



## The Psychology of Writers

By  
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Approximately 500 years ago, some unknown monk or philosopher had a brainstorm. It suddenly occurred to him that the world, which was outwardly so mysterious, might actually be understandable. Considering the tenor of the times, this idea was not only revolutionary, it was subversive. Instead of answering the question “Why is this tree here in this particular spot?” by saying, “Because God wills it to be there,” this philosopher suggested that the problem could be attacked from a purely physical viewpoint. “This tree is here because the wind blew one of its seeds from that big tree a kilometer distant, the seed fell into fertile ground, was watered by the rain, germinated, and began to grow until it reached the height we see today.” Note that this explanation does not negate the possibility that God wanted the tree there, but it avoids invoking divine intervention as a means for explaining a common-day event.

Not only did these 15<sup>th</sup> century thinkers invent a new (and much more materialistic) way of looking at the universe, they invented a rigorous method for testing their hypotheses to determine whether they were true or in need of modification. The name they gave this new way of thinking was “natural philosophy,” but it has come down to us with a different name.

We call it science.

One of the books I strongly recommend for people interested in history is William Manchester's *A World Lit Only By Fire*. It is an exploration of the way people thought from the early Middle Ages to the time of Magellan. For those who think that people have been pretty much the same down through the ages, this book will be an eye opener. If you were to build a time machine and travel back to those times, you would be largely mystified by what you encountered. Medieval man had an outlook and philosophy that was vastly different from those of modern man. You were born in a hovel, you worked the same small plot of land all of your life, and you died there. If you traveled even 10 kilometers (6 miles) from your birth spot, you were special. And for the vast majority of the population, ambition was an alien concept. Indeed, even ego seems to have been totally missing from the ranks of the peasantry.

How do we know this? Because the Middle Ages saw a number of large construction projects, the great cathedrals, some of which took three centuries to complete. And in all of that time, no one seems to have gotten the idea that he could achieve some degree of personal immortality by carving his initials into the cathedral walls. True, most of the workers were illiterate and would not have been able to

recognize their initials if they saw them, but people had an identifying mark and they didn't carve these into the beams and rafters either.

You can imagine, then, how the church, the intellectual guardians of the time, reacted when someone suggested that such mysteries as why the full moon sometimes disappears from the sky could be explained by purely physical means. They went ape! People were burned at the stake for such heresies and Galileo was placed under house arrest by the Vatican for having the effrontery to suggest that the sun is the center of the solar system and not the Earth. In his book, Manchester recounts the story of the man who first published an English version of the bible. Was his accomplishment hailed as an aid to allow the common man to study the word of God? Not hardly. They hunted him down after he'd spent ten years in hiding in the Netherlands, and then hung him before he was drawn and quartered. The monks, it seemed, reacted negatively to the idea that just anyone could interpret the word of God.

At its most basic, the long running argument between science and religion is over whether the mysteries of life can be classified in a systematic and purely physical way, or whether they will always remain in the realm of the supernatural. The fight has been long and difficult, with casualties on both sides. However, the materialistic view (the scientific view) has taken root and prospered. Many of us today believe that God exists, but we also know not to invoke His existence as an explanation for why any particular tree ends up growing where it does. Likewise, we do not attribute floods or other natural disasters to the wrath of an avenging deity. [Author's note: Now we blame them on global warming, a mythical deity no less powerful for being of a wholly different sort than the medieval version of God.] We don't believe in witches or warlocks (at least, most of us don't) and we tend to reject supernatural explanations for physical phenomena.

This half-a-millennium-long dispute between the forces of science and those of religion is really about a basic characteristic built into all human brains. Like our simian cousins, human beings are curious. We see that in our youngest children, whose strongest instinct as they encounter new objects is to pop them into their mouths to see how they taste. This tendency, which causes so many problems for mothers, is due to the inherent human desire to classify the world around us.

At our core, we humans are fanatics about classifying things. We can't help it. It's the way our brains work. It is the reason we see a face in the moon or images of Jesus Christ in random watermarks. It is the reason why all Chinese people look alike. It isn't that they actually look alike, only that they are all filed in our heads under the category "Chinese people." When we search our memories to come up with a name to go with a Chinese face, we often miss and pick the wrong name. (Note: The above assumes that those reading this are not Chinese. The same principle holds for them, except that they think all Caucasians look alike.)

The frequent clashes between the church and science over the past 500 years are not an argument between those who would classify the world and those who would not. It is a dispute between two different methods of classification. Indeed, the medieval church had a very complex classification system to explain the world around them. It involved cycles and epicycles in the heavens, as well as philosophical discussions as to how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. That their worldview has proven to be somewhat askew does not negate the fact that they had one.

I was put in mind of all of this when I set out to write this article. For like all other human beings, my mind tends to automatically sort facts and classifies them as a means of divining whatever sense may exist in them. Take, for instance, the world of work. Every job we do can be classified based on the amount of physical or mental labor we put into it. Some jobs are predominately physical, while others are predominantly mental. Ditch digging, for example, is almost entirely a physical task. You are out in the open, breathing deeply of nature's pure air, sweating profusely, while your shovel rhythmically and steadily excavates the ditch in front of you. Yet, while you make steady progress through the ground, you can be thinking of nothing at all, or else daydreaming about an adventure far away. Once you master the rudimentary skills necessary to operate a shovel, you can let your mind drift anywhere it will. Personally, I find ditch digging to be physically rewarding and mentally relaxing.

Writing, on the other hand, is about as far away from ditch digging as one can get on the physical-mental scale. It is almost 100% a mental activity. Indeed, the only physical activity required is caused by a technological shortcoming, namely that we have yet to develop a direct brain-to-computer interface. Before your words can take form outside of your brain, you must move your fingers very quickly across a keyboard or drag a cylindrical writing instrument across a sheet of paper. These activities don't actually "produce" the words, of course. They are "produced" deep in our brains. All writing them down does is record them on a storage medium more accessible and permanent than the firing of brain synapses.

Although we often refer to the process of putting words on paper as "writing," the actual process of typing a manuscript takes up less than 10% of our total writing time. The rest of the time is spent in a wholly mental activity, namely thinking. Before we can commit words to paper, we must let the idea percolate in our subconscious minds until it is ready to see the light of day. Many writers do this precursor thinking while engaged in some purely physical activity such as ditch digging. Others merely lie flat on their backs and stare up at the ceiling while Roman legions march or lovers tryst in back of their eyeballs. Sometimes a writer will stay in this position for hours, not moving a muscle, yet perform some of the hardest work known to man.

Since writing is as pure a mental activity as one finds in this life, it is hardly surprising that there are psychological aspects to the craft. To be successful, a writer must be aware of the mental constraints under which he or she must operate. Nor is there only one psychological aspect to being a writer. There are dozens. There is the psychology of readers and how they react to the various ways in which they encounter verbal symbols on paper. There is the psychology of editors and publishers, who are mostly interested in getting their money back. And then, of course, there is the psychology of writers.

### The Psychology of Writers: Introversion

It is always dangerous to generalize about people, but after more than 30 years as a professional in the field, I have observed that we writers tend to be predominantly a single personality type. As we have discussed before in this series, writers tend to be introverted. Introversion is the personality trait where one enjoys their own company as much as the company of others. That isn't to say that there are no extrovert writers; but

those few who exist must find it difficult to sit alone for the hours upon hours the craft requires if they are to be any good at it. Introverts tend to adopt solitary hobbies (of which writing is a prime example), while extroverts tend to have hobbies that allow them strong interactions with others. They tend to be enthusiasts for team sports.

If you have ever been to a writers' party, you will understand what I mean. We all tend to congregate in small clumps, talking to our neighbors, or just sitting there quietly while we try to think of something to say. For one of the peculiarities of a writer's personality is that no matter how glib we are on paper, that glibness is usually the result of several rewrites and does not necessarily translate into the ability to be a sparkling on-the-spot conversationalist. Most writers' parties I have attended have been less than successful unless they had some non-writer extroverts (usually spouses) to enliven the mix.

Since introversion appears to be a necessary adjunct of the writer's life, it is necessary to understand the psychology of the condition. Unlike extroverts, introverts tend to enjoy the long periods of peace and quiet in which they can commune with their muse. They actually enjoy sitting alone for hours at a time, working quietly on what they hope will become their next masterpiece. Extroverts, on the other hand, tend to become fidgety when the silence stretches uncomfortably long or when they go too long without human interaction. They can survive solitude, of course; but they don't tend to like it, and therefore, generally lack the patience required to become writers.

Every writer finds reasons to avoid writing, which is after all, much harder work than digging ditches. Extroverted writers just find more reasons to avoid placing pen to paper or fingers to keyboard than do introverts, and they tend to give in to these distractions more frequently. An extrovert who sits down to work for a year on a book must be either driven by some outside force (a very strong belief in the project) or else possess more than the average human measure of discipline. An introvert who does the same thing actually enjoys the activity.

So, if you are going to be a writer, the first question you should answer to your own satisfaction is whether you have the personality to sit for hours at a time and happily type out your story. If you are one who sees himself (or herself) as the life of every party, then you probably don't have the optimum personality to become a writer. You may decide to become a writer anyway, of course; in which case you should recognize the tendency to socialize in yourself and then work to overcome it, at least for the few hours each day when you will be writing.

### Writers, Egos and the Sin of Conceit

Another trait we writers seem to share are our egos. Almost all of the writers I have known, myself included, tend to have egos as large as the Grand Canyon -- and possibly, just a little larger. Some of us have learned to hide it well, while others don't try to hide it at all. But as a class, writers seem to have bigger egos than just about any other profession, except possibly actors.

Despite what many professional writers will tell you, our motivation for writing isn't money. It's ego. We have a burning compulsion to see our names in print and to tell the rest of the world our opinions on just about any subject. We will share the most intimate details of our lives with anyone who will take the time to read us, just for the

satisfaction of seeing our names etched in black letters in a mass circulation periodical. We will suffer through years of humiliation, rejection, and poverty, just on the off chance that we will eventually find someone to publish our work.

It is this burning desire to have our words published that is the second component that makes the writer's personality so paradoxical. On the one hand, as introverts we are not comfortable pushing ourselves on other people; yet as egotists, we are driven to share our ideas with everyone who will listen. If you wonder why most people view writers as being a little odd, this is the reason. We are would-be Dictators of the Universe, but we don't want to impose ourselves on others while we issue our edicts.

Obviously, this is a gross oversimplification of a writer's personality and leaves many nuances unstated. However, at its heart, there is a nugget of truth in this description. That is why we choose the indirect method of writing our opinions down and having them published. That way we can impose our will on many others without having to interact with them directly.

What other reason than ego is there that would drive a writer to work for so many years without financial remuneration while attempting to break into publishing? And if it is money that is our primary motivator, why do the pay scales for writers remain so abysmally low? You thought writers were well paid? Think again. In my own field, science fiction, magazines paid 3 cents per word for stories in 1938. They pay 5-7 cents per word now. There has been a lot of inflation in the last 67 years. Or take the case of a writer publishing his first novel. He can expect to be paid around \$5000 for an effort that may take a year to finish. True, the occasional writer makes a splash with the public and goes on to sign multi-million dollar deals, but they are the great exception to the rule. The average writer in the United States makes less than \$5000 per year, and that average includes the likes of Tom Clancy and Steven King in the calculation. These low rates are driven by the inexhaustible supply of new writers, each willing to labor for a pittance for years merely because they are egotistical enough to think that their opinions count for something and ought to be shared with the world.

Having a large ego is not a sin, although it can often lead to the vice of conceit. A person is judged to be conceited when their fellows believe them to have too keen an appreciation of their own abilities, especially when objective facts do not tend to bear out that opinion. And since writers are uniformly egotists, it is not surprising that one finds that they are especially susceptible to the sin of conceit.

If you think about it, professional writing is an act of conceit of the purest kind. You are going to place your opinion on paper and you expect the general public to pay for the privilege of reading it? What kind of an egomaniac are you?

I have attended a number of science fiction conventions over the years and have been struck by the panel discussions we have on various topics of interest to the science fiction community. Actually, of course, there is but one subject of discussion on any panel. That is the desire of the participants to talk about themselves. The pronoun *I* tends to get overused at such times. It is especially bad if you have a panel composed primarily of new writers, all of whom are basking in the sunlight of public recognition and adulation for the first time. People tend to cut one another off, talk over their fellow panelists, and do everything but wrestle the microphone out of their hands. I've even seen them do that a time or two.

All of these actions are indicators of the true personality of writers. I am not being pejorative when I say that writers tend to be egotists and a little conceited. It's just the way we are. It is that which drives us to be writers in the first place.

### The Physiological and Psychological Need for Quiet while Writing

Regardless of your personality traits, however, when it comes time to write, you should find a nice quiet place to work. Having done so, you should then sit down and begin writing. Quiet is supremely important to a writer because writing is an activity that is nearly 100% mental discipline. When you are writing, you would like to turn off all of your external senses, the better to concentrate on your inner senses, what people refer to as "your mind's eye." And, in fact, the human brain has the ability to do just that. When people are thinking very hard, their various sense organs are largely disconnected from the cerebral cortex. We essentially fall into a trance in which our eyes see nothing but the words on the computer screen, our ears do not perceive sound, and it takes a tactile sensation akin to being stung by a bee to pull us from our creative fog.

If you cannot find a truly quiet spot in which to write, then you should at least go somewhere that has little or no human speech in the background. This means that you have to turn off the television set and possibly the radio while writing. If you listen to music, you should confine yourself to instrumentals. Songs with lyrics will tend to distract you because the human brain insists on assigning meaning to any sound pattern it perceives to be language. There have been scientific studies performed on the phenomenon and they prove that the brain perceives noise one way, speech another. When we hear words with our ears, that portion of the brain that is devoted to language comprehension automatically interprets those sound patterns. The brain circuitry required to process language is extensive and takes considerable brainpower to run. You don't want that circuitry to be busy interpreting extraneous background sounds while you are searching for just the right phrase that expresses what you are trying to say in your novel. Remember, while your ears are listening to words, even words that are merely part of the background noise in a room, then you are not concentrating on your writing. This multitasking of your speech circuits reduces the brainpower you have to devote to your writing, and good writing requires all the brainpower we possess. Thus, we need silence, or at least non-verbal noise in the background while putting words to paper.

Sometimes it isn't possible to find a spot where it is totally silent. For instance, I often write on airplanes where there is the constant drone of the engines and of my fellow passengers to distract me. At this very moment, I am sitting in a hotel on a Sunday morning, listening to the maids going up and down the halls, knocking on doors, and shouting "housekeeping!" for the benefit of guests who, like me, are working in their rooms.

Although these distractions are minimal, they are still distractions. And even if our brain can effectively disconnect our ears when we concentrate, there is no reason why we can't help it screen out the external noise. So, if you write on airplanes or other places where there is a lot of background noise, buy yourself a pair of good earplugs and use them. I recently bought a set that reduces noise by 29 decibels, which is quite a lot. Remember, the less perception you have of your surroundings when you write, the more you can concentrate on your writing.

A corollary to the idea that you shouldn't write with the television on is that you shouldn't allow people to interrupt you when you are writing. Whether it is your wife or husband, your children, or your coworkers, people need to understand that when you are writing, you are to be disturbed only for dire emergencies. Your friends need to know that you are not available for casual phone calls, visits, or anything else that will invade your working time. Most people understand that acquaintances don't have the time to spend all day long chatting on the phone when they are at the office. However, they don't seem to understand that a writer working at home is also "at the office." This is why work-at-home writers should make this point very clear to any visitors who show up at the door while they are working.

Mario Puzo, author of *The Godfather*, has a series of rules for writers. One of them states "If your spouse disturbs your writing, divorce her (or him)!" Personally, I think the prescription is a bit harsh, but apparently he does not. He actually followed that particular bit of advice early in his career. In any event, you should attempt to train your spouse that you are not available when you are writing. As I can tell you, there is nothing more destructive to a creative mood than to be interrupted with a question about the strange noise the dishwasher is making. Unless smoke is pouring out of its door or the electricity has just gone off, there will be time to diagnose the problem once you've finished your current chapter.

### Writer's Block and Other Psychological Problems

If you find something of yourself in the foregoing comments, then I hope my words will assist you in improving your writing. If, on the other hand, you find yourself wondering what it is that I am talking about, then don't let it bother you. My comments reflect the personalities of a majority of the writer population, possibly even a large majority. However, if you are neither an introvert, nor particularly egotistical, then good for you. You may be the exception that proves the rule. There are, however, a number of psychological conditions that affect a writer's output, regardless of personality type.

The most feared psychological condition of writers is known as "writer's block," the inability to make words flow out of your brain and onto the paper. The condition is very real and can strike at any point in your career. I don't know any longtime writer who hasn't suffered writer's block at one time or another, or any who didn't eventually get over it. There are several conditions that can result in a block, and none of them are permanent. If you find yourself blocked, you should calmly analyze the possible reasons and then take steps to overcome them.

### Moving Too Fast

One should not mistake the inability to sit down at a computer and immediately begin pounding the keys as writer's block. Remember, 90% of writing is thinking and if you can't write, there is a good chance that you haven't thought enough about your story. You basically have two choices when you find you are having problems beginning a plot or pushing it to the next plateau. You can shut down your computer, get up from your desk, and think about your story some more; or else you can try to continue even if you don't feel particularly inspired at the moment.

I find when I am working on a novel that I can make the words flow easily for approximately five chapters. At the end of that fifth chapter, however, I begin to run out of things to say. This condition has nothing to do with true writer's block. Rather, it is a condition I refer to as "overrunning my headlights." Having completed the plot up to the point where I have thought it through, I find that I have to pause and think about what comes next. Depending on where I am in a book, this pause can be anywhere from a day to a couple of weeks. Eventually, however, my mind sorts out all the characters and plot possibilities, and I am off and running again for another 15,000 or so words.

[Author's Note: This is not always the case, however. I am currently writing *Gibraltar Sun*. I have written 82,000 words in first draft, and have not yet run out of things to say. This is unprecedented for me, and may be due to the fact that I have thought about the plot for 5-6 years now. Thus, while the actual *writing* portion of writing has gone very quickly, the intellectual part of writing has taken longer than usual. It is a conundrum!]

If you don't want to stop writing, then you can just dive in anywhere and begin typing. Perhaps the words will mean something to you, and they may even be good. But if they aren't, there is nothing to stop you from throwing them away at a later date and starting over. The important thing is to allow your mind to exercise itself and to search for a plot thread in the words you are blindly putting down on paper.

If you truly can't think of anything to write, then go back and rewrite what you have already done. Many times you will find the germ of an idea in some offhand remark you made in a previous section of the manuscript. You can amplify that idea, turning it into a major subplot and when readers read your book, they will be amazed at your cognitive abilities when the clue in Chapter 3 suddenly blooms at the beginning of Chapter 12.

### Fatigue

Also, when I am pushing hard, I find that I can reach a point where I lose the story line and all I can see are the individual words. Interestingly, this often happens to me on Thursday nights. Frankly, I don't let it worry me. I'm not suffering Thursday-night writer's block; I'm just tired. After working all day at my regular job, and then coming home at night to type, I find that I have run out of steam by Thursday evening and lose my train of thought. Try as I might, I just can't seem to pick up the thread of the story. In three decades of writing, I have learned that the only cure for this condition is rest. So, after approximately 10 minutes of attempting to get back into the mood of the story, I give up and take Thursday night off. Sometimes I even take Friday night, too. I find that resting my brain for a night or two is all the restorative that I need. Usually, by Saturday morning, the words have begun to sparkle again and I'm ready to push forward.

I wasn't always so accommodating to my poor aching brain. I used to try to write regardless of fatigue. No longer. I quickly learned that writing when I am tired merely causes me to take good prose and rewrite it into bad prose. No, when fatigue sets in, my critical faculties shut down. So, rather than do lasting damage to my manuscript, I turn off the computer and watch TV for the night.



## Writer's Block

Finally, there are those rare occasions in every writer's life when he or she becomes well and truly blocked. This happened to me in my second novel (my third book), *Procyon's Promise*. At the beginning of Chapter 8, I introduce the head of the world government, whose office is buried in the side of the Jural Mountains of Switzerland. From his office window he can see Lake Geneva and Mt. Blanc in the distance. Yet, despite the fact that it was a minor scene introducing a minor character, I discovered that no matter how hard I tried, I could not make the words flow beyond that point. I found I was blocked.

"What is so hard about describing Lake Geneva and the Swiss Alps?" you ask.

Nothing. I should have been able to dash the scene off in fifteen minutes. Yet, I spent five months trying to write this one small scene. Despairing that my writing career was over, I eventually stepped back from the problem and considered what else might be wrong. Why was I having writer's block at this particular place in the book after having written more than 20,000 words without difficulty? After thinking about it for a few days, I realized that it wasn't the description of Lake Geneva that I was having trouble with. Rather, it was my characters.

The problem turned out to be a decision I had made on practically the first day I began writing the novel. In setting up the characters, I chose badly. I had made the heroine the richest woman in the world, someone who looked to be in her mid-twenties but who is actually much older (the story takes place a couple of centuries hence, when such things are possible). The problem I was having in forcing my subconscious mind to proceed down the path I had chosen was that someone that wealthy lacked the vulnerabilities I needed to make her a sympathetic character. I was asking her to do things that just didn't square with her age and power.

In retrospect, the problem seemed obvious. Rather than make her old and rich, I made her young and wealthy. Instead of her being the richest woman on Earth, I made her the daughter of the richest man in the world. As soon as I made this minor change in her character, the plot began to flow and continued flowing until I finished the book.

The moral I learned from this incident is that a writer's subconscious is largely in control of what they write and that when your subconscious begins flashing danger signals, the smart writer will listen carefully. A writer who is in the groove is operating largely on autopilot, typing as fast as he or she can to read the story as it magically appears on the screen. If your subconscious mind thinks that you have made a mistake in your characters' relationships, then it has no trouble shutting down your critical faculties and calling for help. If that call for help is ignored, a full-blown case of writer's block can emerge.

So what do you do if you find yourself blocked? The first thing is to try and write through the difficulty. Maybe you are just having a bad day and if you write the scene, it won't be the most sparkling writing you ever did, but it will be salvageable. If, however, you find yourself stuck for weeks or months at a time, then ask yourself the following question: "Just what is my subconscious mind trying to tell me?" If it isn't immediately obvious, then you should backtrack and look at your characters. Are you asking them to do something that is out of character? Have you chosen the wrong viewpoint from which

to approach the story? Is there a flaw in your logic that will turn into a glaring mistake once the readers catch it?

Whatever the problem, when you are a victim of writer's block, your subconscious is throwing up red flags all over the place and you ignore them at your own risk.

### Aversion to Writing and Endurance

As I noted above, writing is hard, tiring work. You can sit all day at your word processor, never do more than move your fingers, and finish the day feeling like you have run a marathon (mentally, if not physically). Several years ago, the Air Force did studies on the heart rate of their pilots while they were flying. To their utter amazement, these pilots who were strapped into the ejection seats of their aircraft, barely able to move a muscle, had sustained heart rates higher than someone who is engaged in hard labor. Those who are high school students who have taken any of the daylong scholastic aptitude tests will attest to the phenomenon. By mid-afternoon, you feel like you are starving. All you want to do is eat and then go home to take a nap, even though you have lifted nothing heavier than a pencil all day.

Never forget that thinking is the hardest of all work!

Because of this, writers' minds sometimes rebel against doing this heavy lifting. In my personal situation, I find that I usually have to go to the bathroom almost immediately after I sit down and switch on my computer. I didn't have to go when I passed through the bathroom on the way out to my backyard office, mind you; but as soon as I sit down, the urge overcomes me. This seems to be my mind's way of crying, "No, please don't make me pump out any more of that drivel! HELP!!!"

Other writers will tell you that they have other ways to avoid having to write. Some of them balance their checkbook, or leaf through their reference works, or just stare at the clouds scudding by outside their window. They will do *anything* to put off that horrible moment when their mind must be switched into "creative writing" mode.

It is a well-known fact among writers that we hate to write. What we enjoy is *having written*. Remember, our primary motivation for writing to satisfy our egos. What we crave are the kudos of our myriad fans, the adulation of our readers, and letters of constructive criticism that consist solely of unalloyed praise. We're in it for the glory, not for the actual physical and mental labor of writing.

This is one reason why you see so many one-novel writers. Having sat down and worked for a year on something that turned out pretty good, they are content to rest on their laurels and soak up the praise of an admiring world. Or rather, I should say that their subconscious minds are content to do that. The writers themselves are desperate to prove that they have more than one arrow in their quiver. Somehow they never seem to get that second novel started. Instead, they go on talk shows, sign autographs, write letters -- anything to get out of actually sitting down and writing.

Since we all tend to be procrastinators when it comes to putting our minds in gear for some really heavy work, the solution to the problem is to recognize that we writers really don't like to pursue our craft. We must force ourselves to write. To do that, we must develop good work habits, just as when we were in school, we had to develop sound study habits.

If you are a full time writer working out of your home, then be sure to get out of bed every day and write. In fact, it is a good idea to change out of your pajamas and put on your writing clothes. Not that you have to, mind you. After all, if you work at home you can run around naked and no one will care except possibly the postman and the paperboy. Still, there is something psychological about getting dressed to go to work. It tells your mind that sleep is over and it's time to earn a living.

The solution for procrastination is the same as the one for mild cases of writer's block. Just sit down and write. It doesn't matter what you write. Pretty soon, your subconscious will get tired of writing things that don't mean anything. If there is anything a human brain hates more than mental labor, it's being bored. So faced with the prospect of writing page after page of meaningless, boring prose, your subconscious will generally decide to work on the plot of your book or story. Soon after, you find yourself staring at the screen in amazement as some stranger uses your fingers to cause powerful, evocative words to flow up the screen.

Pretty soon, you are a writer again.

The End

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The Makers searched for the secret to faster-than-light travel for 100,000 years. Their chosen instruments were the Life Probes, which they launched in every direction to seek out advanced civilizations among the stars. One such machine searching for intelligent life encounters 21st century Earth. It isn't sure that it has found any...

#### **2. Procyon's Promise - <sup>US</sup>\$5.00**

Three hundred years after humanity made its deal with the Life Probe to search out the secret of faster-than-light travel, the descendants of the original expedition return to Earth in a starship. They find a world that has forgotten the ancient contract. No matter. The colonists have overcome far greater obstacles in their single-minded drive to redeem a promise made before any of them were born...

### **3. Antares Dawn - US\$5.00**

When the super giant star Antares exploded in 2512, the human colony on Alta found their pathway to the stars gone, isolating them from the rest of human space for more than a century. Then one day, a powerful warship materialized in the system without warning. Alarmed by the sudden appearance of such a behemoth, the commanders of the Altan Space Navy dispatched one of their most powerful ships to investigate. What ASNS Discovery finds when they finally catch the intruder is a battered hulk manned by a dead crew.

That is disturbing news for the Altans. For the dead battleship could easily have defeated the whole of the Altan navy. If it could find Alta, then so could whomever it was that beat it. Something must be done...

### **4. Antares Passage - US\$5.00**

After more than a century of isolation, the paths between stars are again open and the people of Alta in contact with their sister colony on Sandar. The opening of the foldlines has not been the unmixed blessing the Altans had supposed, however.

For the reestablishment of interstellar travel has brought with it news of the Ryall, an alien race whose goal is the extermination of humanity. If they are to avoid defeat at the hands of the aliens, Alta must seek out the military might of Earth. However, to reach Earth requires them to dive into the heart of a supernova.

### **5. Antares Victory – First Time in Print – US\$7.00**

After a century of warfare, humanity finally discovered the Achilles heel of the Ryall, their xenophobic reptilian foe. Spica – Alpha Virginis – is the key star system in enemy space. It is the hub through which all Ryall starships must pass, and if humanity can only capture and hold it, they will strangle the Ryall war machine and end their threat to humankind forever.

It all seemed so simple in the computer simulations: Advance by stealth, attack without warning, strike swiftly with overwhelming power. Unfortunately, conquering the Ryall proves the easy part. With the key to victory in hand, Richard and Bethany Drake discover that they must also conquer human nature if they are to bring down the alien foe ...

### **6. Thunderstrike! - US\$6.00**

The new comet found near Jupiter was an incredible treasure trove of water ice and rock. Immediately, the water-starved Luna Republic and the Sierra Corporation, a leader in asteroid mining, were squabbling over rights to the new resource. However, all thoughts of profit and fame were abandoned when a scientific expedition discovered that the comet's trajectory placed it on a collision course with Earth!

As scientists struggled to find a way to alter the comet's course, world leaders tried desperately to restrain mass panic, and two lovers quarreled over the direction the comet was to take, all Earth waited to see if humanity had any future at all...

## 7. The Clouds of Saturn - US\$5.00

When the sun flared out of control and boiled Earth's oceans, humanity took refuge in a place that few would have predicted. In the greatest migration in history, the entire human race took up residence among the towering clouds and deep clear-air canyons of Saturn's upper atmosphere. Having survived the traitor star, they returned to the all-too-human tradition of internecine strife. The new city-states of Saturn began to resemble those of ancient Greece, with one group of cities taking on the role of militaristic Sparta...

## 8. The Sails of Tau Ceti – US\$5.00

*Starhopper* was humanity's first interstellar probe. It was designed to search for intelligent life beyond the solar system. Before it could be launched, however, intelligent life found Earth. The discovery of an alien light sail inbound at the edge of the solar system generated considerable excitement in scientific circles. With the interstellar probe nearing completion, it gave scientists the opportunity to launch an expedition to meet the aliens while they were still in space. The second surprise came when *Starhopper's* crew boarded the alien craft. They found beings that, despite their alien physiques, were surprisingly compatible with humans. That two species so similar could have evolved a mere twelve light years from one another seemed too coincidental to be true.

One human being soon discovered that coincidence had nothing to do with it...

## 9. Gibraltar Earth – First Time in Print — \$6.00

It is the 24th Century and humanity is just gaining a toehold out among the stars. Stellar Survey Starship *Magellan* is exploring the New Eden system when they encounter two alien spacecraft. When the encounter is over, the score is one human scout ship and one alien aggressor destroyed. In exploring the wreck of the second alien ship, spacers discover a survivor with a fantastic story.

The alien comes from a million-star Galactic Empire ruled over by a mysterious race known as the Broa. These overlords are the masters of this region of the galaxy and they allow no competitors. This news presents Earth's rulers with a problem. As yet, the Broa are ignorant of humanity's existence. Does the human race retreat to its one small world, quaking in fear that the Broa will eventually discover Earth? Or do they take a more aggressive approach?

Whatever they do, they must do it quickly! Time is running out for the human race...

## 10. Gibraltar Sun – First Time in Print — \$7.00

The expedition to the Crab Nebula has returned to Earth and the news is not good. Out among the stars, a million systems have fallen under Broan domination, the fate awaiting Earth should the Broa ever learn of its existence. The problem would seem to allow but three responses: submit meekly to slavery, fight and risk extermination, or hide and pray the Broa remain ignorant of humankind for at least a few more generations. Are the hairless apes of Sol III finally faced with a problem for which there is no acceptable solution?

While politicians argue, Mark Rykand and Lisa Arden risk everything to spy on the all-powerful enemy that is beginning to wonder at the appearance of mysterious bipeds in their midst...

### **11. Gibraltar Stars – First Time in Print — <sup>US</sup>\$7.50**

The great debate is over. The human race has rejected the idea of pulling back from the stars and hiding on Earth in the hope the Broa will overlook us for a few more generations. Instead, the World Parliament, by a vote of 60-40, has decided to throw the dice and go for a win. Parliament Hall resounds with brave words as members declare victory inevitable.

With the balance of forces a million to one against *Homo sapiens Terra*, those who must turn patriotic speeches into hard-won reality have their work cut out for them. They must expand humanity's foothold in Broan space while contending with a supply line that is 7000 light-years long.

If the sheer magnitude of the task isn't enough, Mark and Lisa Rykand discover they are in a race against two very different antagonists. The Broa are beginning to wonder at the strange two-legged interlopers in their domain; while back on Earth, those who lost the great debate are eager to try again.

Whoever wins the race will determine the future of the human species... or, indeed, whether it has one.

### **12. Gridlock and Other Stories - US\$5.00**

Where would you visit if you invented a time machine, but could not steer it? What if you went out for a six-pack of beer and never came back? If you think nuclear power is dangerous, you should try black holes as an energy source — or even scarier, solar energy! Visit the many worlds of Michael McCollum. I guarantee that you will be surprised!

## Non-Fiction Books

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### **13. The Art of Writing, Volume I - US\$10.00**

Have you missed any of the articles in the Art of Writing Series? No problem. The first sixteen articles (October, 1996-December, 1997) have been collected into a book-length work of more than 72,000 words. Now you can learn about character, conflict, plot, pacing, dialogue, and the business of writing, all in one document.

### **14. The Art of Writing, Volume II - US\$10.00**

This collection covers the Art of Writing articles published during 1998. The book is 62,000 words in length and builds on the foundation of knowledge provided by Volume I of this popular series.

### **15. The Art of Science Fiction, Volume I - US\$10.00**

Have you missed any of the articles in the Art of Science Fiction Series? No problem. The first sixteen articles (October, 1996-December, 1997) have been collected into a book-length work of more than 70,000 words. Learn about science fiction techniques and technologies, including starships, time machines, and rocket propulsion. Tour the Solar System and learn astronomy from the science fiction writer's viewpoint. We don't care where the stars appear in the terrestrial sky. We want to know their true positions in space. If you are planning to write an interstellar romance, brushing up on your astronomy may be just what you need.

#### **16. The Art of Science Fiction, Volume II - US\$10.00**

This collection covers the *Art of Science Fiction* articles published during 1998. The book is 67,000 words in length and builds on the foundation of knowledge provided by Volume I of this popular series.

#### **17. The Astrogator's Handbook – Expanded Edition and Deluxe Editions**

The Astrogator's Handbook has been very popular on Sci Fi – Arizona. The handbook has star maps that show science fiction writers where the stars are located in space rather than where they are located in Earth's sky. Because of the popularity, we are expanding the handbook to show nine times as much space and more than ten times as many stars. The expanded handbook includes the positions of 3500 stars as viewed from Polaris on 63 maps. This handbook is a useful resource for every science fiction writer and will appeal to anyone with an interest in astronomy.