

Starman Discussions

Volume 1: Selected Highlights
From Exchanges On The Message Board

(OTHERS WILL FOLLOW)

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Introduction

Yes, folks, we've been at it again! Just when you thought we couldn't release another volume of Starman-related material, we went and did exactly that. Don't panic, though: this isn't another Appendix volume, and it's nice and short – and covers slightly different ground.

So far, the various Appendix volumes that have been released talk about practically everything related to writing, printing, or illustrating the various Starman books. The volumes go into great depth (that's why they are hundreds of pages long) and cover practically everything that David Baumann, Mike Dodd and I talked about while writing the books. That, though, is their weakness: they don't even touch on messages we've exchanged with others.

That is what this document is all about: it focuses on the exchanges between the Starman Team and the rest of the world. Some of those discussions were quite interesting and shaped the future of the series, and others illustrated things about the books that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. At any rate, they do make interesting reading, especially for those who discovered the series long after these discussions took place.

David Baumann has written most of the letters you will find here; if anyone else wrote them it will be properly noted. The material here is by no means complete; it only scratches the surface of the hundreds of letters we've exchanged and leaves a lot of things out. You can consider it a good down payment, though, with possibly more to come in the future.

In the meantime, enjoy the book! If any of this strikes your fancy and you have an urge to comment, just surf over to our discussion group and post away. You'll be able to find a link to our current discussion location at: <http://www.starmanseries.com/contact.htm>

THE STARMAN BACKDROP: THEISM & ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

David Ethell has asked about the presuppositions or backdrop to the formation of the Starman universe, and wonders whether our occasional references to “millions of years” in the books assumes adherence to belief in some form of evolution, theistic or not. It is not an easy question to answer and I hope that this posting will not tax the patience of the readers. Before I share my response to David’s question, a brief review of how the Starman Team writes is in order.

Jon Cooper develops a plot outline and sends it to Mike Dodd and me. By email, we discuss it a bit and then bring the outline into an agreed form—usually not much different from Jon’s initial proposal. Mike frequently throws in amazing plot twists, “out of the box” suggestions, and scientific undergirding and rationale. (Mike has a wonderful gift of combining both book-solid scientific accuracy and a phenomenal imagination!)

From this outline I write the first draft of the text, chapter by chapter, and send each portion to Jon and Mike for their comments as soon as it is written. They make numerous suggestions; in the course of this process other readers associated with us (basically family and friends) also examine the draft and make comments and suggestions, many of which we take.

This is all by way of saying that the first time any “in depth” formation of the text gets done, it is done by me. (That’s why I’m making the initial response to David’s question.) Therefore, the primary, visible contours of the presuppositions behind the text come from me, although the final text is a decision by the three members of the Starman Team in consensus.

Regarding the weight of the creation/evolution controversy in the published Starman books, when I drafted a line referencing the passage of “millions of years,” one or two of the readers who go through the text as it is developing questioned whether this implies a commitment to a belief in evolution. In most such cases, the Team decided to alter the text to read something more general like “eons” or “ages.” It is not the intention of the Starman Team to take a strong position in our stories on the theory of evolution (theistic or not) or creationism and the various schools of these issues. We want the stories to be readable and acceptable to readers of various convictions on the matters without anyone feeling that his or her conscience or convictions are being dismissed.

In previous exchanges on this message board, we pointed out that the Starman series is not a scientific textbook—it is a story that we hope is based on the best of current scientific knowledge but which ventures plausibly into the realm of fiction. Similarly, the Starman series is not a theological treatise—it is a story that we hope is based on solid philosophical underpinnings but which ventures plausibly into the realm of fiction. We have made clear that all three Starman Team members are Christians, so our philosophical world-view is based on Christian theology; we’ve also made it clear that it is not our goal to use the Starman series as a sneaky means of proselytizing. We don’t hide our Christian conviction, but neither do we wave it around like a flag; we’re simply writing a story and drawing upon what we know best to do so.

I am the only one of the three who has made known his denominational affiliation. As an Episcopalian of the high church or Anglo-Catholic tradition, I am a Catholic—that means I hold the unchanging faith of the undivided Church whose essential tenets are expressed today in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and similar historic Churches whose roots go back unbroken to the time of the apostles. Having stated that, from here on, then, I am expressing only my own positions—I cannot speak for either Jon or Mike on this subject, other than to say that we discussed the question David asked as we were formulating the series and the three of us have agreed upon a fitting approach to the series. Jon and Mike, of course, are welcome to clarify or correct what I am posting.

When I write the Starman series, the backdrop from which I draw is my belief that all truth comes from God who is the Creator of all that is. Anything that can be shown and proven to be true, I acknowledge, whatever its immediate source, as having its ultimate source in God. Since $2+2=4$ everywhere in the Universe, even though it is not stated anywhere in the Bible I believe that this mathematical principle is an attribute of the natural order from creation and comes from God.

The conviction that all truth comes from God and that no provable truth, whatever its source, can really contradict the Bible, came early in the history of the Church. One of the first exponents of this position was Clement of Alexandria who died in the early third century. As a solidly orthodox Christian, he taught that the philosophies of the Greek culture did not need to be rejected utterly, but rather found their correction and fulfillment in Christianity. Around the turn of the twelfth century, Anselm of Canterbury wrote about “Faith Seeking Understanding”—that is, he taught that faith cannot be threatened by secular discoveries, but seeks to know more and understand better by observation of the natural world. In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas said much the same thing when the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and others were rediscovered in the Western world. Aquinas taught that there are many true things that can be learned from observation in the world, but that there is some knowledge that can come only by revelation from God. In essence, I think this means that he understood that science and religion are not adversaries, but partners in declaring and upholding truth—and that there is an Absolute nature to truth. Revelation is inherently logical and consistent with all other knowledge, but all other knowledge finds its fulfillment in what is revealed.

Although I have a Master’s Degree in theology, my undergraduate background (UCLA) is in Mathematics, with a leaning toward physics. I still read physics books for fun, especially the writings of Stephen Hawking. I do not see a conflict between science and faith. To state it briefly, I think that science can answer the questions How, When, What, and Where. Faith answers the bigger questions Who and especially Why. To put it another way, science learns only by empirical observation and measurement. Nothing in those endeavors gives any information about the “meaning” of what is observed and measured. Scientists who, for example, try to explain that they have shown that there is no need for God are talking about something of which they are ignorant. But when scientists speak about something they know—namely science—I listen.

When science suggests that the Universe is about 15 billion years old; that it may have begun in an instant of enormous energy; and that the building blocks of matter are assembled in certain ways that make life possible, I think that the evidence points that way and I accept these conclusions as likely without seeing any kind of contradiction with the teaching of the Bible. If later discoveries make better sense—such as when Einsteinian physics expanded upon Newtonian physics—I will accept these new discoveries. They are not matters of ultimate meaning or salvation—ultimate meaning only comes from God by revelation.

Regarding Darwin's theory of evolution—well, I really don't know much about it and I suspect that only a few truly know in detail what he hypothesized. I don't want to mirror scientists who declaim on matters faith, and pretend I have any authority on scientific matters when my specialty is theology. In the past, the Church made this error when it rejected the discoveries of Galileo and Copernicus. With that disclaimer, I'll go so far as to say that I don't think that Darwin suggested that human consciousness or the soul gradually developed from instinct or whatever awareness the higher animals may have. I am willing to be corrected by those who know Darwin better than I. Darwin himself stated his premise, I believe, as a "theory"—that is, an "educated guess"—willing to be corrected. All good scientists should do so. My understanding is that most scientists today recognize that there are many flaws and gaps in the theory. But whether or not Darwin said that human consciousness or the soul gradually developed from whatever awareness the higher animals may have, this is NOT what I believe.

In short—and FINALLY to answer David's question directly—I believe that scientists have made a convincing case for the age and structure of the Universe but (as most scientists themselves say) they haven't got it all right; I believe that all life was and is created by God, and especially that human beings were created by God—that there was no time when a humanoid animal like an ape was an ape one day and evolved on its own steam into an ensouled human being the next. I believe in the revelation through Jesus Christ that there is one God, who is an indivisible Trinity of Persons in one divine Nature; and that God the Son became fully human, whose perfect love, shown in his death and resurrection, opened the kingdom of heaven to those who were in exile through sin and death. I believe that God is the Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is, and that in the power of invincible love and joy he made the atoms and galaxies and everything in between; that he is the Giver of life, and fills all things while remaining separate from the Creation. I hold to every tenet of the Nicene Creed as affirmed in the fourth century by the undivided Church and traditionally interpreted straight through into the 21st century.

And from these convictions, with the support and general agreement of my partners Jon and Mike, I flesh out the world of the Starmen in a way that, I hope, is accessible and exciting to people of different convictions within Christianity, different religions, or none.

C. S. LEWIS and J. R. R. TOLKIEN

Here's what Lewis himself had to say about his science fiction trilogy. He wrote it in a letter to a friend after the publication of *Out of the Silent Planet*:

“You will be both grieved and amused to hear that out of about 60 reviews only 2 showed any knowledge that my idea of the fall of the Bent One was anything but an invention of my own. But if there only was someone with a richer talent and more leisure I think that this great ignorance might be a help to the evangelisation of England; any amount of theology can now be smuggled into people’s minds under cover of romance without their knowing it.”

Regarding The Lord of the Rings being Christian, J. R. R. Tolkien himself wrote (in his Letters), “Lord of the Rings is about God, and His sole right to divine honour.” Also, when Frodo “failed” at the crack of doom, Tolkien wrote, “The Other Power then took over: the Writer of the Story (by which I do not mean myself), ‘that one ever-present Person who is never absent and never named.’” “I am a Christian (which can be deduced from my stories)” “I actually intended [LOTR] to be consonant with Christian thought and belief.” And “The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision.. the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism.”

THE STARMEN’S MARTIAL ARTS TRAINING

- > *I really enjoyed reading LROM! There were many things that were*
- > *fantastic, but I’ll focus on just one aspect, here. I loved the fight scenes*
- > *because I am a first-year karate student and could actually identify several*
- > *of the techniques and how they flowed into each other. This leads me to two*
- > *questions.*
- >
- > *1. What kind of self-defense training do the Starmen receive? How does*
- > *this training compare to current martial arts training?*

The Starman Team hasn’t discussed this in detail, but we take it as a given that training at Starlight Academy includes rigorous physical education. Since martial arts training at its best is deeply holistic, this is the preferred course in phys ed at the Academy—especially for those who are Starmen material. Not every student will become a Starman (*Descent Into Europa*, page 78), and in one case a candidate who was qualified turned down the invitation (*The Runaway Asteroid*, page 183). However, those who DO become Starmen must be highly proficient in martial arts. Classical martial arts training sticks to its roots, but also easily adapts to the time and culture in which it takes place. Therefore, although the externals of training in Starlight Academy may be different from training today, I think that the internal side of the training will be little different.

- > *2. How has handheld energy ray weapons in the 22nd century impacted*
- > *self-defense techniques? Are energy ray guns inherently more accurate because*
- > *there is no recoil? Through training is it possible to toughen the body to*
- > *the effects of energy ray guns, at least against low, nonlethal settings?*

Good question. Not being a gun guy, I can only guess at the accuracy/recoil connection. I assume that accuracy would depend at least as much on technique and the skill of the shooter as on the

absence of recoil. Today's weapons, in skilled hands, can be quite accurate. As far as martial training, the body can be trained to absorb blows or other invasive techniques in a way that does not incapacitate the victim as much as those without training, and mental acuity and "single-mindedness" in the face of attack or danger are a normal part of classical martial arts training. These qualities would be present in the Starmen. Remember how Zip was able to escape from his attackers in *Assault On Mars* in spite of being wounded by a laser blast. He did not succumb until he was in the tunnels out of a position of risk. But check out his attitude and determination in that situation in *Assault On Mars*, pages 76-77, for example. Of course, as today, anyone who gets hit with a lethal weapon is going to come out on the short end, whether it's a large caliber bullet or a laser pulse.

RACE AND GENDER IN THE STARMAN SERIES

I think that as soon as race becomes an issue in just about ANYTHING—whether for or against a given race—the point's been lost. Anyone who wants to do so can claim that he or she has been discriminated against, and we realize that this can be a major factor in today's culture. But I think that the point isn't race, it's discrimination. In the world of the Starmen (like that of Star Trek), we are presenting a world that is BEYOND racism and BEYOND sexism. In the series book world, I think we are unique, though the matter of race in the future is occasionally addressed. "Blake Savage" (i.e. Hal Goodwin, author of the Rick Brants) in his single volume story, "Rip Foster Rides the Gray Planet," presents a character in the future who is one of only 17 remaining pure blooded Hawaiians. Sam Epstein, author of the Ken Holts, made it a point never to present a villain with a foreign-sounding name—though a number of his secondary heroes had such names.

As we have pointed out before, especially in the second Inter*Stellar, in the 22nd century, none of these things is an issue any more than feudalism is an issue today. It's no more than curious history. Just about no one in the world of the Starmen is able even to UNDERSTAND the question of why anyone would think that another person is inferior just because he or she is different.

We are presenting, as best we can, an "ideal" world. This is the main reason why the Collapse is built into the Starmen's world and is frequently referred to—it made it possible for the Starman Team to "recreate" the world as we wanted it for our series. The people of the late 21st century "came together" in the same way the people of the US and the wider world "came together" after the terrorist attacks and put aside the partisan issues that usually divide people. In the US it lasted a few months. In the Starmen's world, after the horrific worldwide trauma of the Collapse, we are presenting the change as being lasting. In short, we are not writing to address the problem of racism; we are writing as if it had been long solved and then forgotten. This is one of the main "messages" of the Starman series. In the Starman world, there is simply no such thing as racism or sexism.

We know, of course, that this is not the world of today, so people are going to raise the issues that have been raised; discussing them on the message board is precisely what the message board

is for. But it seems to me that any kids, or parents of kids, who will not read a book because its main characters are white has a much bigger problem than the Starman series can address. This is the kind of attitude that creates the very problem we are trying to overcome. In such a case, these kids are not being exposed to a series that presents the very world in which “people like them” are respected and included—and they don’t want to read the books just because the “people like them” are not number one?

The photos of the Starmen on the web site? They are only approximations of the Starmen’s appearance—our models for the characters and guidelines for future artists. People may be surprised as these actual guys’ backgrounds. “Zip Foster,” for example, lived his entire life up to college in rural Indonesia among native people, where his parents and three brothers were the only “whites” for a long way. As Jon Cooper has pointed out, the Starmen are generally presented as Caucasian for a reason that, basically, was beyond our control. Further, we have never specifically explained what “race” these guys belong to, other than human. We didn’t care. As the Starman series develops and other Starmen are brought into the story line, they will be just as representative of humanity as the rest of our characters have been. As we’ve indicated, a female Starman has already been introduced.

Advance notice: the Benefactors finally appear in *The Lost Race of Mars*. I expect that a lot of readers are going to be VERY surprised when they discover what race THESE people look like!—and they are presented as, in Zip’s words in LROM, “the kindest people we’ve ever heard of.” When one of the Benefactors explains their history to the Starmen, she says, “Usually we lived in peace, but in the far past, occasionally the kingdoms went to war with one another. In time we learned to live without conflict. We worked together and developed the science necessary for space flight, ...” And nobody in the Starmen’s world CARES what the Benefactors look like. The word “race” is used pretty frequently in the Starman series, especially in the fifth book—and it ALWAYS refers only to inhabitants of planets. In other words, in the Starman series, there is only the HUMAN race. We’ve presented our world like that from the beginning.

THE STARMEN’S PERSONALITIES

Jon Cooper put up a few polls on this site recently, one of which asks which Starman is the reader’s favorite. It is informative to me that three of the eight respondents to date checked “there’s a difference?”

It was stated by two or three of our earliest readers that the Starmen were not sufficiently differentiated in *Assault On Mars*. Since then, I have made an effort to distinguish between them better. Consider the following:

Zip Foster is presented in the “official” world of the Starmen as being analytical, tending toward being a bit anxious (note how often his brow is “furrowed”), and able to pull facts together and make a decision without losing the ability to follow a “hunch.” He has been shown several times as not responding to a joke, to show that he might be a bit too serious. He does have a deeply tender side, however, but it comes out only when he is with his family. He dearly loves his little

sister. Of the three, only Zip has been shown at home with his family. This was done as a means of showing this side of his personality, an essential but concealed part of how he acts when “on duty.” The only time (so far) we have seen these two sides of him come together is when he “lost control” for a moment at the time of the failure of the active shielding in *Journey to the Tenth Planet*. He tries hard to keep these two sides of himself separate, but cannot do it very well—hence the only time we’ve seen them joined was in a moment of weakness. Bringing them together as a strength lies in the future. Because of this, the budding romance with Kristina Bethany leaves him both excited and confused.

Joe Taylor is always ready to do his duty and do it well, but is too ready with a joke. His inclination toward humor might be a bit of a shield to protect some emotional vulnerability. He sometimes makes jokes at the wrong time. Where Zip protects his vulnerability with seriousness, Joe protects his with humor. Joe is the one who talks the most, but is the one who has revealed the least about himself. On rare occasion, he can be surprising.

Mark Seaton is the mystical one. He is always the one who notes first how beautiful a setting is. He is entranced with the splendor of the stars, and is the first to note that stark, thoroughly inhospitable environments like the terrain of the tenth planet can be stunningly beautiful. He doesn’t talk much, but he has a wry sense of humor which is rarely expressed; when it is, his humor is subtle. (Remember his remarks about the “Martian gophers” in *Assault On Mars*.) Mark listens well and does his job without complaint or mistake. When he does talk, it is usually to the point. He is somewhat self-effacing, but can be excitable. He is not emotionally vulnerable, but his emotions are outward directed—way outward. It is difficult to imagine him with a romantic interest.

To see how all three temperaments meld, consider the scene in *The Runaway Asteroid* when the Starmen tried to find the way out of the room in which they were sealed. (Pages 90-93)

Using logic, it was Zip who had the idea that there had to be a way out. Mark picked up on the idea right away. Joe didn’t contribute to that conversation, but went along with the suggestion. Joe, being too literal-minded, couldn’t figure out where the panel might be and just checked the wall over and over again. He finally urged Mark to check the floor while he kept going over the wall. It was Mark who found the panel. He immediately shared that knowledge with his partners; he has a strong sense of teamwork.

Joe needed a hint to see the panel. Once he saw it, he impulsively tried to open it by simple manipulation and failed. Mark, being open to new ideas, figured out how to open the hidden panel, using both logic and a mystical temperament. (The method he used, by the way, is an actual martial arts technique.)

Zip praised him for it, but didn’t waste much time doing so. He turned immediately to the next task. Joe then leaped in again, ready to manipulate the wires to open the door. Zip stopped him by using his analytical mind to assess whether there was danger in plunging ahead thoughtlessly.

In this single scene, then, we see Zip being a leader (not without flaws) and showing his analytical method of thinking. We see Mark using his heart as well as his mind. Joe is impulsive and somewhat easily frustrated. But ALL THREE were necessary to get the door open.

From Mary Doman

Dear Starmanwriter...

Thanks for taking the time to give us your excellent character sketches. One of the objections I always had to series books when I was a kid, was that the characters were pretty much interchangeable. The only differences between them seemed to be gender and/or physical characteristics. To me, they were just “talking heads “ meant to move the story along...there was no difference in how they thought or spoke or acted.

The Starmen are definite individuals, and I am enjoying getting to know each one of them as they reveal themselves through their thoughts and actions.

From David Baumann:

What is also interesting is how the three Starman interact with each other—reinforcing each other’s strengths while countering the excesses. Joe and Mark are there to buoy up Zip when he grows despondent. When Mark starts to wax mystically on some subject the other two can bring him back to reality. And the laid-back Joe is forced to stick to the business-at-hand by the intentness of his teammates. All of which contributes to their growing maturity - and seasoning - as individuals and as a team.

THE STARMEN’S TEARS

- > *Lurker for a few weeks, not much going on so, first post.*
- > *Ok, I’m not bashing ok, I’m just giving an opinion: The*
- > *Starmen cry too much. Once or twice in the whole series*
- > *at a meaningful spot maybe, but it seems to happen every*
- > *book, sometimes multiple times in the same book. Please.*

From Jon Cooper

Now that is something I hadn’t seen before! I went through the books and made a list of all the times one of the Starmen cry, and this is what I came up with:

ASSAULT ON MARS

- None

THE RUNAWAY ASTEROID:

- Zip, memories of the nuclear war, possible destruction of Earth imminent
- Mark, Vly's crystal display
- Joe, when the asteroid was about to hit Earth
- Zip, when meeting his sister again

JOURNEY TO THE TENTH PLANET:

- Zip, upon discovery of the radiation leak
- Zip, upon meeting Kristina
- Zip, after the mutinous fight on board the Starventure
- Joe, upon sight of the holograms of the Benefactor's ships on Nyx
- Mark, after seeing Zimbardo's madness

DESCENT INTO EUROPA:

- Joe, after his trick with the water balloon (definitely not tears of sadness though)
- Zip, after Mark discovered the octopi on Europa knew Titanian

THE LOST RACE OF MARS:

- Zip, when he learns that Ahmanya is Mars, and was destroyed by the Xenobots
- Zip, when he names Tharsos
- Mark, when he remembers that the Collapse caused the death of four billion Earth people

When they are all put together like that it does seem like quite a stack! It's obvious that the Starmen are not stoic, strong men who have no emotions at all but are actually fairly soft-hearted. It's an interesting question: how should Starmen behave? Should they pull themselves together, or not? Of the three, Zip seems to be the softest. Does anyone have any thoughts on this?

From Mary Doman

A few personal observations.

> *The Runaway Asteroid:*

> - *Zip, memories of the nuclear war, possible destruction of Earth imminent*

My Dad STILL cries occasionally over guys that he saw killed or lost during WWII, and that was 50+ years ago...he cried then, too, and he's no wuss. So do a lot of the vets from the "greatest generation" and Vietnam and Korea and the Gulf. I think Zip had a good reason to cry here.

> - *Mark, Vly's crystal display*

Something of this magnitude and beauty would bring tears to ANYONE who had an ounce of feeling!

> - *Joe, when the asteroid was about to hit Earth*

If having your planet about to be destroyed doesn't bring tears, what does it take?!

> - *Zip, when meeting his sister again*

Watch military guys who come back from a tour of duty, peacetime or war, or who come back from being POWs. PLENTY of tears!

> *Journey to the Tenth Planet:*

> - *Zip, upon discovery of the radiation leak*

Remember Star Trek's "Wrath of Khan"...Kirk totally lost it when he knew Spock was going to die!

> - *Zip, upon meeting Kristina*

So maybe Zip has the soul of an artist...is that unheard of in a warrior?

> - *Zip, after the mutinous fight on board the Starventure*

Tears under duress...ever seen any of the documentaries about guys in WWII or Vietnam. Yup, tears!

> - *Joe, upon sight of the holograms of the Benefactor's ships on Nyx*

"Close Encounters of the Third Kind"...remember the reactions of the folks on Devil's Mountain to their first view of the "mothership"?

> - *Mark, after seeing Zimbardo's madness*

Tears of compassion, and probably fear.

> *Descent Into Europa:*

> - *Joe, after his trick with the water balloon (definitely not tears of sadness though)*

Brings back memories of some DARN good practical jokes at college...and later (like last night from my sis!).

> - *Zip, after Mark discovered the octopi on Europa knew Titanian*

Zip is solving one of the greatest puzzles of the Solar System, reaching deep into the collective memory of the human race and its longings...ever cry at a movie, even though you knew it wasn't real, because it touched something personal or "human"?

> *The Lost Race of Mars:*

> - *Zip, twice and Mark, once (I can't tell you why, of course!)*

As part of the reading group, I can tell you it seems justified to me.

> *When they are all put together like that it does seem like quite a stack! It's obvious that the Starmen are not stoic, strong men who have no emotions at all but are actually fairly soft-hearted.*

Do we want unfeeling, uncaring “robots” out there in space...we have them...they're called Xenobots! I wouldn't give 20 cents for a warrior without caring and feeling (heck, in the second “Terminator” movie, the big draw was that the Terminator “grew” human).

> *It's an interesting question: how should Starmen behave? Should they pull themselves together, or not? Of the three, Zip seems to be the softest. Does anyone have any thoughts on this?*

They're together when it counts, right? What more can we ask? I think the 50s style of two-dimensional characters who existed only to serve the mystery is frankly, well....BORING! Give me an “Alan Alda” type, any day!

From David Baumann

> > *The Starmen cry too much. Once or twice in the whole series at a meaningful spot maybe, but it seems to happen every book, sometimes multiple times in the same book. Please.*

[Jon]

> *Now that is something I hadn't seen before! I went through the books and made a list of all the times one of the Starmen cry, and this is what I came up with...*

It seems to me that one other person did mention this a while back, but I appreciate the comment and am impressed that Jon did the research and surprised at the result. It does make quite a list!

The tearing-up scenes are not part of Jon's summaries, so I plead 100% blame/credit for this part of the Starman series. First off, believe me that I have no intention of creating Alan Alda-type characters!! My intention was show that the Starmen do have emotions and can express them without compromising their manhood—I cannot improve on Mary Doman's response, other than to emphasize that in the right circumstances strong men can (and should) express emotions, including those that call for tears. In none of those scenes do any of the Starmen “lose control” except when Zip is taken by surprise at the radiation scene in *Journey to the Tenth Planet* and his discovery of the history of Ahmanya in *The Lost Race of Mars*. In every other reference, the Starmen show emotion, but it is brief and controlled.

I intend to show that the Starmen are believable as fully human characters. In the series, they evidence a variety of emotions such as joy, excitement, apprehension that sometimes even crosses the border into fear, frustration, depression, and anger. (Allen Foster, Zip's father really brought this out in *Journey to the Tenth Planet*.)

I intentionally created the character of Kathy Foster so that Zip, who in his role as Starman leader is mostly analytical and decisive, could show his tender side. She is younger than Zip by ten years so that "sibling rivalry" would not enter into their relationship. With a child he can show tenderness and love without feeling vulnerable. (With Kristina Bethany he is awkward.) I can't think of any other way in which the lead character could "let his soft side out" than to express love to a child. Kathy is the symbol for Zip's family and, more symbolically, for the family life he doesn't have and can't have as a Starman on duty.

Although in the 1950s the philosophy of "real men don't cry" was common, I personally believe that this is unhealthy. The Starman series is willing to break new ground when it seems good to do so, and I think that this is one of those situations—but if they are coming across as Alan Aldas, then I haven't done it well. I've no intention of presenting them as softies. The Starmen should be realistically but idealistically masculine. They should be strong, dependable, honest and honorable, capable, courageous, and other things that series book heroes should be—but also flawed. They don't solve all their problems alone, they make mistakes and errors in judgment. They should be fully men. To my way of thinking, real men are strong and gentle, dependable and tender, just and compassionate. I try to present the Starmen as heading in that direction.

In *The Lost Race of Mars*, I can tell you that there are three fight scenes in the book (there are only two in the previous four books together!!), and these fights scenes are detailed and action packed!

In the fourth short story, "A Matter of Time," a woman takes out three big guys all by herself. (I don't think the men cry when they hit the deck, but I could write that part in.)

Finally, in *Doomsday Horizon* there is only one instance of a Starman getting tears in his eyes, and it is not Zip.

From The Dot

- > *The Starmen should be*
- > *realistically but idealistically masculine. They should be strong,*
- > *dependable, honest and honorable, capable, courageous, and other*
- > *things that series book heroes should be—but also flawed. They*
- > *don't solve all their problems alone, they make mistakes and errors*
- > *in judgment.*

Thank you for putting the "but also flawed." in. I have read quite a few G. A. Henty books and became disgusted with the perfection of the main characters (that and the fact that they were

almost cookie cutter plots . . .). Aside from the crying ;) I think they have been portrayed fairly realistically.

GLENN P.

> *Aside from the crying ;) I think [the Starman] have been portrayed fairly realistically.*

I agree. Although this is still something that only the authors can answer, one thing they need to consider, if “realism” is their goal, is: “How often do REAL people cry?” I think you’d have to agree that while occasions for tears are not unknown, they are rather uncommon in real life.

From David Baumann:

It should be pointed out that the Starman don’t really cry—they “tear up” or their eyes glisten for a moment. That’s not the same thing as having tears pour down your face while you sob. As my wife points out, “tearing up” means having feelings that you are trying to control—this is what I intended in writing those scenes, and it is a rather common masculine characteristic, whether the feelings are those that produce tears or other feelings not associated with tears.

Keep in mind also that for the Starman, “real life” means being in situations that are very emotionally demanding—much more than what ordinary folks experience—so they are likely to sample the palette of feelings more than most. In *The Lost Race of Mars* there are several scenes that, in my opinion, have enormous emotional impact that few people are ever likely to encounter.

SCIENTIFIC PLAUSIBILITY IN THE STARMAN SERIES

The Starman series has many, many small tributes in it. For example, in *Descent Into Europa* there is a line that reads, “the darkness enveloped them like an invisible enemy.” This, as I hope is obvious, is a tribute to Ken Holt (see book 14). Some tributes are blatant, others very subtle. We do this with our corporate tongue somewhat in cheek to have fun, but mostly to show that we know that the Starman series rests on the strengths of its predecessors.

At the same time, the Starman Team does not hesitate to break new ground when it wants to do so. There are many things we have done for the first time, to the best of our knowledge, in the series book genre.

The recent excellent exchanges over science, etc. have been most helpful and enlightening. The Team was not aware of all of the scientific inaccuracies, implausibilities, and impossibilities, but we were aware of many of them. We are trying, deliberately, to walk the line between scientific accuracy and telling a story—and not just telling any story, but telling a story THE WAY STORIES FELT IN THE 1950s. We WANT the stories to feel like the fifties, but with the science of the early 21st century. This means on the one hand a ridiculously-heavily packed

asteroid belt, but also computer technology to traverse it. We take the science seriously, but do not feel bound by strict accuracy; our errors will sometimes be deliberate and sometimes not, but we try to make sure that they will never be the result of stupidity or carelessness.

Our philosophy of writing and our methodology are really rather complex, now that I think about it, and consistent. After having set that as our background, we really do just press the accelerator into the carburetor! (Thanks, Tom!! You're such a neat guy!)

We also hypothesized the Collapse in the mid-21st century to serve several purposes: one purpose was to provide us with a kind of "escape hatch" from having to satisfy a lot of assumptions of our own time. We could just assume, when we wanted to, that 22nd society had changed enormously because of the Collapse. That frees us from having to use the current terminology for designating asteroids, for example, or following the projected train of discovery of Martian probes.

We accept the recent hypothesis that there is water on Mars in the northern hemisphere just under the surface, but add to that the preposterous notion that there was a primitive people who lived there. We suggest the completely implausible notion of a solid hologram, but leave that to "future science." We try really hard to avoid the scenario of "science explains all via a deus ex machine," but also leave just enough mystery of what a very advanced race like the Benefactors could do.

Personally, I think that our scientific foundation and plausibility are just below the standard set in Rick Brant—whose science was one generation ahead of its time and not a century and a half, and whose author (unlike the Starman Team) was a NASA scientist. I am eager to be corrected, but I think we are more realistic than Tom Corbett (in many ways, not least because we are fifty years later than he in the amount of scientific knowledge we have to draw from), Dig Allen, and certainly Tom Swift Jr.

If we put TOO much attention to scientific accuracy, we will not have enough mystery left to work with if we want to write an exciting story. The scientific commentary in the past day or two, had we known about all the issues that have been raised, would certainly have changed the way we wrote the existing books. (For example, one fan, Dan Henton, is a Ph.D. chemist, who provided for us the vision of methane rain and snow on Titan; without his input the scene would have been very different and less convincing.) We learn as we write. Mike Dodd, who is our science advisor as well as plot-twister, is an amateur—yet extremely knowledgeable in the fields upon which we draw.

In short, when we create our stories we draw on three tools: the anchor of realistic science, the sail of imagination, and the rudder of our message. If any one of these takes over or gets out of balance, the ship won't "go."

OVERALL, all our readers should know that we are NOT really writing a science-based series. The science is often left deliberately nebulous (for example, what we are doing with artificial gravity) so that we don't get too anchored with scientific detail. The series is really about RELATIONSHIPS and CHOICES in the context of the eternal, mythic battle between LIGHT

AND DARKNESS. The images, the characters, the plots, the unfolding of each volume and the gradual revelation of the entire saga are all under THAT top priority, in which the Xenobots and Benefactors are the background combatants.

This theme or message was focused, for example, in Lurton Zimbaro who always chose darkness; in his five underlings in *Journey to the Tenth Planet* who chose darkness until the last minute; and in Gene Newman, who chose light after darkness (his name is "Eugene"—Latin for "new beginning"—and whose last name "Newman"—New Man—was not revealed until his encounter with the good guys). The theme is now unfolding in the narrative of Robert Nolan—watch what happens to him! —for he is a "sleeper" whose tale (envisioned by the Team three books ago) suddenly becomes dramatically critical in *Descent Into Europa!*

I hope that I will be able to finish writing the first draft of *Descent Into Europa* by the end of the year. It is about two-thirds finished now. Then it will have to be read by others and then rewritten. Then it will go to the publisher. As soon as the manuscript leaves my hands, others will take over the production of the book and I will begin writing the fifth book. (There are, in fact, several scenes already written—parts of this book are a year and a half old.) Jon Cooper's summary alone is half as long as *Assault On Mars*. THIS BOOK CARRIES OUR GREATEST CHALLENGE AND EXCITEMENT! We have been waiting TWO YEARS to put this one together. It will tie up all loose ends, resolve all sub-plots, and solve all mysteries. We consider the first five books the real Introduction to the Starman series. Once the Starman pentology has been produced, the REAL heart of the series can get launched.

SENSE OF PLACE AND PLACE OF THE SENSES

From Mark McSherry

One of the strengths of the Starman books—in my humble opinion—is the sense of place as well as predicament in the telling of the stories. The Starman Team has enough confidence in their work to take time to leaven the plotting with descriptive accounts of both locale and environment. And, by drawing on all five of the reader's senses while doing so, enriches the tale by adding a depth that lingers in the memory long after the telling.

I knew the Series could be something special while reading AOM. The trek across the Martian landscape to Eagle City, which takes up the middle portion of the book, is exciting in and of itself. But the journey, especially after meeting up with Jogren, takes on a leisurely, almost lyrical quality as the earthmen land-sail across a snowy plain, then work their way on foot through the maze of the mud caves, till finally kayaking the Martian Sea. It is writing such as this, and there are other examples throughout the entire series, that transcends the boys'-sf-adventure series genre that the Team seeks to emulate and pay homage to. It is a style that could almost be called Tolkienesque. Likewise, as an example in *The Lost Race of Mars*, the exotic setting of the villain's desert refuge is visualized in a manner resembling Middle-Earth locales imagined by that inimitable don.

From Jon Cooper

Thank you! Your review of *The Lost Race of Mars* was also very thorough; I really enjoyed reading it. I haven't had a lot of time to post on this board recently thanks to all the work I've been doing (this week and last week are probably the busiest weeks I've had this year) but I have been paying attention. Thanks for taking the time to let us know what you thought of LROM: it is just amazing what we learn from these reviews. Hearing our reader's comments really does help us write these books: among other things, they help us see our stories in ways we hadn't seen them before. I have to give David Baumann the credit for the Tolkienesque quality of the Starman books. David is the one that writes those descriptions and that thinks them up in the first place: they're not in the summaries. David adds dinners and peaceful scenes and reminisces and other things of that nature to the books, and it definitely enhances them; the conversation you refer to, including the entire location it takes place at, was David's idea. This is why it takes all three of us to write the Starman Series. Without David, the books wouldn't have those Tolkienesque scenes. Without me, a lot of the plot and excitement wouldn't be there—that's the sort of thing I tend to add. Without Mike, the books would be much more ordinary; there would be (among other things) no Xenobots and no Benefactors. I know books aren't usually written by three people, but the Starman Series really does take the three of us, and I think it's much better because of it.

From David Baumann

Thanks, Mark, for your thoughtful and insightful comments. The fact that you found it "Tolkienesque" is highly gratifying, since JRRT is my favorite author, and I believe that his saga is in a class of its own, above all other fiction.

- > *by drawing on all five of the reader's senses while doing so,*
- > *enriches the tale by adding a depth that lingers in the memory*
- > *long after the telling.*

You're the first reader to mention this fact, but it is indeed deliberate. I think that reading should be sensual (in the best sense of the word)—that is, it must appeal to all five of the senses. The reader should be able to feel cold or warmth or the walls pressing in, taste the food, smell the smoke, hear the sudden clap of thunder, see the sunlight, etc. I think a story should be a "full immersion" experience for the reader.

- > *The trek across the Martian landscape to Eagle City, which takes*
- > *up the middle portion of the book, is exciting in and of itself.*

As we've pointed out before, our series includes an innumerable amount of references or connections with previous series. Some are very subtle and (unfortunately) we haven't even kept track of them all. The trek was intended to be reminiscent of the trek Tom Corbett and friends made on the red planet in *Stand By For Mars!*—my personal favorite scene in the eight Tom Corbett books.

- > *It is writing such as this, and there are other examples throughout*
- > *the entire series, that transcends the boys'-sf-adventure series genre*
- > *that the Team seeks to emulate and pay homage to.*

I'm glad you see it that way. It's not intended by any means to be plagiarism, but rather building on, or perhaps building with, the abundant material that exists in the classic books. With that material and much of our own stuff, we want to create something that feels familiar but is quite new.

THE FAILURES OF THE STARMEN, ESPECIALLY ZIP FOSTER

From Neil Lindholm

Well Jon, I finished the book today. I dislike criticism, especially when the object being criticized is a labour of love but hey, we are all friends here, right? :) So here goes.

I hate to say it but the book did not improve upon a second read. I followed the story better the second time as I had no clue what was going on during my first read. Not too exciting and Heinlein did it better. KIDDING! Anyway, what really turned me off the book was the personalities of the characters. The Starmen are an elite force, handpicked from the best the Earth has to offer. Why are they such crybabies? It starts off with Zip's collapse during the emergency. When his skill is needed the most, he gives up and becomes a liability to his teammates. Why would they ever trust him again in a stressful situation if he just gives up? While there is a disaster going on, he just sits there and sobs.

The scene with Allen Foster was pointless. What was he trying to get across? It serves no purpose other than shock value.

I found the initial scene with Kristina somewhat offensive. When I meet someone in a wheelchair, I don't start crying or asking them what happened. It is none of my business. I have a friend in a wheelchair and the last thing he would want is pity or someone crying over his condition. The scene reinforced what an emotional wreck Zip is.

When the crewman insults Zip a while later, does he assert his command and put a halt to it? Nope, he starts to cry again. He needs the captain to bail him out. As a leader, he would not be trusted.

It goes on and on. When Zip is not bawling, Joe is crying over an alien ship and Mark is crying over Zimbardo. Zip's emotional instability seemed to be contagious. Why would Zimbardo, a towering presence and natural leader, totally lose it in captivity while his fellow pirates come out if the ordeal more or less unscathed? It doesn't match his previous personality.

The scaring of the Xenobots by means of holograms didn't ring true as well. This is an advanced race, but even though their rays travel through their visual enemies and nothing they do can stop them or their ships, they still don't realize that they are attacking holograms? If I shot at someone and the laser beam went right through them, I would be suspicious.

To be honest, not a very enjoyable read which didn't improve the second time. I realize that this book is an anomaly as the other books in the series are great. I hope this starts a discussion about the merits of this book as many of the readers must have had a different take on this volume. Or maybe not.

From Jon Cooper

Neil,

- > *Well Jon, I finished the book today. I dislike criticism,*
- > *especially when the object being criticized is a labour*
- > *of love but hey, we are all friends here, right? :) So*
- > *here goes.*

Right! No problem at all. It's good to get more feedback! We like a good, solid, honest response. Thanks for the review, Neil!

- > *I hate to say it but the book did not improve upon a second*
- > *read...*

I'm not too surprised! A lot of your objections goes back to the emotional nature of the Starmen: we see these breakdowns as signs of characters who are growing. The Starmen, as you noted, have fewer of these as times goes by and in book six they have none at all, even though had the events that happened to them in book six happened around the time of book three, they would all have had severe nervous breakdowns. I imagine this is mostly a matter of opinion here.

- > *The scene with Allen Foster was pointless. What was he trying to get*
- > *across? It serves no purpose other than shock value.*

This I can disagree with! It wasn't pointless. To quote from Starman Appendix volume 5:

"I've given some thought to your response to Neil Lindholm when he said that he couldn't get into JTP and that that the failure of the active shielding was just tacked on. You noted that the scene was necessary to bring about the collapse of Robert Nolan, which would be a major theme in DIE. The failure of the active shielding was also necessary for other parts of the plot: the Starmen had to land on Titan, thereby meeting Kristina which led to their being shown the base the Benefactors had made when they delivered the Titanians to their new home. From that they learned the history of the Titanians, and saw the 3-moon logo again. Seeing the 3-moon logo changed their perception about many things, and prepared their way for the landing on Nyx and exploration of the abandoned base there, and eventually set the stage for the entire story of DIE. If the failure of the

active shielding hadn't happened, none of these other things would have taken place either. They would have seen the 3-moon logo on Nyx, but its significance would have escaped them. They needed to know that the Benefactors were the people who brought the Titanians to our Solar System and that they were the people behind the 3-moon logo. For these reasons the failure of the active shielding was absolutely essential to the plot, both for JTP as well as DIE and eventually LROM."

As David said, the whole bit with the active shielding was necessary to push Robert Nolan over the edge. When the shielding failed that was bad enough, but what really did him in was when Allen Foster went on national TV and humiliated him. Nolan was not a very solid character: he had lived his life in Richard Starlight's shadow, and this was his big chance to get ahead - and not only did it fail, but Allen Foster - a famous hero - really let him have it. This left him open for Beowulf Denn to lead him astray in book four, and book four is a result of this. Without the Allen Foster scene Nolan would not have gone over the edge. To quote from Starman Appendix Vol 2:

"Robert Nolan's besetting sin would come from always being in Richard's shadow, no matter the reality of his own success and wealth-hence, jealousy and envy. Addressed properly, that would lead him to growth in charity and true rejoicing in his own impressive achievements and Richard's with equal joy. But if he gives in to the temptation, it would lead, as it does in DIE, to treachery, deceit, and smoldering secret anger and hatred. Nolan wants control as a way of making himself "feel good about himself." That's why he blew up, even at the President, in TRA. When his objection wasn't followed he felt personally rejected and humiliated, especially when he was later proven wrong. Then he tried to make up for it with an apology and the generous act of donating the decoy freighters. That helped him a lot to move in the right direction. Then his REALLY BIG PLOY for fame and FINALLY COMING OUT ON TOP AND LOOKING GOOD was the active shielding in TRA-his own personal invention. When that failed so publicly and when the public was already against him, he was tottering on the edge of the abyss. Then when Allen Foster blew his stack on live, public television, Robert collapsed. He was ripe for the little nudge over the edge from Beowulf Denn. That's why Denn's words summarized ALL OF THESE THINGS, twisted the truth about Richard Starlight, and offered the ANSWER to Nolan's deepest fears and angers: power, supremacy over Richard, revenge, and a way to look good publicly, all at the same time. Nolan's decision to choose evil was an easy one at that point-but a decision he would never have made at any other time. Beowulf Denn's timing and method were perfect."

Is it wrenching? Yes, it is, and I even remember objecting to David about this. Here's what he said (a quote from Starman Appendix vol 1):

"Well, keep in mind that that scene was SUPPOSED to be wrenching. It has to cause the collapse of Robert Nolan, which is the main reason it's in there. It also indicates the results of radiation poisoning, which intensifies and focuses many other scenes, such as David's emotional outburst on the ship, his reaction to Mike Saunders' accusation after they leave Titan, Kathy's sobbing out her

prayer, etc. I think the intensity is just what we need. It's placed in the book to be after David's outburst on the Starventure and before his reaction to Saunders' accusation."

I understand that you object to it, but can you understand why it is there and why we thought it is necessary? It was a critical link in the chain that pushed Robert Nolan over the edge.

- > *I found the initial scene with Kristina somewhat offensive...*
- > *The scene reinforced what an emotional wreck Zip is.*

Zip was pretty fragile emotionally, but as you noticed, that changed as time went on. We're trying to show a character slowly growing: he's got flaws and he's got problems, but they are gradually disappearing. By the way, we did run that scene by Kristi (the person Kristina is based on) and she had no objections. She thought it was fine, and so we went with it.

- > *Why would Zimbardo, a towering presence and*
- > *natural leader, totally lose it in captivity*
- > *while his fellow pirates some out if the ordeal*
- > *more or less unscathed? It doesn't match his*
- > *previous personality.*

This is because he had already lost it earlier: he went over the edge in TRA when he decided to throw the asteroid at Earth in an attempt at killing everyone just before he abandoned it. From there it was just a downhill slide as evil ate away at him. Once again, to quote from Starman Appendix vol. 5:

"Our entire premise for Lurton Zimbardo is that he was demon possessed. In drawing his character, I researched and followed the classic symptoms very closely in describing his condition and progression into evil throughout the 3 books. His "journey" into evil and the followers he controlled are very, eerily similar to that of Osama BL. If this premise is correct, then an all-out war is the desired goal of such evil possessed persons. In TRA, when the followers discerned LZ's true bent toward evil, they were shaken-some to repentance (Gene), most to fear and looking out for "number one" (the smugglers and other pirates), and a few to further fanatical obedience (the last five). When Zimbardo's final hinges came unglued, then the last five turned back. It was all very carefully drawn up."

(I know, I know, volume 5 hasn't been released yet. I'm still working on it; we'll try to release it before too long.) So that is what happened to Zimbardo, and that is why he acted as he did. Evil persons, in our opinion, do not stay at a constant level: they either grow and reform or they become more evil and depraved until nothing is left of them.

- > *they still don't realize that they are attacking holograms? If I*
- > *shot at someone and the laser beam went right through them, I would be*
- > *suspicious.*

The idea was that these were "solid" holograms - Star Trek style. I read book three so long ago that I don't remember if we mentioned this or not. Didn't one of the characters run into a holographic tree? Maybe I was just imagining this.

- > *I hope this starts a discussion about the merits of*
- > *this book as many of the readers must have had a different*
- > *take on this volume. Or maybe not.*

So do I! You bring up some great issues. To be honest, few people have let us know what they think of this volume; I don't really know what the "average" opinion is. A good discussion of this book - or the topics it brings up - would be a good thing.

You can also see why I wanted to release the various volumes of the Starman Appendix! It gives a glimpse into our thought processes, and why we included the scenes that we did, and what themes we were trying to work out. It can be fairly interesting.

From David Baumann:

Great comments, Neil, and really very much appreciated. Yes, really! I think that Jon has made some good responses to the points you raised, so I will just add a couple of other observations.

Yes, the holograms in JTP were solid. The Xenobots did not see their laser beams pass through them; what they saw was that their lasers had no effect. This was intended to frighten them. Keep in mind, as is revealed in LROM (two books later), that the Xenobots are deeply afraid of the Benefactors, and this event was a "new" one in their experience in their battle against their "ancient enemy." What the holograms could NOT do was fire back. The Benefactors' technology could create holograms more advanced than what we can create, and there is evidence for this in TRA (the hologram room) and JTP (another hologram room, introduced just before the Xenobot attack). Further references are found in LROM, and in Doomsday Horizon you will find still further references to the Ahmanyans' ability to use light in this fashion. (This ability also appears in the final segment of *The Lost Tomorrow*.) The Ahmanyans are, in fact, masters of light.

Regarding Zimbardo's "demon possession": one doesn't have to believe in it for the story to make sense. A reader who thinks that demon possession is totally idiotic and a medieval superstition can still enjoy the story--I just used classic descriptions of such a thing that form a consistent set of data. Jon's statement that we believe that evil people either grow or continue to decline rather than stay the same is very good. Throughout TRA and JTP, Zimbardo declines and never goes back; his colleagues make other decisions at different times. One of the themes in the Starman series is personal responsibility and choice, both in the heroes and the villains. No major character stays the same--all of them either grow and mature, or decline and fade. Some do so rapidly; others do so slowly. By the time we get to Doomsday Horizon, for example, the over-emotional side of the Starmen is pretty much past history. To be honest, this is in part due to the criticism that several readers have made to this part of the story in the early books. We do want to put out a good product and our readers' comments, criticisms, suggestions, and reactions help us to do that. We listen and we chart our course accordingly.

Finally, regarding some of the points you raise that you found less than satisfying, I can just plead guilty. All I can say is that we are still laying the groundwork for further developments in the story. For example, Allen Foster's inordinate anger and other unresolved feelings about his radiation burns are directly connected to Zip's "losing it" in JTP when he is irradiated. Zip does improve in DIE and LROM. It is, in many ways, a drawback that we are telling one long story in this series, because a scene that is unsatisfying in one book may not find its fulfillment until a book that may not come out for several years. I hope that our readers will be patient; they still may not be satisfied at the end either, but nearly everything you mention has, in fact, a well-considered place in the overall story.

(For a fairly detailed set of exchanges on the Starmen's crying, you might also check the set that began with message 766 on this message board.)

Thanks again for your comments! We are very pleased when someone takes the time to give us a careful analysis of our books.

From Mark McSherry

*>Well Jon, I finished the book today. I dislike criticism, especially
>when the object being criticized is a labour of love but hey, we are all
>friends here, right? :) So here goes.*

*>I hate to say it but the book did not improve upon a second read. I
>followed the story better the second time as I had no clue what was
>going on during my first read.*

Neil, I did a year ago what you're doing now. Prior to the release of LROM I re-read the first four Starman books-- one following immediately after the other. My opinion of JTP improved greatly during the second read-through—Many of the concerns you mention seemed to resolve themselves. There is little doubt that the Starman Team was attempting to 'push the envelope' in terms of character development (especially with the boy's series book genre) both for the 'good guys' and the villains.

*>Anyway, what really turned me off the book was the
>personalities of the characters. The Starmen are an elite force,
>handpicked from the best the Earth has to offer. Why are they such
>crybabies? It starts off with Zip's collapse during the emergency. When
>his skill is needed the most, he gives up and becomes a liability to his
>teammates. Why would they ever trust him again in a stressful situation
>if he just gives up? While there is a disaster going on, he just sits
>there and sobs.*

Events (beginning with AOM) have thrown these three newly-commissioned Starmen (only days after putting on the Starman red) 'into the fire' before they've had a chance to be 'broken in'

to their responsibilities. In AOM Zip is on Mars carrying out his first (rather hum-drum) assignment while Joe and Mark are sitting back on the Moon waiting for their first tasks as Starmen. Then the pirates attack... The youth of the Starmen can be a great asset, but such exuberance can also lead to emotional lapses (or excesses); modulation will come with more experience (seasoning)...Zip's mettle (along with Joe's and Mark's) had been proven in Books' One and Two. Zip's collapse (after the break-down of the active shielding) was exceedingly brief—And only seconds later, Zip was helping Mark pull a dazed crewmate out of danger

*>The scene with Allen Foster was pointless. What was he trying to get
>across? It serves no purpose other than shock value.*

The first time I read this scene I was shocked too-- There was little forewarning-- I expected, perhaps, a heated exchange of words but not what followed...But Allen Foster's emotional outburst helps set the stage for events in DIE. Knowing this probably tempered my reaction to that scene on the next reading. And the tension between Allen Foster and Richard Starlight doesn't entirely go away in the later books...

*>I found the initial scene with Kristina somewhat offensive. When I meet
>someone in a wheelchair, I don't start crying or asking them what
>happened. It is none of my business. I have a friend in a wheelchair and
>the last thing he would want is pity or someone crying over his
>condition. The scene reinforced what an emotional wreck Zip is.*

I didn't see it that way, Neil - even after the first reading. Zip is obviously smitten-at-first-sight with Ms Bethany. It is only after two pages of conversation with Kristina, during which Zip falls deeper under her spell, that he realizes she is sitting in a wheelchair. I found his reaction, which was only momentary, perfectly understandable. And Kristina's disarming response to Zip's awkwardness only reinforces the attraction he (and the reader) feels toward her.

*>When the crewman insults Zip a while later, does he assert his command
>and put a halt to it? Nope, he starts to cry again. He needs the captain
>to bail him out. As a leader, he would not be trusted.*

In this incident, Zip's immediate reaction is anger; he is about to deliver a crippling blow when Joe stops him with one word. Then the captain intervenes. Zip is quietly ashamed...There is no sobbing. Only Mark and Joe notice Zip's glistening eyes. Obviously, Zip's emotions have been rubbed raw by the continual reminders of what happened to his father nearly a generation ago. And, just as obviously, there are issues here unresolved for both father and son...Issues that will slowly be worked out as the Series continues-- As in 'Doomsday Horizon'.

I enjoyed reading your honest appraisal of JTP. Of all the books, this one is the most experimental in the Starman Series-- especially for a series which seeks to relate 'an epic tale told in the classic series book style'. And, perhaps, the most problematic-- Which also makes it one of the more interesting to discuss... :-)

I'll save my comments about Zimbardo and the holograms for another post. And I'm looking forward to your comments about DIE.

From David Baumann

- > *I just got to that part in the fourth book today and I agree that it is*
- > *a glaring error. One member in training fails a test and is forever*
- > *denied a position as a Starman yet another member totally collapses at*
- > *his first command crisis and receives no reprimand. ... Training*
- > *is where these defects are (hopefully) found.*

Actually this is a mighty good observation! No has made this connection before, and it is, at best, an anomaly that has not been addressed, if it is not simply a real honest-to-goodness glitch. Yancy Dufaire was denied the offer of being made a Starman because of a panicky lapse during training. (I can't agree that he was forever denied the position.) However, Zip's "phobia" regarding radiation burns would certainly have been known during his training. He may not have lapsed in an actual situation as Yancy did, but he was obviously not "cured." The possibility of exposure to radiation is quite likely common in space flight, which would have made Zip a high risk individual. One can only guess how this aspect of his psyche was addressed in his formative years in the Academy--perhaps it would make a good subject for a short story sometime.

I suspect that what happened is that he didn't "mess up" in any way during his training, but when it came time to offer the position of Starman to certain Academy graduates, the discussion around the table regarding David Leland Foster was probably rather heated. Some would have held forth that, because of his known fear of radiation he ought not to have been made a Starman until he'd been proven in the field, while others said that in spite of his known fear of radiation he had not buckled under their testing. He may have been approved by the skin of his teeth, and as a compromise was assigned to a virtual "desk" job on Mars as his first assignment--no one suspecting that the assignment would put him directly in the line of action.

In the adventures on Mars and later the Asteroid Belt (AOM and TRA), Zip proved his leadership capability and pulled together the Starman Team. Perhaps that allayed any reservations about his ability, and the lapse aboard the Starventure was a surprise to everyone--followed up by his surge of anger when he was insulted by the future mutineers after they'd left Titan. Perhaps after he returned to Earth at the end of JTP he was allowed to head up his personal expedition to Europa in place of an assignment, since certain persons at SE who had had reservations about him before may have raised objections again--and for good reason, in spite of his successes overall and, by this time, fame. Remember that the adventure in DIE was not an assignment for SE but a personal quest funded by discretionary funds and not the company coffers.

For now, most importantly, I must reiterate that this side of Zip's character was long foreseen by the Starman Team, and is an absolutely vital part of the saga for a reason that has not yet been published. When that reason becomes public, I think all doubts about the propriety of Zip's fear will be laid to rest.