodified humans and the Selkies landed on the water world of Marseguro where for seventy-five years landlings and Selkies lived in harmony with each other. Some landlings were loyal to the Avatar's beliefs and Chris Keating, brainwashed by his mother, is one of them. When two Selkies play a nasty trick on imm, he turns on the homing beacon from the ship that landed there. Richard Lansing made it his life work to find the world his grandfather landed on and when he does he notifies the proper authorities who mount an attack to kill the Selkies. However, Marseguro is not as helpless as earth bureaucrats believe and when Richard, who travels with the troops to Marseguro, discovers who and what he is, the side he takes (Avatar or Selkie) will determine the outcome of what becomes of the mostly water planet.

The regime in power is so xenophobic that it makes war on innocent men, women and children subduing colony worlds by deadly force. Marseguro is determined not to be conquered but if they use the only means available to stop the troops Earth is sending their way, a great travesty will occur. Their moral dilemma is only one of the reasons this novel is so fascinating. The Selkie culture and infrastructure is very picturesque and easily pictured by readers who will want to visit his exotic world. Hopefully Edward Willet will write a sequel starring Marseguro.

Imagine (con't)

entity no better or worse than all the others—the only one, but only one.

It's not uncommon for my clients to describe their cosmos in detail when they do this exercise. Little is original. I know this because I've likely seen every star/space/alien/sun/moon documentary/sitcom/drama ever created (twice) and can name the program that was so impressionable that they unconsciously replay this as their own created universe. One interesting twist to this is that few report their universe as static. Often it is a friendly place with great wonders to be discovered. A minority reports it to be dark and dangerous.

My point. In the future's future, will anything be dreamed/speculated that is truly original? Why do people who do this exercise stop at the edge of their universe (comfort zone) and describe it using a reference they've seen or read somewhere else? In many years of private practice, seven people have gone past the last planet in the solar system or night sky to explore the unknown. Seven. Seven dared describe something they've never seen before, trying to invent an original thought. The old adage that there is nothing new under the sun comes to mind, and I must wonder if perhaps that sage had a peek at his own future's future?

A ship that transports cargo through space is basically, just a boat. A button is a simple invention, but could it be improved on and still remain a button?

What is left to be invented? Where does imagination originate? Is understanding the brain the *real* final frontier? Could our galaxy, our universe hide secrets to inspire our grandchildren's grandchildren to speculate their future for their grandchildren or is it played out and humanity discovers there really is nothing new under the sun?

Close your eyes and let your mind wander...

**Creator anonymous*

The difference between sentiment and being sentimental is the following: Sentiment is when a driver swerves out of the way to avoid hitting a rabbit on the road. Being sentimental is when the same driver, when swerving away from the rabbit, hits a pedestrian.

— Frank Herbert

ET Life (con't)

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 must 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. They must also have a means of reproduction of their species.

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. Just as 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.

Life of any kind is intimately tied to its environment. The characteristics of the planet would be extremely important in determining the characteristics of the life forms that exist on it..

Now what 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 appears 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 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 or escape being eaten. 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

ET Life(con't)

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 have two eyes with overlapping vision, which provides three-dimensional 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, a meal or an approaching enemy. 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.

Writer's Block (con't)

short story first. Get used to how it handles before you tackle your own *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Conjunctions:

"And" and "but" are examples of *conjunctions*, which are meant to join other words or phrases together. Some other conjunctions are "unless," "either," "or," "neither," and "nor." Because conjunctions are meant to *join* two verbal elements together, many people believe it unacceptable to *begin* a sentence with one. If the *history* of English is to be considered, that belief is nonsense. The *Bible* uses "and" and "but" to start many sentences. Shakespeare also knew how powerful these words could be at the beginning of a sentence. As long as they are not overused they can work wonders to increase the drama and poetry of a paragraph.

Adjectives & Adverbs:

Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns, nothing else, and there are a myriad of them in English. Some common examples, with the adjective always appearing first, are: red brick, ugly dog, rich dessert, blue sky, fast car. Some writers will tell you to avoid

adjectives as much as possible, but there's nothing wrong with adjectives by themselves. The problem comes when adjectives are used poorly.

Adjectives, for example, can become cliché to where they add nothing to a noun they modify. Don't all desserts seem to be "rich?" "Aren't most cars in fiction "fast?" We hardly even notice such descriptors anymore. And is "blue" really necessary when talking about the sky? Unless you're on an alien world or need to call attention to the sky for something *out of the ordinary*, why write "blue."

Adjectives also are misused when they are piled on top of each other until they obscure rather than enhance the nouns they are attached to. "*The elegant and expensive bright red sports car started with a low, throaty growl that reminded him of some sleek and savage jungle beast.*" There are just too *many* adjectives here. The sentence is bloated with them, although all of them are perfectly fine modifiers by themselves.

Adverbs typically modify verbs, but they can also modify adjectives, and even other adverbs. All adverbs are supposed to answer one of four questions: How, When, Where, and To What Degree. Examples, with adverbs underlined: *Bob laughed insanely. Janice lost her job recently. The lion crouches there in the jungle. The team's chances of winning have been utterly destroyed.*

Most adverbs end in "ly," which is generally a reliable way of recognizing them, especially when they don't follow a verb. *The brutally expensive sports car...*, or *the frantically screaming mother...* Adverbs are not useless, but they are less useful than adjectives and are often used to prop up weak verbs when the best thing would be to change the verb. For example, *he cried brokenly* might be better as *he sobbed*. *He ran quickly* would be better as *he sprinted*.

Conclusions:

English is a beautiful, complex, and sometimes confusing language. This confusion comes, in part, because English has borrowed so many words from other languages, and because the language itself has evolved dramatically over the past few hundred years. Most of us learned the exceptions to English rules as kids, and we often write correctly because it *sounds* right. What sounds right is not inevitably right, however, and only by practicing and continuing to learn can we make sure that our work is as good as we can get it.