



The Illuminata

Delving Deep Into The Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

SF Unleashed

By Bret Funk

Speculative Fiction is making a spectacular comeback in the world of visual media. Over the last few years, numerous movie and television projects have burst from the ether, comforting old adherents and electrifying new converts to the faith. But what provoked this resurgence of SF, and what is driving the movement?

In part (perhaps a large part), money is the answer. The financial success of the *Lord of the Rings*; *Harry Potter*; *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; and the multitude of comic/superhero related successes lit the fire beneath studio execs. The popularity of series like *Lost* and *Battlestar Galactica* had a similar effect on television. These works proved that to popular culture (and the wallets attached to it), speculative fiction was a luscious fruit, ready to be feasted upon by the vampires seated atop the Entertainment pyramid.

But the true resurgence of SF must transcend money. There must be factors (other than the desire to throw away their earnings) driving people toward speculative fiction. It may be nostalgia or an interest in seeing an old favorite modernized for new times (*Battlestar Galactica*, *Knight Rider*), an interest in following a favorite down a path unexplored (*Sarah Conner Chronicles*), or a desire for something fresh and (hopefully) innovative (*Fringe*, *Life on Mars*).

For me, I believe two factors above all are driving the renewed interest in SF: quality and escapism.

Quality is relative to the viewer and subject to a great many factors, but I believe that in recent years, producers reached a conclusion I came to long ago: if you invest time and money into making an SF project good, then you will attract a larger and more sustainable audience than if you simply rape a franchise for its die-hard fans. By casting actors who take their roles seriously and whose abilities complement the character they are trying to play (rather than attaching the most famous name attainable regardless of how inappropriate to the role), by finding directors with an interest in or a love of the franchise (or at least the professional courtesy to handle the material faithfully), and by working with writers who understand the nuances of the material, products of far better quality can be produced.

In terms of remakes, this combination (and a little luck) results in something that captures the spirit of the original, remains true to any pre-established dogma, and yet still modernizes the work in such a way that it will appeal to fans of the original and SF lovers of today. In terms of new projects, it equates to having faith in the material and allowing it to evolve naturally, rather than trying to force it down a narrow, predestined marketing path.

When the quality is high, many outside the target groups will be drawn to the project... For the acting... For the storytelling... For the deep philosophical undercurrents... For the deliciously mocking political satire... Thousands of reasons exist to draw viewers to a high quality project. Only one (love of SF) will draw people to items of low quality.

The tendency in recent years has been to give SF projects some leniency and support. There are

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Speculative Fiction and the Holidays

by Rachel V. Olivier

Where Does Your Imagination Go When Everything Else Dies Away?

It's no mere coincidence that when fall's chill fingers first make their way across the back of your neck, and the veil between realities thin, you decide it might be a good idea to settle in with a good book, or turn on your favorite TV shows and movies. Autumn is the beginning of the new television season. Movies about magic and mayhem vie for your attention, and for some reason they seem more fun in the fall and winter than summer blockbusters.

Ever wonder about that?

Once upon a time, after the harvest had been brought in, cured, stored, and set ready for the cold dark months ahead, late autumn through winter was the time of the storyteller. As people sat quietly working on indoor projects – sewing, carving, tinkering – the storyteller would sit down by the fire, and maybe for the payment of a meal or some clothing, and a place to sleep, tell his or her stories.

But not just any stories. Like any storyteller worth their salt, the bard, wisewoman, or wiseman, would choose their stories according to the timing of the season and personalities in the room. When the dark, cold of winter encroached on the small building full of humans hoping to make it through the winter, wind whistling in the rafters, animals howling and growling for their own food, that's when the imagination was, and still is, ready for a good tale. Tales about humans becoming animals or about magical places and beings were a way for the humans in that crowded hut to get away from their life for a while.

Consider the types of tales that have come out of our autumn/winter storyteller's mouths and pens. Stories about the dead coming back to life and haunting the living, a jolly elf who gives good children gifts, and many others come out of this time of year. Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol*, Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and *From the Dust Returned* are a few more popular stories. Let's not forget C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* – always winter but never Christmas. Those are just the books.

What about the movies? Live action *Peter Pan*? Released at Christmas. When were they going to release *Star Trek* before moving around the date? Christmas. When do the horror films come out? Halloween. Magical family films? Thanksgiving. Many of the

Harry Potter and other fantasy films? *Stardust*? *Lord of the Rings*? Thanksgiving and Christmas. What about recent releases? *Quarantine* and *Blindness* are two scary science fiction/dystopian type tales coming out in October. *Quantum of Solace* (let's face it, 007 has always been a tad scifi), *Twilight*, and *The Road* are three specific movies coming out in November. In December *Punisher: War Zone*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *The Tale of Despereaux*, *Delgo*, *Bedtime Stories*, and *The Spirit* will be coming out, among others. That only counts some of the children's films.

That list doesn't include television specials or episodes on regular series that use Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas as an excuse to explore the fantastic, such as when *Northern Exposure* had Dr. Fleishman go through a Christmas Carol experience with three rabbis during Yom Kippur. Nor does that account for the books released during that time of the year that lean more towards the fantastical and other.

As a writer, as well as a lover of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and the other, it is well to keep this time of year in mind. What stories have you written that might do better if marketed or slightly skewed for Halloween, Thanksgiving, or Christmas, or other holidays during this time? Audiences that wouldn't otherwise like speculative fiction are more open to it during this time of year. Writers of speculative fiction, knowing this, can take advantage of this openness, use it to introduce people who would not otherwise read speculative fiction or watch shows and movies with a fantasy element.

Whether fantasy, horror, science fiction, or any other type of fiction that looks at the world through a cock-eyed lens, whether you're talking about the big guy named Claus or the big guy who has claws, speculative fiction stories have a special affinity for this time of year. People like their good fantasies. When a good part of the world is passing into a season when living things are either dying or hibernating for the season, that's when the imagination wakes up.

People think that I must be a very strange person. This is not correct. I have the heart of a small boy. It is in a glass jar on my desk.

— Stephen King

Dubious Progress

by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

In our little area of the White Mountains, progress has built a dam over the old town of Adair. Lucky me, Kathryn Moody is a cool gal-pal that owns a metal detector and lives within slingshot distance of the area. If I had the gear, I'd do some diving. Instead, we forgo the frigid water and see what's around/under her place. I'm sure a truck is hiding underground, if the insistent ping is any indication. We've traveled Navajo and Apache County back roads with her metal detector and once, went arrowhead hunting downstream from (likely) Apache camps. I imagine sitting at night around a fire and chipping away at a rock to eventually tie it on a staff and hunt my tribe's dinner. I can't. I know I'd miss and we'd all go hungry and it would be my fault.

Through the years, Kathryn wisely held on to a collection of *Long John Latham's Bottles and Relics* (1970) which I've read cover-to-cover. An article about Indian pottery got my speculating mind to wondering about how Native Americans viewed "progress" and "advancement", since our part of Arizona has four Nations within a hundred miles— Hopi, Navajo, White Mountain Apache, and San Carlos Apache. The article, *Indian Fingerprints*, (Pat Fulks, Oct-Nov. 1970), highlighted the discovery of an ancient mound of bones at a construction site in Hancock County, MS. Later, this would be identified as Poverty Point National Monument, named for the Indian culture believed to have inhabited the lower Mississippi valley since 1400-2000 B.C. A mere two hundred miles away is Stennis Space Center, a former N.A.S.A. Test-Site. The idea of archeology and aerospace started another set of questions that carried me through a grueling "relative run" spanning eight states worth of potholes, boiling tarmac and defensive driving—what is the real price of progress?

Flash forward to the bottom edge of the Texas Panhandle. Wind Generators are cool. They're graceful and large and unmistakably futuristic. A field of them as background for a sci fi novel sets the stage quickly.

I have a friend in Japan who was able to tour inside one of these behemoths and he sent a picture of himself and a group of his friends at the top, in the main structure the size of a small Winnebago, ten lanky stories from the ground. Tri-winged blades whoop-whoop through the sky like something Jules Vern would have imagined. It is hard to watch the road, I'm so energized! We change drivers so I can gawk; I risk a neck injury to take it all in. The road follows the

topography that flows out of Palo Duro Canyon, and skirts Horse Hollow Wind Energy Center. The entire western ridge is row after row of these white stalks, swiping down and up as it generates precious energy.

Hubby and I speculated on other uses. We'd driven through silent oil fields in New Mexico and far west Texas earlier that day and noticed that only one out of ten drilling rigs moved—some very slowly. I "speculated" that if wind turbines generated energy, why not for other uses, right at the pole-sight? Instead of gas/diesel engines to move those sucker rods up and down, why not have one hooked up to a wind generator? That would *save* energy and oil fuel.

And what about the fallow fields we kept seeing? Was it because fuel prices were so high that farmers just never saw a profit, thereby didn't plant crops, or for those who did, never bothered to harvest their wheat or corn? (Really.) When the rechargeable battery craze reached more compact solutions and made farm equipment efficient and affordable, having a wind generator in the back yard, recharging those batteries for the next day's planting seemed like a viable solution. The energy is there, in the wind. All we need to do is harness it responsibly.

I tried to imagine this area in several decades—like the Poverty Point native, speculating the next nomadic tribal site. Wind generators dot the landscape on one side of the road, while the spaceport to the left utilizes this treasure's resources to help lift-offs (I know, I'm really speculating here), all very quiet, almost silent, like electric cars that can literally sneak up on you since all you'd hear was the sound of dirt under the tires as warning.

As the scenery to my right moved on to another ridge, I saw another field of generators. And then, on the next ridge, another. By the time we drove to Snyder, Texas, the entire idea of wind generators lost allure. Why? From Post, Texas to Abilene, most of the mesa land was covered with white windmills. It dominated the beauty of the area from special to spectacle. I'm not a bunny or a tree hugger, however, Mr. T. Boone Picken's idea may take more getting use to if the high points on the windy prairie are entirely usurped by the need to generate energy.

So if I squint, like trying to capture the early morning twilight of pre-waking theta thoughts, I can almost speculate progress on one side of the highway, advancement on the stellar level on the other. Yet, I am saddened. It no longer resembles a West Texas

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What is Outside the Universe?

by Joe Vadalma

Have you ever thought about infinity? Or read what modern cosmologists have to say about the universe? Back a few centuries, people who thought about such things figured that the universe consisted of the earth which was surrounded by crystal spheres. Astronomers (actually astrologers) of those days never wrote about what was outside the outermost crystal sphere. Then came along Copernicus, Galileo and Newton and the universe expanded somewhat to the size of the solar system and the fixed stars out there somewhere; nobody knew how far. When astronomers gazed through more powerful telescopes and other sophisticated gear, suddenly the universe expanded to billions of light years in size.

But how far did it go? Did it stretch on forever? In the early part of the twentieth century, Albert Einstein proposed his Theory of Relativity. This and other discoveries changed everything. Cosmologists began to think of the universe as a great expanding ball (or some other shape) that had a definite limit.

Okay, that is the current view of our universe. But if our universe is a great ball (or some other shape) curved in the fourth dimension, what lies outside of it? Recent articles I have read about what modern cosmologists and physicist think about the universe speak of "multiverses." I wonder what they are like.

Here are some thoughts on the matter. Not all of them are mine. According to one viewpoint, the universe is defined to be everything, including space and time itself. Since the universe includes all space, there can be nothing "outside" the universe. An outside cannot exist.

However, the Big Bang theory completely changed the view of cosmologists and others who study such things. According to the Big Bang theory, the Big Bang was not an explosion in a preexisting three-dimensional space, with matter and light expanding out into empty space from some central point; instead, matter and energy are understood to fill all of space (i.e. "the universe"), and what's expanding is space ("the universe") itself. But, wait a minute, if it's expanding, what is it expanding into?

The Big Bang theory is based on Einstein's

theory of general relativity, which explains that gravity of matter/energy causes space-time to curve. The amount of curve depends on the average density of matter/energy throughout the universe, a consequence of this is that the universe as a whole can be curved, with either positive curvature, zero curvature, or negative curvature.

To visualize a closed universe with positive curvature, drop the dimensions by one. Instead of curved three-dimensional space, picture a two-dimensional universe in which two-dimensional space is curved into a sphere, and "expanding space" means that the sphere is blowing up like a balloon while the bits of two dimensional matter on the surface do not change in size. You can see that if you pasted a bunch of bits of paper on a balloon and then blew it up, each bit would see the other bits receding from it. This is what astronomers observe, when they view distant galaxies.

If you made a movie of the balloon blowing up and play the movie backwards, after a while the size of the sphere approaches zero, all the bits of matter throughout the balloon universe get more and more squished together and approach infinite density as the size approaches zero. This is what the big bang is supposed to be. Of course, this analogy forces you to picture the two dimensional surface of the sphere expanding into a third dimension, and our curved three dimensional space is expanding into four dimensional space. The question becomes what else is in the fourth dimensional space? Other balloons (universes)?

Also, if space is curved in the fourth dimension, what happens if you travel in a straight line as far as you could go? Would you return to your starting point? And if the fourth dimension is time, would you return to the point in time when you started your journey?

On the other hand, J. Bruno wrote: "The center of the universe is everywhere, as well as its border but does not exist anywhere." Thus, the universe has a center that exists everywhere and borders that exist everywhere. Think about this. Does this statement violate any physical or philosophical rules or not? If the answer is "not," the universe is and will stay infinite and isotropic.

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Writer's Block: How To Cheat A Reader

by Charles Gramlich

Although I won't mention the authors' names, anyone who has read the book I'm going to talk about today will be able to find them out. The primary author is a household name, a brand as they say. He's as famous as I am unknown, so famous that he apparently doesn't write his own books anymore.

From what I hear, and this is second hand but I believe it's probably true, famous author meets with a relatively unknown co-author and they develop a story outline. Then the co-writer does the heavy lifting. For the book I'm talking about here, the co-author has his name at the bottom of the cover while the famous author's name is at top. I have no idea which of the two is primarily responsible for this particular monstrosity, but it seems to me a larger part of the blame would fall upon the famous author, who should have had the clout to make this a better book.

First, let me tell you why I started this book. I had read one of the famous author's first novels many, many years ago and it was decent. It wasn't good enough to make me a fan, but I recognized and remembered the name later when he became a literary God. I actually bought a couple of this writer's later books, thinking maybe he'd gotten better over the years—as Dean Koontz did—but before I could get around to reading them I began to hear from writer friends who I respected that his most recent work sucked.

This dropped famous writer's books well down on my reading list and left them gathering dust. Until one particular night not long ago. My wife, who works at the library, brought one of the writer's 2007 releases home for me to look at. It had a somewhat sexy cover, and I thought, "his stuff can't be as bad as my friends are saying. It sells, a lot, and as a struggling writer myself maybe I can learn something from it."

I'm afraid my writer friends had seriously understated the suckage. I've heard Dan Brown described by some of those same friends as a less than stellar writer, but compared with the book

I'm talking about Mr. Brown should be called Mr. Nobel prize. Did I say this book was bad? Oh man, was it bad.

I have friends who will quit a book when it starts to get stupid. But I'm made of sterner stuff. Besides, I couldn't wait to see what train wreck moment was next. Every teensy micro-chapter seemed to drag me further into a world of horrendous plot tangles and awful foreshadowing. How could I not turn the page?

Well, I'm still reeling to know that a professionally published work could be so lame. But let me give you my reasons for hanging that label on it. Many will probably recognize the work from this discussion.

First, although the protagonist is a grown woman, the book starts out reading like the diary of a 15 year old girl. The woman puts on her best little black dress and heads downtown to surprise Hubby. She finds said Hubby arm in arm with a ravishing blond and follows them in her car, like they were "connected by a tow hook," to a hotel. Cue tears.

The woman does not confront her husband then, or later at home, but instead of going out of town the next day for a "job-sponsored seminar" as she is supposed to, she stays home and meets "hunk," a leather jacketed motorcycle rider. These two have apparently carried on a mild flirtation over time, but have *not* had an affair. Yet.

We pause a moment to mention that Hubby is an "investment" type. We know that both he and the woman have been to law school, where they met, but we don't know anything about the woman's job yet. From her interest in the finer things in life and her sweet little "Mini Cooper" she seems a spoiled housewife with no children to worry about.

Anyway, even though Hubby is still in town, motorcycle guy comes over to the woman's house where she's arranged dinner for "two." She has second thoughts, and the hunk starts to leave, but then she chases after him and climbs on the back of his Ducati sport bike and they race off through

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Reviews

Armageddon's Children

Terry Brooks

Del Ray Books, 2007, 404 pgs
ISBN: 978-0-345048410-9

It's appropriate that the first book of the latest Terry Brooks trilogy, *Armageddon's Children*, borrows a Christian term describing the apocalyptic battle between the forces of good and evil. Brooks re-uses stock archetypes from various much-too-familiar mythologies in almost all his works—the Tolkien-derived elves and dwarves of his Shannara trilogy; the fairy-tale creations of his lighter-touch Magic Kingdom series; and here, in his *Genesis of Shannara* trilogy, biblically flavored demons and not-quite-Christian soldiers (“Knights of the Word”, with the “Word” no longer identified as Christ. Neither God nor Christ get explicit mentions here. There is, however, a thinly disguised Mary as the “Lady”, patron of the Knights).

Brooks' religious riffs coexist uneasily with fantasy elements and magic (as a source of more-or-less non-Deity-attributed power). So how *does* one bridge the gap between a semi-Christian Armageddon and Middle Earth?

By starting with that cherished old chestnut, the End of the Civilized World, it seems. Magic comes to the rescue. The scenario of the technological world turning into a magical one has been done before, in Fred Saberhagen's superior *Empire of the East* series. Nuclear bombs in the process of detonation are magically transformed into demons to save the planet (which does give the reader a graphic example of how evil and powerful Saberhagen's new-born demons are).

Brooks has a different take: magic has been here all along. His elves are hiding in Oregon (right along with the Scientology scriptures packed in those southern Oregon mountain vaults, perhaps). The Knights of the Word have been battling evil demons with those magical staves (without being noticed by John Q. Public) for centuries. Magic and science *do* co-exist.

Now it's crunch time, and the last two Knights of the Word have been handed their marching orders by the Lady. Logan Tom gives up rescuing

human slaves from the camps (and, incidentally, euthanizing unfortunate children who have been victims of demonic experiments) in order to trek West as the only Wise Man from the East still in search of a star. Angel Perez heads out on a mystery mission (which is still a mystery by the end of the book) in the company of a magical tatterdemalion. The presumed focus of their efforts is a magically gifted street boy named Hawk, who just *might* be the new Savior of the World (the previous one was presumably Dove, not Hawk).

We don't progress much further in this first book in the series, in part because Brooks insists on giving us detailed back stories on character after character—even the minor ones. We're two steps forward, one step back, all the way.

The backward glances slow the forward progress, and by the time I plowed through the back stories for Owl and Panther and the rest of the street kids, not to mention Hawk the Savior-to-be and the two knights, I was as afloat with unnecessary information as the survivor of a six-pack drinking binge with beer. Some readers want to know the nitty-gritty detail; they don't like ambiguity, and they really do want to know why some minor character has issues because mommy or daddy abandoned him when he was a little tyke. If you're *that* kind of reader, you'll be in hog heaven.

I confess to being a fan of the author's lighter and more humorous Magic Kingdom series, and I wish Brooks would return to it. I admired the early Shannara series for how Brooks could take such un-original elements (elves and dwarves and the like) and still make interesting stories.

But in this book, the engine *chug-chug-chugs* as it strains to marry fantasy and denatured semi-Christian mythology. If you're a die-hard Brooks fan, you'll read this book and enjoy it anyway, even if it isn't Brooks at his best. If you've never read Brooks before, for goodness sake, don't start here. Pick up *Magic Kingdom for Sale* or *Sword of Shannara* instead. Even by the end of this book, I couldn't really picture the Valley of Armageddon in Middle Earth.

Reviews

The Fair Folk: Six Tales of the Fey **Edited by Marvin Kaye**

Ace Books, New York, NY

Mass Market, January 2008, \$7.99

Review by Rachel Olivier

Anthologies do not get the attention they deserve. There are many types of anthologies, such as those collections of well-written essays and heartbreaking stories loved by the literature set and academic circle. These anthologies or collections typically get a lot of critical attention. However, the fun anthologies, the kind were a few of your favorite writers, as well as some you never read before, all got together to write about vampires or murder mysteries or aliens in outer space. These latter are the collections you keep and go back to read over and over again. *The Fair Folk: Six Tales of the Fey* (2008), edited by Marvin Kaye, is just such a book.

Kaye pens a good introduction; it's a shame he didn't add a story of his own. The authors he did include, however, are Patricia A. McKillip, Jane Yolen and Midori Snyder, Tanith Lee, Megan Lindholm, Kim Newman, and Craig Shaw Gardner. With those authors, it's difficult not to find a good story among the lot. The stories range from romance, to drama, to comedy and include some elves who are good, some wicked, and some absolutely ambivalent and amoral.

Tanith Lee's tale, "UOUS", turn the Cinderella tale on its head. This is not a childhood tale where a kindly fairy or old woman takes care of the poor Cinder – ella. In this tale, the fairy could care less about anyone but his own search for justice. And though there is justice, it is dark and pensive. Though well done, it seemed almost too dark to start the collection off with.

In "Grace Notes", by Megan Lindholm, a single guy is puzzled when his normally boring, bland life takes a mysterious turn for the better, and then abruptly for the worse, when a brownie enters his life. This was enjoyable because of Lindholm's ability to describe the mundane life of everyday people so well, and juxtapose it to the brownie intruding on their lives.

Patricia A. McKillip's story, "The Kelpie", is a romance where two artists meet one evening and immediately fall in love. Though very detailed, and otherworldly, similar to McKillip's other work, it is also grounded by a very earthy plot; the competition between two men over one woman. Though a common plot, McKillip gave the female character an uncommon choice that keeps the story from becoming just another trite romantic fantasy.

"The Gypsies in the Wood", by Kim Newman, is a fun read because of its mix of mystery with fantasy. The main character is a part of the British Government that solves strange happenings the regular law enforcement are not capable of handling. This story was a fun two-parter that makes the reader want to know more about this world.

Craig Shaw Gardner's story, "An Embarrassment of Elves" starts with a klutzy apprentice, a beautiful witch, a dour dwarf, an assassin, a brownie, a wizard allergic to magic, and dragon, a Dark Rider, and, of course, Elves. It is a delightful comedy and a very good read.

In "Except the Queen", co-written by Jane Yolen and Midori Snyder, two fairy sisters communicate via letters sent by pigeon, owl, and other means. Over the course of this story it comes out that they are exiled from fairyland because of a practical joke they played on the Queen. Their magic (and immortality) has been stripped from them and they have been exiled to live in the "real world." It was a good decision to end with story. It is the longest, best, and strongest of the lot.

If you're looking for a book of fairy tales to read as the autumn winds rattle the windowpanes, *The Fair Folk: Six Tales of the Fey* is a good choice. Just make sure you haven't insulted any fey yourself as the house grows dark and falls silent about you.

By challenging anthropocentrism and temporal provincialism, science fiction throws open the whole of civilization and its premises to constructive criticism.

— Alvin Toffler

Reviews

Riddle of Stars

Patricia Anne McKillip

Doubleday (1979)

ASIN: B00070D0F0

Review by Terry Crotinger

Patricia McKillip is a World Fantasy Award winning author. Why *Riddle of Stars* was never tagged for an award, is a mystery, or a riddle. Her writing easily stacks up against J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Anne McCaffrey. She paints a believable world of depth, color and originality. *Riddle of Stars* is a delightful read.

Riddle of Stars is a complete trilogy consisting of *The Riddle-Master of Hed*, *Heir of Sea and Fire*, and *Harpist in the Wind*. Like Tolkien, McKillip wrings the reader's loyalties into shreds. By using a riddle as the vortex for this work, even descriptions become suspect. Is this part of the riddle, or not? McKillip teases the reader with inventions like the Great Shout, Pig Woman, and the High One's harpist, Deth. Her titles and names are subtle riddles, or are they? This will intrigue mystery lovers.

The main character is marked with stars on his face and discovers a harp was made for him with the same odd markings. Morgon is a farmer, though a Prince in fact, but not one accustomed to ruling. When he becomes the focus of the entire known world by solving the most famous riddle, wizards and kings take notice, and should—his success at solving the riddle of the stars on his face determines their destiny. Further, when his birth-betrothed, Raederle, joins his quest, both realize how perfectly matched they were, and the isolation of nobility becomes less foreboding. Raederle—even her name sounds like a riddle.

Riddle of Stars has magic, but this is comfortable and natural, rather than severe and potion-laden. A love-story enters in at many levels with family, responsibility for the land and her people, and the need to understand the riddle as a quest and whimsy of mischievous curiosity. It compels the reader to morn and stomp in frustration because it's hard to put down.

A simplified definition [of Science Fiction] would be that the author of a "straight" science fiction story proceeds from (or alleges to proceed from) known facts, developed in a credible way.

— Sam J. Lundwall

The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor

Universal Studios, 2008

Director Rob Cohen

Starring Brendan Fraser

Review by Rachel Olivier

Ever since *The Mummy* (1999), starring Brendan Fraser, came onto the scene it has had a following of fans who adored not only Fraser's Rick O'Connell, but also John Hannah's Jonathan and Rachel Weisz's Evelyn. It was not just the action and adventure of the story of a mummy come back to life that fans enjoyed, it was also the chemistry between the main characters, the repartee, quick wit, patter, banter, etc. They were even able to bring Oded Fehr (playing the earnest Ardeth Bay) into the fun. The writers may have provided the words, and the director may have told the actors what to do, but it was those particular actors who delivered those lines and gave the audiences that chemical mix of action, romance, and comedy that they loved. They loved it again in *The Mummy Returns* (2001).

With the third Mummy, *The Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*, however, the chemistry has been altered. The formula is the same. Wit, banter, sexy action and adventure, and some great additions (Jet Li is a fantastic villain and Michelle Yeoh a superb nemesis to him) brought the movie close to as good as the first two. But with Rachel Weisz missing from the cast, that unique chemistry changed. The writers did an excellent job of introducing Maria Bello as Evelyn O'Connell by hanging a clever lantern on the obvious difference in the beginning. In addition, Bello played her character very well; however, she played it differently. Weisz's Evelyn was beautiful, young, feisty, clumsy, curious and half the reason that the main characters would end up in trouble and have to get themselves out of it. Bello's Evelyn was beautiful, older, sophisticated, intelligent, but not the one to charge headlong into something and get everyone into trouble. That particular part of the equation was left up to Alex O'Connell (Luke Ford), Rick and Evelyn's son, now a college student talked into overseeing the "dig of a lifetime" by an old family friend.

Even the music and the titles of the movie were the quality expected of a Mummy movie. It had all the ingredients – monsters, exotic locale, action, comedic situations, romantic moments – but still fell short.

It is a good movie by itself if not compared to the other Mummy movies. When it comes out on DVD, I'll probably get a copy. I recommend seeing it if you don't have high expectations, or if you rent it. I do not think it is babysitter worthy (as in worth the cost of paying a babysitter, driving to the theater, paying for parking, and paying for the ticket and snacks).

Reviews

Midnight Never Come

Marie Brennan

Orbit, 2008, 390 pgs

ISBN: 978-0-7394-9692-3

Review by Danielle Parker

As a child who grew up on not only the Red, the Blue, and the Green Fairy Books, but, (if there had been one) the Fuchsia, I have always regretted that I lived in the New World. It might have been possible, standing on the green shores of Ireland or the boggy edge of some English moor, to glimpse fairies and boggarts and will o' the wisps just whisking out of sight. But what haunted the cold snowy valleys of the northern British Columbia I grew up in were not fae but wolves and grizzlies and coyotes laughing hungrily as they lured the family pet into the autumn night. If little folk had tried to haunt my woods, they would have surely been snacks for the red-of-tooth-and-claw.

Perhaps my woods were as magical in their own way, but its stories were never comfortable. I knew that over that hill was a bad-tempered, garbage-weaned grizzly, and that was *not* the same as meeting a leprechaun. No, the Little Folk never crossed the Atlantic. If I had doubted it, an English friend who has lived in the U. S. for a number of years assured me in all sincerity that she has never sensed the presence of the fairies *here*. I don't doubt she misses them.

Of course, I still retain a nostalgic love of fairy tales, particularly the ones that depict the fairies as alluringly dangerous. Just such a book is *Midnight Never Come*, and since it is set in Elizabethan England, one of the times I might have chosen if offered the chance to play tourist, I couldn't be happier. John Dee, the original (and there's nothing like the original) Queen E., and the famous spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham all make appearances. We're missing Christopher Marlowe, whom I really wanted to see, but at least he gets a mention. You can't have everything, I suppose.

And of course, there are those dangerous, alluring fae. Unbeknown to the clods of clay

tromping London's less-than-sanitary streets, there is a mirror court below. Queen Gloriana has a dark shadow, the fairy queen Invidiana. Walsingham, Elizabeth's spymaster, suspects such a hidden influence upon the affairs of his Queen. But no sooner is the suspicion voiced than the spymaster himself dies, and it's left to young Michael Deven, his loyal agent and newly raised Gentleman Pensioner of the Queen, to ferret out the truth of his master's death and unravel the mysterious ties between the two courts.

Of course it does not help Deven that his lady love, Anne Montrose, proves to be an agent of sorts herself, possibly for the dark fairy court. Soon, Deven has fallen afoul of the same forces that eliminated Walsingham. Will he free his Queen and find his own true love again? You'll have to read it to find out.

I can't resist finishing with a few other recommendations for readers looking for the darker side of the fairy legends. Arthur Machen's still-chilling classic, *The Great God Pan*, published in 1894, is a must-read. So, too, is Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, published in 1924. Both books are excellent. There's always Spenser's *Fairie Queen*, of course, but I confess to never managing to finish it. Robert Browning's wonderful *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* was more my style in fantastic verse (Stephen King must agree with me). Enjoy!

Hurricane Gustav Update

While not as destructive as Hurricane Katrina, T-Press (and me) were both impacted by Hurricane Gustav. Damage was superficial, but the prolonged power outage and subsequent cleanup, coupled with the exhaustion commonplace in the aftermath of an event like this, has once again taken a toll. As a result, all of T-Press' ongoing projects have been delayed and we are closing ourselves to new unsolicited submissions for the next few months. On a personal note, this hurricane hit just as I had managed to resume something approaching a regular writing schedule, and I have not yet readjusted. I will do my best to get *Forge of Faith* finished in a timely manner, but I offer no official timeline at this point.

— Bret Funk

Reviews

The Touch of Twilight: The Third Sign of the Zodiac **Vicki Pettersson**

EOS, HarperCollins Publishers, 2008

Mass Market, \$6.99

Review by Rachel Olivier

In Vicki Pettersson's third Sign of the Zodiac book, *The Touch of Twilight*, Joanna Archer still leads with her heart instead of her head. As smart as she is (and as much of a smart ass as she is), her emotions get the best of her, getting her more deeply involved in Supernatural Troop (both Shadow and Light) politics than she'd like. Though she tries to help and do the right thing, she ends up digging herself in deeper as only she, the Kairos, can.

A lot is going on in this story, almost too much at times. Joanna has made many mistakes in the past, and she has fixed a majority of them, or tried. The problems that are left, however, are not going away anytime soon, and some of those have just gotten worse. It gets painful to watch Joanna/Olivia making the wrong decisions repeatedly because her ego, guilt, fear, feelings, and desires all blind her to the choices she needs to make. Her conflicting feelings about Ben, Hunter, Warren, Chandra, and others make her more of a target than the weapon she is supposed to be. And even when she does see the truth, she refuses to acknowledge it. Remind you of anyone you know?

That's right. For a supernatural heroine, Joanna is awfully human, which is why *The Touch of Twilight* is a compelling read. The same can be said for both her allies and enemies, who betray their faulty humanness constantly in regards to what they want from Joanna. Some who have been allies in the past are not as trustworthy as they seem, having their own personal, emotional agendas. Others, who have been enemies, might in fact turn out to be better allies in the long run. Like watching a catastrophe, as much as you want to cover your eyes, you still want to see how it turns out. Does she make the right decisions in the end, or is it just going to get worse?

There are many revelations, not all of them good, many of them just a tease to help set up the next story in the series. Pettersson did a great job of writing a difficult and complex story, tying up many loose ends to the satisfaction of the reader, while leaving a few strays blowing out there for Joanna to pick up on next. It will be interesting to see what happens with Joanna the future.

Progress (con't)

ridgeline—there might as well be see-through skyscrapers atop. It mars the land.

I'm torn by the need to solve real problems and trying to hold on to nostalgia.

My generation has seen so much. The difference is that rate of progress for the Poverty Point Native Americans dwelling in the delta was miniscule in comparison to what I have seen in my lifetime. In my early life, Science Fiction was still a dream. Now, it is almost obtainable hard science—from Black/White TV and rabbit ears to computers I carry in my pocket, soon to be compressed further by nano-technology. If I squint, I imagine more discoveries in my lifetime, but can my brain wrap around the kaleidoscope and magnitude of much more? Did some delta dweller, sun-baked and lazing on the bayou bank hoping to catch dinner, wonder what would be the next advancement in his life? I'm sure he'd be amazed, and there might be a tinge of sadness because with progress, his landscape might not look the same. Consider: The frontier town of Adair is underwater.

I've heard my elders lament how change affected them. I'm starting to feel disenfranchised by the advance of technology and time, with costs that are as yet, hidden. Or buried.

Universe (con't)

Not everyone agrees. According to Stephen Hawkins, a black hole transports information to another universe. Another theory hypothesizes that there are many (perhaps an infinite number of) universes outside our own. In fact, one theory is that there is a larger universe of which our universe is only a part, like an atom of something much larger.

There is also the theory of parallel universes in which a new universe is created whenever two or more possible futures occur. That each possibility creates a new universe which is almost identical to the ones parallel to it except in one the change occurred one way, and in the other, it occurred the other way.

Of course, all this brings up the question of what is the universe composed. When we say that space is curved, what is this curved "space" composed of? Nothing? How can nothing be curved? It seems that there are more questions than answers. For more confusing answers and questions, go to any web site on modern cosmology.

Writer's Block (con't)

the rain to the upscale mansion where the guy is house sitting. They make sweet love, and then the man leaves to get "fresh basil and olive oil" so he can cook for her. A sensitive hunk is a good hunk, it would seem.

Meanwhile, Hubby has been following the two and seems to know everything. (Although later we find out that he has another reason for visiting Hunk.) Hubby gets out of his Toyota Camry with a golf club and thoughts of violence in his head. The Camry immediately struck an odd note with me, considering the man is apparently a well off investment fellow who can afford to live in New York City and play golf. But OK, I can handle this. A little harder to handle is a serious timing glitch when we read that the woman has been torturing herself for "weeks" with thoughts of her husband having an affair when for the reader it appears that only one full day has passed since her discovery. But, whatever.

As Hunk comes out of the house, Hubby moves to attack, but boy toy gets the jump and takes away the club. The scene shifts inside where the woman is at a window watching her Hubby and boyfriend start to fight. Hubby wins and throws big hunky guy into the back seat of his car, although the woman can hear the hunk groan (through a window from a long distance away) and knows he is alive.

Ok, now is where it gets really good, or bad, or ugly. Take your pick. The woman decides her Hubby has taken Hunk to a hospital (yeah that sounds about right), and she drives to the nearest one. For the first time, and this is page 45, we see that the woman has a gun in her purse. (Say what?)

But at the hospital the woman finds no Hubby or Hunk. She wonders where Hubby can have gone, and heads to another hospital where she bursts into a room holding a crime suspect and a uniformed officer. When the officer looks at her suspiciously, she nearly panics and makes up some lame lie about dropping off her urine sample before bolting. She is, however, there just long enough to overhear the policeman's radio

Writer's Block (con't)

crackle something about a white male victim and an address.

So, she goes to this address, and sees numerous NYPD police cars. She thinks to herself that she needs to just keep going or she'll get in big trouble. But instead, she pulls up to the cop directing traffic and suddenly stops and gets out of the car. The cop reaches for his "Glock" and we read: "But then I took it out. *Took out my badge.*"

Yes, you heard right. On page 51 we find out that the woman is a cop, and on page 52 we read that she's been a NYC police officer for seven years, the last year and a half as a detective in homicide. We also learn that the trip she blew off to meet hunk boy was to Quantico for a seminar with the FBI. A few pages later we learn that she is also a lawyer as well as a cop. (Rightttt.)

Our intrepid (insipid) heroine goes over to where a tarp is covering a body, looks under, and sees one dead hunk, although she doesn't notice he's been shot until another officer (her partner) points it out. We also find out here that boyfriend is a cop too, a narcotics detective.

After this, the woman cries hysterically, despite the fact that on the next page we learn she is considered by her chief to be one of his top detectives. And even though she has blown off a trip to FBI headquarters without permission or explanation, the chief immediately assigns her to the case of the murdered hunk.

I could go on, but you probably wouldn't believe the rest. I can't even describe all the things wrong with this story. I don't have space on my hard drive. But how could we go fifty pages into a book following a flustered, silly, hysterical housewife and suddenly find out she's a cop? A homicide detective no less?

We are *also* expected to believe that an investment banker Hubby could beat a younger, bigger, stronger man who is a police officer and armed with a golf club in hand to hand combat. (Although I was quite sure that in this lamely plotted piece of crap we'd find that Hubby was really a spy or assassin or some equally ridiculous thing. *By the way, we do.*)

Writer's Block (con't)

And the possibility of believing that this woman is a homicide detective is less than believing that the pyramids were erected by penis-headed creatures from Tau Ceti, or that my Taleran trilogy will outsell Dean Koontz's entire backlist next year. We know she can't tail a suspect worth a damn. She follows them like she's attached to their bumper. But! Hubby can tail her without her having a clue.

She also can't recognize a bullet wound until it's pointed out to her. She works in homicide but her first, second, and third thoughts are that Hubby is taking beaten up hunk to a hospital. And she's crying hysterically at a murder scene with her partner and boss looking on.

Worst of all, because it's nothing less than fraud, we are deliberately misled repeatedly by the author(s). The woman's reaction to uniformed police officers is designed by the writer to make us think that she's simply a housewife, when in reality all she ever had to do from the start is show her badge. The author played false with the reader. The story is told primarily in first person and we're inside the woman's head for page after page, which means that because of the novel's poor design the author has to lie to the reader about the woman's genuine thoughts.

The worst sin in writing is to show a lack of respect for the reader. This book is a perfect example. Tricking the reader in such an underhanded way, showing the reader the thoughts, but not the *true* thoughts, of a character, is a cheat. I'll not be reading another one from either of these authors. Most importantly, though, I'll never allow myself as a writer to disrespect my readers this badly. They deserve better. You deserve better.

Don't think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It's self-conscious and anything self-conscious is lousy. You cannot try to do things. You simply must do things.

— Ray Bradbury

SF Unleashed (con't)

glaring exceptions to this (ahem... *Firefly*), but in general, as the quality of the works has increased, so has the interest in those works. One can only hope the trend continues.

The flip side of the coin depends completely on the viewers and not a bit on the producers. The desire to escape the real world, for even a little while, is strong in most people, especially when gas prices are skyrocketing, the economy is crumbling, the globe is warming, and children in Africa are still starving despite decades of hard work and the tireless efforts of Sally Struthers. In general, most television and movies serve this purpose, but watching hours of *CSI*, *Law and Order*, and other dramas tends to be more depressing than cathartic, since these shows deal with subject matters that highlight the ills of our world rather than overcome the ills of another. And one can only garner so much joy from watching celebrities debase themselves for money or thrill at the prospect of a man and a woman finding true love that may, just may, last longer than the first run of the show they found it on.

The escapism of SF goes beyond that. Whether one's taste gravitates toward space or fairy-land, whether one seeks out rousing tales of righteous heroism or dark dystopias on the verge of internal collapse, the problems of those worlds (even when set on Earth or exaggerating our problems) are not the our problems. Once immersed in the story, the imagination takes over, leading viewers away from their own worries. Whenever that happens, even if it only happens occasionally, or for a few minutes, it gives the mind a chance to reboot, to refocus. Maybe the brilliant futures portrayed inspire us; maybe the horrors of the What-May-Be spur us to redouble our efforts, lest we, with today's trivial problems, spiral into the abyss of tomorrow.

For me, virtually all SF fires my imagination, prodding me along with my own efforts, and (I hope) inspiring some of my own innovative and someday-well-received works. And quality SF... It leaves me excited and jealous. Hungry for more, but frustrated I didn't think of it first.