



Character in Fiction

By

Michael McCollum



As an engineer who is also a science fiction writer, I am often asked whether writing fiction is easier or harder than writing the technical things I do for work. I always answer the same: Writing fiction is *fifty times* more difficult than writing technical treatises. Why? Because when you write something technical, be it a schematic description, a proposal, or a progress report to your boss, you are merely trying to impart information to the reader. In effect, you are like a personal computer at one end of a telephone line sending your little bits and bytes of data via modem to the big computer at the other end of the line. Dial the number, listen for the tone, synchronize baud rates, send data packets, receive acknowledgment, and then hang up the phone – a simple mechanical process. All that is required to accomplish the task is to organize your thoughts logically and then write them down in complete sentences. Start out with an introduction, go to discussion, and then wrap it all up with a nice conclusion. All simple and relatively easy once you become practiced at it.

When you write fiction, you are doing far more than imparting information to another person's brain. You are attempting to operate directly on their central nervous system. Think about it. Have you ever felt a surge of joy while reading a book, or had tears running down your cheek as you turned pages, or felt like you were punched in the stomach when a particularly likable character is unexpectedly killed? No? Then I suggest you go have your soul checked.

Let me give you two examples of what I am talking about: Two of my favorite writers are Tom Clancy and Herman Wouk. In his novel, *Patriot Games*, Clancy has a group of Irish terrorists after Jack Ryan and his family. There is a scene where the terrorist cell leader is sitting in a van watching Caroline Ryan pick up her daughter at their preschool. He is obviously planning something nefarious. I got to that scene and felt a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. "Oh, no! You wouldn't dare hurt that darling little girl, would you, Tom?" I asked myself (pleading with the author). If you want to know how things came out, you'll have to read the book. Suffice to say, things got exciting there for awhile.

One of the true masterpieces of our age is Herman Wouk's *The Winds of War* and its sequel, *War and Remembrance*. Throughout *The Winds of War*, Natalie Jastrow finds repeated reasons not to escape from the clutches of the Nazis. No matter what decision she makes, it always turns out to be the wrong choice, one that is bound to place her in greater danger than she was before. As you are reading, you realize that this must be so.

If she gets out of danger, the book will be over. Still, you find yourself becoming very exasperated with her. And when she finally gets on the boat for Palestine at the end of the book, you are enormously relieved. (Of course, she gets off the boat in the first few pages of *War and Remembrance*, causing you to want to punch her out. That her continued idiocy is necessary for purposes of plot makes the whole thing no less frustrating.)

Finally, the most evocative scene I believe I have ever read comes late in *War and Remembrance* when Wouk describes a group of Jews lining up to enter the gas chambers at Auschwitz. He has a little girl, naked, standing in line, holding a daisy. I defy anyone to read that passage and not have tears running copiously down their cheeks.

To evoke such a physical reaction from what is basically a series of ink splashes on paper requires a level of skill far beyond that needed merely to inform. And developing the skill necessary to bypass a person's cerebral cortex and aim straight for their glands takes hard work. Very hard work, indeed!

One of the primary reasons why fiction is so much more powerful than merely recounting facts lies in a component of fiction that doesn't exist in "real world writing." For fiction isn't primarily about facts. It's about people, human beings who have problems. These are the "characters" of the short story or novel, the people upon whom the story is inflicted. I am not attempting to be literary when I say that the story is "inflicted" upon the characters. As we learned in the last chapter, fiction is about conflict and nothing else. It is "someone else having a hard time far away."

Yet, while we are reading the story, the characters aren't someone else. They are us. Their triumphs are our triumphs, their tragedies are visited upon us, and their emotions reverberate in our own minds and bodies. The effectiveness of any particular story is directly proportional to the degree to which readers identify with the characters, and how well they do that is determined by the skill of the writer.

That then, is the subject of this month's article. How do we, the writers, develop characters with which the readers will identify? There are a few simple rules that help, but like most things in writing, it mainly takes practice. Let us then look at the rules:

Protagonists and Flaws

The degree to which a reader "gets into" a story is determined by the degree to which he or she identifies with the main character, or protagonist. The protagonist is the "hero," of the piece and the person with whom the reader is supposed to be sympathetic. This means that the protagonist must be likable, or at least, a sympathetic figure. Thus, you will find very few stories with Adolph Hitler or Josef Stalin as the protagonist. Considering their crimes against humanity, it's difficult to make either of those two sympathetic.

So the hero or heroine of a story are usually young, physically attractive, strong, popular, and confident – in other words, all of the things we would like to be. By giving our protagonists these desirable traits, we cause the readers to be naturally attracted to them, the better to elicit their sympathy and identification. This is the reason you see an overabundance of exceptionally beautiful women, and to a lesser extent, handsome men, in the movies (at least, in proportion to the percentage in the general population). We

like watching “beautiful” people more than “ugly” people and therefore are more likely to identify with a physically attractive hero or heroine.

But danger lies down this path. For if your hero is all knowing, immensely powerful, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, then you basically have a boring story on your hands. How can there be conflict if your godlike protagonist can solve every problem merely by flexing his muscles at it, or come up with that brilliantly obvious solution that no one else seems to notice? Every hero needs something without which there can be no fiction. He needs a flaw, and not just any flaw. He needs a flaw that is crucial to the telling of the story.

Superman is just about the most powerful character in all of fiction. I’m not talking about his evocative ability, which is fairly limited. I’m talking about his physical abilities. He’s strong enough to move planets out of their orbits, fast enough to make time flow in reverse, is invulnerable to all normal hazards, can see through walls (and presumably women’s dresses), and so far as we can tell, is immortal. How boring! What makes superman interesting is not his strengths, but rather, his weaknesses.

There is his most obvious weakness: He is vulnerable to kryptonite. Green kryptonite will kill him, red kryptonite will turn him mean, and all the other varieties have equally adverse effects on him. Thus, the Man of Steel has something to fear and that fear makes him human. All of us mere mortals can identify with him because we, too, have things to fear. Nor is his vulnerability to kryptonite his only flaw. He feels lonely (at least on the TV program), sensitive to the differences between himself and normal people. He longs for a normal life. He is worried about those he loves should anyone ever discover who he is, thus the costume and the secret identity. He feels frustration and exasperation at Lois Lane because she is always putting herself in harm’s way. As Clark Kent, he is even jealous because Lois Lane loves his alter ego, Superman – as advertising for the now defunct *Lois and Clark* put it, “the world’s only two person love triangle.” In other words, despite his super powers, he is a normal human being in every respect.

[A digression: If you want to laugh until you ache inside, read Larry Niven’s “Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex,” which involves some fairly raunchy philosophical speculations on the nature of superman. For example, Superman (the former Kal El) is less closely related to Lois Lane than she is to an oak tree. Does he not know what he is doing, or does he just not care anymore?]

The example of Superman points up a very important principle for protagonists. They must be identifiably human! This doesn’t mean that they must be human in fact. They can be aliens, or machines, or animals, or trees. But for the purposes of storytelling, they must have human motivations. If your story is about the “little Christmas tree,” then that tree must have aspirations. It must *want* to be cut down and taken inside a house to be decorated, to give joy to the children on Christmas morning. It must be *sad* when it is stripped of its finery after New Year’s Day and then discarded in the alley with its dried-out brethren. To evoke a response from the readers, they must to some degree think “I am the Christmas tree. How would I feel if I were chopped down, decorated for a few weeks, and then discarded?”

One of the finest pieces of science fiction ever written was “The Wobbler,” by Will F. Jenkins, writing as Murray Leinster. The wobbler is a mobile marine mine. It is

dropped from an aircraft, lands in the sea, and then goes off to hunt enemy ships to sink. The story follows the exploits of one particular wobbler as it floats about looking for a ship to blow up. After several close calls, it eventually finds the enemy's main battleship just as it is leaving dry dock. The wobbler floats up to the ship, explodes, sinking not only the battleship, but also destroying the dry dock. And when the wobbler finally manages to blow itself up, we are happy for it. Because in the story it isn't a soulless machine. It's a person. It has aspirations, it triumphs over adversity, and in the end, it achieves its goal. The effectiveness of the story lies in Jenkins's ability to get us to identify with that small hunk of inanimate machinery, something he does spectacularly well.

When designing your protagonist, you need to take great care in the flaw you give him (or her). It must bear directly on the problem presented in the story and enhance the level of conflict in the story. When Shakespeare designed Hamlet, he made the prince of Denmark a strong character, but with a fatal flaw. He's indecisive. And the problem that Hamlet faces in the play is one that requires decisiveness, something that Hamlet does not possess.

A few years ago, I decided that I wanted to write a science fiction, western, sea story. Unfortunately, I was born and raised in a desert, and therefore, know little of ships and the sea. So, having heard about the *Horatio Hornblower* books over the years, and having seen the movie more times than I can count, I figured that would be a good research source. For those who haven't read them, the *Horatio Hornblower* series was written by CS Forester, who also wrote *The African Queen*. Horatio Hornblower is an English sea captain during the Napoleonic wars, who goes through eight books of adventures, conquering all odds.

Having not read the books previously, I figured that Hornblower would be a hero cut from the Errol Flynn mold – dashing, devil-may-care, and supremely confident. I couldn't have been further from the truth. Hornblower's flaw is that he suffers from an inferiority complex. No matter how great his triumphs, he is constantly worried that others will see through his facade and discover just how unworthy he is. He is ashamed of his first wife's coarse manners and looks, and believes that he is unworthy of his second wife. The more successful he is, the more insecure he becomes. Nor are his feelings of inferiority his only flaws. He is also tone deaf, has a tendency to go to paunch, is petty when it comes to his first officer and crew, and really doesn't like the Spaniards, the Italians, or especially, the French. He also gets seasick whenever he has to go to sea.

And yet, all of these flaws go to make him one of the most believable heroes in all of fiction. I didn't read one *Horatio Hornblower* book; I read them all – twice, in a two-year period. CS Forester was the Tom Clancy of his generation, and I recommend them to anyone who wants a powerful and good read. You could do a lot worse than study his technique if you want to be a writer.

Viewpoint

Building a protagonist that people can identify with is only one technique for worming your way into readers' heads. You can also increase the effectiveness of your writing by being careful with viewpoint.

“Viewpoint” is simply the point of view from which the story is told. And one powerful technique for getting your readers to identify with a character is makes that character's viewpoint the one from which the story is told.

Remember that every story must have a storyteller. In previous centuries, the use of a storyteller was explicit. Two characters sit around a gentleman's club in London in the mid-nineteenth century, and one of them begins to tell the other the story of his latest expedition into deepest, darkest Africa. You see this technique used in Rudyard Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King*, which was made into a movie with Sean Connery and Michael Caine several years ago. In the movie, Kipling is himself a character. He is working late when the Michael Caine character, horribly disfigured, stumbles into his office and begins to relate the story of what happened to him and a fellow ex-soldier when they went into Afghanistan to set themselves up as kings.

The technique is known as “using a frame.” It is a story within a story, and is now considered to be an archaic writing technique. Modern fictional technique does not require the elaborate setup that removes the reader one layer from the action. Now days, we just tell the story. The storyteller is still present, but that presence is implicit rather than explicit. And how we tell our story is largely determined by the viewpoint we choose.

Stories can be told in first person, second person, or third person viewpoint. First person narration is popular with new writers because it is instinctive and makes it easy to generate a sense of immediacy. First person narrative is essentially the use of the word “I” to tell the story: “I jumped from the burning deck of the pirate ship with a cutlass clamped between my teeth. The sea was cold as I sliced my way through the waves. I hardly noticed the frigid water because of the pain when my teeth were knocked out because I hadn't dropped that damned sword before I hit the water!”

Using first person narrative naturally confines you to a single viewpoint, namely that of the character named “I”. Whether or not you write in the first person, this is always a good idea. You should tell your story from the viewpoint of a single character and stick with that character. And most often, that character should be the main protagonist. Even more than making your protagonist likable, seeing the world through his or her eyes will make the reader identify with that character.

For a short story, you should try to stick with one character throughout. For a longer work, like a novel, you can switch viewpoint characters from time to time in order to keep the action moving. But any one scene should have only a single viewpoint, and when you change, you need to carefully signal that fact to the reader. Otherwise, your audience will become hopelessly confused about what is going on.

While first person narration (the use of the “I” viewpoint) is very popular with beginners, almost everyone else writes in the third person. Instead of “I jumped from the deck of the pirate ship,” you use “He jumped from the deck of the pirate ship.” While third person doesn't have the inherent immediacy of first person narrative, it has

numerous other advantages. First of all, it allows the writer and the reader to consider the character's flaws more dispassionately than if they think of that character as "I". Nobody likes to be criticized, so if you want them to know that Horatio Hornblower has an inferiority complex, it's better that they think "he" feels inferior and not "I" feel inferior. Also, it is almost impossible to get an "I" character to describe what he or she looks like without it coming out sounding stilted or conceited. "I am a honey colored blonde with a nice figure and a beautiful face," doesn't sound nearly as natural as "She is a honey colored blonde with a nice figure and a beautiful face."

There is a simple rule for second person viewpoint narrative: DON'T EVER USE IT! About the only time you find an author using second person viewpoint is when he is attempting to impress the other writers with how good he is. Basically, saying, "You jumped from the deck of the pirate ship," is both stilted and unnatural. It will generally leave the readers feeling disoriented and angry after a few pages and it takes someone with a strong stomach to actually finish a novel written in the "you" viewpoint.

Whether using first or third person viewpoint characters, the technique limits you in what you can tell the reader. You must not include anything the viewpoint character is not in position to observe or to know. Thus, all action that takes place outside the range of the viewpoint character's seeing, hearing, or smelling, is forbidden territory. If there is an earthquake in San Francisco while your viewpoint character is in New York, the only way they can participate is by watching a news report on television. This is the reason that Herman Wouk's Natalie Jastrow is so irritating in *The Winds of War*. She is a primary viewpoint character and must fall into Hitler's clutches in order for the author to show the reader the horrible face of the Nazis, up front and personal. The book wouldn't be nearly as effective if Natalie obtained all of her information by reading the newspaper.

While the majority of writers use third person viewpoint character in their fiction writing, there are other ways to do it. The competing system is "author omniscient." In the author omniscient approach, the storyteller stands above it all, telling the reader what everyone is doing and what everyone is thinking. This can be an advantage over viewpoint character because when you limit yourself to one character at a time to tell the story, the only thoughts you can quote belong to that one character. However, author omniscient style pulls the reader back one more level from the action and reduces the feeling of engagement and immediacy. You sometimes run into a plot that is best told in author omniscient, but you have to a very skilled writer to pull it off. Most people recommend that newer writers stick with third person viewpoint character.

I have seen one major science fiction writer attempt to get around the limitation of third person viewpoint character by inserting short passages between the chapters titled "What They Didn't Know At The Time." It is a technique that I don't recommend. Other than forcefully pulling the readers out of the story whenever they encounter these little interludes, they merely point to the fact that the writer didn't take the time to weave this information into the story in the first place.

Antagonists

If you have protagonists (heroes), then you obviously need antagonists (villains), right? Well, sort of. The role of the antagonist is similar to that of the protagonist, but

the two are not mirror images of one another. For one thing, the antagonist doesn't necessarily have to be a human being or exhibit human qualities. In many stories, the antagonist is Mother Nature. If your heroes are on a ship caught in a hurricane, there need be no villains trying to kill them. The force of the storm is more than sufficient reason for them to struggle. In such stories it is best not to dilute your impact by having silly subplots about terrorists or jewel thieves. You risk turning your piece into a soap opera if there are too many problems going on simultaneously. Look at just about any big budget disaster movie: *The Towering Inferno* or *Earthquake*, for example. The characters in *The Towering Inferno* have all kinds of problems that are unrelated to the fire. And while these problems make the characters believable if handled carefully, too often the question of who is sleeping with who overbalances the flames that are licking at everyone's toes. So when your antagonist is an overpowering force of nature, try to keep everything in perspective. Remember that an earthquake beats four of a kind in a poker game every time!

Then there are the human antagonists, the people you love to boo! Just as you can build cardboard, stereotypical heroes, you can build cardboard, stereotypical villains. The nineteenth century melodramas built the stereotyped villain almost into an art form. These early dramas – where Snidely Whiplash tied Tess Trueheart to the railroad tracks just as the 5:15 steam locomotive was due – were a reflection of the level of sophistication of the audiences of the day. Hopefully, modern audiences are more sophisticated. Therefore, if you want to build a believable villain, you need to make him or her a well rounded human being.

I have a suggestion for doing just that: Write *the villain or antagonist as though he is the hero*. By this I mean to take the same care with the antagonist that you did with the protagonist. Make him believe that he is the hero of the piece, except give him a motivation the readers aren't likely to feel sympathy for. This technique is effective because that is the way it is in real life. We are all the stars of our own little movies and nobody sees themselves as the villain of their lives. Everyone does things for what they believe to be good reasons. The only question is whether the rest of the human race will agree with their assessment.

One difference between the antagonist and the protagonist is that the antagonist doesn't need a flaw. That is because he already has one, namely the motive that causes all of the readers to fall out of sympathy with him. You can even make the antagonist a good man who is trapped by circumstances into serving a bad cause. This allows your villain to spend a lot of time agonizing over what he is doing. It doesn't stop him from doing it, of course. Otherwise, he wouldn't be the villain.

By making your antagonist a believable human being, you allow the reader to identify with the villain and understand his motives, even while being out of sympathy with them. However, if you do too good a job, you run the risk that the reader will change allegiances in mid-story. I discovered the problem the hard way in the early 1980s.

My first full novel was *Life Probe* (available for download from Sci Fi - Arizona), that takes place in the mid-twenty first century. I worked very hard to build a believable background for the story. In order to convince readers that they were in the future, I decided to elevate a third world country to the status of a major player on the

international scene and to make them the antagonists of the novel. Looking at the choices, I finally came down to either the South Americans or the Africans. I chose the latter because no one had used them as villains in quite a long time.

So I swept the apartheid government away with a simple stroke of the typewriter key (this when the white apartheid government looked like it would last forever). I made my Pan Africans strong, intelligent, and highly capable people. Indeed, they are some of the strongest characters in the book. I gave them individual courage and a strong love of country. To make sure that everyone understood that I wasn't attacking black people, per se; I made one of the major protagonists an expatriate Pan-African, giving him one of the most likable personalities in the book. He is the heroine's partner and mentor, and as powerful an individual as you will find in the whole novel.

What distinguishes the antagonists from the protagonists in *Life Probe* is the Pan African motivation. Smarting under what they perceive to be centuries of white domination, they set out to even the score. And though their goal is laudable, their methods are not. They set out to build a secret space fleet and embark on a program of military imperialism.

As many of you who have read *Life Probe* know, the result is a fast paced, exciting, science fiction story. I was very pleased with the way things turned out and eagerly awaited the reviews that would follow the publication of my new novel. I still remember the day that I received my copy of *Locus*, science fiction's answer to the *New York Times*, in which my book had been reviewed. I turned anxiously to the review of *Life Probe*. My feeling of delicious anticipation lasted about three microseconds. The reviewer began; "Here is a book that leaves a very, *very* bad taste in my mouth..." He ended with, "It has all of the racism of a 1950s cowboy and Indian movie."

So what went wrong? Basically, I inadvertently punched the reviewer's hot button. By making black people the villains, I uncorked all of the emotion of the American civil rights struggle in someone who apparently believes that black people must only be portrayed as protagonists. In other words, because of the reviewer's personal biases, he felt more sympathy for the Pan Africans than the people they were opposing. This, then, is the danger in taking the approach of making the antagonists think of themselves as the heroes. Some people are liable to decide that they *are* the heroes.

In a way, the *Locus* review was a backhanded compliment to my writing skill. It said, "You did such a good job developing your antagonists that we decided the book was about them." (Backhanded compliment or no, I have consistently referred to the *Locus* reviewer for two decades as "that asshole!" When it comes to bad reviews, we writers never forget or forgive!)

Conclusion

The success of your story will depend to a large degree to how well the readers identify with your characters, both protagonists and antagonists. There are a few simple techniques for maximizing the readers' involvement in the story. The most important of these is to give your protagonist a flaw, one that makes the problem at the heart of the story nearly intractable. If your hero must climb a tall steeple to rescue a child, then make him an agoraphobe; if he must give a speech to save the family business, make him

stutter. Above all, make your hero a living, breathing, perspiring human being. As a wise man once said, “A hero isn’t one who is fearless, but one who does his duty even while afraid!”

Make your protagonists human, give your antagonists believable motivation for the evil that they do, and make sure never to violate your viewpoint. Do all of these things and you will be well on your way to writing a piece of fiction that will be remembered long after publication. Violate these rules, and the only thing you will be remembered for is the shallowness of your writing.

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The End

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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

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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 ...

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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

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.

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