



Writers and Readers

By
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In this series on the Art of Writing, we have conducted a far ranging inquiry into the craft of the writer. We began by discussing the attributes required for a successful career in writing. There are basically two: You have to be strong willed and an introvert. The strong will is needed to survive the many letters of rejection you will receive before selling your first professional work, and unless you are introverted, it's unlikely that you will be able to bring yourself to sit alone for the long hours necessary to write something that will sell.

We then went on to review Robert Heinlein's four rules for a successful career in writing and their practical application. After that, we reviewed some of the more basic aspects of the craft, things that are often overlooked by aspiring writers, small details such as "Now that I've written my epic work, to whom am I going to sell it?" With this foundation built, we struck off into deep waters, "dog paddling" as fast as we could. We looked into the intricacies of characterization, conflict, pacing, plot, and dialogue. And finally, we reviewed the business of writing, and hopefully provided you with some insight into how publishing actually works. Let us now speak of the most important relationship in all of writing, the covenant between Writer and Reader:

The Covenant

I, the reader, being of sound mind and having paid actual money for the work of the author, do hereby agree to believe everything the author says up to the point where the author's words exceed my ability to suspend my disbelief. Should this occur, I reserve the right to consider this agreement null and void, to put down the author's words, never to pick them up again!

You will never see a written agreement like the one above, but whenever someone purchases your work, this is precisely the agreement they are mentally making with you. They agree to believe everything you say up to the point where you say something they just can't bring themselves to believe. The technical term for this covenant between reader and writer is "The Willing Suspension of Disbelief."

When the reader buys your book, they are taking money that could otherwise be spent on a six pack of beer. For this reason they have an incentive to believe anything you tell them. If you say that the ground is blue, the sea is orange, and the sky is green,

your readers will visualize a blue beach, orange surf, and a sky of emerald green. They will cling to this belief for as long as they are reading, and in fact, will resist when the logical part of their brain tries to tell them that this is illogical. So long as you give them any barely plausible reason for maintaining this false belief, they will do so. Only when your tower of lies grows tall enough that it begins to wobble and threatens to tip over will they allow their inner logic to regain control of their minds. Not for nothing have we discussed writing as “brainwashing for fun and profit.”

The reader comes to the act of reading as defenseless as a newborn babe. In their search for entertainment they lower their normal guard against the outside world. And once these defenses are down, they are vulnerable. This surrender of will gives the writer power that the worst despots of history could only dream of attaining — it gives us the power to tell other people how to think. And with this power comes obligation. The reader has given the writer their unguarded trust, and it is up to the writer not to abuse that trust.

How does the writer abuse this privilege? Betrayal of trust takes many forms, but at its root, it is usually a failure to play the game fairly. Remember that writers are gods in their fictional universes. They are the creators, the omnipotent beings with the power of life and death over their domains. A writer can create a nation with the stroke of a pen, or wipe one out. Because we are all powerful within our books, it is incumbent on us not to violate the rules merely because we can. Throughout human history it hasn't mattered much whether the gods were benevolent or malevolent, and in fact, civilizations have flourished under both systems. What matters to human beings is that the gods be predictable. Nothing strikes terror in the human heart more quickly than the thought of a capricious deity!

And so it is with us. When we hurl a thunderbolt from the Mt. Olympus of our computer screens, that cataclysm must be well prepared for. We need to make sure that the readers are aware before the fact that thunderbolts are occasionally thrown. They need to see the distant flicker of heat lightning, and be given time to study the brooding shape of the mountain on which dwell the author-gods. As the moment nears, they must be shrouded in a drenching rainstorm on the slopes of the holy peak, they must hear the distant rolling thunder approaching ominously, and finally, they must see the instantaneous flash of the bolt as it is hurled earthward. They may be momentarily startled, but they must not be surprised. For to totally surprise the readers is to betray their trust. Remember, a god who violates the strictures of the established religion, who does things without reason or warning, will soon lose all of his worshippers.

So what does all of this mystical stuff mean?

There are a variety of ways that authors violate their covenant with the reader. Sometimes these sins are committed intentionally, either to provoke a reaction or to demonstrate prowess with the written word. When done skillfully these violations may lead the reader to gasp in amazement at the sudden, unexpected turn of events. More often, however, they merely make the readers mad.

Making the readers mad is dangerous for a writer's career. For, lest we forget, we are really only demigods. We can build the universe that lies between the covers of a book, but the ultimate power of life and death belongs to the reader. To kill your fictional universe, all the reader needs do is to snap the book closed, place it at the back of a bookshelf, and never again pick it up. Once a reader has put down your book for

good without finishing it, that particular fictional universe has ceased to exist (for that one reader). Perhaps all your future creations have ended for that individual reader as well. If enough readers react to your work in this way, then your book-universe will truly come to an end. Worse, it will be remaindered!

It's bad enough when the readers throw your book down in disgust because of something you intended to do. It is worse when they do so because of something you did by accident. Remember that it is a sin to violate the readers trust, and just because that sin was accidental doesn't make it right.

So what are these sins we are talking about? A few of them are listed below, though the list is far from exhaustive. Still, these few will illustrate the "*Thou Shalt Nots*" of fictional godhood.

Treat Your Subject And Readers With Respect

When I go out on the lecture circuit to talk about science fiction writing, I always ask a simple question: "Why, is it that the aliens always lose the struggle in science fiction novels?" After a suitable pause in which most of my audience looks blank, I answer, "Because, frankly, the aliens haven't been buying that many books lately!" Hidden inside this small joke is an important truth: Readers are the writer's customers and the source from which all sustenance flows. You would do well to treat them with respect.

Just as airline passengers are the people who ultimately pay for the airplanes that Boeing manufactures, just as consumers ultimately pay all of the taxes the government levies on corporations, readers are the ones who provide the money writers need to live. Nor do we have the government's ability to extract funds from the public by threat of force. Any money we writers receive must be surrendered willingly.

Since readers are the source of all monies, it stands to reason that you don't want to make a practice of irritating them by not respecting their views and beliefs. Lack of respect comes in many forms. One of the most basic is not taking your fictional universe seriously.

In 1968 one of the most popular programs on U.S. television was *Batman*. It starred Adam West and a variety of Hollywood character actors in the roles of villains. Frankly, I never liked it. The reason was that the style of the program was what is known as "campy." Campy is where the writers and producers seem to be engaged in their own private joke, where they poke fun at the characters and defy the conventions of the art form in what they hope is a humorous manner. It's as though they are saying, "Hey, look at the dumb people watching our program. Can you believe they like this shit?"

This is the same attitude displayed by writers when they believe themselves to be superior to the people who buy their books. Not that any writer actually comes out and makes the flat statement that his or her readers are stupid. But the superior attitude comes through when writers talk down to the readers, when they put on false airs, when they write in an artificially high brow idiom, using six syllable words where two syllable ones will suffice. When they do this, writers are treating their readers with disrespect and eventually the readers will return that disrespect by not buying the books of the offending writer.

The rule is that even if you are writing a comic book, you must treat the people and situations within that comic book as though they are real. Does Lois Lane snicker every time she sees Superman in his blue tights and red cape? Of course, not. He may look ridiculous, but he is the “Man of Steel,” and is treated with the respect an all-powerful being deserves.

There are lots of other ways to show disrespect for the readers. Plots that are too trite is one way, canned dialogue is another, characters who are stereotypes are a third. There have been millions of books published and I doubt if a single character type or situation has escaped examination. That fact does not relieve you of the responsibility for breathing life into your characters or believability into your plots. Writers who lack either the skill or imagination to strive for originality are called “hacks.” You need to strive with all your might to avoid being labeled one.

Another thing that turns off readers is the *deus ex machina*, a plot twist in which you literally pull a rabbit out of the hat to get your characters out of a problem. Excessive use of coincidence, or the clumsy foretelling of the “Little did he know what terrible things awaited him...” sort are also forms of disrespect. Then there are the forced happy endings or the artificial plot resolutions in the last dozen pages of the book. If you respect your readers, you will drive your story to its logical conclusion, wherever that conclusion leads.

One of the best movies to come out of Australia in recent decades was *The Road Warrior* in which Mel Gibson played a roving adventurer in a post-Apocalyptic world. That movie had a hard, gritty edge to it, and once the situation was set up, the director drove it to its logical conclusion without flinching. That is what made it memorable, a trait the sequel lacked. Another movie that follows its premise to the bitter end is Bruce Willis’s *The Army of the Twelve Monkeys* (now simply *Twelve Monkeys*). After spending nearly an hour mystified as to what was going on, I suddenly realized that the clues were starting to form a pattern. Once I picked up on what was going on, I uttered two quiet syllables: “Uh-oh!” Frankly, I didn’t like the way things were pointing, but logically, they could have pointed nowhere else. It isn’t a pleasant movie, but if you want to see a real piece of cinematic science fiction, that is one you may want to consider.

Just remember that if you respect the reader, they will respect you ... and hopefully, make you rich!

Don’t Change Mood Inappropriately, or Without Warning

Several years ago there was a movie called *The Great Waldo Pepper*. It starred Robert Redford as a World War I flyer that joined an aerial circus after the war and took up barnstorming. The movie is a light little adventure through its first half, with spectacular scenes of old cloth and wood biplanes flying through a rural countryside. At its midpoint, however, the movie turns dark when the comely heroine, who has been convinced to attempt wing walking, panics and falls to her death while Redford is trying to save her. The scene, which starts out with almost a comic tone, develops dramatic tension as the heroine clings to the wooden struts out on the end of the wing. It is instantaneously transformed to tragedy by the sudden fall, for which there is no foretelling at all.

The director's intent was obviously to shock the audience and to set up the last half of the movie, which is much darker than the first and ends with Redford and a former German fighter pilot fighting a duel to the death with their aircraft. Rather than being awed by the director's shock treatment, I was very irritated with him for this betrayal of my trust. How dare he let someone I had grown to identify with be killed without any warning? That one scene ruined the movie for me.

This then is the great danger involved in shocking your readers. The tone of your work sets up certain expectations and to suddenly change that tone without preparing the readers only generates hostility. The same happens if you use an inappropriate tone in your story. A light, breezy narration style is often appropriate, but never for a scene where a massive battle is taking place or an ax murderer is busily chopping up his victims. Likewise, a ponderous, solemn narration isn't usually what you want to describe a little girl's birthday party. Your tone must match the plot as much as the mood music in a movie must match the intent of the scene. Imagine an Alfred Hitchcock thriller whose sound track consists solely of circus music and you will get some idea of what I mean!

Check Your Facts

One of the easiest ways to snap your readers out of their willing suspension of disbelief is to state a fact that they know isn't true. For this reason, it is best for you to check your facts in order to minimize your errors.

One of the more entertaining books I have read was *Flight of the Old Dog*, by Dale Brown. The book is a military thriller in the Tom Clancy mold, and it moves quickly through an action packed plot in which the hero, a B-52 pilot, is trying to save the world from the Soviet Union's evil plot. Halfway through the book, the United States launches a laser battle station into an orbit where it hovers continuously over the North Pole. The station is named "Ice Palace."

So here I was reading along, enjoying the improbable, but entertaining adventures of the *Old Dog's* crew, when I get to the battle station that is in a stationary orbit over the north pole. *Tilt!* Suddenly I was ripped from my warm, comfortable reverie as though someone had dumped a bucket of ice water over my head. If you know anything about how satellites orbit the Earth, you will understand why.

Communications satellites are placed over the equator in an orbit some 37,000 kilometers (22,500 miles) high. At this altitude, it takes a satellite precisely 24 hours to complete one complete circuit of the Earth. And since any point on the globe also takes 24 hours to make one circuit, the satellite appears to hang stationary in the sky. Mind you, it *isn't* stationary, but since both the ground and satellite make the circuit in the same period, it *appears* stationary. Now consider the North Pole. A satellite directly above the pole would have to be stationary in order to stay there since the pole isn't traveling to the east at the same 1800 km/hr (1100 mi./hr) that a point on the equator is. Yet, a stationary satellite isn't in orbit. It will immediately succumb to the pull of gravity and fall to Earth, taking only a few days to do so.

Obviously, Dale Brown didn't understand the principle behind geosynchronous orbits and so decided that he could move a stationary satellite to anywhere in the sky he needed it. But since I, the reader, did understand it, his *faux pas* seriously damaged my

enjoyment of the book. After having swallowed all of his improbable plot details regarding his fictional B-52, “The Old Dog,” I just couldn’t bring myself to swallow his mistake and so I lost the train of the plot. It took me at least three chapters after that to get back into the mood of the thing.

Nor do your mistakes have to be large, glaring ones like this to cause you to lose your readers. Writing about the “rocky cliffs of the Florida shore” is sufficient to betray the fact that you have never been there. (For those who have not, Florida is as flat as a billiard table, without a rocky cliff to its name. The highest point in Palm Beach County where I used to live is the Indiantown Bridge on the road to Lake Okeechobee). One of my favorite authors once lost me by stating that “irrigation is only a short term measure.” I was born and raised in a valley where irrigation has been a viable method of agriculture for more than a century, so knowing better, I lost my willing suspension of disbelief.

How can you avoid mistakes? By carefully checking your facts. No sense making it harder for your readers to suspend their disbelief than necessary.

Keep Your Politics to Yourself — or At Least, Well Hidden

There is a danger that comes with having an audience willing to believe anything you say. That is the overwhelming desire to preach to them. After all, here you are, an articulate author who believes passionately in some cause, with an audience waiting to devour uncritically whatever you tell them. Why not educate them in the right way of thinking about war and peace, the environment, man’s inhumanity to man, the evil Republicans, Democrats, Socialists, Laborites, Tories, Communists, Capitalists ... (pick at least one!)?

Why not indeed?

The propaganda piece is, of course, one of the most time-honored forms of writing. In propaganda you are attempting to persuade someone to think like you do, with no requirement to present the opposing viewpoint either fairly or accurately. The problem with propaganda, however, is that many of your readers will hold an opposing viewpoint, and when they come across your heartfelt beliefs (which oppose their own heartfelt beliefs), their respect for you as a writer and a human being will drop precipitously. And one thing the willing suspension of disbelief cannot withstand is having the reader think the writer is an idiot!

This point was brought forcibly home to me when I read a book titled *Hyperspace: A Scientific Odyssey Through Parallel Universes, Time Warps, and the 10th Dimension* (1994) Oxford Univ. Press, written by Dr. Michio Kaku, one of the most widely respected physicists of our time and a superb popularizer of some of the more arcane aspects of physics. (Did you know that we may have discovered the unifying principle of the universe? We just don’t know *why* it’s the unifying principle, but then, I digress...) The author is not only a prize winning physicist, he is an extreme liberal of the Massachusetts variety. You may have guessed from some of the things that I have written in this series, and also from the fact that I am a native of Arizona, that I am not.

While he was talking about the state of cosmology and the other advances in the physical sciences, I found Dr. Kaku’s words to be compelling, insightful, and provocative. However, when he let his politics intrude into his writing, I found his ideas to be just plain silly. An example from the book: “I find it interesting that the smartest

man in the world is a liberal Democrat!” (Kaku wrote). Personally, I don’t find it interesting. I find it a humorous jump in logic to think that brilliance in science somehow leads to right thinking in politics.

Now depending on your own particular brand of politics, you may agree with Dr. Kaku or with me, and if you are a non-American, you probably wonder what the hell it is that I’m talking about. That’s the problem with writing propaganda. If done too blatantly, all you really are doing is guaranteeing that you will irritate at least half your audience. Now Stephen King and Tom Clancy have enough readers that they can afford to lose half of them, but I do not. And I suspect that you do not, either.

This isn’t to say that you can’t write propaganda, only that you have to be extremely skilled at it. As in all other forms of writing, there are certain rules you must play by. One of these is that you must give the opposing viewpoint a fair chance. In fact, whenever I insert anything remotely resembling a political viewpoint into my books, I work extra hard on presenting the antagonists’ point of view. This is true whether the protagonists’ view is my own, or merely a convenient plot device.

In my book, *Life Probe*, I use as a backdrop for the story a contest of wills between the long established northern hemispheric nations and the newer nations of the Southern Hemisphere. Specifically, the antagonists are a powerful group of militarists in a post-colonial, black controlled nation that has displaced South Africa. (The book was written a decade before the ascent of Nelson Mandela to the South African presidency.) Despite the fact that the Pan-Africans are the villains of the piece, I presented them as powerful characters representing a strong nation with real grievances. In fact, I presented them with considerable sympathy. They are, in their own eyes, the heroes of the story. I worked very hard on their position because I wanted the eventual triumph of the protagonists over them to be emotionally satisfying. Remember that there is no joy in knocking down a few cardboard figures. That is why villains are frequently the most interesting people in fiction. Writers want to make them formidable foes so the triumph of the heroes is that much better.

I did such a good job of presenting the Pan-African position that the critic for *Locus Magazine* decided that the story should have been about them and trashed my book. Talk about your “backhanded compliments!”

Of course, if you believe passionately in something, it’s hard to give credit to your opponents. That is one of the problems with the abortion debate in the United States. The pro-choice side believes their opponents to be a bunch of right wing religious fanatics who aren’t too removed from Hitler’s fascists. The anti-abortion side thinks their opponents are all baby killers. Obviously, the two positions leave very little room for compromise, and any author who takes sides is going to lose a lot of readers very quickly. This doesn’t mean that you must be neutral on every controversy, of course; only that you treat those who disagree with you with respect. They may be wrong, but you must acknowledge their right to an opinion. If you write a tract in which their view is presented as being illegitimate, then it is unlikely they will read past page three of your polemic.

And in case you haven’t noticed, it’s difficult to convince people of the error of their ways if you can’t get them to read your argument!

Don’t Trash Anyone’s Religion!

If you think trampling on someone's political beliefs is a fast way to lose readers, try to say something unkind about their religion. You may be rabidly opposed to Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Moslems (Shiite or Sunni), Buddhists, Shintoists, Mormons, Baptists, or Seventh Day Adventists. That is your right. Just don't put any of your biases in your books. To do so is to risk turning off not only the adherents of that particular religion, but also of every other religion. Remember, maintaining a rapport with your readers is a matter of respecting them, and there is no faster way to disrespect a person than to attack their religion.

You may find this advice odd coming from someone whose short stories include *The Shroud*, which some might construe as an attack on the basis of Christianity itself. Actually, while *The Shroud* may be slightly sacrilegious, I went out of my way to treat religion with respect. In fact, my father, a very religious man, complimented me upon reading it. About the time he reached the last page, he said, "I want you to know that this is very well written, because I don't think I'll be talking to you when I finish it."

Conclusion:

There is a mystical aura that surrounds the profession of writer, an aura that is largely due to the efforts of writers to set themselves apart from the rest of the human race. People look up to us as the creators of legend and myth. And in truth, we do more than merely dirty up sheets of paper with black smudges. We brighten peoples' lives and increase their store of knowledge, both worthy goals to which to devote one's life. With writing comes the power to persuade, to mold, to change minds, even to touch souls.

When a reader picks up your book, he or she is ready to believe just about anything you tell them. Such is the power of the written word. As in all things, with power comes responsibility. Just as a doctor must live by certain rules, so too the writer. There are rules to what we do, rules worked out over long centuries of trial and error. A writer who violates these strictures soon finds his or her ability to practice our profession curtailed due to lack of sales.

Always remember, our success is due to the people who buy our books, people who have likely foregone the opportunity to rent a video instead. By taking their money, we owe them something. We owe them respect. We owe them value for value received, and if we fail to deliver on this debt, then we are little better than common pickpockets.

Ultimately, however, it is the writer who loses when the readers are cheated. There are a great many books for sale. Nowhere is it written that people have to buy yours! A sober thought.

A thought to be remembered.

The End

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Michael McCollum, Proprietor
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NOVELS

1. Life Probe - ^{US}\$5.00

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

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.