



Writing a Novel
By
Michael McCollum

Author's Note: This article was originally published in August, 1999, and celebrates the completion of my ninth novel, Gibraltar Earth.

It is done!

After seven years of planning and execution, several fitful starts and stops, a hiatus that included the construction of an entirely new method for delivering the printed word to the public, and endless cycles of hope and disappointment, it is complete ... finished ... whole.

The *it* in question is my ninth novel, *Gibraltar Earth*, which went online for sale at 11:00 PM Mountain Standard Time, on July 28, 1999. How did it turn out? I think well. In my opinion, it is at least as good as *Life Probe* and *Antares Dawn*, my two most popular books, and possibly better. At 120,000 words in length, it is certainly longer.

However, the author is the last person to render such a judgment. Our books are our children, our babies. We conceive them, live with them through their gestation period, and suffer emotional pangs at the moment of their birth. By the time they are complete, we have either read them so many times that we can no longer see the story for the words, or else we enter a period of false euphoria in which we are blind to their faults. In this, we are not different from other parents. I have yet to meet the proud parents of a newborn babe who will admit that their offspring is ugly. In fact, the cliché is so pervasive in our culture (and, I suspect, in every culture) that there was a running gag on *Seinfeld* about the couple whose baby was so ugly that people got nauseous just looking at it. Of course, the parents thought he was the most beautiful baby in the world, and no one on the program dared to correct their opinion.

However, I am heartened by the fact that the few other people who have read the book tend to validate my opinion. My wife, Catherine, is my most severe critic. She delights in blue-penciling my best stuff. To "blue pencil" is to mark words for deletion in a manuscript, so named because editors once used those light-blue Xerox-invisible pencils to mark up the manuscript. Whether they still use them, I have no idea. Not only did Catherine not take anything out this time, she strongly suggested that I add a 5000-word insert toward the back of the book to break up a particularly long passage in which necessary things happen, but where the action slows down a bit. The technical term for this is "maintaining dynamic tension." Because of her suggestion, there is plenty of excitement there now!

Geoffrey Kidd liked the book. I have never met Geoffrey, or even spoken to him over the phone. He is, however, a person whose opinion I value highly. Having

purchased several of my books in the past, he took the trouble to send me emails with a list of typographical and grammatical errors in each one. It seems that I have trouble with “which” and “that,” and a tendency to pack my writing with contractions. Upon receiving about three of these thorough proofreading reports, I contacted him by email and suggested that I provide him with reading material free—in exchange for the reports. He readily accepted and provided me with a couple of months’ work upgrading my entire library.

In addition to his typographical error reports and stylistic suggestions, Geoffrey sometimes inserts a personal comment in his reports. His *Gibraltar Earth* proofreading report is relatively mundane up until he reaches Page 200. The personal comment he made there convinces me that he was well and truly engaged with the story by that time.

Don Dixon liked the book. Many of you have visited the Gallery at Sci Fi – Arizona to view Don’s beautiful space scenes. Some of you have even purchased prints. More of you ought to! They are superb and are sure to be collectors’ items someday. Don is doing the cover for *Gibraltar Earth* and read much of the book while he was on vacation in Costa Rica.

So, with a statistical universe of four, all of who agree *Gibraltar Earth* is a worthy successor to my other novels, is it a good book? That is not for me to say. The only people who have a right to comment are the readers, and as usual, opinions will vary. Those whose tastes run close to mine — i.e., to hi-tech science fiction set in a future that is recognizably an extension of our own time — will probably like it. Those readers whose tastes diverge significantly, probably will not. As the man said, “that is why there are horse races and a stock market.”

However, that is also why the new information technology of the INTERNET so excites me. While I was growing up, there were three television networks and two newspapers in my city. Both of the newspapers were published by the same company. Come to think of it, they still are! As for books, there was the public library, stocked by a few publishing giants.

In case you haven’t noticed, that is no longer the case. Now we have the capability for producing millions of books, each aimed at its own niche audience. This is bad news for the surviving publishing conglomerates, but good news for both writers and readers. Henceforth, if your tastes run to detective fiction about an Amish private eye who never carries a gun, then you will probably be able to purchase such a book on the INTERNET. If you cannot, then you will be able to *write* such a book and publish it in cyberspace, and if there are enough aficionados of Amish Detective Fiction, you will do well.

Having spent the last three months in an intense effort to finish a long-delayed novel, and because I have novels on the brain at the moment, I thought this would be a good time to look at the overall process of writing and publishing a novel. We will look at the traditional approach and the emerging technology of cyber-publication. Whichever approach you choose, writing a novel is a long, difficult, frustrating job. It is also the most rewarding work you can possibly imagine.

In fact, bringing a novel to print is about the closest we males will ever come to experiencing childbirth. Having been present for the birth of all three of my children (although banished to the waiting room for two), I never really understood why any woman would subject herself to that process more than once. One female comic put it

memorably: “Imagine pulling a Cabbage Patch Doll out of your body through a nostril!” I had no inkling of the feeling of accomplishment and reward that women feel, however, until I saw my first book in print! The sight of that small, rectangular offspring sitting there on the bookstore shelf was enough to convince me that the whole agonizing process was worth it.

Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I am sending the following announcement to all of my friends:

“Mr. and Mrs. Michael McCollum are proud to announce that, after seven long years in gestation, they are the parents of a bouncing, baby novel. Its weight at birth is slightly more than one pound. Its name is derived from an ancient limestone formation on the North Shore of the Mediterranean Sea, one-half of the fabled Pillars of Hercules; and a planet, which, though battered, seems to have a few trillion more miles left in her before the end.

Announcing *Gibraltar Earth*, our ninth born, and elder sibling to *Antares Victory*. May both, ‘Live Long and Prosper.’”

Having gotten the announcement out of the way, let us turn to this month’s subject, namely how one goes about writing a novel.

Starting a Novel

There is more to beginning a novel than just sitting down and writing it. For one thing, it is a horrendously large project, sort of like rowing a boat from California to Hawaii. Although it is possible (I suppose) to get the idea one minute, drive to San Pedro, hop in the trusty ocean-going skiff, point the bow due west, and begin rowing; I would not recommend it. For one thing, there is the little matter of food and water for what is likely to be a journey of several months’ duration.

The same is true with a novel. The first act in writing a novel is to *plan* the novel. In this respect, the traditional model of publishing gives established writers an advantage. When you are a neophyte, with nothing more than a burning desire to see your words in print, you have to actually write the novel before you can sell it. I know of no publisher who will offer you a cash advance on the basis of a proposal and three sample chapters if you are previously unpublished. Even if you are accomplished in your own field, say as a doctor or lawyer, that says nothing about your ability as a writer, and since money is a precious commodity in the world of business (by definition), publishers refuse to part with any until you turn in the finished product.

Once you have published a novel, however, the process is different. For published authors with sales records, publishers will pay you money *before* you waste a year of your life writing the damned thing. I highly recommend this approach, especially if the advance you can get is a large one, say in the million-dollar range! I would caution you, however, as I have done before in this series. Advances in the six- and seven-figure ranges are heard of far more often than they are seen.

Even if the publisher is offering to give you an advance against royalties, there is a problem. For none of them will just hand over the money and ask you to write on any subject that interests you. They want to know what the novel is going to be about before you receive your money. And sometimes, when they find out what the novel is about, they change their minds about giving you the money.

To give the publisher a sufficient idea of the novel's purpose and plot, you must write a proposal. Proposals can range from a few sentences to many thousands of words. In Hollywood, movie and television proposals are "pitched" in meetings between studio executives and writers without anything being put down on paper. This arrangement is unique, and found nowhere else in writing. It is an historical oddity brought about by the fact that producers used to abuse writers by asking them to write and re-write entire scripts before signing on the dotted line. The screenwriters' guild eventually developed sufficient clout to end this perfidious practice. Unfortunately, other writers' unions have nowhere near that much power.

Personally, I prefer long proposals. Indeed, these are less like the plot synopses you find in *T.V. Guide* than they are short dramatic works that capture the feel and mood of a novel. I do this for a couple of reasons. The first is that I want the editor to know what he or she is buying, which involves far more than merely telling them the events in the book. There is tension in fiction, and conflict; also love, hate, envy, greed, stupidity, heroism, sacrifice, courage, and perseverance. I try to give the editor the "flavor" of what will take place within the 300 pages for which I am asking them to pay multi-thousands of dollars.

The second reason why I recommend detailed proposals is that they can be used as roadmaps. For most people, writing a novel is a matter of months or years. By writing a very detailed proposal, I have recorded my initial thoughts concerning the book for my later self, who may have lost sight of where it is that I was going. If I just write, "Napoleon decides to invade Russia, gets beat, and slinks home with his tail between his legs," then there is nothing to key my memory when I find myself stuck for a plot idea halfway through *War and Peace* (*Voynya ee Mir* in the original Russian).

By writing a short story version of the novel, complete with characters, limited dialogue, and entire narrations from the important parts, the proposal serves as my compass for when I get lost. For, as the well known bit of folk wisdom maintains, "When you are up to your ass in alligators, it is hard to remember that the job is to drain the swamp!" Think of a proposal as armor against alligators.

Those, then, are the two models in traditional publishing. You decide to write a novel and then you either 1) write the novel and try to sell it, or 2) write a proposal and try to sell it. And though 2) is preferable, the choice of which model to use is generally not up to the writer. It is the editor who makes the decision whether or not to risk the publishing company's wealth on any particular project. Do not judge them too harshly for this. It is, after all, their job.

INTERNET publishing is more like the first model than the second. On the INTERNET, the author is the publisher. That, at least, is the paradigm we use at Sci Fi – Arizona. As I tell authors at Third Millennium Publishing – <http://3mpub.com> – I view myself less as a publisher (except of my own books) than as the operator of a Writer's Cooperative. The authors who place their books online with us establish the conditions

of sale, the price of the book, and determine how long the work will be offered to the public – all traditional functions of the publisher.

An INTERNET author-publisher has no mega-corporation with deep pockets to cushion them against economic reality. If the author writes a good book, he or she makes money at ten times the standard bookstore royalty rate. On the other hand, if a book does not sell – for whatever reason – then it is the author who fails to make back his or her investment. With the prospects for reward comes risk. It is the assumption of that risk in traditional publishing that justifies the publisher raking off 90% of the cover price for each book sold.

Writing a Novel

As I have mentioned before, most writers do not like to write. They like to “have written.” Even if you intend to publish the book yourself, you should still write a detailed proposal for the project. Write the idea down in sufficient detail that you can recall it later after you have forgotten what it is you intended when you began. You may have changed your mind in the interim, but at least you can go back and recapture your initial thoughts once you have become lost in the thicket of words that is a book-in-progress.

So, to make sure that we are on the same wavelength, consider the following question: “Just what the heck *is* a novel, anyway?”

Firstly, a novel is a work of fiction. If you have written a book like “How to Unclog the Bathroom Drain Without Getting that *Stuff* All Over You,” then you may have produced a work of utilitarian value, a book with equal parts information, humor, and inspiration. It may even become a best seller on a par with *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Repair*. It is not, however, a novel. That is because novels are about things that are not real. They are fiction, organized lies that run to many thousands of words, stories that both writer and reader agree are untrue even as they believe every word in them.

Nor is every piece of fiction written, a “novel.” Many fictional accounts are too short to be novels. I find that the constraints on length are the most misunderstood part of writing for new writers. That is why, whenever a new writer proudly tells me that he or she has completed the best novel ever written, my first question is, “How long is it?” You would be amazed at the wide disparity of answers I receive to that simple question.

To combat this problem, writers and editors have developed a specialized jargon to characterize the lengths of fictional works.

Length Classifications for Works of Fiction

Not a week goes by without someone asking me about my books. Not long after we strike up a conversation, they generally ask how big the book is. What they are asking is for an estimate of page count. Readers are familiar with the number of pages in books because it is something they find easy to discern. All that is required is to switch to the last page of the book and look at the small number in the middle of the page footer.

Writers measure length differently from readers. When categorizing the length of our works, we talk in terms of word count. There are several historical reasons for this

preoccupation with individual words. The most important is that in the era of pulp fiction, writers were paid by the word – and in the periodical markets, they still are!

Not surprisingly then, the various categories of fiction are characterized in words rather than pages. These categories are:

Vignette

A vignette is a really short piece of writing, typically less than 1000 words in length. Vignettes are not stories because they lack plots. They are scenes, well-written little gems that evoke an emotional response without having a great deal of “movement” to them. A vignette is to writing what the “bowl of fruit on the table” is to painting. Vignettes demonstrate a writer’s skill with the language, but are not likely to be made into television miniseries any time soon.

Short Stories

Short stories are, as the name implies, short pieces of fiction. A short story is a fictional work that is 7500 words in length or less (by definition), and more typically, 5000 words long. Short stories have characters and plots, which is what distinguishes them from vignettes. Many short stories are confined to a single scene, although there is room to squeeze in a couple of scenes, if you are careful. Despite the fact that they contain very few words, short stories are actually among the hardest of the fictional forms to write. That is because each word carries a far greater weight in a short story than in a novel, a natural consequence of there being fewer of them.

Many writers believe that the short story is the highest form of the fictional art. Unfortunately, they have largely fallen into disfavor with the reading public, and except for a few specialized magazines (*Analog*, *Isaac Asimov’s*, *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*), there is not much of a market for short stories in the United States.

As I write this, I am sweating on an airplane, stuck at the gate in the St. Louis airport. I mention this because there is a story in the *TWA Ambassador Magazine* about a company called Travelman in England. Apparently, they print short stories on a large sheet of paper, then fold them like subway maps. They are selling them for 1 pound each (\$1.60) in airport terminals and Underground stations (that’s “subways” to you Yanks!). I wish them well. It would be nice to have a market for short stories again.

Novelette

A novelette is a long short story. Its range is 7500 words to 15,000 words. Novelettes are very popular in magazines, and have sufficient space to develop a full plot. A novelette is large enough to contain 3-5 scenes and many a novelette has provided the opening basis for a novel. They are not novels, however, because they are too short to fill up a book. This is especially important to traditional publishing houses, whose sales are often influenced by the thickness of the book.

Novella

A novella is a long novelette. It ranges in size from about 15,000 words to 30,000 words. It can also be thought of as a short novel. A magazine like *Analog Science Fiction* may publish one novella each month, with 1-2 novelettes, and 3-4 short stories.

Novel

A novel is a fictional work that has a minimum of 50,000 words. Even at that length it would be considered short. Most novels tip the scales at 60,000 words and many go up to 100,000 or more. Personally, I find I have a predilection for writing in the 90,000 to 120,000-word range.

Is there an upper level on novel size? Not officially, but one soon runs into practical problems when approaching the 150,000-word mark. The primary problem is that paper and ink cost money and the publishers are not usually willing to print a book larger than that. “Wait a minute,” you say. “I’ve seen Tom Clancy and James Michener books that were a lot longer than that!” So you have. However, would you consider it indelicate of me to note that you are neither Tom Clancy nor James Michener? You may be someday, but at the moment, you must live with the restrictions placed on us mere mortals.

I learned this lesson with *Thunderstrike!*, a novel that tips the scales at 142,000 words. During the production phase, my agent received a friendly call from the editor, who said, “Tell McCollum that the next book better not be any larger than this one!” Your editor may be more or less willing to expend resources on your behalf than was mine.

This is one area where becoming an author/publisher on the INTERNET is an advantage over the traditional approach. If you are the publisher, then you obviously will not object to publishing your book, no matter how many words it contains. You have the additional benefit that the readers do not actually see the books until after they buy them. These means that the “heft” of a book when the reader picks it up has neither a positive or negative effect on sales.

Writing Your Novel

So, you have written a killer proposal, obtained a publishing contract (or at least told yourself how to proceed), and figured out what length of book best supports your proposed plot. There are only one or two small things left to do to see your book in print. The first is to actually write the novel.

As noted above, having a detailed proposal and synopsis helps a great deal in this endeavor. It does not, however, relieve you of the long necessary hours at the screen of your word processor. A good proposal will outline the major events in a book, what writers sometimes call the “macro plot,” but will not help you with the thousand small details that go into the making of a successful novel. After all, the proposal may be anywhere between 5,000 and 20,000 words long. The novel, on the other hand, comes in between 60,000 and 100,000 words. What are you going to say in all of those extra words?

To make this point, let us assume that you have decided to write a novel of colonial America. You will call this novel *The Last of the Mohicans*, with a plot based

on the recent popular movie of the same name that starred Daniel Day Lewis and Madeleine Stowe (as opposed to the classic novel of the same name by James Fennimore Cooper). You sit down to pen a proposal:

The main character is Nathaniel Poe, a frontiersman people call Hawkeye, who lives with his two Mohican Indian friends, Chingachgook and Uncas, during the time of the French and Indian Wars, circa 1757. These three are en route to Cain'tuk'ee one day when they encounter signs of a Huron war party. They track the war party and come upon an Indian ambush of a company of English troops. Among the troops are two women, Cora and Alice Munro, the beautiful daughters of Colonel Munro, commander of the English troops at Fort William Henry. Also along is Major Duncan Heyward, of the British Army, who has just proposed marriage to Cora.

Nathaniel and the Mohicans save the trio from a renegade Huron named Magua and his band of marauders, who ambushed the column in order to take revenge on Colonel Munro by killing his daughters. They agree to convoy the Major and the two women to Colonel Munro at the fort. When they arrive, they discover the fort under siege by French regulars, allies to the Hurons. The party manages to sneak past the French and into the fort, where they discover that unless Munro receives reinforcements, he will be forced to surrender when the French dig close enough to move their siege guns into position. While stuck in the besieged fort, Nathaniel aids the colonial militia to escape so that they can return home to protect their families on the frontier from Indian attack. This action earns the wrath of Colonel Munro, who orders him hanged for aiding and abetting desertion in the face of the enemy. Before the sentence can be carried out, however, the fort falls and the English surrender to the French Commander, the Marquis de Montcalm. The French allow the English to leave the fort, but the party is ambushed and massacred by Hurons in the forest.

Nathaniel, Chingachgook, Uncas, the two Munro daughters, and Major Heyward escape the massacre in a canoe, but are pursued across the lake to a waterfall, where the women and the Major are captured by the Huron. They are taken to the local hostile Indians' village. Nathaniel braves the enemy camp to offer himself as a sacrifice if the Hurons will let Cora and Alice go free. Major Heyward offers himself instead. To assuage Magua's anger, the Huron chief gives him Alice, lets Cora and Nathaniel leave, and burns the Major at the stake. Nathaniel and the Mohicans chase after Magua. A fight ensues, Uncas is killed, Alice jumps off a cliff to prevent a "fate worse than death," Chingachgook kills Magua in hand-to-hand combat, and Nathaniel and Cora live happily ever after.

That is the proposal. I have written it in my best proposal style. I managed to squeeze two hours of movie and 120 pages of script into 400 words. It gives some flavor of the drama, pathos, and just plain action that will occur in the novel. It does not, however, tell you any of the thousands of small details that will go to make the novel successful. It does not describe the forest, the smell of the trees (or of the unwashed woodsmen, for that matter). It does not show the aftermath of an Indian raid where a frontier family is slaughtered and left where they lay. It does not let you hear the roar of the cannon or see the flying splinters where the cannonballs crash into the fort's palisade. You do not hear the screams of the defeated English as they are ambushed in the forest, or feel the desperate adrenaline flow in the veins of Nathaniel as he races to save Cora from an Indian tomahawk.

All of these small details that grab the readers' attention must be inserted into the narrative during the writing of the novel. Motivation must be developed. Why does

Magua hate Colonel Munro so, and how does Cora come to love Nathaniel when she would normally marry Heyward? What are the characteristics of the characters that make the readers feel for them during the battle scenes, and weep with them afterward?

This is what the additional 50,000-plus words that separate a novel from a proposal do. Nor is the difficult part of the task the writing of the words. The hard part is thinking up the words in the first place, developing a narration that holds the readers' interest, supplying the necessary background, and moving the plot along in a brisk, but understandable manner. As we have noted several times before in this series, 90% of writing is thinking and only 10% is pounding the keys of a computer or typewriter.

How many words can a writer expect to write in a day? That depends. It depends on what sort of writer you are, how familiar the material is, and most importantly, how hyped you are about the project. I know some writers who can produce a book in three weeks of concentrated effort. Others take months, or even years. My normal speed for novel writing is approximately one per year, although in the case of *Gibraltar Earth*, it took seven! Of course, I took three years off to build my web site in order that I would have some place to sell it directly to the public when I finished, so that doesn't count against writing time. I did do a lot of thinking during those three years, however, an activity that I believe added materially to the quality of the final product.

Most full time writers will tell you that they try to average 1000 words per day when they are writing a book. That means that you can finish one standard-size paperback novel every two months, which is probably faster than the market can absorb them. This is not a hard and fast rule, of course. Different writers write at different speeds.

In my case, I tend to write in spurts. When I start a book, I will proceed slowly through about the first six chapters. This is the time I am working on the introduction, defining the characters, and generally working on suspending my own feeling of disbelief. I find that I cannot really progress with a novel until I believe that the people and the situation in it are real. This process can take anywhere from one to three months.

After that initial "fumbling around" phase, I find that I can really move ... for about 15-20,000 words. Then something funny happens. I reach the point in the book where I look at the screen and ask myself, "Damn, what happens next?" I don't know because I have not figured out the details of the novel (the micro-plot) that far. I refer to the phenomenon as "overdriving one's headlights." In effect, I write until I reach uncharted territory, and then I have to stop and think about things.

In this way, I go sprinting/halting through the entire book. Sometimes I go back to the beginning and start a rewrite, both to improve the product and to remind myself what is going on. Other times, I force myself to write when the words won't flow just to see if I can push through to another point where my imagination will again catch fire.

That is why I refer to writing as the most frustrating profession on Earth. Here you have a perfectly good dozen chapters of a dynamite novel and you cannot figure out how to start Chapter 13 — for a month! Once it happened to me for six whole months.

Eventually, however, you come to a point where you type those magic words, "The End," and you go back to reread that which you have wrought. Magically, those words start to take on a life of their own. You read along and somewhere in your journey, you stop and exclaim, "Damn this guy is good!" You read through to the end and you discover that you have a complete, professional, reader-enthraling novel.

The hard part is done. All you have to do now is get it published!

Publishing a Novel

So, you have written 100,000 words that you just know is the best novel ever written in the English language, with the possible exception of a couple of Shakespeare's plays — the famous ones, not the lesser plays that no one ever makes into movies. You have read through your masterpiece a dozen times, corrected all of the misspellings, taken out or added in those things your spouse seems to think that it needs. All you have to do is get someone to publish it. As noted earlier, there are two possible approaches you can take to the publication. You can either seek out a traditional publisher, or you can publish it yourself on the INTERNET. Since the former approach is by far the most popular (for the moment), we will begin with the traditional approach.

Traditional Publishing

You send your manuscript to your agent, who shops it around to the various publishers for a period ranging from a few months to a year or more. Eventually, the publisher buys it and begins the pre-production process. While techniques vary at the different publishers, I will tell you how it worked at my publisher.

The editor reads your manuscript quickly all the way through, making notes to himself or herself about points that grab their attention. Maybe these points are answered later on in the book, maybe not. At the end, the editor writes a letter to the author explaining all of the details that need to be improved in the manuscript. If the required rewrite is not too extensive, the editor then begins the second phase of editing. This is called a "line edit." In a line edit, the editor goes through every sentence and puts it into proper English. They straighten out convoluted thoughts, extract extraneous words, and break up improbably long sentences. They strike entire paragraphs that add nothing to the plot.

The editor then brings in another kind of publishing specialist, the copy editor. The copy editor goes through the manuscript again, making sure that all punctuation is proper and that the book agrees with the style manual of the publishing house. He then returns the manuscript to the original editor, who has the manuscript typeset. Galley proofs are run off from the manuscript and a copy is sent to the writer for proofreading and comment.

The writer reads the edited manuscript, moans and groans about the changes, marks the manuscript up, and sends it back with a series of pithy comments and complaints about the unfairness of editors. The editor then sends the book to final typeset, makes sure that the art department has cover art, then sends it to the printer to have a few thousand copies run off.

Sometime later, the book is placed on the publisher's monthly list and sent to the bookstores, where it will be displayed prominently for approximately thirty days before being relegated to the shelves to make room for next month's "best seller." Elapsed time for the whole process between manuscript delivery and book on the shelves is approximately 9-18 months. I have occasionally heard of it being done faster and have often heard of it taking longer, but that was my personal experience. One of my

manuscripts was actually lost at the publishers and as I remember, I waited two years for that book to see the light of day. That was, however, an anomaly.

Publishing on the INTERNET

The non-traditional approach to publishing has been made possible by the rapid and radical development of computer technology. A traditional publisher is in business because they have made a huge investment in a large, commercial printing plant. (Actually, most modern publishers do not own printing plants. They subcontract their printing. However, they do pay for all of that expensive machinery and setup time with their orders.)

Note: If you wonder why vanity presses require minimum orders to get books at any sort of a reasonable cost, it is because of the setup charge involved in commercial printing. If you are going to print one book and it costs \$1000 to set up the press, then that book will have to sell for \$1000 to break even. If the same print run produces 100,000 books, then the setup charge can be amortized over the print run and amounts to only ten cents per book.

INTERNET publishing is done on the same personal computers that the authors use to write their books. Instead of having a multi-million dollar machine that spits out books at a prodigious rate, INTERNET publishers produce their output in electronic files or in individual books printed on laser printers. The formats used for electronic books are many, although the industry standard appears to be Adobe's portable data format (PDF), which can render a WYSIWYG copy of anything that appears on a piece of paper.

Editing in this type of publishing is done by the author-publisher, who hopefully can have the book read by someone other than themselves before publication. This lack of a rigorous and formal editing process is one of those two-edged swords with which the new technology seems rife. On the one hand, the author's words come through crystal clear, with no adulteration. On the other, many authors need the assistance of a good editor in order to make them intelligible.

Typically, first editions of electronic books have more than their fair share of typographical errors, although offerings from publishers are not immune to this either. (I remember one case where a typo turned an innocuous word in one of my stories into an obscene one. Luckily, we caught it in time.)

Typos are not the problem in electronic publishing that they are in print publishing. That is because the electronic file can be changed to eliminate the offending error in a heartbeat. In fact, during the first few months an electronic book is online, it is not unusual for every reader to get a slightly different copy as mistakes are reported and corrected in real time. That is one reason why anyone who has purchased one of my books has an eternal right to download it at a later date in order to obtain a better copy.

The other difference between traditional and INTERNET publishing involves the elapsed time and manpower required to go from manuscript to finished product. As noted above, the fastest my traditional publisher ever brought a book to print was nine months. I finished *Gibraltar Earth* over a long July 4th weekend, and put it online on the evening of July 28, a period of a little over three weeks. That includes two complete proof-readings by people other than me and several hours of going through the manuscript with the spelling and grammar checkers in Microsoft Word 2000.

That is another thing that modern computer technology has wrought. An author can now assure that every word in a manuscript is correctly spelled (although not necessarily the word they intended), and grammar checkers are becoming very sophisticated. So once again, the computer is doing the job that was formerly done by a professional editor. This is not to say that you can blindly accept a computer's opinion about what the proper grammatical form should be. They are not *that* smart yet. But they highlight systemic problems (like my aforementioned "which/that" confusion and my tendency to insert too many words with apostrophes in them). By using the formal grammar checking function, as opposed to the casual setting, a modern program like Microsoft Word can substantially enhance the quality of your writing.

So, rather than take nine months to bring the baby to term, I was able to do the job in 21 days. As for the manpower required, bringing the book to print required the efforts of only a few people – my proofreaders and myself. They were busy days, but productive ones. In addition to preparing the electronic copies of the manuscript and preparing the *Gibraltar Earth* pages on Sci Fi - Arizona, I designed an alternate cover (in case Don Dixon wouldn't be able to finish on time due to his vacation). I also worked at my real job and took a three-day trip to Connecticut to meet my Russian buddies regarding our joint venture.

It was a busy month, but a happy one. After all, for the first time in seven years, I have a new novel for sale and I think it is pretty good. Its name is *Gibraltar Earth* and I hope those of you who are science fiction enthusiasts, will give it a look.

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The End

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If you enjoy technologically sophisticated science fiction or have an interest in writing, you will probably find something to interest you at Sci Fi - Arizona. We have short stories and articles on writing— all for free! If you like what you find, we have full length, professionally written science fiction novels in both electronic form and as hard copy books, and at prices lower than you will find in your local bookstore.

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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. 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

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

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. 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.

16. 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.

17. 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.