



The Psychology of Readers

By
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Last month, we learned something about ourselves as writers. We discovered that we are all egotists. How could we not be? We labor long hours in solitude for little or no pay and suffer unceasing abuse from strangers in relative silence, all for the remote possibility that someone will choose to publish our work. We write our stories, put them in an envelope and then send them off to some editor we have never met, only to receive a curt form letter in response that states, "Thank you for your submission, but it doesn't meet our needs at this time." And that is about the best we can expect. Once you really get to know them, the editors' notes become progressively less polite. Who else but an egotistical writer would consider it a sign of progress when they get back a handwritten note that says, "Dear, Mike. This stinks!"

In many respects, a writer's life is just one long series of rejection letters. And don't think those letters don't hurt. They do, horribly! I've known parents who react better to being told that their new baby is ugly than most writers respond to having their work rejected. For that is what our writing is – our offspring, our children, our bid for personal immortality. Those black shapes spread across a ream or more of white paper aren't just our work, they are also our egos! When you attack my story, you attack me.

In what other profession do you pour your heart out onto a piece of paper and then invite others to stomp on it with hobnailed boots? Who but an egotist would put himself or herself through this torture time after time, always hoping that the next time they will gain acceptance? It would be more understandable if writers made a lot of money, but writing is one of the lowest paid professions on Earth. Most writers don't even make the minimum wage in the U.S. Hell, most writers don't make minimum wage in Bangladesh! The sad truth of the matter is that the yearly income for the vast majority of writers and would-be writers is precisely \$0.00.

Which, of course, merely makes the point that there must be some other attraction to writing than money. That attraction is ego.

We also learned in the last chapter that writers tend to be introverted, and are thus temperamentally suited to the long hours spent working in quiet solitude. In fact, while writers are well suited to chronicling life, they are probably not best suited for actually living it. Remember the definition of fiction: "Someone else having a hard time far away." Few writers (or indeed, readers) would be comfortable being in the situations in which we routinely place our characters. For instance, would you really have liked to

storm Normandy Beach on D-Day, or sailed with the fabled lost passengers and crew of the *Titanic*? I think not. Reading about it is one thing. Living it, quite another!

If one can generalize, always a dangerous thing to do, writers tend to be bookish people with strong opinions who have probably been less successful than their peers on the athletic fields of their youths. As a class, there is nothing to distinguish us physically from the general population, save possibly our pasty complexions and general lack of robust physiques. We are not more beautiful, nor better muscled, nor more self-assured than our fellow human beings. In fact, most writers tend to be below average in all of these categories. We often cannot speak with any great oratorical skill, and may not have voices designed to project into the balcony from a Broadway stage.

However, we writers share a number of positive characteristics. We tend to think deeper thoughts than our fellows do. As a class, we are curious about the world around us and often unconventional. Generally, we are willing to explore the envelope of social relationships – in print, if not in person. And we are society’s dreamers, people who generally believe in Robert Kennedy’s maxim: “There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask why? I dream of things that never were, and ask why not.”

Writers, then, are complex people – as complex as any other human beings on Earth. We do much good (and some harm). It is important that we writers understand our own motivations, if for no other reason than to allow us to better understand others. That was the purpose of the last article, to give established and aspiring writers some insight into their own personalities to enable them to improve their performance.

Understanding what it is that makes us write is only half the job, however. For the Psychology of Writing is not only about writers. It also encompasses the psychological needs of readers; for without readers, a writer is incomplete. A writer without readers is like an orator who only speaks when no one is around to hear. Writing is as much a performance art as the act of any nightclub ecdysiast – perhaps more so, since we writers strip down to our souls and not merely to our naked epidermises (epidermi?). It is this burning desire to inflict our words on others that forms the compulsion that drives all of us to write. Our need for a sympathetic audience is that which causes us to put up with all of the negative aspects of our profession – acid-tongued editors, dunderheaded critics, and the pervasive indifference with which others regard our work. If we are to win through to the Promised Land that is publication, we must pay as careful attention to the motivations of the readers as we do to our own.

The Psychology of Readers

Many years ago, I read a book that was a collection of Soviet Science Fiction short stories. The book’s editor (whose name escapes me) made a cogent observation concerning the differences between Soviet science fiction and that produced in the West. If you were a Russian writer during the Cold War or a writer in one of their satellite states, then there was one absolute requirement that your work had to meet. It had to support whatever line the Communist Party was taking at the moment of publication. If you took exception to the party line, or otherwise failed to support the established order, you were not going to be published. The reason for this was very straightforward. The government controlled all of the printing presses. Either you supported the government or you didn’t publish. It was as simple as that.

Most western writers have long looked down on their colleagues who worked behind the iron curtain, derogating them as propagandists and hacks. To win accolades in the West, a Soviet writer had to rebel against the system – either implicitly like Boris Pasternak did in *Dr. Zhivago*, or explicitly as Alexander Solzhenitzn did in *The Gulag Archipelago*. Russian writers who were honored by their own nation were forever shut out of consideration for the Nobel Prize for Literature, while those who rebelled against the stultifying communist regime were feted, even while they spent time in those same gulags that Solzhenitzn wrote about.

Yet, as the editor of the book of Soviet Science Fiction pointed out, we western writers have our own dogmas to which we must conform if we are to be published. The primary difference between the Soviet writers and us lies in the fact that our particular orthodoxy isn't politically motivated. Generally, it isn't a requirement for a writer in the West to swear allegiance to any political party. Whether you are Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, or Communist, you can usually find someone to publish your work if it is good enough. Nor do we discriminate against people of different social or sexual orientation – at least, not when one considers publishing as an entire industry. (The story can be quite different at any given publishing house!) However, there is one absolute requirement for publication that we ignore at our own peril. In every case, we must strive to be entertaining!

For entertainment is one of the necessities of human life, and a writer who does not entertain his or her readers is a writer who will soon lack an audience. There are numerous ways to entertain the readership. A writer can strive to frighten, to excite, to get them to laugh, or to stimulate the production of hormones naturally associated with the opposite sex. One thing a writer must never do to the readers is bore them!

The techniques for exciting the interest of readers have been developed over 50,000 years by storytellers sitting on their haunches around campfires. They have been refined for 3000 years by writers who applied quill pen to papyrus, parchment, or foolscap. They have been honed for 400 years by itinerate printers; for a century by writers of screenplays; and for 50 years by purveyors of television shows.

The techniques have been fine-tuned until they fit the structure of the human brain like a rubber glove fits the hands and fingers of a surgeon. They work for modern writers as well as they did for prehistoric storytellers and for the same reason. The basic structure of the human brain remains the one constant in a universe that changes with ever accelerating speed. And until brains change, the needs of storytelling will stay the same. These techniques are as timeless as they are effective. We have discussed these techniques before in this series, but they are important enough to justify revisiting them. What follows is advice on how to positively affect the reader's psychological state, at least for as long as he or she is reading your book. A writer who wishes to be successful ignores them at his own risk.

1. Shoot the Sheriff on the First Page

When you start out a literary work, whether fiction or non-fiction, it is important to grab the readers' attention quickly. The technique may involve an intriguing first sentence, such as "We keep Uncle Herbert in a bucket; he prefers it that way," or by quite literally, "Shooting the sheriff." As we discussed in a previous article, Robert Heinlein, the writer who shaped modern science fiction into what it is today, used to kill someone in the first paragraph to gain the readers' attention. The technique is a bit obvious, but it has the advantage that it works nearly every time. It not only convinces the reader that something serious is going on, it sucks them into the plot to the extent that (hopefully) they won't come up for air until several hundred pages later.

If you are writing a work of non-fiction or other plot that doesn't lend itself to instantaneous action, then you should begin with a provocative statement or something else that will intrigue the reader. In pursuit of their desire for entertainment, most readers will plunge ahead for dozens of pages into a book if the first paragraph has captured their fancy. Likewise, if your opening is ponderous, then they will only read a few pages before they decide that they are wasting their time. What point is there to put your exploding hydrogen bomb on Page 6 if everyone stops reading about the middle of Page 5? "Start the action early and often" is good advice for any writer.

2. Maintain Dynamic Tension

Maintaining dynamic tension is a fancy way to say, "take the boring stuff out." You will occasionally find a writer who has become so successful that his editors leave virtually every word of the original manuscript in the finished book. James Michener is a name that immediately comes to mind with regard to this sin. In *Centennial*, Michener actually begins by telling us the history of the River Platte. In fact, it takes quite a while before the first human being appears in the story.

Michener could get away with that. You can't. When you read your manuscript, take out everything the reader may find to be boring. If the detail is necessary to the plot, then rework it until it is interesting. Don't pepper your work with long political tracts. Remember the words of the immortal Samuel Goldwyn: "If you want to send a message, use Western Union!"

There was a time in the 19th Century when an author would spend two or three chapters lovingly describing the hero's hometown. No longer. Rather than kill the pace of your book with long, boring descriptions of the setting, cut these descriptions to the bare minimum required for intelligibility, and sprinkle them throughout the action portions of the narrative. The same goes for descriptions of the characters or of their histories. A little is good; a lot is probably bad. If we need to know that the heroine had an alcoholic father and that she is a rabid anti-alcohol advocate as a result, then tell us that. We don't need to go all the way back to Carrie Nation for a history of The Movement.

An excellent example of the way not to do it is a movie that you may have seen on the late show on television. In the early 1970s, Clint Eastwood and Lee Marvin made a movie out of the stage hit *Paint Your Wagon*. The movie was made at the height of the Vietnam War and the Anti-War Movement, and at the zenith of the Hippie Movement in the United States. Frankly, the era shows in the film. Even more interesting, both Eastwood and Marvin attempt to actually sing. Incredible!

In the middle of the film, they stage the big song from *Paint Your Wagon*, one of my all time favorite pieces of music: “They Call the Wind Maria.” In the movie, there is a drenching rainstorm that halts all activity in the California mining camp where the story takes place. One of the gamblers (played by Harve Presnell) stands in his tent, gazes out at the rain, and begins to sing. Having gotten the plot moving briskly up to that point, the director stops everything for three minutes while Presnell sings the signature song, thereby sacrificing all of the momentum he has worked so hard to build. Three minutes is not an insignificant period in a movie and the director never really regains the momentum he lost.

If you are smart, you will have no boring passages in your book or screenplay. This doesn’t mean that you can’t be contemplative, introspective, or didactic. It does mean, however, that shouldn’t be any of these for very long. Personally, I try to hold interludes, technical explanations, or asides to no more than 1000 words. That way the reader can remember where he left off in the plot when he makes it through the necessary detour where you have taken him.

3. Make Sure You Have Something To Say

If you are a writer of non-fiction works – fact articles, how-to-do-it books, or current events – then it is enough if you are able to grab the readers’ attention and hold it with a crisp, straightforward narrative. The purpose of non-fiction writing is to impart information and imparting information is relatively easy to do. This article, for instance, was written for the purpose of informing you about one of the many aspects of writing. It could have imparted the same information had I written it in the style of an insurance contract. I doubt, however, that you would have bothered to read this far had I chosen to go that route, and therefore, the article would have failed in its purpose. Hopefully, you are finding this treatise sufficiently informative and entertaining that you will read all the way to the end. If you do, I have succeeded in my mission. If you don’t, I have failed.

Writers of fiction, however, don’t have things as easy as writers of non-fiction. Even if a fiction writer successfully “shoots the sheriff” on the first page, then maintains dynamic tension from first page to last, he or she may not succeed in holding the readers’ attention. That is because a fiction reader has other purposes for reading than merely being informed. If he or she were merely searching for information, they would go to the encyclopedia and not waste their time reading a novel. Herman Wouk’s *Winds of War* has as its subject the history of World War II. That is not, however, what the book is about, anymore than *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are a recounting of Homer’s war correspondent dispatches from the siege of Troy.

As important to the reader as being entertained is the feeling that they are not wasting their time. How often have you gotten 2/3 of the way through a gripping mystery or techno-thriller when you were suddenly overcome by the feeling that the author had lost his way; that action was happening, but the plot wasn’t really moving anywhere? This feeling is triggered when readers begin to lose interest in the story and are sufficiently disengaged that they are able to see the underlying structure of the plot.

I first became aware of this phenomenon while watching movies based on the works of Alistair Maclean. (Note: Not having actually read Maclean’s books, I may be accusing him of something that is actually the fault of the Hollywood producers who

turned his books into a series of big budget movies in the 1960s and 1970s – shortly after I first wrote these words, a reader emailed to tell me that Maclean is a much better writer than the movies indicate.) Maclean’s work includes *The Guns of Navarone*, *Where Eagles Dare*, and *Ice Station Zebra*, among many others. The plot of a Maclean-inspired movie is fairly predictable – the hero is given an impossible task, he and a small group of cohorts attempt to achieve their goal against impossible odds, and despite all of the forces arrayed against them, they eventually succeed – often through a wild and improbable series of events. In *The Guns of Navarone*, Gregory Peck, David Niven, and Anthony Quinn blow up the Germans’ big coastal batteries just as they are about to open fire on a squadron of British destroyers sent to evacuate the trapped garrison of a nearby island. In *Ice Station Zebra*, Rock Hudson, the American submarine commander, manages to keep a canister full of sensitive reconnaissance film out of the hands of the Russians; and in *Where Eagles Dare*, Richard Burton and Clint Eastwood discover the mole inside military intelligence and take out an entire German castle in the process.

This basic plot is as time honored as it is popular, and there is nothing wrong with using it. However, what causes my enthusiasm to flag about 2/3 of the way through these Alistair Maclean movies is the sudden realization that the plot isn’t really advancing. About the fifth or sixth close scrape, I wake up to the fact that I am learning nothing new about the characters or their situation. All I am watching is two groups of cardboard figures spraying each other with machine gun bullets.

The transition point at which the plot comes to a halt is subtle, but unmistakable. Maclean’s saboteur team or nuclear submarine crew continues to slog through their various adventures, but I am no longer sitting on the edge of my seat. Rather, I am looking surreptitiously at my watch, estimating how much longer it will be before the movie will end. No longer is the action integral to the plot. Rather than advance the story, the action merely marks time until sufficient minutes have passed to get on with the climax of the story.

In the writing business, putting in more detail than your plot can support is known as “padding.” Unfortunately for writers, readers have an uncanny ability to spot the “word inflation” mode into which we tend to slip when we have nothing else to say.

Generally speaking, if you are going to capture the readers’ attention and hold it all the way through, you will have to have a real idea behind your story. This is especially true in my particular field, science fiction. At its best, science fiction is a story of ideas and at its worst, is merely a collection of cardboard stereotypes going through their paces with the predictability of the path of the sun through the sky. However, science fiction isn’t the only literature of ideas.

To a lesser or greater extent, all of fiction involves a foundation of ideas. Too often in modern novels you find a piece that is beautifully phrased, evocatively written, and which is filled with glorious similes. However, at their heart, these modern novels are often empty of ideas. You, the author, owe it to the readers not to waste their time, no matter how technically adept your writing style. In the end, the readers will not be fooled by a book that consists of 100,000-plus words of meaningless platitudes. They will recognize you for what you are, a fraud and a time thief; and they will be resentful if you have nothing to say, but say it at great length.

4. Don’t Use Your Position as the Author to Spring an Unfair Surprise on the Readers

Human beings will tolerate many things. You can lie to them repeatedly, cheat them, and even punish them with impunity. Given time, they will eventually forgive you for the mistreatment. But if you make a fool of them, you will have made an enemy for life. There are many ways for a writer to make a fool out of his or her readers. Surprising them without first giving them a fair warning, or at least a hint (the technical term is “foretelling”), is about the fastest way I know to irritate them.

These un-foretold surprises can come in many forms. One of the most blatant of these is to start a story with one prevailing mood, lull your readers into a mental state of acceptance, then switch to the diametrically opposite mood without warning. Some writers believe they are demonstrating their virtuosity with the written word when they do this. While this technique can be very effective, nine times out of ten it merely irritates the readers.

We’ve all seen movies or read books where the writer sets up a prevailing tone that is almost comic in nature, only to segue without warning into tragedy. Occasionally you see the opposite take place, where a book has a funereal mood for six chapters, only to break into high comedy at the beginning of Chapter 7. Authors are attracted to such wrenching mood swings because, as we have discussed before in this series, writers of fiction are attempting to operate directly on the readers’ central nervous systems. By setting up a violent mood swing, made more pronounced because of the element of surprise, they are demonstrating their control over their readers.

Occasionally, an author will be skilled enough to actually pull off this sort of trick. I am put in mind of the infamous “cockroach” episode of the *X-Files*. Throughout that tour-de-force, Chris Carter, the *X-Files* creator and chief writer, presented us with a sequence of events with which we were already familiar. Upon recognizing the familiar trajectory of the plot, we had little trouble projecting what would happen in the future. In other words, having presented us with a predictable plot line, Carter lulled us into believing that we knew where he was going. The only problem was that he didn’t go where we were expecting. Rather, he repeatedly set us on the familiar path of an *X-Files* episode, only to swerve sharply left in the middle of a scene. For instance, the killer cockroaches that we all knew were coming never really appeared on stage. The infested house, in which the very walls appeared to move, turned out to be nothing more mysterious than a Department of Agriculture experimental laboratory. And when we were expecting to get a wizened, bearded senior scientist to explain what was going on, he served up the authority figure in the form of a perky blonde named Bambi. Each time we tried to project where the story was going, we were double-crossed and flummoxed. And we loved it every single time! The result was what may have been the best episode of *The X-Files* ever.

To pull off this trick, however, Carter had to set up some pre-existing conditions that seldom exist in a story or novel. The first was to train viewers to expect the unexpected. This he has done exceedingly well over a period of several years. In case you haven’t seen it, *The X-Files* is a program devoted to the unexpected. And though many episodes are dark and foreboding (in a *film noir* sort of way), periodically, the series serves up an episode that is whimsical. Having trained us to expect these shifts in mood, Carter has also trained us to like them. So, having prepared the ground and

carefully planted the seeds, he was able to turn just about every literary convention of the genre on its head and entertain us as he did so.

However, Carter's success in bamboozling us and making us enjoy it should not blind other writers to the fact that his feat was actually quite difficult. Had he spent less time preparing the ground, it is likely that he would have ended up with an indecipherable mess on his hands. Indeed, when they made *The X-Files Movie*, the attempt to appeal to the diehard fans of the series as well as the general audience produced a result that was less than stellar.

More often than not, when a writer pulls a change in mood without first warning the readers, he is taking advantage of his position as god of that particular fictional universe. Occasionally, the readers thank him for the surprise. More often, however, they resent him for it. For, when done poorly, the technique leaves the readers with the feeling that you are having fun at their expense. And, as we all know, the natural human reaction to being manipulated too blatantly is hostility. If the readers think you don't respect their intelligence, they won't respect you, the writer.

Playing your customers for fools is the surest path to failure that I know. Before you take the risk of doing an unexpected emotional shift in the middle of your story, I suggest you think about it long and hard. If the necessary preconditions exist to get away with it, then proceed. If not, then let discretion be the better part of valor.

Conclusion

Most writers understand intuitively that they must cater to the psychology of their readers. Indeed, the very structure of fiction is designed to cater to readers' psychological needs. The best fiction not only caters to readers; it actually resonates to the very core of their being. We've all experienced the phenomenon. When you were a kid at the movies, didn't you have an overpowering desire to yell instructions at the characters on the screen? Of course, you did. As adults, we know that we are reading a good book when we revert to that same behavior. For instance, when I first read Tom Clancy's *Patriot Games*, I was horrified by the scene where the terrorists are watching Cathy Ryan pick her daughter up from the day care center. "You wouldn't dare harm that woman and child, would you?" I demanded under my breath. Of course, since I know how a techno-thriller must proceed, I knew that I was wasting my time. And later, starting with the barbecue in honor of the Prince of Wales, I was so absorbed by the story that I couldn't put the book down.

That I stayed up until 2:00 AM to finish reading *Patriot Games* is a testament to how well Tom Clancy was able to satisfy my own particular psychological needs. Your reaction to the book may have been different. My wife, for instance, can't stand the way Tom Clancy writes. (Hmmm, since I write similarly, what does that say about her reaction to my work? ... This will bear thinking about!) Whether any particular author is able to grab your interest and hold it for an entire book is not the point. People differ in their reaction to literature. However, if you are to be successful as a writer, you need to find your target audience and then satisfy their psychological needs without violating your own. Depending on how many people there are in your target group, you may even get rich doing it.

I know that Tom Clancy has.

The End

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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. Gibraltar Stars – First Time in Print — ^{US}\$7.50

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

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

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

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

12. Gridlock and Other Stories - US\$5.00

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