



## The Practice of Dialogue

By

Michael McCollum



Last month we discussed the theory behind writing dialogue. We learned that dialogue is not the same as speech. Rather, it is the distillation of speech, intended to convey meaning without being a verbatim record of the way real human beings talk. Dialogue must give the reader the impression of speech, but without the imprecision and disjointed delivery of normal speech patterns.

The reason that dialogue is not speech involves the way our brains process information. Hearing is one of our species' autonomous functions. So long as our hearing apparatus is in good working order, we can no more ignore sounds than we can ignore breathing. And when those sounds include the distinctive patterns of language, they are routed to various areas around the brain whose function it is to decode speech.

The older theory was that speech was processed in two regions of the brain, Broca's area for speech production and Wernicke's area for speech comprehension. Collectively, these were known as the speech center. It is the location of the speech center within the brain that determines whether you are right or left-handed. Or so we thought!

The newer theories prove that the brain is much more complex than we had imagined. The parts of the brain that handle speech are called convergence zones because they are the region where a variety of signals converge to produce meaning. However, the older concept of speech center will suffice for our discussion. It gives you an understanding of the principles important to a writer without necessarily being technically accurate to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree.

Your brain takes electrical signals produced by alternating pressure waves in the air (sound), decodes them to form verbal symbols, and then combines these arbitrary sequences of signals in a way that conveys meaning. Sound, as the doctors are fond of noting, is entirely inside a person's head. If a tree falls in the forest, does it make a noise if there is no one around to hear it? The answer to that age old riddle is "no." That is because sound isn't sound until it has a brain to comprehend it. Unheard noise is merely a very short periodic change in the local barometric pressure.

Most amazing of all, the algorithms the brain uses to decode the sound waves vary from person to person. The people who are reading this article utilize the sound decoding system known as English, while others use the German, Japanese, Hindi, Chinese, or Urdu decoding systems. No matter which decoding system we learn as

children, however, they are all equally good at extracting meaning from sound waves. Some of us even learn more than one algorithm, although we are seldom as proficient at these later additions to our firmware as we are with the system we learned as children. The reason for this is also physiological. New languages are stored in different (and less efficient) locations than are old languages. It takes many years before the neural pathways to the new information are as well worn as the old.

And, judging from the large quantity of extraneous sounds with which we pepper our conversations, the speech center performs another marvelous function. It filters out all of the information-neutral sounds that are common in everyday speech. Whether the speaker hems, haws, stutters, or says “Like, you know,” every three words, the listener’s speech center is usually able to extract the underlying meaning from the sentences, no matter how badly mangled the delivery. Somewhere within the speech center there is a “gibberish filter” that effortlessly removes those impediments to understanding that are so common in our spoken communication.

Reading, on the other hand, is not one of the things we do automatically and effortlessly. Do you remember how difficult it was when you first began learning to read in school? Reading is a skill we usually teach after a child reaches the age of six, although four year olds who can read are not uncommon. When you consider all of the things babies learn in their first couple of years of life, the fact that we wait so long to teach reading is a measure of how unnatural that particular act is for us. Just think of what the world would be like if people were born knowing how to read, but had to be taught how to hear in school!

Thus, it shouldn’t be surprising to learn that words that enter our consciousness via the optic nerve take a different path than those that come through the vibrating membrane in our ears. “How does a word enter via the optic nerve?” you ask. Simple. We call it reading. You’re doing it right now!

Judging by the average person’s reaction to reading courtroom transcriptions, it is likely that this different path bypasses the gibberish filter inside the speech center altogether. Where we barely notice the disjointed, halting delivery with which people speak, to follow that same delivery in print is slow torture. I liken it to wading through hot tar up to one’s neck.

We also learned last month that dialogue is the most immediate and strongest way to have an impact on the reader. When the author narrates the story, that story is (by definition) taking place in the past. When a character speaks, however, even though the passage in which he does so is written in the past tense, the reader *hears* that speech in real time. Narration is where you tell the reader what *has* happened; dialogue is where you tell them what *is* happening.

So, knowing that dialogue is a major skill in the writer’s bag of tricks, let us transition to this month’s topic, which is to give you some “how-to” tips for writing dialogue.

## **Dialogue Format**

There is a prediction I can make with the same certainty that I can tell you the sun will rise tomorrow. Not too long after you become a published author, you will be

approached by a struggling writer with a request that you read his or her manuscript. I know this will happen because the urge is so overwhelming in new writers. You work for weeks or months on a project, only to have it rejected with a form letter and not one iota of advice as to how you can improve it. Is it any wonder that struggling writers will latch onto anyone who might tell them how to improve their skills in their chosen craft?

A friend of mine at work came down with the writing bug, and knowing that I had published novels, asked me to read his manuscript. Since he was a friend, I agreed to read the manuscript if it wasn't too long. (If you are a new writer, please remember that professionals can't read everything offered to them. If they did, they wouldn't have time to earn a living.)

The work was a fairly conventional detective story that was competently written, save for one thing. My friend, I discovered, was ignorant of the fact that dialogue must follow a particular format. He figured that he could write the spoken words any way he wanted and the readers would be able to follow him.

Nothing, of course, could be farther from the truth.

Dialogue format is very specific and must not be modified. Why? Because putting words down on paper as condensed speech is difficult. It's difficult to write and even more difficult to read. Over the centuries certain conventions have been developed concerning how you write dialogue. This doesn't mean other conventions aren't equally valid, of course; just that they are not equally universal. If you would like to write all of your dialogue in some idiosyncratic manner, then by all means do so. Just don't expect to get your writing published.

Dialogue is written in short paragraphs, with the actual words the characters are speaking set off by quotation marks. Each time a new person speaks, that speech begins a new, indented paragraph. (Note: It is possible to write dialogue without breaking it into new paragraphs each time, but it isn't recommended, especially for new writers. It's too easy for the readers to become confused about who is speaking. When you get to be experienced, you can experiment as much as you like. But for now, stick to the conventional way of doing things.)

The following is a typical section of dialogue:

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"I hate you, Matt Jones!" Diane Henderson shouted. "I hope you know that."

"You've made it clear enough," Matt said gruffly as he drew back from the beautiful, but angry, blonde. "What did I do to draw your ire?"

"WHAT DID YOU DO? What *didn't* you do? We had a date Saturday night, remember?"

"I remember. I had to go out of town on business and I left a message with your little brother. Didn't you get it?"

"You left a message with Mikey? That's the same as not calling me at all."

"What did you expect me to do? Miss my plane so that I could drive out to your house and deliver you a personalized letter?"

"You could have called Sheila at work. She would have gotten me word."

"I suppose she would," he agreed, nodding. "Too bad Sheila and I aren't speaking."

"She hates you, too?"

#

Let's look at that small scene. It is a dialogue between two characters, Matt Jones and Diane Henderson. We learn their identities in the first line when Diane is speaking. We learn Matt Jones's name because she uses it as an identifier in the first sentence: the words "Matt Jones" are set off from the rest of the sentence by a comma. This indicates that she is addressing Matt, not merely mentioning him in passing as she does Mikey and Sheila.

Following the first short sentence is a dialogue marker denoting who it is that is speaking. These markers are crucial in writing dialogue because the reader will get lost without them. Diane Henderson is speaking, or rather shouting. We know that the first speech is an exclamation because of the exclamation mark that ends it. However, the verb "shouted" inside the dialogue marker reinforces the fact that Diane is angry.

Look closely at that first sentence and its attached dialogue marker. There are only eight words in that sequence, yet in those eight words we learn the names of both characters and the fact that one of them is angry. That's pretty powerful stuff if eight words give us three solid facts. Is it any wonder that dialogue has more impact on readers than narrative?

That same observation should give us pause, however. The information density in dialogue can be so high that altering even a single word will have a dramatically different effect on the reader. For instance, if instead of shouting, what if Diane had hissed? Personally, I would interpret that to mean that she was beyond angry and had gone straight to fury. With such a high density of information, there isn't much room for sloppiness or error in dialogue. That is why it is so damnably hard to write!

Look at the second paragraph. Matt is speaking here, which is why it's a new paragraph. His words are contained within a pair of quotation marks. Normal sentences end with a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point. Matt's dialogue ends with a comma. That is because the dialogue is not a sentence that stands on its own, even though it has all of the elements of a sentence. The sentence is the dialogue plus its attendant dialogue marker: *Matt said gruffly as he drew back from the beautiful, but angry, blonde.* Since Diane named Matt in the previous paragraph, a dialogue marker is not absolutely required in the second paragraph. When one character speaks to another and a new paragraph begins, the reader can assume that the new paragraph is the reply of the second character. The dialogue marker in the second paragraph not only reinforces the fact that it is Matt who is speaking, it also tells us something of his reaction to Diane's attack. And if that weren't enough, it gives us a physical description of Diane. Again, the information density in dialogue is unusually high.

Having planted dialogue markers in the first two paragraphs, I am able to write the next five as pure dialogue. Since the two characters speak alternately, it is relatively easy to keep track of who is speaking, both due to the alternating speeches and from the context of what is being said. It isn't until the eighth paragraph that I feel it necessary to reset everyone's character indicator by inserting a new dialogue marker: *he agreed, nodding.* I not only tell you that it is Matt who is speaking in the eighth paragraph, but I include a physical description of a non-verbal component of communication, the nod.

So in nine paragraphs of dialogue, I have decided that it is prudent to insert three dialogue markers to make sure you always know who is talking. In fact, I could probably

get away with the one in the first paragraph alone, except that then you wouldn't know that Diane is a beautiful, but angry, blonde.

If your scene is a conversation between two people of the opposite sex, it becomes fairly easy to keep the reader oriented as to who is speaking. You can go a long way with only minimal dialogue marking. Often context makes the identity of the speaker clear. For instance, there is never any confusion as to identity when one of the two characters exclaims, "I'm pregnant!" If context makes identity ambiguous, then inserting *he said* and *she said* periodically will eliminate the confusion.

Short story writers are especially adept at writing two character scenes. Unfortunately, they often make a mistake in continuing to do so when they graduate to novels. A 100,000-word book consisting of fifty or more scenes becomes tedious if every scene contains only two characters. Thus, the novelist must learn to write scenes where multiple characters interact, sometimes even crowds.

Writing multiple (more than two) character dialogue is more difficult than for a male-female pair. So is writing dialogue for characters of the same sex. The reason for this is simple. You can't identify an individual character by referring to him as "he" or her as "she." "He" may be any number of he's. The same with the she's. When this situation arises, it becomes necessary to name the speakers frequently, especially if they speak in no particular order.

If you must insert dialogue markers frequently in your text, then take the opportunity to do something else with them. Describe what the character is doing, or what they look like, or use the opportunity to reveal their inner feelings (*Diane Henderson shouted*). If you have to have an interruption there anyway, use it to advance the story.

### Dialogue Marker Placement

The placement of dialogue markers isn't as important as the punctuation you use with them. Personally, I prefer them to follow the first short sentence or phrase, but they can actually go anywhere. Here are a few short examples of markers in dialogue:

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(1) "Generally speaking," Lois said, "I don't like to fly."

(2) "The cat is out of the bag," Todd reported. "The teacher knows we cheated on our final exam."

(3) Teri frowned as she said, "God help us, because the government sure isn't going to."

(4) "How do you expect me to keep the house clean when you children won't pick up your clothes and put them into the hamper? I swear, pigs must be tidier than you are!" the exasperated mother screamed.

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In each of these four examples, you know who it is that is speaking because I have included a dialogue marker. In Example 1, the speaker is Lois and the marker

actually splits the sentence. A comma and a quotation mark show the reader where the first phrase ends and where the dialogue marker (*Lois said*) begins. Then the dialogue marker ends with a comma, followed by a space, and then a quotation mark denoting a return to the spoken dialogue.

In Example 2, the dialogue marker is at the end of the sentence. The end of the spoken passage is marked by a comma and a quotation mark (the speech has ended, but not the sentence). The second sentence begins with a quotation mark.

Example 3 shows the dialogue marker in front of the spoken words. I find this placement to be awkward, but you may disagree. Note that I began the sentence with a statement of action on the part of the character. This helps soften the transition. I could have written, *Teri said, "God help us..."* and have on occasion. I try to use leading dialogue markers sparingly, but that may just be a matter of personal preference. If you like them, use them.

Example 4 shows a paragraph with a trailing dialogue marker. The problem with this is that you have to read the entire paragraph, storing it in your memory as you read, until you reach the end. Only then can you ascribe the speech to someone. This works with short paragraphs, but imagine a paragraph 500 words long where you don't learn who is speaking until you reach the end. (Note: Only showoffs write paragraphs 500 words long in the first place. It can be done, but the readers won't appreciate your display of artistic prowess. They may stop reading, which means that only you will know how good you are.)

### Extended Speeches - Punctuation

If you change paragraphs each time you change speakers, how can a single speaker say something that requires more than one paragraph? Won't the transition from John's Paragraph #1 to John's Paragraph #2 be mistaken for the transition to Mary's Paragraph #1? Could be. However, there is a convention for handling dialogue where a single character speaks for more than one paragraph. It involves placing a quotation mark at the beginning of each paragraph the speaker utters, but leaving off the closing quotation mark until the end of the speech. The form looks like this:

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"Friends, Romans, Countrymen! Lend me your ears," the toga clad orator proclaimed. "No, I don't want you to listen to me. I want to cut your ears off and sell them to the Britons for a healthy profit.

"And why Britain, you may ask? Because those people are barbarians of the first order. They paint themselves blue and couldn't conjugate a proper Latin verb to save their lives.

"Not that I want to save their lives, of course. I would just as soon crucify them as look at them. Take the Brits ... please!"

— Speech by Hennis Youngmanus, to the Roman Senate, 123 AD

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The above bit of fictional dialogue has but a single speaker and three paragraphs. Note that there are no "close quote" marks until the very end. This is the signal to the

reader that the Roman orator is still speaking. (It is also a signal that Henny Youngman jokes were old about the time of Christ.)

Please note that the quotation marks that begin the paragraphs are right leaning marks while those that end the paragraphs are left leaning. Real typesetters and modern word processing programs use the Open Quotes (“”) and the Close Quotes (”) symbols. Microsoft Word refers to these as “smart quotes.” Typewriters and older word processors merely use the Quotes (”) symbol. Using the open and close quotes gives the reader a visual clue to the fact that character's speech is continuing. Using the plain Jane quotation marks such as those found on a typewriter makes it more difficult to catch the signal. Difficult or not, it is all the signal we have to signify that a character's speech is continuing.

Since many readers are totally unaware of this convention, except possibly on a subconscious level, it is not surprising that multiple paragraph dialogue can cause the reader to pause regularly to orient himself or herself. This is why it is so important for the writer to be rigorous about punctuation.

### **Extended Speeches - General**

If one masters the punctuation conventions of having a character talk for several paragraphs, is there anything wrong with writing long speeches? Yes, there is, and the reason has nothing to do with punctuation.

There are times in a story or a novel when it is necessary for one character to speak for an extended time. These situations may arise if your character is a politician who gives a speech. The problem with long speeches is that dialogue, if it goes on too long, will lose its punch. It starts to sound like narration, which is what it has become.

The secret to keeping your dialogue fresh when you must deliver it in large doses is to break it up. This can be handled in a variety of ways. In Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *The Mote In God's Eye*, the authors have an entire chapter where one of the characters delivers a long lecture. The purpose of the passage is to fill readers in on events that have been taking place off stage. To break up this very long section of exposition, they use a fairly obvious device. They have the character, a scientist, dictating his mission report into a tape recorder. And in between taping his reports, he thinks about how things are going while enjoying a glass of wine.

Thus, Niven and Pournelle give us a very long and dry exposition on what we need to know, but in the form of dialogue with interruptions. The effect is as though we were listening to a particularly windy professor giving a lecture. The various asides that go through the character's mind as he dictates break up the dry information and keep us more interested than we otherwise would be. The technique is far from perfect, but it gets us over a difficult spot in the novel with a minimum number of words. The authors are also relying on the fact that we are more than halfway through this long novel, and it is unlikely that we will stop reading at that particular point.

Another way to soften a long speech is to recount only a portion of what the character says as dialogue. The rest can be done as straight author narration. The two forms are mixed until you work your way through the passage. The advantage of narration is that you can compress the time it takes the reader to advance along the plot

line. Instead of quoting the dictator's entire three-hour harangue against the heroes, you can merely say: *He went on for three hours, cursing us with every other breath.*

In my book *Life Probe*, I have a scene where the United Nations is arguing over whether or not they will welcome the alien spacecraft then on the outskirts of the Solar System. This takes place at one of the internal climaxes of the book, so I want the speech to have a powerful effect on the readers. Yet, instead of quoting the character's entire speech to the General Assembly, I alternated between speech and narration. To illustrate the technique, I have included this excerpt from *Life Probe* following this article.

### Dialect in Dialogue

One way to provide an invisible dialogue marker is to make the speech of each of your characters distinctive. This can be done by giving your characters a special speech pattern, or by making them a foreigner who speaks with an accent. In the nineteenth century, this was done by spelling out the words phonetically. If the character was Dutch, the writer would write: *"A laty coom in de udder tay to puy a pair've garters und I ask her vat kind did she vant."* (If you are interested in a good book on writing, I recommend *Dare To Be A Great Writer* by Leonard Bishop, Writer's Digest Books, 1988, from which I have borrowed this dialect example).

Because modern readers are more sophisticated than those of the last century (who didn't have the dubious benefit of watching 10,000 hours of television as they grew up), the technique of attempting to phonetically copy the exact sound of an accent has fallen into disuse. One reason for this is that phonetic dialect is difficult to read and slows the reader down. If faced with too long of a passage of this ersatz Dutch, Yiddish, or German, a reader may just give up. Besides, it is unnecessary to reproduce the actual sounds a character makes.

Remember that writing takes place on a piece of paper, while reading takes place in the reader's head. Just as it isn't necessary to physically describe each of your characters precisely, it isn't necessary to reproduce the sound pattern a foreign character makes as he speaks. In the case of physical descriptions, it is only necessary to say that a woman is "tall and beautiful." The reader will fill in the rest of the details for themselves. They will imagine what *they* mean when they describe someone as tall and beautiful, not what you mean. And in the event you tell the reader that the character has a Dutch accent, they will hear that accent if you provide them with a few clues.

One of the most powerful ways to denote that a character speaks in dialect is to change their word order and possibly throw in an occasional foreign word: *"You are perhaps enjoying your visit to Germany, Ja?"* Adopting a non-standard word order is particularly effective because it delivers a marker to the character's identity without slowing down the reader. Interestingly, it doesn't matter a great deal which nationality goes with which word order. You can tell your readers that the character is Russian rather than German, and convince them by saying: *"You are perhaps enjoying your visit to Mother Russia, Da?"* Japanese is even easier. The standard Japanese response to just about anything is *"Domo Arigato,"* which translates literally as "Thank you very much!" However, they don't say it like that. Almost every Japanese I've dealt with in my professional career has pronounced it as a single word: *"Thankyouverymuch!"*



Remember, it is the non-standard delivery that convinces, not the fidelity to any given nationality's speech pattern.

As an aside, I have recently taken classes in Russian to support a project at work and have gained a new appreciation for the flexibility and power of English. In Russian the functions of the various words in a sentence are determined by word ending (as they are in Latin). This makes word order completely arbitrary. Thus, it is impossible to denote "foreign-ness" in a Russian novel by changing the word order since the word order doesn't matter in the first place.

### **Dialogue as Validation**

One of the most important uses of dialogue is to validate the characters. You can describe a character for page after page in narration, but on a very basic level, that character doesn't become real until he or she speaks. Think of a character that appears only as narration like being an extra in a movie. They are part of the scenery, and not quite real. They're like the crewman in the red uniform in the old *Star Trek* episodes. When you saw Captain Kirk, Dr. McCoy, Mr. Spock, and an actor you didn't recognize wearing a red uniform in the transporter room, you knew one thing for certain. The guy in red wasn't coming back to the ship alive. As a result, you didn't invest much emotional capital in this obvious piece of cannon fodder.

(My wife and I are both avid moviegoers. In the satirical movie *Hot Shots*, they make fun of these disposable characters by having one whose name is Dead Meat. Now whenever we go to the movies and I see a character that doesn't appear to have a function, I always lean over to her and whisper "Dead Meat!" Usually I get elbowed in the ribs for my trouble.)

So, if you want to validate your characters and make them real to the readers, give them something to say! Because the human mind treats dialogue the same as actual speech, your brain will say, "That beautiful young lady must be real. I just heard her talk!"

And once you've got your readers' brains thinking the characters are real, you are well on your way to having a successful story or book. Dialogue can be an invaluable aid in entertaining the readers, or it can be a major burden.

It's all up to you, the writer, and your skill at reproducing this condensed, synthetic speech. Like any other skill, writing dialogue can be learned. All you need is practice.

Appendix 3  
Excerpt from Life Probe

Illustrating One Method For Writing A Long Speech As Dialogue

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Eric Stassel shouldered his way into the darkened, crowded Staff Lounge. He was half an hour late for the daily UN debate, and the holoscreen already showed the General Assembly chamber. A familiar figure looked out at him from behind the podium. Augusta Meriweather looked a bit more haggard than he remembered from his ExCom interview, but was otherwise unchanged. After a single, quick glance Stassel concentrated on stomping as few toes as possible as he edged toward an empty spot near one wall.

“Hi, traveling partner,” he whispered as he sat down.

Lisa Moore turned in the seat directly in front of him. “Hi, Eric. Where have you been keeping yourself?”

“I’ve been busy. Have I missed anything?”

“Not much. We’re just getting to the good part.”

Stassel nodded and sat back to listen.

“ ... And that, colleagues and delegates, was the situation up to the moment when the probe began transmitting its messages of friendship. Since each of you know the content of those messages as well as I, there is no need to belabor the point by repeating them here. Suffice to say, we have been asked to help this traveler from afar. You have before you a resolution to do just that. On behalf of the Trusteeship and Security Councils, and at the behest of the secretary-general, I ask you to give it your speedy approval.”

Mrs. Meriweather’s patrician features suddenly swelled as the camera zoomed in for a close-up. Stassel was surprised to note that her eyes glistened with a hint of tears. She seemed to look directly at him from across 150 million kilometers of space, and continued.

“I do not ask you to give your blind support to this resolution, however. Those who know me are well aware of my views on the sin of altruism. Nowhere is it written that we must assist every traveler who happens by. I must note in passing, however, that the Parable of the Good Samaritan has its counterpart in every culture on this planet.

“No, I ask you to welcome this emissary for more practical reasons. Consider, if you will, the magnitude of the accomplishment of those who built it. Who among us would be sufficiently farsighted to undertake such a project? Do we squabbling, squalling, scrabbling creatures have the right to foil this great dream?

“I say not! To do so would be an act unworthy of us, and would result in our undying shame.”

The ancient, lined face, still in close-up, paused. The fierce eyes scanned the audience. “A few moments ago I spoke of altruism, and yet I now find myself perilously close to committing that very sin. After all, we humans have done things in the past that were contemptible and richly deserving of revulsion. It

hasn't really harmed us, has it? What matter one more black mark more or less on our record? So let us consider things on a less moral plane. Let us shed our hypocrisy and ask how we may turn this event to our own profit.

"The facts are these: The probe has traveled far and has gathered much scientific data for its builders. It desires to return home, but lacks both the fuel and the stamina to do so. Our experts tell me that it must destroy its engines in the process of shedding the frightful velocity it carries. Apparently, this is normal operating procedure for instrument packages of this type. In order to return home, the probe and its fellows must seek out indigenous life forms capable of overhauling its engines and replenishing its fuel stocks.

"They who built the probe seem to place more trust in their fellow creatures than would we in similar circumstances. Yet, they do not ask for charity. Instead, they send their servant to us equipped to pay its own way. The probe is a veritable treasure house of advanced scientific knowledge. It has offered to share that knowledge with us.

"We have been offered a gift that will catapult us a thousand or more years into our future. I urge you to vote in favor of this resolution, not only because it is right. It is also profitable. This chance will not come again. If we let this opportunity slip from our grasp, we will deserve the curses that our children and grandchildren will heap upon us. Delegates of the Sovereign Nations of Earth, this is your chance for greatness.

*"For God's sake, don't flub it!"*

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#### **1. Life Probe - <sup>US</sup>\$4.50**

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>\$4.50**

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\$4.50**

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\$4.50**

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\$4.50**

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\$4.50**

*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. Gridlock and Other Stories - US\$4.50**

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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### **12. 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.

### **13. 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.

### **14. 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.

### **15. 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.

## **16. 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.