



Common Mistakes in Writing

By
Michael McCollum



Have you ever made a mistake? Of course, you have. We all have. Mistakes are as much a part of human existence as ... well, breathing. One of the pieces of folk wisdom that I learned from my mother was that "people learn from their mistakes." I think a good case can be made that making mistakes is the *only* way we learn things. As they say in the exercise business: No pain, no gain!

Think about it. As babies we had a single automatic response to any new object we encountered. If we could pick it up, we popped it into our mouths. Sometimes the unknown object was made from milk chocolate, and we were rewarded. Often, it had no taste at all. Occasionally, it tasted bad. At these times we would spit it out as quickly as we had mouthed it. We had to suffer many more bad tastes than good ones before we learned which objects were good to eat.

Then we grew into adolescence and began making mistakes wholesale. Who can forget the waves of raw emotion that accompany the many errors of our teenage years? Most experts hold that these emotional storms are merely a side effect of the increased hormonal levels of puberty. In other words, like pimples, those white hot flashes of anger and shame are merely an unintended consequence of our reproductive organs coming online. But maybe they aren't that at all. Perhaps the hypersensitivity is a survival mechanism that spurs us to a burst of new learning just before we depart the nest forever.

"Learning" then is nothing more than surviving a "bad" experience and subsequently modifying your behavior to avoid repeating it. And if it is true that we cannot learn without going through the emotional turmoil that accompanies a mistake, then we shouldn't fear our mistakes – we should embrace them! This principle is illustrated by a story they tell in management class. A senior executive in a major multinational corporation made a decision that ultimately turned into a \$2 million error. When the executive's boss, the corporation's CEO, was asked whether or not he is going to fire the miscreant, he thought for a moment and then answered, "I'd love to, but I can't. I just invested \$2 million in his education!"

What has all of this to do with writing? Simply this.

If you are such a perfectionist that you can't stand even making the tiniest mistake, then you are probably too highly strung to be a writer. If you are so afraid of making an error that you never try anything new, then you will never progress to the level of skill required to sell your work. As a writer you will make your fair share of mistakes while practicing your craft. Some will be small, noticed only by you and corrected

before anyone else has the opportunity to read your manuscript. Others will be mammoth. In the first editions of his most famous book, *Ringworld*, noted science fiction author Larry Niven had the Earth rotating backwards. No one caught it, not even me when I first read the story.

If you can't stand the frustration that accompanies making such mistakes, you have definitely chosen the wrong line of work! For frustration is the normal state of mind of a writer. Either you are frustrated because the words refuse to flow, or because your masterpiece has been rejected for the tenth time, or because some twit of a critic has completely missed the point. You spend years suffering rejection letters, then manage to sell your book, only to have it ruined by an editor who homogenizes your distinctive style into pabulum. Nor does the frustration end when you are finally published. When you enter a bookstore, one of two things happens: 1) either your book is on the shelf, indicating to you that it isn't selling, or 2) it isn't on the shelf, indicating that you've been remaindered. Nothing ever goes right in the life of a writer! Our personalities won't allow it. Successful writers must maintain a careful balance between stoicism and perfectionism, with a bit of masochist thrown in for flavoring.

Embracing mistakes does not come easily to us. Still, embrace them we must if we are ever to improve. Which brings us to the subject of this month's article, a discussion of some of the more common errors made by writers, and specifically, one particular writer – me! I present them here to help you avoid them. Just because you are destined to make mistakes doesn't mean that you have to make the same ones I do. No, show the creativity that has driven you to write in the first place. Make *new* mistakes, bungle your story *differently*, embark on a course toward finding new ways to *destroy* your narrative. Give the editors a break. They're tired of seeing the same old errors pop up in manuscripts *ad infinitum*.

Clichés, The Eradication Of

By temperament, I am an amiable, one of those people who likes to keep interpersonal relationships friendly and non-confrontational. I get this tendency from my father, whose personality I seem to have inherited whole. For the forty years that our lives overlapped, my father kept telling the same ancient, corny jokes. One of his favorites came whenever we drove past the local cemetery. He would invariably say, “people are dying to get in there!” We would, of course, groan on cue. Another of my father's favorite jokes was, “Keep your ear to the ground, your shoulder to the wheel, and your nose to the grindstone; and then see how well you can work in that position!” (For our non-American readers, “ear to the ground,” “shoulder to the wheel,” and “nose to the grindstone,” are three of the most common colloquial American clichés. They mean “remain alert,” “work hard,” and “persevere,” respectively. The joke pokes fun at clichés by stringing the three together and then treating them as though they were literal instructions on body position rather than exhortations to good work.)

Because I am my father's son, and have a fondness for clever sayings, I tend to pepper my own writing with clichés. It just seems natural somehow. But natural or not, this is one of the worst mistakes a writer can make. Since I recognize the tendency in myself, I work hard to overcome it, especially in the final edit of a book manuscript.

After all, a book is forever (hopefully) and you don't want your great-great-great-grandchildren believing that you lacked originality.

But what exactly is a cliché? A cliché is a short thought or sequence of words that is universally judged to have once been a pearl of wisdom, but which has lost its bite over the years due to overuse. "Son of a gun," "A horse of another color," "another row to hoe," "not playing with a full deck," "a little bit pregnant," are all examples of some of the simpler clichés. In a broader sense, of course, a cliché is any saying or literary convention that has been dulled by overuse. The prostitute with the heart of gold, the cowboy loner whose sense of honor requires him to stand up to the villain, the mad scientist – these are all examples of fictional clichés rather than word clichés. Instead of being the powerful comments on the human condition, clichés are merely semantic noise that add nothing to your writing except to convince readers that you are lazy.

This is a shame since clichés represent some of the best writing the race has ever created. If they weren't, then the sayings and plots would not have achieved the popularity that has robbed them of their power. I was especially struck by this fact when my wife and I attended the sneak preview of the movie *Hamlet*, with Mel Gibson. But I get ahead of myself...

Like most high school students forced to read the plays of William Shakespeare, I was not enthralled. They were written in this strange, hard to understand language and illustrated attitudes that obviously had no relevance to modern life. Like most adolescents, I was sure I had the world figured out and William Shakespeare had nothing new to offer. Not until a Shakespearean touring company came through Phoenix during my senior year did I actually see one of the plays performed on stage. I saw *Twelfth Night* and *Macbeth* performed at the Phoenix Little Theater. To my great surprise, I enjoyed both immensely – especially after developing a crush on the leading lady.

Many years later, my wife returned to college after a 20-year absence. She entered the College of Liberal Arts at Arizona State University where she majored in English literature and minored in Latin. Because of this English literature focus, we went to several Shakespearean plays and movies during her educational stint. The best of these was Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V*, a true masterpiece of the cinematic art. King Henry's exhortation to the troops just prior to the Battle of Agincourt is the finest example of an inspirational speech I've ever seen, and well worth study by every writer.

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition.
And gentlemen in England now abed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

King Henry V, Act 4, Scene 3

Having found *Henry V* so enjoyable, I actually looked forward to Mel Gibson's *Hamlet*. (My wife, of course, had other reasons for seeing the movie.) And though it was extremely well made, after about fifteen minutes, I leaned over in my seat and said, "This movie has more clichés in it than any I've ever seen!" I was rewarded for my effort by a quick elbow in the ribs!

If you've seen *Hamlet* performed on stage or in the movies, you know what I'm talking about. When Polonius's son, Laertes, departs for France in Act 1, Scene 3, his father gives him several pieces of advice. The speech is nothing but one long cliché. "To thine own self be true. ... Never a lender or borrower be ... For the apparel oft proclaims the man (clothes make the man)."

"But wait a minute," you say. "Those weren't clichés when Shakespeare wrote the play. He's the one that said them first!" Of course, he did. And having done so, he enriched the heritage of the English language immensely. Then, other people picked up the wisdom of his sayings and repeated them over and over again! And having heard these things hundreds or thousands of times, we essentially filter them out. A few months ago, we discussed the fact that the human brain has a "gibberish filter" in it. A cliché then is a sequence of words that is unable to get past the gibberish filter.

Nor is it necessary for William Shakespeare to write a sentence for it to become a cliché. Anyone able to utter a good enough thought can have it turned meaningless through overuse. Let's look at the first cliché I had in my list, "He's a son of a gun!" The expression is so common among my father's generation that it is often pronounced as one word (sunuvagun), and is sometimes used all by itself as an exclamation, often as a substitute for a similar, but more vulgar expression, *Sonovabitch!*

But what exactly does *son of a gun* mean?

A "son of a gun" is someone with a powerful, driving personality. Yet, despite the fact that it is a common American colloquialism, not one person in a million has any idea where the expression comes from.

For the record, the term comes from the British Navy in the days of the Napoleonic wars. The crews of His Majesty's warships were often prevented from going ashore when they returned to port because once they got their feet on dry land, a large percentage of them would desert. To keep their crews from disappearing, the Admiralty ordered common sailors confined to their ships, sometimes for years at a time. When those ships were in port, the admiralty allowed the sailors to bring their "wives" aboard. Whole families lived below decks until the ships put back to sea. And, sailors being the way they are, pregnancies resulted.

Some of the pregnant women would go into labor while aboard ship, and the obstetrical procedures of the day were, to put it mildly, unique. When it came time for a woman to give birth, she would be stretched out on the wooden deck between two of the ship's cannons. This was a necessity as these were often the only places where there was sufficient room to lie flat during the delivery. Then, at the crucial moment, just as the baby's head emerged from the birth canal; gunners would simultaneously fire both adjacent cannons. The roar of the guns was sufficiently startling that the babies would literally "pop out." A male child delivered in this manner became a "son of a gun." If there were also "daughters of a gun," that fact has not come down to us.

Do you see how much more flavorful the expression is once you know its derivation? That's the problem with clichés. These pearls of wisdom have been used so

much that that all the air has leaked out of their tires. (“Pearl of wisdom,” is a cliché, and its use in conjunction with “air leaked out of their tires” is a mixed metaphor. This is a sin we will get to in a moment.)

Isn't there *any* time when it is permissible to use a cliché? Actually, there is. They can be used with impunity inside dialogue. In fact, they help lend credence to a character if he or she peppers their speech with clichés. You can see this in a recent movie, *A Few Good Men*, with Tom Cruise and Demi Moore. In it Cruise plays a Navy lawyer defending two Marine enlisted men against a charge of murder. One of the minor characters in the movie is a newsstand vendor from whom Cruise buys a newspaper each evening. Now this character has nothing to do with the basic plot of the story, and it would have been totally acceptable to have the newsstand stand mute while Cruise's character bought the paper. Instead, the director had Cruise and the vendor engage in a nightly cliché contest to see who could top the other in delivering the most hackneyed line. The effect of this was to make both characters more human and likeable, as well as to have a light moment that contrasts well with the dramatic moment that follows immediately.

Still, except for dialogue intended to aid characterization, clichés – both words and situations – should be avoided at all costs. They are thoughts that have been used up, mere limp imitations of their former robust selves. They taste of nothing. Unless you want your writing to do the same, you will learn to avoid them.

Covers and Titles

It is important that book covers and titles be an accurate reflection of the book contents, but that they also not be too esoteric to attract readers. This particular rule is one I've learned the hard way over the years. Being a science fiction writer, I have a fondness for book names that are astronomical or intellectual. My books include *A Greater Infinity*, *Procyon's Promise*, *Antares Dawn*, and *Antares Passage*. Although Judy Lynn Del Rey, one of the greatest SF editors who ever lived, thought *Procyon's Promise* was a very well written book, its sales were disappointing. I believe one reason for this was simply because people didn't know how to pronounce *Procyon* (Pro-see-yon, not Prok-ee-yon). Procyon, by the way, is a nearby G-class star (the same class as Sol), although much larger than our own star. It is a good place to look for Earth-like planets, and therefore, a good place to plant a human colony.

I learned the lesson again with a more recent book, which bears the cryptic title, *The Sails of Tau Ceti*, and a cover illustration showing a light sail (a big sheet of reflective plastic that moves the ship by reflecting photons off its surface). The cover illustration is beautiful, but no one knows what it represents. (It was painted by Don Dixon, who now exhibits his work in the Sci Fi - Arizona art gallery. If you haven't checked out the gallery, you are missing one of life's more basic pleasures.)

From these two experiences I promulgated “McCollum's Rule for Naming Books and Applying Cover Illustrations.” This rule states: *Never put a title on your book that people don't understand, especially if coupled with a cover illustration that can only be recognized by scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California!*

People shouldn't judge a book by its cover (a cliché if there ever was one), but you can bet that the cover is what causes them to purchase the book in the first place.

Having learned my lesson, I plan to swear off intellectual titles. My next book will be titled *LUST!!!!* in red letters 72-points high, with a suitably appropriate cover illustration.

Titles, then, are a crucial marketing tool for selling books. You should spend as much time thinking about them as you do any single chapter if you want to sell a lot of books. Don't try to demonstrate your intellectual superiority by making the title too obscure or too cute. A clever play on words is often good, although puns are generally terrible. Titles should be descriptive, clever, and above all, short. Why short? Well for one thing, a short title is easier to remember than a long one, something that is important in an industry that does most of its advertising by word-of-mouth. It should also be short in order to fit on the top half of the cover in order to be seen when your book is stacked two or three tiers back on the shelves. Besides, a title that is too long can cause interesting problems at the time of publication.

An illustration of this point is a book I wrote called *Thunderstrike!* Despite my typing "Thunderstrike" several hundred times throughout the manuscript, everyone thinks the title of the book is *Thunder Strike!* Why? Because my publishers couldn't get the full word on one line in the size font they wanted. So they broke the word in two, after having judged that hyphenating was not a good idea.

Remember. Your title should be simple, understandable, and fit easily on the cover. Try to avoid writing whole sentences for a title, as this puts off a great many people. Remember that when they made a movie from *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick, they titled the movie *Bladerunner*. Why do you suppose they did that? Do you think it could have had something to do with maximizing the income stream?

As for cover illustrations, as an author you probably can't do much about them. That is, after all, the publisher's business, not yours. Still, you can pray that your publisher has a certain degree of commercial sense and properly matches the cover to your book. You don't want the same experience as a pair of famous writers of romance novels. One of their books was released with a cover illustration that looked like a Boris Vallejo science fiction illustration. Because the cover made the book look like a science fiction novel, none of the romance readers would touch it. As for the science fiction readers who purchased it based on the cover, they were furious when they found out what it was.

The rule for cover illustrations is simple: *The illustration must reflect the contents of the book!* And this rule goes farther than merely what picture is painted on the cover. The whole feel of the cover must reflect the kind of book it is, right down to the style font and color scheme used. One of my books had the distinction of having my name printed in violet over a reddish patch on the cover painting. That particular color combination is not a good one for visibility. From more than about four feet away, it was almost impossible to read my name. I leave it as an exercise for the student to determine whether the illegibility of my name increased or decreased sales of the book.

Redundancies and Unneeded Qualifiers

One of the sins of writing that is closely related to clichés is the use of redundant language and unneeded qualifiers. The first type lengthens your writing without adding anything to it, thereby diluting the effect you are striving for, while the second merely

takes powerful words and reduces their impact. So what do I mean by a writing redundancy? My favorite is one I heard listening to the news a few years ago. The talking head was doing a story about women in the military and used the term, “pregnant female soldier.” Excuse me, but is there any other kind? Until medical science advances considerably farther than it has to date, the word “pregnant” will always imply “female,” so the whole phrase could just as easily (and more effectively) have been written “pregnant soldier.”

If you are now laughing over the news writer’s stupidity, don’t! This business of padding our writing with redundant words is an insidious one. Because it takes so much longer to write a passage than to read it, we writers are operating on an entirely different time scale than our readers, and thus, don’t recognize these problems when they creep in. Consider, “She rushed quickly into the bedroom, where she picked up the loudly caterwauling baby!” Is there any way one can “rush” except by doing it “quickly,” and have you ever heard a baby “caterwaul” quietly? I think not. It is much more effective, then, to say, “She rushed into the bedroom, where she picked up the caterwauling baby!” But because we are trying to make ourselves understood, we often say the same thing two or three times.

These last two are examples not only of redundancy, but also of unnecessary modifiers. The words “rush” and “caterwaul” are powerful in and of themselves. They need no help from modifiers. Writers should search their work for such words and kill them. In fact, there is a good rule of thumb (cliché) you can use if you wish to strengthen your writing: Remove *all words ending in “ly.”*

“Huh?”

Think about it. In English, how do you signal to the reader that a word is a “helper” such as an adjective or an adverb? You often add an “ly” ending. “He was *hardly* finished.” “I am *barely* awake.” Each of the italicized words is a modifier intended to change the meaning of the words they refer to. They make the sentences mushy! Is there really any benefit to saying “He was *hardly* finished,” rather than “He was finished.”? How about “I am *barely* awake,” in place of “I am awake.”?

Mixed Metaphors, or Unintended Hilarity in Writing

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison. Metaphors allow authors to clarify their meaning through the use of similarity. “Sea of troubles” is a metaphor, as is Shakespeare’s “All the world’s a stage,” implying that we are all actors in a giant play. A good metaphor is like a brilliant diamond sparkling amidst the black lines of your manuscript, and if one metaphor enlivens a sentence, why not two, or three?

There is a rule in life that more is not necessarily better, and this rule applies especially to metaphors. Why? Because in the act of making multiple comparisons in a single sentence, you run the risk of inadvertently tickling the reader’s funny bone. In fact, the danger of the mixed metaphor is so great that it has become a staple of that popular literary tradition, the “Dark and Stormy Night” competition.

Each year, since 1982 the English Department at San Jose State University has sponsored the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest, a whimsical literary competition that

challenges entrants to compose the opening sentence to the worst of all possible novels. The colloquial name is from the most overused story opening in history, “It was a dark and stormy night!” If every editor had a dollar for each time they read that sentence at the beginning of stories, well ... they wouldn’t have to be underpaid editors any longer. They could do something useful. (Just joking! Mostly.)

The underlined passages of the following “Dishonorable Mention” entries into the 1997 Bulwer-Lytton contest are metaphors. They are also mixed. I leave it to the reader to judge the impact of the passages:

The breeze was as cool and biting as a Roger Whitaker hit song, whistling through the remaining shreds of her dress as easily as a prune passes through a colon, when Tony stepped up and solicitously put his jacket around her shoulders, saying “Here, let me break the wind for you.”

–Nick Bruechle, Fremantle, Western Australia

The love of her life, Cordelle Horstmussen, wasn’t much to look at (he had sunken, bloodshot eyes that were unevenly spaced, differed in color, and—thank God—drew attention from his elfin ears and doubly cleft chin, and his complexion was sallow and dotted with pimply blackheads, so that it resembled month-old cottage cheese in the throes of a fungal blitzkrieg, and he walked with an uneven, duckfooted, and halting gait, like Charlie Chaplin with a case of bleeding piles), but he made her laugh, and now that she realized why, she planned to dump him like a truckload of chicken entrails.

–Mark Watson, Cary, NC

Day broke like an enormous egg cracking over the rim of the great, jagged-edged bowl of the Grand Canyon, its bright yellow yolk of sunshine pouring runnily into every crag and crevice, suffusing the early morning air with the same ochereous brilliance as it had for millennia while the mighty Colorado River cuts its way to the stratum of the present valley floor.

–Mary Christensson, San Mateo, CA

Enough said? I thought so. Actually, that last example is less a mixed metaphor than merely a really bad one. So, you don’t have to mix them in order to trip over metaphors. You can screw up single metaphors as well. The rule is that you shouldn’t try to stretch your comparison too far, lest you pop something in the reader’s brain. Be careful and conservative when it comes to metaphors. Since the days of Mickey Spillane, some writers have thought they could sling metaphors like hash, only to discover that they had broken their omelet, causing the bright yellow yoke to ... Omigod! It’s catching!

For those interested in the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest, you can find their home page at:

<http://www.bulwer-lytton.com/>

Conclusion

These are far from the only writing mistakes you can make. To discuss them all would take a thousand pages, and then they would only be the ones I've made myself. You will probably make all the same mistakes, and then some. So don't worry about it excessively, nor kick yourself too much when you do. This is not to say that you shouldn't kick yourself a little bit for errors. After all, if they aren't the least bit unpleasant, you won't have any reason to avoid them in the future.

Still, learn to embrace your mistakes. They are your friends. Just don't make them lifelong friends!

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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 - ^{US}\$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. 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

12. The Art of Writing, Volume I - US\$10.00

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