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**«ФИГУРА НАСТАВНИКА В НАУЧНОЙ ФАНТАСТИКЕ И  
ФЭНТЕЗИ XX–XXI ВЕКОВ»**



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Individual essay contest

**«Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World.  
Time for Equal Opportunities»**

Essay

**«THE FIGURE OF A MENTOR IN SCIENCE FICTION AND  
FANTASY OF THE XX–XXI CENTURIES»**



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## **Theses**

1. Motivation of the essay. “Mentoring: system of development in educational establishment”.
2. Science fiction and fantasy are not only about joy but also about obstacles to overcome. Books about fantasy are particularly fascinating for the incredible obstacles that heroes must overcome on their path to freedom or victory over evil. A mentor helps the hero along the entire journey.
3. Mentors might be different but all of them help heroes to achieve goals. Science fiction and fantasy of the XX-XXI centuries are rich and diverse of examples on this topic.
4. A mentor will not solve a problem but demonstrate the way of solving. The task of the mentor is to help the hero, but heroes can only achieve everything when they themselves take a step towards their destiny.
5. Science fiction and fantasy are a way to explore the world and yourself. Dreams are a condition for fantastic breakthroughs in the future.
6. Conclusion. Only our own efforts can bring you to success.

The first thing that needs to be said is that year 2023 has been declared the year of mentor. This autumn there was a seminar for school directors in Saint-Petersburg: “Mentoring: system of development in educational establishment”. According to one of the participants, “the system of mentoring in an educational establishment enables to respond to current challenges and can be a long-term direction in progress of school education”. [4] The school director presented this model for the contest “The best director” and became the winner. That is why the topic “The figure of a mentor in science fiction and fantasy of the XX–XXI centuries” seemed relevant and interesting to me.

Why do many people and particularly teenagers love reading or watching fantasy and science fiction? Firstly, they are unusual, interesting, full of adventures and surprises. In the case of fantasy, it is another world. It is the world with no limit for fantasy. Or, in case of science fiction, the world which changes its reality. Secondly, fantasy books are particularly fascinating for the incredible obstacles that heroes must overcome on their path to freedom or victory over evil. Together with the hero we learn something new. However, for an attentive reader, it would be inconceivable for the main character, often young and not fully skilled, to be without a mentor who helps him along the entire journey. A mentor is a powerful individual who teaches, guides, provides support and instills confidence. It is important to note that a mentor is someone whom not only the hero relies on, but we ourselves also need.

Let us start by considering what this figure is. When the hero needs help, a mentor appears, becomes a teacher, inspires, gives important information, advice or objects which will help in future. Usually he is an older and wiser person than the main character and can share his skills and experience. Also, the mentor often gives gifts, but the hero has to deserve them by diligent study and dedication.

When we hear about the figure of a mentor in fantasy and science fiction of the XX-XXI centuries, the first thought which comes to mind is about

wizards like Albus Dumbledore from a series of fantasy novels about Harry Potter written by a British author J. K. Rowling, or Gandalf from the fantasy novel “The Hobbit, or There and Back Again” by an English author J. R. R. Tolkien. This is an image of a very old and wise man with silver hair and beard. It is a supremely talented wizard who knows everything and has extraordinary powers. One more feature that everybody loves is that he often uses humour to make people feel comfortable in his presence. Indeed, the literature and cinema of the XX-XXI centuries are rich and diverse of examples on this topic.

I would like to attract your attention to “The Sea of Trolls”, a book written by an American writer Nancy Farmer. This story tells us about Anglo-Saxon England, Scandinavia and another world, with magic, mythical creatures and unusual people. Here the role of a mentor plays the famous Bard named Dragon Tongue. He teaches the boy Jack, the main character of the book, everything: from magic and various spells to friendship, to the history of the Northmen and about the mysterious Queen Frith. The Bard gives the boy what his father cannot give. The relationship between the mentor and the hero is not just the apprenticeship. They have an invisible link and become close people like a family. In “The Sea of Trolls” the Bard and Jack care for each other. During his apprenticeship Jack learns not only real magic. Listening to the Bard’s stories about the Jotuns, who can read your thoughts, Jack learns to see his father differently, to understand him. Here the mentoring becomes a synonym for friendship. The old man protects the boy from dangers and gives him a magic rune. The Bard has the same image as the above mentioned wizards, but differing from them the Bard suddenly loses his magic power and the main hero has to manage himself.

The Bard tells Jack: "You see, lad, most people live like birds in a cage. It makes them feel safe. The world is a frightening place, full of glory and wonder and danger." [3, p. 52] The Bard's judgement applies to the world we live in, and I think the way we live our lives closely connects with people who guide and

support us, I mean mentors. Of course, the world around us is full of contradictions. On the one side, it is a wonderful world with a wide choice and plenty of opportunities. On the other side, all that is new and unknown frightens. People often fear to change something in their lives, to try something new because they fear to leave their comfortable and safe existence, “leave their cage”. And even the mentor does not always know and understand everything, nor is always able to manage any situation. He is not ideal and may make mistakes.

A science fiction novel which impressed me is “Fahrenheit 451” written by an American writer Ray Bradbury. It represents American society in near future where books have been outlawed and "firemen", among them the main character Guy Montag, burn any that are found. Here an old man named Faber, an English professor, plays the role of a mentor. He saved Guy's life and helped him to look for his own way. Faber says: “Most of us can't rush around, talk to everyone, know all the cities of the world, we haven't time, money, or that many friends. The things you're looking for, Montag, are in the world, but the only way the average chap will ever see ninety-nine percent of them is in a book”. [2, p.111] This quote shows how the books are really important for educational process. The author warns how mass media reduces interest in reading literature.

One more thing that needs to be said is that the figure of a mentor plays an important role not only in fantastic and fantasy world for the survival and success of the main hero, but also in our real life. However, you should remember, how a Chinese proverb says: “Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself”. [5] The proverb brightly demonstrates that you should make efforts to achieve your goals. Moreover, a mentor may not even fully know the best course of action in a given situation, as each case is individual and also concerns another person. Therefore, the task of a mentor, like that of parents, is to help the hero understand on their own what to do, how it is best to act, and

with full awareness of the decision made, to embark on the path that will lead them to the desired result.

Reading books, it seems that the actions of a mentor allow the main characters to achieve everything. However, the task of a mentor is to open the door, open the hero's eyes to the truth, show the truth, or protect them from the cruelty of the surrounding world. Definitely, heroes can only achieve everything when they take a step towards their destiny themselves, show courage and accomplish a feat with support, rather than fully relying on the mentor's hands. And this is true, even in ordinary life, no matter how wonderful and inspiring a teacher may be, they cannot teach a lazy person who does not want to engage themselves in the subject.

My teacher never stops saying that there are three things that no one can teach you without your desire: sports, a foreign language, and playing a musical instrument. That is true, each of these skills requires daily practice, self-discipline and a desire to achieve results. Not every mentor will help you defeat a dragon, but a great victory in life can also be expressed in much smaller achievements that will play no less of a role in our destiny.

Another striking features of this topic is when you read science fiction and fantasy you see what happens to other people, you visit and learn about new places and worlds. Turning to science fiction literature, an attentive reader deeply plunges themselves in another reality, a world on the pages of a book. There are people who say that living outside of reality is impossible, but I only partially agree with them. Dreaming is possible and necessary; immersing oneself in the world of non-existent things, other universes, and interacting with magical heroes makes our brain think differently. We engage our imagination, ponder what else could exist. 50-100 years later these things become real. And some young readers even become the creators of these wonders. It turns out that the founders of brands like Apple, Microsoft, Google, leading companies of the 21st century, were fans of fantasy in their childhood. Back then, no one could

have imagined that almost anywhere in the world, one could pull out a small box from their pocket and learn everything by simply typing it into a search bar.

The truth is that our world ends where we want it to. So, could dreams be a condition for fantastic breakthroughs in the future?

In conclusion I can say that the actions of science fiction and fantasy are often set in the real world in parallel with a mythical realm. In our real life we dream, have plans and finally achieve our dreams. Great people say: “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams”. [6] In our movement to our dreams we turn to a mentor. Of course, this figure, whoever he can be, helps and leads, but only our own efforts can bring you to success.



## Appendix 1.

### Illustration

Picture 1 – Nancy Farmer, *The Sea of Trolls*, illustration of Gregoriy Babichev [1]



## Reference list

1. Babichev Gregoriy, illustration of the book “The Sea of Trolls” by Nancy Farmer, <https://www.labirint.ru/child-now/babich/>, accessed 16 November 2023.
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3. Farmer, N. The Sea of Trolls. Russian Edition. –Moscow: Volchok, 2021.
4. Gymnasium 155, ‘Mentoring: educational institution development system’, Gymnasium 155 [website], 2023, [https://vk.com/gym155?w=wall-211015905\\_1402](https://vk.com/gym155?w=wall-211015905_1402), accessed 16 November 2023.
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