

## Honors Thesis Proposal

Aurora Clark

January 22, 2002

For my Honors Thesis I propose a two-part project: a showcase of a selection of my own short science-fiction/fantasy stories and a comparison/critique of them in relation to noted authors who influence my writing.

The purpose of this work is to show my own creative development and its influences. Since I have not the space to list each and every author I have read and to explain how each has affected me, I will start with a few of the authors that I count as major influences on my work.

My first and also my greatest influence is J.R.R. Tolkien. I remember my mother reading *The Hobbit* to me and later, the voice of the reader from a Recording for the Blind audiotape of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Tolkien's stories are undeniable classics; the standard by which other fantasy stories are written and judged. The stories about Bilbo and his nephew Frodo, while incredible in themselves, are brilliantly condensed and re-woven out of fairytale and myth. Also remarkable is the unique world that Tolkien constructs for these tales: histories, languages, and detailed maps. I have found these fascinating and very useful in my own attempts at world-building.

Ursula K. Le Guin's books, while not as lengthy or complicated compared to the science fiction and fantasy being written today, are of superb quality. For example, Le Guin creates real characters in her world of EarthSea. Ged and Tenar are not the predictable fearless hero and wilting heroine; rather, they seem solid in the way of ordinary people faced with extraordinary situations. Le Guin does plainly and simply with little embellishment what other authors like Robert Jordan present in more intricate and complicated ways. Jordan writes the *Wheel of Time* series, running on nine books so far, each approximately seven hundred pages or more with multiple intertwined characters and history. It is not that Jordan rambles, it is simply that his stories are so wide-ranging and detailed.

I am not sure when I started reading Andre Norton's books. It must have been in junior high, because I can remember checking out all of the *Star Ka'at* series from the Brainerd school library. Unlike Tolkien, Heinlein, or Jordan, these books are short (less than one hundred pages) and not so deep, but they do have a soothing other-worldliness that fascinates me. Norton can create characters and stories from next to nothing through her skill with tone and language.

I first encountered Edgar Allan Poe in a high school English class. Stories such as "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "Masque of the Red Death" appealed to me then and even more so now that I understand the difficult techniques of short-story construction. Poe's use of setting and description down to the last delicate detail that builds a story is fascinating to me. Giving ordinary objects such striking significance is something I have attempted to

emulate. Poe embodies the saying, "write only what you need and no more." It is his knowledge of what the story needs that is so brilliant.

An author who has built some interesting social and psychological concepts into his stories is Robert A. Heinlein. The first of his books I read, *Have Spacesuit, Will Travel*, I checked out of the Wadena middle school library. Little did I know where that book would take me. His novels *Friday*, *Starship Troopers*, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls* taught me how to include a social concept in my stories without any lecturing or preaching on the narrator's part.

An author who has provided me with a specific example of what not to do is Margaret Ball's *The Shadow Gate*. Basically, it is a story that moves characters from our world into a fantasy realm, a plot with very good potential. But I feel it does not fulfill its potential. The story seems to be told only in passing, with almost a mocking tone. This may fit with parody or satire, but Ball's story is neither. As a result, the story's end left me asking "And the point is?" In my writing, I have used the same plot device with my own characters and fantasy world, but have tried to treat the plot more seriously. My reading permits me to see both the strengths and flaws in even the most famous writers and to learn from these and to apply what I learn to my own writing.

The above six authors are just a few of the many authors whose works I have read and learned from. These six have had an undeniable influence on me. Creating characters that the reader can care about, building a believable world,

employing effective language and tone, writing only what is necessary. implementing social and psychological concepts with subtlety, and treating plot decisions seriously are a few of the lessons that I have learned from these authors.

In my paper, I will use these lessons to discuss my own work. My Honors Thesis will include a half-dozen manuscripts of my short stories or excerpts from my longer works along with a critique of them in relation to the writing practices I have learned from famous authors in the science-fiction/fantasy field. Using specific examples from other writers and from my own writing, I will discuss a specific writer's technique in light of my own stories and explain my experience of the creative act of writing.

<~>

*Be: Heinlein*

Robert A. Heinlein was born in 1907 in Missouri and died in 1988. As a child, he was bright, having an instant interest in astronomy and mathematics. As a young man, he went into the Naval Academy in 1924 and was later assigned to the USS Lexington. He married Leslyn MacDonald in 1932 and in the same year was reassigned to the USS Roper, a much smaller vessel than the Lexington. This gave him tuberculosis in 1934 and he was retired the same year. He moved to Los Angeles to attend UCLA, but withdrew and entered politics. From politics, he went to writing (Patterson).

In 1945, he officially began his book writing career with *Rocketship Galileo*. At this time Heinlein divorced his second wife and met his third wife: Virginia Gerstenfeld. From here on, he wrote and published steadily and was involved in a few movie projects, all of which fell flat. In the 1950's he drafted *Stranger in a Strange Land* under several different titles, along with finishing and publishing *Starship Troopers*. The critics hated it. But *Starship Troopers* was science fiction at its best and did what all top-notch science-fiction does. It challenged the reader to re-think their basic assumptions. In no way did it detract from Heinlein's reputation among science fiction fandom. *Starship Troopers* won the Hugo Award at the 1960 World Science Fiction Convention (Patterson).

Various medical problems began to keep him from his writing in the 1970's, from an over-due gallbladder removal to a carotid arterial blockage. He did not fully recover until 1978 and from here on his health continued to decline. On Heinlein's 80th birthday, June 7, 1987, Putnam's published what would be his last novel: *To Sail Beyond the Sunset*. He died in 1988 (Patterson).

His stories have fired the imaginations of young people around the world for over fifty years. He is perhaps best known for his science-fiction, but he was far more than just a writer of science fiction. The ideas that he built into his books have affected far more than just their readers, through whom they have become major players in the worlds of ideas and commerce. As any good writer should, Heinlein dealt with the issues that were current in the society in which he lived. The legacy that he has left us is a body of work that addresses the basic human

concern of species survival. His works ask and often answer: how would and should we behave under a wide variety of circumstances and situations? Heinlein's stories make us look at society, ourselves, and the world around us. The fact that he tells excellent stories and creates characters with real depth just makes it easier to become enthralled with the philosophy he has built into his works (Gifford).

It is this weaving of philosophy into a story that fascinates me about Heinlein. He uses his characters, not as puppets but as prophets of the simplest kind: normal every day people, forced by circumstance and chance into things normally far beyond their ken. This is what our heroes of yesterday and today are made of. This is also what makes the best fictional characters, flaws and all.

As for the book *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, it is written from the viewpoint of a one-armed computer technician who is best friends with the sentient computer that runs the Lunar complex. Somewhere along the line, he ends up as one of the top people in a grass-roots Lunar revolution aimed at taking over from Lunar Authority. Mannie (Manual), Wyoming Knott, Professor Le Paz and Mike (computer) plan their revolution carefully, immediately after a disastrous Authority attack on a Liberation meeting they attended.

Their concept of revolutions embodies how such revolutions are the slow, careful, cautious kind than flashy and fast. Begin small, with encouraging (but not taking part in) public flouting of new Authority rules, and gathering people, funds and materials. This is perhaps clearest in a quote by Professor Le Paz:

"...I will accept any rules that you feel necessary to your freedom. I am free, no matter what rules surround me. If I find them tolerable, I tolerate them; if I find them too obnoxious, I break them. I am free because I know that *I alone* am morally responsible for my actions" (Heinlein, *Moon*, 65).

The book surprisingly, uses an Edgar Allen Poe story as part of its revolution background. "The Purloined Letter" plays an integral part in the placing, construction and secrecy of a second lunar-based catapult, later used to literally throw rocks at Earth, guided by the sentient computer, Mike. The revolution itself is touched off by the rape and murder of a female storage clerk by six of the Warden's peace-keeping troops. After settling things on Luna, Professor Le Paz and Mannie go Earthside as ambassadors, mainly trying to sell the idea of Earth-based catapults to lift goods up to the moon to be turned into grain and sent back to Earth, but also pushing Luna's independence. This failing, the next stage of the revolution starts and no more grain is shipped to Earth. Earth sends ships to take over Luna. These ships are taken down and their troops killed. Then Luna starts throwing rocks, mainly aiming for uninhabited or military targets, and with plenty of warning. The revolution is over when the countries of Earth acknowledge Luna's freedom.

First, I feel it necessary to discuss Luna, or "The Rock" as it's called by its inhabitants. Humanity can adapt to downright hellish conditions, if that is what it takes to survive. Society changes because of these conditions. Society on Luna has adapted in many ways. People on Luna are polite, violent crime is

nonexistent, especially rape. The Loonies themselves enforce these unwritten rules. If an unwritten rule is broken, the perpetrator is judged and tossed out an airlock if the offense is grave enough. In essence, Heinlein suggests that society would be best served by growing into self-guidance and self-correction.

This story is my attempt to build *purpose* into my work, short as it is. Instead of society at large, I chose to deal with the concept of orders and religion. Both of which are concepts that have troubled me in the past and no less so now.

This story is also something of a response to the shocking happenings of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Of religion, any religion, I would ask; what happens when you turn faith into a weapon? My writings in this direction are an attempt to show that while religious ideals can bind a group together, they need not be the driving force behind said group. I feel that religion, any religion, should be treated with care and respect instead of wielded to harm others. It is a hard concept to get across in fictional writing, and I hope that this is adequate to the task.

<~>

*Be:*

He licked the sweat from his upper lip and peered around the shelves beside him. Five minutes to go. He whirled as the door at the far end of the room opened and closed behind a gaggle of school children. *Damn*. He would have sworn they hadn't scheduled any tours today. The explosives would trigger soon.



He swallowed hard and edged his way back into the maze of shelving. The tiny pliers dropped into his left palm as his wrist twitched. Then he hesitated. The commander had ordered this done. But the code that they recited every morning and night stated that they would not take a life unless it was justifiable. He didn't think the destruction of old computer records justified killing schoolchildren, did it? He was sure the commander would have specified if he wished deaths here and why. Quietly, he made his way back to the panel he had replaced just minutes ago. Carefully, he pulled it off and disarmed the powerfully tiny explosive caps...

<~>

He saluted and laid his kit upon the table in front of him. "Sir."

"Belthasar." The tall gray-haired man nodded. "How did it go?"

He bowed his head. "I failed, sir."

"Ah?" One gray eyebrow rose. It was whispered that he'd been born with gray hair, but no-one knew why.

"The explosion didn't happen- they brought a special tour in and you had not ordered lives taken, so I felt it best that I try another time, sir. My cover is still good, I think. No-one pays too much attention to janitors."

The NC smiled thinly, ice-blue eyes crinkling at the corners slightly. "Very good, Belthasar."

He gulped. "Sir?"

"You've learned the difference between just following orders and thinking for yourself within the scope of those orders. You learned this on your first mission

in fact. Excellent.”

“Y-you mean that was a test?” His hands were clenched in rage and his knees trembled. If he'd-

The man who had supposedly risen in the ranks of the NC's through his own stubbornness smiled wider. “Yes. And if you had failed, you would be dead and vanished.”

Vanished. It hit him like a fist to the kidneys and he caught himself with both hands to the table. He was not afraid of dying. But vanished- vanished meant erased from the NC ranks, his possessions sold, his body cremated and scattered over nameless ground. No-one would remember or care what he had done in the name of his faith. The commander shoved a chair over to him and he sat, stunned.

“Welcome to the real Neo Christians, lieutenant.” Jonathan Tsadekiel said quietly as he turned towards the door. He hesitated and turned back. “By the way, those explosive caps were dummies, Belthasar.”

His jaw dropped a second time as the commander smirked, winked and closed the door behind him.

<~>

### *Angel of Memory: Tolkien*

J. R. R. Tolkien, born in 1892 in South Africa to English parents, was returned to England at an early age. Both parents died in quick succession and

young Tolkien moved around a lot from 1905 to 1911, when he entered Exeter College, Oxford. He received his B.A in 1915 and his M.A in 1919. During the interim, he married his childhood sweetheart and served for a short time on the Western Front ("Tolkien, J. R. R.").

He began writing in 1917, recovering from "trench fever". His work, titled *The Book of Lost Tales*, later became *The Silmarillion*. This book serves as the basis for his tales and the background of Middle-Earth. For awhile, he did translation work at Leeds University. Despite, or perhaps because of, his intense interest in North European myths and legends, he did studies and literary criticism of *Beowulf*, and on Chaucer. A deep involvement with two writing/literary discussion groups prompted him to publish *The Hobbit* in 1937.

Tolkien retired from professorship in 1959. The unauthorized American publication of *The Lord of the Rings* in 1965 angered him deeply. His wife died in 1971 and he died two years later, the author of a cult-classic work of mythic folklore ("Tolkien, J. R. R.").

The weaving of story within story is one thing that Tolkien is very good at. He ties many smaller stories into that of his most well known, multi-volume story: *The Lord of the Rings*. From the story of Bilbo; to that of the Ring he found; to that of Aragorn, the heir of Elendil, Boromir, the Rohirrim, the fading of the elves; and many many more, each thread is a story in its own right, but each would be near meaningless without the others. These stories are built upon his history, contained in *The Silmarillion* and the two-volume set *Book of Lost Tales*.

It is this story weaving that I have attempted to emulate in the following short story, which is predictably inter-woven with still others of my own creation. My weaving of alien contact, earth mages, global wars, religion, and "ordinary" people is nowhere near as tight as Tolkien's, but I'm working on it.

This aspect of Tolkien is perhaps better seen in my other writings, specifically those in the same universe as my *Prison of the Mind* excerpt, further on in this document. But I feel it is still quite obviously evident in this storyline. I will point out the main "secondary" stories and give background as follows: in the first paragraph the main character notes that there are people on the moon. This is a separate story, as yet untitled and so far, ninety-five thousand words or so. There is more detailed reference to this further on in the story.

The next "story within story" can be best seen here:

Amali had died in one of the myriad  
plagues that had risen out of the  
BioWars, which had ravaged Earth over  
forty years ago (Clark, Angel).

This places the overall story at approximately 2087 on my rough timeline, right in the aftermath of a space-based war or lunar revolution, whichever fits best. However, none of this is evident in this story. Further more, the BioWars is a reference to a story involving the misuse of nanotechnology and government

which takes place around 2046 on my timeline (Clark, *Timeline*).

The creation story told by the grandfather is my second attempt at a folk-tale and as such, a simple thing. A creation story from one of my fictional Five Clans, the Stone People, I found it useful to demonstrate the grandfather's talent at metal shaping. The history of the last nature preserve and the grandfather's family involvement is also a story that must wait for another day to be written.

The grandfather's passing reference to Space Marines is also another section of short stories, one of which is in this document (titled *Body Thief*). Within this timeline, the Space Marines act as an interstellar police force and are not bound to Earth, nor is being human a requirement in their ranks, much like Tolkien's Company of the Nine from the *Lord of the Rings*.

This is a very quick view of a few of the stories that I have attempted to weave into a coherent universe. However, such a weaving would be totally incomplete without the different people, races and species that I have attempted to create, or re-create as Tolkien did. He took ancient myth and newfound mystery and made such magic with it that still is popular to this day.

Tolkien's world building is also an interest of mine. He pays attention to intricate detail, from the creation of the elven languages, dwarven runes, maps, myriad creatures that populate Middle-Earth and more. I have only seen this type of work paralleled once, in the writing of Dennis L. McKiernan, whose story-line takes up about nine or ten books to date. And even he followed the path that Tolkien had made, as every writer of fantasy must do.

The creation of a race can be a frustrating thing. What makes them different enough to stand out from the rest of humanity? Or what makes an alien species different enough so that it doesn't seem to be regular people dressed up in odd wigs and strange clothes? How alien is alien? These questions and many more I must ask each time I sit down to write about my universes. In this, Tolkien had help from his study of legends and myths. But I must turn to the archetypes of science-fiction and these are not as easy to see as those of the fantasy realm.

Above all, it is Tolkien who interested me in this widespread sprawl of story-weaving, world-building and race-creation. And it is Tolkien who continues to give me new insight into these processes.

<~>

### *Angel of Memory*

(Dedicated to David Gonzalez)

He looked up as the hum of a car whooshed up the dirt road. Sighing, he set the heavy yoke down carefully. It wouldn't do to spill the water- he would need it for washing up later. Silence blossomed around him as the car whirred closer, dust billowing out behind it as its support fans slowed. Looking farther up, weathered eyes crinkled as he squinted into the sun, which flashed brightly off the green and dark amber stones set in his forehead. The tiny crescent moon gleamed through tree branches to one side and he smiled. There were people up there, somewhere. A moonbase of dedicated people.

Cold wind ruffled his hair and he brushed it back absently, checking his pockets with his other hand quickly. The stones were there-good. It would not do for the twins to catch him unprepared. Waiting patiently as the car he'd heard hummed towards him in a thinning cloud of dust, he hummed tunelessly. It slowed to a stop beside him and the window vanished with a slight crackle.

"Grandpa! Grandpa!" The twins tumbled out of the window like happy wiggling puppies and he caught them, setting them down carefully. The tiny girl-child climbed out right after them, more careful than her younger brothers. She dropped to the road beside the humming car and shook out long black hair, which was immediately blown about by the draft from the car's fans. Odd, it was the same color his had been at her age and twice as long.

He smiled and nodded to his son in the car's pilot chair. "Go ahead, Kev. I'll walk them up." Kevin nodded back and drove carefully up the hill.

"Tell us a story!" The twins chorused impatiently. "Please?" The girl added, smiling hesitantly up at the old man.

His weathered, sun-browned face wrinkled like a raisin as he smiled back. "After we get up to the house, kids." He patted his pockets and took out the stones, handing one to each of the twins and a third to the girl. "Carry these for your old grandfather, please?" They took them with crows of delight and dashed off. The girl looked at hers shyly and murmured a "thank you".

He nodded and braced himself to pick up the old wooden yoke again, steadying each bucket with a knobby hand. His ring flashed silver and blue in the

sun and he watched as the girl looked at it curiously. Then she looked up at him and he knew she was focusing on the stones that crossed his brow. She smiled brightly.

He smiled back. Maybe she would be the one. He'd hoped his son would follow after him but was not too disappointed when he hadn't, having learned the hard way that just as each stone he'd laid in the walls of his house had its' place, so each person had their niche. His son had not wanted the niche he'd tried to make for him here, even though he had the talent to fit it if he tried. At twelve, Kevin had been almost as good as his father at rough-shaping rock and moving earth. But he had refused further teaching and stopped using his powers. Shaking his head, he pushed memory away. What was left of his family was here now. There was no need to dwell on past and it would disturb the children if he allowed his sadness to show.

Smiling, he turned his attention to the twins, who were looking around curiously. They were still too young to be sure about, but he guessed that they did not have any more than the smallest talent with Shaping or Making. And he might be dead by the time he could be sure. Maybe the girl would understand and be able to take his place. If not, this place would die with him. And Earth would loose her last great nature preserve.

The twins chased each other around his legs as he plodded up the hill, but the girl walked beside him. She watched the roadside, sharp-eyed gaze flickering up into the tree when a squirrel scolded them or a bird took to its' wings



from above. She was attentive to the world around her-that was a good sign, he mused, taking care not to trip over the twins as they rolled around in the dust almost under his feet. His son called to them from the top of the hill and trotted down when they didn't answer. They were too busy wrestling and getting covered in road-dust to listen.

"Let me take that, dad." Kevin fell into step beside him and watched, warily. Almost as if he was afraid the old man would snap at him for offering to help. Where *had* the boy been, to pick up that kind of an attitude?

"That's all right, son. I've got it." He kept his eyes on the road in front of him and smiled to himself. The girl had taken her father's hand and twittered at the twins. They perked up and came to her, like hunting hounds. She whispered to them and they fell into a line behind her, hand in hand. They were dressed in jumpsuits of identical cut, one in ruby red, the other in deep blue. Like the jewels he'd shaped this morning. Maybe he should make them into something the boys would wear when they got older- matching belts and buckles perhaps. Or knives- they were coming back into style in the East. Something more intricate for the girl, she would understand and might be able to duplicate his work when she got older. She was dressed in a flowing robe of some odd cut, patterned with pictures of land and sea scenes. Kevin wore a severe black jumpsuit with white piping and had a worried, impatient look about him. The old man wondered what was on his son's mind. Ah well, he'd talk when he felt ready and not before. The boy was almost as stubborn as his own wife Amali had been.

They reached the leaf-padded spot where Kevin had parked the car. He set the still full buckets down carefully beside the thick wooden door that opened into his small home. The girl distracted the twins just as they caught sight of the buckets and jumped to investigate. She neatly corralled them both and led them along the trail next to the house. Kevin looked after them as if he wanted to call them back, but the old man shook his head.

"They'll be alright. Nothing will bother them here, you know that."

Kevin sighed tiredly and nodded. "I keep forgetting it's not like home out here. What with you being the preserve keeper for forty years, I should know that by now." He smiled ruefully. There was gray in his short-cut hair, though it was hidden by careful application of color- the old man still sensed it. "What do you think of them, dad?"

"Cute little buggers," he winked and grinned at his son. "That girl's gonna grow up to be a heartbreaker."

"Dad." Kevin rolled his eyes. "Do they have it?"

The old man sighed and rubbed his chin. "The boys don't have any trace of it, yet."

His son's face fell and he swallowed. "But-"

"They could develop it after puberty, but that hasn't happened in our family for sixteen generations. And when it did, it was a special case." The old man's face softened and he shook his head. "I'm sorry, son. They will pass it on to their children, if they choose to have them. That has amplified it in the past."

"That's one good thing," Kevin whispered and looked down, scuffing the dirt with his black boot-heel. Suddenly he looked up, blue eyes sharp on his father's face. "What about Amaerlys?"

A smile turned the sun-browned face into a mass of happy wrinkles. "Named after my grandmother. I think she has it. If she does, she might well rival my grandmother in power and strength."

His son's breath puffed out in a sigh of relief. "They call her Emrys- the twins do," Kevin added softly, joy shining in his eyes.

The old man nodded and pushed the polished wooden door open. "Come in. Sit. Let me tell you the cost of her gift, if she chooses to follow that path." He set a kettle of water on the tiny gray circle of volcanic basalt that was inset into the heavy slate counter. "Something you have never needed to know because you had already chosen yours." He traced the stone circle's edge and it began to glow dimly. The water would be boiling soon.

He turned back to look at his son. "All power is paid for, son, but most aren't willing to pay that price. That's as it should be. There are always those who are." His sky-blue eyes were bright. "And it is your job to see that and step out of the way when you see such a one in your life. She will not have it easy, or safe, but you must learn to let her go. As I learned to let go, almost too late." The kettle whistled shrilly and he turned away to set out cups and strainers of herbs for tea.

Kevin frowned. "Was that what happened to Mother, dad?"

The old man's shoulders slumped and he nodded slowly. "I loved Amali very much. But I could not keep her from the path she chose to walk. Nor would I, if I had it to do again." He looked up and held out a cup of tea to his son. Kevin pretended not to notice the tears in his eyes. They both knew it wasn't the steam from the kettle or the tea.

They shared a moment of silence over the bitter tea, remembering a tall woman with large hands and bright, blue eyes. Amali had died in one of the myriad plagues that had risen out of the BioWars, which had ravaged Earth over forty years ago.

"She will be alone," the old man murmured finally. "Once she learns what she needs to know to control her power, she will be bound to this place. as I am. As my grandmother was before me and as her great-aunt was before her."

Kevin nodded, but said nothing. Their mood lightened as the children clattered back in, led by the girl. She marched up to them and held out one tiny fist to grandfather. He smiled and held out his own hand, curious to see what she'd found out there. She carefully opened porcelain-white fingers over his ruddy-brown palm and dropped three perfectly shaped grass-green peridots into his open hand.

Kevin's jaw dropped. "Where did you find those, Amaerlys?"

"I made them for grandfather, daddy." Emrys smiled up at her father.

He smiled back as best as he could. "That's very nice of you." The old man's eyes were sharp on him and he swallowed.

"Thank you, Emrys. These are too fine for me, though. Perhaps they would suit you better." Grandfather turned and reached for a large silver bar on the wooden shelf behind him. It gleamed in the dim lamps around them as he pinched off a thinner chunk of it.

"Let me tell you a story, Emrys, Jordan, Garcia," he said. The boys squealed in delight and sat at his feet, quivering with excitement. Emrys picked up a cushion and sat also, blue eyes on his wrinkled face. When the twins had quieted, he took a slow sip of his tea. Then he held up the chunk of fine silver and began.

"Once the Earth was like this silver, but far far larger, without difference in form, texture or color. And the One saw it, and the One wondered what could be done to make this World new and different." His gnarled hands cradled the silver as if it were a delicate plant. "So the One touched the world," his hands hid the strip of silver for a moment. The twins watched, eyes wide and mouths hanging open. The girl watched too, but not as surprised when he held the silver out to them again. He'd shaped it into a smooth rounded crescent. This was the first thing Grandmother had taught him- the rough shaping of refined metal. The refining of such metal he'd learned later and at greater cost.

"And where the One walked, suddenly there was tossing ocean and driest desert and wide plains and endless forest." The twins gasped as they saw the silver *change* before their very eyes. Tiny waves formed along the ends, even tinier sandy beaches banking them. Barchaan sand dunes eased into star-dunes

up the bracelet's sides. Tough plains grass 'grew' up into tiny, seemingly delicate silver trees at the apex of the bracelet. He smiled at their rapt expressions. When Grandmother had done this trick for him, his expression had probably been very similar.

"The One looked at Her Work and thought it to be good, but still lacking." His hands hid the gleaming metal again and they leaned forward expectantly. "So the One thought. And smiled as She raised Her hands and brought color to the lands that were created out of darkest rock and brightest fire." He presented the bracelet to Emrys with a flourish. The peridots she had given him were set into the tree-trunks as foliage and there was a light green-brown dusting on the tiny sparkling plains. The 'desert' was golden-gray and the 'seas' were blue and silver. She gaped at him and took it gently, as if she feared it would break. The twins poked each other and giggled as he set it carefully about her tiny wrist. He remembered Grandmother's dry voice explaining what chemical each color needed and how to obtain it out of things around him. The first thing he'd made and colored had been nowhere as complex as this, but that had been ages ago. He had learned control many times over since then.

"Thank you, grandfather!" She smiled. "Will you teach me how to do that? Please?" She brushed long black hair back out of her eyes.

Grandfather looked to his son. "That is not for me to answer, Amaerlys."

"Daddy? Can I?" She turned to him, a puppy-dog expression on her delicate face.

Kevin smiled sadly. "I'll talk to grandfather about it outside, honey. You keep the twins out of trouble, please."

Her face fell, but she nodded. "Ok."

The old man followed his son outside. "What is there to speak of that you don't wish her to hear, Kev?"

Kevin swallowed hard. "We're moving to the moon-they're building a secondary base up there. I've been ordered up there as a systems technician. The boys are coming with, they're too young to leave. But the limit on dependants there is two, still. Besides, Amaerlys is old enough to understand what is going on somewhat and she does not wish to go." He bit his lip. "I do not wish to leave her but-"

"But it seems as though you have no choice. So you're scrambling to set up things for her to stay here on Earth, then?" Sky-blue eyes narrowed thoughtfully. The things his son had *not* said were far more interesting than what he had. He must not have much time for a girl-child when he had the twins to care for too. And he was sure Kev's wife had had relatives, but whether they were suitable was another matter. From Kev's worried expression, they must not be. Or perhaps they blamed his son for Sarah's death.

Kevin nodded impatiently. "Yes, but we're running out of time and options. I have a month from tomorrow to get up there and settled in. There are still things that need to be arranged for her-"

"Like where she is going to live."

"Yes." Kevin ducked his head. "We don't want to put her in one of the orphan Houses or a military crèche, but-"

"I will take her in. She has the talent to fit in here- you saw that much. Making peridots from glacial moraine isn't easy." The old man smiled sadly at his son. "We have the people to train her properly, so she won't misuse it. If you'd like, I'll have a com-link brought up from town so you can talk to her whenever you wish."

Some of the desperate glint in his son's eyes faded and he clasped his father's arm in thanks. "I know how you hate those things! Thanks, dad. Are you sure you can handle teaching her though? You're not young anymore-"

The old man's face wrinkled again as he smiled. "I'm her grandfather, what else should I do? Yes, I can handle her. I managed to 'handle' Yvette when she tried to take over from Grandmother." He rubbed his shoulder, remembering. It still ached when it rained- she had broken it with the power of her mind alone. He had no skill with living things and so could not fix it properly. His face brightened as memory faded. "Besides, this might make up for the hell I put you through." He winked.

"Maybe. After you teach her what she needs to know. And if she doesn't want to learn-"

"I will let her go, son. I've got friends in this wide world who can help her if she wants to learn a trade other than rock-shaping and wilderness-tending." He



grinned, white teeth flashing in the sun. "She could always join the Space-Marines."

Kevin snorted and rolled his eyes. "Dad, I grew out of that when I was six and learned what they had to go through to be what they are. The twins are in that phase already I think, but she never went through it."

The old man chuckled. "I know, I know. Hitch me a ride into town and I'll order that com-link and supplies for her."

"Thanks, dad, for everything." They sat on the porch, looking out over the preserve, the lake in the far distance gleaming silver, with bright green treetops beyond. A breeze moved the greenness there, fusing it into the pebble shape and color of peridots.

<~>

*Prison of the Mind, Excerpt. Norton*

Andre Norton was born Alice Mary Norton in 1912. She started writing in her teens. Since she was writing in a male-dominated market, she often wrote under a pseudonym, as many contemporary female writers did. I find it interesting that the name Andre isn't really "male" or "female" - it lets people jump to their own conclusions. After graduating from High School, she went to the Flora Stone Mather College of Western Reserve University (now known as Case Western Reserve) for a year intending to become a history teacher. Due to the Depression,

she was forced to find work in order to support her household, even though she still managed to take evening courses from Cleveland College, the adult division of the same university. In 1932 she was employed by the Cleveland Library System for approximately eighteen years, most of which, she spent as an assistant librarian in the children's section of the Nottingham Branch Library. In 1941 she owned and managed a bookstore and lending library called the Mystery House, in Mount Ranier, Maryland. Unfortunately it was a failure. Around the same time she worked as a special librarian in the cataloguing department of the Library of the Congress and was involved in a project related to alien citizenship, which was abruptly terminated by the beginning of the World War II. After she left the Cleveland Library System, she started working as a reader for Martin Greenberg at Gnome Press. After eight years there, she left and finally devoted herself to writing. The results we will enjoy reading to our children and our children's children (Ejgierd).

Her success in writing has paved the way for other women to write in the fields of science-fiction and fantasy. Writers such as C.J. Cherryh, Anne McCaffrey and Mercedes Lackey; all grand story-tellers in their own right and all favorite authors of mine. Even though Norton's work ranges through many genres, she is most well known for her fantasy, in particular the Witch World series, which was begun in 1963 with the Hugo-nominated book of the same name (Ejgierd).

Some say that science fiction is primarily philosophy, edifying the right to

be different to the extreme. Nowhere have I found that to be truer than in Ms. Norton's writing, where characters of many races and species have shown their intelligence, valor and, for lack of a better term, humanity. The thematic elements she deals with in her books are as fundamental and as close to universally human as you can get, even disguised as they are, under green, gray or scaled skin. Part of this, I think, is how well-told her tales are- they fit together like puzzle pieces. Also, the reader can believe in them, even though her concept of space-ships and space travel is far from what is put forward today. In addition, her stories are tightly woven and highly dramatic, without the use of profanity or graphic violence which seems to be part and parcel of science-fiction and fantasy today, sadly enough. Her main characters are frequently young and on a voyage of discovery, as are most of us, when we begin reading her books. She intertwines the virtues of past, nature, and the all-important future in her stories. It is interesting also that all her books are meticulously researched, providing a treasure of historical information.

I find her style to be clean and simple. She doesn't get bogged down under a multitude of minutiae, in either exterior or interior worlds. She hands the reader the very hearts of her characters and cleanly paints her settings. an artist who can show us the shape of an object by the thickness of the line with which she draws. But I've seen something beyond her skillful plots and fascinating settings. Something intangible that fuses her writing into your very soul. Most of her readers are in their teens when they first find her and I am betting most of

them still read her books in their later years. I know I do. It's something like falling through a secret door into a multiverse of worlds.

She builds worlds where being different is no crime, and bravery overcomes the characters' own fears and proves stronger than evil. When reading one of her books, you feel she wrote that story for you alone, that somewhere the person in those pages lives, in a world somewhere near. Her characters are real in a way authors who have expended three times as many words may never achieve. And throughout the course of your life they continue to be wonderful companions.

Andre Norton is usually classified as a young adult writer, which I feel to be somewhat inappropriate since anyone of either gender, any age, and any walk of life who enjoys simple, well constructed stories will find at least one segment of her enormous range of writing enjoyable. The three books of hers that I have read, reread and will use for this comparison are *Flight in Yiktor*, *The Zero Stone* and *Breed to Come*. All of them have some aspect of the alien contact theme in them, which is an area of science-fiction that continues to fascinate me. Each time that I think the depths of possibility have been emptied, I come across a new twist on this pillar-theme of science-fiction. But while there are authors out there who have created aliens far more alien than the ones to be found in the pages of Norton's stories, somehow, her stories are still great. They still have that pull of newness to be re-read again and again.

The first book in my list, *Flight in Yiktor*, is actually the third book in a

series of four. This volume follows **Maelan**, an outcast of the Thassa, an elder race within Norton's Forerunner universe; **Krip Vorlund**, an outcast of one of the Free-trader ships; **Farree**, an orphan in the multispecies sprawl of the Limits on Grant's World; and **Togger**, an alien beast. It is written from the viewpoint of Farree, a crippled alien child who does not know his world of origin or his people. In this roller-coaster tale of an ancient people, personal discovery, and Thieves Guild hunters, Farree discovers that he is of an unknown alien race in his journeys with the Thassa Maelan, Krip and their "Little Ones".

The second book is the first volume of a duology that spans many star systems, races and strange ports of call within Andre Norton's Forerunner universe. *The Zero Stone* follows the displaced gem-buyer's apprentice Murdoc Jern and his recently acquired alien companion Eet on a mission to keep the both the Thieves' Guild and the all powerful Patrol from an ancient cache of Forerunner stones of unimaginable power.

The third book, *Breed to Come*, could have been written within the Forerunner universe, or in its own. It chronicles the meeting of humanity's old servants with a human scoutship on a deserted colony planet. It is also the tale of Furtig's coming of age, a cat-man of the People on the edge of the deserted ruins of Humanity in a continued war with their old enemies, the Rattons and the Barkers.

The overall concept of alien first contact is one that has fascinated science-fiction writers, myself included, ever since H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*

was published. The fictional tenants of alien first contact range from simple, as in the example of *Star Trek: The Original Series*, to incredibly complex, as in C. J. Cherryh's *Faded Sun* trilogy or her *Inheritor* series, each playing host to a humanoid race incredibly different from our own.

It is this end of the spectrum of science-fiction that Andre Norton does best. In her galaxy-spanning Forerunner books, which totals at least twelve volumes and probably more, she writes of creatures as alien as Farree, as different as Eet, and as new as Furtig. This is what I have attempted to emulate in the following story: newness with a tinge of the alien, and understandable difference. I felt this was best shown in a language lesson, since survival and communication are universal necessities.

This is my attempt to create an alien race, in relation to humanity. For alien-ness is not found just in a different language, clothes, or physical features. It is in the workings of the mind where true strangeness is seen.

<~>

*Prison of the Mind*, excerpt

He was startled awake as the door was pushed open and a dirty bundle of bloodstained rags and bruised limbs was tossed in. The echoes deafened him as the door was slammed and locked. He jumped as the bundle twitched and leapt to its feet.

A tiny *Altarin* with a lot of *Sedras* blood stood there, trembling, back pressed to the door. Its thin face was as grubby and bruised as his own. He couldn't tell if it was male or female but by the angry *look* it gave him, it was mad. Soft blue eyes without pupil or iris glared into his own and he prayed it wasn't in the mood to kill him.

He blinked first, wondering what the hell to do now. It was obviously waiting for him to make the first move. He watched, entranced as it blinked at him- milky nictitating membranes flickered to briefly veil its eyes. The more solid, skin covered lids remained up. Its long hair was matted with blood and dirt, but he thought it probably would be snowy white if washed. Tangled ghost-white strands drifted about its head and tiny waist. He watched the scarred six-fingered hands tremble. Fully erect, the top of its head would probably come up to his shoulder. But now it looked like a cornered animal where it crouched against the door. Tattered armor was bound to its thin body by grubby leather wrappings. They had been made for someone much larger and been trimmed down to size. Its boots were in somewhat better shape than the rest of it, they were made of tougher material than its clothes. He was surprised it hadn't frozen to death yet.

Slowly, he reached for the water-skin they'd left him. He'd conserved it on principle since the guards were not regular or careful about refills or feeding times. He shook it. Still two-thirds full, that was a relief. The tiny elfin figure perked up at the sound and a pale tongue flickered between cracked lips. It had an almost hopeful-looking expression on its face now, he thought and hoped he was right.

Those tiny hands had stopped shaking and it watched him warily, seemingly unafraid now. He hoped it wouldn't jump him for the water. Depending on how weakened it was, it still might be able to kill him.

"Want some?" He asked softly, not daring to hope it understood him. Instead, he prayed that maybe his tone of voice would soothe it and it wouldn't think he was threatening it. The water-skin dangled from a broken strap and he extended his arm slowly.

"Tsa," it whispered and reached out just as slowly to take the skin from him. Two small sips later it corked the skin carefully and set it down on the stone slab between them. Blue eyes watched him for a moment and a tiny hand pushed it back towards him carefully. "Tsa l'ye," it said again and bowed. "Tsa."

Bobbing his head, he set the water-skin in the corner next to him. Scooting back on the slab that was his bed, he gestured to the empty space.

"Sit?"

Tiny white eyebrows wrinkled and he held his breath as the *Altarin* settled itself slowly on the gray stone. It did not lean back and continued to stare at him, lips twitching.

"S'eet?" It echoed, trying to match his pronunciation.

He blinked and tried again. "Sit," enunciating each letter and patting the stone.

One of those tiny hands rose and it pointed at him. "Se *A'hinn taush'i*." That was what the guards had called them, laughingly, amongst other things that must



have been curses.

"Human. Ingram." He patted himself on the chest.

"Hyoo-man. Inngrahm." Those enigmatic blue eyes were on his as its lips struggled to shape the alien words. "Se *A'hinn taush'i*. S'Hyoo-man. Inngra'am." Its hoarse voice made them into a sing-song of syllables.

"A-hinn taush i. Ingram."

It nodded once, lowering one set of eyelids at him. "Hyoo-man. Seet."

"Sey Ahinn taash i, Ingram, sit, stone." His hand moved from himself to the 'sit' motion he'd made before and then to point at the stone slab.

Its head tilted, long hair whispering counterpoint to the language lesson. One six-fingered dropped to lightly touch the slab on which they sat. "Stohne." Its pronunciation was already getting better, just in these few minutes of listening to him.

"Yes! You've got it!" He smiled for the first time in a long time, face aching.

It tapped its chest. "*S'Altarin. S'Rhavnn. Sît. Stone.*"

Esses were singular. They had to be. He pointed to it, wondering again which sex it was. "Raven. *S'Altarin.*"

It blinked and pointed back at him. "Inghra'am. S'hyuman."

He slowly extended one hand to it, hoping he wasn't pushing this too far. "Friend."

It blinked, considering. Slowly, its hand inched out and closed delicately around his dirty palm. "Inghram. Frriend. *S'ashii.*" Six fingers felt oddly wrong

against his, but he figured he'd better get used to it.

"Raven, *S'ashii*. Friend."

It withdrew its hand quickly and he guessed prolonged physical contact wasn't a wise idea. Settling back against the stone walls, he watched as it curled up on the slab and blinked at him, nictitating membranes sliding down and back up in sequence. It was favoring its right leg badly and the leather was almost totally shredded on its lower leg. Sitting awkwardly, right leg hanging off the slab, it shifted nervously as snarls and shouts echoed down the halls.

"*S'ashii*," he murmured, reaching out slowly towards its leg.

It froze and iridescent blue eyes sought his as it tensed. He paused and waited. Slowly, slowly it relaxed and he rested his hand on its knee lightly. Then he knelt slowly and painfully on the floor next to it. All the while it watched him expressionlessly, not twitching a muscle. He tugged gently at the mangled leather wrappings looped around its leg and stopped as it winced slightly. The rough armor under the leather was soaked with dark red blood and more blood had dried on the leather bindings. He swallowed as he pulled back the mangled armor as gently as he could.

Muscles tensed under his hands and deep puncture wounds oozed darker blood slowly. One of the Hounds had mauled it by the look of things. The makeshift armor had saved its leg from a lot of the Hound's fury, but wouldn't hold up under much now. He sighed and carefully ripped a strip from his tattered under-shirt. Binding the wounds tightly, he patted the armor back into place. Glancing up

to gauge its reaction, he wound the leather strips back around its leg carefully. It hadn't said a word the whole while. But he thought he saw the slightest hint of a smile about its lips as he sat back. It curled up, back propped against the corner.

"S'ashii, friend," it whispered and closed its eyes. Sighing, he followed suit. He would have thought that sleep would be as hard to find as it usually was, but strangely enough he drifted off easily this time.

He woke, shivering. The dim light from the barred slit of a window had vanished. It was freezing in the tiny cell and his breath puffed out about his head, making him painfully aware of how fast he was losing body heat. Clenching his jaw to keep his teeth from chattering, he listened carefully. Finally he heard the slight noise of breath and creak of cold leather somewhere near.

"S'ashii," he whispered.

"A'ah vess, friend?" Its voice was no more than the barest thread of sound in the pitch-black room.

Shifting against the frigid stone at his back, he fought to keep the tremors out of his voice. "It's c-c-cold."

A puzzled silence followed his shaking words. Then he heard the *Altarin* moving stealthily towards him. "S'ashii, se tathan'na." it whispered, touching his hand with cool impersonal fingers. 'Na' was negative, he knew that much.

Then its hands were at his chest, pulling back his tattered jacket slowly. He almost tried to kill the tiny *Altarin* then and there, but controlled himself with an effort as it crawled carefully into his lap. Slowly he dared to close shaking arms

about the small body that was so close to his own. What the hell was it doing this for? It certainly wasn't large enough to warm him. It must be female, he decided, blushing in the darkness as his arm accidentally closed about its upper chest. His hand found a small lumping of flesh beneath ragged leather-bound armor that had to be a breast but it-she did not react. Wondering what to do now, he fought to keep himself still as the shaking of his limbs steadily got worse. It hurt to breathe and his throat was bone dry. It would be hell if he started coughing now.

The *Altarin* didn't move. The skin of her arms was cool but not cold to the touch. They were ridged with old scars and pockmarks that must have been bullet-wounds. He wondered how old she was. Frowning in the darkness as her body warmed in his arms, until finally he was warm enough to stop shivering, he swallowed hard.

"S'ashii, se na'aten kahleethess." A tiny, six-fingered hand rose to rest on his cold cheek and he covered it with his own wonderingly. It was warm. He wondered what *that* meant as he drifted off to sleep, arms wrapped securely around the *Altarin* in his lap.

<~>

### *Body Thief: Edgar Allen Poe*

Edgar Allen Poe was born in 1809. Both of his parents were actors. His mother died in 1812 and he was sent to live with a merchant in Richmond,

Virginia. He was sent to private schools in England, and later a school in Richmond. At 18, he went to Boston, published *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, enlisted in the Army, was bailed out two years later by his adopted father, John Allan. He went to West Point for a year, but was court-martialed for failure to follow military regulations and left. In 1831, he published his third volume of poems and moved to Baltimore, where he attempted to begin a literary career. He was an editor for the Richmond literary magazine *Southern Literary Messenger*. He married his cousin Virginia Clemm in 1836 and they moved to New York the following year. At some point, he moved to Philadelphia and served as an editor for two literary magazines there. His wife died in 1847 and he became notably mentally unstable, if he ever was truly sane in the first place. In his later life and until his death he enjoyed moderate popularity, but never to the extent he wished. Today his popularity lies mainly in academia and among gothic writers, such as Annie Rice (Leary).

His stories tend to be tightly written, with no wasted space. For example, in "The Oval Portrait," he first sets up the scene with a description of the shabbiness of the chateau, various other portraits and the half-delirious state of the narrator. Then he nails the coffin lid on, figuratively speaking, with a wonderfully fey description of the oval portrait and little over half a page quoted from the small volume found by the narrator in the same room as the portrait. Better scene setting I have yet to see elsewhere and still have yet to emulate properly.

My second excellent example of Poe would be "The Cask of the Amontillado". He sets the tone and tenor of the piece with scene, and character conversation. His care, even in having the main character Montressor give Fortunato plenty of chances to escape, but being doomed by his own drunken greed, is amazing and amusing in its own macabre way. Montressor even warns Fortunato with, among other things, his family motto. Whether he intends this as a warning or is poking fun at Fortunato, I am unsure. Either way, Fortunato has his chances to refuse and leave, but takes none of them.

This brings me to a question about my own story: which is better? The trap baited and left? Or the trap baited and the prey carefully guided, through misdirection and careful prompting? Which makes a better story? It depends on the author, obviously. But I prefer the carefully constructed trap, guide included. And Poe's is so carefully constructed that the prey's final words: "*For the love of God, Montressor!*" are the story's final death knell.

My third example involves Poe's story "Masque of the Red Death". A powerful sense of scenery and description set us up for the shockingly violent ending. Again, a trap. Although an implicit one instead of an obvious one. Another question occurs to me: is the implicit trap more powerful than the obvious one? In dealing with my *Body Thief* story, the obvious trap is seen first, but the implicit one is far more binding upon the main character. He has stolen before and the prospect of punishment does not faze him. However, the implication of his inability to escape the duty his captors will set for him is

stronger than any punishment to be meted out by law. The form that this inability takes is unimportant in this short story. We need only know that it is there, somewhere. Mysteriousness makes one far more wary than outright spoken warnings.

<~>

### *Body Thief*

He peered through the containment field at the seeming opal. It was huge—larger than any real Earth opal he had ever seen. *And didn't I steal the Challain Opal from right under the noses of the best security money could buy on Earth?* He smirked at the memory. *But this, this is better!*

Casually, he followed the tour guide around the wide room, examining the other artifacts. They were indeed interesting. A few large *Kalharni* swords with war legends attached were hung around the walls. Painted-Dancer artifacts of unknown use and making were scattered among them. Even an authentic Native American Kachina doll from Old Earth and a small hand-carved *pytha'nar* flute from Mars. The Kachina doll might be worth lifting, but for some reason his attention always returned to the opalescent stone in the center of the large room. Slightly smaller than both of his fists, its surface was glassy and pitted as if it had been in open space for awhile. Colors swirled hypnotically just under the milky

surface. The tag listed it as an unknown all across the board and offered speculation as to its origin. *The heart of a comet, indeed.* He snorted.

A quick glance at his wrist-computer showed no active security systems and no known warning devices. Odd for a place like this. He looked around carefully. Someone was watching him- the back of his neck itched. Turning, he met the gaze of a small woman with short-cropped, platinum colored hair. She smiled and his heart seemed to stop. Her eyes were gray, he mused. She walked around the clear column that held the stone and nodded to him.

"Hello." Her voice was soft, but somehow it carried in this larger room.

His mouth quirked up in a slight grin. "Hello, I was told that the Elves had all left long ago, lady. I see my teacher was mistaken."

She chuckled. "I'm not of the fair folk, friend. My name is Faylin."

"Tam," he clasped her hand and bowed. To his surprise, she tucked his arm in hers and led him after the tour-guide.

"Then walk with me Master Tam, if you please."

He followed, bemused. They wandered through the museum, as if in a daze. Hours, or perhaps it was days later, he found himself in a small beverage nook, a cup of steaming coffee before him.

Faylin smiled. "I'm sorry, but I had to get you away from there." Her voice was soft, but somehow he was able to hear her perfectly over the noise and bustle around them. Even the scratchy noises the Manti at the next table were making didn't distract him as it normally would have.



His eyebrows rose. "Why?"

"That stone- it- it called to you. I've never seen anything like it, even among the stone-shapers." Her gray eyes narrowed in worry.

"I don't understand-"

She sighed and shook her head. "This isn't the place to talk. Do you have a place to stay?"

"No, I hadn't gotten a room yet."

"Then come to mine, please? We must talk."

<~>

He listened carefully until he heard her breath slow across the room. Faylin was asleep. Slipping from under the couch blanket-netting, he carefully pulled his pack from the floor. She stirred and he froze, slowing his breathing until hers deepened again. Easing his pack on, he slipped out the door, glad that the corridors here were darkened to approximate standard Earth day and night. The door closed silently behind him.

The hall was empty and he walked down it slowly. When he hit the main hallways, they were brighter and somewhat crowded, even at this hour. Mostly spacers and aliens walked here, but there were a few security personnel in sight. He blended with them easily, just another spacer from Sol system or one of the other Human Stations. Ducking into the hall that led to the small museum, he watched carefully to make sure no-one had seen him.

Everything was calm, but the hair on the back of his neck stood on end. Having learned to trust that feeling even before his first heist, he looked around yet again. Nothing out of place. His wrist-comp also came up negative. Not even any light laser sensors or active/passive cameras were in the area. That alone was very odd.

The double doors at the end of the short hall seemed sinister and lonely now. Delicately shaded *limmel* wood from the *Kalhar* system looked darker without the cheery voice of the tour-guide and shadows of gawking tourists moving across it. He scoped the doors carefully. *Still* nothing. Three strides brought him close enough to it to breathe in the sweet scent. His computer detected nothing unusual on the other side of the doors or within them and he remembered no odd mechanisms on it either.

Testing them carefully, he found them open. Pulling the left hand one towards him, he froze, listening intently. Then opening it far enough for him to slip through, he eased it closed behind him. There was still no response from anything within or without.

Pausing, his eyes immediately found the stone in the center of the room. He walked towards it and examined the casing. Simple single-layered containment field. He grinned. *Easy as pie to break*. His static tool winked, signaling that the field was down. Pulling the stone up from its stand, he cradled it in his hands, turning it over and over. Quickly he settled it in his pack so that it would not rattle. Then he got the hell out of there.

Wandering casually towards the spacedocks, he frowned, wondering why he was still on edge. There was still no sign of anything gone wrong, but the hair on the back of his neck still stood on end as he sauntered down the hall. The Ship he had reserved a berth on was third on the second level and he boarded quietly, the Ship recognizing him by the intelligent plas-card he offered it and his handprint. He made his way to his assigned bunk and sealed himself in. Pulling his pack off, he turned the tiny bunk-light up and dumped the stone out onto the bunk next to him. It glowed even brighter now and he watched it in awe, hands framing it. Brighter and brighter it blazed, until it outshone even the bunk-lamp.

<~>

He groaned and tried to move. Blinking painfully at the brightness of the light above him, he tried again. A noise somewhere to his left made him freeze.

"I was afraid you would do that. I *tried* to warn you."

He mouthed her name. Now her voice was different, harder somehow, colder. He squinted and blinked until his eyes finally adjusted to the lights.

"What- happened?" He croaked, straining against the confines of the medbed.

"You are now a *Da'shin'e* host. Welcome to the Space Marines, *thief*," a second voice grated from the right and he started. He'd heard no-one else in the room- he was sure of that. A short, white-haired man stood there, leaning casually against the wall. His clothing was half space suit and half combat armor. All of it

was bright glaring red, from boots to thin, spidery headset and neck coif. Gold spots of paint gleamed at his shoulders.

"I don't understand-"

"That stone that you stole was a *Da'shin'e*. A very old *Da'shin'e*. We think it's only been in space for a few billion years. It chose you as its host." Faylin did something to a console out of his line of vision and the medbed released him. He sat up slowly, muscles protesting. Gaping, he almost flopped back onto the bed in shock. Faylin also wore the glaring red of a Space Marine. The blue starburst on the front of her space-suit armor stood out even more than the suit itself. He had never heard of that kind of marking on one of them before.

She smiled sadly. "We don't usually get our people this way. But in times of need, we've been known to make exceptions."

"But-"

"This is one of those times, *thief*. And you're the lucky man for the job." The second Space Marine grimaced. "We'll talk more later."

"But-!" His head spun.

"Too late, Master Tam." The other Space Marine sighed and set a neatly folded stack of red clothes beside him. Blunt fingered hands laid a pulsegun-belt on top of the pile and he left, growling: "Too damn late."

<~>

*DoomRiders, excerpt: Margaret Ball*

Since, to date, I can find no biographical information on Margaret Ball, I suspect this to be a pseudonym. On a side note, some of her other science-fiction and fantasy books are parody and satire, but obviously so. Her *Mathemagics*, and *Chicks in Chainmail* anthologies parody, among other things, the Texas school system, male preconception of woman who wear chainmail and who actually know how to swing a sword.

However, the book that I am using for my comparison is probably, at best, a parody of crossover stories. And at worst, it is a cliché ridden crossover story, intriguing characters aside.

*The Shadow Gate* brings us into the world of the Three Realms which is doomed to be taken over by the Durandine Monks, unless an escapee from their world can be found and brought back from our world in time to undo the damage she wrought in her own world. She is a volunteer at the New Age Psychic Research Center in Austin, Texas and happens to be an illegal alien. Through an amusing misunderstanding, she is thought to be the Lady Sybille, Queen and mage of Elven-kind. She is, however, the apprentice-mage who originally was tricked into helping the Lord Joffroi of Brittany in sapping the power of the Stones of Jura, the source of all magical power in the Three Realms. On these premises the story leaps from world to world, encountering the Wild Hunt, which the Durandine Monks have released in the world of the Three Realms and believe

they control. While the Wild Hunt is an interesting legend and a useful plot device for inducing horror, I haven't seen it or anything like it used as public transportation except in a few of Piers Anthony's *Xanth* novels, which are pun-ish to the extreme.

Several of the main characters hop between worlds as if it is nothing, and are chased by the Durandine Monks in both worlds at one point. While Andre Norton might be able to pull something like that off with impunity once or even twice, it seems an over-used plot device here, even though it is integral to the story itself.

Traditionally, crossover stories begin in one of two ways. The first way is in the victim's world of origin. The second method is to skip the whole transferal process and deal with what happens after. The rest may be dealt with further into the story, or not, at the author's choosing. Here, it is what happens after that concerns me. What would a normal, every-day person do if confronted with a sudden switch in worlds?

It is this question that has been dealt with in a variety of ways. From Stephan R. Donaldson's *Thomas Covenant* series; to Andre Norton's *Witch World* series and beyond- each showing us a different face of human reaction to newness.

<~>

*DoomRiders, excerpt*

He rolled over and pushed himself to his feet groggily. Shaking snow out of his clothes, he staggered to where Kale lay. The boy still breathed, thank god! Wrapping the thin body in his light jacket, he froze at the howl that drifted towards them on the wind.

He frowned. Where the hell was the car? They were in a small glade nestled among ancient snow-shrouded pines. The howl sounded again, closer, and above it he heard another sound. Chiming- *bells*? Laying Kale under the shelter of a giant pine, he looked around, then remembered the short sword Meme had given him. For some reason it still hung from his belt. He could have sworn he'd tossed it in the back seat. The bells jangled wildly, coming closer by the second. The yips and snarls of a pack of hunting dogs followed it. He slipped the sword from its sheath and pulled his bootknife from its hiding place and frowned, listening carefully. Perhaps the chase would bypass them-

A horse burst from the brush and bracken downhill from him and his heart sank. The rider was looking over his shoulder, some sort of bow drawn full back. He loosed it and one of the hounds went down with a yelp. The horse panted and blew as it lumbered across the clearing towards him. It was at the end of its endurance. The rider drew back again and another great black hound fell, a gray-fletched arrow in its throat. Ornate silver and blue-green armor covered the thin, boyish rider's torso and he turned in surprise as the horse nickered uneasily. He-

no *she* frowned at him, thin face framed by short shorn, ragged platinum hair and sharply pointed ears. What the *hell*-?

Three more hounds burst from the trees behind her and she turned, drawing the sword that rested at her shoulder with an ease that made him wince. He quickly turned his attention to the hounds, which were snarling about her horse. Oddly enough, they ignored him completely. One he downed by simply chopping its head off. The remaining two turned on him, one going for the throat with a quick leap. It howled in agony as it burst into flames and thudded into the snow, sizzling.

He blinked stupidly and somehow managed to cut down the last hound as it leapt at him. Then he ducked as something swung towards his head, rolling under the churning, nervous hooves of his attacker's horse. Coming up on the other side, he let whatever remained of his combat training take over. Shearing open the poor horse's belly, he blocked the black and gray clad rider's sword with his own on the back-swing as it dove towards his head. The horse thudded into the ground next to him and he almost gagged at the stench of horse guts and blood that spattered the snow. Dancing back, he slipped and fell in the snow bank again. The first rider finished the downed one off quickly with her sword and he gulped, retching. Then he remembered Kale. "Shit-" Foundering his way out, he shook snow out of his clothes a second time and began to shiver as snow dripped down his neck.

Another black and gray figure lunged at him and he drove his sword into the man's abdomen after knocking a long hunting blade from his hand. Sensei Barden



would have turned his back on him in shame if he'd seen the moves he was making, but evidently these folks had no idea what unarmed combat was, beyond fisticuffs or drunken boxing. He looked around quickly- the rider had downed the third hunter.

The short sword dangled from a strap about his wrist and he took out his handkerchief and began to clean the blade with snow almost automatically. No need to damage his only weapon by leaving it dirty when it might be needed again soon. Too bad he couldn't clean the blood from his clothes as easily. Kale bit his lip and looked, wide eyed at the carnage. The strange woman cleaned her weapon also, then checked over the hunters' corpses.

"Kale," he rasped. "You're awake-"

"Good thing too. Th'boy roasted one of th'hellhounds just before ye went berserk." He jumped at the oddly musical voice from the figure sifting through the dead man's belt-pouches.

"Da, what's going on?"

"I don't know, Kale," he ran a hand through his short grayed hair and stretched, joints protesting in the cold. At least he hadn't sprained anything. "I think we better get somewhere warm and then ask questions."

Kale gulped and nodded.

"Ye're right Human, we'd best na' stay here. The Laird o' th' Hunt will begin to wonder where his hounds be." She stood, tucking a small pouch into her belt.

He glared at the speaker, then shook his head tiredly, almost gagging again

at the stench that rose from the cooling corpses around them. "You're right."

She pulled a rough-spun wool square from her tired horse's saddlebags and when he didn't move to take it from her, draped it over his shoulders. "Here. Ye can use m'horse blanket, since th' boy has your cloak, odd though 'tis." She settled Kale carefully on the horse, handing him the dead rider's cloak to wrap himself in and walked to one side, glancing curiously at his leg brace. She led the horse upward. Will followed and finally caught up to them. Glad of his boots as they floundered through the at-times knee-high snow, he blew on his hands to warm them and tucked them into his armpits.

"Where are we going?" He growled, shivering under the rough blanket.

"To Celrith Malwe."

"That name means nothing to me." He struggled to keep the anger from his voice. It would do no good to frighten off the one native who seemed inclined to help them instead of kill them.

Those silvery eyes widened as she glanced at him over the horse's shaggy neck. "What be ye, that ye know not the Fey Laird's Keep? E'en th' slaves o't West know th' FeyMage."

"Not from around here," he mumbled.

"Ah. An'what be yer names?"

"Will Dwimmerlight. This is Kale, my son."

Again her eyes widened. "Odd names those. Mayhap th'FeyMage will be aible t'set things aright. I be Maiya Fleetfoot."

&lt;~&gt;

*Atealachaan Creation Story: Ursula K Le Guin*

Ursula K. Le Guin was born in 1929 in Berkeley, California and is currently still living. She was educated at Radcliffe College and earned a master's degree at Columbia University in 1952. She won a Fulbright fellowship for study in France where she met and married Charles Le Guin. She returned to the states with him to Macon, Georgia, where she taught French at Mercer University in 1964.

After she had written five unpublished novels, *Rocannon's World* was published, being the first of her Hainish cycle which was based upon Norse Odin myths. Other books in Hainish series include *Planet of Exile* (1966); *City of Illusions* (1967); *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), winner of the Nebula Award and the Hugo Award; *The Word for World Is Forest* (1972), winner of the Hugo Award; *The Dispossessed* (1974), winner of the Nebula Award and the Hugo Award; and *Four Ways to Forgiveness* (1995). The books in the trilogy Earthsea are as follows: *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1972) and *The Farthest Shore* (1972). Fourth and fifth books were published in that series: *Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea* (1990) and *The OtherWind* (2001). Her other works include *Always Coming Home* (1985), *Eye of the Heron* (1991), *Fish Soup* (1992), and the short story collections *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea*

(1994) and *Unlocking the Air* (1996), *Wonderful Alexander and the Catwings* (1994) and, interestingly enough, a collection of poems titled: *Going Out with Peacocks and Other Poems* (1994).

Her writing explores the shape of understanding of the human condition under fantastic circumstances, mirroring authors such as Jonathan Swift, Edgar Allan Poe, and H. G. Wells, all of which are also favorites of mine. She seems especially concerned with gender and gender fairness, both in utopian and dystopian form. Le Guin writes everything from science fiction to fantasy, children's literature, essays and criticism, and "mainstream" fiction. An excellently well-rounded writer, she manages to capture the mysteries of being human in an amazing simplicity of writing.

It is her simplicity of form that I admire and have attempted to incorporate into my own writings. For if you can say more with less, is this not a good thing? To get the point across in as few paragraphs as possible leaves less room for confusion, in my humble opinion. To do this well, however, is hard.

It is her *Earthsea* trilogy which interests me particularly and which I re-read every few years. The story of Ged, Tenar and Tehanu seems a simple one. From Ged's teaching at the magic isle of Roke, to his accidental creation of the *gebbeth*, to his flight from and eventual facing of the *gebbeth*, this first tale told in *A Wizard of Earthsea* covers 182 pages.

The second book, *The Tombs of Atuan*, follows Ged after his defeat of the *gebbeth* and in his quest for the Ring of Erreth Akbe, but it does so in a round-

about way, beginning with the tale of Tenar in her reign as priestess over the Tombs of Atuan. This tale of ancient evil and new beginnings covers a mere 142 pages.

The third book tells of Ged, now the Archmage of Roke, and his quest to restore magic to the mages of Earthsea. With his companion Arren, the young king-to-be, he manages just that, but at the price of his own magic. Only 197 pages carry this tale of deathless magic, dragons and the bravery of the human spirit.

Le Guin writes with purpose and philosophy, but also a stunning simplicity. Perhaps it is because she was writing for a young adult audience in these three books, but the same simplicity of form can be seen in her other works, works such as *The Word for World is Forest*.

This short story is more of a fable than a story, but it is the best that I can do to echo Le Guin's use of simplicity in storytelling. Creation stories have long fascinated me, including Le Guin's fragmented *Creation of Éa*:

*The making from the unmaking,  
The ending from the beginning,  
Who shall know surely?  
What we know is the doorway between them  
that we enter departing  
among all beings ever returning,  
the eldest, the doorkeeper, Segoy...  
Then from the foam bright Éa broke.*  
(Le Guin, Tehanu, 207)

<~>

*Atealachaan Creation Story:*

Out they were driven, into the dead, dry hills. Out they were driven, these ones who were Changed. Out they were driven, into the dust. Made by the hand of Man, yet not Men themselves. Cast out from the halls of Man, they wailed and died in the dusty desert. They died from hunger. They died from thirst. They died at each other's hands. And then, when their numbers grew thin, they wandered alone, seeking the deep dark places to hide.

One among them, after wandering for many years in the barren lands came upon a valley. But this valley was not empty, nor dusty, nor dead. In the center of this valley, there grew a tree.

Looking up into the huge branches, he wondered aloud how it had gotten so big in such an empty place.

"Look about my roots and in my branches and you will see why I have prospered here," the tree said in its' deep, earthy voice.

Yellow cat-eyes narrowed and the man who-was-not-a-man looked up into the branches. Creatures big and small chattered and sang there. Strange ants herded aphids among the leaves and huge bees hummed busily in and out of their hives in the great tree branches. A bright red squirrel dropped a nut at his feet, scolding. He looked at the roots of the tree. Tiny plants, the like of which he'd not seen before flourished there, poking up through carpet-like moss. Strange, brightly colored bugs wandered hither and thither through the plants.

"I do not understand," he said.

The tree sighed, leaves drifting down around him. "Sit beneath my branches for awhile and I will teach you." So the man who-was-not-a-man sat at the foot of the great tree. Many things he learned there and when he had learned much, the tree bade him go, whispering: "Gather your people together, for they cannot truly survive alone and scattered."

Out he went, into the dead hills, into the empty places, into the dust. Out he went, this man who-was-not-a-man, seeking. Out he went, preaching hope and peace. And where he went, change followed. Up sprang the great jeweled cities we know so well today, built among the ruins of what had gone before. The people prospered, each doing what they did best.

And thus, the great *Atealachaan* free-state arose from the outcast of the American Empire and the shattered remnant of what once was Southern America.

<~>

Bibliography:

Ball, Margaret (*Psued*). *The Shadow Gate*, Baen Books, 1991

Clark, Aurora. *Body Thief*. Online. Internet. 29 April 2002. Available

<http://www.angelfire.com/space/afclark/honors/thief.html>

----. *Angel of Memory*. Online. Internet. 29 April 2002. Available

<http://www.angelfire.com/space/afclark/honors/angel.html>

---. *Atealachaan Creation Story*. Online. Internet. 29 April 2002. Available

<http://www.angelfire.com/space/afclark/honors/atcreac.html>

---. *DoomRiders, Excerpt*. Online. Internet. 29 April 2002. Available

<http://www.angelfire.com/space/afclark/honors/doomr.html>

---. *Prisioner of the Mind, Excerpt*. Online. Internet. 29 April 2002. Available

<http://www.angelfire.com/space/afclark/honors/meeting.html>

---. *Be*. Online. Internet. 29 April 2002. Available

<http://www.angelfire.com/space/afclark/honors/be.html>



Gifford, James. *On RAH: A Survey of Heinlein Commentary and Criticism*.

Online. Internet. 5 March 2002.

<http://www.nitrosyncretic.com/rah/critics.html>

---. *The Robert A. Heinlein Frequently Asked Questions List*.: 26 May 2001.

Online. Internet. 5 March 2002

Heinlein, Robert A. *Have Spacesuit, Will Travel*, DelRay/Balantine, 2<sup>nd</sup>  
printing, 1978

---. *Starship Troopers*, Ace Books, 1987

---. *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, Berkley Books, 34<sup>th</sup> printing, 1984

Le Guin, Ursula K. *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Bantam Books, 1977

---. *The Tombs of Atuan*, Bantam Books, 1977

---. *The Farthest Shore*, Bantam Books, 1977

---. *Tehanu, The Last Book of Earthsea*. Bantam Books, 1991

"Le Guin, Ursula K.," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2001. 22

February 2002. Available

<http://encarta.msn.com/index/conciseindex/27/0279F000.htm?z=1&pg=2&br=1>

"Le Guin, Ursula K." Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999. Online. Encyclopedia. 22 February 2002. Available  
<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/litlinks/fiction/leguin.htm>

Leary, Lewis. "Edgar Allan Poe." *The New Family Encyclopedia*. 1982

Norton, Andre (Pseud). *Breed to Come*, Ace Books, 1973

---. *Flight in Yiktor*, Tor Books, 1987

---. *The Zero Stone*, Ace Books, 1968

Ejgierd, Macieg Z., Kepa, Greg. *Chronological Biography [of Andre Norton]*. 11 June 2001. Online. Internet. 22 February 2002.  
<http://www.andre-norton.org/anorton/anlf.shtml>

Ejgierd, Macieg Z. Biography of Andre Norton. 21 October 2000. Online.  
Internet. 24 February 2002. Available <http://www.andre-norton.org/anorton/anbio.shtml>

Patterson, Bill. *Robert A. Heinlein: A Biological Sketch*. Online. Internet. 5 March 2002. <http://www.nitrosyncretic.com/rah/rahbio.html>

---. The Heinlein Society: Robert A. Heinlein. 1 January 2001. Online. Internet. 23 February 2002. Available <http://www.heinleinsociety.org>

Poe, Edgar Allen. "The Oval Portrait." *Short Masterpieces: Stories from the World's Literature*. Ed. Goodman, Roger B. Bantam Books, 1961, 8<sup>th</sup> printing, 214-217.

---. "Cask of the Amontillado." *An Introduction to Literature*. Ed. Barnet, Berman and Burto. Little, Brown & Co, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. 96-101

---. "Masque of the Red Death." No date given. Online. Internet. 23 February 2002. Available <http://www.eapoe.org/works/tales/masquec.htm>

The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, Inc. 19 November 2001. Online. Internet. 22 February 2002. Available [www.eapoe.org](http://www.eapoe.org)

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*, Ballantine Books, 65<sup>th</sup> printing, 1977

---. *The Lord of the Rings*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Collector's Edition, 1987

"Tolkien, J. R. R." *Biography Resource Center*. Internet. 26 February, 2002.

[http://search.biography.com/print\\_record.pl?id=3469](http://search.biography.com/print_record.pl?id=3469)