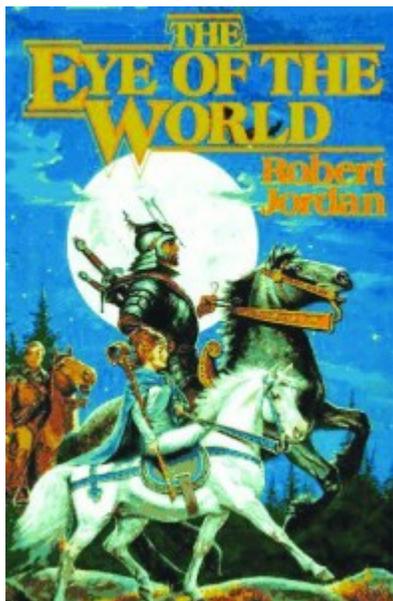


Offer Editor the Antidote? Maybe

I don't make New Year's resolutions, because I despise the inevitable disappointment I feel when I break them slightly more than I enjoy the wicked thrill of violating even self-imposed laws. This doesn't mean, however, that I don't indulge myself, at least vicariously, by suggesting resolutions that would better both those who ought to make them and everyone within their sphere of influence.



For reasons I have yet to work out, friends and family tend not to take these helpful recommendations in the spirit of self-improvement in which they are intended; not-so-subtle hints about precisely where I can stick my proposals flow with the eggnog, and I've learned to keep my mouth shut after ducking enough hurled cups of Holiday cheer.

So this year, I will reserve my advice for those who truly need it, and who are least likely to come after me with a hot bowl of figgy pudding in one hand and a sharpened sprig of holly in the other. I'm talking about those responsible for the book world: writers, publishers, and the various hangers-on who derive a parasitic existence from these worthy hosts. Book reviewers being the obvious exception, as we are a rare breed whose ways are little understood and whose habits are strange.

To begin with an eye toward November, when we will conclude the quadrennial exercise in waste, false hope, lies and futility otherwise known as a Presidential election, let it be resolved that any candidate for President who writes a book will be required to recite from their own work, from memory, and answer questions put to them about its contents. Any inability to do this proficiently will result in that candidate's immediate withdrawal from the race.

Secondly, lawyers who have tried and lost conspicuously public cases are barred from retrying those cases in the form of books. If you were too stupid or incompetent to secure either a conviction or acquittal when it mattered, at the trial, then why should anyone bother to read what you have to say about it? My rules, as the late, great George Carlin said, I make 'em up.

Peter Jackson must apologize publicly every year on September 22nd for what he did to The Lord of the

Rings. That one is a bit personal, since I have been a devoted LOTR geek since age nine and, while I appreciated the majestic sweep and thrilling action of his films, I cannot abide the many blasphemous changes and elisions he perpetrated. And the damn movies were still too long! Other LOTR aficionados will understand why September 22nd is the chosen date for this necessary penance.

Any established author who writes his books 'with' another author — I'm talking to you James Patterson, Tom Clancy, Clive Cussler and quite a few others I could name — must immediately reverse the royalty structure breakdown, so that the person that did most of the grunt work on the text receives their due. You know, the little thing called writing gets the majority of the money. Write your own damn books, people!

No one is allowed to appropriate a dead author's name in order to continue that author's work. A dispensation will be granted on a one-time-only basis for the Wheel of Time series, but that's it. Unless the writer who is too lazy to come up with his own characters and stories agrees that, prior to publication of a new book using someone else's characters, they will kill themselves. I know that sounds kind of harsh, but I don't make up these rules, despite what you may have read above.

No more books turning classic characters or historical figures into zombie hunters, vampire slayers, werewolf neuterers, or any other such nonsense.

David Mitchell, Salman Rushdie, and Louis DeBernieres will be required to publish new, full-length novels every two years, minimum. There are very few writers working in English who consistently produce A+ material, and these three are among them.

People who star in reality television shows are not allowed to write books. I use the words 'people' and 'write' in the preceding sentence at least as loosely as the word 'reality.' It's bad enough that these doughy bags of fetid narcissism masquerading as human beings pollute the general zeitgeist via TV. Do we really need to see their faces in bookstores too?

Anyone pretentious enough to use the word zeitgeist in print will have his laptop confiscated.

Uh-oh.

The halftime show at the Super Bowl will be the Nobel Prize for Literature awards ceremony. No possibility of wardrobe malfunctions here. The prizes for peace, physics, chemistry and whatever other insignificant garbage they award those things for can be shown between innings of the MLB All-Star game.

And finally, I know I said that I would refrain from making any resolutions about my own behavior, but I will resolve here to at least one positive (more or less) action. I promise to continue administering the antidote to the undetectable poison I slipped into my editor's drink during a barbecue at his house a few summers ago, following his inexplicable and unforgivable act of cutting an entire sentence from a review I had filed.

Sleep tight. You're safe. For now.