



▷ *A Different Light* began with a picture and a voice. The picture was Rembrandt's 'The Polish Rider', and the voice was that of a character: an artist, I knew, and one of great talent who was caught in a peculiar double bind. His name – I

learned later – was Jimson Alleca. When I first started to write, in longhand, what I knew about Jimson, I knew only that he was an artist, that he had cancer, and that he had once had a love affair with someone named Russell. Oh, and I knew that Russell's hair was red.

The rest of the book grew slowly out of four years of work. I wrote it three times before it ever went to a publisher: once in longhand, twice on a typewriter. As a long time science fiction reader, I rather liked the idea of writing 'space opera', and so *A Different Light* deliberately makes use of a number of that genre's clichés. I use a variation of hyperspace, but in my future history hyperspace is a little less convenient and a bit more malignant than in classical space opera. Similarly, Russell O'Neill is the stereotypical swaggering starship captain, but interiorly he is a much more complex character than the standard member of that set.

Future history – the opportunity to project the trends of the present onto the blank screen of the future – is another lure for the science fiction writer, and I confess I have succumbed to it. I found myself, in *A Different Light*, creating a Federation, new planets, various kinds of social systems, aliens, etc. Several of my short stories and at least one more novel are set in the 'Living Worlds'. While doing the second novel I even found it necessary to make a timeline and hang it on the wall, so that I could be sure to keep my future history consistent.

I would never claim, of course, that in my writing I predict the future. But the ability to challenge our preconceptions about the future is science fiction's unique and valuable strength. I only hope that *A Different Light* provides as much of that challenge to its readers as it did for me while I was writing it.

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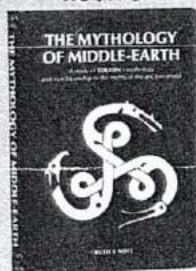
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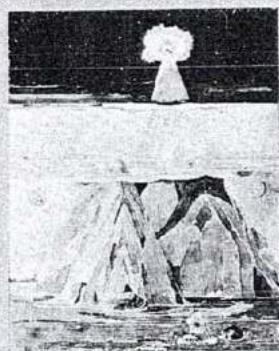


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