

Resonance in World Building



Adding depth to your speculative fiction

What is resonance?



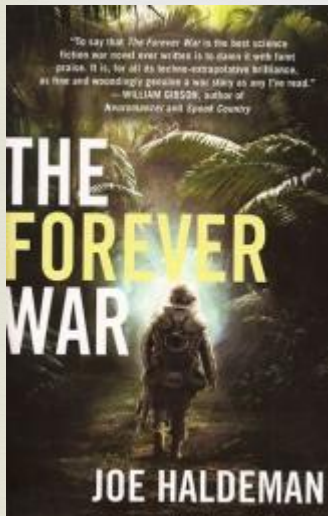
- ❧ “Resonance” has a lot of definitions, but for my purposes, resonance means reflecting a classic tale or historical element in a story, to give the story an added layer
- ❧ This may include elements of:
 - ❧ Pastiche
 - ❧ Parody
 - ❧ Homage
 - ❧ Allegory
 - ❧ Shameless rip-off

Classic Examples



England and France are at war in the Great Age of Sail.

(But he went too far when he named a character Rob S. Pierre)

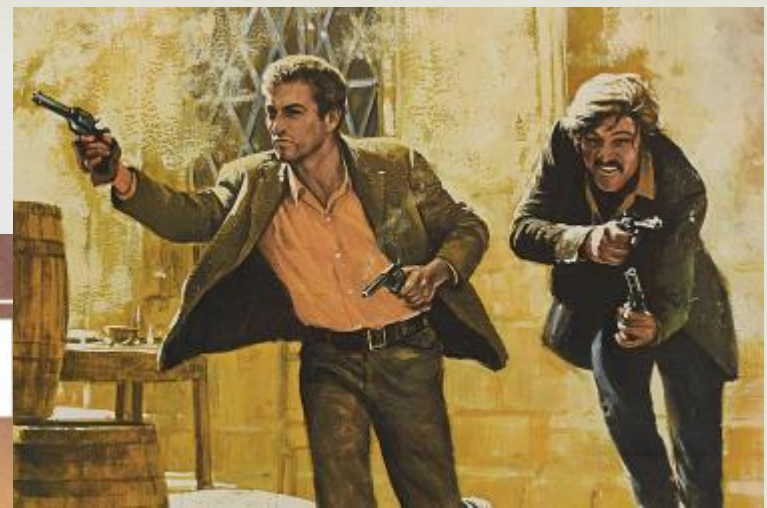


This novel of interstellar war was profoundly shaped by the author's experiences in Vietnam.



A hot, sandy, dry place holds a precious resource essential to the transportation industry, triggering political scheming and open warfare.

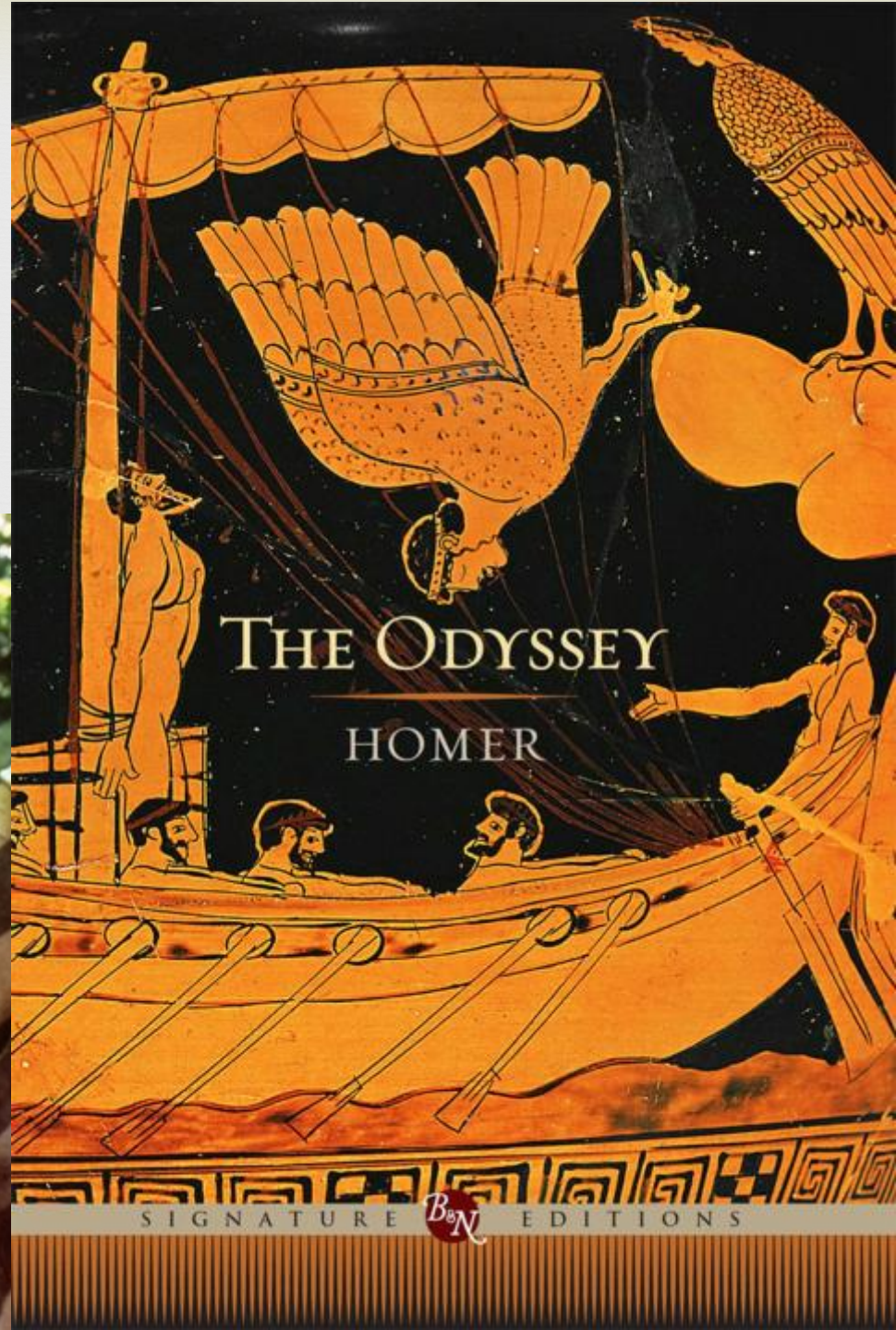
What I want to emphasize here is that these novels are classics. They are successful and beloved. No one dismisses these as rip-offs or tired retreads. Resonance adds to these books. It's an extra level, not a crutch.



The Mandalorian, Season 1, is full of nods to classic Westerns, and to the Samurai movies which were themselves inspirations for many Westerns, and for Star Wars.



“O Brother, Where Art Thou” is based, but not too closely, on Homer’s “The Odyssey”. A great many films are based on Shakespearean plays, some loosely, some closely.

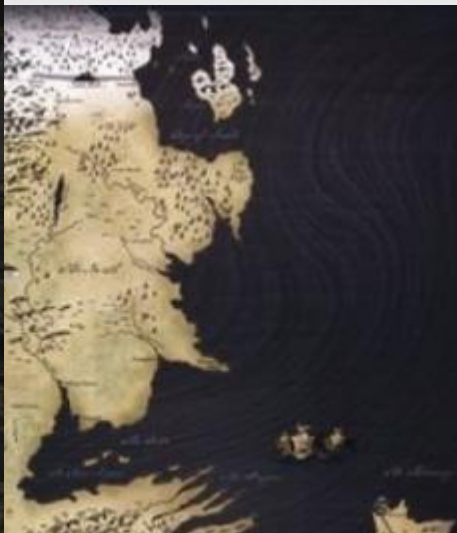


GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

A Clash of Kings

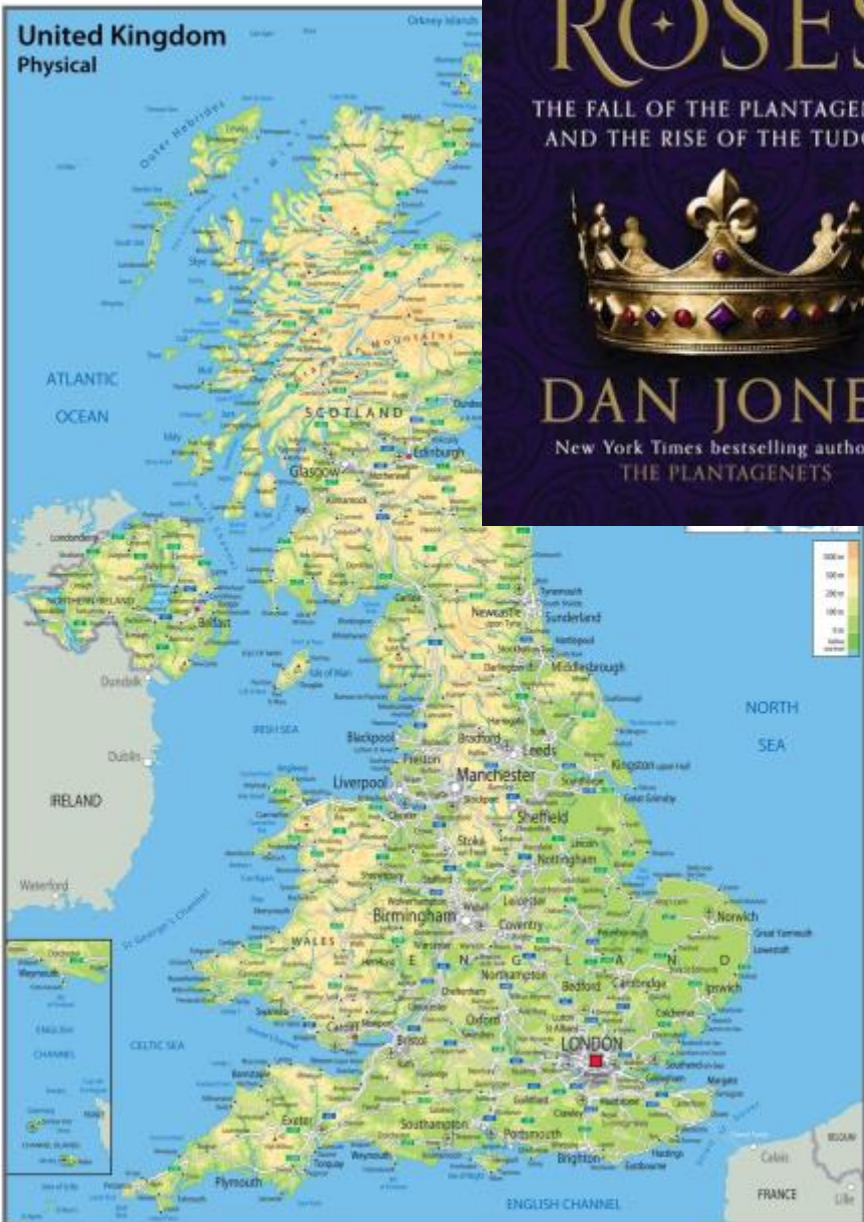


'Nobody does fantasy quite like Martin'
Sunday Times



GAME OF THRONES

United Kingdom Physical



THE WARS OF THE ROSES

THE FALL OF THE PLANTAGENETS
AND THE RISE OF THE TUDORS



DAN JONES

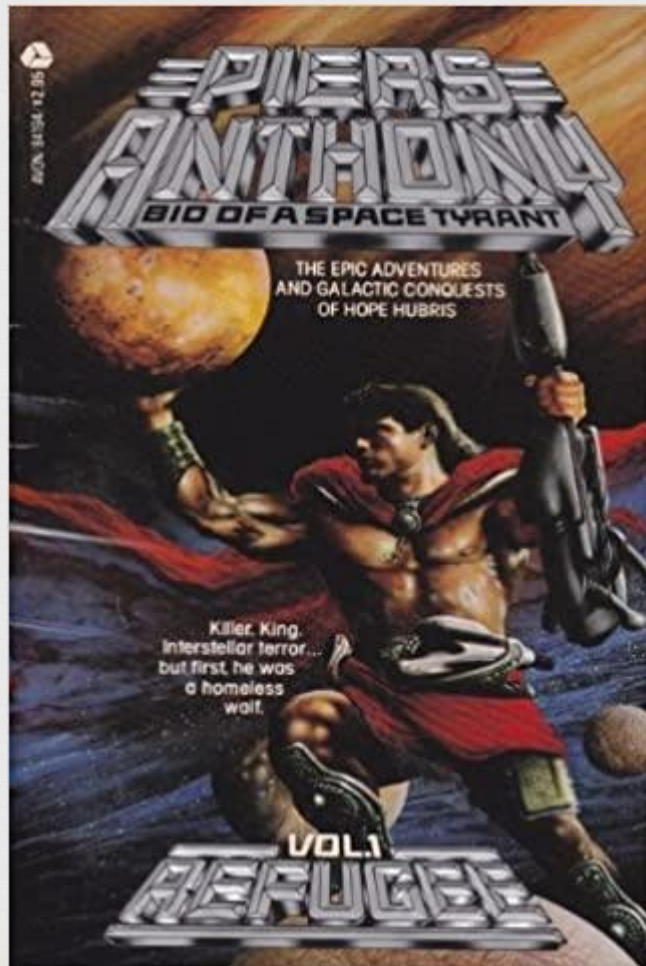
New York Times bestselling author of
THE PLANTAGENETS

Resonance as Shorthand



The Empire in Star Wars is not directly based on Nazi Germany except in very broad strokes. But by modeling the officers' uniforms on Nazi uniforms, the audience immediately understands that the Empire is very bad news.

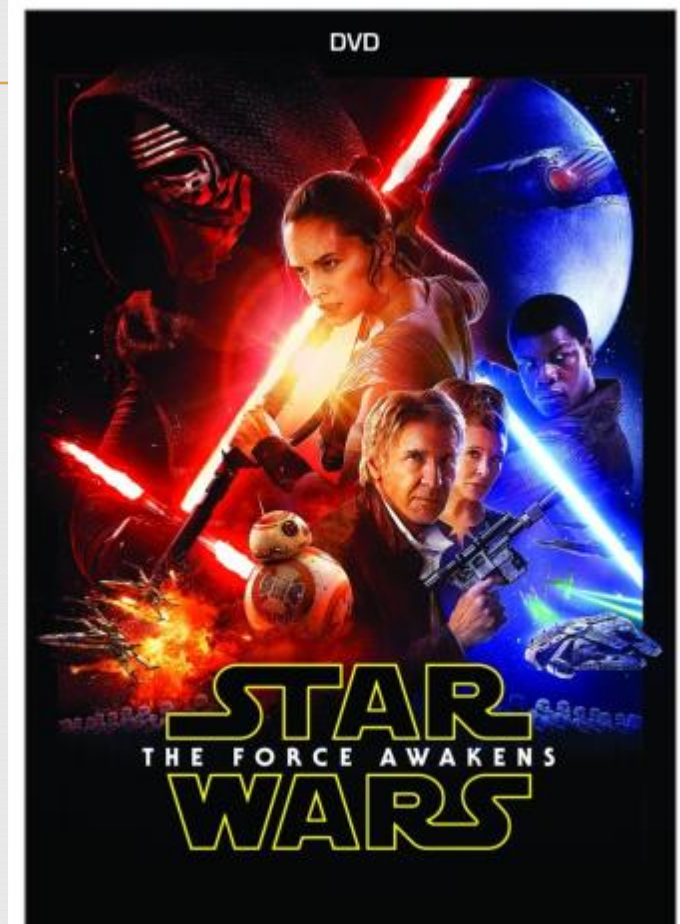
Resonance Done Poorly



If you can list thirty points of comparison between your book and your source material, you're doing it wrong.

Try for limited points of comparison. A handful of things to provide a jumping-off point. Make sure you're not just filling in the blanks.

Resonance Done Poorly



If nearly every significant plot point in your movie is also in one other movie, you should probably take a different approach.

Resonance Done Well

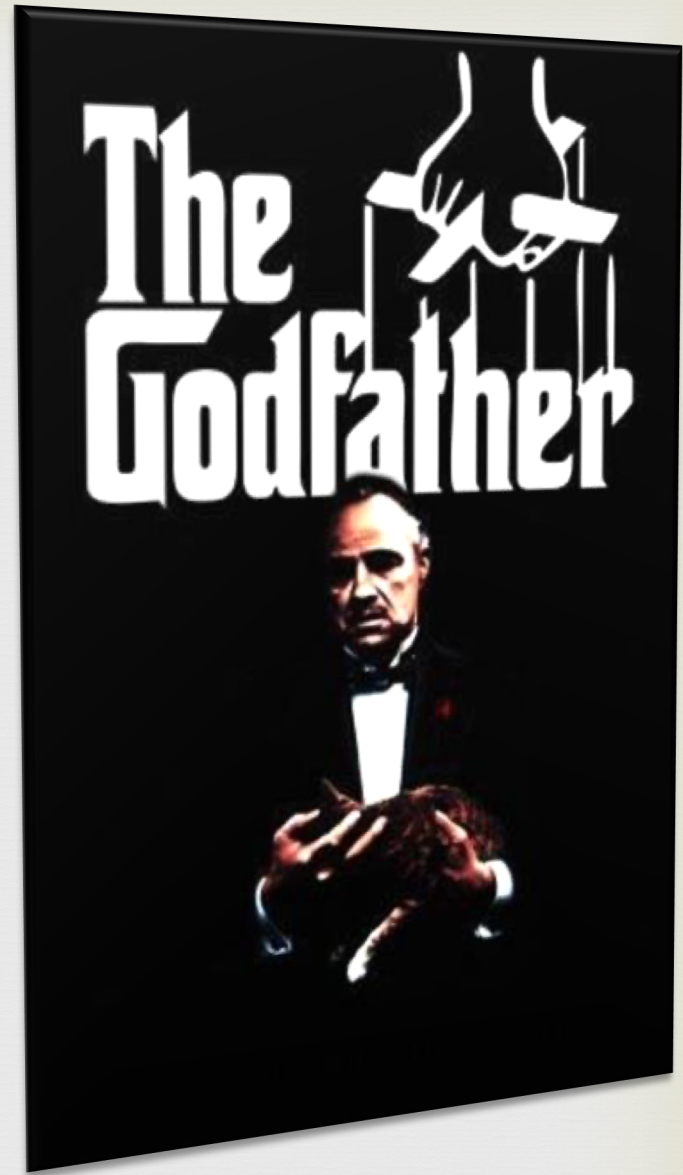


Star Trek VI, The Undiscovered Country, is firmly rooted in the end of the Cold War. The film comments on what was, at the time, current events. One key to the movie's success is that the parallels were strong and unmistakable, but limited.



Once there was a king. He ruled wisely and effectively, but he was growing old.

The king had three sons. When the kingdom was threatened, only his youngest son had the strength and wisdom to save the kingdom.



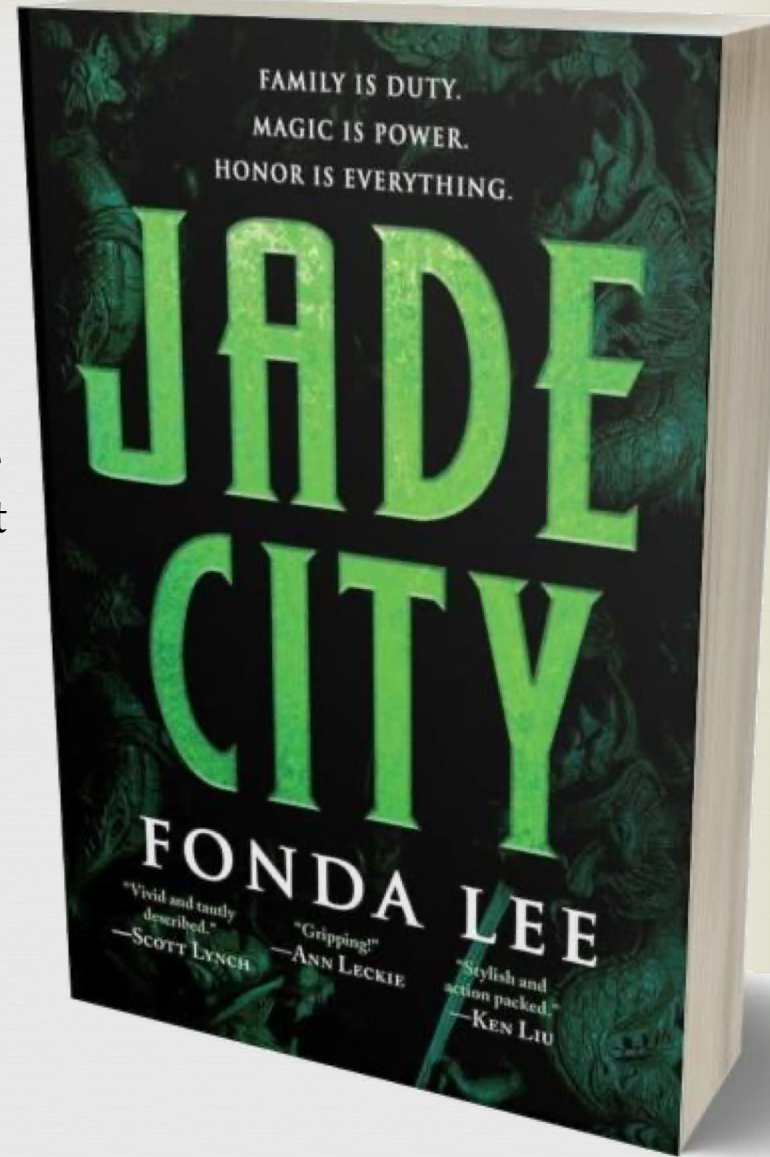
The Godfather doesn't draw from one specific fairy tale or story, but it draws from a few archetypes so fundamental and strong that they are instantly recognizable.

The Godfather



A hero left her home and family and made a life for herself far away.

She returned, and tried not to get pulled back into the family business. But her family are aristocrats of organized crime, the patriarch is elderly and unwell, and there is a gang war brewing.



The Godfather was so successful, so influential, that now it's a powerful source of resonance for new stories. Jade City, at heart, is The Godfather in Asia with magic.

Why would I try this?



❧ I want to comment on current events or recent history

❧ (The Unseen Council has a new Chair – a demagogue who tries to pit werewolves against vampires, and whip up fear of mundane people)

Why would I try this?



- ❧ I'm writing something utterly fantastical and I want to give readers something familiar to latch onto.
- ❧ (My tale of magic-wielding mouse warriors roughly follows the plot structure of Macbeth)

Why would I try this?



- ❧ My writing contains either too many familiar tropes, or the same characters and situations that I always write. I want an external structure to force me to make different choices. Strangely enough, I'll be more original because I borrow elements of plot and setting.
- ❧ (My war fought by dragon riders will be based on the Battle of Britain, with the dragons and their riders facing the terror of drowning if they're knocked from the sky.)

Why would I try this?



- ❧ I'm fascinated by a story, a place, or an event.
 - ❧ (The world has too many versions of the Arthurian legends already. I won't write another story of a boy pulling a literal sword from a stone, but what about a weapon coded to genetically engineered soldiers, all of whom are now dead, and a boy whose genes were altered by the same science team, and he's now the only person alive who can activate the ...)

Why would I try this?



❧ I need a starting point.

❧ (I have a bunch of cool ideas for battles between spaceships, and the cynical disgraced captain brought from retirement for one last mission. But I don't know how to construct a plot around it, or how to create a setting that isn't thin and trite. So I'll base my war on the experience of British forces in China during WWII.)

Why would I try this?



❧ I want to add another layer.

❧ (My gritty cyberpunk novel will echo the tragic story of Lady Jane Grey, as a young woman inherits a mega-corporation and is swiftly and brutally targeted by her rivals. But I'm giving it a happy ending, because the real story sucks.)

