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Turning to the "Darkside": Fanficition as a Training Tool for Aspiring Genre Fiction Authors

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TURNING TO THE 'DARKSIDE'

Using Science Fiction & Fantasy Fanfiction to Hone your Writing Skills

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WHAT IS FANFICTION?

- Stories written by fans of a particular movie, TV series, book, comic, or manga using the characters and/or settings of the original work
  - New adventures
  - Correcting "Mistakes"
  - Character Studies
- Participatory Culture (Henry Jenkins)

WHY IS IT THE 'DARKSIDE'?

- Fanfiction authors do not own the copyright to most of the characters and settings they are using.
  - Economic damage to the original owner
  - Tampers with the author's vision
  - Shows lack of originality
- Certain authors forbid fanfiction of their works

FANFICTION'S RESPONSE

- Respect author's wishes
- Disclaimers
  - Not the original creator/copyright holder
  - Not making ANY money from the activity
- Work from a different medium
- Self-Policing of content
  - Warnings
  - Age restricted sites

SO WHY WRITE FANFICTION?

- ❑ Readers –
  - Instant feedback
  - Builds confidence
- ❑ Challenges –
  - Try new things
  - Test your skills
- ❑ Passion –
  - Love the world and characters
  - Love the fandom/community

WHY SCIENCE FICTION OR FANTASY?

- ❑ It all started with Star Trek

  Or Arthur or Homer or Gilgamesh or . . .

- ❑ Generally largest & strongest fan base

- ❑ Greatest scope
  - Can work in any of the other genres
  - Can build your own "worldlet" within the original's environment
  - Can break laws of nature or current mores

WHAT CAN YOU LEARN?

Plot-Building--Given a set of characters and a setting:

- Can you make them do something new and interesting?
- Can you write with consistent pacing of the action?
- Can you limit your focus to those elements intrinsic to the plot?
- Can you tie up loose ends to your readers' satisfaction?
- Can you kill off characters?

WHAT CAN YOU LEARN?

Characterization—

- ❑ Can you keep the people in this world "in character"
  - --In conversation?
  - --In action?
  - --In introspection?
  - --Through growth and change?
- ❑ Do they live?

WHAT CAN YOU LEARN?

Characterization—

- ❑ Can you create interesting minor or major original characters?
  - --Description
  - --Back story
  - --Motivation
  - --Role
  - --Foibles
- ❑ Can you avoid writing a Mary Sue?

WHO OR WHAT IS MARY SUE?

- Mary Sue is a pejorative term used to describe a character that exhibits certain clichés
  - Portrayed in overly idealized ways
  - Lacked noteworthy or realistic flaws
  - Primarily functioned as wish-fulfillment fantasies for their authors
- Mary Sue Litmus Test (http://www.katfeete.net/writing/marysue.html)

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU LEARN?

- ❑ Writing sex scenes—or not
- ❑ World Building
- ❑ Working with an editor/beta reader
- ❑ Writing to 'specs'
  - Length
  - Style
- ❑ Creating catchy titles and summaries
- ❑ Discipline to finish stories/series

HOW TO GET STARTED?

- ❑ Find a fandom
  - ▪ Yahoo Groups
  - ▪ Fanfiction.net
  - ▪ Adultfanfiction.net
- ❑ Read what's there
  - ▪ Dreck happens
  - ▪ Fandoms/Sites w/mature authors
- ❑ Learn the rules

GETTING STARTED (CONT.)

- Find a beta reader
  - Knows the fandom
  - Knows the language
  - Work with them to set their role
- Start posting
  - Start close to canon/fanon
  - As reputation builds, can explore
- Cope with feedback
  - The good, the bad, and the nonexistent

SOME TERMS TO KNOW

- Canon – facts, timeline, background as established in the original work
- Fanon – "facts", etc. as established by the fandom
- Slash – a.k.a. Why is Captain Kirk kissing Mr. Spock?
- OTP – One True Pairing (see above)
- MPREG – It is SciFi/Fantasy, after all
- Flames/Flamewars

BUT I DON'T WANT TO WRITE FANFICTION

- Fiction Press (http://www.fictionpress.com)
  - Original Fiction branch of Fanfiction.net
- Online Writing Circles
  - myWriterscircle.com
  - Critters Workshop (SciFi/Fantasy) (http://www.critters.org)
  - Writer's Beat (http://www.writersbeat.com)
  - Critique Circle (http://www.critiquecircle.com)
  - Writing.com