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Setting: The Character Without A Face by Bret Funk

One aspect of writing often overlooked by newcomers (and sometimes by old hats) is setting and its importance to the overall dimensionality of a work. Setting is more than just the place where the story happens; it is a force able to infuse a tale with believability or imbue a work with that little something extra, that little bit of magic, transforming it from average to spectacular. Proper choice of setting (and a little effort to develop it) helps a work come alive in the minds of readers, and the more immersed readers become in a story, the more likely they'll be to seek out more works from the same author. And while setting may stand behind other elements (like characters and plot) in terms of importance, without a convergence of all aspects of writing, a work will likely be confined to the annals of mediocrity.

Properly utilized, setting augments characters. With a few simple lines of poignant description, setting can highlight the internal conflicts of the characters, or stand in stark and ironic contrast to their turmoil. The places where the story takes place, or where characters come from, or where they are going, give insights not only into their past but also into their motivations. When readers discover that an ambitious and cut-throat thief grew up in the most dangerous slum in the land, they take away a different impression than when they learn he is the privileged son of a wealthy landowner, committing murder and mayhem just because he is untouchable by the law. Similarly, a prophet who, following his revelations from God, seeks the solitude of a monastery is a vastly different character than one who hastens off to the gilded halls of the Mother Church to cast out the heretics or work his way to the top of the hierarchy. Such insights into a character's motivations can be made with simple yet effective use of setting, sparing readers from endless exposition and internal monologues, and allowing them to draw their own conclusions about characters.

Setting can be used on a grander scale as well, offering subtle insights into the work's world and cultures. The description of a town might tell readers how religious, or warlike, or naïve the villagers are, or it might symbolize something more grandiose within the overall work. The description of the castle that will serve as the main setting for a chapter—is it crumbling or solid? Stark or filled with treasure? Airy or gloomy?—offers hints into the state of affairs around the castle as well, but by using setting and description instead of infodump, an author lets readers reach their own determinations, drawing them more fully into the world.

Of course, that does not mean that settings must be cliché. Mysteries need not take place on a dark and stormy night. Villains need not live in an unassailable castle protected by dragons and ogres. And while it might make more sense for a Treant to live in a forest, a setting outside the woodlands might make for a far more provocative tale, making readers wonder why this particular character opted to reside in a desert rather than among his brethren.

In many of the better works, setting becomes a character in its own right. The deserts of *Dune*, and the secret of the spice, held as much mystery to me as any character in that book. Hogwarts School of Wizardry is almost alive, and I personally believe that without the benefits added by the setting, the Harry Potter books would not have been quite so popular. The cramped quarters on *Firefly* helped set the tone on that series, while the living breathing spaceship *Moya* on *Farscape* was a character in her own right as well as the primary setting, and both shows owe a portion of their popularity to the power of their settings.

In the end, setting is not enough to make a story great. It is, however, an extremely useful tool. When utilized properly, setting can help make a story stand out among the crowd. When setting is ignored, a story will seem flat at best, discordant at worst. And when treated as if it is a character, a living breathing extension of the author's will, the outward expression not of any particular character, but of the entire city, nation, or world, then setting will drive readers firmly into the writer's vision, investing them not just in the story, but in the story's universe.

A Few Words of Caution about Online Writing Forums by Doug >!< Roper

A few months ago I was lured to an online writing forum, in the hopes that surrounding myself with some fellow amateur wordsmiths would compel me to produce a bit more short fiction, mainly as a way to keep myself sharp, but also to nurse along some ideas that I'd been doggedly ignoring. I settled into the small but active community and started learning the particular ropes of the forums, who the heavies in the forum were, and reading some of the stories and their associated critiques. The alarm bells hadn't started ringing yet, (or maybe they had and I just downplayed them as nervousness) and it all seemed straightforward enough until the administrators held a competition for a chance to win a spot in a small anthology sponsored by the website. This contest opened my eyes to the disturbing fact that what I thought was a writing forum was in actuality a cult.

Maybe cult is too strong a word (I don't think so, but you might). After seeing the range of entries, and admitting to myself that the resident studs who patrol the forum are revered with a passion normally reserved for reality TV stars and chocolate, I saw a disturbing pattern. When the winners of the contest were announced, the pattern rose from my monitor like a rabid vulture and threatened to devour me. (As an aside, you might be assuming that I entered and was rejected, but I assure you I had not entered the contest.) I quickly asked that my account on the forum be deleted, and I haven't gone back since. The winning entries were in many cases not really stories at all (as they lacked any real conflict or plot to speak of), and only seemed to be selected because they most closely resembled the writing that the contributors most liked to read. The strongest writing in the contest was not recognized.

What I saw at that forum, and what I've since learned is fairly commonplace out there on the web (and what horrified me and worried me so) is that these tiny writing forums and support groups are doing nothing to raise the quality of the writing of its members. In fact, I think they are severely degrading the writing. These places trap new writers with a sticky sweet kind of support and blanket encouragement, then slowly and insidiously mold the writer to fit the forum.

Everyone who writes fiction these days understands that online publishing is a good way to drum up interest in your work and possibly even a little fame, which would hopefully carry over to the paper publishing world and help secure a material publishing credit or contract. These small forums and writing groups seem at first a great place to put your stuff for critique and support as you hone your skill and polish your writing, but the writer must be ever so careful when choosing a site to join. As I saw with the forum I wandered into, each of these little sites on the web tend to support a particular kind of writing, either genre, romance, historical...whatever, and once you are on the forum, I think there is a strong undercurrent in the encouragement and critiquing to push or pull the writer into writing just like the more accomplished authors on the site, or the agreed upon professional author geniuses. After witnessing a single competition, viewing the entries and reading the opinions of the judging panel (comprised entirely of the contest's contributing authors), I saw a directly focused and myopic outlook on what was best in the writing that totally ignored the basic mechanics and structures of writing in favor of brightly colored fluff.

Granted, this type of selective acceptance happens in any publishing house in the world, and my caution is not to avoid these sites and forums, because a lot of them do have some good information and some patrons are sharp editors. Instead it is to enter with your wits about you. If a writing forum is devoted to horror, or to high fantasy, keep in mind the borderline stories which only flirt with those genre motifs may not be popular on those forums simply because they do not embrace the subject matter strongly enough, regardless of the skill of the writing or construction of a good story. Be aware of your audience when you enter these places and you stand to take a great deal more from them in the long run.

There is a frightful amount of ego stroking on these places as well. There were several threads on the forum I read through that were filled with the nursing of hurt feelings, and in some cases the retracting of valid criticisms to make the sniffles stop. No author who cares about what he's doing is going to feel great knowing that something he or she wrote just isn't readable, but it happens. If you are serious about writing, you must willfully allow others to tear it apart to fix what's broken and polish what's right.

Many people on these types of forums are purely amateur and only seeking the approval of like minded individuals, and there are countless mother hens who will gush praise like busted oil pipes (oohhh...topical!), but offer little in the way of constructive comments. The trap here is that, people like praise and even without realizing it, they may begin to write in a style to get that praise. If back-patting comes easier on a certain internet forum when you write about angst-riddled teenage vampires, and if the praise is loud enough and you are desperate enough for it, soon all you would be writing about are emo blood drinking cadavers. Sure people like to feel good about themselves and what they do, but meaningless platitudes don't do anything to hone the writing...they just make you feel better. It's like chugging a delicious sugary soda when you need to slam a glass of V8. The soda tastes better and makes you feel good for a while, but it isn't really helping you.

There are ways to navigate these places if you decide to be more public with your works in progress and commit them to one of the numberless writing forums for workshopping. My first bit of advice is to look for sites that are not concerned with a particular genre. If the forum is concerned with fundamental writing components, character, plot, description, grammar and such, chances are you will find better information and better responses from those who frequent the forum. Likely these places will have sub-forums devoted to genre fiction where you can get more specialized assistance anyway.

Secondly, if you must enter into a genre forum, don't stop at one. Get onto as many boards as you can reasonable manage, and put your story under as many eyes as will give it a fair shake. The danger of getting pulled into a cycle of producing work for praise will be greatly reduced if you are taking in a wider array of opinions on your writing, and try to keep a list of what forum contributors are offering good criticisms of your work, and which ones are blowing smoke up your rear end. Keep in contact with the former, and don't waste too much time on the opinions of the latter. The last and probably best piece of advice I can give to you is write, a lot, and divorce yourself somewhat from the writing. You have to be prepared mentally to undergo the process of improving your writing. It will take time, and as long as you keep your head wrapped around the reason for being on these writing forums they can be a good place to work on your craft.

Just don't get sucked in.

Changing Roles of Television's Women In Space: Part 2 by Terry Crotinger/montanasing

The television show, *Battlestar Galactica*, like the other shows mentioned in our last issue of *Illuminata* (*Flash Gordon*, *Star Trek*, *Buck Rogers of the 25th Century*) was not a one-time phenomena. It too was made and re-made on the small (and large) screen, accompanied by the now expected line of toys, comics, books, games (rpg and computer), and a miniseries. The original series (1978) had an ensemble cast with mainly males in action roles. A few lieutenants (Lt. Sheba, Lt. Athena) and a young, non-descript flight commander comprised the main female characters. One exception was Serina (Jane Seymour), Apollo's love-interest who was killed off at the beginning of the series. Her death was valiant, and set the stage for Apollo to grieve throughout the series. These women had little authority, though were recognized as part of the fleet's military service. In the 2003 television series, the survivor fleet abounds with women in authority: President Laura Roslin (played by Mary McDonnell), Admiral Helena Cain (Michelle Forbes), Anastasia Dualla (Kandyse McClure)--a woman of color, and very white and blonde, reckless Lt. Kara Thrace (Katie Sackhoff) as "Starbuck". A female Starbuck shocked viewers but was refreshing once evident it wasn't a cupcake role. She wasn't a towering Amazon like "Xena"; she more resembled a seasoned GI Jane with an agenda.

Having seen both the original and the new series, some things I've learned about women in space:

Dress: Both series' costumes seemed logical for the time it aired. Only a few questionable choices (like Cassiopeia's fashion-that-wasn't yet got our attention attire) were seen, but thankfully, those were rare. Women needed to be fit and trim (like *Flash Gordon's*, Dale) but didn't need to look ultra-femme to be functional. In fact, being grungy (*BG '03*) was suddenly acceptable, as long as whatever made the grungy look was heroic.

Function: As times changed, so did women's roles. *Star Trek* already broke ground in how service women behaved. *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) pushed it with a female Starbuck. By the turn of the century, it seemed we'd eased into women in authority gracefully--until Starbuck smacked viewers out of complacency.

Respect: Finally, by *BG '03*, earned respect ordered space service. Viewers saw females behave like men--with estrogen. And perhaps, that's not a good thing.

Factors that influenced the writers of each show depended on the cultural norms of the time, political and world events, economy and spiritual beliefs. Changes in these four areas of television produced women's roles from companion to cohort in real life. Here's how:

Cultural Influences: The role of women in medicine, science and in space expanded as the information age did, specifically for white or fair skinned women. A man or woman of color was chosen rarely in these fields and sadly, reflected in television writing/roles of the era. Few women, much less African American, Asian or Hispanic people were given acting roles. Of note were Nichelle Nichols (Lt. Uhura, *Star Trek*) and Terry Carter (Col. Tigh, *BG 1978*) in the original series and a host of other roles in 2003, notable among them was Edward James Olmos--Adama (*BG '03*).

Women and women of color are featured in several television offerings this season (and last). From reality shows to "COPS", female roles in the industry expanded. Notable about this trend is the "reality show" format allowing women to be caught (supposedly) script-less. Would anyone watch (or buy advertising time) the heroic women in America's space program just hang out with the boys on the Shuttle? How close to voyeurism can you get without stalking? (Ironically, the 90's saw many women of color in space doing everything from space walks, retrievals and living on the space station to piloting!)

Political/World events: Emerging to the fore-front in our current elections are women business owners and CEOs. In industry, is the "glass ceiling" shattered? Will our next President be a woman? In later *Star Trek* (Next Generation) episodes and movies, women were elevated in rank to Starship Captain and Admiral. But these parts were short and one-liners. In the late 80's and 90's, Counselor Troi (Marina Sirtis) in a command role was still written as a gaining-confidence shadow instead of a knowledgeable and skilled Star Fleet Officer, mirroring real life desires of women, who were given bit parts and silent walk-ons in management and industry decisions.

In the last decade, world events shaped television and women's roles in society in a severe way. 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina caused a response scramble requiring trained individuals to check their schedules to see if they could deploy and provide clean-up or relief. In television, and specifically science fiction and military shows, the sets, costume and action reflect the gritty reality of those events. Pulp-fiction-like, the tone and look of series/shows became dark, depressing and fearful. This is well represented by the *Battlestar Galactica's* (2003) set and writing, including women's roles where they lost limb and life performing their duty.

Economics: What all four series had in common were strong actresses struggling to please the audience of their day while satisfying what their director, polls/feedback and industry watchdogs deemed acceptable and would sell advertising to pay the bills and make a profit. Women gained more function over the years, but less respect as competent officers with limited authority to command. Why? The writers were bound by an increasing demand to either keep female characters in traditional roles (conform) or expand the function, but only so much as the males who controlled the purse strings for that project could tolerate. Who shaped women's role in space? Advertisers. Powerful corporations who in television's infancy, kept the lights on by hawking their soap and wares in commercials.

Isn't it about telling the story? Time to pop that pretty, fluffy idea. Corporations often align with political candidates or issues because it makes money or will influence a decision (or candidate). *It can't be all about the money! Are these advertisers our true masters?*

Almost. As science fiction enthusiasts, our opinions matter. But only in volume. If few of us speak plainly about what we want on television or what we will buy in the market (as opposed to not buying or boycott), corporations ignore us. Numbers are recognized as legitimate; only the masses will be heard.

Since we don't all have Neilson Ratings boxes in our homes, our voice must be in print and pocketbook. Reality Check: only money has a loud enough voice.

Spiritual Influence: The phrase, "Oh, my God", turned from a reverent response in the 60's to slang by the 90's. Reverence for life ebbed slowly over the years on television and in real events. Abortion was seldom mentioned in any early television, but surprisingly, elder-cide (euthanasia) was a common theme in other science fiction genre in general (*Soilant Green*). These four series had only fleeting mention about this, and thankfully, real life has been very quiet in this arena. Mourning a fallen officer or friend was given at least a cursory moment. *Star Trek* (Original Series) had occasional assemblies in a chapel-like area. A church/chapel or spiritual reference was almost non-existent in subsequent years on these other science fiction sets. A few television series in the last 40+ years have written in more spiritual exploration (*Babylon 5*, specifically) in their shows, giving them a rich multi-cultural/dimensional look.

In conclusion, the gradual evolution of women's space/science fiction television roles paralleled real-life roles of women. Or did real-life influence the writers? Not only would television remind us to buy soap or that by using a certain product, we'd be better women and homemakers, it shaped America's perception of advancement and competency in a man's job market. And in space. Women seek employment in science, medicine and other more male-traditioned employment, unwilling to allow their gender to be factors for exercising their talents and abilities. Few are discouraged from trying or patronized as in decades before. When television writers create well-rounded roles for actresses, and directors allow the process to continue, real-life experience should mirror this advancement. Science fiction fandom speaking out can accelerate this. Can it be too soon?

Armageddon in Science Fiction

by Joe Vadalma

One of the most reoccurring themes in science fiction is the end of the world, or at least the end of civilization. It is not surprising since there are many ways that this could actually come about. Also, prophets have been predicting catastrophic disasters from the time men learned to speak to each other. Two popular ones lately are global warming and an asteroid strike. So we have a choice of drowning when the ice caps melt or being smashed to atoms by a big rock.

For a while, when a few people caught bird flu in Asia, pandemics were all the rage. In the latter half of the twentieth century, everyone was betting on an all-out atomic war, but that fizzled when the cold war ended. Recently, I read article about a scientist who said we could all die from a burst of gamma ray radiation from a nearby supernova explosion. As the clock struck midnight ushering in the year 2000, all the computers were supposed go mad because they only had the last two digits of the year and could not distinguish between the twentieth and twenty-first century (which to some people did not start until 2001 anyway.)

Anyway, science fiction authors love to write about Armageddon of one sort or other. Here are some of my personal favorites. There are two by John Brunner. The first is *Stand on Zanzibar* where civilization is brought to an end because of overpopulation. Overpopulation as threat seems to be no longer in vogue. I guess because there are so many ways of dealing with overpopulation. For example, nuke the excess or give everybody a gun and give them leave to hunt and kill everybody they hate.

The second book by Brunner is *The Sheep Look Up* which is about pollution. We are pretty certain that is the most likely end that we face.

There are many atomic war novels. These were especially popular during the cold war years. The funniest was the movie *Doctor Strangelove*, where a deranged general starts world war three because of his erectile dysfunction. I also like the novel *On the Beach* by Nevil Schute, which was also made into a good movie. In this novel, the last people on earth after an atomic war are living in Australia waiting to die from the radioactivity produced by all those hydrogen bombs going off. Probably my all time favorite about a post apocalyptic world is *Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter Miller where a monk finds an artifact from our time after civilization has gone back to the dark ages after an all-out atomic war.

One of the more interesting ways that the human race comes to an end is a little known book called *The Black Corridor* by Michael Moorcock. In this short novel, bigotry runs wild so that everyone kills everyone else that is different from himself or herself. It's a real chiller. I got goose bumps reading it.

Invasions by aliens is another possibility that could end the human race. My favorite is *Footfall* by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, where the invaders look like elephants.

An old movie that's fun is *When Worlds Collide* where a group of scientists and a chosen few race to build a spaceship to escape from a collision between earth and another planet. The one thing I never quite understood was where the planet they were headed for was located

I liked the TV miniseries *The Stand* by Stephen King as the survivors of a pandemic meet up at the cabin of an old woman and go to Las Vegas to fight the devil.

Of course there are many more great science fiction novels and stories about the Apocalypse, but those were some of my personal favorites, because they each have a slightly odd slant to the end of the world.

I have written one novel about Armageddon myself. It is called *Morgaine and Armageddon* and has a lot of stuff in it based loosely on The Book of Revelations of the Christian Bible. If you are interested, you can find more information about it on my web site, [The Fantastic World of Papa Joe](#).

Fictional Footnotes

by A.M. Rose

Referencing fictional texts in speculative fiction goes as far back as Lovecraft and his *Necronomicon*, but while Lovecraft's allusions to infernal tomes remained rooted in his text, contemporary styles eschew this standard rule should narrative voice demand. Recent works of fantasy, such as Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, leave the seamless narrative behind and make prodigious use of paratext common to academic writing: the footnote.

Footnotes aren't part of a story. They're numbered points and asides listed at the bottom of a page corresponding with demarcated segments of the proper work. They provide additional context and history which typically have no bearing on the story. Reading fiction with footnotes, depending on their use, is a little like watching a movie with the director's commentary track on. So, why use footnotes if their information is irrelevant to the plot?

Speculative fiction is only as strong as its world-building. A world has history and culture, details an author needs to write their short story or novel well. For every vignette ending up on the page, are hundreds of other stories concealed in its set pieces and side characters. Readers don't know these stories, but their existence creates depth. Footnotes let the author reveal the extensive history imagined before the story took place. Some see this as a world-building crutch, but without a solid world in place, a story would ring hollow no matter the amount of paratext.

In tandem with world-building is suspension of disbelief. A reader must believe the world they're reading about could exist or they won't care what becomes of it or the characters it contains. Footnotes bolster suspension of disbelief through academic authority. They signal to the reader the work is something researched, scholarly, intelligent. This academic tone coupled with an appropriate narrative voice, such as the detail oriented Oscar Wao or the implied magical scholar narrator in *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, make a powerful author tool. Absent suitable voice, footnotes are ineffective; useless information better left off the page.

Solid world construction and suitable voice are pre-requisites for using footnotes effectively in speculative fiction and even used well, they aren't for everyone. Rules for a sound story condemn disrupting narrative flow and diluting intimacy, and footnotes do just that, but a savvy author can bend a rule or two as long as the effect remains faithful to the form.

A.M. Rose is a newbie writer blogging at amrose25.blogspot.com. She recently made her first sale to *Bards & Sages Quarterly*.

Childhood: The Gateway Drug to the Fantastic by Rachel Olivier

When I was in high school and college Nancy Reagan had just begun her “Just Say No” to drugs campaign and much was made of “gateway drugs” such as marijuana or gateway alcohol, like beer. Girls were warned about gateway behavior down “that” road – the road to slut-hood, shame and who knows what else.

I remember that also around this time a friend of mine was persuaded by me and a few other friends to read the Tolkien trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*. Those of us who had read it had also cut our speculative teeth on series such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis and books like *The Sword of Shannara* by Terry Brooks. We didn’t know anyone who had read those books who didn’t like them. And we didn’t want to know people who had read them and didn’t like them.

It was a huge shock, then, when that friend showed up one day to say he’d read the trilogy finally and would never read it or anything like it ever again. Why? Because it was too good. Too tempting for him to read the books, get involved in the world and not want to do anything else or read anything else. I didn’t see anything wrong with that, but apparently, for him, it was a “gateway drug”.

That was a long time ago and I hadn’t thought about that incident again until recently. I’ve been watching movies like “UP” (2009) and “The Fantastic Mr. Fox” (2009) and rewatching movies such as “Something Wicked This Way Comes” (1983) and “Flash Gordon” (1980). While two are animated films and two are live action, they are all similar in that they are basically movies for “kids” that adults enjoy as well. In fact, much of the subject matter is very adult, despite the fact that kids are the target audience.

In “UP”, for example, a young boy grows up, falls in love, gets married and then watches his wife grow old, fade and die. And that’s just the first 15 minutes of the movie. “The Fantastic Mr. Fox” is basically about a con artist with big dreams trying to make a life for his family. “Something Wicked This Way Comes” deals with a handful of temptations that adults have a difficult time with and two boys are expected to resist. “Flash Gordon” is basic Good versus Evil, with a football player leading the Good Guys, but it also explores some adult themes (torture and sex being but two).

In many ways these stories are not much different from straightforward “children’s” stories such as *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Graham or any other fairy tale or myth or legend shared with children when they are young. They use an imagined world with imagined characters to explore themes such as Good versus Evil, resisting temptation, fighting for what you believe in, love, loyalty and friendship. These are stories children read or have read to them. Somewhere along the line, many children abandon the fairy tales for “real” stories that take place in contemporary society.

For many of us, however, one of those many fairy tales or “children’s” books like *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll or *Robin Hood* by Howard Pyle, or even *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* by J.K. Rowling became our “gateway drug” to the world of the fantastic and more than possible. Because we fell in love with these stories, we learned we could joyously suspend our disbelief for other stories about exploring outer space or traveling to the center of the earth or being able to change into an animal.

We love the fantastic. In the parlance of current 21st century speak (leaving Nancy Reagan far behind) it is our “drug of choice”. Some of us are lucky enough to be born into families where many members are also lovers of the fantastic. Some have to seek out others who love it as much as we do. I still end up defending science fiction and fantasy to my mom and dad who think of vampires, werewolves and zombies as “weird” – and I’m 46 years old.

I guess what I’m saying is that if you’re part of this speculative fiction “fad” that “all the kids are raving about” (psst – remind your friends and family that it’s not a fad and not going away any time soon), you aren’t alone. You’re part of a group of people who enjoy your imagination and enjoy the endorphins that wake up when you explore planets and realities outside of your own. Be proud. Hold your head up, look people in the eye and say: Hello. My name is Rachel and I love science fiction and fantasy.

To A Writer by Charles Gramlich

A few days ago, someone of my acquaintance sent me an email asking how they could get started in writing. They wanted the basics, the first few steps they needed to take. Here's a somewhat expanded version of my response, with a few details changed to protect the person's identity (like using the plural "they" instead of he or she).

* * *

The first thing a writer does is write, and it's very easy to start. All you need is some paper, and a pen or pencil. I use a computer word processor myself, but that isn't necessary.

What *is* necessary is that you start out writing about something that engages your emotions. You write about the things that make you angry, or afraid, or happy. You write about loves won and lost. You write out memories that you have; you write about experiences you really, really *want* to have. You write something that *you'd* be interested in reading. And if what you write seems ugly to you, so be it. You still don't give up. If it's on the page, it can be fixed. If it's not on the page then nothing can be done.

The second thing a writer does is read. Writers read not only in the genre they want to work in, but in all kinds of genres. Fiction, nonfiction, poetry. They all feed the writer's head. Besides, if you don't like to read, why on earth would you want to write? That's like saying you want to be a master chef but you don't really care for food.

The third thing a writer does is treat writing with the respect it deserves. That means actively working toward improving your skills. Reading books on writing, grammar, and punctuation--such as William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*, Bill Bryson's *Dictionary of Troublesome Words*, or Karen Gordon's *The Well-Tempered Sentence*--is one example of treating the field with respect. Using a dictionary to make sure you get the nuances of words just right is another. Becoming your own harshest critic is yet another. The writer is quality control for him or herself. You are Inspector Number One for your own work.

Know that writing is a lonely business but you don't always have to go it alone. Others are taking the same solitary path as you are. Or they want to but haven't yet gotten up the courage. Joining a writing group is one way to fight the isolation that writers sometimes feel.

In cities and large towns, writing groups often form around bookstores, libraries, and colleges. They are often advertised with flyers at those locations, or in local coffee houses, or sometimes in local magazines. In a small town you might need to start your own group. You can put up flyers at the library, or advertise in the local paper. Believe me, if *you're* interested in writing, others around you are too.

There are also many, many writing groups online, for just about any kind of writing you might want to do. I've been a member of both online and in-person groups, and I've gotten a lot out of them--feedback on my writing, emotional support, and even publication opportunities.

There's nothing magical about the act of writing. It's really just a natural extension of the thinking and imagining we all do every day. It shouldn't be a scary process, although it often is for people. It certainly can be frustrating, but it can also be immensely rewarding, especially on an emotional level. Writing is the closest a human being can come to the kind of sheer creation that is normally ascribed to gods. And it's a helluva lot of fun.

Two Worlds of Poul Anderson

Poul Anderson

ISBN: 1-55742-693-7

66 pages, \$2.99 (chapbook)

Wildside Press: World Science Fiction Classics, 2010

Review by Rachel V. Olivier

This recently released chapbook has two novellas/novelettes, "Industrial Revolution", which appeared originally in 1963 in *Analog* and "Duel on Syrtis", which appeared in *Planet Stories* in 1951. If you know of anyone who you think might enjoy being introduced to stories from the Golden Age of Science Fiction, and specifically Poul Anderson, then these two tales would be a good start.

"Industrial Revolution" takes place sometime in the far future – near enough in the future that the world as we know it now is still mostly familiar, but far enough that colonies are being built on asteroids by adventurers and explorers willing to risk everything to make a go of it out in space.

I enjoyed this tale because it's an old school space story, but I did get lost in a few places. I'm not sure it was Poul Anderson's editing or an editor's choice, but there were parts where it felt like a chunk of the story was missing. I realized later, there was supposed to be a jump in the story. Where normally there would be an extra space or chapter mark, it was all together. So it went from Mike Blades and Jimmy Chung speaking with a character over the intercom to suddenly having that character in the same room with them and a reference to a plan that seems out of nowhere. If there had been the extra space there, I would have realized some action had happened behind the scenes and wouldn't have been torn out of the story to try to back track and reread the section a few times trying to figure out what was going on. Again, I think this was an editing problem, not necessarily a writing problem. But, there were other areas where I got lost as well, but it's clever and mostly, I enjoyed it. Though, I have to say, I thought the protagonist, Mike Blades, chose the wrong wife, but that's my opinion. And would make it another story altogether.

"Duel on Syrtis" is a Martian tale of the old school as well, back in the days when we assumed that there might be life and beings on Mars, Venus, Mercury, and maybe even Pluto. This story is along the same lines as *The Most Dangerous Game* or something Ernest Hemingway or Herman Melville would write about a hunter's search for the most challenging game to hunt. But the game ends up being more deadly than the hunter.

Though this was the earlier tale, I enjoyed it much more. It's also a tad shorter, but I can safely say I was never torn out of the story like I was with "Industrial Revolution". I followed it all the way through to the conclusion, and even then wanted there to be more to the story. I wanted to know more about the Martian culture Anderson had created, the symbiotic relationship between the planet and the beings (and why it worked with some of the animal life but not with the others). In short, I liked this world. And, personally, I'd recommend reading this story first, even though it comes second in the chapbook.

Despite some of the setbacks, however, this chapbook is a deal at \$2.99 and a great intro to the writing of Poul Anderson.

Chasm City
Alastair Reynolds
Ace, 2003, 694 pages
ISBN: 0-441-01064-4
Review by Danielle Parker

Alastair Reynolds writes *big* books. Big in size: Chasm City is nearly 700 pages in the paperback mass market edition, and stuffed with enough detail on its future setting to fill a travel brochure. Big in scope: good and evil, vast reaches of time and space, men and mutant pig-men and aliens from the void. *Chasm City* is like a bowl of wildly overflowing yeast. Even the author can't punch it down to an entirely manageable shape.

We start out with two interleaving story lines. One seems to concern Tanner Mirabel, a mercenary soldier in the hire of an arms smuggler and warlord named Cahuella. He's out for revenge on an aristocrat named Reivich, who, in revenge for Cahuella killing *his* family, caused the death of Cahuella's wife, for whom Tanner had an unrequited passion. Soprano fans yawn in *deja vu* here, but hey, however far in the future we go, there's apparently still thuggery going on somewhere.

Of course, Tanner's whole planet, Sky's Edge, is in the grip of an incestuous civil war started before its flotilla of long-sleep colonists and multi-generational crew even arrived from Earth. Hence Cahuella's booming arms trade and zest for fueling the flames.

In the process of chasing Reivich, who's fled off-world, Tanner appears to be infected by a mysterious virus spread by a cult religious group. The group worships (although they also killed) the colony ship's captain (and instigator of the unending civil war), Sky Haussmann.

Tanner, caught in an accident that lands him, fifteen years of long-sleep later, in Chasm City, begins to have disturbing hallucinations of Sky's life, from childhood on up.

But the virus-inspired visions don't follow the sanitized mythos. Sky seems to be a bad man, who did some *really* bad things, including torture, murder, and good old scheming for the top job.

Only, why do hallucinations of a man who lived centuries before start to seem to Tanner like... memory? And why does Tanner sometimes remember from the perspective of Cahuella, the arms dealer and big (really big) snake game hunter, rather than just his own viewpoint?

The book's a shell game of personality switches. Tanner may not be the person he thinks he is. He thinks he's a good man, but he might not be. He thinks his boss Cahuella is a bad man, but he might not be. Reivich, the man he so ardently and vengefully pursues, might be a bad man... or he might not be.

Not many authors have the guts to write such an ambitious story. Reynolds kept me pinned to the next page to the end.

Though I'll admit, that ending left me distinctly uneasy. Yes, there were a few logic inconsistencies; not a surprise in this huge a book. But that wasn't the cause of my unease.

This story deals with good and evil: specifically, whether the multiple personalities in this epic are good or evil men. My uneasiness was due to the fact the main character ends up thinking he *is* a good man.

I was afraid maybe the *author* thought he was, too. But when you're left wondering what the man behind the curtain really thinks, at least he stayed off the stage, as an author should.

For the main character in this story *was* a monster.

How banal evil always is, in the final weighing: less grand schemes and lofty ambition than *I want his job* or *I want his money* or *I want his woman*. Torture, not the glittering pinnacle of evil, but revenge for childish traumas.

But then, even Lucifer's fall was banal. The Prince of Darkness just wanted to be a Real *Big* Somebody. He lusted after the job.

Still, I give Reynolds high marks for his big story, overall. Nice to meet a *writer* with lofty ambitions, at least. Enjoy!

Halloween In The Garden

by Margaret Sweeney-Ballou

Kyle rode his motorcycle down the road at dusk, as he did every school night. He couldn't wait to get away from his old man, be free, graduate from the lousy high school. One more year. Then freedom. To get away from home. Anywhere else but home. Away from his father and the bitch he married.

"Go to school. Your future. Go to church. Show some initiative." He'd show them the back of his rear end on the bike.

He approached the Moore farm again. Old Moore would be standing watching from behind the lace curtains as Kyle rode over the corner of his property. Where he had the flowers. Why didn't he put up a fence if he cared about flowers so much? Old bat.

Kyle gunned the motor and roared over the protruding corner of the property. A large flower bloomed in his path. A red one. Some kind of big flower, a Dahlia or something. Soon the weather would kill the flowers. It was getting cold at night. Old Moore planted the same things in the same spot every year. He invited somebody to ride over them. Why didn't he plant them in the back of the house? Why didn't he pave a pathway over the garden for motorcycles? Maybe Kyle should drop some more pizza boxes on the garden and write "pave this path" on them.

He reached down and grabbed the Dahlia. It didn't even smell. He threw it down on the ground and gunned the bike again. Mud flew from his wheels. Kyle laughed. "Like my mud, stupid?" He roared off down the road and out of sight.

Halloween was coming. He planned to go as a zombie. He had seen them in the movies. They rose up out of the ground and had white eyes turned up. He didn't know if they ate people. If they were dead, why did they need to eat? He wondered if they liked pizza.

He stopped the bike and looked back. An idea percolated in his head. Why not give old Moore a thrill, make him wet his pants, or better still, soil, as his proper stepmother would say, his underwear? He would start Halloween at dusk by coming up from the ground as a zombie in front of Moore's farm. Maybe then he would put up a fence. Kyle wondered if the old man would worry about fencing in the zombies in his dirt. He rode slowly home, planning how he would do it. He was good at this type of stuff, even if he failed math. Zombies were fun. Math was stupid. He figured it out and roared down the road, whooping with laughter.

On Halloween night, dusk was falling. The sun was already down and the sky was getting dark fast. Kyle had parked his motorcycle out of sight of the farm. He was dressed as a zombie from an old movie, one of the bald zombies with the white eyes. He wore a white sheet wrapped around his body. Maybe old Moore would think he was a mummy. It didn't matter. As long as he had to wash his underwear afterward.

Kyle wrapped a dark navy blanket around him for concealment in the dark and crept along the ground to the garden, within sight of the window with the curtains. He would usually ride across the yard about this time every day. He lay on the ground under the blanket. The curtains moved at the edge of the window. The old creep was watching.

Kyle slowly rolled the blanket off his body. He lay still in the white sheet for a moment, then slowly and stiffly rose up from the ground to a standing position. He walked toward the house with the zombie walk he had seen in the movies. He didn't want to come too close. A few times old Moore had come out yelling, "Get off my property!" and holding what looked like a shotgun in the dark. He tried to remember what happened to zombies in the movies when they got shot. He couldn't remember. They were already dead, so what could happen?

Nothing happened at the window. The curtain fell back to its place where it covered the window totally. Kyle thought, he's seen me. Maybe I better get out of here. He sank to his knees and then to a lying down position. He had the blanket behind him, and wrapped it carefully around himself by rolling in it, then crawled back to the road. He stood up and ran to the motorcycle, then drove slowly away. He did not want Moore to realize who it was. He laughed all the way to the Halloween party.

Three days later was Sunday. Kyle rode into the small town in the morning. It was sunny but becoming quite cold. There had been frost Friday night. He wondered if old Moore's flowers were dead yet. If not, they soon would be.

A hearse stood in front of the little church across the street from the park. People started coming out of the church. A funeral. Kyle stopped with surprise. Old Moore was one of the people who came out of the church. He was a pallbearer, helping the funeral directors push the casket to the hearse.

Kyle wondered if Moore would recognize him. Moore stopped and stared at Kyle. He did recognize him. Stone cold hatred streamed from Moore's eyes toward him. How could he recognize Kyle? He had always ridden by the farm at dusk. The bike! He recognized the red bike with the devil's figure painted on it. His stepmother had almost had hemorrhoids when he special-ordered the paint job on the bike. She drove an old navy blue Chevy. She was a moron. Like his father. His grandmother had said, "As God made them, He matched them." How right she was. Kyle drove on and did not look back.

The next night, Kyle drove his bike down the road. It was getting dark earlier. It was also getting cold. He was glad he had on leather. There would be frost again tonight. He glanced toward the house. If the curtain moved, he would flip Moore the bird as he frequently had done. The curtain didn't move. Too bad. Kyle pictured the old man's face when he saw the bike and the upraised finger.

Suddenly the bike hit something. Kyle was thrown across the handle bars and landed heavily on his face and shoulders. The bike hit his back as it careened on its side off the road into a ditch.

He lay there stunned in the garden. He tried to get up. His arm couldn't move. His right arm. His dominant one. His shoulder hung painfully from its socket. He looked at it and thought it was dislocated. He did not know what that meant, but the shoulder didn't look right, it hurt terribly and he couldn't move it. His nose hurt and his nose ran with a salty tasting fluid. Blood. He felt his nose. It was smashed and blood ran down his chin. His right clavicle hurt. He thought that's what it was called. He touched it. It was agonizingly painful and swollen. He sat on the ground. It was getting dark fast. And cold. Frost tonight.

There was no sound. Nothing. He thought, he couldn't sit here. He might freeze to death. How could he drive the bike with his arm and shoulder? Was the bike totaled? Would it run? Could he lift it and climb on it? Should he crawl to Moore's farm and ask him to call an ambulance? Or his father? Moore hated him. He remembered the eyes.

He had to get up. Had to walk. How far was it to town? Twelve miles. In the dark. Maybe he could hitchhike. Everybody was afraid to pick up hitchhikers. He had hitchhiked with a friend. A lady had picked them up and they robbed her. His friend had raped her. He couldn't manage it. Ever since then everybody was afraid to pick up hitchhikers. The lady never could give a good description of them.

Suddenly he heard a noise. Footsteps in the gravel driveway. Someone was coming. Slowly coming. Should he scream? They would find him. He sat still and waited.

A figure loomed black against the horizon, blocking out the stars. It came closer. It was Moore. Moore stood looking down at him from three feet away.

"You got to help me. I'm hurt. Call the ambulance."

"So you're giving me orders now, are you, you little slime bag? How do you think you rode into that barbed wire stretched across my yard? Do you think zombies did it?"

Kyle tried to stand up. Moore kicked him back again. His boot hit the clavicle. Kyle screamed with pain. He began to be afraid. Very afraid. He began to panic.

"Help! Help! Help me!" he yelled as loudly as he could.

"There's nobody out here. You ought to know. You been by this farm a million times. We're twelve miles from town. Nobody on this road. You could see the lights coming if there were any cars. Nobody comes along this road but me and my brother."

Kyle looked up at the man he could hardly see in amazement.

"Your brother?"

"Yeah. I had a brother. A twin brother. He was kind of simple. He lived with my mother until she died, then when my wife died too, I moved in with him. I took care of him. He wasn't exactly retarded, but real simple."

"I didn't know you had a brother," said Kyle, beginning to feel cold shivers go up and down his spine. He was starting to feel numb with cold. The pain was becoming unbearable.

"I had a brother. A twin brother. He looked like me, but he wasn't like me. He loved the flowers, though. We had that in common. He loved our garden. The garden you ran over every night with your cursed motorcycle. Some nights I would come out and yell at you, sometimes not. It didn't matter to you though, did it?"

Kyle stared up at him dumbly.

"So call the police. Report me."

Kyle would rather have the police come than sit here and freeze listening to Moore.

"Then your parents would sue me, wouldn't they? For hurting their precious boy."

"No. I would tell them not to," said Kyle, who would say anything in his desperation.

Moore's face was not visible, but Kyle heard him snicker.

"So you're a little liar, too? You didn't know my brother existed, did you? Let alone that he had a bad heart. He had hardening of the arteries of his heart. So when you showed up in his beloved garden in your little zombie costume, he had a heart attack and died."

Kyle stared up at the black shadow, feeling heartsick and a dread he had never before experienced. He tried to sit up. Moore kicked him again. This time he kicked him down on his back. Kyle felt for the first time a pain in his ribs. The motorcycle must have broken a rib. He tried to sit up. He could not.

The moon had risen. Kyle had not noticed it until he was lying flat on his back. A full moon. A harvest moon.

Then he saw it. Kyle saw the hatchet in Moore's hand, shining in the moonlight. It was now very bright.

"You little zombie! Nobody will go to your funeral. You won't have any pallbearers. Nobody will find your body."

Kyle tried to scream. His scream was interrupted by the hatchet flashing down on his neck. Moore struck several times, until he had severed Kyle's head from his body. He cut off both hands. Then he wrapped the body in a tarpaulin and tied it around the body with twine.

They found the motorcycle, several miles on the other side of town, off the road in a deep culvert. There was evidence of Kyle's blood on the bike. They never found Kyle's body.

The Turning

by Rachel V. Olivier

Parched and tired, all I wanted was a drink. I stopped to rest and get my bearings. I had been running since midnight and while it was still overcast, the sun was at high noon above the cloud cover. The food I grabbed from the kitchens during my escape from the castle needed to last until I found sanctuary. I had been less lucky in my search for clean water on the way out, the castle wells having been contaminated during my brother's Turning. Now, my water skin was empty. I was counting on finding a spring in my flight to freedom – the spring that I seemed to find whenever I needed it. My body was aching, my tongue was swollen and all I wanted to do was find someplace to rest and grieve for the brother who no longer existed.

I knew the surrounding woods as well as I knew all the secret passages of the castle, but so did my brother. That was the problem. We had played all over this area together. I never suspected I would use those same passages and paths to escape from him. Yet here I was, running for my life. I was wearing some of his clothes now in an attempt to confuse his hounds, but they would find me soon anyway.

If I could just find that spring – I could hide my scent, fill my water skin, and take a long drink before moving on and away from what would soon become a desecration of humankind, but the spring was nowhere to be found.

Stopping to get my bearings, I struggled to still my breathing. I heard the hounds in the distance still, starting a panic in the pit of my stomach. If the sun came out from behind the clouds, then I might have a chance. Striving to fight the panic, I closed my eyes and tried to use my nose and ears to find the ever elusive spring.

There.

The woodland smell of fresh moisture was a backdrop to the liquid crystalline sound of a mountain spring nearby. Allowing myself a small smile of victory, I vaulted in the direction of the water.

"Thank you," I panted, not sure whom I was thanking them all the same, and hoping it would cover all my bases. Quickly I filled my water skin, then dipped my hands into the spring to drink deeply.

"Why not just thank me in person?" a silvery voice asked.

Looking up, I coughed and sputtered. I saw white threads of light mixing with silver threads of water to create the form of a woman hovering over the spring. Twin azure orbs looked out from what I guessed to be her face.

"You're a—"

"Naiad – Lotus, the guardian of this spring," the woman tinkled. The resonance of her voice was off – no lungs to breathe through or cords to talk through. Enchanted, my ear tried to follow the sound her voice along its many arpeggios.

"And what is your name, mortal?"

"Hippolyta, at your service." I knelt down as I'd been taught by the castle priest, awed she would give me her name, even if so obviously a fascia one.

"How do you come to treasure these waters so, may I ask?" The rings and clinks of ice and water and other sounded over the trickle of her spring. Her cobalt eyes whirred thoughtfully as she looked down on me. My water skin lay forgotten on the bank next to my lap. I wondered what it would be like to have a voice so beautiful. To float above the water.

"Well?" Threads that I guessed passed for eyebrows raised above her eyes and I came back to myself, heart heavy with realization of the moment.

"My brother hunts me. He has taken the way of the Turning."

Lotus nodded in acknowledgement, her silver lips making a small round "o".

I had heard of people who had been Turned into the creatures of the night, forsaking forever the fellowship of their own kind, and instead choosing to feast upon their own kind – their own kin. But I had never before met someone who had chosen that path of their own accord.

I knew my brother less than I thought.

Lotus waited patiently for me to come to myself. It was the baying of the hounds that eventually brought me back. Distant they seemed now, farther away than they had been, but still hunting me. I cleared my throat.

"I would quench my thirst with your waters and travel down your spring to loose the scent of his hounds – with your permission of course."

She nodded again.

"And he hunts you because—"

"He has become one of the undead and would like me to become one, too – to be the bride of his Sire."

"Ah." The Naiad looked up and across at some point in the horizon, silvery finger tapping gently on her lips.

"He will never leave off that Hunt, you know. He will be ever after you until you succumb. It is way of those who Turn."

I nodded, I hadn't been sure of that, but now I knew. I needed another plan – and soon. Slowly, I got up, legs protesting at the movement after so much running and then stillness. I shook them out, getting ready to traverse the spring.

"There is a way you can avoid the Hunt and eventual capture."

My heart leapt at her words.

“The offer of your help—”

“Hear me out first, young one. While it would help you avoid the Hunt, it would also change you.”

I paused, opened my mouth to say something then stopped. I wasn't sure what she offered and wanted neither to accept nor decline until I knew what she proposed.

“But could I change back?”

“It would change you – irrevocably and forever.”

Puzzled, I looked at her as she held out her arms to me.

“I can offer you a different type of Turning. Come to me. Drink me, drink deep and you will go where he will never be able to follow.”

I knew what she was offering. Was it truly the only way? The hounds sounded closer. I looked deep into Lotus' eyes, wondering if she advised me truly. She was immortal. I had no way of knowing her mind, only my own.

With a sigh, I walked into her arms, turning my face up to hers. I felt her arms about me, chilly, unyielding, as her mouth came down to my face. I struggled only a moment as her lips met mine, her tongue elongating down my throat in the long goodbye. Her firm embrace enclosed me as part of me fought for life, and the other sought release. And then –

– warmth, joining, mingling, light and water entwining in dance. I pulled away gently, overwhelmed by the new feelings. My old body lay dead and discarded on the riverbank. There my brother would find me, and then leave me alone – forever.

I felt a tug and looked over to see Lotus beckon me.

“Come.” Her voice sounded more musical than before. “You must meet the others.”

Announcements

SF Programming at The British Institute

Tyrannosaurus Press was recently contacted by a representative of the British Institute who asked us to spread the work about some of their upcoming programs. A description of one of their classes is below. So, for all of our readers across the pond, please feel free to follow the link below and learn a little more about BFI.org and what they do.

Film Science: Future Human (BFI SOUTHBANK)
July & August 2010

Cinema has long striven to imagine the future, near and distant, but what would it mean to live in the societies depicted in such cinematic speculations? We present a two-month season that surveys the future human condition as it has been imagined by filmmakers over the years. Titles include Fahrenheit 451, Terminator, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Solaris and George Lucas' THX 1138.

For full information go to http://www.bfi.org.uk/whatson/bfi_southbank/film_programme/july_seasons

Killing Trail by Charles Gramlich now available for Kindle

Illuminata Contributor Charles Gramlich has a new book, Killing Trail, available for Kindle. Support our authors and read his book!

http://www.amazon.com/Killing-Trail-ebook/dp/B003UNL98G/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&m=AG56TWVU5XWC2&s=digital-text&qid=1278221290&sr=1-1

Soft Release Date For Forge of Faith Set

Tyrannosaurus Press wants to announce the soft release date of early 2011 for the fourth book in the Boundary's Fall series, Forge of Faith. A digital version may be available sooner for select readers, so interested parties should check our website or blog for updates