

WRITING

POP



ULAR

FICTION



BY DEAN R. KOONTZ

WRITING POPULAR FICTION

BY DEAN R. KOONTZ

WRITER'S DIGEST CINCINNATI

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To

*Lynne Ellinwood, whose suggestions made this
a much better book than it might have been,*

And to

*Robert Hoskins,
who taught me most
of what I'm now teaching,
with apologies
for beating him to the punch
with this book*

A NOTE TO THE READER

This book can be valuable to the new writer. It provides insights into category fiction, offers suggestions not to be found elsewhere, and ought to save you time and rejection slips on the way to a sound, professional writing career. I will be pleased to hear from anyone who, having read the book, feels he's gained from it. However, spare me letters that say:

—"You forgot to mention *theme!*" I didn't forget. I neglected it on purpose. The theme, the "meaning" of a story, is not something you can sit down and plan out ahead of time. Or, anyhow, it shouldn't be. Theme should grow from your characters and your plot, naturally, almost subconsciously. If you sit down to deliver a Great Message to the reader, *above all else*, then you are an essayist, not a novelist.

—"Some of these writers whose books you recommend are not really that terribly good." I know. For the most part, I've tried to point you to the best people in each field. But, occasionally, a mediocre writer achieves such stunning success that he *must* be mentioned in the discussion of his genre. If, out of the hundreds of books I recommend, I steer you to a couple of bums, please realize that you can learn *something* from those bums, if only the taste of a large part of that genre's readership.

- "You list seven science fiction plot types, but I have found an eighth!" Okay. But it may be the only one of its kind; and with enough thought and enough familiarity with the field—Western, suspense, science fiction or whatever—you probably will find it fits into my list just fine.

—"You don't show us how to make writing easy!" I know I don't. It's hard work, and it's frustrating, and it's lonely. I'm writing this to inform you, not deceive you. So set to work, and good luck!

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CHAPTER ONE Hammer, Nails, and Wood

Basically, there are two general kinds of modern fiction: category and "mainstream." The first includes those stories we can easily apply labels to—science fiction, fantasy, mystery, suspense, Gothic, Western, erotica—and is called category fiction chiefly for the convenience of publishers, editors, reviewers, and booksellers, who must categorize novels to differentiate areas of interest for potential readers. The second, mainstream fiction, is anything which does not comfortably fit into one of the above categories. Some mainstream writers include Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and, more recently, R. F. Delderfield (*God Is an Englishman*), Herman Wouk (*The Winds of War*), N. Scott Momaday (*House Made of Dawn*), and William Goldman (*Boys and Girls Together*, *Soldier in the Rain*).

For the new writer who has not yet chosen a creative area in which to work, category fiction (also called genre fiction) may seem to hold little appeal. For decades, college literature courses—caught up in the Realism and Naturalism which dominated American fiction until the early 1960's—have ignored the best craftsmen of category fiction, often concentrating on mainstream authors with far less talent. The "better" critics in the many little literary magazines and the mass market reviewers from *Time* and *Newsweek* also have traditionally looked down their noses at category fiction. Recently, of course, the *New York Times Book Review* section of the Sunday *New York Times* has shown interest in genre writing, and many colleges have introduced courses on science fiction. Still, for the main part, critics and educators seem to think that immortality lies only with the mainstream novel, while all else is ephemeral.

This is not the case at all. Many writers who have gained some immortality, from Homer to Poe to Twain, have been category writers, men who knew how to tell a good story. Homer wrote adventure fantasy. Edgar Allen Poe wrote fantasies and mysteries. Mark Twain put most of his efforts into adventure-suspense and occasional fantasy. Undeniably, each of these men produced work that has more than a good story; but this only shows that there is no law that restricts meaning and relevance to the mainstream author. Today, for every reader who knows the mainstream author Henry James, a thousand know Twain and five thousand know Poe. The most-translated author of this century is Edgar Rice Burroughs. He is also the best-selling worldwide. Most of us would say that his stories are not what we would strive to create—too little characterization, too much melodrama—but we must admit that through Tarzan and John Carter and other characters, Burroughs has achieved that conditional immortality which is every writer's hope.

John D. MacDonald, Ross MacDonald, Daphne Du Maurier, Alistair MacLean, Robert Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, and Raymond Chandler are a few category writers whose works have not only sold millions of copies, but who have at last begun to receive the critics' praise. To be known and remembered, a writer's work must first be read, and it is a fact that the majority of readers will more willingly buy a well-told mystery, fast-paced suspense, or mind-boggling science fiction novel than a slice-of-life view of the Average Man. And they will do this on a continuing patronage basis. You can confirm this by looking at the best-seller list, which is nearly always 80% category fiction, or by studying *Publisher's Weekly's* yearly compilation of published titles, wherein the totals for category fiction regularly outstrip those for uncategorizable novels.

Since genre fiction is more widely read than mainstream, the writer's market for category work is larger than for mainstream. Publishers, like any businessmen, operate within the law of supply and demand.

The inexpensive paperback book has become the most rewarding form of publication for the average category writer. Though paperback distribution is inefficient and the major problem of the industry, good profits are possible because the total production costs of any paperback book average between eight and ten cents a copy, leaving a comfortable mark-up for publisher, distributor, and retailer, despite returns and inefficiency. Every year, for the past decade, the number of new paperback titles has increased. Most paperback fiction is category work; and about half are paperback originals, never before published in hard covers. This is, clearly, a rich field for the new writer.

This is not to imply that category fiction has a difficult time in clothbound book markets. Indeed, more than half the hardcover fiction published today is category fiction. While most mainstream novels do not break even, hardcover category novels—whether overtly labeled as genre fiction or labeled only by inference in the jacket copy—usually show at least a marginal profit from the first edition.

In the following chapters, we will examine the major categories of modern fiction. Once a writer has mastered a genre, he should be able to turn his hand to another category with at least some success. Both Gothic and erotic novels have strict frames which are surprisingly alike. Writing a science fiction novel, once you understand the ground rules, is not that much different from writing mystery novels. Adventure-suspense is, in many ways, quite similar to fantasy.

Every writer has one or two kinds of stories he most *e-n*-joys reading and writing. I prefer suspense and science fiction, the first for its readability and no-nonsense prose, the second for its color and wealth of ideas. But there are times when publishers—especially paperback publishers whose buying trends are influenced by an unusually finicky market—are overstocked in a particular category and are not buying. Maybe Gothics are booming, and editors are buying heavily.

But mysteries have currently lost favor with readers, forcing publishers to temporarily cut back on their monthly mystery issues. It happens. All the time. Of course, the Biggest Name Writers continue to sell their books despite an overall slump in their field, but the new or average writer can find himself locked out, with work he cannot sell. This is when you should be able to turn your energies into other fields and still earn enough to keep bread on the table.

In other words, you should write so well, handle words so easily, that you can genuinely be called a "professional."

With that goal in mind, let's look, first, at what makes category fiction so different from mainstream. Basically, genre stories require five elements which don't always appear in mainstream work:

ONE: A STRONG PLOT

In category fiction, there is no substitute for the age-old story formula: the hero (or heroine) has a serious problem; he attempts to solve it but plunges deeper into danger; his stumbling blocks, growing logically from his efforts to find a solution, become increasingly monumental; at last, forced by the harsh circumstances to learn something about himself or the world around him, to learn a Truth of which he was previously unaware, he solves his problem—or loses magnificently.

One of Donald E. Westlake's early suspense novels, *Killing Time*, while flawed in other ways, is a prime example of the well-used story formula. The story concerns a private detective, Tim Smith, who is in tight with the town's business and government elite, because he has enough "dirt" in his files, on each of them, to make them want to be friends rather than enemies. Because he knows them all so well, he's on the city payroll for services he never renders, and he gets a cut of the backroom pie. Smith justifies this because he feels the present Winston power elite is far more desirable a group than any other that could replace it, that despite all their flaws, these men *do* get things done. When a crusading non-profit organization—Citizens for Clean Government—comes to Winston to scour away its corruption, Smith will not help the crusaders, for he believes they'd only be opening the door to *new* wolves, by getting rid of the old. Still, one of Smith's powerful friends is afraid Smith will spill what he keeps in his files, and an attempt is made on Smith's life. Now, we have the hero, and the hero has his problem: how to find out who panicked, and how to keep that nameless man from killing him. As the book progresses, and as Smith makes several attempts to discover the would-be killer's identity, the attempts on his own life become more violent and more difficult to escape. Smith becomes a man without friends on either side of the issue; his stumbling blocks become more and more monumental. At last, when his apartment is destroyed by a hand grenade and a bomb is placed in his car, he decides to face the truth about himself: he has always cooperated with Winston's power elite because he cherishes power and money himself, not because, as he always pretended, he thought his friends were tamer wolves than others that might replace them. Facing this in himself, he is able to act more ruthlessly than before; he becomes a less admirable man, but a more honest one and a more formidable one.

Because it does require a formula, many writers mistakenly assume that category fiction is limited in scope and artistic merit. Not so. This same plot formula can be applied to any number of respected mainstream works, like Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Generally speaking, the plot in a category novel must contain fewer muted, psychological story developments of the Hemingway sort—that is, developments which, for pages and pages, deal solely with a character's changing attitudes—and more overt, physical action. But the latitude for individual creativity is broad indeed.

TWO: A HERO OR HEROINE

The anti-hero has a place in category fiction—but only if he is presented as being admirable. His moral values may be the opposite of what we think of as "right," so long as he is true to the values he has set for himself and so long as we can sympathize with him as a character. There is no room, however, for the loser, the weak-kneed or spineless hero. The name of the game is Escape. Your average reader wants to pick up your novel and be carried away from nagging spouse, overdue mortgage, and the morbid things he has seen on the television news that night. He wants to be entertained and to participate in somebody's triumphs for a few brief hours. He does not especially want to share someone's failures; there are enough failures in his

Hammer, Nails, and Wood own daily life. A category novel, therefore, centers around a very colorful, strong central character, usually male but not necessarily so, usually a "good guy" but not necessarily so. The hero is permitted character flaws to give him a depth of personality, but he should eventually triumph over these. Several good examples of flawed heroes who learn the nature of their flaws and come to terms with them are Ben Chase in my own novel *Chase* (under the pseudonym K. R. Dwyer); John Graves in *Binary* by John Lange; and Hell Tanner in Roger Zelazny's *Damnation Alley*.

THREE: CLEAR, BELIEVABLE MOTIVATION

The hero and the villain must have obvious objectives and goals: the winning of love or wealth, the preservation of life, etc. Of course, motivation is also essential in mainstream fiction, but it is often deep psychological motivation which the reader only sees through a distorted lens and must fathom for himself. Category fiction must never leave the reader in doubt about a character's motivations. *Good* characterization is a requirement, but the story is not to be sacrificed for the sake of a character study that runs for pages at a time.

Any set of character motivations, when examined, fits into one of seven slots: love, curiosity, self-preservation, greed, self-discovery, duty, revenge. Before going on to the fourth requirement of genre fiction, let's take a look at the uses and pitfalls of each of these motivations.

Love. Such a universal emotion is adaptable to any genre, though a writer must be careful not to let cliché situations lead him into unbelievable character conflicts. For instance, it is generally too much to accept that a hero would die for love. Orwell's *1984* is good for a point here. Though Winston loves Julia, he is prey to the "thought police" in their campaign to make him deny her. They find his own weakness: rats. When Winston is faced with being bitten by starving rodents, he shouts, "Do it to her!" They have broken him. A hero might risk his life and sanity for love, but only with a high chance for success; otherwise, the risk seems foolhardy.

Love is a primary motivation in my own novel *Dark of the Woods* (science fiction); in Gerald A. Browne's best-selling *11 Harrowhouse* (suspense); in Brian Garfield's *Gun Down* (Western); in *Dance with the Devil* by Deanna Dwyer (Gothic.)

Curiosity. Curiosity is often used as a character motivation in the mystery story, science fiction, fantasy, and the Gothic romance. We humans are curious creatures. Without curiosity, we might still be sitting in caves, scratching our fleas and eating raw meat. Curiosity is responsible for every discovery since man tamed fire, yet, as with love, it is not motive enough to sustain a character for a full novel. There is a point at which—after he has been beaten and threatened enough—a realistic character motivated only by curiosity will call it quits. In that case, the next source of motivation nicely complements curiosity.

Self-preservation. When we nose into affairs meant to be kept secret, we court emotional and physical disaster. A genre novel hero courts it more than most. His curiosity often propels him into a fight for his life, usually against the corrupt forces toward whom his inquisitiveness was first directed. A warning: Don't force your character to endure such extended peaks of punishment that the reader's suspension of disbelief is destroyed. In real life, a man will only endure so much pain and exhaustion before surrendering. If you must, for excitement, put your protagonist to horrendous affliction, give him a goal to supplement self-preservation and thereby add believability to his stamina. If his life *and* the life of the woman he loves depends on his staying one step ahead of the enemy, you'll have more leeway in making him surmount the largest obstacles.

Greed. This is usually not a hero's motivation, though it can be if—as in the suspense novels of Dan Marlowe and Donald E. Westlake—the hero is a bandit. It is excellent motivation for antagonists if it is supplemented with other motives to keep it from seeming cartoon-like.

Self-discovery. This is an acceptable motivation for a category hero, though the writer must not get bogged down in long paragraphs of character analysis and lose the storyline in the process. The hero should only uncover truths about himself through his reaction to plot developments, not through any long, detailed soul-searching.

Duty. In Shakespeare's day, duty was a valid motive for a writer's characters but is now dated. The masses no longer blindly give their loyalty to king and state. It is not sufficient, for example, to establish that your detective or secret agent is investigating the case because it is his job. The reader finds little empathy or escape in the exploits of a man just doing his job. Your protagonist must have a reason for his actions aside from the fact he's paid for them. Why is he a spy or detective? What is there about him that makes him want to do these things, what need is satisfied? Therein lies your *real* motivation.

Revenge. This was also a Shakespearean tool—Hamlet was motivated by revenge—but is also dated. In Shakespeare's time, it was often necessary that a family revenge the murder of one of its own because little organized authority existed to handle such things. A novel set in the last sixty years, however, will deal with a social background in which society's revenge has replaced the family's revenge. Most people are content to allow established police and judicial systems to take care of their own revenge. If this is your motivation for a present-day hero, he must be one of three things: (1) mentally or emotionally unstable and blinded to rational procedure, (2) seeking revenge for some matter that does not fall under the jurisdiction of elected authority, (3) a member of a racial or occupational or religious minority who cannot expect justice at the hands of the regular officials. Aside from the Western (set temporally and geographically in a place where law and order were not reliable) or historical novel, revenge must be used only as a prop

to more acceptable motives.

Of course, in almost every story, a combination of two or more of these motivations is necessary to produce a well-rounded hero and a well-rounded villain. In a Gothic, for example, the heroine is likely to be motivated by curiosity, love, and self-preservation, as in *A Darker Heritage* by Gerda Ann Cerra or *Shadow of the Lynx*, the best-selling Gothic by Victoria Holt, or in Anne McCaffrey's excellent *The Mark of Merlin*.

Thus far, we've listed the kinds of motivation you have to choose from, but how do you decide which motivations best fit your characters and story? There is only one rule of thumb: no character should be motivated by something which is at odds with his basic personality. For example, your hero, if he were to be admirable, could hardly be motivated by an insatiable greed for power and wealth. And your antagonist, if he is to be a fearsome character, should not be motivated by great, enduring love for the heroine.

Okay. A strong plot, hero, and believable motivation have been covered; only two more qualities are essential to the success of the category novel.

FOUR: A GREAT DEAL OF ACTION

A strong plot consists of a story that is reinforced by the plot skeleton we mentioned earlier; that simple, linear formula. But a strong plot can seem weak and bland without action: movement from place to place, confrontations between characters, personal confrontations between a character and himself. The reader wants to be kept in perpetual anticipation. The hero and heroine must constantly be engaged in conquering some barrier that grows logically from their own actions in trying to solve their major predicament. Action can come in the form of the fist fight or gun battle—or as suspense, the psychological game-playing which leads to the fight. Suspense is usually more desirable than the fight itself, because the anticipation of the fight is always more nerve-wracking than the actual confrontation.

FIVE: A COLORFUL BACKGROUND

Not every suspense novel must take place in Jamaica, Istanbul, or Singapore. One of my own, *Blood Risk* (under the pseudonym Brian Coffey), is set in Pittsburgh and the surrounding countryside, certainly a mundane place. No matter where the story is set, the writer should create gritty background, a stage on which hotels, houses, streets, and people are uniquely painted. This is part of the escape a category novel provides and is as important to the suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader as is an intriguing plot or solid characterization.

In short, what distinguishes category fiction from mainstream fiction is its use of all five of the elements named above—a strong plot, a hero or heroine, clear and believable motivation, plenty of action, and a colorful background. With this in mind, let's look at the seven major genres and see how they are similar—beyond these five rules—and how they differ. When you have learned to write well in one category, you will be able to write well in others.

CHAPTER TWO Science Fiction and Fantasy

Rayguns, helpless maidens stranded on alien planets, bug-eyed monsters, invasions of the Earth by wicked creatures, arch-fiends bent on the destruction of the race, super heroes—if you believe this is what science fiction is about, you either stopped reading it *circa* 1930, or have formed your opinion from motion pictures and television programs. The science fiction stories of the 1930's and 1940's were often ludicrous, but they have long ago given way to the same sophistication of theme, background, characters, and style found in other genres. The film medium has rarely done justice to the field—notable exceptions being *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Village of the Damned*, and *THX-1138*. Before trying to write science fiction, read it (a truism applicable to *each* category of fiction, because each has its special requirements). When you read the work of Poul Anderson, John Brunner, Arthur Clarke, Harlan Ellison, Robert Heinlein, Barry Malzberg, Samuel R. Delany, Theodore Sturgeon, Robert Silverberg, and Roger Zelazny, you'll discover that the rayguns have been packed in mothballs; the helpless maidens have taken to women's liberation; the heroes, once flawless, are now quite human.

Of the five required elements of genre fiction, perhaps *background* is the most important in science fiction novels.

Since most science fiction takes place in the future, the background must be wholly of the writer's imagination. The future can be researched to only a limited extent (even the most well-informed scientists can only *conjecture* what it will hold). The writer's vision must be detailed and believable, or the reader will ultimately not believe anything—not the characters, motivations, or the plot. This intense detailed creation is a challenge, but a fascinating one for the writer willing to invest more of his mind and soul than he would have to in the average Gothic or Western.

THE NEAR FUTURE

Structuring a story background of the *near* future—twenty, thirty, or forty years from now—is in some ways more difficult than creating an entire alien planet in some impossibly distant future, because it cannot be made up *wholly* of the imagination. You must research to discover what engineers and scientists project for each area of living. From this data, you must then *extrapolate* a possible future, one which might logically rise out of the basis for the future which we are building today.

This doesn't mean that every science fiction novel set thirty years from today must be placed against the same background. The future, even extrapolating it from today's conditions, may go a million different ways.

For instance, a writer may set two different stories in the same future period, though he builds utterly different backgrounds for them. In *The Space Merchants* by Frederick Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth, the authors project a future within this century, a society in which high-pressure advertising agencies have gained terrible influence over the minds of the masses and have become, in effect, rulers of the world. The same authors, in *Gladiators-at-Law*, intricately develop another near future in which big business has grown so large it's begun to collapse from within, society collapsing with it. Each future is believable; each could come to pass.

The trick lies in how well you detail your future. If you paint it in broad strokes, no one will accept it, including an editor. When considering the background for any science fiction novel, be sure to give careful thought to each of the following:

Moral codes of the future. Assume that morality will change, and that it will change radically. Don't assume your own morality will inevitably dominate the future or that present-day morality will continue to be accepted. Remember that, in the early 1950s, no one would have believed that "free love" and "group marriage" would become commonplace two decades later. Though morality will most likely continue to be liberalized, even this is not a certainty. The future has infinite possibilities. All you can be certain of is that it *will* be different from today. A few moral questions for you to consider in the context of your future society: Will marriage exist as an institution? Will pre-marital sex and adultery be frowned upon or not? Will murder still be considered *immoral*? Will murder, in the service of your country, still be considered *moral*?

Domestic politics. Will there still only be two major political parties in the United States, and will they still be Republican and Democratic? Will the U.S. still be a democracy? What effects will data banks on private citizens (being put together even today) have on the conduct of politics? Will the war still be an issue? Another war? The space program? Will poverty be a political issue?

World politics. Will the U.S. still exist? Will Russia or China? What new power will have arisen as a major agent in world affairs—Brazil, perhaps, or Israel? If your novel is set on an alien world, what is the nature of galactic politics and diplomacy?

Religion. Will the U.S. remain predominately Christian? Set aside your own religious views and extrapolate honestly. Will religion play an even more important role in politics, accumulating even more establishment power? Or will the boom of scientific discovery eventually be the death of belief in supernatural beings? What new religions might arise?

Day-to-day life. This is the most important area of background detail in the future you are constructing, for it is the one which will be constantly in the reader's eye. Morality will play an important part; politics may be mentioned marginally in your story; religion may figure only vaguely in your tale; the international situation may influence only a few paragraphs in your book; but day-to-day life in the future will be visible in every scene. Will the population explosion do away with private dwellings (as it presently appears it will have to), thereby forcing everyone to live in space-conserving high-rise apartments? Will people eat the same foods or be forced to consume flavored algae because of vast food shortages? Will automobiles exist, or will they have been replaced with other transportation systems? How will people dress? Over the last century, as man has gained control of his environment, he has had less need for the protection of clothing. Will nudity then be casual in the future? Will books exist, or will they be replaced by mechanical devices? Will children go to public schools or be taught at home by television and robots? Will marriage exist? Will the pollution problem have been solved, or will people wear gas masks on the street and salve their skin to ward off deterioration caused by a caustic atmosphere?

Will marijuana be legal? How will food be prepared, perhaps without human contact? Will cancer have been cured? Will madness have been cured? Will we have settled on the moon? On Mars? Beyond?

The questions go on and on, and you must have answers to them; you must know your future so well that, if a friend quizzed you about it, you could answer him with the same alacrity you'd answer questions about the real world, the world of today.

As a potential writer of science fiction, you would be well-advised to read *Dune* by Frank Herbert, a science fiction

classic set in the far future that has sold more than a million copies and which contains one of the most detailed futures imaginable. Likewise, Robert Heinlein's million-copy classic, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a book which details a near future so well that few authors have ever approached its catalogue of extrapolative minutiae, is well worth your perusal.

You should understand that not every novel in this genre requires such a wealth of background in the finished draft—but you should have your future so well thought out that you *can* apply detailed background in any scene that demands it. Some writers keep elaborate notebooks full of background data for the future they're drawing, and Robert Heinlein has even gone so far as to plot a Chart of Future History, outlining major events over several hundred years and slotting his stories into this future. I find that careful thought, before beginning the first page, plus a few notes is all that I need. I don't keep notebooks or charts, but hold the entire scheme in my head, to keep it more flexible than it would be if I wrote it out on paper. Each author, through trial and error, must find out which method best suits his temperament.

A warning: When considering all of the researched and extrapolated elements of your near future, be sure that they mesh into a coherent whole. For example, if you extrapolate a future U.S. run by a right-wing military junta, democracy abolished, do not also portray a society where the arts flourish. These two elements—dictatorship and artistic energy—have never co-existed in one country at the same time, and seem unlikely to in the future. Do not portray a future where the Christian Church governs the world and sexual liberty is encouraged; the church would have to change drastically for this to be believable. In short, a society works only when the majority of its parts are compatible and when few if any of its parts are downright hostile to the majority's philosophy.

THE FAR FUTURE

When the story is set centuries from today, on this or another world, you have a greater imaginative freedom and correspondingly less research to do. No one can know what life will be like in 4000 A.D., nor how it might be structured on an alien world. No amount of research into the sciences can prepare the writer for accurate prediction when such spans of time are involved. The only rule, for far future stories, is this: your future must be consistent in its detail (not such a different rule than the last one we talked about in discussing near-future backgrounds).

For example, don't build a future in which mankind has made robots as able and intelligent as human beings—and then have your hero and other humans tending mundane, daily jobs. In that sort of future, unless a logical alternative is given, the robots would do all such work.

Nor should a writer set his story on an alien world with three times Earth's gravity, then let his heroes move about as if they were at home. Earthborn men would move slowly, painfully, and clumsily in such an ambience, for they would weigh three times what they weigh on Earth, and they would feel as if they were carrying a huge, heavy burden. Nor should the writer create aliens for this world which look like men, because triple gravity would produce short, heavy people with only vague—and perhaps no—resemblance to humanity as we know it.

Researching these backgrounds is not a simple matter. For instance, how could you expect to find a book about life on a planet with three times Earth's gravity—a non-fiction book with tables, charts, and graphs? If your idea is to use a world with heavy gravity, you have to start your research by learning everything you can about Earth's gravity, then extrapolate or extend from there. Unless you're accustomed to the often dreary and difficult prose of science books, juvenile and even children's non-fiction on the subject most concerning you will prove to be a treasure trove. In these books, the fundamentals—usually all you'll need to begin your story—are simply explained, easily grasped and retained. And whereas the average library may be short on available science books, it will have thousands of children's books covering everything from the nature of stars and suns and gravity, to the operation of a jet plane and the construction of an oil well.

If you're embarrassed about checking out children's books, you can always say they're for a grandchild—or that you're intending to write one yourself and are doing a bit of catching up on your competition!

Once you've delineated your background, you are ready to develop a plot to set against it. It is advisable, of course, to have some idea of the nature of the story before devising a detailed future setting, since the plot will affect the background and vice versa. There are eight major types of science fiction plots, each with its own sort of background—and each with its own brand of pitfalls you should avoid.

IF THIS GOES ON . . . STORY

The "*If this goes on...*" story is the kind most likely to reach the widest audience and receive critical acclaim, for it not only deals with the near future, but a present-day situation which has been extrapolated to its ultimate conclusion. Already concerned by the subject matter and somewhat familiar with it, the average reader will find the story believable and immediately applicable to his own life. You begin with a single area of society that disturbs you and build a future in which that area has become the focus of society. Most such stories cannot escape being "warnings" to the reader, and therein lies half of their entertainment value. The most frightening things, after all, are those which are so familiar that we have come to discount them—until we abruptly see a dark and ugly side that shows us what we have been living with all unawares. A few examples should explain the form.

In a short novel, appropriately enough titled *If This Goes On...*, Robert Heinlein writes of a future in which the church's tax-exempt status and the gullibility of the masses propel a backwoods evangelist into national politics and, eventually, into a religious dictatorship that covers North America. Heinlein's argument that the church should not be given an inch of influence in government, lest it take a mile, is given plausibility by the manner in which churches, in recent years, have pyramided their moral influence over government into a multi-million-dollar-a-year pro-church lobby in Washington.

Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!* gives a vivid and terrifying view of an over-populated near future. Here, a man is fortunate to have one tiny room to call his own, lucky to share a bathroom with only a few strangers. Drinking water is precious; decent food is almost unknown. If our present rate of population growth, world-wide, continues, Harrison says, look at the nightmare we'll be living in.

John Brunner's *The Jagged Orbit* deals with a near future in which violence and racism have made America a land in which each man goes armed against his neighbor and must live in a fortified house with armor and weaponry and deadfalls. If we don't curb racism and misdirected violence, Brunner says, we'll end up in a nation where sudden death is the norm and no one knows peace and quietude.

Remember, although you are extrapolating one area of society—tax-exempt religion, population growth, racism and violence, changing morality—if that one area has come to dominate your imagined future, it will have its effect on every segment of daily life. It is your responsibility to consider that before beginning.

For example, if you were primarily concerned with writing about the total failure of law and order in the city streets after dark by the year 1990, if you were portraying a future city living in siege during the dark hours when only criminals prowl about, you would have to consider the effect of this development on these, and other, areas of human experience:

The arts: Would art forms requiring people to leave the safety of their homes after dark—legitimate theater, motion pictures, sporting events, musical concerts—die away?

Dating: Wouldn't men and women who wanted to date have to meet immediately after work, go to one or the other's apartment, and lock themselves in until dawn? And wouldn't this cause a breakdown in traditional morals?

The work day: Might the work day of the city man be changed, running from dawn until eight hours later, to allow him to adjust to this kind of hostile environment?

The family: Would people be as anxious to bring children into the world as they are today, if they were bringing them into such a nasty place? Or would the Old-World family unit be restored? After all, a woman would need a man to protect her against the more adventuresome criminals who might try breaking into fortified apartments and houses, and she would have to relinquish at least a little of her new-found liberation, for strictly biological reasons.

Factories: Production plants that now work around the clock, with three different shifts, would either have to close down during darkness, or provide sleeping facilities for one whole shift that would work through most of the dark hours but couldn't go home immediately when their shift was over.

Fire protection: How would firemen, forced to answer an alarm in the night, assure their own safety? Fire trucks like tanks? Armoured suits?

Rural life: Would those people living in the relatively peaceful rural areas be overwhelmed by city-dwellers anxious to escape their beleaguered metropolises? Would country people band together to forcefully prevent such immigration? Or would the city people stick it out, holding on to their way of life, refusing to opt for the rural way?

Criminals themselves: Who would they prey on, in the dark hours, if most citizens were behind bolted doors and armoured windows? Each other?

Politics: Would demagogues rise to power on the national level, promising law and order and delivering dictatorship? Would national leadership choose to ignore the plight of the cities? Would some cities, in anger at the federal

government's apathy, secede from the country—or form their own outlaw states? Would dictators arise in these city-states? Would none of this happen and, instead, the breakdown in law and order during darkness be considered just another "burden" of city life as, today, metropolitan residents view outrageous pollution and overpopulation?

Broadcast media: With more people staying home at nights, would the broadcast media become even more popular? With the larger audience, would new forms of broadcast media—other than radio and standard television—be put on the market? Three-dimensional television? Total sensory television? Home motion picture tape systems?

From this list, you can see that, though you may be extrapolating chiefly one thing, that single exaggerated social factor will have a pronounced effect on every facet of daily life.

ALIEN CONTACT STORY

The second plot type in science fiction is the *alien contact story*. This includes invasions of the Earth like H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, though, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this kind of fright story is presently out of vogue. More subtle and therefore more terrifying invasion stories, like John Christopher's *The Possessors*, are far more acceptable to today's readers: stories, in brief, in which only a few people—perhaps only a single household or individual—may ever know about the alien presence, in which the threat of world conquest is not dramatized in melodramatic terms, but in human ones. The alien contact story also includes novels about voyages of Earthmen to other worlds, and even stories in which the alien is a man from so far in the future of our own Earth that he is either mentally, physically, or *both* mentally and physically unlike a man. A good novel in this vein is Robert Silverberg's *The Masks of Time*, which deals with a physically perfect man from the future whose mind is strangely different from our own, his attitudes quite unlike ours.

Putting aside the man from the far future device—since it is rarely used—we see that all other aliens are extraterrestrial in nature, beings from other worlds and other galaxies, even other universes. No matter what the nature of the alien being, you can handle it in two ways. First, you may construct a creature which has evolved under entirely different circumstances than mankind has. Perhaps it's an alien from a world with many times our gravity. (Hal Clement's *Mission of Gravity* is a classic with this kind of background.) Perhaps it comes from a world where the atmosphere is predominately methane or some other substance toxic to man. The possibilities are limitless. If you choose this path, you must thoroughly research—through science books—what such a world would be like, extrapolating from what present-day facts you can find. Then, you must learn what effects such strange conditions would have on the evolution of a species. Only then can you hope to convince the reader of the validity of your vision.

The second way to handle your alien is to have him originate on a world essentially like our own Earth, but to have him be a member of another species—besides the ape, from which man most likely descended—such as a lizard-man (my own *Beastchild* creates a sympathetic alien of reptilian nature), a winged man, a creature of the seas, a nocturnal, four-legged predator, or any of countless other possibilities. Robert Silverberg's excellent *Downward to the Earth* postulates intelligent, elephant-like creatures on an Earth-type world. A. E. van Vogt's *Voyage of the Space Beagle* contains a catlike alien that can pass, unchanged, through walls or any other barriers, and my own *Dark of the Woods* is set on an Earth-like world where the native race is a diminutive and delicate human-variant with gossamer and functional wings.

This second method—creating an alien who comes from an Earth-type world and breathes Earth-mixture atmosphere—helps you avoid a great deal of research, while providing a suitably eerie extra-terrestrial being. You don't have to probe in science books if he comes from an Earth-type world—you already know much about him. You can concentrate, now, on extrapolating his physical looks and his culture.

At this point, considering your plot and your ability, you must decide whether the alien will be handled as a serious character or as a figure for satire and buffoonery. Unless your writing talents are well developed, and unless you are *very* familiar with science fiction, you should avoid the latter approach. You may think it a simple matter to create a comic alien with too many legs, several eyes, and a squeaky voice, imbue him with a crackpot sense of humor (we all think of ourselves as the master of the funny line, even if we write tear jerkers for a living), and push him on stage. This way lies disaster. Only one writer in recent years has proven continually adept at creating funny aliens and using them to advantage: Keith Laumer's many books, including his Retief novels about an Earth diplomat mixed up in galactic intrigues, usually escape crossing that line between humor and boredom.

If you intend to develop your alien as a serious character—in either the role of a menacing antagonist or as a compatriot of the hero—you should delve as deeply into the alien's psyche and personality as you would into a human's. Extra-terrestrials do not invade the Earth without purpose—indeed, they should have doubts, aspirations, second thoughts, loves, hates, and prejudices—unless they are megalomaniacs. Also remember that an alien creature, while having motivations just as humans do, will have substantially *different* motivations. Suppose, for instance, that the alien comes from a society where the institution of the family is unheard of, where breeding is a more natural process and less of a personal one than it is with human beings. The effects upon various motivations will be profound.

Examples of alien characterization, as well as other requirements peculiar to science fiction, will be given later in this chapter.

TIME TRAVEL STORY

The third plot type in science fiction is the *time travel story*. Ever since H. G. Wells created the form with *The Time Machine*, readers have evidenced a continuing interest in the subject. One reason for this popularity is that the science of time-space is so esoteric, so intangible, that a writer can formulate a "wonderful new discovery" to justify the existence of the time machine and place his story at any point in history: today, tomorrow, next week, a hundred years from now, or a hundred years ago, making for varied and vivid backgrounds and plots. Too, because time travel stories deal with a quantity which people are familiar with—minutes, hours, memories—it seems more real than a story based on science beyond their understanding.

A time machine can operate in several ways. If the story purpose is best suited by a machine that will only carry passengers into the past (Harry Harrison's *The Technicolor Time Machine*), the writer need only say so. If he wants a machine that only travels into the future (Wilson Tucker's *The Year of the Quiet Sun*) and then back to the starting point, or if he wants a machine capable of forward and backward time travel, he need only inform the reader, briefly, of the machine's limitations or abilities.

Trips into the future require the same extrapolated background we have discussed. Trips into the past require a background for the proper period; this can easily be researched in any library with a good selection of historical reference texts.

Only one main brand of error is endemic to the time travel tale: the *time paradox*. The term is best explained through examples, which are limitless. For instance:

If you traveled back to last Thursday morning in a time machine and met yourself back then and told yourself to invest in a certain company because their stock would soar during the next week, what would happen if the Early You did as the Later You wished? When the Later You returned to the present, would he find himself rich? Or perhaps, while the Early You was running to the stock broker, he was stricken by an automobile and suffered two broken legs. When the Later You returned to the present, would he find himself with two broken legs? Perhaps you would end up hospitalized, never having been able to make the trip in the first place because your legs were broken a week ago. Yet, if you had never taken the time trip, you wouldn't have sent your Early Self into the path of the car and would not have broken legs. Yet, if you *did* make the trip, and *had* the broken legs, you *couldn't* have made the trip *because of* the broken legs and...

Do you see what a time paradox is?

Here's another:

Suppose your hero went back in time and killed the villain ten years in the past. The villain would cease to exist at that point. Any children he had fostered would cease to exist if they had not been fathered before that day ten years ago. Did you really mean to kill his innocent children as well as him?

Or suppose you traveled back in time and married your great-grandmother. Would you be your own great-grandfather?

If you returned again and again to the same general period in time, wouldn't there be a whole crowd of you walking around?

If you go into the future and see something unpleasant in your own life, and you come back to the present to make sure that the future thing never happens—can you really hope to change the future? If you've already seen yourself dying in a wrecked automobile, can you return to the present and avoid that accident? If you've seen it, isn't it already predestined?

To better understand the complications you must deal with in the time travel story, read *Up the Line*, a modern classic of the form by Robert Silverberg, published by Ballantine Books. Silverberg purposefully generates every conceivable time paradox and carries them all to their wildly absurd and fascinating conclusion.

NEW DISCOVERY STORY

If you don't feel up to the confusion of time travel, perhaps the fourth type of science fiction plot will intrigue you: the *new discovery story*. First, you conjecture a new discovery—it may be a device, process, or simply a theory—which would revolutionize modern life. You then concern yourself with detailing the effects that discovery has on society and, more immediately, upon your small cast of characters.

Harry Harrison's *The Daleth Effect* deals with the discovery of a simple, relatively inexpensive stardrive which will permit space travel at a ridiculously low cost. Suddenly, the stars are ours—not in thirty or fifty or a hundred years, but *now*. The powerful social force of this process or device (Harrison never makes that entirely clear) spreads antagonism among world governments, because if any one country owned the Daleth Effect, it would soon so dominate as to make other nations powerless.

Wilson Tucker's *Wild Talent* deals with the emergence of ESP abilities in the first of a new breed of human beings and details the fear and doubt such a discovery would cause in today's society.

It is not essential, in the new discovery story, to adequately explain, through present-day science or pseudo-scientific double-talk, how the discovery *works*. It is always preferable, of course, to ground the device in a bedrock of acceptable scientific theory. But this type of science fiction story is far more concerned with the "how" and the "what" than with the technical-theoretical "why." And, since it usually takes place in the present or the very near future, it is the story type which requires the least amount of extrapolation and research. Indeed, many new discovery science fiction novels are set in such a near future that they are not labeled as science fiction, but as suspense: Michael Crichton's best-selling *The Andromeda Strain*, and *The Tashkent Crisis* by William Craig.

SCIENTIFIC PROBLEM STORY

Fifth, we have the *scientific problem story*. This form is actually best suited to the short story, unless the problem the characters must solve is so complex, with so many ramifications, that the novel length is justified. In this form, the author confronts his hero with a seemingly insoluble scientific problem and forces him to use his wits to overcome staggering odds.

A typical sort of problem story might be this: The hero has landed his spaceship on an uninhabited, lifeless world, without benefit of his rockets which are out of order. As he fixes the engines, he discovers the planet's atmosphere is combustible, of a gasoline-like vapor. If he had landed with the rockets blazing, the entire kaboodle would have exploded; he was lucky. But, now that he's down, how in the devil can he take off again? Even if the engines are repaired, can they lift off without igniting the atmosphere around them and completely destroying themselves in the resultant explosion? One answer is this: Since the atmosphere is composed of gasoline-like vapor, and is not pure oxygen, it cannot explode; there is simply nowhere for the expanding vapor to explode *to*. All it can do is burn, and that cannot harm them at all as long as they remain inside their escaping, steel ship.

Unfortunately, the problem story leaves room for little more than adequate characterization, and the plot is severely constricted by the necessity to solve the main, center-stage problem which usually concerns, not people, but a scientific phenomenon. Many well-known science fiction writers began with problem stories, but Hal Clement (*Mission of Gravity*, *Star Light*) is the only writer to have made a solid career from them.

ALTERED PAST STORY

Sixth, we have the *altered past story*. These tales are based on the notion that the world would have been substantially different than it is, if some ma/or historical event had not happened, or if it had been reversed. For example, Philip K. Dick wrote a masterful Hugo Award-winning novel (The Hugo is the science fiction world's equivalent of the Oscar) *The Man in the High Castle*, which dealt with a world in which Germany and Japan won World War II and split the United States between them. That idea, clearly, is staggering. Keith Roberts' *Pavanne* tells the story of a world in which England did not defeat the Spanish Armada, Spain Catholicized England, and the Middle Ages, when science was considered necromancy and was banned, have never ended.

The wealth of story ideas is obvious. What if the South had won the Civil War? What if America had lost the Revolutionary War? What if a nuclear war had been fought in 1958? What if Lincoln had not been assassinated?

The new science fiction writer should be warned that the research required to write such a "period" science fiction novel is intense indeed. Before you can project how things would have developed since the historical event was rewritten, you must know how things really were back then, what forces would have filled the vacuum, what philosophy would have replaced the dead ones, what persons would have replaced the assassinated greats.

ALTERNATE WORLDS STORY

Akin to the sixth type is the seventh type of science fiction story: the *alternate worlds story*. Imagine that, in the beginning, there was only one Earth but that different *possible* Earths branched off from ours at various points in time. Let's say that every time something could have happened two different ways, another possibility world came into being. On our world, there was a World War I which the Allies won; in another world, the Allies lost; in our world, we did not avoid the Second World War; in a third world, they did; in a fourth world, the U.S. got into World War II, and lost to the Germans who took possession of America, giving the course of history yet another turn. So on, and on, and on. The result is a vast, indeed an infinite number of possible Earths existing side-by-side, each invisible to the other but nonetheless real. This is, basically, the theory of other dimensions beyond our own, dimensions in a romantic sense rather than the mathematical. Specific science fiction novels that deal with alternate worlds include: my own *Hell's Gate*; *Worlds of the Imperium*, *The Time Benders*, and *The Other Side of Time* by Keith Laumer; *The Gate of Time* by Philip Jose Farmer; and *The Wrecks of Time* by Michael Moorcock.

While the alternate worlds and the altered past stories are similar in essence, the alternate world background allows a hero from our own Earth and time, the here-and-now, to investigate new places and encounter odd wonders with the familiar perspective of a modern-day American.

JOURNEY THROUGH A STRANGE LAND STORY

The last story form is best described as the *journey through a strange land story*, a great trek and epic quest narrative that is science fiction chiefly by virtue of its setting which is also its plot. The characters in this kind of tale must journey from Point A to Point B, through a landscape as different from our own as a Dali painting is from the reality it represents.

Jack Vance's *Big Planet* is the classic of this form, dealing with a huge world many times larger than Earth, and a forty thousand mile journey across an enormous continent harbouring dozens of wildly different societies, terrains, and challenges. In one short paragraph near the beginning of the novel, Vance sets the sense-of-wonder tone upon which all such stories depend, presenting a taste of marvels to come:

Looking to where Earth's horizon would lie, he could lift his eyes and see lands reaching far on out; pencil lines of various subtle colors, each line a plain or forest, a sea, a desert, a mountain range He took a step forward, looked over his shoulder. 'Let's go.'

The landscape over which this trek takes place may be an alien planet, our own Earth in the far future (tens of thousands of years from now and utterly different than we know it today), an alternate world, an Earth based on an altered past, or even our own world in the days of pre-history when the continent of Atlantis (some maintain) was the focal point of civilization. The writer must create one fantastic scene after another, make them credible, and keep the characters moving toward their distant goal, whatever it may be.

The difference between this story and the alien contact story is simple: in the alien contact story, the alien race and mankind's interaction with it is the center of focus; in the journey through a strange land tale, the landscape itself, rather than any alien race, is the prime focus. Aliens may appear, but they are dwarfed by the land they live in.

There are, naturally, thousands of science fiction stories, each subtly or obviously different than the last. But I believe that all of them can be categorized in these eight forms, without stretching the point much. Those published works that don't seem to fit any of the eight slots are usually composed of a combination of two or more of the plot types, such as John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*, Keith Laumer's *The Long Twilight*, and my own *Beastchild*.

By now, your plot at least sketchily outlined according to the simple plot formula mentioned in Chapter One, your background detailed, you are ready to begin putting the story on paper. It is not sufficient, however, merely to launch into the tale. A science fiction novel requires that certain conditions be met in the first paragraph, others in the first few pages, if the finished work is to be successful. We'll examine these conditions, and how to begin, next.

Every category novel must hook the reader's attention in the first paragraph and, if possible, in the very first sentence. It must provoke in him an immediate "need to know" how the situation, stated in the first paragraph, will be resolved. Once the narrative hook has been planted, the story may hold the reader's interest in one of two ways:

(1) the original situation, which caught his attention, turns out to be the major problem of the story and will not be resolved until the conclusion, after many intermediate challenges to the hero; (2) the hook turns out to be a minor problem that leads the hero rapidly into his most important bind. In either case—though (1) is preferable to (2)—the pace must be swift, the danger and the suspense continuous.

In a science fiction novel, you should not only present a strong narrative hook in the initial paragraph, but also give the reader a glimpse of the background of the story, thereby acclimating him to all the extrapolative detail yet to come. The sooner the reader understands that the story is set on another planet or in the future, the better equipped he will be to follow the plot without confusion.

Yet this information should not come in a dry, encyclopedic fashion. It should be a part of the narrative, incorporated into the developing story without causing the slightest hesitation in the plot pace. The following selection of first paragraphs should help you to understand how this requirement can be met.

This, from my own novel, *Anti-Man*:

It was really too much to hope for, but we seemed to have lost them. We had jumped from Knoxville to Pierre, South Dakota, from that drab terminal to Bismark, North Dakota, and on to San Francisco. In the City of the Sun, we had walked unknown with our hands in our pockets and our faces open to the sky, feeling less like fugitives than we had any right to, grabbing a day of much needed rest and a moment to collect our thoughts before dashing on. We had spent the day buying gear for the last leg of our escape, eating our first decent meal in two days, and sitting through some atrocious toto-experience film just because it was dark in the theater and, therefore, safer for the two most wanted men in the world. At midnight, we had bought tickets and boarded the next Pole-crossing rocket flight that would take us over Alaska. As the high-altitude craft flashed above Northern California and into Oregon, I took Him into the bathroom at the end of the First Class compartment (fugitives should always travel First Class, for the rich are always too concerned with the way they look to notice anyone else) and locked the door. "Take off your coat and shirt," I told Him. "I want to see that wound."

Here, the narrative hook is planted in the first sentence, when the reader discovers the narrator and his companion are on the run from someone. The second sentence elaborates that point. The third sentence labels them as "fugitives" which would seem to put them on the wrong side of the law. In the fourth sentence, the reader is thoroughly hooked when he's told that they are the two most wanted men in the world. What are they wanted for? Will they escape their pursuers, or be

caught? How badly is the unnamed man wounded? How was he wounded? What complications does his wound pose to their flight? The reader must follow the story to its conclusion to learn some of these answers.

A wealth of background detail is fitted into that paragraph, preparing the reader for a science fiction setting. That the heroes "jumped" from city to city implies some futuristic transportation system. "Toto-experience film" is a term that implies omni-sensory cinematic experience but which describes nothing available in the present-day world. They travel in a world-spanning rocketship, and such means of travel appears so commonplace that a future setting is indicated. Finally, the use of the capitalized "Him" for the narrator's companion prepares the reader to expect something odd, something presently indefinable. This last, besides being background, functions as a narrative hook too.

Also from my own work, *Dark of the Woods*:

The first bit of trouble came even as they were leaving the starship on Demos's port field; it was a harbinger of worse times ahead.

The first sentence is also the first paragraph. The narrative hook is the "trouble" mentioned and the statement that it was indicative of all that is to follow. Also in the first sentence, a starship and alien planet are mentioned, immediately clarifying at least the generalities of background for the reader.

In a science fiction novel, as in no other category, you can delay the appearance of the narrative hook for a few paragraphs, *if* the exotic background is so strange and intriguing of itself that it acts as the initial grabber to keep the reader going until the problem arises. Such a delay in the plot should never be longer than a page or two.

As example, consider the first paragraph of Robert Heinlein's *Podkayne of Mars*:

All my life I've wanted to go to Earth. Not to live, of course—just to see it. As everybody knows, Terra is a wonderful place to visit but not to live. Not truly suited to human habitation.

Though the heroine lacks a desperate problem at the outset, she does interest us by casually discounting Earth. Why is Earth a backwater place? Why is it unfit for habitation? What has happened between our time and hers? By the time that she explains herself, we have also been narratively hooked.

Robert Silverberg's excellent novel, *Thorns*, has a similar beginning in which background acts as a narrative grabber:

"Pain is instructive," Duncan Chalk wheezed. On crystal rungs he ascended the east wall of his office. Far on high was the burnished desk, the inlaid communicator box from which he controlled his empire. It would have been nothing for Chalk to sail up the wall on the staff of a gravitron. Yet each morning he imposed this climb on himself.

The crystal rungs, gravitron, and Chalk's own statement make the reader wonder what this future world is like. As he reads a bit more to find out, the plot snares him expertly.

Here's a third and last example of the background-as-lead-in from another Silverberg novel, *Nightwings*:

Roum is a city built on seven hills. They say it was a capital of man in one of the earlier cycles. I did not know of that, for my guild was Watching, not Remembering; but yet as I had my first glimpse of Roum, coming upon it from the south at twilight, I could see that in former days it must have been of great significance. Even now it was a mighty city of many thousands of souls.

Clearly, Roum is Rome, and the story is set so far in the future that the present is forgotten. Such a background interests the reader, because he wonders how it came to be and how it differs from our world. The mention of guilds, Watching and Remembering, serves to add a note of mystery, of the exotic and curious.

Ordinarily, you should avoid the use of a "frame" in opening and closing your story. This is a narrative device in which the reader is addressed more directly than in the body of the plot with the intent of setting the story off like a gem in a gold brace. More often than not, the new writer will create a brace of lead, not gold. If you feel you *must* employ a frame, keep it short and dramatic, as in the following two examples. From *The Puppet Masters* by Robert Heinlein:

Were they truly intelligent? By themselves, that is? I don't know and I don't know how we can ever find out.

If they were *not* truly intelligent, I hope I never live to see us tangle with anything at all like them which *is* intelligent. I know who will lose. Me. You. The so-called human race.

From *The Masks of Time* by Robert Silverberg:

A memoir of this sort should begin with some kind of statement of personal involvement, I suppose; I was the man, I was there, I suffered. And in fact my involvement with the improbable events of the past twelve months was great. I knew the man from the future. I followed him on his nightmare orbit around our world. I was with him at the end.

Once begun, a science fiction novel requires a continuing balance of new plot developments and new background material, especially in the first few chapters. Experience at the keyboard, working on science fiction stories, and a study

of the better science fiction writers will help you master this technique. To help you learn what to look for in your own work and the work of others you are studying, let's examine the first chapter of one of my own novels step-by-step, with special attention to how the plot and the background can be developed simultaneously.

The book is *A Darkness in My Soul*, published in June, 1972, by DAW Books, a publishing company begun by Donald A. Wollheim, formerly Vice-President of Editorial Policy at Ace Books and a well-respected, long-time editor of science fiction.

Chapter One

For a long while, I wondered if Dragonfly was still in the heavens and whether the Spheres of Plague still floated in airlessness, blind eyes watchful. I wondered whether men still looked to the stars with trepidation and whether the skies yet bore the cancerous seed of mankind. There was no way for me to find out, for I lived in Hell during those days, where news of the living gained precious little circulation.

I was a digger into minds, a head-tripper. I espied, I found secrets, knew lies, and reported all these things for a price. I espied. Some questions were never meant to be answered; some parts of a man's mind were never intended for scrutiny. Yet our curiosity is, at the same time, our greatest virtue and our most serious weakness. I had within my mind the power to satisfy any curiosity which tickled me. I espied; I found; I knew. And then there was a darkness in my soul, darkness unmatched by the depths of space that lay lightless between the galaxies, an ebony ache without parallel.

The first two paragraphs are part of a frame, but packed with narrative hooks and exotic background. The main hook: what did the hero discover, through ESP, to so change his life, and what trouble did it cause him? The background teasers include strange names—Dragonfly, Spheres of Plague—and the existence of a man with ESP who evidently exists in the future.

It started with a nerve-jangling ring of the telephone, a mundane enough beginning.

I put down the book I was reading and lifted the receiver and said, impatiently perhaps, "Hello?"

"Simeon?" the distant voice asked. He pronounced it correctly—Sim—ee—on.

It was Harry Kelly, sounding bedraggled and bewildered, two things he never was. I recognized his voice because it had been—in years past—the only sound of sanity and understanding in a world of wildly gabbling self-seekers and power mongers. I espied out and saw him standing in a room that was strange to me, nervously drumming his fingers on the top of a simulated oak desk. The desk was studded with a complex panel of controls, three telephones, and three tri-dimensional television screens for monitoring interoffice activity, the work space of someone of more than a little importance.

Here, a new character is introduced, in circumstances that indicate a problem about to develop. Also, we get more evidence of the future setting: the control-studded desk and tri-dimensional televisions.

"What is it, Harry?"

"Sim, I have another job for you. If you want it, that is. You don't have to take it if you're already wrapped up in something private."

He had long ago given up his legal practice to act as my agent, and he could be counted on for at least one call a week like this. Yet there was a hollow anxiety in his tone which made me uncomfortable. I could have touched deeper into his mind, stirred through the pudding of his thoughts and discovered the trouble. But he was the one person in the World I would not esp for purely personal reasons. He had earned his sanctity, and he would never have to worry about losing it.

In the no-nonsense fashion of category fiction, the relationship between these two characters is established. Also, with words like "hollow anxiety" and "uncomfortable," a tone of apprehension is slowly built.

"Why so nervous?" I asked. "What kind of job?"

"Plenty of money," he said. "Look, Sim, I know how much you hate these tawdry little government contracts. If you take this job, you're not going to need money for a long while. You won't have to snoop through a hundred government heads a week."

"Say no more," I said. Harry knew my habit of living beyond my means. If he thought there was enough in this to keep me living fat for some time to come, the buyer had just purchased his merchandise. All of us have our price. Mine just came a little steeper than most.

"I'm at the Artificial Creation complex. We'll expect you in—say twenty minutes."

"I'm on my way." I dropped the phone into its cradle and tried to pretend I was enthusiastic. But my stomach belied my true feelings as it stung my chest with acidic, roiling spasms. In the back of my mind, The Fear rose and hung over me, watching with dinner-plate eyes, breathing fire through black nostrils. The Artificial Creation building: the womb, my womb, the first tides of my life...

I almost crawled back into bed and almost said the hell with it. The AC complex was the last place on Earth I wanted to go, especially at night when everything would seem more sinister, when memories would play in brighter colors. Two things kept me from the sheets: I truly did not enjoy the loyalty checks I ran on government employees to keep me in spending money, for I was not only required to report traitors, but to delineate the abnormal (as the government defined that word) private practices and beliefs of those I scanned, violating privacy in the most insidious fashion; secondly, I had just promised Harry I would be there, and I couldn't find a single instance when that mad Irishman had let me down.

I cursed the womb which had made me, beseeching the gods to melt its plastic walls and short-circuit those miles and miles of delicate copper wires.

I pulled on street clothes over pajamas, stepped into overshoes and a heavy coat with fur lining, one of the popular nordic models. Without Harry Kelly, I would most likely have been in prison at that moment—or in a preventive detention apartment with federal plain-clothes guards standing watch at the doors and windows. Which is only a more civilized way of saying the same thing: prison. When the staff of Artificial Creation discovered my wild talents in my childhood, the FBI attempted to "impound" me so that I might be used as a "national resource" under federal control for the "betterment of our great country and the establishment of a tighter American defense perimeter." It had been Harry Kelly who had cut through all that fancy language to call it what it was—illegal and immoral imprisonment of a free citizen. He fought the legal battle all the way to the nine old men in nine old chairs where the case was won. I was nine when we did that—twelve long years ago.

We have now learned that the hero is apparently not of human parents, but an experiment of as yet unexplained "Artificial Wombs." He reads minds for pay—since his ability appears unusual—and is lucky to be a free citizen. We have also learned that the scene is the future United States, that Scandinavia is a source of fashions during this period, and that the hero is twenty-one.

It was snowing outside. The harsh lines of shrubbery, trees and curbs had been softened by three inches of white. I had to scrape the windscreen of the hovercar, which amused me and helped settle my nerves a bit. One would imagine that, in 2004 A.D., Science could have dreamed up something to make ice scrapers obsolete.

At the first red light, there was a gray police howler overturned on the sidewalk, like a beached whale. Its stubby nose was smashed through the display window of a small clothing store, and the dome light was still swiveling. A thin trail of exhaust fumes rose from the bent tailpipe, curled upwards into the cold air. More than twenty uniformed coppers were positioned around the intersection, though there seemed to be no present danger. The snow was tramped and scuffed, as if there had been a major conflagration, though the antagonists had disappeared. I was motioned through by a stern faced bull in a fur-collared fatigue jacket, and I obeyed. None of them looked in the mood to satisfy the curiosity of a passing motorist, or even to let me pause long enough to scan their minds and find it without their knowledge.

I arrived at the AC building and floated the car in for a Marine attendant to park. As I slid out and he slid in, I asked, "Know anything about the howler on Seventh? Turned on its side and driven halfway into a store. Lot of coppers."

He was a huge man with a blocky head and flat features that looked almost painted on. When he wrinkled his face in disgust, it looked as if someone had put an egg-beater on his nose and whirled everything together. "Peace criers," he said.

I couldn't see why he would bother lying to me, so I didn't go through the trouble of using my esp, which requires some expenditure of energy. "I thought they were finished," I said.

"So did everyone else," he said. Quite obviously, he hated the peace criers, as did most men in uniform. "The Congressional investigating committee proved the voluntary army was still a good idea. We don't run the country like those creeps say we do. Brother, I can sure tell you we don't!" Then he slammed the door and took the car away to park it while I punched for the elevator, stepped through its open maw, and went up.

I made faces at the cameras which watched me and repeated two dirty limericks on the way to the lobby.

In the space of three hundred words, the hero reaches the AC building, managing to fill us in, as he goes, on more of the background of 2004 A.D. The wheeled vehicle seems to have been replaced by air-cushion craft. The social system is in turmoil, with rioters and heavy police patrols. A voluntary army seems to have been in effect for some time—giving rise to charges by the "peace criers" that it is somehow running the country. Background topics touched on thus far: social conditions, fashions, transportation, the state of scientific advancement.

When the lift stopped and the doors opened, a second Marine greeted me, requested that I hold my fingertips to an identiplat to verify his visual check. I complied, was approved, and followed him to another elevator in the long bank. Again: up.

Too many floors to count later, we stepped into a cream-walled corridor, paced almost to the end of it, and went through a chocolate door that slid aside at the officer's vocal command. Inside, there was a room of alabaster walls with hex signs painted every five feet in brilliant reds and oranges. A small and ugly child sat in a black leather chair, and four men stood behind him, staring at me as if I were expected to say something of monumental importance.

I didn't say anything at all.

The child looked up, his eyes and lips all but hidden by the wrinkles of a century of life, by gray and grave-like flesh. I tried to adjust my judgment, tried to visualize him as a grandfather. But it was not so. He was a child. There was the glint of babyhood close behind that ruined countenance. His voice cracked like papyrus unrolled for the first time in millenia, and he gripped the chair as the words came, and he squinted his already squinted eyes, and he said, "You're the one." It was an accusation. "You're the one they sent for."

For the first time in many years, I was afraid. I was not certain what terrified me, but it was a deep and relentless uneasiness, far more threatening than The Fear which rose in me most nights when I considered my origins and the pocket of the plastic womb from which I came.

"You," the child said again.

"Who is he?" I asked the assembled military men.

No one spoke immediately, as if they wanted to be sure the freak in the chair was finished.

He wasn't.

"I don't like you," he said. "You're going to be sorry you came here. I'm going to see to that."

A bit of background is added, extrapolating on advancements in criminology with the "identiplat." By the end of the chapter, the hero has encountered the problem of the child/ancient who is apparently born of the Artificial Wombs and who intends him harm. Wondering what kind of harm, and whether the hero can escape it, lead the reader on.

As the plot develops in chapter two, the reader learns that the Artificial Creation program is a military effort to develop human psionic weapons. Simeon, until this child/ancient, was their only success, the others being merely normal or hideously mutated but all without esp. Though several hundred words of background are given on the Wombs and what they have done, it is parceled out through the entire chapter, as it was in chapter one, rather than delivered in one or two long expository paragraphs. This parceling-out is the key to a good science fiction background construction.

At one time, writers differentiated story characters by labels, simple descriptive tags used for repeated character identification. The writer would blatantly label one woman a hussie, the next a "good" woman, this man a cold-blooded egoist, the next a man of humanitarian impulses. Thereafter, when reappearing, the characters were recalled to the reader

by their labels. Editors and writers alike shun such simplistic "craftsmanship" these days. You are expected to develop your characters through their actions, by *showing* the reader instead of *telling* him.

For example, if one of your story people engages in a fist fight, bests his opponent but continues to beat and kick him after he has won, we do not need to have the character labeled a sadist. He has *shown* us, by his actions, that he has ugly violent urges.

If another character sits in a fancy restaurant, eating french fried potatoes with his fingers, belching, telling raucous jokes, his napkin balled beside his plate rather than smoothed over his lap or thigh, he is clearly somewhat of a mannerless lout. The writer does not have to directly label him as such.

Likewise, it is no longer acceptable for a writer to differentiate his story people through the use of physical quirks or personality idiosyncrasies. A character with a scarred face and no other traits to separate him from his fellows is not a character at all, but a vague outline. A man identified continually through a habit—scratching his chin, pacing, always with a certain kind of drink, or by repeated use of the same phrase—is also a thin creation, ultimately unbelievable.

This is not to say that physical quirks and idiosyncrasies are to be avoided. They work well in conjunction with carefully explained motivation and a well-rounded portrait of *all* aspects of a character's personality.

A common mistake made by good, new category fiction writers is that in their science fiction stories they attempt to fully realize the *human* characters, but they construct the aliens out of cardboard, spit, and prayer. As I said before, the non-human members of your science fiction cast must be as believably motivated and as individualistic as any of their human counterparts, with but two exceptions: (1) when the alien is used as a comic foil or focus for satire or slapstick humor (and I've already warned against this approach), or (2) when the aliens never appear directly in the story, or appear only fleetingly, chiefly revealed as a sinister, unseen force (examples of this sort of story are *Out of the Deeps* by John Wyndham, which recounts a horrifying battle between mankind and unseen aliens who live beneath the seas, and *The Shores of Another Sea* by Chad Oliver, which describes a first contact between man and unseen alien as they try to conquer fear of each other and learn to accept each other's existence). Otherwise, your extra-terrestrials must be as realistic as you can make them.

The reader can be made to *feel* the unhumanity of your aliens in several different ways. Most obvious, and the first technique you will use when introducing them, is their appearance, which will be either subtly or radically different from that of mankind. The more detailed you make their appearance, the more solid is your first step toward making them credible beings.

In my own novel, *Beastchild*, which was voted one of the most popular science fiction novels of the decade in one poll and received a Hugo Award nomination in its year, I was especially conscious of creating a believable alien, for he was the hero of the story and had to capture the reader's interest and sympathy from the outset. Careful, thorough delineation of his race's physical and mental standards helped to make him real, as the following passages from the book should indicate.

In his onyx-walled room in the occupation tower, Hulann had disassociated his overmind from his organic regulating brain. He removed it from all stimuli, including the cells of his memory banks, where it could not even dream. He slept the perfect death-like sleep that only his kind, in all the myriad worlds of the galaxy, seemed to be able to achieve.

The naoli? The lizard men? They're the ones who die every night, aren't they?

To Hulann in his sleeping state, there was no sound whatsoever. No light. No images of color, no heat or cold. If there was a taste upon his long, thin tongue, his overmind could not know. Indeed all the stimuli were so censored that there was not even darkness. Darkness, after all, represented only nothingness.

He could return to wakefulness in any one of three ways, though there was a decided order of preference among these methods. First, and most unpleasant, was his body's built-in danger alarm. If his regulating brain, the heavily convoluted organic portion of his mind, should discover something seriously amiss with his temporal shell, it would be able to contact and wake his overmind through a fail-safe system of seldom-used third-order nerve clusters. Such a contact would shock its own grey cortex, opening the nether-world pocket in which the ethereal overmind sleeps.

(Pause here for an anecdote or two. In a thousand places across the stars, stories are told which concern the naoli and the seriousness with which alcoholic beverages affect their "danger alarm" waking system. These stories are told in barrooms in port cities, down in the basements of questionable buildings that lease their rooms to even more questionable businessmen, or in sweet-drug centers on better looking but no more honest streets. It seems that while sweet-drugs bring only euphoria to the naoli, alcohol transforms them into bobbling, bouncing, scaly-tailed clowns who—after half an hour of making total fools of themselves—collapse into their death-sleep. They stretch out stiff as ice right on the floor. In some less reputable establishments (which is to say most of these places) the other patrons make great sport out of carrying the unconscious lizard men to odd places like garbage bins and ladies' washrooms and letting them there to wake. This damages nothing but the naoli's ego. A far more nasty pastime among these same drunken buffoons is to see how far they must go to trigger the naoli's "danger alarm" system. But the alarm is stupefied by alcohol and does not work well. The stories you hear later are about naoli lying there with their webs sizzling, not even twitching in response. Or of a naoli with fifty pins stuck in its legs, sleeping peacefully while its heavy blood seeped out through its tough gray skin. Naoli do not often drink liquor. When they do, it is usually alone. They are not a stupid race.)

Much less unpleasant but still not desirable, a naoli could come awake if the Phasersystem had something to tell him. That could, of course, be anything from urgent news to another spate of propaganda from the central committee. More often than not, it was the latter.

Finally, and best of all, the overmind could awake of its own accord. Before retiring into the netherworld, the overmind could plant a suggestion with

a time-trigger. Then, ten or eight, or fifteen or twenty hours later, it would click into consciousness with the clarity of a tri-dimensional screen being turned on.

Here, the reader is confronted with an alien quality so fundamental that it becomes impossible for him to think of the hero, Hulann, as a fancily dressed human. If naoli and man are so different in the way they sleep and wake, how much more must they differ on complex questions? Also, with the key words and phrases like "lizard men," "scaly-tailed," "webs," and "tough gray skin," the unhuman appearance of the aliens is kept in the front of the reader's mind.

Other physiological references abound:

He snorted, opening his second set of nostrils now that he would need a full air supply for movement. When his lungs swelled and adjusted to the new air flow, he got out of bed.

And:

Hulann moved closer, raising the double lids completely free of his huge, oval eyes.

And this:

Hulann winced. His double stomach burned on both levels with acidic agitation.

Aside from their physical peculiarities, alien creatures will have habits and gestures that are unlike human habits and gestures. The naoli, for example, use sweet-drugs rather than alcohol, a substance with no effect on human beings. As for their gestures:

He tucked his tail between his legs, wrapping it around his left thigh in the age-old reaction to danger, to the unknown, to that which made the scales of the scalp tighten and ache.

A human being's reaction to fear might be a hunching of the shoulders, a stiffening of the back, balling of the fists. But the naoli are not human beings. Another gesture:

[Hulann] passed the others without comment, noticing the odd looks he drew from them. Realizing that his lips were pulled in over his teeth, giving him a look of shame, he quickly rearranged his facial composure...

When we say a *man* looks shamefaced, we certainly don't mean that he has his lips drawn in over his teeth!

Having convincingly established the differences in appearance between the aliens and mankind, you must make continual application of these differences, elaborating on them, throughout the story. This can be done in any of three ways: (1) through the alien's relationships with his own kind, (2) through his contacts with men, (3) through his reactions to events in the story.

Let's look, for example, at alien-to-alien interaction in *Beastchild*, one of many such scenes in the book, this one concerning naoli sexuality:

She licked her lips with her tongue, then stuck more of it out and flicked at her chin. She was pretty. He did not understand how he had almost walked by without stopping.

Certainly, a man would not be attracted to a woman whose tongue was so long she could lick her chin with it and did so, apparently, with some regularity. But naoli values of beauty will be different from those of a man. And, having established a naoli's sexuality, one must also expect it to be satisfied in a manner unlike human satisfaction:

He watched her a moment longer, reluctant to leave. More than any other female he had seen in the last two hundred years, she made him want to make a verbal commitment. It would be a delight to go away with her, into the warren of his own house back on the home world, and fuse for sixteen days, living off the fat of their bodies and the ceremonial waters they would take with them.

He could envision her in ecstasy.

And when she came out of the warren, she would have the gaunt, fleshless look of a desirable woman who has mated for the standard fusing period.

She would be gorgeous in the aura of her femininity.

In a few simple paragraphs that don't interrupt the narrative flow, the reader gets a glimpse of another basic difference between men and naoli, as profound a difference as the way they sleep and wake.

Through contact with men, the alien's unhuman qualities will also be driven home, as in the following exchange between Hulann and a human child, Leo, whom he has befriended against all the laws of his race which has been at war with ours for many years:

"Doesn't that hurt?" Leo asked.

"What?"

"Your lips. When you pull them in over your teeth like that."

Hulann quickly showed his teeth, put a hand to his lips and felt them. "No," he said. "We -have few nerves in our outer layers of flesh."

"You look funny," Leo said. He drew his own lips in over his teeth and made talking motions, then burst out laughing.

Hulann found himself laughing also, watching the boy mimic him. Did he really look like that? It was a mysterious expression on a naoli; or at least he had been raised to respect it as such. In this mock version, it truly was humorous.

"What are you *doing*?" the boy squealed, laughing even harder.

"What?" Hulann asked, looking about him. His body was still. His hands and feet did not move.

"That noise," Leo said.

"Noise?"

"That wheezing sound."

Hulann was perplexed. "Mirth," he said. "Laughter like yours."

"It sounds like a drain that's clogged," Leo said. "Do I sound that bad to you?"

Hulann began laughing again. "To me... you sound like some birds that we have on my world. They are great, hairy things with three legs and tiny little bills."

In other words, the writer must realize that the aliens will find human beings as strange as men find them.

Finally, the writer must apply these alien peculiarities to plot developments. In the following example from *Beast-child*, while Hulann and Leo are fleeing pursuers by means of a cable car dangling above a snowy landscape in the midst of a storm, we see the naoli react in a very individual and different manner, based on his race's traits:

Hulann's tail snapped, then wound around his left thigh, tight.

"What's the matter?" the boy asked.

"Nothing."

"You look upset."

Hulann grimaced, his reptilian features taking on a pained look. "We're awfully high," he said in a thin voice.

"High? But it's only a hundred feet down!"

Hulann looked mournfully at the cable sliding past above them. "A hundred feet is enough if that should break."

"You've been in shuttlecraft without even a cable."

"The highest they go is fifteen feet."

"Your starships, then. You can't get any higher than that."

"And you can't fall, either. There's no gravity out there."

Leo was laughing now, bending over the waist-high safety bar and giggling deep down in his throat. When he looked up again, his small face was red, and his eyes were watery. "This is something else!" he said.

"You're afraid of heights. Naoli aren't supposed to be afraid of anything. Do you know that? Naoli are vicious fighters, hard, ruthless opponents. Nowhere does it say they are permitted to fear anything."

"Well..." Hulann said weakly.

"We're almost there," Leo said. "Just steel yourself for another minute or two, and it'll all be over."

Because he has irrational fears, the alien becomes that much more of a believable character, amusing and sympathetic.

Appearance, habits, gestures, expressions, sexual and non-sexual value judgments, actions and reactions to plot incidents in accordance with his other-worldly origins all serve to make a non-human character real. You must further explore his eating habits, manner of dress, social customs, forms of entertainment, religion, government, philosophy and a hundred and one other facets of his unusual daily life.

Then, when you have created a believable extra-terrestrial race, you must be certain that the various aliens in your story—if more than one appears—are as unlike each other, personally, as one human being is from his neighbor. Certainly, they will all share attitudes and reactions. But just as certainly, their personalities and opinions will differ wildly from one alien to another—unless, of course, you have postulated a race of ants with a group mind and single social goal.

Remember, too, that not all members of an off-Earth race will be soldiers, bakers, or candlestick makers. Each will have a different career and will have his worldview colored by his talents. One present-day science fiction writer continually portrays alien races—in a consistent future history he has been writing in a number of stories and novels—as each being interested in one pursuit: the building of spaceships, the making of war, and so forth. His fiction lacks

credibility because of this simplistic touch, this lack of individuality among separate members of the same alien group, and he is the only major writer in the field who gets away with that inadequacy.

As with science fiction, *fantasy* has improved in recent years, both in the substance of its themes and the depth of its characterization, though it remains less relevant to the real world, on the whole, than science fiction. This lack of relevancy is an unavoidable part of the form, by its very definition: *a literature dealing with magic and/or the supernatural*, without the scientific rationale for its "wonders" that science fiction must contain. Because it lacks a reasonable, scientific explanation, fantasy is divorced from reality and requires more "faith" on the part of its readership, a greater willingness to suspend disbelief. The moment you begin to explain how a werewolf could exist, how a disease can cause lycanthropy (as in Leslie Whitten's *Moon of the Wolf*), how a man might become mentally disturbed enough to actually *live* as a vampire (Whitten's *Progeny of the Adder*), you are writing science fiction or, possibly, psychological suspense. Fantasy generally lacks these levels of meaning and exists as pure escapist literature—a function it fills admirably well.

The similarities between science fiction and fantasy are so obvious that many writers have a difficult time understanding they are not the same category of fiction. Both kinds of stories are usually set in times and places alien to ours. Both are filled with fantastic incident and bizarre problems for the hero to overcome. Both forms often employ non-human characters. Yet science fiction and fantasy *are* different, are bought and published and read under different labels.

Except in especially unique stories, fantasy does not deal with extra-terrestrial creatures, time machines, strange new inventions, or space travel. It employs, instead, many sorts of superstitions: ghosts (Richard Matheson's *Hell House*), vampires (Bram Stoker's *Dracula*), werewolves (Guy Endore's *Werewolf of Paris*), demons (James Blish's *Black Easter* and *Day After Judgment*), banshees, witches (Keith Roberts' *Anita*, Fritz Leiber's *Conjure Wife*), sorcerers (David Mason's *The Sorcerer's Skull*), elves, leprechauns, dwarves, fairies, inexplicably sentient beasts and other mythological beings, charms, incantations, chants, spells, curses, and devils, all of which exist without rational explanation. Usually fantasy is set in its own richly detailed world with no overt comparisons to our place and time (which would destroy the reader's suspension of disbelief in such delicately wrought tales; except in some Dark Fantasy—which we will soon discuss—the reader should be made to forget his own world and settle thoroughly into the fantastic one). The author usually makes no attempt to explain how this other world came into existence or where it is in space/time. The fantasy may also be set at the dawn of time on Earth, in that period of pre-history when, some say, great cities—influenced by the laws of magic rather than by the laws of science—flourished. If set in the *far* future, a fantasy must not provide scientific explanations for its miracles; for example, if the hero's magical abilities are hinted to be extra-sensory perceptions which have evolved in human kind since our own day, the story becomes science fiction and not fantasy.

In short, fantasy is mystic. It is shrouded in mystery and a psychic sense of "other lives, other places" which require in the reader a special faith in magic and the supernatural for him to be fully snared—while science fiction is predicated on our present-day knowledge of the universe and upon what we rationally expect to discover in the future.

This does not mean, however, that fantasy may be illogical. Once the oddities of the imagined world are given, all events must flow from the background conditions within the world. A hero may not escape from a dungeon simply by "magically" snapping his fingers, unless you have prepared the reader for this development from the outset by establishing that the hero has such a power. (And if you do make a hero's lot this easy, you destroy any suspense you might otherwise be able to build; if he is all-powerful, the hero generates no sympathy or concern from the reader.) Nor may you postulate a land in which the citizens have all sorts of magic powers—and then fail to postulate a set of controls and balances that would insure social order among these men who could circumvent most laws. For example, if everyone could perform feats of magic, would the police use magic too, instead of guns and handcuffs; a stronger magic than criminals might possess? Because of this need to order the basically unorderable, to reason with the unreasonable, many writers find fantasy far more demanding than science fiction.

Like science fiction, fantasy can be broken into sub-types. Unlike science fiction, characterization differs from form to form, as do, in some cases, the motivations. Let's look at the four sub-types of the fantasy story and their individual characteristics.

DARK FANTASY

The foremost writer of dark fantasy in this century is H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937), whose stories remain in print (even though some were written as much as fifty years ago) and enjoy regular, cyclic bursts of extraordinary popularity. With stories like "Pickman's Model," which deals with a painter who fashions portraits of monsters that, the narrator learns, are not imaginary, as they first seemed, "The Rats in the Walls."

"The Dunwich Horror," and dozens of others (*The Dunwich Horror* and *The Colour Out of Space* are two excellent paperback collections from Lancer Books), Lovecraft created the ghastliest, most horrifying non-humans ever to shamble across the pages of fantastic literature—not the plastic fright-wig monsters of cheap scare movies, but believable and sinister creatures that can frighten an adult as easily as a child. Because of Lovecraft and other fantasy masters before and of his time—August Derleth for his many stories, Bram Stoker for his immensely powerful *Dracula* and other weird tales—the conditions of the dark fantasy have been established, providing certain things the readers expect. To be successful at this sub-type, one must be familiar with these early masters and with the perimeters they established.

First of all, dark fantasy—unlike all other fantasies—most often takes place against a normal contemporary or recognizable historical setting. Though it could be placed in pre-history, in the far future of Earth, or in another imaginary world altogether, it seems to work best if its supernatural elements can be put in contrast with an otherwise common background.

For example, William Peter Blatty's enormously popular *The Exorcist*, which is the story of the demonic possession of a pre-teen girl, is set in the present-day environs of Washington, D.C. Its cast of characters is typically American: a moderately popular movie actress, her director, her servants, her child, a clever police detective, a priest troubled by doubts of his calling and his religion, a lady occultist, and assorted minor characters. The day-to-day lives of the characters are full of problems we've all known and can identify with: busy work schedules, concern over a dying mother, and grief at the loss of friends. The only things at all out of the ordinary are the wild, careening changes in the child as she is in stages possessed by a demon, her fits of physical, emotional, sexual rage. Because all else is ordinary, the girl's condition is as moving, terrifying, and fascinating as it could possibly be for the reader.

Likewise, in Ira Levin's best-selling *Rosemary's Baby*, the fantastic element is the only "impossibility" in the story. The hero and heroine are a nice New York couple, with a bright future, newly married. When they move into an enormous old brownstone apartment house, the husband's career seems to move less quickly than it once did. In frustration, and unknown to his wife Rosemary, the husband makes a deal with an older couple in the same building, an older couple who are Satanists: for his own success, he will allow Satan to have a son by Rosemary. By the end of the book, this comes to pass, and the anti-Christ has arrived. This fantastic plot is developed in such a levelheaded manner, with so many references to "normal" life—Rosemary's morning sickness, going to an obstetrician, buying playpens and baby toys—that the impact of the fantasy element is optimal.

In a fantasy world of miracles and magic, one cannot really fear the villain, because of the hero's superhuman powers. The reader knows the protagonist can handle anything, meet any danger, and that he doesn't deserve much concern. When the setting is work-a-day, however, the hero plainly mortal, the terror blooms and is genuine, for the hero *might* die, be maimed, tortured, go mad, or lose his soul.

Indeed, a second requirement of dark fantasy is that at least one and perhaps all of these gruesome possibilities *do* transpire. Since the theme of dark fantasy, stated or implied, is "there are things in this life men were not meant to know," and since the hero often pokes deeper and deeper into a curious circumstance in order to learn what's behind it, it follows that more of these tales must end pessimistically than optimistically. In fact, if your protagonist is destined to die, the circumstances of his passing should be as hideous as you can make them, in order to reinforce the theme and provide the reader with the thrill of horror he is seeking. For instance, one of your characters might die by crashing through a window, wrestling with the insubstantial form of Satan, falling to the street below where he ends up with his head twisted clear around on his shoulders, so it's staring behind him (Blatty's *The Exorcist*).

This presents a major problem for the writer: whether to show the hero's final disaster on or off stage. If, being cornered by the foul-breathed and grave-rank vampire, the hero must clearly die, should the bloody bite and bloodsucking be viewed by the reader in gory detail, or subtly suggested? The answer: subtly suggested, more often than not. Having spent pages to build the reader into a frenzy of suspense—and dark fantasy relies on *anticipation* of the encounter between hero and villain, rather than the actual physical encounter itself—it is nearly always impossible to make the climactic confrontation between good and evil as terrifying as the reader, himself, has imagined it. The understatement, here, is more valuable than anywhere else in category fiction.

It is less effective to write:

And then there was no more room to run. The great banquet hall lay behind the vampire, the double doors back there where Roger could not get to them without first running the fanged gauntlet. He had but a corner, a cubby of cold stone, with no weapon, no hope. The Count approached, grinning, his

two longest teeth protruding over his lips, his eyes aflame, both hands raised with his cloak flowing out around him like a piece of the darkest night. As he touched Roger, Roger seemed terrorized into immobility by those white, icy fingers. Then, the Count pushed the man's head to the side and went quickly for the jugular, his razored teeth slashing flesh, drawing blood which ceased to flow as his hollowed fangs sucked it down. The sound of this inhuman feast—obscenely loud, slobbering—was the only sound in the banquet hall—other than the feeble, guttural whimpers Roger managed to give out with.

than it is to write:

And then there was no more room to run. The great banquet hall lay behind the vampire, the double doors back there where Roger could not get to them without first running the fanged gauntlet. He had but a corner now, a cubby of cold stone, with no weapon, no hope. Mesmerized by the Count's inhuman stare, his bloodshot eyes, Roger thought he should lower his gaze, should look out for those wicked teeth. But he could not. He couldn't look at them until it was too late, until they glistened with his own blood.

When selecting a non-human creature that will serve as the antagonist within your story—be it vampire, werewolf, ancient god, demon, ghost, ghoul, or monster of your own creation—you must apply the same conscientious thought to him as you would to a human character. Furthermore, if your beast is not of your own manufacture, you should research its history as well as you can. This will not prove easy, but there are two ways you can learn the mythos of, say, the vampire. First, you can haunt a couple of libraries, perusing as many books on the occult and the history of myths as you can find. Second, and far easier, you can read other novels which concern vampires. For example, once you have read Stoker's *Dracula* you will know that vampires avoid sunlight because it can kill them, are otherwise immortal unless a wooden stake is driven through their hearts, are repelled by crucifixes, have a great revulsion to garlic and wild onion, and hundreds of other details.

Last of all, in dark fantasy (as against other fantasy), even if your hero does not perish, even if the supernatural creature is destroyed, a mood of still-existent evil must fill the last scene, a sense of undying forces waiting for their next chance to do evil. In this manner, a reader is left satisfied with the solution of the immediate story but aware that an ultimate victory has not been won. Readers of dark fantasy enjoy this lingering uneasiness, as is evidenced by *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby*. In the first, though the child is no longer possessed in the end, the ultimate war against Hell is yet to be waged. In the second, though Rosemary's terror is abated after the baby's birth and after she accepts her role as the anti-Madonna, the evil is very, very much alive.

Considering the consequences of the dark fantasy story—a horrible death for someone and maybe for the hero himself; confrontation with pure evil; lingering evil in the end, so that no one triumphs completely—you might wonder what would motivate a character to become involved with this sort of thing in the first place. I believe you can use all the motivations mentioned in Chapter One, except Duty, to involve the hero in occult or religious experimentation to get your plot moving: He loves a particular woman and wants to enchant her so she'll love him, and he thereby gets mixed up with the Dark Powers; or he wants to become rich and seeks Satanic help towards this end; he seeks a more horrible revenge on an enemy than society could ever take; his own world is not as he wants it, and either to preserve his emotional-mental state or to preserve his physical state, he deals with the Dark Powers; or he is simply curious, without realizing the dangers involved in consorting with demons (as in James Blish's *Black Easter*). And, of course, as in *The Exorcist* or *Dracula*, he may find himself the victim of supernatural beings, without generating the situation himself.

As for characterizing your supernatural villain, just remember that he must be deeply evil, that his every goal should be connected with death or pain or eternal damnation. He is motivated, always, by a supernatural drive, a lust for blood or death, that a man could never quite understand. He may, at times, rue his own fate—he may, on rare occasion, have a fleeting thought that he is trapped in a hellish role—but he can never disavow that role.

SWORD AND SORCERY

The plot of a sword and sorcery novel invariably concerns a quest—at the order of the queen, king, sorcerer, or someone—for jewels, wealth, magic totems, sacred relics, magic texts, a charmed locket or mystical artifact, or for a lovely and nubile girl kidnapped by evil, barbarian people. Subsequently, the hero engages in a long journey and/or chase, searching for the missing quantity, encountering beasts and magics that try to stop him. He usually finds what he wants. The form takes its name from the action of the story, which is nearly always generated by the clash between swords and sorcery—the hero preferring the more human weapon in his battle against inhuman forces that have magical powers.

Like Lovecraft's work, sword and sorcery novels are always being reprinted—primarily in paperback—and enjoy a cyclical popularity boom that can widen the market considerably for several years at a time before the readership is satiated. Robert E. Howard's books about Conan the Barbarian—a muscular soldier of fortune, barbarian king, saviour of virgins, slayer of dragons, antagonist of sorcerers, and all-around superman—enjoyed enormous popularity beginning in the middle 1960's (*Conan*, *Conan of Cimmeria*, *Conan the Freebooter*, *Conan the Wanderer*, *Conan the Adventurer*, and so on). Michael Moorcock's novels about Elric, another swordsman, and Fritz Leiber's excellent series about Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser have also won steady patronage from a large number of readers.

The end-all and be-all of sword and sorcery is action. The delicious anticipation of horror in the dark fantasy is sacrificed for one explosive fight and chase sequence piled atop another. Whereas, in science fiction, the background is the most important element, the pace is the most vital thing about this sub-type of fantasy; it should be breakneck.

Unfortunately, the bulk of sword and sorcery fiction is distinctly inferior, regardless of its color and verve. This is true, primarily, because too many writers forget that plot complications must be generated by a character's actions and not by one whim of Fate after another. Desperate to accelerate the pace, writers construct series of obstacles which they then propel the hero through, never realizing that the lack of cause and effect in the plotting eventually leads to boredom.

This is the *right* way to establish the challenges in a hypothetical heroic quest: Your hero is stubborn, bullheaded but a likable fellow who won't quit until the job is done. He accepts an assignment from a White Magician to find the magician's daughter who has been kidnapped and carried off by a Black Magician, an evil sorcerer. When the hero reaches the borders of the warlock's kingdom, he receives a supernatural warning to stay away. Being the kind of man he is, he ignores the warning and plunges ahead. Now, when the warlock dispatches legions of the living dead and countless other forces to kill the hero, the successive battles are due to cause and effect: the prime cause is the hero's personality.

Too often, writers do not develop cause and effect, but confront their heroes with monsters and supernatural forces in a random fashion, so that their triumphs over each are not, as they should be, small triumphs over the villains as well.

Furthermore, a sword and sorcery hero must—with rare exception—be all-powerful, thereby negating any possibility of real and lasting injury to him. The suspense is nil. A superman who has no problems with which the reader can identify is largely unsympathetic. The result, frequently, is cardboard characterization.

There are, then, two ways to avoid this trap. First, you can use a hero who has obvious flaws and physical limitations, so that each fight he engages in is dangerous, each wound he sustains is serious and painful. Though the basic requirements of the sword and sorcery form make such a hero less acceptable than his strongman brothers, it *can* be done by an established sword and sorcery writer or by talented new authors in the field. Second, you can opt for a strongman lead, but surround him with a few intimates of whom he is inordinately fond; these secondary characters will be far more mortal than your hero, appealing to the reader, so that when one of them dies or is hurt, the reader will be emotionally touched by the incident. And, directly, the hero can be made to seem more real and human through his own grief at the friend's fate; if he cannot be physically harmed, himself, he can at least be emotionally damaged. Fritz Leiber, in his Gray Mouser stories and most notably in "111 Met in Lankhmar" in his book *Swords and Deviltry*, makes fine use of this second technique.

In sword and sorcery fantasy, all of the character motivations in Chapter One are useful. A hero may set out on a quest to recover a kidnapped maiden because he is being paid to do this (Greed) or because he is attached to her and wants her for his own (Love). He may seek out a fabled magician who holds the key to his parentage and fortune (Self-discovery), or go after a magical device (Greed for Power). He may begin a quest because he is beholden to a king, queen, or sorcerer (Duty), or because he has been angered by the acts of another warrior or sorcerer or king (Revenge). Perhaps a curse has been placed upon him, and he must venture into strange lands in search of the magic to relieve him of this spell (Self-preservation). Perhaps, initially, he strayed into a private estate owned by a warlock (Curiosity), had a spell cast upon him, and was ordered on a quest (Self-preservation). The possibilities are endless, the combinations complex. The only warning is: As in the other genres, the hero must be motivated by more than one thing, by more than a single obsession.

No writer I can think of—aside from Fritz Leiber, occasionally—currently writes sword and sorcery fantasy for

anything other than the sheer vitality and color it offers. It can transport the reader away from his cares as well as any other genre can, if he is predisposed to it. And if, once he's finished the final page, the reader has gotten nothing more from the experience than solid entertainment—no grain of philosophy, no new understanding—who is to say that the book did not deliver enough? We are all, more than anything else, *story* tellers, not moralists.

EPIC FANTASY

Epic fantasy combines dark fantasy with sword and sorcery, then works these diverse elements into a story with the scope, theme, characterization, and plot of a serious modern novel. As in dark fantasy, the element which is being contested between heroes and villains is something of great import, a fundamental clash between good and evil for the future of all mankind. The epic story takes, as its second concern, the plights of its individual characters; unlike the sword and sorcery novel, the epic would never be entirely, or even chiefly, concerned with the rescue of a single maiden, the banishment of a particular curse, the retrieval of one magic totem. The maiden, the curse, and the totem will probably *all* play important roles in the epic, but no one of them will be the entire core of the story.

Epic fantasy, in short, demands three qualities: an especially rich tapestry of characters, several sub-plots to add depth and breadth of vision to the main storyline, and a background of considerable "alien" detail. Each of these things is, really, one of the original five elements of category fiction; yet each deserves a closer look, according to its function in the epic fantasy novel.

Characters. In the epic, you will have one lead protagonist, of course, in order to focus your reader's attention and concern. However, in addition to this hero, the epic should contain at least half a dozen secondary protagonists who are nearly as important as your hero. These will play less crucial parts in solving the major story problems, and they will appear onstage less often than your lead, but they will be sympathetic people with whom your reader can identify and about whose struggles he can care. For instance, if your epic hero is to be a young king whose empire is beset with strife and whose enemies have let loose a plague of evil magic on his subjects, your secondary protagonists might include these: the Court Jester, a funny little man on the surface, a sensitive and romantic man beneath the greasepaint, a man who deeply loves his king and insists on going along on the Great Quest, no matter how dangerous that journey is; The king's Chief Knight, an aging warrior who is no longer much good in the heat of battle but whose genius for strategy is unequalled; a Young Knight in love with the king's sister, who has been taken by the adversary's hired warlocks; the king's Lady, a beautiful, tough minded woman who appears quite fragile but can wield a dagger and a whip with ease.

Furthermore, these secondary characters must all have major character problems or hangups which they work out during the course of the novel. This is a requirement of all category fiction, of course, but it is even more essential in the epic fantasy than in the other genre forms. The epic is broad and lengthy; characters lacking this special depth cannot hold a reader's sympathy and interest for all this extra wordage. Taking the set of protagonists mentioned in the previous paragraph, let's see how they could be made richer with the addition of these deeper character problems: the Court Jester wants to go on the Great Quest to help his king, but he has always been a coward and shies from dangerous circumstances. At the same time, he realizes that this is the best chance he will ever have to overcome this flaw that has forced him into a life of placation as the "funnyman" no one can get angry with. The Chief Knight was, all through his youth and middle-age, a man who judged other men according to their strength and prowess in a fight. Now that age is sapping most of his own strength, he must, during the Quest, re-think his long-held criteria for manhood. The Young Knight, in love with the king's sister, has always placed great value on "virtue" and especially on sexual virtue in the woman he will marry. Now, the king's sister has been kidnapped by unprincipled people and is very likely a member, against her will, of the evil king's court harem. Her innocence has been erased, her virtue destroyed. The young knight must now decide which is most important—his love for the girl, or his need for a virgin bride. The king's Lady has always taken pride in her ability to defeat men in most competitions. Now, however, on this rugged trek and dangerous quest, she is faced with situations where only male strength can save her.

At first humiliated, and then enraged, she must eventually come to terms with this new and unavoidable dependence.

Just as the secondary protagonists must have character flaws, so must the lead in an epic fantasy. The sword and sorcery hero, the strongman who can always be depended on to save the day, is rarely acceptable to the epic audience and should be avoided at all costs.

Villains should also number half a dozen or more, in addition to the lead antagonist. If your major villain is the evil king, then your secondary villains might be his number one Black Knight, his castle Warlock, his twisted and despicable brother who is the spawn of a human-demon love tryst, and so forth.

The character clashes between a large cast of heroes and villains provides that breadth of vision which, as mentioned earlier, puts the epic fantasy in the same class as the really important modern novels.

Sub-Plots. The major storyline, in an epic, usually cannot sustain the entire book without becoming tedious and strung-out. Therefore, the writer must explore every solid, potential sub-plot, any secondary storyline which can also provide suspense. The best sub-plots are not grafted onto the main story, but arise naturally from the personal problems of the secondary protagonists, which we discussed earlier. For example—if we remain with the hypothetical fantasy novel that has supplied us with examples so far—the story of the Court Jester's cowardice would provide an excellent sub-plot. Suppose that one of the good king's knights is a rather unpleasant character named Rollo, and suppose that

Rollo is the only one in the entourage to realize that the Jester's wit is a cover for weak knees. If Rollo is developed as a first class bully, who constantly harasses the Jester, we have a good, secondary sub-plot in this man-to-man confrontation. During the course of the book, the Jester would take less and less guff from Rollo, until they were finally matched in a duel which, naturally, the Jester would win, perhaps not because of his strength but because of his superior cunning and determination.

In the epic fantasy novel, the length can easily support a major sub-plot for every secondary protagonist.

Alien Background. Unlike the dark fantasy, the epic fantasy takes place in a completely imaginary world; it bears little or no resemblance to present-day society and is rich with its own customs, religions, languages, countries, and geographical peculiarities. However, the epic is *also* unlike sword and sorcery, in that action is *not* the end-all and be-all of its existence; the background, here, must be as carefully detailed as any in science fiction, and according to the same methods that a science fiction background is worked out. The only difference, of course, is that the epic fantasy does not have to have, as its setting, a world that is a logical, scientifically justified outgrowth of *today*.

With these things in mind, you would do well to read carefully the work of J.R.R. Tolkien whose *Lord of the Rings Trilogy* (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*) is perhaps the greatest series of epic fantasies ever written. Other popular epic fantasy novelists are Mervyn Peake (*Titus Groan*, *Gormenghast*, and *Titus Alone*) and Talbot Mundy (*Tros*, *Helma*, *Liafail*, *Helene*, *Queen Cleopatra*, and *The Purple Pirate*).

CHAPTER THREE Suspense

Of the seven major categories of modern fiction, the mystery and suspense forms—especially suspense—provide the writer with the greatest opportunity for financial success. Most hardcover and paperback trade book (Trade books are the kind sold in general bookstores, department and drug stores, etc.) houses publish regular mystery and suspense lists; and a substantial portion of the novels labeled as "general" and "mainstream" fiction are actually suspense novels. The leading best-seller lists often include at least one mystery and almost always two or three suspense titles, though these last may not be clearly labeled as such. The Mystery Guild and the Detective Book Club reprint published novels for their members, providing extra income for established suspense and mystery writers; and the Literary Guild, Book-of-the-Month Club, Doubleday Bargain Book Club, and other large, mailorder discount organizations feature mystery and suspense titles more often than they do those of other genres, paying extremely well for book club rights. And the percentages of mystery and suspense novels sold for motion picture production, while not exceedingly high, are nevertheless substantially above the percentages of film rights sales in other categories.

In addition, while there are some series characters to be found in the science fiction, fantasy, Western, and erotic genres, none of these categories support the quantity and range of series characters that the suspense and mystery genres do. Series novels, like Ian Fleming's James Bond books, in which the same characters and backgrounds are used through several books, are important monetarily and creatively, because the series character allows you to build a regular and faithful audience that would be harder to come by if every story you wrote were unrelated to the last. Category readers pay for *escape*; if they like a character who appears in two dozen books, the familiarity of background and story helps them "settle into" each successive novel more quickly than they got into the last. Also, by picking up a novel in a series they enjoy, they are taking less of a chance of wasting their reading time on something they cannot finish or, having finished, wish they had not.

Successful *mystery* series include Ross MacDonald's Lew Archer novels—many of which received lengthy runs on the best-seller lists—and Richard S. Prather's Shell Scott books. Prather's agent (Scott Meredith) some years ago got him a million dollar contract with Pocket Books to write several new Shell Scott novels over a period of years; but Prather has earned far more than that from the series, which has been selling steadily since 1950. Successful *suspense* series include Donald E. Westlake's Parker novels, John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee novels, Edward S. Aarons' Sam Durell stories, Donald Hamilton's Matt Helm adventures, and Philip Atlee's Joe Gaul espionage capers. Wide reading in both these fields, not only to help you learn the form but also to help you learn the names and careers of established series characters, is essential. (You may also find *Who Done It: A Guide to Detective, Mystery and Suspense Fiction* by Ordean A. Hagen (R. R. Bowker) helpful for its list of mystery and suspense characters.)

This book separates mysteries and suspense novels into two separate categories, as the differences between them are few but fundamental. First of all, in the mystery the villain is always unknown until the end: a major purpose of the narrative is to deduce, by degrees, the identity of the murderer or thief. The unveiling of the villain is the whole dramatic focus, forms the entire climax, and comes near the very end of the novel. In a suspense novel, however, the villain is often identified at the outset—at least to the reader if not to the lead character, though most often to both—and the story interest comes from the reader's anticipation of various disasters befalling the protagonist.

Donald E. Westlake's excellent suspense novel, *Slay-ground* (published under the pseudonym Richard Stark), is a

good example of this point. In chapter one the professional thief who is the protagonist, Parker, robs an armored car, survives the wreck of a getaway car, and flees with a suitcase of money into an amusement park which is closed for the winter. Unobserved by anyone except two mafia types and the crooked policemen they are paying off, his predicament would, at first, seem only slightly serious. Parker soon discovers that the park is ringed by a moat and an unscalable fence, and that he can leave only as he entered, through the main gate. That route is blocked by the mafia and the crooked cops who intend to enter the park after sundown, locate Parker, kill him, and take the stolen money. The bulk of the novel concerns the manhunt, Parker's skillful evasions, and the use of the amusement park rides and shows as deadly traps for the mafia interlopers. The villains are all known. The excitement comes from three main questions: (1) Will they find Parker? (2) Will they kill Parker? (3) Will Parker get away with the money?

In those rare suspense novels where the villain's identity is withheld from the reader, the revelation, when it comes, is secondary to the resolution of the hero's predicament: once the reader has found *who*, he is mostly interested in *how to stop him*. A good example is my own *Chase*. The story concerns a Medal-of-Honor-winning Vietnam veteran who shuns the media spotlight and public acclaim; he was an unwilling participant in a never-discovered My-Lai-type massacre and is fighting a battle with his own guilt, aware that this war crime more than offsets the bravery, under other circumstances, which earned him the Medal. In chapter one, he comes upon a killer, in the lover's lane overlooking his hometown, who has stabbed one boy to death and is menacing a young girl. He grapples with the killer, frightens him off, saves the girl and finds himself front-page news again, against his will. Not only does this exposure put him under more emotional stress, but it quickly tips off the lover's lane killer as to the identity of the man who stopped him from killing the girl. The disgruntled psychotic sets out to murder the hero for interfering. This time, partly because he doesn't want the notoriety of police protection, and partly because he isn't altogether believed when he tells of the threats against his life, the hero decides to find the killer where the police have failed. Either he locates his man, or he becomes front-page news again—this time as the psycho's victim. The madman's identity is withheld from the reader, but not for the purpose of mystery. When the hero finally learns who the unseen adversary is, the revelation is less of interest to the reader than what will follow it: the dangerous and suspenseful confrontation between protagonist and antagonist.

Mystery and suspense differ in another important manner. A mystery novel usually opens with a single, major crime and, more often than not, contains no other murders. The hero sets out to solve this dirty work and takes two hundred pages of sleuthing to do it. If other murders *do* occur, they come about by surprise, with little or no build-up to titillate the reader; these secondary murders, then, become additional twists in the plot, complicating the protagonist's job. By contrast, the suspense novel withholds its major violent incident until the end. More often than not, the villains' intended crime is never pulled off, for the lead character manages to foil his antagonists. In short, the mystery is characterized by the word "solve," while the suspense novel could be summed up in the word "anticipate." This means that the most dramatic narratives, full of the most hair-raising escapes and encounters, will be more likely found in suspense than in mystery where the worst has happened at the outset.

Those are the differences between the mystery and suspense forms. While the mystery is, fundamentally, a rather exhausted vein and is closed in by a number of strictures which we will mention in the next chapter, creatively speaking the suspense novel offers a wider latitude for serious work than any other genre, primarily because it requires only the five basic elements of category fiction and no other special considerations or limits. Science fiction, while wildly imaginative and capable of encompassing the most important themes, generally demands that substantial wordage be given to the carefully considered development of an exotic background and to explanations of the science on which the story is based. Gothics require a certain kind of theme and a relatively rigid plot formula. The Western, by its nature a bastard offspring of the historical novel and thereby limited in scope, also requires a certain type of plot and action and characterization that restricts the author's freedom. Erotic novels demand a quantity and quality of sex scenes around which the main story is built. In suspense, however, no peculiar strictures exist, no plot or thematic or background or character considerations that apply only to it and no other genre. This makes for a vigorous category and explains why some of the cleanest, sparest prose has always been turned out by professional "thriller" writers. Now, for the remainder of this chapter, we will be concerned solely with suspense.

You should look at the negative first and learn, at the outset, what to avoid as a suspense writer. Several things which will mark your work as less than professional in the eyes of the modern suspense editor are:

CLICHÉ PLOTS

Avoid the cliché or corny plots that were hardly acceptable when they were first used, and which are now the stuff of bad television shows and comic books. Do not, for example, propose "secret organizations" who are out to overthrow some government and destroy the world. Only governments themselves have the power to destroy the world. And organizations out to overthrow governments are usually not secret, though their machinations may be. Consider the factions who have talked most loudly, in the last few decades, about overthrowing the United States' system: the Minutemen, a right-wing group of fanatical gun-toters; the SDS, paramilitary left-wing publicity mongers, and other similar and equally vocal organizations. None are in the least bit secret. *Never* propose a villain who, *single-handedly*, sets out to destroy the world, no matter how wealthy or resourceful he may be. The modern world is simply too complex for any such schemer to obtain even minimal success; he will appear to be a buffoon and not a real character.

On the other hand, you may use the theme of pending holocaust if your antagonist is a high government or military official (President, influential General) who would have access to terrifying weaponry and the authority—or perverted authority—to use them. An excellent example of such a novel is James Hall Roberts' *The February Plan*, which deals with nuclear brinkmanship. Roberts' detailed military-governmental background is a good model for the writer who would like to know how to make this sort of plot perfectly plausible.

TOUGH GUY CHARACTERIZATION

The Mickey Spillane hero, one who has few scruples and kills indiscriminately, is no longer terribly popular with the average reader. If a hero kills, he must have ample justification, must feel some remorse, or—as in the case of Parker, in Donald E. Westlake's novels—must kill only when his own life is threatened and with an unspoken but moodily evident distaste for the necessity. The tough guy is always making moral judgments and justifying his own murderous impulses through those judgments, as in the following little scene:

I shot him twice, in the chest. He looked surprised, tried to stop the stream of his own blood, then fell flat on his face. He was dead. Very dead. I turned away from him and holstered my gun. I didn't feel the least guilty for having killed him. He was a hood, a punk. He'd been asking for it all along.

The modern-day suspense hero makes no such judgments, but he does what is necessary and forgets the rationalization, knowing that he will pay emotionally and mentally for any pain or death he causes. In the first book of a suspense series I have just begun for Bobbs-Merrill—*Blood Risk* by Brian Coffey—I followed a violent scene, in which my hero shot a villain, with this:

Despite the high risk associated with his profession [thief], Tucker had only twice been pressed into a position where he had no choice but to kill a man: once, it had been a crooked cop who tried to force his point with a handgun; the second time, it was a man who'd been working with Tucker on a job and who'd decided there was really no sense in splitting the proceeds when one shot from his miniature, pearl-handled revolver would eliminate that economic unpleasantness and make him twice as rich. The cop was fat and slow. The partner with the pearl-handled revolver was as affected in every habit as he was in his choice of handguns. He didn't choose to shoot Tucker in the back, as would have been the smartest move, but wanted, instead, to explain to Tucker, in the course of a melodramatic scene, in very theatrical terms, what he intended to do. He wanted to see Tucker's face as death approached. He'd been very surprised when Tucker took the revolver away from him and even more surprised when, during the brief struggle, he was shot.

Both kills had been clean and quick, on the surface; both of them had left an ugly residue long after the bodies had been buried and begun to rot. For months after each murder, Tucker was bothered by hideous nightmares in which the dead men appeared to him in a wide variety of guises, sometimes in funeral shrouds, sometimes cloaked in the rot of the grave, sometimes as part animal—goat, bull, horse, vulture, always with a human head—sometimes as they looked when they were alive, sometimes as children with the heads of adults, sometimes as voluptuous women with the heads of men, and as balls of light and clouds of vapor and nameless things that he was nonetheless able to identify as the men he had killed. In the few months immediately following each kill, he woke nearly every night, a scream caught in the back of his throat, his hands full of damp sheets.

Elise was always there to comfort him.

He couldn't tell her what had caused the dreams, and he would pretend that he didn't understand them or, sometimes, that he didn't even remember what they had been.

She didn't believe him.

He was sure of her disbelief, though she never showed it in her manner or in her face and never probed with the traditional questions. She could not know and could hardly suspect the real cause of them, but she simply didn't care about that. All she was interested in was helping him get over them.

Some nights, when she cradled him against her breasts, he would take one of her nipples in his mouth as a child might, and he would be, in time, pacified in the manner of a child. He wasn't ashamed of this, only welcomed it as a source of relief, and he did not feel any less like a man for having clung to her in this manner. Often, when the fear had subsided, his lips would rove outward from the nipple, changing the form of comfort she offered, now offering her a comfort of his own.

He wondered how other people, who had killed, handled the aftermath, the residue of shame and guilt, the deep down sickness in the soul...

There, in less than 500 words of narrative flashback and character study, is a facet of the hero that makes him more human, more sympathetic and his violence against another person more moving and acceptable.

RESOLUTION BY FATE

When you have spent 200 pages piling one suspenseful incident atop another, making your hero's plight unbearably tense, do not solve his predicament by ushering in the cavalry or its present-day equivalent. If the hero is going to be saved, it must be by his own hand or by events he has initiated himself. Likewise, do not solve the plot problem by having the protagonist-antagonist clash turn out to be "one big mistake." A reader who has breathlessly followed the growing terror of your hero's condition is hardly going to be pleased when the villain opens the dungeon door, smiles, shakes hands with the man he has been persecuting, and explains that the entire affair has been a ghastly case of mistaken identity or misinterpreted motivations.

INADEQUATE RESOLUTION

You must be especially careful to provide believable and interesting solutions to each of the hero's plot problems and, finally, to his major predicament. If you don't choose to work from a point-by-point outline (see Chapter Nine for a discussion of the pros and cons of outlining your plot), you can easily write your lead into a corner from which you can only extricate him by the most silly and artificial means.

Edgar Wallace, one of the most famous adventure writers of the twenties and thirties, was once writing an adventure serial for a leading magazine in that field. The magazine rushed each installment into print almost as soon as they got it, before Wallace had finished the next part. Each installment ended on a moment of high suspense, in order to keep the reader coming back for more. At the conclusion of one installment, the hero was trapped in a smooth-sided pit out of which he could not climb. He was threatened above by the enemy, pressed at both sides by spikes that were slowly closing in from the walls, and endangered by a pipe spewing molten lead into his hole. The readers were all but salivating for the final installment to learn how the hero escaped *this* situation. In truth, the editors were salivating as well—for fear the author wouldn't be able to rescue his man in time. Evidently, the author himself was stuck for a while, but when he delivered the last part of the serial, he had overcome the problem handily in the first sentence: *With a mighty leap [he] sprang out of the pit.*

Today, no magazine publishes story installments before the author has finished the entire piece. And no book editor will be satisfied with rabbit-from-the-hat solutions. Your hero must be clever and bold enough to deal with obstructions you've placed before him, and he must deal with them *in an interesting, original manner.*

There are seven different types of suspense stories, categorized by the occupation of the lead character. Each type has its own requirements and its own clichés to avoid. Let's examine each:

SPY STORIES

Stories of secret agents, counter-espionage, international intrigue, secret formulas, political prisoners, passwords, and dagger-carrying assassins are perennially popular, though the audience for the form *does* peak and ebb. The heroes here are spies—usually for the United States or for Great Britain—and are developed in one of two ways: (1) as another James Bond superhero who has access to fantastic gadgets and whose physical stamina and moral resources are without limit, or (2) as a realistic character with his own personal problems, doubts, ambitions, fears, and talents, like the lead in John Le Carre's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. Unquestionably, the second approach is more desirable.

When building a lead character for your spy story, you must consider the subculture in which he exists and understand what character traits that strange milieu demands and forbids. For example, a successful spy could not be scrupulously honest, nor could he be a committed pacifist; in the line of duty, he will be called upon to steal, cheat, lie, and kill. Because espionage agents travel all around the world and are familiar with many other cultures which they often respect, they are not so opinionated, racially or religiously, as the average United States citizen. Sexual and social relationships that cross racial barriers would not be thought "abnormal" or even unusual by a spy. Furthermore, the spy has seen, in his job, that "moral" behavior is relative and that it rarely accomplishes anything, while Machiavellian techniques usually lead to the desired results. For this reason, he is not likely to subscribe to any formal religion. Unrestricted by religious taboos, and his sense of pleasure sharpened by the constant possibility of sudden death, the spy will usually be sexually liberated. If not, he may be the type of man who finds a sexual outlet in risking his life and in committing acts of violence. This type rarely makes a satisfactory protagonist, for the average reader has trouble identifying with him. Whatever the hero's sexual proclivities, he will *never* be a moralist who criticizes extramarital and pre-marital relationships, for such a hidebound attitude would be ludicrously antithetical to everything else he must be in order to survive.

Understand, all of the above are not *restrictions* of spy story characterizations, so much as fundamental, common sense requirements. If you are writing about a spy, he must be as much *like* a spy as you can make him. When writing about a great musician, you would not say that he had a tin ear. If your lead was a world-famous surgeon, you wouldn't inform the reader that he was terrified of the sight of blood. Likewise, a spy's personality must be true to his profession.

Once you've established your characters, you must give long consideration to the background. In a spy novel, the story will usually be set in a foreign country. You need not have visited Turkey to write of it, but you should be prepared to *think* Turkey before writing a word. Study travel and history books, learn the country's geography, customs, traditions, history, governmental system, family structure, and major religions. Only when you can name streets and create the mood of a foreign land are you ready to begin.

One of the most common background errors made by the new spy story writer is the misplacement of a hero in the bureaucracy of counter-intelligence. An FBI agent, for instance, doesn't work in other countries: he's limited to the borders of the U.S. Similarly, a CIA agent rarely works in the States, for his duties are more within the sphere of international intrigue. The British agent in another country will not be from Scotland Yard, but from M.I.6, British equivalent of our Central Intelligence Agency. The Russian version is the KGB. The famed United States Secret Service is only a branch of the Treasury Department and is not concerned with espionage, as many new writers think: its sole concern is the protection of the President, Vice-President, their families, and Presidential candidates/hopefuls. A few novels (Michael Mason's *71 Hours*, Le Carre's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, and almost any of Philip Atlee's Joe Gaul stories) and a few non-fiction titles (*The Game of the Foxes* by Ladislav Farago, most notably) should give the new spy story writer sufficient background data on which to proceed.

Once you've settled on the spy story sub-type of suspense fiction, you will want to decide what sort of plot you'll develop. Most every spy novel can be fitted into one of the following six plot groups:

Rescuing someone from enemy territory. The protagonist must cross into Russia, East Germany, China, or some other unfriendly country to rescue a fellow countryman or spy being held by the enemy. In some cases, the man to be rescued is a leading foreign scientist or political figure who has requested U.S. aid in leaving his own country and finding political asylum.

Stopping someone from reaching enemy territory. The protagonist must keep a defecting scientist or fellow spy from reaching his contacts and being whisked into enemy hands.

Stopping the enemy from obtaining vital data. The protagonist must foil enemy plans to obtain information which will improve their international position—usually, information that will increase their power to wage chemical, biological, nuclear, or psychological warfare.

Stealing data from the enemy. This is a reverse of the third type of plot: the protagonist is assigned to retrieve scientific data from the enemy. This form is seldom used, for two reasons: first, American readers don't like to think of

their own spies initiating international trouble by stealing from the enemy, though, in reality, this is not uncommon; second, the reader likes to think that *we* have no need to steal data, because *we* are more advanced than *they* are—an abysmal misunderstanding of the world, but a common one.

Stopping the enemy from taking over another country. Again, the average reader doesn't like to think *we* would attempt to overthrow some other government or meddle in the internal affairs of a foreign power, despite historical evidence to prove that we have often done that and sometimes had considerable success.

Stopping the enemy from overthrowing our government. In this kind of story, the antagonists are usually domestic right- or left-wingers and most often a part of the government itself.

No matter which of the six kinds of spy plots you employ, you may either paint the world of international espionage as thrilling, glamorous, and desirable—or as a necessary but sordid environment where the souls of its inhabitants wither early. Any of Ian Fleming's novels about the

Suspense glamorous counter-intelligence operative James Bond would serve as an example of the first method, while John Le Carre's justly famous *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* would make a fine model for the moody spy story.

DETECTIVE STORIES

In the suspense novel, a detective hero is usually a member of some public police force; private investigators are reserved for use in mystery novels where there is a puzzle to solve and an identity to uncover. These stories deal almost exclusively with violent murder or kidnapping; in either case, remember that the unveiling of the criminal, to the suspense reader, is less important than *how to stop him*.

When a suspense novel centers on a kidnapping, the child is rarely murdered. If you kill off an innocent child, your reasons must be more complex and artistically justifiable than "for the shock value."

If you are thinking of tackling a kidnapping story, you should understand that the form has been used many times and that the basic plot progression—child kidnapped, child threatened, child traced, child rescued—is so familiar to suspense readers that a new novel of the type can only be successful if it contains a fresh slant or gimmick.

Evan Hunter's 87th Precinct novel, *King's Ransom* (under the pseudonym Ed McBain), is a kidnapping story that works. King, the wealthy man of whom ransom is demanded for the return of his son, is on the edge of making a business deal that will make or break him financially. He can't afford to put up the cash for the ransom without missing out on the deal and losing most of his fortune. When it turns out the kidnappers have accidentally taken a servant's child, and not his own, King's moral dilemma is knottier rather than more simple: just because the child isn't his own, is he now free of all responsibility, even though the kidnappers *were* after his son? King's conflict of values gives the novel a dimension without which it would have been far less successful.

Stanley Cohen's fine novel, *Taking Gary Feldman*, deals with the kidnapping of a rich man's son. When the boy and one of his abductors begin to take a strong liking to each other, and when the abductor finds out that the child's parents do not give him much love or respect, it becomes clear that Gary Feldman would be better off if he were *not* returned to his family. This slant, marvelously developed by Cohen, makes for a suspense novel as fresh and innovative as the reader could wish.

When murder, not kidnapping, is the subject of a *suspense* detective story, the chase and capture of the killer is more important than learning his identity. Usually, he is a psychotic, for such a man does not need intricate reasons for murder and does not provide grist for a mystery-type plot.

CRIME STORIES

When your protagonist is a criminal, he may "be either admirable or evil. The evil protagonist is usually mentally unstable rather than rationally motivated, because his crimes can be made more horrifying and suspenseful that way than if the reader can sympathize with his reasons: one of the most frightening villains is the utterly unpredictable man. Perhaps the best suspense novel using a madman as its lead character is Stephen Geller's phenomenal *She Let Him Continue*, also published under the title of the movie version, *Pretty Poison*. In this masterpiece of horror, the protagonist is an extremely unbalanced young man who has convinced himself that he is employed by the CIA and that it is his duty to investigate and kill those "subversives" working around him. He enlists a young, sexually precocious but utterly vicious girl in his campaign, and their activities lead the reader rapidly to as spectacular and gruesome a climax as anything ever written in the genre. Because readers tend to identify more readily with fictional characters they can like, the evil protagonist should be used only rarely. When a story demands him, he should get his just rewards in the end.

If your hero is an admirable criminal, in the vein of Donald E. Westlake's Parker or Dan Marlowe's Drake (in Marlowe's *Operation Breakthrough*, *Operation Flashpoint*, *Operation Fireball*, and *Four for the Money*), he will not kill unless forced to do so to save his own life. Usually, he does not kill innocent bystanders or policemen (those he simply outwits), but he will use bullets on other criminals and crooked cops who have him marked. After killing, he will evidence either overt or covert remorse for what he has had to do, though he will always be too pragmatic to moan and weep about death.

If you choose to use a protagonist who is an admirable crook, do not fall into the moralistic trap of using the cliché ending in which, after all his trials and tribulations, the lead loses the stolen loot either through a quirk of fate, the machinations of an even more crooked partner, or the cunning of the police. If you have established your crook as a sympathetic character and have gotten your reader to root for him throughout the bank robbery (or whatever), your audience will only be frustrated when he loses everything simply because you feel that you must prove "crime doesn't pay."

Do not confuse your reader by trying to establish a sympathetic criminal protagonist who commits a crime that is grossly unpleasant—stealing from hardworking folks, stealing from invalids, rape, murder of innocent bystanders and at odds with what is expected of a hero.

SUDDEN TERROR STORIES

In these tales, the protagonists are ordinary, everyday people, going about average jobs, minding their own business—but are suddenly thrown into a violent confrontation that shatters their complacency. The appeal in this kind of story lies in its verisimilitude, the readers' certainty that this kind of thing might happen to anyone. Few of us ever meet spies or know professional crooks, but any one of us might become the victim of a psychotic killer.

John D. MacDonald's *The Executioners* is a sudden terror story of formidable proportions. Sam Bowden is the protagonist, fourteen years out of the service after having testified against a shipmate who criminally assaulted a young girl. The rapist, Max Cady, was sentenced to life at hard labor; in the intervening years, Bowden has married and fathered children including a lovely teen-age daughter. When Cady gains his freedom, he has only one desire: revenge on Bowden for testifying against him. Cady is a dangerous man, clever enough to work clandestinely and keep the police out of the picture, unsettled enough to want to kill Bowden's entire family and rape his young daughter. As the story unfolds, Bowden can find no help from organized authority and must learn to overcome his natural decency in order to fight for the lives of his loved ones. The heightening suspense and hard, reasonable climax are unforgettable.

The most famous suspense novel in this form is Joseph Hayes' *The Desperate Hours*, which has sold nearly four million copies, world-wide. The story deals with a fine, happy family whose home is taken over, without warning, by a desperate group of sadistic escaped convicts who have nothing to lose by murder and much to gain if they can use the Milliard family to prepare and accomplish their own escape from the search area.

In all of these sudden terror tales, the main theme is that, in this less-than-perfect world, the completely civilized man cannot survive unless, in times of peril, he can reject his civilized veneer and act with the cunning and the sense of self-preservation that for most of the tale has made the villain superior to him. The protagonist should triumph. The writer who lets him die is, in effect, saying that the civilized man *never* stands a chance against the savages in society, and the reader will rarely tolerate such a frighteningly pessimistic attitude.

WAR STORIES

Here, the heroes are soldiers, and the values portrayed are nearly always pure black and white, good and evil. The Second World War is the most popular background for novels of this nature, perhaps because the Nazis were so inexcusably evil that the reader can easily draw lines between the protagonists and antagonists. This simplicity of moral judgment is necessary, because a war story requires so much killing: if the reader is not comfortable with the clear-cut assignments of guilt and virtue, from the very start, he may be revolted rather than entertained.

By leaving your villains somewhat shrouded in mystery and giving only your heroes well-rounded personalities, you can contribute towards this black-and-white situation. Your heroes should be intricately detailed, with faults and virtues, hopes and fears, so the reader sympathizes with them and wishes them well; at the same time, your villains, in the war story, should not be shown to have a good side, but should be powered by an overwhelmingly evil motivation; greed for money or power, revenge, or even sheer insanity. If you show the villain with his family, or in a moment of deep personal torment, he is instantly a "gray," not a "black," and his death becomes more complicated than it otherwise might be; he begins, at that point, to retard the progress of the war story.

In the war novel, the protagonists are sent as a commando unit into occupied territory, there to accomplish some objective such as the destruction of an enemy gun emplacement not vulnerable to air bombardment (*The Guns of Navarone* by Alistair MacLean), a dam (*Force 10 From Navarone* by Alistair MacLean), a bridge, or a command headquarters hidden from aerial attack. Their every movement is an invitation to discovery, and their survival owes as much to wits as to skill with weapons.

Ideally, the war story should have one chief protagonist surrounded by as many as four or five accomplices who are only slightly less important in the reader's eye. In the deadly atmosphere of a war, it is only reasonable to expect that some of the protagonists will die. By beginning with a large enough group, the author can whittle them down with effective death scenes and still allow the main hero and two or three others to survive.

(If you will recall our discussion, earlier, of the sword and sorcery fantasy novel, you will see two evident parallels between that form and the war story. In both the war novel and the sword and sorcery novel, the forces which generate the plot are perfectly black and white, good and evil. And, in both, the hero's suffering is often shown, not from his own wounds, but from his reaction to the loss of close friends and comrades.)

Warning: In the war story, it is rare that all of the heroes are killed off, and it is also undesirable. Because the reader does see the values in black and white, he wants to see the rewards properly issued, as well. If you absolutely must let your heroes die, all of them, you should make certain that their deaths are heroic and that they have accomplished all of their objectives. If they die and fail their mission, too, the *reader* will *be ready* to begin his own war on you!

SCIENTIFIC CRISIS STORIES

These tales revolve around an impending disaster which can only be solved by, *or is a direct result of*, modern scientific methods. The crisis is often generated by mishandled or stolen bacteria cultures which are being developed in the United States germ warfare program, as in Henry Sutton's *Vector*. Or the crisis may be a biological attack on the U.S., as in James Henderson's fast-moving *Copperhead*. Or the threat may come from some bizarre source, such as outer space, as in Michael Crichton's best-selling *The Andromeda Strain*.

Usually, your hero will be a research scientist or a medical doctor. The suspense comes from his continuing attempts to neutralize the crisis and the continual worsening of the situation despite all that is being done. To make your hero seem real and his efforts believable, you will need to study, carefully, whatever scientific background the crisis and the plot require.

Because a layman is usually not acquainted with the basic facts of any particular science, the research for such a novel may require months, or more time than you are willing to put into it. If that is the case with your novel, but you feel the idea is still valid, reconsider the way your story was originally to be told and see if the scientist or doctor protagonist can be replaced by either an average citizen caught up in the disaster, or by an FBI or CIA agent who is trying to discover the roots of the crisis. In either case, you will need to know quite a bit of science to write the tale—but less than you would to create a believable scientist or doctor hero whose intimacy with laboratory methods and theory is difficult for a layman to properly reconstruct.

ADVENTURE STORIES

At one time, the adventure story could be classified as a vital genre in its own right. Its material was the exploits of adventurers and explorers, men who lived at the edges of civilization and who fearlessly faced scorching deserts, high mountains, hostile natives, impenetrable jungles, savage seas, and frozen arctic wastelands. The adventure plot consisted, primarily, of how the characters got from Point A to Point B, and though the story people might be differently motivated and squared off into groups of protagonists and antagonists, the chief villain was always the environment, Nature herself.

Today, few straight adventure novels are written and published. The non-fiction lists have begun to supply adventure tales that have few fictional equals. Henri Charrier's best-selling *Papillon*, concerning the author's real-life ordeal on Devil's Island, his repeated escapes from the police, his hazardous ocean voyages in leaky boats never meant to brave the fury of the open sea, his months with a primitive South American tribe and his acquisition of a native wife, has the authority of detail that fiction rarely achieves. Likewise, Maurice Herzog's *Annapurna*, which concerns the French Himalayan Expedition's heroic climb to the top of the world, contains more high drama than any man could spin in a fantasy. Readers are willing, even eager, to put down the money for a real-life adventure story, but are only rarely interested in an adventure *novel*.

Adventure stories *are* still being written, published, and sold, though they are no longer a pure form. They have acquired bits-of-business from other suspense forms, borrowing most often from spy and war stories. Though Nature remains as the primary villain, a secondary plot bolsters the Man-Against-the-Elements theme.

For example, in Alistair MacLean's adventure novel, *Night Without End*, the victims of a plane crash on an arctic icefield and the staff of an isolated scientific outpost must struggle towards rescue across hundreds of miles of hostile terrain, through snow and ice storms, hurricane winds, and sub-zero temperatures. The bulk of the novel concerns this challenge, though a secondary plot, always in the reader's eye, deals with the espionage agents among the passengers of the downed plane who were responsible for the pilot's death and the crash itself. The protagonist, a doctor, must not only keep them alive despite Nature's worst treatment, but he must identify the agents and keep them from killing whomever Nature doesn't dispose of.

Or, in MacLean's *H.M.S. Ulysses*, a British supply ship is making the Murmansk Run along the Arctic Circle, during the Second World War. The heavy seas, ice, wind, and cold present a challenge that makes for plenty of narrative excitement, but the secondary plot, concerning the attacks on the convoy by German ships, planes, and submarines, gives the piece that final touch that makes it a thriller readers will pay for. The writer does not always need to characterize the enemy in a war-adventure story because, if they fight from planes and ships and submarines, they may never make person-to-person contact with the heroes; they become, in some ways, the same kind of omni-present but mindless threat that Nature herself is.

Once you have familiarized yourself with suspense fiction, have settled upon a sub-type that interests you, have read heavily in the field to learn what other writers are doing, and have chosen a background, thoroughly researched it, and developed a plot against it, you are almost ready to begin writing. Almost.

People greatly enjoy being unsettled, frightened, and even terrified out of their minds—by art. The movie industry goes through periodic slumps, but horror films are perpetual breadwinners, as are movies crammed with wild chase scenes (*Bullit*, *The French Connection*, *Vanishing Point*, *Dollars*). In a carnival, the most popular rides are those which threaten, however superficially, injury or death: the rollicking, giant roller coaster, the plummeting "dive-bomber," the spindly-looking Ferris wheel. Also in carnivals, the funhouse is always well patronized, and its express purpose is to terrify its paying customers. Alistair MacLean, Hammond Innes, Donald E. Westlake, and dozens of other suspense novelists have made careers out of frightening the public. Most any suspense writer can earn a good living if he can learn to supply these vicarious thrills.

Basically, narrative tension is achieved through a combination of three techniques: the chase, the race against time, and the anticipation of a violent event. The suspense writer must understand how to use all three methods to keep his reader on the proverbial edge of the seat. Let's look, first, at the chase scene.

THE CHASE SCENE

The antagonists will pursue the hero for only one reason: he has something which they want. This "something" may be vital information, or a commodity of more immediate value such as jewels or money, or it may be knowledge which would incriminate them if he were to release it to the proper authorities. If the last is the case, their only reason for giving chase is to catch and kill him. Even though the hero's death is not implicit in the first two circumstances, the threat of death is desirable, for it will strengthen his motivation for flight and put an edge to the tension that will make the reader more concerned for his welfare than he otherwise might be.

Occasionally the protagonist will be the pursuer, usually in those cases where the protagonist is some form of sanctioned public official, like a spy or a policeman. However, in this sort of story, the writer must match his antagonist and protagonist evenly, so that the possibility always exists that the villain will turn the tables and start pursuing the hero. In Brian Garfield's *Relentless*, the hero is a policeman with Indian heritage, forced to track government-trained mercenaries—now civilians, gone bad and become bankrobbers—through Western wildlands in order to retrieve their loot and hostage. Throughout the story, one expects the villains to turn, unexpectedly, and take the initiative. Indeed, at certain points in the story, they do. In short, even if your hero is doing the chasing, the threat of a reversal must be there, so tension can be generated concerning his own personal safety.

Depending on the suspense plot-type, the chase may be established between these factions: A spy will be pursued by enemy agents or by members of his own bureau, depending on the nature of his trespasses—and *he* may do the chasing of these same people, depending on your story. A detective will be pursued, if at all, by the killer he seeks—usually, *he* will pursue. A criminal may be pursued by the police, by other free-lance criminals anxious to relieve him of his loot, or by the Mafia, which frowns on individual effort within its territory—or *he* may pursue a crooked cop or another criminal. An ordinary citizen may find himself the subject of a chase by police who have wrongly accused him of a crime, by a psychotic killer from whom the police cannot or will not protect him, or by enemy agents he stumbles into by accident. A soldier will be chased by other soldiers in enemy uniforms. The scientist—while rarely pursuing anyone himself—may be chased by an enemy who seeks his secrets, or by his own people who want a secret that he doesn't believe *any* nation should possess. (The scientist, though, is the one type of suspense hero who is rarely involved in a chase story, of any kind.)

The hero should usually be the subject of the chase, for he is the one the reader least wants to see suffer or lose his life. Also, he should be pursued by more than one man; otherwise, if he were a true hero, he would not run but would turn about, confront his lone opponent and deal with him at the first opportunity. The use of several implacable villains not only strengthens the protagonist's motivations for flight, but makes his situation all the more perilous. (How will he foil six determined men? He hasn't got a chance against those odds!)

Each step of the chase should build suspense by making the hero's hopes for escape grow dimmer. Every time a new ploy fails to lose the chasers, the hero's options should be narrowed until, at last, it seems that each thing he tries is his only hope, each momentary reprieve from death looking more like his last gasp than the reprieve before it. This narrowing of options can be created in two ways in the chase story. First of all, the distance between the hero and villains should constantly narrow. When he stops to rest, the villains should go on; every trick he tries to throw them off the trail should only slow him down and give them a chance to get nearer; when he thinks he has lost them and stops to rest a few hours, they should pop up unexpectedly, nearer than ever. Second, options may be narrowed if the villains drive him out of places where he moves with relative alacrity, into landscapes he is unfamiliar with and where he becomes further alienated from hope. For example, a tough city hero might be less formidable in wild country. Likewise, a country man might be forced to flee into the city where everything seems hostile and dangerous to him. A rich man may be driven from the halls of power and wealth into the city's slums where he can find no succor and make no friends.

Few suspense novels generate narrative tension exclusively through the chase. A rare exception is Alan Dipper's modern chase story, *The Paradise Formula*, which seems to have been modeled on the more famous but inferior *The 39 Steps* by John Buchan. The new suspense writer is on more solid ground if he augments his chase sequences with other tension-generating techniques.

THE RACE AGAINST TIME

Setting a time limit for the events of the story creates an urgency that adds to the suspense page by page. For example: "Unless he located Hawfield in twenty-four hours, the girl would be killed," or "He had six hours to reach the rendezvous point, and if he did not make it, he would be left alone behind enemy lines without resources of any kind." As the minutes tick by, each obstacle to the hero's progress is magnified and made more (pleasantly) frustrating for the reader.

Two novels which make superb use of the time limit are John Lange's *Binary* (in which a federal agent must find two hidden tanks of deadly nerve gas, in the center of a city, before their scheduled time of detonation) and Michael Mason's *71 Hours* (in which Secret Service and FBI agents have exactly seventy-one hours to locate a hired assassin before he shoots the Russian Premier at a scheduled diplomatic mission landing at a Washington airfield).

Be certain that your time limit is a genuine restriction on the development of the plot. Don't send your hero racing towards a place when, in actual fact, there's no reason for him to be there in two hours instead of two days. Something drastic should transpire if he fails to reach the place in time.

If you have set a time limit for your hero and propelled him into a breakneck journey, don't put more than one accident of Fate in his way. If he is delayed by a long freight train crossing the road, don't repeat a similar incident with a herd of cows, and don't confront him with a landslide across the highway after those first two unexpected delays; the reader will stop believing your story. You must build obstacles from the hero's own actions. For example, if he is reacting to the pressure of the situation by driving too fast for the road conditions, it is logical for him to wreck the car. He will then need to find another vehicle or continue on foot. If he is in a blind rush to get where he's going, he might steal a car that's parked nearby with the keys in its ignition, and a confrontation with police might ensue, further delaying him. The reader would not mind this sort of obstacle, for he can see cause and effect, which are missing when the obstacle is a trick of Fate.

ANTICIPATION OF A VIOLENT EVENT

The third method of creating narrative tension—anticipation of a violent *event*—*should* be implicit in the first two techniques. The man being chased is trying to avoid his own death or trying to keep information from the antagonists which would allow them to wreak havoc on other people. The race against time is entered for the express purpose of preventing some deadly, disastrous event. If this violent event is not his own death, it should be something that will have a grave effect on the hero—such as the death of the woman he loves.

The bestselling novel, *The Day of the Jackal* by Frederick Forsyth, builds narrative tension in all three ways. The protagonist is a clever French policeman assigned the job of tracking down a hired killer who intends to assassinate the President of France on a certain day, at a certain place: the race against time. The antagonist is the assassin who is almost as clever as the policeman and is being hunted across the entire European continent: the chase. As the story builds and builds, the reader begins to wonder if the assassin might not kill *someone*, even if not the President: anticipation of a violent event. Forsyth employs the three methods to the last page, resolving the story in the very last paragraph.

Once you have chosen the type of suspense story you want to write, have picked and researched a background, have plotted your story, and have decided how you will build narrative tension, you should ponder these three less important but still vital questions:

1. *Should my story be told in first or third person?* There is no hard and fast rule for this, in any genre; every story demands its own voice. However, a good rule of thumb is to use third person for a story whose hero is hard-bitten and extremely competent. A first person narrative by such a hero, in which he must regularly comment on his own prowess and cunning, may seem ludicrous to the reader. He may dislike the hero and, therefore, the entire novel. A very sympathetic, very human hero makes a good narrator for a story, as in Donald E. Westlake's comic crime novels, *God Save the Mark*, *Somebody Owes Me Money*, and *The Fugitive Pigeon*.

2. *How close to the end of my suspense novel should the climax come?* The nearer the end, the better. Do not resolve the main plot problem on page 200 and continue to page 220 before typing "The End." When the reader knows what happened, he doesn't want to read on while the characters gab about how awful it was. If your plot contains an element of mystery, the explanations should be given throughout the climactic scene and not as an afterthought when all the action strings have been tied and cut. On the other hand, try to leave a couple of pages after the climax to let the reader settle down from that peak of emotional involvement—a thousand words, no more.

3. *Can I build a series character into my suspense novel?* A spy will be sent on more than one dangerous mission in his career; a detective will handle more than one case; a criminal will pull many robberies in his professional life; a soldier may be assigned to several different campaigns in one war; an explorer will most likely tackle one of Nature's challenges after another. All of these make good series characters. It stretches credulity, however, to imagine that any ordinary citizen will have bad enough luck to become the protagonist of more than one sudden terror story in his lifetime. Likewise, few scientists experience major crises more than once or twice in their careers, if that often. Remember that the nature of your hero's occupation must generate dangerous situations.

That's it. If you read Chapter Nine, especially the section dealing with style, you're ready to try your hand at providing vicarious thrills for the vast suspense audience.

CHAPTER FOUR Mysteries

The mystery story is the oldest of the seven categories discussed in this book. Oh, certainly, some fantasy was written centuries before Edgar Allan Poe created the first fictional detective (C. August Dupin, in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," published in 1841), most notably *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. And erotica has been around nearly as long as the written word: even the Bible contains subdued erotic passages, stories of outlandish orgies, incest, and lascivious women. The Gothic novel pre-dates the mystery, but in its early form, the Gothic was much different than it is today: it contained little or no romance and was closer to what we now think of as the straight horror story. In any event, though all of these things existed prior to the mystery story, none of them achieved a steady, solidified audience or form strong enough to let them be thought of as categories until after the mystery emerged, as the first easily identifiable category of modern fiction.

Although very few mysteries provide a good vehicle for social commentary or important observations on the human condition, they *do* make for fine escape literature, and they are always being published. Because the mystery—as we discussed it the previous chapter—is most concerned with *Who did it?*, with the solving of a puzzle, and is very little concerned with the morals of crime or the themes of human suffering that crime is tied to, its function is more therapeutic than that of any other form of category fiction. Most people pick up a mystery novel when they want only to relax. The mystery reader doesn't want the slightest reminder of his workaday world. Unlike science fiction, fantasy, suspense, and

occasionally the other genres, the mystery deals almost exclusively with lightweight material. Indeed, the only mystery novelist I can think of, after considerable cerebration, who writes *meaningful* mysteries is Ross MacDonald; and in his Lew Archer books, the reader actually becomes less concerned with the traditional mystery question—*Who did it?*—than with another question—*Why was it done; with what social maladjustment does the fault lie?*

You can, of course, attempt the Ross MacDonald sort of story; but, as with all category work, you will achieve acceptance and recognition much sooner if you begin within established limits before breaking out into less-tried territory.

In every genre, there is a single element of those five mentioned in Chapter One which is the most important. In science fiction, it is the background. In suspense, it's plot, closely followed by action; a suspense novel should *move*. And though your first impression may be that plot, once again, is the fundamental element of the mystery, such is not the case. In the mystery, the writer must pay special attention to *character motivation*.

Yes, I know, the words "mystery" and "plot" seem almost synonymous. However, consider that the average mystery novel's plot is quite like that of any other: a crime is committed; suspects are introduced in the course of the detective's probing; further crimes are committed by the villain as he tries to keep his identity secret; the detective draws nearer the truth, finally puts the pieces together; the guilty party is confronted; climax, conclusion. If this is somewhat simplified, it is also close enough to the required line of a mystery story to show you that plot is not the most essential element of the mystery.

Action, in the mystery story, is usually confined to the detective's travels and his interrogations of various witnesses and suspects. Though some physical confrontations between the hero and the villain may occur, they are generally saved for the end of the book, after the hero has begun to narrow down his field of suspects, and the villain has begun to feel the pressure.

Background is important, of course, but not nearly so major a factor in the successful mystery novel as it is in science fiction. Once you have chosen your background, a couple of books devoted exclusively to that area—or your own experience, if you place the story in your own geographical region—should prepare you to begin.

However, when you set out to establish the motives of the people in your mystery, you must give much careful consideration to each of them. Since the characters in a mystery are basically pieces in a puzzle, the reader's attention is focused on them, closely, as he tries to solve the crime before the author solves it for him. If the characters' motivations seem weak or implausible, the reader will notice it at once, and he will swiftly grow bored with your story.

Any of the major character motivations are applicable to the mystery. Love, greed, self-preservation, revenge, and duty within their limitations are all sound motives for murder. Curiosity might lead someone to become a victim.

And self-discovery might be a secondary motivation for your hero.

Keeping the nature of the mystery novel in mind—*Who did it?* being the first question the reader wants answered and the five elements of category fiction all employed, with special attention given to believable character motivations - there are fifteen other requirements of the form that you should be aware of:

1. *Does your story open with a crime in the first chapter?* It should. The sooner the puzzle is presented to both the reader and the hero, the stronger your narrative hook. You may even open after the murder was committed and the police have arrived. Or you might begin with the discovery of the body, or with a brief scene of the murder in progress. However you start, start with a bang.

In the first chapter of *The Bridge that Went Nowhere* by Robert L. Fish (one of his Captain Jose Da Silva mysteries), a plane lands in a clearing in a dense Brazilian jungle, carrying three men. One of these is shot on the second page of the story; another is blown up, along with the bridge that feeds into the clearing, on the fifth page, well before the end of the chapter. It would be difficult to imagine a bigger bang of a start, and the novel goes on successfully from there.

In Donald E. Westlake's *Murder Among Children* (under the pseudonym Tucker Coe), the hero, Mitch Tobin (who has appeared in five Coe mysteries to date), opens the first chapter with a trip into the West Village, in lower Manhattan, looking for his cousin, Robin Kennely. On the third page of the book, he finds her:

"The stairs are through that door," the young man said, and as he pointed the door opened and Robin Kennely came through, smeared with great streaks of not-dry blood. The knife in her hand was carmine with it.

"There's a certain thing," she said, enunciating clearly in a high thin voice, and collapsed on the floor.

Thus ends a very short first chapter, obviously immediately after a murder. Though the killer's identity would seem certain, the second chapter brings up other possibilities, other suspects, and launches the reader on the trail of the solution.

2. *Does your hero appear in chapter one?* He should. In most mysteries, he will be, by title and/or circumstance, a detective: policeman, private detective, a private citizen caught up in a situation only he can unravel (Agatha Christie's Jane Marple mysteries are good examples of this form), a scientist sorting through clues to a disaster only he can explain, a soldier-detective, a spy-detective—and his entire role in the story will be that of the sleuth seeking and evaluating clues. If the crime is committed at the outset, then, you'll have a good reason to focus on him from the first page.

Some mystery writers favor the first person viewpoint for telling a story—that is, telling it through the eyes and the mind of the lead character. In fact, the mystery genre supports more first person narratives than any other. Though this makes the early introduction of the hero almost no problem at all, it should be avoided; the vast majority of published novels are told in the third person. A great many editors and, apparently, readers as well, share a prejudice against the first person. Since your chief goal is to please first the editors and then the readers, you should not tackle a first person narrative until you can do it well enough to squelch any editorial dissatisfaction with the method.

In Rex Stout's enormously popular Nero Wolfe series, even though the initial crime is usually committed offstage, the heroes are onstage in the first chapter. With only a few exceptions, the Wolfe stories begin with a client who comes to Wolfe's 39th Street townhouse in an attempt to get Wolfe and his trusted associate, Archie Goodwin, to take on a case. We know our heroes straight off, and we soon learn the nature of the puzzle, and from there on, it's easy reading. (Some of the Wolfe novels, by Rex Stout, include *The Doorbell Rang*, *Plot It Yourself*, *Death of a Doxy*, *The Father Hunt*, *The Mother Hunt*, and *Might as Well Be Dead*.)

3. *Does your hero have a sound motive for becoming involved in the investigation of a case?* He should have some other reason, outside the most obvious—i.e., it's his job. For example, Stout's detective, Nero Wolfe, is quite often motivated by a desperate need for cash. Wolfe lives lavishly, with a full-time chef, a half-day orchid specialist who helps him tend his hundreds of greenhouse orchids, and other expensive accouterments of the "good life." Naturally, there are times when he is desperate enough for ready cash that he will take on even the most unpleasant cases. When it isn't money that motivates Wolfe it may be curiosity, because that overweight private investigator is as much a puzzle fancier as any mystery reader. Or he may be motivated by self-preservation, to the extent that Wolfe must preserve his rich lifestyle by preserving his reputation as a private investigator.

Occasionally a writer creates a mystery novel protagonist with more depth to him than most. Donald E. Westlake's ex-detective, Mitch Tobin, the focus of a series of novels (*Kinds of Love Kinds of Death*, *Murder Among Children*, *Wax Apple*, *A Jade in Aries*, and *Don't Lie to Me*), is a man with a monkey on his back: the monkey is guilt. It's like this: Tobin was once a respected detective on the police force. However, when he arrested a burglar named Dink Campbell, he met Campbell's wife and fell for her at once. The attraction was mutual. While Campbell was serving his sentence for burglary, Tobin and Linda Campbell carried on an affair; since Tobin was married, the affair had to be during working hours. Tobin's partner covered for him, during their tour of duty, when Tobin wanted to see Linda—until one afternoon, while Tobin was in bed with the girl, the partner was killed. Tobin was disgraced, thrown off the force, and left with a load of guilt he was almost unable to bear: guilt that he had cheated on his wife, guilt that he had embarrassed his son, guilt, most of all, that he had shirked his responsibility and had not been there to back up his partner when the partner arrested a heroin pusher. In each of the novels, one of Tobin's motivations, either unspoken or quite evident, is this guilt, a need to make up for what he's done, to repay the debts, to help other people and thereby even his own moral record a little. In some cases, he actually would prefer not to be involved at all, but does get involved, out of this sense of *duty* to his family, his dead partner, and himself.

4. *Is your fictional crime violent enough?* You cannot expect a reader to get terribly excited about a stolen car or a mugging. You should begin with a murder, attempted murder or threatened murder, or missing person. One other possibility is the story in which a woman (usually young and pretty, but not necessarily so), either the accused man's wife, sister, girlfriend, or mother, comes to the private detective and hires him to prove that the accused is innocent despite what the police or the jury has said.

5. *Is the method of murder or the way the body was found unique and attention-getting?* It should be. Not every mystery must contain a clever murder method, but those that do have another plus. You should be anxious to acquire as many story values as possible, and you should try to think of something unique, something besides a simple stabbing, shooting, or strangling. An axe murder? Hit-and-run in a supermarket parking lot? A forced drowning? A murder made to look like a suicide, but so obviously bungled that the killer intended the police to know it was murder in disguise? A case of deliberate poisoning?

In the first chapter of Donald E. Westlake's *Don't Lie to Me*, the body is discovered nude, in the middle of a museum, as if it had been dropped out of the sky. Since the victim was strangled, he would have eliminated from bowels and bladder as he died, yet here he is clean as Christmas. Evidently, he was killed, then washed carefully, dried, and brought here in the dead of night, with the guard on duty. Why? How? *And by whom?* The circumstances of the body's discovery are startling enough to carry the reader through the book, wondering about the answer.

6. *Do you introduce at least one potential suspect by the end of chapter two?* You should, so that both the hero and the reader will have something to mull over. This doesn't necessarily mean that the suspect must be blatantly obvious (though he may be). You need only introduce an associate, friend, relative, or lover of the dead man, someone who might conceivably have a motive for killing him; this person may seem like a very unlikely prospect for the role of the killer, at first, but the important thing is that he remain at least a possibility.

7. *Do you introduce a second suspect by the end of chapter three?* The sooner you expand the list of possible killers, the more difficult the puzzle becomes—and the more firmly your narrative hook is implanted. For this reason, you should establish murderous motives for at least three characters. Even four or five suspects are easier to work with and better for the creation of a real puzzle.

For example, if in chapter one the president of a prosperous and busy city bank is found dead in his office immediately after his lunch hour, you might have the following suspects for your detective to question. The president's own Private Secretary, a beautiful young woman who has been angry with the president of late because he's been vacillating about his intentions of marrying her. She was out to lunch, but can't prove where she was when the murder took place. The Vice-President of the bank, who has long coveted the top job and feels the board would put him in if the president retired or left for another position in another bank. The banker's "cousin," who turns out to have been his Mistress. This girl often visited him during his lunch hour, for the purpose of quick sexual relaxation, and might have been there today—and might have been mad at him because he vacillated about rejecting the notion of marrying his secretary. The banker's desk drawer contains a typed note indicating that his ex-brother-in-law had borrowed \$20,000 from him a year ago, agreeing to pay it back in twelve months. Perhaps the Brother-in-Law couldn't pay back the money and was there to plead, unsuccessfully, for an extension on the loan. Here you have four characters with murderous motives; in the course of this story, others could easily arise.

8. *Have you provided legitimate clues to the killer's identity?* You should hide at least three in the course of the story. These may be introduced so quietly that the reader never picks them up. Perhaps, for example, your story opens with a body found in a muddy flowerbed behind a mansion. When the detective covertly steals a glance at the shoes of each member of the household, as he questions them, he may notice that they are wearing scuffed or dusty shoes, that one man's shoes are freshly polished, but that no one is wearing muddy shoes. Later, it may dawn on the hero that the man with the freshly polished footwear had, just before the interrogation, scrubbed away the traces of mud; his shoeshine could have been to eliminate the evidence. This is, of course, an exaggerated example, but it should give you an idea of how the clue can be presented deceptively, the meaning quietly covered until later.

A clue may also be introduced with fanfare. A pair of work gloves, covered with garden mud, might be found in the room of the dead man's stepson, for example. This kind of thing is usually used to throw the reader off the track, to get him looking in all the wrong places. Later, it will turn out that the blatantly delivered clue was false; the muddy gloves could have been put there by the killer to throw suspicion on the stepson, or the stepson might have some perfectly legitimate explanation for them.

Likewise, the very obvious clue can be used to make the reader think: "Well, I'm supposed to suspect the stepson. That much is obvious. Therefore, it couldn't possibly be the stepson." Then, in the end, it is the stepson, after all.

The idea is to give the reader the pertinent data but to try to fool him into employing it incorrectly. When the real killer's identity is disclosed at the end of the book, the reader should be able to go back, spot check you, and say, "Now, why didn't I see that?"

9. *Does your narrative tension come from the reader's desire to know who more than from his desire to know how to stop him?* It should. The killer's identity, the why of the crime, is more important to the reader than any chase or race against time or anticipation of a violent event. Again, the Nero Wolfe books, or anything by Agatha Christie (especially *The Mystery of the Blue Train*, *Murder in the Calais Coach*, and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*) serves as a fine example of this.

10. *Does your hero exhaust one avenue of investigation after another until it seems impossible to assign guilt for the crime?* He should reach this point no sooner than halfway through the book. He should seem stumped, or so confused by new developments that the reader almost suspects the killer will get away with his crime.

11. *Is your police and laboratory procedure genuine?* Does your detective follow established investigatory procedure, as it is known in most public and private police agencies across the country? If you're writing about an autopsy, do you know just how one is done? Do you know what all the police can learn from an autopsy: old injuries, evidence of rape, traces of the killer's skin and hair, a thousand other useless and valuable bits of data? Do you know what surfaces take fingerprints well, what others take them poorly, and which ones don't take them at all? Do you know the different techniques for lifting fingerprints? Do you know how or why a shoe print or tire track can lead the authorities to the villain? All these and hundreds of other things can easily be researched in a university, city, county, or

state library. If they do not have any books on criminology, they can borrow them from other libraries for as long as you will need to study them and make notes. One of the best resources on criminology is Jurgen Thorwald's *Crime and Science*, a Harvest Book published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in a moderately-priced, over-sized paperback. Thorwald's book is not only a valuable reference work, but an entertaining compilation of famous crimes that were solved through the clever application of forensic science.

12. *Does your hero's sudden realization of the killer's identity evolve from a juxtaposition of events that he has been playing with, in his mind, all along but which he has been unable to interpret, thus far, because of some preconception or character flaw of his own?* It should. You must never drop the solution into the hero's lap through some twist of fate or stupid mistake made by an otherwise clever villain. His own best efforts should solve the puzzle, his own wit.

(This is similar to the advice I gave in Section 2 of the preceding chapter, when we were considering the suspense novel. To gain some additional insight on mysteries, you should read Chapter Three as closely as this one.)

13. *Does the revelation of the villain's identity come close to the end of the book?* If it comes in the first third, or in the middle, you are probably writing a suspense novel and not a mystery. Remember, the mystery reader wants to be kept guessing until the end.

14. *Is the revelation of the killer's identity delivered in an action scene, as opposed to a dry, verbalized accounting made by the hero to other people in the story?* Long summations, after the detective has called all the suspects into one room, are trite and tend to slow the plot nearly to a standstill. It is true that your reader, having come that far in the story, will read to the end no matter how you present the last few scenes. But it is better to leave a reader perfectly content with the final chapter, for it is this last sequence of events that he will most clearly remember. If he was displeased with your handling of the conclusion, he will not rush out to buy your next mystery novel. Instead of a tell-'em-about-it climax, incorporate the detective's summation into an action scene.

For example: The hero goes to the suspect's apartment, breaks in, and searches for that one last piece of evidence that will clinch the case. He finds it, but he is surprised by the villain before he can steal safely away. At the antagonist's mercy, perhaps at gunpoint, he bargains for time by trying to unsettle the killer. He laughs at him and tells him how inept he was at trying to hide his identity; in the course of delivering this ridicule, the detective explains how he came upon the clues, how he put them together, and why he decided the killer must be Mr. X. Like this:

I rested my hand on top of the paperweight, on the desk, getting an idea of its weight. It would make a good missile; even if I could not hit him with it, I could distract him long enough to close the short distance between us.

"But how did you know Rita was my old girlfriend?" he asked.

"You provided that clue yourself," I said. I gripped the paperweight, ready to throw it. "Do you remember when we were talking about—"

"Let go of the paperweight," he said, smiling. "I'd have a bullet in your chest before you could pitch it."

Reluctantly, I did as he said.

"Now, go on," he said.

As you see, there is a dramatic element intertwined with the explanation. As the detective tells how he put two and two together, he also searches for a way to turn the tables on the antagonist. This is much more readable than a dry summation.

15. *In the course of your story, does your hero gain some piece of data from every interview and avenue of investigation that he conducts?* Some new mystery writers construct paper suspects who can easily be proven innocent in the detective's first confrontation with them. Then they propel their protagonist through a series of interviews and surveillances that lead absolutely nowhere—except that the hero can say, at the conclusion of each dead end, something like: "Well, Walters, we don't know anything more about Lady Randolph's death now than when we started. But at least we can be certain that Lord Biggie is not the man we want!" It is acceptable to have your protagonist follow up a few bum leads, for this gives the story a realistic touch; but the majority of tacks he takes must provide some information, no matter how minimal, that has a bearing on the solution of the case.

Again, I must stress, these rules and requirements of the form will not be all you need to know to write a salable mystery novel. As important as knowing what pitfalls to avoid is your familiarity with the writers who have been successful in the genre. Toward that end, you should have read something by each of these writers: Ross MacDonald (*The Goodbye Look, The Underground Man, The Moving Target, The Zebra-Striped Hearse, The Ivory Grin*), Agatha Christie (*And Then There Were None, The A.B.C. Murders, By the Pricking of My Thumbs, Passenger to Frankfurt*), Georges Simenon (any of his Maigret stories), Evan Hunter (*Shotgun, Jigsaw, Killer's Choice*, all under the pseudonym Ed McBain), John Dickson Carr (*The Problem of the Green Capsule, The Dead Man's Knock, The Man Who Could Not Shudder*), Raymond Chandler (*The Big Sleep, The Lady in the Lake, The Little Sister, The Long Goodbye*), Nicholas Freeling (*Death in Amsterdam, The Dresden Green, Strike Out Where Not Applicable*), Harry Kemelman (*Friday the*

Rabbi Slept Late, Saturday the Rabbi Went Hungry, Sunday the Rabbi Stayed Home), Cornell Woolrich (*The Bride Wore Black, The Black Angel, The Black Curtain, Deadline at Dawn*), Colin Watson (*Charity Ends at Home, Coffin Scarcely Used, Lonelyheart 4122*) and Dashiell Hammett (all five of his brilliant novels: *Red Harvest, The Dain Curse, The Maltese Falcon, The Glass Key, and The Thin Man*). This is, of course, only the barest of lists, and should be supplemented with as many other mystery writers' work as you can find and can find time to read.

CHAPTER FIVE Gothic-Romance

In my third year as a freelance writer, the science fiction market temporarily dried up, due to editorial overstocking at several of the houses with the largest monthly science fiction lists. Since I was selling far more science fiction than anything else, I was caught in the pinch. I was learning the suspense form, but had not yet had great success with it, and I was several years away from writing the big, serious novels I'm now concentrating on. I needed new markets, fast. The previous year, I'd dabbled in erotic novels, as a sideline, but I did not feel like returning to that category and, besides, it was not flourishing as it once had. What to do?

For a year, an editor friend had been urging me to try a Gothic novel since the form is perennially one of the most popular in the paperback field. I declined, principally because I didn't think I could write believably from a woman's viewpoint, but also because I simply did not like Gothic novels. I felt they were so formulized as to be mirror images of one another, and I didn't see how I could write in a field for which I had no respect. When the science fiction market remained tight, however, I finally tried my hand at a Gothic. I finished the book in two weeks, attached a female by-line (half the Gothics published today are written by men, but the by-line must always be female), and mailed it off. The editor read it, made a few suggestions, and bought it for \$1,500. That's \$750 a week; not a fortune, but a pleasant enough income to make it worth most any genre writer's time.

Three months later, I wrote my second Gothic, again in two weeks, and received a \$1,750 advance. My third Gothic, a few months later, took me one week from first page to last and earned another \$1,750 check. Within a single year, taking only five weeks away from my serious work, I made \$5,000 from my Gothics, enough to relieve immediate financial problems and let me get on with my more important work.

Herein lies the great advantage of writing category fiction. Financial worries are the most common causes of writers' blocks. If a writer cannot pay his bills, he usually cannot create. He either has to take a second job or a part-time job (if he is already a full-time freelancer) until his bills are paid and the tension relieved—or he must set aside his serious work and write something that will turn a fast dollar. Since he can probably earn more money, more quickly, by writing a Gothic than by working as a clerk, he is foolish not to take advantage of his talents. I know of writers who say they will not "prostitute" their talent by writing anything just for money. When they get desperate to meet the bills, they take a job for five or six months until they're financially solvent again, then launch into full-time freelancing once more. So far as I can see, they are doing worse than prostituting their talent; they are denying it altogether for unnecessarily long periods of time. In four weeks of Gothic writing, they could earn more money than they do in six months of office work, and be back at their serious creation five months sooner.

Lest I give you the impression that anyone can sit down and bat out a marketable Gothic novel in two weeks, let me point out that the Gothic form requires the same five basic elements as any other category novel. If you have already familiarized yourself with the basics of other categories, and if you've written and sold a novel or two in them, you will find Gothics relatively easy fare to create. However, if you're starting your writing career as a Gothic novelist, you will find it as taxing and demanding to achieve sales as if you had started in any other genre. Remember, though, that anyone who can write and sell a Gothic can also write and sell in at least one other category. Because it usually contains a crime committed early in the plot and because the villain is not revealed until the climactic scene towards the end, the Gothic resembles the mystery story and is subject to many of the techniques and rules of that form. Because it usually contains some supernatural events—which may or may not be explained away as natural phenomena or tricks of the villain—the Gothic often resembles fantasy. Because the reader is lured on, not by fights and chases so much as by anticipation of disaster, the Gothic bears many similarities to suspense novels.

Just as you must not underestimate the job of a Gothic novelist, you must not underestimate the Gothic readership. That audience cannot be summed up in a phrase like "dewy-eyed schoolgirls," because it includes women of all ages. Likewise, you cannot think of them as "dull, unimaginative women," because some men and many bright ladies have been bitten by the Gothic bug. I *do* believe that a large percentage of the *Gothic* readership is composed of housewives who, growing weary of the sameness of television programming, begin to read. These are people who have never been readers before, and they prefer to start out with books that seem familiar to them. (Gothics resemble television soap operas, though they are considerably less insipid than those daytime serials.) A percentage of this audience will remain content with the Gothics, while others will move on to different kinds of novels. As a result, all writers benefit by the growing audience, and the Gothic author can be certain of a constant flow of new readers.

By far, the majority of Gothic novels are published as paperback originals. Here, the advances range from \$1,500 to \$2,500 for new Gothic writers and as high as \$3,000 and \$3,500 for a popular paperback author like Dorothy Daniels. Because the demand for Gothics is so great, the successful Gothic novelist can obtain multiple-book contracts, such as Dorothy Daniels' 12-novels-a-year deals with Paperback Library. Advances, for the most part, are the sum total of the paperback Gothic author's earnings, for subsidiary rights are seldom picked up in this field.

At one time, only the best Gothic writers were published between hardcovers, those whose talent for characterization runs deep and who manage to stretch the formulized plot into moderately unique arrangements that give the genre more life and excitement than it usually has: Elizabeth Goudge, Victoria Holt, Daphne Du Maurier. Recently, however, the hardcover market has opened up to a whole range of Gothic talents, and the new writer has a better chance of being published there. Periodically, hardback Gothic novels achieve long runs on the bestseller lists, with all the subsidiary money *that* means, including huge paperback advances, book club sales, and foreign editions. The new Gothic novelist, however, should understand that these are dishes he will not taste for some time, if at all.

The first thing a potential Gothic novelist must learn is the plot formula which is peculiar to the Gothic, which does not supersede the traditional plot formula discussed in Chapter One, but which severely refines it. With few exceptions, the Gothic-romance plot follows this skeleton: A young heroine, alone in the world and often an orphan, goes to an old and isolated house to take a new job as a secretary, governess, nurse, or traveling companion to a motherless child or older woman in a family of some financial means. Everyone in the house is a stranger to her. At the house, the heroine meets a cast of suspicious characters (servants, the master or lady of the house, usually one or two sons of the lady, neighbors) and soon finds herself plunged into some mystery—either of supernatural or more mundane origins, most often concerning the death of someone in the house. Inexplicably, she becomes the target of the supernatural or mundane killer's attacks—or else, because she begins to snoop around in hopes of discovering what's happening, she becomes fair game for the murderer. Concurrent with the development of this mystery plot is the growth of a romance between the heroine and one of the young men in the household or in the household of a neighbor; or between her and the master, if he is unmarried or a widower. Either this man is her only safe haven in the dark events of the story—or he is as much a suspect as any of the other characters. If he is the only character with whom she can have a romantic relationship, he should always turn out to be the good guy she wants to think he is, for the conclusion of a Gothic must always promise marriage or the development of genuine love between heroine and hero. If the story has two handsome men, you can let her fall in love with one and fear the other—but plot the story so that her favorite turns out to be the killer, while the man she fears becomes the one who really cares for her. This is a popular Gothic gimmick that never seems to lose its appeal, no matter how often it is used. The only variant on this plot that is commonly used is to have the orphaned heroine go to live in a house with her last living relatives. If you take this tack, remember that the relatives must be distant and all but strangers to the heroine.

The pace of the average Gothic novel is considerably different from that of any other genre fiction, and the new Gothic writer should read at least half a dozen titles in the field to get the feel of this special rhythm. Gothic events develop slowly, against a moody background which must be fully and leisurely explored. Gothic novels are full of rainstorms, snow, thunder, lightning, leaden skies, cold draughts, and other gloomy omens which set the mood and act as generators of suspense as much as do the few violent incidents in the course of the story. Nowhere is the Gothic's subdued pace more evident than in the opening of the book. The reader's attention must be caught, but not by an intriguing plot problem that sparks a "need to know." Instead, the Gothic opens by establishing the mood of impending disaster, lurking evil. It makes the reader want to say: "Get away from this place. Leave. Get out. Run." Traditionally it will begin either with a description of the house which is to be the center of all the action, or with a scene that shows how alone and helpless the heroine is. Here's an example of the first type of Gothic opening, from Deanna Dwyer's *Legacy of Terror*:

Elaine Sherred was ill-at-ease from the first moment she caught sight of the Matherly house, and she would later remember this doubt, and wonder if it had been a premonition of disaster.

The house stood on the brow of the hill, partially shielded from her by several huge Dutch elm trees, and it was sprawling, immense. That in itself was not what bothered Elaine, however; all of the houses in this exclusive suburb of Pittsburgh were extraordinarily large, and all of them stood on four and five acre estates which were carefully tended by the most professional of gardeners. What made the Matherly house different, and therefore disconcerting, was its rococo stonework. Beneath the deep eaves, under the thrusting, flat black slate roof, a band of hand-carved story-stone ran across the entire facade and continued down the west wall as well. Indeed, those stone angels and stone satyrs, frozen nymphs and bas-relief urns, trees and flowers and planets and stars probably encircled the entire house, like a ribbon. The windows were set deep in thick stone walls and flanked by fretted black and silver shutters which contrasted starkly with the light stone of the walls. The main entrance was a door twice as large as any man could require, like the entrance to a cathedral, at least twelve feet high and five wide. Heavy brass handles adorned it, gleaming against the oak as did the brass hinges. The windows on either side of the door, unlike the other windows that she could see, were stained glass, in no particular pattern, the individual fragments worked together with lead. In the circle of the driveway, directly before the entrance, a white stone fountain, complete with three winsome cherubs whose wings were gloriously spread, sizzled and hissed like a griddle with oil spilled on it. The pavement immediately adjacent the fountain had been torn up and rich earth placed in its stead, banked by a second marble curb as white as the fountain itself. In this dark earth, a dozen varieties of flowers sprouted, blossoming in purples, reds, yellows and oranges. This dazzling splash was vaguely reflected in the white base of the fountain, giving the illusion that the marble itself shimmered and was somehow transparent so that you were looking through it to the flowers which bloomed on the other side.

Immediately following the description of the house, we learn that Elaine Sherred is an orphan and that she has managed to face the world, alone, only because she has been especially wary of it, has challenged life as if it were an adversary. She is very practical, dislikes fancy people and fancy places. She knows how to cope with anything, by herself, if she can reduce it to the simplest terms, but she is frightened of colorful places and people. She is somewhat humorless, always expecting the worst, and she distrusts people who do not think the same way. The Matherly house, therefore, in all its ostentation, is the quintessence of what she fears.

The opening of Deanna Dwyer's *Demon Child* does not dwell on a description of the house, but on a scene which informs the reader of the heroine's isolation in the world:

The sky was low and gray as masses of thick clouds scudded southward, pulling cold air down from the north as they went. Jenny huddled against the chill as she entered the quiet graveyard where it seemed ten degrees colder yet. That was her imagination, of course. Still, she hunched her shoulders and walked faster.

She stopped before three similar tombstones, one of which had only recently been set before an unsodded grave. In the entire cemetery, she was the only mourner. She was thankful for that, for she preferred to be alone. Turning her eyes to the stones, she read the names cut into them: Lee Brighton, Sandra Brighton and Leona Pitt Brighton. Her father, mother and paternal grandmother. As always, reading the names together, she found it difficult to believe they were all gone and that she was alone without even a brother or sister to share the burdens she carried. She wiped at the tears in her eyes.

The tone of most Gothics is melodramatic, but in a feminine, not a masculine sense. That is to say, the melodrama does not grow out of wild fist fights, chases, violent events, and the like, so much as from *stereotypically* female fears, hopes, and reactions. One taboo of the Gothic novel is the use of a Women's Liberation type for your heroine. First of all, most of the readership would find her unsympathetic; they prefer heroines who are somewhat timid, delicate, emotional, and yet decidedly coltish about their sexuality, heroines who cry and tremble and like to be kissed and cuddled (but no more than cuddled!) by their menfolk. Second, a real Women's Lib heroine would probably not be in the old house, the target of a murderer, consumed by her own terror; instead, she would take matters into her own hands as any man would do, and settle them quickly. She'd end your novel on page thirty! You won't face such problems if you keep that heroine with stereotypical female fears—a fear of the dark, of being alone and ending up an old maid, of rape, of losing the man she loves—and hopes—for a good marriage, love, perhaps children, religious and social contentment.

Though the Gothic heroine is nearly as formulized as the plot, she cannot remain a static personality from the first to the last page: she must change and mature through the course of the story. Ideally, at the outset, she should have one obvious character fault which is the cause of her problems. In Deanna Dwyer's *Legacy of Terror*, Elaine Sherred is too much of a pessimist, too stone cold serious for her own good. Because she lost her parents and was raised in an orphanage, she developed a hardened outlook on life, but this is not a healthy attitude. Taking up life in the Matherly house, she's attracted to the son who is sober, hard-working, humorless, and always ready to face the worst. At the same time, she distrusts the Matherly son who is carefree, works as a freelance artist and illustrator, dresses flashily and laughs a lot. Blindly, she gives her attention and trust to the sobersides and learns, too late, that he is the psychotic killer. She matures through experience. She learns that the man who appears stable may be living behind a tenuously constructed facade, while the carefree man may actually have an excellent grasp of realities. She learns to balance her worldview with hope and optimism. In the same author's *Dance With the Devil*, the heroine believes that life should be fun. She has tried to forget her loneliness (she is an orphan too) by surrounding herself with colorful, happy friends. She comes to distrust the story man who is a pessimist and to favor the man who is always laughing and gay. Again, she places her safety in the wrong hands. By the end of the novel, she comes to understand that a friendly, happy man may be desperately trying to cover a personality that is anything but charming. She learns, from the pessimist, to balance her outlook on life and—as a twist—she intends to help him balance his, so that he is less gloomy and more fun to be with.

The character faults that can be used are limitless. The writer need only remember that the Gothic novel should have a happy ending, one that implies a bright future for the heroine or bluntly assures it. That implication is here in the last few paragraphs of *Legacy of Terror*:

As they drew near the house, she saw the windows were open, airing out the odor of paint—and of misery.

"Don't worry about tomorrow," Denny said. "Enjoy today, Elaine. That is a big achievement in itself."

"Oh," she said, "I'm not *worried* about tomorrow. I'm looking forward to it!"

And the blunt assurance of future happiness is here in the last few paragraphs of *Demon Child*:

"Now," he said, "we've got to get to the house and wrap up this awful business. Dr. Malmont will be there, and we've got a surprise for him. As nice as it might be, we can't remain here all night, kissing in the rain."

She giggled and felt younger than she had felt since she was fourteen. There might yet be problems in life. Everything wouldn't go smoothly all the time. But she felt that she was ready to face the rough spots. It was time that she collected the happiness in life that God set aside for everyone.

By the time they reached the great house, the rain had stopped completely. The clouds were scattered thinly across the night sky, and the moon shone through, brilliant and huge. If she still believed in omens, in forewarnings of good and bad luck, she would have known that this sudden clearing of the sky meant that the future could *only* be a happy one.

The taboos in the Gothic novel are few but inflexible. The sooner you understand the limits you must work within, the sooner you will be producing marketable material. Following are seven Gothic taboos in easy-to-refer-to form:

Stories that do not employ the Gothic plot formula are taboo. You must have a heroine who is alone in the world, and she must suffer through some nightmarish ordeal in a strange place, finding terror and romance along the way, triumphing in the end. Though creativity is more difficult within this genre than within any other, you can write fresh stories within the plot formula if your heroine is strongly characterized and your background exotic.

Stories that do not center on an old, gloomy house—or some variation of the same—are taboo. The ancient mansion, permeated with evil, should be as much a character in your story as any of the people who live in it. Variations on the house might be: a steamboat used as a dwelling, archaeological diggings in a strange country, or a ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean in the 18th Century. Anything used in place of the old house should have all the same qualities of it: isolation, gloominess, an air of mystery, lots of dark places, eerie corridors, and musty rooms.

Stories that do not feature the traditional Gothic heroine are taboo. Gothic readers most easily identify with the type of girl we have already discussed, and they will rarely support the writer who gives them other kinds of heroines. Never, of course, employ a man as a Gothic hero, in the place of a young woman.

A heroine who does not mature through the course of the novel is taboo. Give her a single major character flaw and then help her to change as the story progresses, until, at the climax when the real villain is unmasked, she fully understands where and why she has gone wrong.

Stories that lack happy endings are taboo. Throughout the novel, the heroine's condition has been filled with danger. Her past is bleak—though it may have had moments of happiness in it—because she was orphaned or witnessed some traumatic disaster, and her future has seemed even worse from the moment she entered the old house around which the plot revolves. The Gothic reader, after going through so many scenes of impending doom, demands some glow of hope at the conclusion, to relieve what would otherwise be a depressing story. Not every Gothic novel must have a Pollyanna ending in which every problem is solved and all the characters are set for brighter futures, but it ought to contain at least the intimation of good things to come.

Stories not written in the moderate Gothic pace are taboo. The murders should, if possible, be limited to one; you cannot pile the bodies atop one another like lengths of cord-wood, as you might in a suspense or mystery novel. Once the reader has been shown that the villain will go to any lengths to obtain what he wants, as is witnessed by the first murder, there is no need to kill off anyone else. There will seldom be a *direct* chase scene of any great length in the Gothic novel, though the heroine will *feel* pursued through out the book. Rarely will a Gothic contain a race against time. Instead, the narrative tension will be generated by the anticipation of a violent event: for example, the death of the heroine, which never comes to pass.

Stories containing explicit or even implied sexual contact are especially taboo. A Gothic must contain no bedroom scenes, no petting, and not even any necking. When you describe your heroine, you will always indicate that she is pretty, but you must never discuss her figure or her sexuality. When she meets a man in the course of the story, she may evaluate him in the way any normal woman would evaluate a brother or a father figure, and she may even wonder what kind of husband he would make, though in a romantic and not a sexual sense. When she and her potential mate exchange gestures of affection during the story, these will be limited to gentle embraces, chaste kisses, and delicate words of endearment. Rare are the soul kisses and rarer still the fierce clinches. Not even the villain can have lustful thoughts. As one Gothic editor once told me, "The villain can want to beat her, torture her, and even kill her. But he mustn't contemplate rape!"

CHAPTER SIX Westerns

As long as the American public looks upon the history of the Old West as a romantic and nostalgic era, there will be a market for the Western novel, and this means the marketplace should be open for a good many decades to come. Few hardback houses besides Doubleday publish a large yearly list of Westerns, because there simply is not a large high-price audience for the form. On the other hand, Dell, Bantam, Fawcett, Avon, Lancer, Signet, Ballantine, and most other paperback houses release monthly Western lists. One of the canniest paperback editors working today once told me that his company occasionally lost money on some titles in every category—except the Western. No Western has ever lost them a dime. No enormous profits, you understand. Just modest but steady sales.

Advances on Westerns often average below what is paid for other kinds of category novels, unless you have an agent forceful enough to demand standard advances. Subsidiary rights are not particularly hot, though it is possible to pick up a motion picture sale and, more often, a motion picture option to buy. (See Chapter Ten, question 10, for a discussion of movie sales.) The top-flight Western writer can build a reputation that can escalate his income into pleasant tax brackets. Louis L'Amour, a continually best-selling Western author, has had several books purchased for and made into successful

films and is perennially reprinted with great success. It would be impossible to estimate how much money the many westerns by Max Brand (originally the pseudonym of Frederick Faust [1892-1944]) have produced for their publishers, though we could safely say the figure runs into the millions.

If your concept of the Western is highly unfavorable, and if you look upon it as an unimaginative form full of mostly bad writing, you likely have read little or nothing of what has been written in the genre in the last fifteen years. More than any other category, the Western is condemned out of hand by people who make judgments without experience and, often, by writers in other genres who would scream foul if anyone criticized *their* form without first having read extensively in it. Modern Western writers can and do turn out high-quality novels. Louis L'Amour is a good fast-action writer who knows how to establish his characters in short order and plunge the reader into a no-holds-barred plot progression that insures their attention to the final page. Lee Hoffman's work ranges from solid adventure novels laced with social comment, as in *Wild Riders*, to Western satire like *The Legend of Blackjack Sam*, a genuinely funny story. Brian Garfield's work has always opened new frontiers for the Western novel, exploring characters more deeply than once was the tradition of the field and using sexual encounter with the same honesty and detail found in any other genre but the Gothic. One of his best novels, *Gun Down*, should be proof enough to any skeptic that the Western novel is as vital as any other form. Unfortunately for the Western field, Garfield has written his last oater and is now a successful suspense and mainstream author.

Westerns, like war stories, usually paint good and evil in fairly distinct blacks and whites, at least to begin with. But one technique of characterization, used by most Western writers and visible in the vast majority of Western novels, saves the genre from the war story's simplicity and gives it verisimilitude. Most Westerns begin with a carefully delineated hero and an equally obvious villain. The protagonist seems 100% good, while the antagonist is 100% bad. However, in the course of the story's development, the hero becomes less admirable than he was at the outset, while the villain grows gradually more sympathetic and less starkly evil than he seemed in the beginning. By the climax and conclusion of the novel, the reader's main concern is still centered on the hero, but he has accepted good and evil in both antagonist and protagonist. The overwhelming thematic point of the Western is: The good man cannot remain perfectly good in a world full of evil; some of it will have to rub off on him if he is going to survive. Naturally, if that philosophical point is to be accepted, its reverse must also be true: The bad man cannot remain perfectly bad in a world that contains some good; a little of it will have to rub off on him if he is to survive. This character development resembles the changes wrought on a Gothic heroine as she passes through a story, though here the author's approach and tone must be a good bit more profound than it is in the Gothic-romance.

Brian Garfield's *Gun Down* uses this Western theme and style of characterization. Sam Burgade, a retired lawman, is shown in the opening sequences of the book as a man of virtue and heroism. The antagonist, Zach Provo, whom Burgade put behind prison bars, is clearly a psychopath set upon obtaining revenge. Provo escapes from prison, kidnaps Burgade's virginal young daughter, Susan, and leads the retired lawman deep into the wild country where he intends to kill him. Susan is eventually raped, by several of Provo's murderous allies, in full sight of her father, but is at least rescued from death. By the end of the novel, we have begun to sympathize somewhat with Zach Provo, because we learn that Sam Burgade accidentally shot and killed the antagonist's wife the first time he arrested him. Provo, who loved her quite a bit, has never really recovered from the loss. Burgade, on the other hand, seems to have suffered little guilt for Provo's wife's death and is too quick to write it off as being Provo's fault for having placed her in the middle of a confrontation with the law. Also, by the end, we see that Sam Burgade is a craftier, more deadly man than any of the outlaws who have taken his daughter: he kills seven of the eight and saves his daughter's life. We still prefer him to Provo and look upon him as an admirable, good man, but we no longer see him as all white and his enemies as all black.

Perhaps the major reason why this characterization gimmick has become more associated with the Western than any other genre lies in the nature of the background against which a Western is set. Most Western novels take place in the years between 1865 and 1899, when there was little organized law enforcement and when local and territorial law was often as corrupt as the outlaws it pretended to be interested in apprehending. Rich men owned the large ranches; they viciously destroyed competition and killed and financially ruined other ranchers and sheep herders. Rich men owned most of the important mines and paid little heed to prior claims staked by powerless individuals. Whole towns were often run by companies or by one or two men from whom all the money in the area generated. This was rarely a time and a place for individual enterprise unless the individual was willing to take enormous risks and was willing to fight for his own. In such a land, the outlaw could easily be elevated into the role of a folk hero. He thumbed his nose at the handful of men in power, stole from them, and fought his way free of all pursuit. To the average man of that time, the outlaw was not just a villain, a law breaker, and a thief—but something of a symbol of each man's soul set free. Unless his only crime was murder, and unless his victims were helpless women or children, no one could really view him without *some* favor.

Although the modern reader lives in a more civilized society, he too often feels put upon by forces too large for him to deal with—big business, large institutions, the government itself—and he can't help but sympathize a little with the man who makes his way outside traditional bounds of permissible behavior. That is not to say that he will cheer the

antagonist and boo the hero. Instead, he will expect well-rounded portraits of both of them.

Just as science fiction and suspense can be broken down into a limited number of plot types, so can the Western. There are basically seven Western plot types:

THE LAWMAN STORY

In this type of Western, the hero is a sheriff, marshal, or deputy, and his antagonist is an outlaw of one sort or another. The hero is always dedicated, but in a modern Western he should be motivated by more than a sense of duty, pride in his badge, and his monthly paycheck. *Badge of Honor* by Lee E. Wells is a good example of the type.

THE OUTLAW STORY

Here, your hero is an outlaw, and he must be treated with as much sympathy as you would accord the lawman. His crimes rarely include murder, and never include *unprovoked* murder. He is most often either a highwayman or a bank robber, forced into a life of crime by the social conditions of his day (which we have discussed above) or by the Civil War and the changes it brought to his life. (The Civil War is the factor which influenced the hero of Lee Hoffman's *Wild Riders* to become an outlaw.) You should either logically reform your hero by the end of the book, or you should see that he escapes whatever forces of law pursue him and lives to rob again. As with the suspense novel using a criminal hero, don't construct a sympathetic outlaw only to hand him defeat in the end because "crime does not pay."

THE CATTLE RANGE STORY

These are stories set on ranches, on long cattle drives, stories about sheep herders battling cattlemen, cattlemen battling farmers, cattlemen battling each other, stories about droughts, rustlers, and other cattle range problems. You have a wide choice of heroes and villains, though, again, they must be realistically drawn. Good examples of this type of Western are Todhunter Ballard's *Blizzard Range*, and Louis L'Amour's *Killoe* and *North to the Rails*.

THE REVENGE STORY

There are three common heroes for this type of plot: the outlaw unjustly punished by a crooked or overzealous marshal; the good law-abiding citizen wronged by ruthless outlaws; and the last surviving member of a family murdered by Indians or bandits. In every case, the hero vows revenge and sets out to take it. Nothing will stand in his way, and he must eventually deliver the antagonist to retribution. Don't forget that you must strengthen the hero's motivations whenever possible and not propel him through a long chase simply for revenge; he must have secondary motives. A good novel of this type is Wayne D. Overholser's *The Long Trail North*, but without question the greatest Western revenge novel written to date is Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*.

THE OPENING-THE-WILD-WEST STORY

This kind of story includes those plots dealing with the journey of a wagon train across the continent, the construction of the railroad, telegraph line, toll road, stagecoach line, pony express route, or similar endeavour. Your hero may be the boss of the wagon train or of the construction company; opposed by reactionaries, ranchers who want more money for the use of their land, Indians, and outlaws in equal numbers. Or he may be a local rancher, a small businessman whose property is being condemned or taken away from him without proper compensation: in this case, the opponents would be those who want to force the construction ahead no matter who gets hurt. A warning: This second type of hero must have a personal stake in fighting the new construction; he may not oppose it simply for spite or because he doesn't want to see Eastern progress cut across his beloved wilderness. Few readers can sympathize with a hero, good or bad, who is against progress of any kind; and in those days, there was no ecological crisis to justify such a viewpoint. Luke Short's *The Outrider* is a good novel dealing with an ordinary citizen up against the corruption of mining and railroad interests.

THE BATTLE OF TITANS STORY

These novels always concern a conflict between two enormous ranches or economical concerns of the Old West. One wealthy family is pitted against another in a fight for water sources, mineral claims, fencing limits, or because of mutual rustling. Your hero will be a member of and usually the head of the more virtuous family and will always triumph. Everything in this kind of Western must be on a grand scale, set against a panorama of Western landscape and history.

THE CAVALRY AND INDIAN STORY

The new writer is often tempted to do this as Ouster's Last Stand, using Indians as immoral savages who harass and torture the good cavalry men. At one time, indeed until quite recently, this was permissible. Today, the average reader has read *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown (by far the best research work on the horrible war against the American Indian) or its equivalent and is aware of the true relationship between the cavalry and the Indian. More often than not, the cavalry was the persecutor, the Indian the innocent victim. Before attempting to write a Cavalry and Indian story, you must do intense research in order to understand the true situation of the American Indian in the Old West.

No matter which Western plot you employ, you must research customs, slang, dress, and day-to-day chores before putting Word One down on paper. A Western is an historical novel, and it must be true to its period of genesis. (Besides adult and juvenile books on American history and Western history, one excellent reference is *Western Words: A Dictionary of the American West* by Ramon F. Adams. Published by the University of Oklahoma Press, it is a rich source of cowboy vernacular.)

We have already mentioned a few of the taboos a modern Western writer must be aware of, but let's list them in more orderly style:

The hero who cleans up a town because he believes in "justice," and for no other reason, is taboo. He must be a sympathetic man with his own problems, fears, hopes, and dreams and with a sound personal reason for everything he does.

Racial Westerns in which the Indians or the Mexicans are portrayed as mindless savages are taboo. The modern reader demands authenticity and honest treatment of *all* your characters.

No modern Western author can succeed when writing stories based on sloppy research or on no research at all.

The story of the lone cowpoke who rides onto a new ranch beset by troubles, reveals that the foreman is a crook, and wins the rancher's daughter, is taboo. This is such a cliché that the regular Western reader would flinch the moment he recognized it.

The story of the shoot-out on Main Street, in which the opponents are out to prove who's the best man, or in which one of them is determined to prove his manhood in a sort of rite of passage, is taboo. It is cliché unless you can give the plot a very original twist.

Misinformation about handguns of the 1865-1899 period is taboo. Regular Western readers will know how many shots were carried in a gun you just described, and they'll know what its capabilities were. If they catch you in a fundamental error, they'll not believe anything in the rest of the book and will, justifiably, put it down without finishing it.

A sympathetic outlaw who loses in the end to prove that "crime doesn't pay" is taboo.

The hero who stands in the way of progress railroad, telegraph, stagecoach linemereely to preserve the untainted West, comes off as an idiot and is taboo. There was no ecological crisis back then; no industry was contributing to an unnecessary and dangerous pollution of the land.

Just a final note to assure the potential Western writer who is a woman that not all Westerns are written by men, though most publishers insist that women who write Westerns assume a male pen name or at least use only the initials of their first and middle names. Western by-lines you have seen, which are covers for women, include Lee Hoffman, B. M. Bower, Eli Colter, and Stewart Toland. Women often have a talent for research and a feel for historical periods that make them outstanding Western novelists.

CHAPTER SEVEN Erotica

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of erotic novels: the Big Sexy Novel and the Rough Sexy Novel. You can make a fortune on the first and little more than pocket money on the last. Big Sexy Novels are written by Harold Robbins, Jacqueline Susann, Henry Sutton, Morton Cooper, Rona Jaffe, and many others. Six figure incomes are a starting place in the Big Sexy Novel field, with million dollar rewards if you achieve the position of a Robbins or a Susann. Rough Sexy Novels are written by, among hundreds of others, Marcus Van Heller, Ann Griffin, Tor Kung, Peggy Swenson, Marco Vassi, and Jesse Taylor. Their financial rewards average between \$1,000 and \$3,000 a book, and they do not even receive the fringe benefits of national fame accorded the BigSN writer—to say nothing of the subsidiary rights a RoughSN novelist rarely ever profits from.

What, you may well ask, differentiates between a Big Sexy Novel and a Rough Sexy Novel? Most importantly, language. In a sane world, we might expect the dirtier, more arousing book to make the biggest money. In a land of

sexual hypocrisy, however, the opposite is true. The BigSN contains at least one sex scene in every chapter, but describes the bedroom action in a "refined" way that is acceptable to a broad spectrum of American book buyers who can, because the crudest language does not appear, pretend they have no interest in the prurient passages of the work and are reading it for other reasons when, of course, the prurient passages are at least half of what they want to get out of the book. The RoughSN, on the other hand, pulls no punches, describing the bedroom scenes at greater length and in greater detail than the BigSN, letting the reader see them from every conceivable angle and character viewpoint, and employing any word no matter how "filthy" its connotation or denotation. Furthermore, the tone of the RoughSN is very straightforward, honest, and blatantly arousing, while the tone of the BigSN is coy, flirting with style and "meaning" while actually delivering a great deal of thinly disguised erotica.

In most categories, clarity of prose is important and overwriting is taboo. Not so in the Big Sexy Novel. Here, the writer often uses the over-written scene to pretend toward "literary content" or merely to avoid using earthier language that could describe the scene better and more directly. For example, the BigSN might contain something like this:

As Rita swelled towards her peak, she felt like the sea, the great, all-encompassing sea, the churning of dark waves, so that she was a mindless mass moving, moving everywhere and all at once. And she cried out, but softer than the sea when it cries against the rocks, more like the soft cry of water on sand, rolling, breaking, foaming, rocking up and down in liquid ecstasy, pulling back to build up and rush in again, exploding, shuddering...

Or the Big Sexy Novel might contain this sort of passage:

It was like a storm for Glenda. He entered her like lightning striking into the dark heart of the sky, and she was filled with a momentary light that faded but, in fading, promised to return in even more brilliant display. And, with that bolt enfolded by her dark night, the rolling clouds came, moving together, parting and then mingling again; and the thunder was their breath as they rolled together, achieving, at last, that greater flash of lightning and the wet release of storm water.

If you think these examples are humorous, you would do well to read some of the financially and critically accepted Big Sexy Novels to be sobered. None of what I've written here would be particularly out of place in D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover* or Henry Sutton's *The Voyeur*.

Of course, the strength of language permissible in the BigSN changes from year to year, and the potential BigSN author must read the latest works to know just how far he may go. Today, four-letter words appear on the average of two to four times on every page of the BigSN, and euphemisms for the parts of the body and the sex act are frequently supplemented by the vulgar tongue. But one thing that has never changed and will never change in the BigSN is the lack of the clinical descriptions of bodies and acts which are the life's blood of the Rough Sexy Novel. The BigSN reader is not interested in how the act is done so much as in the seduction leading to it: he wants to read about the lust more than the satisfaction, just as the suspense reader likes to *anticipate* more than witness the violent event around which a suspense novel is built.

Another appeal of the BigSN, aside from its artificial literary value, is its gossipy quality. Americans are great gossipers, especially about other people's sexual proclivities and adventures. Therefore, a BigSN will be written around one of five main plots:

BEHIND THE SCENES IN SUBURBIA

The author attempts to show that moral corruption and sexual permissiveness are the norm in middle-class suburbs.

The book is full of cheating wives, cheating husbands, wife-swappers, and promiscuous teenagers. Examples of the form are John Updike's *Couples* and Edmund Schiddel's *The Devil in Bucks County*.

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE JET SET

Harold Robbins' *The Adventurers* and Burt Hirschfeld's *Fire Island* are examples of the form. The author shows us the moral corruption and sexual permissiveness in the world of exotic resorts and swinging young people.

BEHIND THE SCENES IN HOLLYWOOD

The author paints the "inside" story of moral corruption and sexual permissiveness among stars, starlets, producers, directors, screen writers, and other motion picture glamour types. Henry Sutton's *The Exhibitionist* and Jacqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls* are "classics" of the form. Harold Robbins' *The Inheritors* is another, interesting for the strength of its language which is harsher than in most Big Sexy Novels.

BEHIND THE SCENES OF A GLAMOROUS PROFESSION

Here, the author takes the reader for an "inside" look at the moral corruption and sexual permissiveness in a profession the general public looks upon as exotic or secretive: publishing (Edmund Schiddel's *Good Time Coming*), international finance (*The Richest Man in the World* by "J.P."), prize fighting (*Crown* by Francis Pollini), high fashion designing and modeling (*The Rag Dolls* by Simon Cooper), medicine, law, Madison Avenue advertising agencies and hotel management.

BEHIND THE SCENES IN ANYTOWN USA

The author dissects life in a small town, giving the reader a "scorchingly honest" view of hidden moral corruption and sexual permissiveness. Grace Metalious' *Peyton Place* was the first major novel of this type.

In the first four BigSN plot types, you must also attempt to carry off a *roman à clef* [French for "novel with a key"], a story in which the characters all seem to be allusions to real people—preferably quite famous people—and to real events the reader may have read of in newspapers and magazines; this establishes a celebrity guessing game among readers and reviewers that strengthens the illusion that you are telling of genuine events and, not incidentally, increases the book's sales. ("Was Evelyn, in the novel, really Judy Garland?")

"Was Blanche really Marilyn Monroe—or Jane Mansfield?"

"Was Lew really Rock Hudson, or might he be Henry Fonda?") In actuality, the BigSN bears only passing resemblance to the real lives of the personalities mentioned, but the reader likes to feel that he is getting the whole, ugly story, firsthand. (You research these stories the same way as you do stories in other categories: by reading books on the neighborhood, profession, or industry, and keeping current with social behavior and celebrities through magazines and newspapers.)

In the fifth type of story, Anytown USA, you must not provide a *roman à clef*, because the reader wants to do that himself, placing the novel in his own town. You thoughtfully provide sparsely characterized professional types—a town doctor cheating on his wife, a policeman cheating on his wife and taking bribes on the side, a school teacher who's really a nymphomaniac who can't keep her hands off the principal or her students—whom the reader can think of in terms of people he knows.

The only taboos in BigSN, then, are too-explicit language that would irritate the sensibilities of Middle America, and "bad" sexual conduct that goes unpunished. The BigSN reader wants to see the sinners reformed or delivered unto retribution, preferably the former. The cheating husband or wife should either finally "see the light" and quit his or her adulterous activities, meet a violent end because he or she cannot see the light, or get a divorce so that everyone can be happier in the end. (Warning: Do not employ divorce as a solution to the BigSN problems unless you have no other reasonable course. Many of the women who read the Big Sexy Novel are terrified of divorce and, rather than seeing it as an answer to the problem, might find it a frightening and depressing non-conclusion. This might change, too, in coming years, as more and more women realize their value, as people, outside of the institution of marriage.)

In the Rough Sexy Novel, however, you must be sure to use explicit language and rich detail in the sex scenes. The only taboo is a reverse of the BigSN requirement: No character shall be punished for his sexual conduct, and neither shall he be reformed. The entire point of the RoughSN, or the "porn" book, is that sex is healthy, exciting, and extremely desirable in almost any quantity or quality. No "perversion" can be criticized in the Rough Sexy Novel, unless it is one in which one of the sexual partners is hurt. Sadism and masochism, then, are usually unpopular topics for Rough Sexy Novels, while homosexuality, lesbianism, group sex, troilism, and most other bedroom activities are not only permissible but encouraged.

In the Big Sexy Novel, the character motivation must be believable; the *bedroom* action plentiful; the hero and/or heroine sympathetic (she or he should have problems which all of us can identify with: married but in love with another man/woman; problems with children and jobs); the background at least exotic if not colorfully developed; but there need not be a terribly strong plot, in the sense of telling an exciting, tension-filled story. The "plot" of a BigSN is constructed from the peek-behind-the-scenes of whichever one of the five backgrounds you're using, and from the string of sex scenes and the sexual interrelationships of the characters. A carefully developed, exciting plot would require too high a ratio of story to sex; every chapter of the BigSN must have at least one sexual encounter, which leaves only a small portion of the book for other purposes.

The BigSN will have one major problem that must be solved by the end of the story, though that problem will not be one that requires great physical resources on the hero's part and will be solved after the hero has climbed over only a minimum of obstacles to his success (or failure). For example: the publisher-hero might be losing financial control of his magazine empire and be fighting desperately to hold onto it; the doctor-hero might have a big and important operation to perform on someone of note, on the woman he loves, or on a small and defenseless child; the lawyer-hero might be arguing a nationally publicized case upon which his whole reputation is staked. But the main plot of the BigSN will come from the dozens of affairs, between the many characters, and the reader's curiosity about how each will turn out. ("Will Samantha get her just rewards and lose Bill to Tina?" "Can Joan and Don find happiness together when she is so frigid?" "Will Arthur's homosexuality prove incurable, or will Beth's love help him to straighten himself out?")

Understandably, with all these interlocking affairs progressing simultaneously, you almost always require the modified omniscient viewpoint to tell the story—that from which you can settle into the head of each of the characters

when you need to and can develop several plot threads at once. (See Chapter Nine for a discussion of viewpoints in category fiction.) If you insist on using the third person limited or the first person viewpoint, you must stretch the story action over a considerably longer period of time than when employing the modified omniscient voice: if you have twenty characters and use the latter voice, you can write about a hundred different sexual encounters in a week or ten days of story time; but you cannot expect a reader to believe that your hero and heroine have the stamina to indulge that often in the same amount of time. Besides, the more characters you introduce, the more kinds of kinky behavior you can write about—and variety is the spice of the Big Sexy Novel.

A BigSN hero should be a sexual dynamo, thinking about making love when he isn't, a handsome and virile dreamboat. The BigSN heroine should be exceedingly desirable, possessed of a handsome lust of her own—but she should always be somewhat hesitant at the start of every sex sequence. Even if she has bedded five different men on fifteen different occasions since the start of the book, she must be a bit trembly and unsure with the sixth man on the sixteenth occasion. She will stall, wonder if they really ought to, and only give in to the hero's gentle but persistent urging. Once she has decided to participate, however, she must be his equal as a lover, enthusiastic and versatile.

The vocabulary of the BigSN should always be simple. The fewer multi-syllabic words you use, the better. This does not mean that the BigSN reader has a more limited vocabulary than other genre readers; however, most BigSN fans want a book that can be read at the beach, over several evenings, between household chores—in short, a book that is interesting but not so demanding that it must be read carefully and in as few sittings as possible. You must learn to deliver simple entertainment slightly cloaked in "meaning," in a style as easily read as anything in *The New York Daily News*.

In the Rough Sexy Novel, the plot is also minimal. The main story problem may be similar to that in the BigSN, or it may be strictly sexual in nature. For example, your heroine may be a nymphomaniac trying to come to terms with her sexual nature, or a frigid wife learning to be a good lover, or a young boy or girl coming of age and fighting to achieve an adult sexual harmony with their peers. Just as with the BigSN, you should read a great deal of the field to fully understand how a RoughSN plot is structured and to get the proper feel for sex scene description. Any dozen titles published by Olympia Press and its subsidiary houses will properly acquaint you with the styles and language requirements of this kind of erotic novel.

In the RoughSN, the heroine—unless her frigidity is the central story problem—should be every bit as virile and anxious for love-making as the hero. Indeed, she should be outright aggressive and should, at least half the time, initiate the sex scene herself. For the most part, women read the BigSN and they want the heroine to be the constant focus of male aggression, the recipient of unlimited sexual offerings. Likewise, the overwhelmingly *male* audience for the RoughSN wants the hero to be the focus of *female* aggression and the recipient of unlimited pleasure.

Finally, when you choose a title for your erotic novel, you must carefully consider your market. The reader who buys the Big Sexy Novel wants a "refined" title, something that will not embarrass her when she buys the book, and something which she can unhesitatingly leave out on the coffee table to impress guests or generate conversation. *The Voyeur*, *The Exhibitionist*, *The Love Machine*, *Good Time Coming*, *The Rag Dolls*, *The Body Brokers*, and *The Ravishers* are all good BigSN titles, because they promise erotica without blatantly heralding the book's content. None of these, however, would be appropriate titles for the RoughSN, which must come on much more forcefully, as these several examples attest: *Share the Warm Flesh*, *Thirteen and Ready!*, *Swapper's Convention*, *Sextet*, *Thrust*, and *Hung*.

Erotica is included in this book because—though it does not follow the category plot formula and is often lacking in the other four basic requirements of category writing—editors and publishers refer to it, handle it, and think of it in the same way they do any other genre. The form can be labeled, and monthly erotica lists can be established. This is more true of the RoughSN than the BigSN, but applicable to both.

The advantages of the form are obvious. A BigSN author, if his book should catch on and make the bestseller lists, will earn far more money from far higher sales than he could with a bestseller from any other category. Even if his book only skirts the bestseller lists or receives no particular special attention in hardcover, it will generate larger paperback advances and sales than will titles in other categories. If he's lucky, the BigSN author can establish himself with a few books, and gain fame (of a questionable sort) that few other genre writers ever enjoy. Because he makes more money per novel, he can spend less time at the typewriter than the average genre author—or, he can spend the usual time and, working within the strict requirements of the BigSN form, write *better* books than he could if he had to churn out ten a year. Somehow, though, the successful BigSN writer never seems to take advantage of this last benefit.

The disadvantages of the BigSN are also clear. You can rarely create anything meaningful within the genre, because of its sex requirements. James Jones, Joyce Elbert, Gwen Davis, and a handful of others have now and then come close to bits of art in their BigSN work, but those moments are outweighed, by far, by the unusual BigSN content. Also, while the writers working in other categories are delivering average 60,000-word scripts, the BigSN author must put together a story at least 100,000 words long and preferably 150,000-250,000 words. A 120,000-word novel is not simply twice as

hard to write as the 60,000-word book, but geometrically more taxing, because the plot and the character interaction must be several times more complex in order to support these extra pages. Only the profound novel with genuine insights and something important to say can carry this many words; profundity is ruled out for the BigSN author, by the definition of his field. Because the size requirement is difficult to meet, many writers tend to overwrite the BigSN, to puff it up. Often, they lose their perspective after a few books and no longer consciously realize that they *are* puffing.

Since the advances and royalties in the Rough Sexy Novel field are lower than the average for category work, no one should set out to become a RoughSN writer for money. If you can write a porn novel quickly (a week is not a bad schedule, for the professional in this field), then you can keep your work-reward ration at a reasonable level and you can enjoy other benefits of the field. For one thing, since virtually all Rough Sexy Novels are published under pen names, you can learn to polish your writing while getting paid for the pleasure, and have no fear of damaging your creative reputation. Also, because the RoughSN puts absolutely no restrictions on the writer besides the requirement of regular sex scenes, one after the other, you can experiment with style, try stream-of-consciousness, present tense narrative and other stylistic tricks, to learn if you can make them work. If they fail, you still get your RoughSN money; if they succeed, you can adapt them to serious work, later.

The disadvantages of the RoughSN form are these: low advances; royalties are rarely reported correctly from exclusively RoughSN publishing houses, and often they are not reported at all; you are not building a useful reputation as a writer; you may write so many Rough Sexy Novels that you literally burn yourself out.

Finally, both BigSN and RoughSN authors are subject to boredom with their work. Subconsciously if not consciously aware that their work is strictly formulized and repetitive, having written thousands of sex scenes in what few ways they can be written, they lose interest in producing anything more. And this, for the writer, is the worst fate of all.

CHAPTER EIGHT The Most Important Chapter in this Book

This is not only the most important chapter in this book, but the shortest as well. It consists of one piece of advice that no new writer can afford to ignore.

I have given you the rules and requirements of each modern category of fiction. In the chapter that follows this one, I'll discuss some writing techniques that are applicable to all the categories. When you've read all this, you can go out to the bookstore and purchase a dozen novels which, in some minor or major way, break one or more of these rules, fail to meet these requirements, and ignore some of these Dos and Don'ts. Writers break rules and still get published all the time. But these are writers who have published, for the most part, numerous other books: people who have learned all the rules, have proved that they can use them successfully time and again, and have therefore earned the right to break a tradition or two. Just as the abstract painter must first learn how to draw in realistic detail, so must the rule-breaking writer first learn how to write saleable material within the restrictions I've talked about. Your road to success in any genre will be shorter if you walk the known trail and leave the exploration of new territory for later.

CHAPTER NINE Other Questions

Familiar with the five basic ingredients of category fiction—a strong plot, a real hero or heroine, believable character motivation, a great deal of action, and a colorful background—and having learned the fundamentals of each category, you will have other things to consider, things of a lesser magnitude than those already discussed but nevertheless also vital to the quality of the finished work. Most of these do not present problems unique to category fiction, though they are none the less important for their literary universality. We'll consider each in a general way, and, where necessary consider each as it applies in a special way to one or more of the genres.

Plot wheels, plot cards, and story construction lists, all of those devices one time on sale to help writers get ideas, are utterly useless for the serious fiction craftsman. Writing, after all, is an art as well as a craft, requiring emotional involvement on the artist's part, a commitment you are clearly not ready to make if you think such a mechanical plotting system will be valuable to you.

Likewise, if you attempt to build stories from newspaper clippings, you are fooling yourself if you believe you can establish a body of respectable work in this manner. Some writers have sold stories generated by human interest newspaper clippings; indeed, one writer I know of has sold more than two dozen stories that originated like this. Rarely, however, are these pieces *good* fiction: because the most engaging newspaper human interest stories revolve around a quirk of Fate or coincidence, the final plot of the fictionalized version is forced or outright incredible. You also run the risk of using a clipping that is being simultaneously developed by another writer, one who—if the idea is saleable—may hit the proper market before you and effectively render your work dated and imitative. The world of writers is not so small that this is unlikely. I know of three different cases where it happened, making the unlucky author's work useless.

Plot wheels and newspaper clippings can't provide you, either, with a genuine concern for your characters and their situation. For that, your story people and their milieu must come from within you, based on your personal experiences, revolving around lessons and truths you have learned.

This doesn't mean you must write only about what you have done yourself. Obviously, that would badly limit any writer. "Personal experiences" may include things that have happened to you, to friends, to others you've heard about; things you've learned from books, movies, television, radio, school, and other sources. Everyone is a witches' cauldron of bubbling facts, ideas, images, and memories. You must learn to tap this magical brew and order the unconscious plots within it.

You can learn to open this inner storehouse in many ways, though I've found the following two methods to be the most rewarding. I have frequently used both since sold my first story and recently developed my forty-second novel with the second method.

METHOD ONE: PLAYING WITH EXOTIC TITLES

A story title is not always dictated by the finished work. Indeed, by spending an hour playing with odd title possibilities, you may gradually generate an entire story idea. Begin by choosing a dramatic or colorful word that will catch a potential reader's interest and which will be the central word of the title you finally arrive at. Man, horse, winter, rain, coat, and similar words would be bad choices, for they are too common and undramatic. Words like death, blood, fear, witch, killer, thief, darkness, prisoner, and sword would be good title beginnings, for each has dramatic potential. With a key word in mind you're ready to begin winging it.

I've always kept notebooks in which I record all my free-associating for posterity, and I can, therefore, faithfully recall how I generated title and plot for my first published science fiction story. I began with the central word dragon, because it was rich with fantastic, fearful implications. At first, I played at adjectival amplification of that single word, jotting each idea down in a list:

The Cold Dragon
The Warm Dragon
The Dancing Dragon
The Black Dragon
The Eternal Dragon
The Waiting Dragon
The Dead Dragon
Steel Dragon
The Crying Dragon

When that seemed to be leading nowhere, I tried following the word dragon with various prepositional phrases:

Dragon in the Darkness
Dragons on My Mind
Dragon in Amber
Dragon in the Sky
Dragon by the Tail
Dragon for the King
Dragon in the Land

Several of those attempts were good titles but didn't spark my imagination at that time. Next, I tried using a series of verbs with the key word:

The Dragon Stalks
The Dragon Watches
The Dragon Creeps
The Dragon Feasts at Midnight
The Dragon Fleed

But none of those were particularly intriguing. I moved on, trying to amplify the title by adding another noun:

The Dragon and the Sea
The Dragon and the Night
The Dragon and the Knight
The Dragon and the Key of Gold

Finally, when I tried coupling the key word with other words that seemed at odds with it, I hit on the right track:

The Weak Dragon
The Sad Dragon

The Timid Dragon

The Tiny Dragon

The Soft Dragon

The contrast in the last somehow appealed to me. I began toying with different applications of it:

The Soft Dragon

The Dragon Who Screamed Softly

The Dragon Who Walked Softly

The Dragon Came Softly

And finally the title was there, effective because of its slightly altered word order and its contrasts:

Soft Come the Dragons

After an hour of word games, I had hit upon a set of words that broke open that inner storeroom and set my mind to racing. In another few minutes, I had an entire plot in mind, concerning an alien world where flying dragons, as insubstantial as tissue paper, are inexplicably able to kill with their gaze. When I chose the proper characters and motivations, those too came naturally, with very little work. The resultant story received a modest amount of acclaim, brought me a couple of dozen fan letters in the years after its publication, became the title story of a paperback collection of some of my science fiction pieces, and has been published in Spain, France, and Japan. The muse had been reluctant that day, but I tickled her feet with a mental feather until she got to work!

For many reasons, you should keep a notebook full of ideas—mine is unorganized, chaotic but full of rich little bits written in at random—titles, scraps of dialogue and character sketches, so that you may return to these at a later date to get a sluggish imagination going again. But if you use the playing-with-exotic-titles game to get story ideas, you'll find a notebook *especially* valuable. That morning I spent coming up with "Soft Come the Dragons" has provided me with two additional stories. Months after that session, perusing my notes, I struck on the title "Dragon in the Land," which had not intrigued me at the time, and wrote and sold a story with the title as the jumping off point. A third title, "Dragon in Amber," inspired yet another story which I am presently completing. Three titles using the same key word is the limit for one writer, lest the similarities confuse his readers. Yet, none of these stories would have existed today had I not begun to tease my mind with this little word game.

Other stories and novels I've generated in this manner include *A Werewolf Among Us*, *Dark of the Woods*, *Island of Shadows*, *Cold Terror*, "To Behold the Sun."

"The Temple of Sorrow," and "The Terrible Weapon."

Science fiction and fantasy, because of their predilection for unusual titles, are the best genres on which to work this word game, though it is applicable to any category and has worked well, for me, with Gothics and suspense novels.

METHOD TWO: PLAYING WITH THE NARRATIVE HOOK

This game is similar to the first, though you begin with a narrative hook (a sentence that will grab the reader's attention), not a title. You sit at the typewriter and, without a great deal of cerebral exercise, type an intriguing opening sentence or paragraph. It is not necessary to know where the story will go. The idea is to present yourself with interesting and challenging beginnings out of which, when your free associations begin to jell, you will be able to construct a completed work. Write one new beginning after another, no matter how wild they seem, how impossible the development of a reasonable piece of fiction may appear to be from them. Shortly, you will find yourself so interested in one of these hastily jotted openings that you won't rest until you've carried on with it.

The first piece I generated in this fashion was a novelette titled "Where the Beast Runs." After its magazine publication, I incorporated it as the middle section of a novel, *Fear That Man*. It begins:

Long ago, shortly after my mother's blood was sluiced from the streets of Changeover and her body burned upon a pyre outside of town, I suffered what the psychologists call a trauma. That seems like a very inadequate word to me.

The bizarre circumstances of that off-the-top-of-the-head opening spurred my imagination into working up a story to explain them.

In a short story, "Shambolain," I introduced several characters that caught my fancy—just by the nature of their names—and continued to write what I feel is one of my two or three best short stories:

Four days before Christmas, I had my first of two troubles with the Creep and Delia grew ill and Shambolain arrived—and nothing was ever quite the same after that.

As an extension of this muse-kicker, you sit at the typewriter and work up paragraph after paragraph of character descriptions, until one of them interests you enough to build a story around him. This happened to me with the short story "A Third Hand," which I eventually expanded into the novel *Starblood*:

Timothy was not human. Not wholly. If one included arms and legs in a definition of the human body, then Timothy did not pass the criteria necessary for admission to the club. If one counted two eyes in that definition, Timothy was also ruled out, for he had but one eye, after all, and even that was placed in an unusual position: somewhat closer to his left ear than a human eye should be and definitely an inch lower in his overlarge skull than was the norm. Then there was his nose. It totally lacked cartilage. The only evidence of its presence was two holes, the ragged nostrils, punctuating the relative center of his bony, misshapen head.

There was his skin: waxy yellow like some artificial fruit and coarse with large, irregular pores that showed like dark pinpricks bottomed with dried blood. There were his ears: very flat against his head and somewhat pointed like the ears of a wolf. There were other things that would show up on a closer, more intimate examination, things like his hair (which was of an altogether different texture than any racial variant among the normal human strains), his nipples (which were ever so slightly concave instead of convex), and his genitals (which were male, but which were contained in a pouch just below his navel and not between his truncated limbs). There was only one way in which Timothy was remotely human, and that was his brain. But even here, he was not entirely normal, for his IQ was slightly above 250.

How did Timothy become as he is shown? What problems would such a freak have? What would his outlook on the world be? What kind of adventure might he have about which to base a story? I ended up writing "A Third Hand" to satisfy my own curiosity as much as to entertain a reader.

Of course, most of your ideas will not be generated in any of the ways I've described, but will float unbidden from your subconscious. Only a team of psychiatrists could ever deduce what all contributed to these "spontaneous" ideas. Still, you can help these stories surface if you read, read, read. With every novel you read, thousands of facts, characters, and plot twists are stored in your subconscious, constantly interacting below the level of awareness. When they jell and rise, they are usually in an original arrangement that bears no resemblance to the books that inspired them. Also, you will often find a concept in another writer's work which intrigues you, something he tossed away in a line or paragraph but which can become the whole center of your own novel. If you develop this idea into a story that does not resemble his, you are not guilty of plagiarism, but of literary feedback which is a source of story ideas for all writers.

If you write science fiction, most of your reading—but by no means all of it—should be in that field. Other science fiction writers are most likely the artists who will spark your own flights of fancy—though you may well generate science fiction story ideas from mystery novels, too. The science fiction writer should also read the popular science magazines—*Science Digest*, *Popular Science*, and others—to keep apace with various advancements which might be incorporated into a story. A Western writer will benefit from reading histories of the old West in which he may discover an historical incident that will spark an entire story idea in him. Full-time freelancers will have more leisure for reading than will those holding jobs during the day and writing nights and weekends, but both the full- and the part-time writer cannot afford to ignore what else is being published.

Because the second person viewpoint (an example would be: "You open the door and walk into the room, and you see the corpse at once. You are shocked, and you wonder if you should run. You can't be sure if the murderer has left, yet

you have a duty to find out what has happened") is too affected to be suitable in any but the most special cases, the genre writer has four possible viewpoints from which to tell a story: the omniscient, modified omniscient, third person limited, and the first person.

OMNISCIENT AND MODIFIED OMNISCIENT VIEWPOINTS

An omniscient viewpoint is one from which the author may look in on any of his characters, switching from hero to heroine to villain to any of the minor characters and back to the hero again. Free to view the unfolding events from many vantage points, the writer can develop several plot threads, building suspense by letting the reader see how all the pieces will come together while the characters are kept ignorant of the true situation: when the reader knows something the characters don't, this is called "dramatic irony," and it can be quite effective. Furthermore, by spending some time in third person with every character in the book, the writer is better able to create believable people all down the line than if he must use only the eyes and mind of the hero to present the rest of the story people.

In the late 1800's, the pure omniscient viewpoint was most popular with writers. In this, the author was a God who halted the action to comment on his story people, and he often addressed these comments to his reader, like this:

Robert stepped away from the overturned coach, brushed off his britches and looked up the long road toward the mansion that rested at the top of the hill. It would be a long walk in the dark, but he was determined to make it. Foolish man! You suspect nothing, anticipate only joy. But ahead, for you, lies more evil than you ever expect to encounter. Pity him, gentle reader, for the unutterable horrors he must soon face, and pray that his moral fiber and his long-held convictions will see him through these tribulations.

Ninety-nine percent of the novelists who used the pure omniscient viewpoint have passed into total obscurity: their work is now unreadable. Of the few whose talent was strong enough to permit such indulgences, nearly all have their work edited or abridged in modern editions to eliminate the worst of these stylistic ineptitudes. A modern category fiction writer must never permit himself the pure omniscient viewpoint, must never obstruct the plot with asides to the reader or with small sermons. First of all, such asides often give away events or at least the outline of events to come, thereby destroying the reader's suspension of disbelief. (If he *knows* the story is carefully planned out, he cannot kid himself that all of this is unfolding before his eyes.) Second, such pauses in the narrative flow tend to *tell* the reader what he should be *shown* through dramatic action.

Many new genre writers use the pure omniscient viewpoint without being aware of it, shaping it a bit to fit modern tastes but making the same basic mistake as all those long-forgotten novelists. They may begin a piece like this:

Leonard turned the car around and drove back toward the house, sorry that he had yelled at Ellen that way. He was going to have to apologize; otherwise, he would be awake all night with the knowledge of what a fool he'd been. As it turned out, he would have been far better off had he gone to a motel as planned and stayed awake until the small hours. He couldn't know that then, however.

This foreshadowing is less irritating than the long-winded omniscient commentary, but as undesirable. If you want to create a sense of impending doom, you must do it in mood words and suspenseful events, not with coy hints to the reader.

The modified omniscient viewpoint differs from the pure omniscient because it never stops to sermonize or comment directly to the reader. The author must show, not tell. The only similarity between the two voices is that the author may tell the story from many different character viewpoints, which is advantageous.

THIRD PERSON LIMITED VIEWPOINT

The third person limited viewpoint differs from the omniscient viewpoints, because the writer stays with the hero, showing the reader only what transpires around the hero, describing other characters mostly through the hero's perceptions of them. The advantages here lie in the ease with which the lead can be made sympathetic. If the author does not have to jump from character to character, he has time to make the hero vivid, and he will more likely snare the reader than if he treats all the characters equally; the reader will know at once where his sympathies should lie and can quickly identify the hero. For example, in the average 60,000-word suspense novel, with a 4,000-word first chapter, it is far easier to develop a likable, single lead than to attempt to sympathetically describe four or five different characters in the same space. And with your attention focused primarily on the one hero, that character can be even more well rounded and strengthened in subsequent chapters.

FIRST PERSON LIMITED VIEWPOINT

When you employ the first person narrative voice, in which the hero tells his own story, you strengthen further the advantages of concentrating on a single lead character. If your lead is fresh, untyped, and individual, he can best be presented by letting him color the story events with his own judgments. The serious drawback to first person narration is the awkwardness with which the hero must speak of himself. Writing in third person, you can be objective; but if he is telling about himself, he cannot dwell too much on his own appearance or thoughts, lest he appear unsympathetic and egomaniacal.

The new writer should stick with the third person limited viewpoint until he has sold a number of pieces, if only because three-quarters of all the novels sold and published are told in that voice.

In conversation, I am an incurable anecdote-teller, no matter what the subject, and I like to think I tell them amusingly. However, as I reach the middle of a recollection, I often interrupt the *real* story while I explain the background of a side issue.

"Get on with it!" my wife shouts. "You wouldn't *write* the story with all these interruptions in it!"

She's correct.

But many writers *do* write it that way, halting the narrative flow to drop in huge chunks of previous history which are intended to help explain the developments prior to the beginning of the story, so the reader can see how these characters got into the mess they're now trying to get out of. Called *flashbacks*, these explanations are so often used improperly that many editors and writers shun them altogether. If a story is begun at its real beginning, the writer should not have to use many flashbacks.

At times, though, a flashback can add vital character information or help clear up a plot point. When such an occasion arises, the best and only rule for flashback use is to keep it short, never more than a small paragraph, and to the point.

Here's an example of an overextended flashback in the opening pages of a Western novel:

John Masters stood on the front porch of the post office, the newspaper held tight as a drum skin between his hands, and read how Kaplo, in the company of three other convicted murderers, had escaped from Yuma Prison. When he was finished, he knew he would have to make preparations for Kaplo. The young killer would show up here, soon, anxious for revenge. Masters remembered how it had been in court, four years ago, when he had testified against Kaplo. As county sheriff, Masters had seen each of the kid's victims shortly after the bodies were found—always young women, always molested first and brutally slain immediately after. Masters had headed the investigation, had found the traces Kaplo left behind, had set the kid running, had lost two of ten good deputies in the chase, and had captured Kaplo himself after four days of hard riding. In court, when he said that Kaplo was insane and recommended the death penalty, the kid had stood up, screaming incoherently and had, when finally put forcefully back in his seat, threatened revenge should he ever escape Yuma where he was sentenced to life at hard labor and denied visiting privileges for the entire length of his imprisonment. Now, Kaplo was coming to fulfill his promise.

Properly written, containing all the vital facts, that same flashback would read like this:

John Masters stood on the front porch of the post office, the newspaper held tight as a drum skin between his hands, and read how Kaplo, in the company of three other convicted murderers, had escaped from Yuma Prison. When he finished, he knew he must prepare to face Kaplo. The young killer would show up here soon, anxious for revenge. Four years ago, Masters had tracked him down, losing two good deputies in the process, and arrested him for the brutal sex slayings of three county women. In court, when he had called Kaplo a madman and recommended incarceration in an asylum rather than the death penalty, the kid had flared, angry, and promised revenge. Now he was coming to fulfill his promise.

Almost a hundred words shorter, the paragraph still contains all the important data, with less of an interruption in the narrative.

When writing a flashback, avoid the use of the word "had" except to clearly set the scene as past event. For example, the following flashback contains too many "had" reminders:

Bill had gone to the garage where he had started the car and had driven away from the house. He had had enough money in his wallet to buy a good dinner, and he had drunk what remained, had become, quite honestly, soused to the gills.

Properly written, this flashback should be:

Bill had gone to the garage, started the car and driven away from the house. He had enough money in his wallet to buy a good dinner, and he had drunk what remained until he was, quite honestly, soused to the gills.

Finally, avoid using the observer frame for your story, in which the first person narrator prefaces and ends the story with statements that this was the way he saw it all happen. This technique, made popular by Conan Doyle in his Sherlock Holmes stories, renders the plot all past event, one long flashback, and it robs the story of its immediacy.

Your style will evolve naturally as you continue to write, and you should not make much of a conscious effort to develop it. Of course, every writer should strive to create clear and dramatic prose, but if you are trying to write *beautiful*

prose full of catchy similes and metaphors and other figures of speech, you have reached a point where you should stop and reconsider what you are doing. Whether or not you recognize it, you have your own voice already, one the reader will identify as yours, and you have only to let it grow of its own accord. If you make a conscious effort to form an individual style, you will more often end by imitating the work of writers whom you admire. Unconscious imitation, but imitation nonetheless.

In recent years, a number of young science fiction writers have striven to gain the praise of the *literati*, because critics have long ignored category fiction in general and science fiction in particular. These young Turks became concerned about writing styles, experimented, broadened science fiction's horizons, and generated much genuine excitement within the form. A few, disappointed that the literary world repaid this enthusiasm with only a smile and a nod, decided the mainstream critics had not accepted the field because it was still not good enough. They never wondered if the fault might lie in the perceptions, breadth of vision, and prejudices of the critics—and not in an innate failure of science fiction itself. As a result, they became even more conscious of style, more picky about word choices; rewriting and revising their work endlessly. A few of them worried themselves into writing blocks that they may never get out of unless they understand what misconceptions of their own put them where they are today. One acquaintance of mine, a better than average science fiction novelist, became so determined to polish each word so well and to write "perfect" prose that his once-promising career has collapsed. After several popular books, he has gone nearly three years without finishing another and has earned editorial disapproval by failing to deliver books that were contracted for on outlines and sample chapters. The warning is clear: if you attempt to force your style, to consciously develop your voice, you are concentrating on only one facet of fiction and are losing the perspective and spontaneity that makes your work readable and saleable.

There is one rule of style that every writer can benefit from: say it as simply, as clearly, and as shortly as possible. Only two genres are hospitable to the baroque style of writing—fantasy and Gothic-romance; all other categories are better suited to crisp, lean prose.

For example, let's postulate a detective hero, Joe Black, and two punks who are beating him up. Here's how the scene might be overwritten:

Riccio and Goldone took turns delivering the punishment. Riccio was carrying a pebble-filled kosh, and he slammed it hard against Black's skull, driving the detective to his knees. Lights sprang up behind Black's eyes, pretty lights dancing around and around... He didn't have an opportunity to appreciate them, because Goldone stepped in front of him, grabbed his head and brought a knee up hard, under his chin. Black croaked and passed out.

When he came to, he tasted blood, but forgot about that when Goldone goaded him to his feet. Riccio, standing behind him, brought the kosh in several times, in hard, rapid strokes, placing it square on Black's kidneys. The detective's knees jellied, but he somehow managed to stay on his feet. Riccio pinned his arms, then, while Goldone, grinning, came forward and methodically pistol whipped the detective's face. Black felt his lips split and dribble blood. His cheeks were gashed by the pistol barrel. Sweat and blood ran down into his eyes and blurred his vision...

This kind of thing can go on and on. And, if used only once or twice in a novel, can be very effective. The shorter, more direct, less melodramatic version will, however, be more often suitable:

Using fists, a pebble-filled kosh and a pistol barrel, Riccio and Goldone gave Joe Black the worst beating of his life. They drove him to his knees, urged him back onto his feet, and slammed him down again. Over and over. Relentlessly. They broke his teeth, split his lips and tore open his face. He was glad when he finally pitched forward, unconscious. They might continue to kick and hit him, but he wouldn't feel it—until he woke.

That's less than half as long as the first version but still adequately describes the action. Unless the scene in question is the *climactic* scene which should be milked for all its potential suspense, this sparser prose style is always the better of the two.

When describing a character's state of mind or reaction to story events, understatement is more effective than wordy scenes. For example, when showing a nervous character, a new writer may unnecessarily puff the description like this:

Joe Black wiped the perspiration from his forehead, wiped his trembling hand on his slacks. His car was parked a block down the street from Riccio's house, but there was still a chance he might be spotted in his stake out. He ran a finger around his collar, finally loosened the button at his throat and slipped off his tie. He kept clearing his throat when he didn't need to, and he had tapped out a dozen favorite tunes on the steering wheel before half an hour had passed.

A better way to project this image might be:

His car was parked a block down the street from Riccio's home, but there was still a chance he might be spotted in his stake out. While he waited for Riccio to show, Black methodically shredded several paper handkerchiefs. He did not even realize that he was making a mess.

One clue to a character's mental state, if properly developed, is more effective than a catalogue of his every movement.

When describing a new setting as it first appears in a novel—a new street, house, hotel, room, bit of landscape—decide whether it warrants a lengthy description. If it is the focus of only one or two minor scenes, it does not deserve the same

detailing as does the place where the climax and other important plot developments transpire. If, for example, a motel room in Chapter Three needs only a short description, don't treat it like this:

The hotel room depressed Joe Black. It measured twelve by eight feet, and it was made even smaller by the weak yellow light and the small, dirty window in the far wall. The only furniture was a swaybacked bed dressed in yellowed sheets and a battered chest of drawers with a cigarette scarred surface. The paint was spotted and peeling and discolored by too many years, too much cigarette smoke and too many sorrows absorbed from the tenants. The floor was covered with cracked, gray linoleum and stained with dozens of brands of spilled whiskey.

More to the point and less of an interruption in the narrative flow is this version:

The hotel room depressed Joe Black. Small, shabby and poorly lighted, it was the sort of room to which a poor man brought a whore, where a junkie came to shoot up, or where a hopeless wino ended up when he went somewhere to drink himself to death.

In less than half the words used in the first version, we've created the same atmosphere of poverty and despair. Economy of language is the most important stylistic goal.

Erroneously, many new writers think fiction should be a mirror of reality. Actually, it should act as a sifter to *refine* reality until only the essence is before the reader. This is nowhere more evident than in fictional dialogue. In real life, conversation is often roundabout, filled with general commentary and polite rituals. In fiction, the characters must always get right to the point when they talk. For example, if one of your characters has been threatened by a psychotic killer and is sure his house is being watched at night, he would not approach a neighbor for confirmation of his fears in this natural but extended manner:

Jack Moffet hesitated, then knocked on the Halseys' front door.

In a moment, Bill Halsey answered the knock. "Why, Jack! How are you, you old sonofagun?"

"Fine, fine," Moffet said, though he wasn't fine at all.

"Come on in."

Jack followed Halsey into the quiet of the front hallway and then to the living room where Lena Halsey was sitting in an easy chair reading the evening paper.

"Look who's here, Lena," Bill said.

"Jack! We haven't seen you in a couple of weeks."

"Yes, I have been busy."

"Sit down," Bill said.

Jack took a seat.

"Can I get you coffee or anything?" Lena asked.

"No thanks," Jack said.

"It's past coffee time," Bill said chuckling. "How about a drink?"

"No, I—"

"It's no trouble," Bill said. "I'm going to make myself something, so you might as well join me."

"Scotch, then," Jack said. "On the rocks."

When they had their drinks, Bill said. "Now, what brings you over here after two weeks of being a hermit?"

"I have a problem," Jack said. "Maybe you can help me with it."

And so on. Though a real life conversation would run something like this, it is not adequate for fiction. You must trim and get to the point:

Jack Moffet hesitated, then knocked on the Halseys' front door.

In a moment, Bill Halsey answered the knock. "Jack! How are you? We haven't seen you in weeks."

"Actually," Moffet said, "I'm not too good, Bill."

"Oh?" Halsey said, ushering him into the livingroom. "What's the problem?"

Jack nodded to Lena, Bill's wife, and said, "I may sound like a paranoid, but I honestly believe someone is trying to kill me. I think they've been watching my house at night, waiting to build up their nerve."

That's more to the point. However, you can go overboard when compressing dialogue. Avoid something as hasty as this:

Jack Moffet hesitated, then knocked on the Halseys' front door. In a moment, Bill Halsey answered the knock. Before he could say anything, Moffet said, breathlessly, "Someone is trying to kill me, Bill. I need your help!"

Dialogue is essential to the rhythm of a story, and few novels are bought that contain less than twenty or thirty

percent dialogue. A book filled with heavy, narrative paragraphs is not as psychologically appealing to the browsing book buyer as one in which the narrative is broken regularly by sprightly stretches of short, conversational exchanges between characters.

However, a very long section of dialogue can become as boring as page after page of unrelieved narrative. Sometimes, in mystery and suspense novels when the hero must finally explain how a situation is to be resolved or is to identify the killer to the other characters, the writer must present a great deal of information as dramatically as possible. In order not to bore the reader with page-long soliloquies by the hero, you can interrupt the hero by having other characters challenge his facts, his conclusions, or pose other questions for him to answer. And, if the reader has already been shown the killer's identity and how the hero arrived at his conclusions, you will not want to repeat everything verbatim to enlighten the other characters. In a situation like this, you can employ indirect dialogue to sum up what has already been shown. For example:

Joe Black waited until they were all seated in the drawing room, then, succinctly, told them how Mrs. Housel had been murdered, who the killer was, and why the crime had been committed.

Direct dialogue is preferable in every case except these: (1) when one character must tell another of an event the reader has already seen, as in the example above, (2) when one character must explain to another character something which the reader does not have to hear in detail ["Joe Black told Lord Randolph how to load and use the pistol if he should need it"], and (3) when a long section of direct dialogue could be made more rhythmic and interesting by the use of a few lines of indirect dialogue, as in this example:

He got to his feet a moment before Tilly entered the room, and he smiled at her, weakly. He was surprised he could smile at all.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Yes, Tilly."

"What was that noise?"

"A shot." He had decided to hide nothing from her.

She was shocked. "A shot?"

"Yes." He pointed to the broken glass and said, "It came through the window."

"Are you hurt?"

"No, no," he said. "I dropped out of sight when I saw him standing there, just before he pulled the trigger."

"For heaven's sake, before *who* pulled the trigger?" she asked, her elfin face drawn up in a knot of tight lines.

"It was Richard," he said.

"Why would he want to kill you?"

As quickly as he could, he told her why, told her everything he had learned last night.

She sat down in the nearest chair. "It's hard to believe!"

"I found it hard to believe too, at first."

"If he means to kill you, he means to kill me as well."

He agreed.

The lines "As quickly as he could..." and "He agreed" are examples of indirect dialogue mixed with direct, to give a more varied tone.

Finally, don't go searching for synonyms to replace the word "said." These simple variants will suffice in almost every case: shouted, called, replied, asked, insisted. If more force is required, stick to common words like these: cried, screamed, howled, wailed. Avoid, at all costs, melodramatic substitutes of this nature: ejaculated, belched, conjectured, shrilled.

The title is the first thing (besides the cover illustration, which is not in the author's province anyway) to attract a genre book buyer's attention. It should be dramatic, colorful, and intriguing; it should generate in the reader a desire to know what kind of story it describes. A title should promise one of or any combination of four things: exotic events (a foreign background, fantasy plot, or glamorous profession), suspenseful action (a chase, a race against time), a violent incident (death, injury, rape), or sex. A title should usually be as short as possible, and the promise of one of those four elements should be carried in one key word and possibly one or two modifying words. For example:

Exotic events: *The Hong Kong Caper* or *The Boat to Singapore* suggest a foreign background; *The Gentle Unicorn*, *A Journey to Atlantis*, or *Ghost Story* suggest a fantasy plot; *Starlet*, *The Gossip Columnist*, or even *Airport* suggest a glamorous profession.

Suspenseful action: *The Running Man*, *Flight into Fear*, or *Smith's Escape* suggest a chase; *30 Seconds Over Tokyo*,

The Desperate Hours, *Last Chance*, or *The Ticking Clock* suggest a race against time.

A violent incident: *Deadly Edge*, *Anatomy of a Murder*, *One Body Too Many*, or *Killer's Choice* suggest death; *The Bleeding Man* or *Scars* suggest injury; *The Mishandled Girl* or *The Lady Killer* suggest rape.

Sex: *The Love Machine*, *The Ravishers*, *Nude with a Gun*, or *The Million-Dollar Babe* all suggest sex.

New writers generally make one of seven mistakes when choosing a title for their novel. Here are those mistakes, in an easy-to-refer-to list:

Dull titles. Remember that a title must have some action word that promises one of those four quantities already discussed. Titles like *The House*, *The Place by the Sea*, or *The Circus* don't especially whet the book buyer's appetite.

Cliché Titles. Do not use old sayings, famous quotations, or punch lines from well-known jokes or proverbs as titles. They will be so familiar that the book buyer will only yawn at them. Titles such as *Murder Will Out*, *Winner Takes All*, *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, and *The Tables Turn* will gain you no readers.

On the other hand, if you take your title from a poem, proverb, or quotation which is unknown or known but still fresh, you might have something interesting, like: *The Dead of Winter*, *The Clash of Distant Thunder*, *The Naked and the Dead*, or *Alas, Babylon*. Also, if you choose a well-known phrase and give it a clever twist, the resultant title may well intrigue a potential reader, as would be the case with each of these titles: *Do Your Christmas Killing Early*, *Murder is the Best Policy*, and *Slay ground* (which twists a single common word).

General titles. Titles that are too general are similar to those that are too dull, with one important difference—even a colorful word will make a bad title if it is too general, offering no distinct promise. For example, *Dragons*, *Warriors*, *The Sun*, and *Rat* would be too general to make good titles, while *Soft Come the Dragons*, *The Unborn Warriors*, *The Other Side of the Sun*, and *The Stainless Steel Rat* are all successful science fiction titles.

Incomprehensible titles. No reader will be attracted to a book bearing a title like *The Poisonous Colchicum* or *The Hyperborean Giant*, while they could be intrigued by *The Poisonous Herb* or *The Frozen Giant*. Every word in a title should be understandable at a glance.

Misleading titles. You wouldn't call a Western, set in a great fir forest where the sky is seldom seen, something like *The Starless Trail*, which sounds as much like a science fiction story as like a Western. An excellent suspense novel by Stephen Geller may have suffered in sales by having a title that promised sex more than suspense—*She Let Him Continue*. Readers seeking erotic fiction probably skimmed it in the store, discovered it wasn't for them, and dropped it. Suspense readers not interested in erotica would never have picked it up. Even though the title fit the story quite well, it was a bad choice. The title must promise exactly what the book delivers.

Revealing titles. If there is any mystery whatsoever in your plot, don't choose a title that gives away the killer's identity or the fate of your hero. *The Murderous Schoolmarm*, if the killer indeed is the schoolmarm in the end, is a foolish title choice. *My Brother's A Killer* would be a bad title for a mystery in which the brother was, indeed, the murderer. You know enough not to use the technique of foreshadowing to spoil suspense for your reader, and you should be equally aware of the disastrous effect of a give-away title.

Arty titles. *Your Huddled Masses Yearning to Be Free*, *The Meaning of the Archbishop's Death*, *The Implications of Troy's Kidnapping*, *Death Scares Me Not*, and other similar antiquities will never appeal to the modern reader.

Many writers are proud of the number of drafts they do on a novel. You'll hear them say things like, "I did four complete manuscripts before I had it polished exactly as I wanted it." Indeed, the writer who won't settle for anything but the right word, who wants his prose to ring true and to read easily, is to be admired. But the writer who rewrites the same story again and again until he has it down pat is usually not so much a careful artist as he is a sloppy one. If he had trained himself to write as clean and sound a first draft as he could, he would not have needed to go over all that material again and again.

When I sit down to begin a new novel, I type directly onto heavy bond paper, with carbon paper and second sheet attached. If a paragraph is not going well, I rip that set of papers out of the typewriter and begin the page again, but I never go on until that page is *finalized* and cleanly typed in finished copy.

I waste a lot of paper.

But I save a lot of time.

The danger of planning to do several drafts lies in the subconscious or unconscious attitude that, *If I don't get it right this time, it's okay; I can work it out in a later draft*. This encourages carelessness in your original word choices, phrasing, and plotting. The more things you write with this approach in mind, the sloppier you become until, finally, your first draft is so poorly done that no number of re-workings will make it click.

No financially successful, critically acclaimed writer I know has let himself get caught in the "fix it in a later draft" trap. Without fail, however, the hopeless amateur clings to this fallacious theory like a drowning man to the only rock in the lake.

Disregarding this tendency for the multiple-draft writer to get careless with his work, there are other reasons why you should learn to write good first drafts and eliminate revision wherever feasible. First of all, your emotional involvement with the work can be the intangible quality that makes it exciting and marketable. If you must rework the story several times, you will lose that sense of excitement and, more often than not, create a finished piece that reflects your own ultimate boredom. Unless you have a firm grip on the structure of your story, you may begin to change things, in a rewrite, that do not need to be changed at all; reworking a story, you may begin to doubt all of it and alter it without logical reason. And, of course, a great deal of revision takes time from your *new* work.

One familiar piece of advice given new writers is: "Put it aside for a couple of days or weeks and re-read it when you've cooled off." At all costs, ignore this advice. It is true that, in the clinical mood that sometimes follows the completion of a work, you can see prose faults and correct them. More often, however, you are only giving yourself time to start doubting the story. Often, when you approach it again, you're too critical, because you've lost the mood that generated it. When you've finished a piece, send it out straightaway and get to work on something new. You're a professional. You have all the confidence in the world.

Reams have been written about the transition, and most all of that has only tended to confuse new writers to no good end. The transition is easily written; any mistakes you may be making with it can be easily corrected.

The transition is the change from one scene to another in a dramatic narrative, moving your characters from one place to another or from one time to another. By stepping in on the end of this scene and the beginning of the next, we can see a *poorly done* transition:

"Are you going to just sit there like a stone?" Lou asked her, looming over her where she sat in the big easy chair.
She didn't answer him. She looked straight ahead, her eyes on the wall behind him, her lip trembling but her determination otherwise unbetrayed.
"I don't have to take this, and I'm not going to," he said, turning away from her. "I can always find someone else—someone who *will* talk to me."
Still, she sat, silent.
"Damn you," he snapped, crossing the small room, slamming the big oaken door behind him.
He went down the steps and out into the clear spring morning, walked two blocks down Elm Avenue to the bus stop, where he caught the 9:45 for town. He rode there without incident, brooding over the scene with Rita, got off at Market Street and went to his favorite bar on the square.
Max, the bartender, wasn't as moody as Rita had been. He was willing to talk. In fact, he had some interesting news. "Selma's been in here the last couple of days, Lou. She's been asking around about you."

The longest paragraph in the example is essentially all transition, getting Lou from one place to another. It stalls the story, because it adds nothing, and it should be pared down to the minimum. It should have been handled this way:

Still, she sat, silent.
"Damn you," he snapped, crossing the small room, slamming the big oaken door behind him.
Thirty minutes later, he was in his favorite bar on the square downtown. Max, the bartender, wasn't as moody as Rita had been. He was willing to talk...

As soon as one scene is over, you should lead your reader into the next, with no excess prose between them. The details of how the character got from here to there do absolutely nothing for the story except retard it.

One popular way of changing scenes is with the space break, a blank space on the page between the blocks of print, which indicates when one scene has ended and another begun in a different place or time from the first. To make the best use of this the writer may want to end the first scene with a lead-in for the opening of the second. For example:

Still, she sat, silent.
"Damn you," he snapped, crossing the small room to the big, oaken door. "I'm going down to the bar. If you won't speak to me, at least Max will!" He left, slamming the door behind.
Max put the beer down before him and, in that match-making tone of voice some bartenders culture, he said, "I've got some new for you. Selma has been in the last couple of days..."

Another transition of the same sort might run like this:

The voice on the phone said, "Have the ransom money at the museum by midnight tonight. Otherwise, your wife is dead."
Mike swallowed hard, wiped at his mouth and said, "I'll be there, midnight on the dot."
The museum was dark and deserted when he rounded the corner and walked towards the stone lions that flanked the steps.

As you can see, writing good scene transitions is really a simple matter; as I said, when discussing style, brevity is the best course.

The most successful writer, as I've said before, is the one who can sit down at his typewriter every working day and produce a certain number of words or finished pages, regardless of what he might prefer to do instead. If you can write ten pages a day, five days a week, you can complete ten solid novels in a year. I've done it; I've done even more than that, in fact. And I know of one man who, working for a literary agency during the day, commuted to the suburbs each evening and sat down and wrote ten pages, no matter what, on top of his regular job and commuter's blues!

However, many writers find that each day, in this sort of schedule, can begin with a small writer's block, a two- or three-hour thing, before the mind is nimble enough to create. There's a cure for the mini-block. When you sit down to start, each *day*, begin by retyping the last page or two that you finished the day before. Not rewriting, mind, just retyping. This little trick will put you back into the mood you were in when you were working steadily the day before, and it can eliminate that mini-block for almost anyone.

It also helps to keep your work area clean, uncluttered, and your resource notes or material easily at hand. I have read countless articles about how good it is to work at a cluttered desk, how the jumble of books and papers can give you a feeling of excitement and fertility. Bull. A writer is a professional, and he needs that sense of order that is so evident in other professions like medicine, law, and education. I think it's interesting that I've never read the cluttered-desk theory proposed by any truly *successful* author, and I know that you will find it easier to start each day if you're working in a pleasant, businesslike area.

Occasionally, of course, there are days when nothing works, when the clean work area and the retyping of yesterday's last page, and the brisk walk around the block do nothing to get the juices flowing. When this happens, it is best to take the day off, and perhaps the next day as well—if you keep in mind that the lost wordage will have to be made up in the days following your short vacation.

CHAPTER TEN Practicalities: Questions and Answers

1. *I want to be recognized as an artist, not just as a storyteller. When the category fiction writer must adhere to plot formulas, how can he create real art?* Plot is not the only element which makes fiction great. Characterization, motivational developments, theme, mood, background, and style are equally important in the creation of prose art. Fortunately, the basic genre plot skeleton is flexible enough to allow you artistic breathing room, while at the same time relieving you of doubts about the strength of your storyline; if you *know* it follows an accepted formula, you can cease worrying about it and spend more time on your other story elements. Actually, you have a greater opportunity to create genuine art than the mainstream writer.

But, what's wrong with being "just a storyteller"? Very few creative prose artists originally set out to write immortal work. They began as entertainers; their talent was innate, not cultured; their success as artists was because of, not in spite of, their storytelling abilities.

2. *I am a new writer without any sales. How many rejection slips must I accumulate before I start selling?* I garnered seventy-five rejection slips before my first sale, a number I believe to be about average. John Creasey, who has sold in excess of 500 novels, collected more than 500 rejection slips before his first sale. There is no magic limit beyond which you sell all you write. Nearly every category writer continues to receive occasional rejection slips even after he has become critically and financially successful. You must be unaffected by mounting rejections; you must continue to write in the face of them.

3. *I'm an established writer in one category. How long will it take me to make sales in a new one?* A few category writers find it impossible to switch from one genre to another, because their interest and talent lies solely with one kind of story or background. The majority, however, can break into a new genre within half a dozen tries—if they have *carefully studied the new field and fully understand it*.

4. *Should I begin writing short stories or novels?* A short story requires less commitment in terms of a writer's time and energy than does a novel and is the best literary form in which to practice writing fiction. However, there are two good reasons why a modern category writer should start out writing novels. First of all, not all the genres contain an active short story market. Only two or three magazines buy Gothic-romance stories. Two magazines purchase Western short stories; three purchase mystery and suspense regularly; a number of men's magazines publish erotic fiction, but pay erratically and—with a few exceptions—not very well. Only science fiction writers enjoy six specialty magazines and dozens of original story anthologies as markets for their shorter work. And even here, the pay is inferior to what writers can make from novels. Secondly, it is virtually impossible for a category author to build a reputation writing short stories. Three or four novels will make you better known to editors and readers alike than will a hundred short stories.

This is not to say you should avoid short stories altogether. Some ideas are best developed in 5,000 words instead of 60,000 words. But the time you give to writing short pieces should be in proportion to the part of the current market they represent.

5. *What kind of advance against royalties can I expect for the average category novel?* The new writer will receive from \$1,500 to \$2,000, unless he is writing Westerns, in which case the advances are always somewhat lower. As his reputation increases, he can work as high as regular \$4,000 advances and even, in some cases, substantially higher. Advances to the author remain rather static for long periods of time, and they do not adjust with the cost of living or reflect increased profits on the part of the publishers.

6. *If I am established in one genre, will my advances in another category go up to reflect this success elsewhere?* Maybe and maybe not. More than likely, you will employ at least one new pseudonym in every category you try. In that case, the publisher cannot take advantage of your established name and reputation on the book cover and will pay you just as he would a new writer, until your pseudonym has built its own reputation.

7. *I am more concerned about art than money. Must I write for money?* If you feel that money should not concern the creative artist, stop right here, go back and pick up life in your fantasy world. Money is important to the serious artist, for three excellent reasons. First of all, in the early years of your career, money may be the only way you have of telling if your work is being accepted or not. New writers seldom get reviewed and do not generate large amounts of fan mail. Nice advance checks and royalty payments are valuable indications of your popularity among readers (the only ones who count, when all is said and done), and they give you the morale necessary to continue in what must be one of the loneliest occupations a man can choose. Second, the freedom that a healthy, regular income affords you is perhaps the most important factor bearing on your productivity. With the bills all paid and savings stored up against a run of bad luck, you can devote yourself full time to your craft and dispense with the agony of finding some way to meet the latest bill when you could be writing. Finally, financial success is important because it is a good credential to bring before a publisher. If your work generates large sales and earns the top dollar in your field, your publisher is far more likely to give you free rein with what you do than he would the novelist whose works barely pay the printing costs.

Must you write for money? No. But neither should you write in ignorance of what it can mean to the quantity and quality of your creative work.

8. *How long must I work to gain financial security?* You may never gain it. If you can produce only one or two category novels a year—especially science fiction, Gothics, mysteries, and fantasies—you will never know a time when the wolves are not a stone's throw from the door—and you without a stone to throw. Unless, of course, you hit the best-seller lists or have a book made into an enormously popular movie, both of which are more easily dreamed than realized. Even if you are prolific enough to produce and sell eight or ten novels a year, your income may hold steady at \$20,000 a year, which is comfortable but by no means enough to classify you as *nouveau riche*.

On the other hand, with a top-flight agent (and there are very few of them), and a willingness to try other categories, to go where the money is the best and the audience the largest, you can achieve an income of \$50,000 a year and up with half a dozen novels per annum. The uncertainty and the constant possibility of extravagant success are what make this profession so exciting. The nine-to-five office worker knows he will never starve—but he also knows he will never make a fortune. The full-time freelance writer can always starve—but he may also feast. The second possibility makes life interesting.

When you begin to make more money than you are used to having, don't fall into the trap of beginning to live more lavishly, as so many writers do. Your first financial goal, as a freelancer, should not be a new car or wardrobe, but the establishment of a savings account at least sufficient to support you, in comfort, for an entire year in the event your markets dry up or you become seriously ill. I say support you "in comfort," because you may develop a writing block, out of emotional depression, if you are suddenly forced to lower your standard of living and deny yourself pleasures you've grown accustomed to. Once the savings account is set up, invest an equal amount in stocks as yet another failsafe source of funds before you begin to live at or beyond your means. A writer must learn to budget year by year, not week by week.

9. *If I am prolific, won't I make extra money from the sale of foreign rights to my books?* The category fiction writer rarely makes foreign sales in his first three years, barring a best-seller or a much-talked-about movie purchase. If you are agentless, you will not have foreign contacts at all. Even with an agent, you may amass a large body of work before you begin to receive regular checks for foreign rights, because some agents are less able to make foreign sales than others.

Realize, too, that book advances in other countries average only one fourth or one half of what the American publisher paid and are subject to a 20% agent's commission—as opposed to the standard 10% commission on domestic sales—as well as a possible split with the original U.S. publisher. A writer can make substantial money from foreign sales only if his books make the best-seller lists and thereby demand higher foreign advances—or if he is so prolific that all those tiny checks are multiplied by fifteen or twenty books a year.

10. *What about other subsidiary rights—paperback sale of a hardcover edition, films, serialization?* Most novels printed in hardcovers are picked up for paperback reprint, though a substantial minority do go without this reward. Paperback houses pay the original publisher as little as \$2,000 and as much as \$1,000,000 or even more for best-sellers or potential best-sellers; this paperback money, then, is split (usually fifty-fifty) between the author and the hardcover publisher. This can mean as little as an additional \$1,000 for the author, or as much as \$50,000 for the author in the case of *A Report from Group 17* by Robert C. O'Brien, and better than \$200,000 for someone like Mario Puzo and a book like *The Godfather*.

For every novel purchased for motion picture production, hundreds go unnoticed by Hollywood. A movie sale is either a stroke of luck which no sane author would waste time thinking about, or the work of a shrewd agent and, again, beyond the author's province. Motion picture sales can run from as little as \$10,000—all of it, aside from the agent's fee, being the author's money—to as much as the property can command. While producers are reluctant to commit that kind of cash, they are often willing to *option* a novel—usually at ten, fifteen or twenty percent of the purchase price. Most authors with ten books behind them have benefited from one or more options never picked up and carried to a final purchase. Many authors consider options "found money" and keep an agent chiefly for the bits and pieces of income, like this, which he brings them.

The era of the large circulation, general audience magazine is gone and, with it, most of the markets for serialization of a novel. *Playboy* and several women's magazines still pay big money for serial rights but reject two hundred titles for every one they run. The only genre magazines that regularly carry serials are in the science fiction field and pay two or three cents a word for the privilege of publishing them. That's not a fortune, but still the competition is rugged.

Book club rights, if sold, more often bring \$1,000 to \$3,000 for the author rather than the five- and six-figure sales reported by Book-of-the-Month Club and the Literary Guild. Like the possibility of the movie sale, the sale of book club rights to a major company at a fat advance is something to be kept in the back of the mind, shelved next to "miracles" where it cannot obsess the writer and cause him to waste time in useless daydreaming.

11. *If I manage to sell hardcover rights instead of going straight to the paperback original market, what kind of royalties can I expect the hardcover to earn?* Hardback sales are not what they once were, and most hardback category novels are supported by libraries. Few books get a second printing, and the average novel earns between \$2,000 and \$6,000 in hardback royalties, from which you must deduct the amount of your original advance.

The standard hardback advance schedule makes provision for a 10% royalty on the first 5,000 copies, 12½% on the second 5,000 copies, and 15% on everything thereafter.

12. *Would I help the sales of my hardcover novel if I spent time promoting it?* Undoubtedly, you would, if you have any knack for being interviewed by newspaper, radio, and television reporters. However, unless your book has sure best-seller potential, you will not be reimbursed by your publisher for your travel expenses on behalf of the novel. If the novel has best-seller potential, special response from readers and critics prior to publication, the publisher may provide an advertising budget and may help you promote the work. For the large majority of new novels, however, not a cent is dealt out for promotion purposes.

The smart writer will consent to newspaper or other interviews whenever he is asked, will promote his book whenever he can, so long as most of his time is still spent at the keyboard creating *new* work. Promotion of his latest piece should not become—unless he's an Arthur Hailey who writes only a book every three years or so—a full-time or even a substantial part-time job, for it seriously saps the strength.

13. *So far, it sounds as if a genre writer must be prolific to be successful and that he must spend quite a bit of time at the typewriter. Exactly what kind of schedule should the freelance genre writer maintain?* When I speak before a group of potential novelists and short story writers, or when a new writer solicits my advice, I always say the most important thing a writer must cultivate is discipline. He must learn to sit at the typewriter a certain number of hours every day, and he must teach himself to complete a minimum number of pages in each sitting. He cannot afford the conceit so often expressed by the amateur: "I can only write when the muse is with me." The professional author can write whenever he wants to. He can learn to stimulate a tired imagination and kick himself into action when he would rather read or sunbathe or watch television.

I used to work ten to twelve hours a day, seven days a week, with an occasional day off for some folly or other. Now, I work eight hours a day, five or six days a week, which is the best schedule for the professional writer to maintain. Writing is your job; it puts the bread on your table. Your fringe benefits are numerous—no bosses, no white shirt and starched collar, late to bed and late to rise, unlimited earnings potential, an outlet for the ego—but you must earn them through hard work. If your goal is eight pages of finished script a day and you only produce two pages on Monday, you had better produce fourteen on Tuesday; if you let yourself slide one day your entire schedule will collapse.

Heinie Faust (under the pseudonym Max Brand) produced hundreds of Westerns in his career and sold millions of

copies of his work, by writing only two hours a day. His secret was to write two hours *every* day, no matter what, and to produce fourteen pages in those two hours. Few writers have matched his prolific pace.

Of course, the part-time writer cannot keep a schedule of this sort in addition to his regular job and family duties. But, just as the full-time professional, he should learn to force his imagination into gear without the aid of the "muse." He should set aside one or more days of each weekend for uninterrupted work. If possible, he should write for an hour or two every evening. If he truly cares about a career as a novelist, he will not begrudge the hours spent working that could have been passed in relaxation, games, or sport.

The successful freelancer, the one whose books occasionally sell to the movies and who receives solid paperback advances, can afford to, and should, take a few weeks off between each project, time to recharge the creative batteries. But the new writer, with a name to build, needs to work as much as he can stand to work.

14. *But what if I sit at the typewriter day after day and only produce a few paragraphs?* Don't give up and don't satisfy yourself with so little. Grit your teeth when you find your self stuck or daydreaming, and go on—put a verb after a noun, a conjunction after that, another verb, a phrase, and so on until you are working with words as if they were tangible blocks. What you create this way may be crude, but you can keep retyping the page until it's right, then go on. The dogged drive you display will eventually erase the clumsiness and give you a genuine ease with the words.

15. *How do I overcome a complete writer's block, when I can't write even one word?* A writer's block is most often caused by one of five things: overwork, boredom, self-doubt, financial worries, or emotional problems between the writer and those close to him. If overwork is the cause, stop writing for a couple of days or weeks; when you're ready to start again, you'll know, because the typewriter will no longer appear to be a formidable opponent, but a delightful toy. If boredom with the piece in progress has slowed you to a standstill, put it aside and begin something new, no matter how close to the end of the piece you may be; chances are, if it bores you, it will bore editors and readers also. The simplest way to cure a case of self-doubt is to shame yourself without restraint for your lack of confidence and start something new which may, by its freshness, restore your confidence. Don't worry if you go through a dozen ideas before you hit something that gets you going again. Financial worries must be solved before you can write again, even if that means you—the full-time freelancer—must take a job, temporarily, to keep above water, or you—the part-time writer—must take a part-time job and temporarily forsake writing until your financial position is less chaotic. If emotional entanglements occupy your mind and keep you from producing, sit down with your boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife, and talk out the things that are bothering you. Not only will such sessions improve your love life, they will improve your writing as well.

No writer's block need be more than a few days long if he is determined to break it.

16. *How long is the average category novel?* Paperback and hardcover minimums are usually 55,000 or 60,000 words, though Westerns average ten percent below this. Generally speaking, editors are more pleased with a 60,000-word minimum, but every book should be as long as it needs to be and no longer: never pad a short book just to get it up to the minimum word levels. On the other hand, realize that you will have great difficulty marketing a novel that's 40,000 words long. Usually, with a bit of thought, you can find places where the plot could be developed more dramatically, at greater length. In other words, to lengthen a short novel, add incidents, don't merely stretch those incidents already done.

In the Big Sexy Novel, minimum word lengths may be, depending on the publisher, considerably longer than 60,000 words: as much as 100,000 and 150,000. Likewise, some Gothic publishers prefer minimum 75,000-word Gothics.

17. *I'm a new writer, as yet unpublished. Should I choose one genre and work at it until I begin selling, or should I employ a scattergun technique and try writing for several categories?* Choose one category—usually that you most enjoy reading—and stick with it until you've built a reputation in it. You will learn the fundamentals of genre fiction and develop your style more easily if you write the same type of fiction again and again.

18. *I'm an established writer in one genre. I want to branch out. Should I choose a single area and concentrate on it, or is it all right for me, the pro, to use the scattergun technique?* Develop your skills in one category at a time. If you're a successful suspense writer, you can't necessarily dash off a Western and Gothic and sell them first time around. Each form requires a subtly different touch which you will need time to learn.

19. *Should I mail my manuscripts First or Fourth Class?* Because Fourth Class is cheaper, most instruction books recommend the manuscript rate. I disagree. For two years, I mailed all my scripts Fourth Class. I had to retype six short stories because the post office had mangled them. Two novel manuscripts were lost, forcing me to retype. One manuscript box, returned to me marked "Fourth Class—Special Handling" was broken at all four corners; three of the four lengths of twine that bound it were broken and twisted around the single remaining strand; most of the paper wrapper was torn away, with only the address remaining; the bottom of the box was decorated by a large, muddy footprint. That certainly *was* Special Handling! In the three years I've used First Class mail, I've never had a script lost or mangled beyond repair. The extra cost seems, to me, well worth the work and worry saved.

20. *Can I copy a manuscript and submit it to several publishers at the same time, to save myself the extra waiting?* No. Only the most respected authors in each field can get away with multiple submission, and even they irritate editors by the practice. An editor likes to feel that you value his opinion and especially desire to make a sale to his list; he cannot maintain the illusion of a personal author-editor relationship if he knows other editors have received copies of the same work simultaneously with your submission to him. Furthermore, he doesn't want to be a buyer at an auction who must outbid other parties to obtain the piece, especially not when he is bidding for the work of an unknown or minimally established author. Multiple submissions of novels should be made only by your agent and only when he feels you've created a property with enormous financial potential.

21. *It seems to me that writers could save time by collaborating on novels. Do you recommend collaboration?* No. The only reason for collaborating is to create a better story than either writer could do alone. Such occasions are rare. Never collaborate to save time on a story, for the collaboration-fraught with arguments, rewrites, plot discussions, and mutual criticism—always takes longer than you would have needed to do the work alone. Remember, too, that the money will be split fifty-fifty and that, in the end, your work-reward ration will be substantially less than you've come to expect.

Writing is such a personal craft that collaboration can make enemies of friends, and turn a potentially fine story into a boring pastiche of styles, moods, and plot concepts.

22. *Should I use a pen name?* If your real name is completely without intrigue or musicality, you might want to employ a pen name from the start. No one can say, for certain, whether a phonetically pleasing by-line sells more books than an irritating by-line, but most writers tend to *feel* that it does. We can more easily visualize a reader going to a bookstore to pick up the latest Ross MacDonald mystery than to purchase Kenneth Millar's new thriller. (Mr. Millar has had great success with his pen name.) Some authors are born with names that cry to be splashed on book covers: Isaac Asimov, John D. MacDonald, James Gunn, Brian Garfield. Others are not so lucky. Dean R. Koontz is basically an unpleasant, guttural name, but I have stuck with it, for the most part. And after twenty books under that name, I find that editors prefer to use it than some melodic pseudonym. In short, the work between the covers is more important than the name on the outside.

Once you are established, use your own name for your most serious books whether they are inside or outside the category you're most known for, and keep your pen names for your lighter things. I learned this lesson a bit late, after publishing a serious novel, *Chase*, under a pen name and then wishing my own by-line were on it.

If you are publishing six or seven original paperbacks a year, you are not taxing the market for work under your own name. If you're publishing that many hardcover titles a year, you should use a pen name for some of them. Remember that hardbacks are often reprinted in paper, with the result that six hardcover books a year eventually means twelve separate editions a year. There is no sense competing with yourself once you've established the value of your name.

Many prolific writers, especially in the suspense and mystery fields, employ at least one pseudonym in addition to their real names, and they often make no particular secret of their many publishing identities. Donald E. Westlake is also Richard Stark and Tucker Coe. John Dickson Carr is also Carter Dickson, and Robert L. Fish is also Robert L. Pike.

23. *Should I employ a typing service for preparation of my final manuscript?* A manuscript should be as clean and flawless as you can make it, but it should not necessarily be prepared by a professional typist just because your own keyboard expertise is slight or even laughable. If you do several drafts and heavy blue penciling (which I have expressly advised against), a typist may be of value to you. However, most professional writers find that they make last minute changes in phrasing even as they prepare the submission script. You forfeit this last polish if you use a manuscript typist. (See Chapter Nine for a discussion of manuscript revision.)

24. *If I type the script myself, should I keep carbons?* Some publishers now require two copies of an author's manuscript when they purchase it. Occasionally, the original copy will be lost or destroyed, and the writer must supply his publisher or his agent with a good carbon to take its place. You should, therefore, keep two carbon copies, one of them as readable and unmarked as the original bond paper script. Personally, I dislike wasting the time it takes to correct typos on a carbon copy. Therefore, I make only one, which is smeared and good only for my own files—and I have the original script photocopied. Though the cost for this service averages \$25.00 a novel, I feel the time saved is more than equal to the cost.

25. *Should I subscribe to a clipping service to receive reviews of my novels?* Most clipping services charge a minimal subscription fee and then bill you by the item—usually \$.50 or \$1.00 for each clipping they find—until you tell them to stop. Since original paperback novels are rarely reviewed in the major newspapers and magazines, the service is more valuable to the regular hardcover novelist. You can benefit by the feedback a clipping service can supply, if you understand beforehand that the bad as well as the favorable reviews will be sent you. The greatest danger is that one of your books will suddenly catch on, and the avalanche of clippings will threaten to wipe out your life's savings. I know of one writer who published a dozen novels with only moderate success, but unexpectedly hit the best-seller lists with his

thirteenth. In all the excitement, he forgot about his clipping service. Two months later, he received a shipment of forty cardboard cartons full of clippings and a bill for slightly more than \$5,000! This could have been avoided had he established with the service a limit that he would buy, at the start.

26. *If a reviewer really slams my book, should I respond?* Absolutely not. If he personally slanders you, a response may be necessary. Otherwise, shut up and get back to writing stories, not letters. As a published writer, you open yourself to negative as well as positive, inept as well as perceptive reviews. More often than not, reviewers will miss the entire point of a book or so baldly misrepresent it to their readers that it is barely recognizable as the novel you wrote. If you respond, you irritate the reviewer, who will be less likely to give your next book a fair review, and you appear, in your response, to be either pedantic or egomaniacal. Temper your anger with good reviews and the amused tolerance for reviewers that most professional writers cultivate. You will be less stung by negative reviews when you discover that even the positive reviews often miss the point, misrepresent the novel, and recommend it for all the wrong reasons. Reviewers do not read a book solely for enjoyment, as most of your audience does, and this is exactly what is wrong with the entire concept of professional book evaluation.

Of course, not all reviews are off base. Most writers, in private, are truthful enough with themselves to be able to distinguish the sound criticisms from the unsound, and to learn from them.

27. *If an editor requests a rewrite, should I oblige?* If you are a new writer, do exactly as he asks. Most editors, even if they are not writers themselves, have an excellent grasp of prose structure and rarely make suggestions that would damage a book. After selling my first three novels without changing a word of them, I began to find it difficult to sell anything more. An editor at Lancer Books, who has since become a good friend, took my fourth, fifth, and sixth science fiction novels, brutally criticized them, made me completely rewrite them, and bought the final versions. In the process of helping me make those books publishable, he taught me more about the craft of writing than any book or series of articles ever had.

If you are an established author with published works to support your self-confidence, you might occasionally refuse to rewrite a book as an editor requests. However, if you can set aside your ego, you will nearly always find that the requested rewrite would not hurt the book, would probably help it. If the sale to this particular editor seems important enough to you, you should try to make compromises even when you feel deeply that the changes will not add to the work's quality.

Many writers mistakenly believe that the great prose artists never allow anyone to suggest changes in their novels. The opposite is the case. The most revered prose artists are open-minded enough to request advice and to use suggestions that might strengthen their work.

28. *You've mentioned the literary agent. Should I obtain one?* First of all, you will not be *able* to obtain a good agent until you have sold at least one novel on your own. Most agents, before accepting a new client, must know you are professional, understand your craft, and can regularly produce saleable material: they have no time to teach you to write or to educate you in the business of writing and publishing.

Secondly, you will gain valuable market experience and editorial contacts by submitting your own work for the first couple of years of your career. You will be ready for an agent when you're earning close to \$10,000 a year, or when an editor tells you it's time to obtain a literary representative for your work.

If you are an established writer, you are foolish to continue without a New York agent, even if you live in the city. Most publishers are honest, but only as honest as they have to be. After all, they are in business to make a profit, not to enrich writers. An agent can obtain larger advances and better contract terms than the average writer would know how to wangle. I know one major science fiction writer who has, for his whole career, permitted his hardcover publishers to handle his subsidiary rights and to, in effect, act as his agents. As a result, though he is nationally known and a regular guest on the television talk shows, he still gets a \$1,500 or \$2,000 advance for books that eventually earn royalties in five figures. "So what?" he says. "I get it all in royalties, anyhow." But any business-minded writer knows that \$10,000 in royalties, paid over four years, is less valuable than a \$10,000 advance paid right now: for one thing, the rising cost of living makes those strung-out royalties five to ten percent less valuable than the same sum paid today—and for another, the writer could invest a large advance and earn dividends on it during those four years. He could increase his work-reward ratio and make it possible to spend less time at the typewriter in order to maintain his favorite lifestyle. A good agent will generate enough new income for the writer to more than compensate for his 10% commission.

29. *Is it worthwhile to pay a reading fee to an agent to get his opinion of my book?* Once or twice, yes. If you make a practice of it, no. In a few criticisms he will have said all he *can* say about your work, will have given you all the advice you need. After that, it's up to you to apply his suggestions.

30. *Once I obtain an agent, will he sell everything I send him to market for me?* Probably not. An agent can only sell good work, the same pieces you could have sold yourself: he has no friendships with editors that insure the sale of

inferior work. An agent's value lies in the better terms he arranges for the work he *does* sell.

31. *Will my agent personally handle my fiction, or will he merely act as a forwarding service?* Only rarely, and only when the script has great financial potential, will your agent deliver it personally to an editor. For the most part, he relies on telephone contacts, city mail service, and messenger services. In some cases, if the piece is only average, he will submit it by mail just as you would yourself, with no advance patter or socko introductory letter. But remember, when an editor receives a script from a good agent, he gives it closer attention and more consideration than he gives to anything that comes from the slush pile. He knows that an agent is handling professionals and that his reading time will be better spent with agented scripts than with un-agented freelance submissions. For this reason, several major publishing companies no longer accept unsolicited manuscripts.

Wait! I know what your next question is before you ask it: "If the publishers stop accepting unsolicited manuscripts, and if an agent will only handle writers with several credits, how can new writers hope to break in? We can't sell without an agent, but an agent won't handle us unless we've sold!" It isn't so bad as that. The publishing houses who have ceased to accept unagented manuscripts are those who never bought from unestablished writers in the first place. They are among the most prestigious houses that no new writer could expect to hit, at the start, with or without an agent. By the time your work is polished enough and your audience substantial enough to interest these companies in your books, you will also have obtained an agent.

32. *Which agents are good and which are the ones to avoid?* There are no lists of worthy and unworthy agents. You must decide what you want from your agent and then choose him accordingly. The larger agencies, with long lists of famous clients, will have the experience and muscle to generate big money for you, *if* you happen to write a book that hits or skirts the best-seller lists. If you write good books that have only normal sales, a large agency will do little for you: you will be expected to make the first breakthrough, and they will exploit your talent for you when that plateau is finally reached. A smaller agency, sometimes only a single agent with no aides, will be better for the new writer, because a more personal relationship can be established. The agency that handles 600 clients, even if it employs five or six sub-agents, cannot provide the personal contact and concern that a one-man agency, with fifty or sixty select clients, can. And while a large agency can afford to carry dozens of writers who earn less than \$10,000 a year, the small agency cannot. It must obtain top money for each of its clients if it is to stay solvent. Also, some agents are better for novelists than for non-fiction writers; some are clumsy with the representation of science fiction, because they handle little of it and don't understand the field; others handle chiefly suspense writers and are best at making suspense and mystery sales.

33. *How do I discover which agent would be best for me?* Talk with an editor whom you've become friendly with: he'll be able to help you winnow down the possibilities. After that, you've got to count on dumb luck. Many writers go through at least one or two agents before they find one just right for them.

34. *What's the nature of an agent-author contract?* This is a short form granting your agent exclusive permission to handle your work for the contract period—usually two years, automatically renewable—for the consideration of 10% of all domestic sales and 20% of all foreign sales.

35. *Is there any clause in an agent-author contract I should be wary of?* Yes. Do not sign any agent-author agreement or any book contract handled by your agent, which contains a clause giving the agent "... permission to handle the author's work in perpetuity and forever." It is only fair that an agent share in the monies growing out of the book contract he negotiated for you. But if, in later years, you change agents, and your new agent can resell a book that the original publisher has permitted to go out of print, your old agent has no moral right to share in this new loot.

36. *Will an agent tell me when a manuscript has been rejected and where it will go next?* If you phone him about the whereabouts of a manuscript, and if it is an important script that you both have high hopes for, he is more than willing to let you know where it stands at the moment. He cannot waste the time to keep you informed about every development, however, and he will not appreciate regular calls or letters requesting such information. Be patient. In time, you'll discover it's very pleasant to be notified only when the script sells and to be shielded from depressing rejections.

37. *Will an agent send me my money as soon as he receives the publisher's check and takes his commission?* Yes. Agents are, almost without exception, honest with their writers.

38. *If I suddenly begin making big money—either by virtue of an unexpected best-seller or because I am prolific—how do I save it from the Internal Revenue Service?* Get a good accountant at once. If your sudden financial upswing takes place within a single calendar year, he will probably help you to pay on an "averaged income" basis, a device the IRS permits for those whose sudden wealth was balanced by a few years of low or moderate income prior to success. This can save you from 10% to 30% in tax payments. If your success seems to be relatively lasting, he may even suggest, depending on which state you live in, that you incorporate yourself. Federal taxes on businesses are substantially lower than they are on individuals. A good accountant will make you aware of all the legal deductions you may take and will more than pay his own fees in the money he saves you.

39. *I am not earning enough to warrant the services of an accountant, but I would like to be sure I'm deducting all that I can. What expenses can a writer claim against his income?* You should keep receipts and records for all of the following:

1. Suppliestyping paper, carbon paper, typewriter ribbons, staples, envelopes, paper clips, pens, pencils, rubber bands, and other such paraphernalia.
2. Magazine subscriptions.
3. Paperback and hardback books. Every book you as a writer buy is deductible as a business expense. At the end of the year, you can add up your expenditures, divide by either five or six [years], and take an average deduction each year for the next five years. If you divide by six, you are permitted to take a double deduction the first year.
4. Mileage. Keep a record of any driving you may do in connection with writing—to the library, to do an interview with someone, and even to drive to the bookstore to look over the new titles. You may take a standard tax deduction for each mile driven.
5. Postage.
6. Commissions, if you have an agent.
7. Travel—meals, hotels, gas, oil, tips. If you spend a weekend in Atlantic City, like the place, study it, and use it as background for a story, all your expenses are tax deductible. Trips to New York to talk with editors and trips to writers' conferences are also deductible.
8. Furniture—desk, chair, bookcases, desk lamp. An average five or six year deduction for depreciation is permitted, as with the cost of your books.
9. Machines—typewriter, photocopier, adding machine. These expenses may be averaged and deducted as with furniture and books.
10. Rent. If you have an office in which you write and do nothing else, the rent is 100% deductible. If you write at home, estimate the portion of your living space that is used for writing (don't forget areas where bookcases stand, the easy chair in which you generate ideas every night, or the kitchen table on which you collate scripts, do proofreading, correct galleys) and deduct that percentage of your monthly rent.
11. Utilities—light, heat, garbage collection. If one fourth of your living space is used for writing, you are permitted to deduct one fourth of your utilities too.
12. Telephone calls. All long distance calls that are related to your writing career are deductible. If you can honestly say that a considerable portion of your telephone usage is exclusively for business purposes, you can also deduct that percentage of the standard monthly charge, in addition to the charges for the long distance calls.

40. *Does any country exempt writers from income tax?* Yes, Ireland.

41. *Do you recommend that footloose writers live in Ireland?* Everyone should investigate the possibility. It does not appeal to me. Ireland is relatively peaceful (Northern Ireland, a completely different country, is the place you've read about in the papers for years, where all the social unrest is fermenting), is an English-speaking country, and is not any more expensive to live in than the U.S. But it is also terribly conservative and out of the mainstream of world affairs, trends, and thoughts. Because of religious and social intolerance, Ireland's great writers have, in the past, been forced to go abroad to do their finest work. But the decision to be an expatriate American in Ireland is one the individual must make himself.

CHAPTER ELEVEN Marketing Genre Fiction: Questions and Answers

In addition to the peripheral marketing questions that were covered in the last chapter, let me answer what I believe will be your major questions regarding marketing your stories.

1. *What is the proper manuscript form?* Use good, bond paper, not the "typing paper" you can pick up in your local five and dime. Good, bond paper can be obtained, by the ream, from any business supply store in your area. I use Sphinx Erasable Bond, twenty pound weight, myself. Although a few editors dislike the erasable papers, these coated stocks can save you enormous amounts of time.

Once you have your paper in the typewriter, you put the page number in the righthand corner, an inch down from the

top. If you haven't an agent, you will also want to put the story title there, or a key word from it, to identify the manuscript and help keep it together as it changes hands. Likewise, if you haven't an agent, your name should go in the upper lefthand corner, also one inch from the top. If you are agented, you need only the page number.

Next, space down six lines from your name and the page number to begin a chapter. Space down four lines on any ordinary text page. Leave an inch margin on both sides and approximately an inch at the bottom of the page. Indent each paragraph either five or ten spaces (be consistent, of course), and double-space everything, including examples, quotations, etc., which will be indented five or ten spaces.

An occasional crossed-out word is all right. However, if you begin to change whole phrases, blue-pencil sentences, and make other changes with pencil, you had best retype the page. Editors will bless you for a clean, readable manuscript.

A novel will have a cover page, containing your address in the upper lefthand corner (or your agent's address, if you have an agent), and an estimate of wordage in the upper righthand corner. Centered will be the title and your byline. The title page isn't numbered; the first page is the first page of your story.

2. *Should I send a cover letter with the manuscript?* Yes, but keep it short and to the point. Your book should speak for itself; you have no need to explain it to the editor in your letter. If you have no credits to mention, the body of your cover letter might go:

This is a science fiction novel, set on an alien world, written more in the style of the Old Wave authors like Clarke and Heinlein, than in the new, experimental manner of some younger writers. It is, I think, crammed with adventure and action. I hope you'll like it. I've enclosed return postage, and I'll be awaiting your reply.

If you do have credits, short stories in professional magazines, or perhaps a couple of book sales, you might mention these, at the outset, to let the editor know you have already accomplished something.

3. *Would it be wise for me to have business stationery printed, with my name and address?* I don't think it really matters one way or the other. I've sold a considerable amount of work in the last five years, and I've never had any. Other writers, who have sold as much, seem to feel it's a necessity. I *don't* think any good editor is the least bit influenced by stationery. In the end, it's a personal decision, to be made for personal reasons.

4. *Once I have sent off my manuscript, how long should I wait for a response?* If you sent it Fourth Class, remember that it will require about two weeks just to reach the editor's desk. Otherwise, figuring from the time the editor *ought* to have it, eight to ten weeks is a reasonable time to wait. At that point, you might drop the editor a short, friendly note, inquiring about your manuscript and asking if it's still under consideration. If it is, the editor will tell you so; if it isn't, he will return it posthaste.

If another month passes and you have received no answer to your letter, write another, still friendly, but more pointedly asking for your manuscript. The second letter rarely fails.

If it should, write a third, withdrawing the manuscript from the editor's consideration, reminding him you enclosed return postage, and requesting its return at once. Keep a carbon for your files. Then if you still do not receive your manuscript, retype and submit it elsewhere.

Really, though, all this is mostly academic, since nearly all editors reply within reasonable time limits.

5. *How many publishing houses should I take a book to before I decide to shelve it as unsalable?* Never give up on a manuscript you have faith in. Some of the most successful novels have been rejected by as many as a dozen houses before they've been taken on. Even when you pass the twelfth, keep going until you have exhausted all the potential publishers for that sort of story.

6. *If the book sells, what kind of contract will I get?* That varies from publisher to publisher. It may be as little as a two-page, legal-size form in fine print—or eight pages of the same. It will, you can be sure, be legally binding for both parties, and it will *not* require a notary public to witness your signature.

The new writer won't be able to bargain for a higher advance than is offered, or for a higher royalty. The author with a list of strong credits in his field, however, will be able to negotiate on both points.

You *can* be sure that you are only liable for suits brought against libelous material in the book—and not for any obscenity suits that may be lodged against the publisher because of the book's sexual content. You can merely strike the word "obscenity" from any clause of this nature and give yourself protection against this unlikely but possible turn of events.

Also, you can be sure that, if you want the book published under a pen name and never under your own, this desire will be obeyed. In every contract, there is a clause which gives the publisher the right to publish and promote the work under "the author's name or pseudonym." The new author who is writing, say, a Rough Sexy Novel and doesn't want it

linked to his real name later on in his career, can simply strike "name or" and insure himself against the calamity.

If you don't have an agent, you would be well advised to let the publisher keep a percentage of his foreign sales (25% is fair), so that the publisher will act as your representative for translation rights. A similar arrangement is wise (for the unagented author) so far as motion picture rights are concerned, except that the publisher should be permitted to keep no more than 10% of this valuable subsidiary right.

There is really no way either the new or established writer can refuse to allow the publisher to change the title. It may be irksome to see your title replaced by that of some

Writing Popular Fiction stranger; as often as not, however, the new title will be an improvement over your own.

7. *Will I see proofs of the manuscript, prior to publication?* If it is a hardcover novel, yes, always. If it is a paperback original, you will rarely if ever see galley proofs before the book is published. The paperback scheduling system is too frantic to give the author this courtesy.

A word of warning: If you sell a hardcover novel and receive a set of galleys to correct, change as little—beyond the printer's errors—as you can. Often, when you see the work set up in print, you find errors in phrasing you'd like to correct, things that weren't obvious on the typewritten page. These are your own words you're correcting, not the printer's mistakes, and such changes are known as "author's alterations." This is a good rule of thumb regarding author's alterations: Once you've made changes that require the resetting of twenty-five lines of type, any additional resetting will be charged to you, against future royalties—and at the rate of three or four dollars a line.

8. *Do editors buy books from sample chapters and outlines?* Yes, but only from writers who are well established, whose work is known to the editor, and whose reliability is also proven. A new writer, until he has four or five novel sales behind him, cannot get book contracts from portions and outlines.

9. *What is a portion and outline like?* My agent sold my first mainstream novel, *Hanging On*, to M. Evans on the basis of a hundred pages and a three-page outline. This might seem like a huge "sample," but then the book is projected to run at least five hundred manuscript pages and perhaps considerably more. Another book of mine, a suspense novel, was sold to a hardcover house on the basis of one half-page of single-spaced plot summation in a letter I wrote to the editor after I corrected the galleys of the first novel I wrote for that house.

For the most part, however, if an editor will buy from you on the strength of sample and outline, he will require a first chapter about fifteen pages long and a four- or five-page outline of what follows. This was the sort of package I sent Robert Hoskins, at Lancer Books, when I sold him the science fiction novel *The Haunted Earth*:

Chapter One

Count Slavek, having proposed a toast to his new lady friend's great beauty, tossed off the glassful of red wine. Then, smiling so broadly that he revealed his two, gleaming fangs, he said, "Before long, my dear, we shall drink other toasts together, though none of wine."

Mrs. Renee Cuyler, dressed alluringly in a thigh-high skirt and a blouse slashed almost to her navel, smiled at the Count's thinly veiled promise of inhuman ecstasy and sipped her wine, which she, more decorously, had not swallowed in one thirsty gulp.

The Count put his glass down and walked to her, his cape flowing out behind like dark wings, and he touched her lightly, along her slim neck. A small sigh (from both of them) punctuated the caress.

"Pure Hokum," Jessie Blake whispered.

He *had* to whisper, for he was sitting in the closet, watching the Count and Mrs. Cuyler through a fisheye lens which he had installed in the door some hours earlier. Neither the Count nor Mrs. Cuyler knew he was in there, and they would both be acutely disturbed when they learned that he was watching. That would just have to be. The important thing was not to let them know they were observed until the crucial, incriminating moment had arrived. So Jessie *whispered* to himself.

He had bribed the hotel desk clerk into admitting him to the expensive Blue Suite three hours before either Count Slavek or Renee Cuyler arrived for their none-too-private assignation. He had chosen, as his observation post, a stool in the only closet which looked out on the main drawing room of the Suite. Though he knew events would rapidly progress to the bedroom, he suspected that Count Slavek, in his excitement, would choose to chew on Renee Cuyler's neck right here, in the drawing room, before moving to other stimulating but decidedly more mundane, sensual activities. Vampires were notoriously over-eager, especially when, as in the Count's case, they had not made a convert in some weeks.

Mrs. Cuyler put down her own wine as the Count's hand pressed more insistently at her neck.

"Now?" she asked.

"Yes," he responded, rather throatily.

Jessie Blake, private investigator, got off his stool and put his hand on the inside knob of the closet door. Still bent over to peer through the tiny fisheye lens, he made ready to confront the Count the moment that toothy sonofabitch made a single, legal error.

The Count gazed into Renee Cuyler's eyes in a manner intended to convey more than mortal longing.

To Jessie, who was getting a crick in his back, Slavek looked more as if he had suddenly gotten stomach cramps.

The woman hooked her fingers in the lapels of her already daring blouse and opened it wider, giving the Count a better approach to her jugular and incidentally revealing two full, round, brown-nippled breasts.

"You look ravishing," the Count said.

"Then ravish me," Mrs. Cuyler breathed.

What tripe! Jessie thought. At this crucial moment he couldn't even risk a whisper.

"Of course," the Count said apologetically, "there are certain formalities we must perform, certain..."

"I understand," the woman said.

His voice losing none of its slick, warm charm, the Count said, "I am obligated, by the Kolchak-Bliss Decision of the United Nations Supreme Court for International Law, to inform you both of your rights and of your alternatives."

"I understand."

The Count licked his lips. In a sensually guttural voice, clearly too excited to take much more time with the legal formalities, he said, "At this time, you need not submit to the consummation of our pending relationship, and you may either leave or request the services of a licensed advisor on spiritual matters."

"I understand," she said. She pulled her blouse open even wider, giving the Count a good view of the normal pleasures that awaited him once the greater joy of the bite had passed.

"Do you wish to leave?" he asked.

"No."

"Do you wish the services of a spiritual counselor?"

"No, darling," she said.

For a moment, the Count seemed to have forgotten what came next in the litany engendered by the Kolchak-Bliss Decision, but then he went on, speaking quickly and softly so as not to break the mood: "Do you understand the nature of the proposal I've made?"

"Yes."

"Do you understand that I wish to initiate you into the world of the undead?" the Count asked.

"I do."

"Do you understand that your new life of damnation is eternal?"

"Yes, darling, yes," she said. "I want you to—to bite me. Now!"

"Be patient, dearest," Slavek said. "Now, do you realize that there is no return from the life of the undead?"

"I understand, for Christ's sake!" Mrs. Cuyler moaned.

"Don't use that *name!*" the Count roared.

In the closet, Jessie Blake shook his head, saddened by this spectacle. Maybe he wouldn't even have to interfere, if things kept going like this. Another five minutes of questions-and-answers would bleed away most of the romantic element the Count had spent the

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early evening hours in building up. U.N. law certainly had made things tough for the likes of Slavek.

"I'm sorry," Renee Cuyler told her would-be lover/ master.

The Count composed himself and, still with his fingertips resting on the pulse at her neck, he said, "You understand that my culture encourages a certain male chauvinism which you must accept as intimate terms of our blood contract?"

"Yes," she said.

"And you still wish to continue?"

"Of course!"

Jessie shook his head again. Mr. Cuyler was going to have his hands full restraining this wife of his, even if Blake did pull her out of the fire this time. Obviously, she had a vampire fixation, a need to be dominated and used in a physical as well as a sexual sense.

The Count hesitated on the brink of beginning the second and shorter section of the Kolchak-Bliss litany, the part dealing with the woman's alternatives, and having hesitated he was lost. He tilted Renee's pretty head, sweeping back her long, dark hair. Baring his fangs in an unholy grin, he went, rather gracelessly, for her jugular.

Delighted that his estimation of Slavek had proven sound, Jessie twisted the doorknob and threw open the closet door, stepping into the drawing room with more than a little flair.

Count Slavek jerked at the noise, whirled away from the woman and, hissing through his pointed teeth like a broken steam valve, back-stepped with his arms out to his sides and his cape drawn up like giant wings ready for flight.

Jessie brandished his credentials and said, "Jessie Blake, private investigator. I'm working for Mr. Roger Cuyler and have been assigned to protect his wife from the influence of certain supernatural persons who have designs upon both her body and soul."

"Designs?" Slavek asked, incredulous.

Jessie turned to the woman. "If you'd be so kind as to close your blouse, Mrs. Cuyler, we can get out of this dump and—"

"Designs?" Count Slavek insisted, moving forward. "This woman is no innocent victim! She's about the hottest little number I've seen in—"

"Are you contesting my intervention?" Jessie asked.

He was six feet tall and weighed a hundred and eighty-five pounds, all of it bone and muscle. And though he couldn't harm a supernatural person without resorting to the accepted charms and spells, silver bullets, and wooden stakes, he could sure as hell generate a stalemate out of which no one could gain anything.

Still, the Count said, "Of course, I contest! You have somehow secreted yourself in a privately rented hotel suite, against all the laws of individual—"

"And you," Jessie said, "were in the process of biting a victim to whom you had not recited the entire pertinent information which the Kolchak-Bliss Decision obligates you to state in easily understood language."

Mrs. Cuyler began to cry.

Blake, undaunted, continued: "A mindscan, which you would have to undergo if I lodged this charge with the authorities, would prove my allegations and make you vulnerable to a number of unpleasant punishments."

"Damn you!" Slavek growled.

"No histrionics, please," Blake said.

The Count took a threatening step in the detective's direction. "If I were to make two converts here, then there would be no one to report me, would there? I'm sure Renee would help me to convert you." He grinned, his black eyes adance with light.

Blake removed a crucifix from his jacket and held it in one fist, where, with a human antagonist, he might have carried a fully loaded narcotic pin gun. "I'm not unprepared," he said.

Slavek appeared to shrivel a bit and looked guiltily away from the crucifix. He said, "I was Jewish before I was a vampire. There's no reason for that device to thwart me."

"Yet it does," Blake said, smiling down at the plastic Christ-on-a-Cross which was in four different shades of glow-brite orange. His pin gun was the best model, an expensive piece of equipment. But he did not believe in toting around a hand-crafted crucifix when any old hunk of junk would do. He said, "Studies have been done which show that you people fear this on only a psychological level. Physically, it has no effect. Yet, because you get your power from the mythos of vampirism, and because the cross plays such a strong part in that mythos, you really would die if you came into contact with this—if a spirit can be said to die."

As the detective spoke, Slavek began a strange transformation. His cape appeared to mold closer to his body and to alter, by slow degrees, into a taut brown membrane. The Count's features changed, too, growing darker and less human. Already, he had begun to shrink, his clothes miraculously shrinking with him and dissolving into him as he strove to attain the form of a bat.

"That'll do you no good," Jessie said. "Even if you escape out the window, or somesuch, we know who you are. We can have you subpoenaed in twenty-four hours. Besides, Brutus can trail you wherever you go."

The Count hesitated in his metamorphosis. "Brutus?"

Blake motioned towards the closet where a powerful hound, four and a half feet high at the shoulders, strode out of the closet. Its head was massive, its snout long and crammed with sharp teeth. Its eyes were an unsettling shade of red with tiny, black pupils.

"A hell hound?" Slavek asked.

"Of course," Brutus said.

Mrs. Cuyler seemed shocked to hear a deep, masculine voice coming from the beast, but neither Count Slavek nor Jessie found it odd.

"Brutus can follow you into any little netherworld *cul-de-sac* you may intend to flee to," Blake said.

The Count nodded reluctantly and reversed his transformation, became more human again. "You work together, man and spirit?"

"Quite effectively," Brutus said.

He held his burly head low between his shoulders, as if he were prepared to leap after the Count if he should make the slightest move towards escape.

"An unbeatable combination," Slavek said, admiringly. He sighed and walked to the sofa, sat down, crossed his legs, folded his pale hands in his lap, and said, "What do you want of me?"

"You've got to hear my client's ultimatum, and then you can leave."

"I'm listening," Slavek said.

He had begun to buff his nails on the hem of his cape.

Mrs. Cuyler, bewildered, still stood in the center of the room, crying, her small hands fisted at her sides as if the tears would soon turn to screams of rage.

Jessie said, "You've been caught in an illegally executed bite, and you will remain susceptible to prosecution for seven years. Unless you want Mr. Roger Cuyler—my client and this lady's husband—to initiate that prosecution, you will henceforth have nothing whatsoever to do with Mrs. Cuyler. You will neither contact her in person, by telephone, by vidphone, or by messenger. Neither will you employ supernatural methods of communication where this lady is concerned."

Slavek looked longingly at the leggy young woman and finally nodded. "I accept these conditions, naturally."

"Be off, then," Jessie said.

At the door of the suite, Slavek turned back to them and said, "I think it was much better when we kept to ourselves, when you people didn't even know, for sure, that we existed."

"Progress," Blake said, with a shrug.

"I mean," Slavek said, "there's much less risk of a stake through the heart nowadays—now that we understand each other—but the romanticism is gone. Blake, they've taken away the thrill!"

"Take it up with city hall," Brutus said. He wasn't in the best of moods today.

"It's seven years now since my kind of people entered real commerce with your kind—and things get worse every day. I don't think we'll ever like it the way it is now." Slavek had taken on the brooding tone that so many middle-European bloodsuckers adopted when in a musing mood.

"The Maseni have learned to live with *their* supernatural brothers—and vice versa," Blake reminded Slavek.

"But they're different," the Count insisted. "They're alien to begin with. It was a natural thing for them to establish contact with their supernatural world. But they forced this on Earth; it isn't a natural condition here."

"I hope not," Blake said. "If relations between the flesh and the spirit worlds, here on Earth, become as easy as they are on the maseni home world, I'll be out of a job."

"You exploit other people's problems," Slavek said.

"Solve other people's problems," Blake corrected.

Grimacing to express his distaste, Count Slavek left the suite in a swirl of black cloth.

At the same moment, Renee Cuyler's tears changed abruptly into anger, as he had expected they would. The woman ran at him, screaming, clawing with her well-manicured nails, kicking, biting, slapping.

Jessie pushed her away and, when he could not settle her with words, settled her with three narcotics pins in the abdomen. She slumped down on the thick carpet and went to sleep. She snored.

"Jesus, what a bore!" Brutus growled. He had no compunctions about using the Lord's name in vain or otherwise, though Blake had never heard him use it otherwise. He padded to the sofa, jumped onto it, curled up with his big, hairy paws hanging over the edge of the cushions. "It's one infidelity case after another, these days," he complained.

"Boring but safe," Blake said. He went to the vidphone, punched out the number of their office and waited for Helena to answer it.

"Hell Hound Investigations," she said, almost five minutes later.

"You're a poor excuse for a secretary," Blake said.

She blinked her long-lashed, blue eyes, pushed a strand of honey yellow hair away from her face. "Yeah, but I'm stacked," she said.

He could see her swelling bosom in the vidphone screen, and he could not argue with her. He said, "Okay," and he sat down, a bit overwhelmed by mammary memories. "We've got Renee Cuyler safe and sound. I want you to call her husband and send him over here." He gave her the address of the hotel, and the suite number.

"Congratulations," she said, smiling. She had ripe lips and very white teeth. She should have made commercials for unnatural sex acts, Blake thought. "Oh," she said, "You've received four calls this morning from a potential client."

"Who?"

"Galiotor Fil," she said.

"A maseni?"

"With that name, what else?" she asked.

"What's he want?"

"He'll only talk to you."

Blake thought a moment. "I'll be back in the office in an hour and a half, if you get to Roger Cuyler right away. If this Galiotor Fil can be there, I'll talk to him."

"Right, chief," she said.

He winced and didn't have a chance to reply before she snapped off, her perfect face and better bosom fading from the screen.

"Looks like you got your wish—for something interesting to happen," Blake told the hell hound.

Brutus climbed off the couch and shook his head, his ears slapping against his skull, and he said, "Did I hear right? A maseni for a customer?"

"You heard right."

The hound said, "That's a first. What problem could a maseni have that his own people couldn't solve, that he'd need a human detective for?"

"We'll know in an hour or so," Blake said. "Let's get our equipment out of the closet and ready to go, before Mr. Cuyler gets here to collect his wife."

Brief Outline

Background. The date is 2000 A.D., with all the scientific and social advancement that date implies. But two things have changed Earth more than any scientific revolution ever could. First, mankind has been visited by and has established close relations with an alien race, the maseni. These are humanoid creatures with thick, pallid skin, bulbous foreheads, deepset yellow eyes, slit mouths and finger-sized tentacles where ringers should be. Naturally, there has been severe cultural shock here on Earth. And the maseni haven't helped things much. It seems they have always been able to contact the supernatural analogue of their world, and they take ghosts, werewolves, and other such creatures for granted. When they come to Earth, they bring their own otherworldly creatures with them—besides showing mankind how to open relations with the supernatural creatures of their own race. The result is a world of men, maseni, and the supernatural creatures of both races. The world borders on chaos, but the maseni assure Earthmen that it will only take a century or so for us to learn to live in harmony with our supernatural brethren. Meanwhile, we must deal with vampires (and their like) as well as with maseni; and the resultant hoaxes, murders, plots, and counterplots require a specialist in untying complex knots. We have two specialists, our lead characters. (All this background is worked into the first few chapters, as the plot develops.)

Characters. Our specialists are Jessie Blake, a former Interpol operative and now a private investigator who specializes in cases involving the maseni and supernatural creatures—and his aide and friend, Brutus. Brutus is, of course, the Hell Hound, a supernatural beast whose form is that of a large dog perhaps bigger than a husky Great Dane. Brutus has the soul of a man condemned to Hell two thousand years ago, but he's forgotten who he was in his human form. He can, of course, reason as well as a man and perhaps better, and he can speak. He and Blake met while Blake was thinking of quitting Interpol. Brutus has worked off his debt in Hell and could either accept final rest or reincarnation, but he enjoys being a Hell Hound. They decided to team up, to mutual advantage, and formed their own detective agency four years ago. They've maintained an infallible record. The maseni have only arrived seven years before; there is one hell of a lot of terror and confusion—and more than a little of running amok.

Theme. The overall theme of the book is that man makes his own fate, creates his own heavens and hells. This is fortified by the nature of the supernatural creatures themselves, who are governed in part by what men have always believed about them. A vampire, for instance, really does have to hide from the sun, but only because generations of belief in this facet of the superstition, on the part of the *real* world people, has led to a deep and deadly psychological fear of sunlight on the part of vampires.

Tone. The tone of *The Haunted Earth* is of underlying humor, while containing as much suspense and terror as possible. The book is fast-paced, fast-action adventure, done to absorb the reader's attention with this complex future society.

The enclosed sample chapter is the first chapter of "Book One: The Alien Graveyard." The remainder of that section of the novel will run thus: Returning to their office, they meet their new client, a distraught maseni. The maseni's brood brother, an alien named Tesserax, has supposedly died and been buried in the special maseni cemetery outside of Los Angeles where maseni government people permanently stationed on Earth are quartered. The family was not notified until long after burial, and no service was held. The maseni seems to feel that something suspicious is going on, and he hires Jessie and Brutus to look into matters. Formal application for disinterment has been refused, and the higher maseni officials appear to be clouding the issue of Tesserax's death. Digging into the case, Jessie and Brutus discover that other high-ranking maseni have been reported dead and have disappeared in similar suspicious circumstances. Their investigation leads them among supernatural maseni haunts, into encounters with a variety of murder spectres who seem intent on stopping the investigation. In a post-midnight raid on the cemetery and a bit of grave robbing, they discover that there is no body in Tesserax's grave. Caught in the act, they are arrested by maseni soldiers, thrown into jail and, on the following day, are introduced to Tesserax himself, who is not, after all, dead.

Tesserax explains that various high-ranking maseni on Earth have been secretly recalled to the home world their death notices being cover stories to deal with a crisis that has arisen there. On the home world, a supernatural beast has appeared, one which does not fit into either maseni or human mythology. Unlike other supernatural creatures, it cannot seem to live in harmony with its fellows, but wishes only to destroy. Because they know nothing of it, they have no spells, charms, or devices to use against it. They have been undertaking the investigation of the beast's origins in secret, because they know that anti-maseni Pure Earthers would make great propaganda out of the news that the maseni did not, after all, exist in complete harmony with their supernatural brethren. (The Pure Earthers appear at several points in the story, extreme racial bigots who want the aliens and the supernatural characters all put in their places again—out of sight and mind.)

Tesserax enlists Jessie's and Brutus' help in solving the problem, asks them to track down this elusive and dangerous beast, on the maseni home world. They will depart Earth in a day or so.

"Book Two: The Beast at Midnight": Jessie and Brutus reach the maseni home world and begin their investigation in cooperation with the alien police. They find that the beast's claws and fangs are as dangerous to the maseni supernatural creatures as to the flesh and blood maseni, an unheard of thing. Supernatural people are vulnerable only to spells, chants, silver bullets, wooden stakes through the heart, and other complicated devices. The supernatural people are as terrified of the new beast as are the real people, but refuse to give out any information that they have. Jessie cannot understand this duplicity until, at last, he and Brutus discover that the beast is the product of a mating between a human supernatural and a maseni supernatural. The maseni supernaturals want to find some way of dealing with this thing themselves before it becomes public knowledge and, as a consequence, intermarriage of supernatural races is forbidden because of one bad result. Jessie, when he knows the parentage of the beast, is able to combine a pair of supernatural devices—one which would hurt the mother, one which would hurt the father—and use them in concert to destroy the mindless beast that the two 'races' of ethereal creatures have created. Triumph. Return to Earth.

End of Outline

When the editor agrees to contract for a novel from sample chapter and outline, you are given a deadline to meet. In the paperback field, you usually have three or four months to deliver the completed script, unless the novel is complex and important enough to warrant a longer creative period. In a hardcover contract, you may be given anywhere from six months to a year, and even longer for special projects. In either case, paperback or hardback, you will be given half your advance money on signing the contract and half on delivery of publishable manuscript. If you should not be able to deliver the script, you must return the original payment. Few writers default on this, but the potential for default is what keeps new or unproven writers from obtaining contracts in this manner.

10. *Who publishes the genre I'm most interested in?* It would be difficult, in a book intended to remain timely for a number of years, to give you a solid marketing list for each category. My suggestion, then, is that you do what I did, when I was a new writer, to keep up with markets for genre novels: first, read as much as you can and note the publisher of each novel, so you gain firsthand knowledge of what each house's line is like; second, buy *Writer's Digest* magazine every month in order to take advantage of their market lists, and purchase the hardbound annual, *Writer's Market*, which the same people publish. And then, good luck!
