

DIFFERENT

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THE PULP MARKET AND WHAT IT MEANS TO THE NEW AUTHORS LEO MARGULIES

(Address delivered November 15, 1944, before the Authors' League of America at its 1944 series sponsored by New York University.)

Ladies and gentlemen: Each month a golden stream of checks flows from the inner sanctum of the story-hungry editorial offices of Standard Magazines. \$20,000 in good money is exchanged for two million good words. And it's all yours--for the writing.

You should give serious and careful consideration to writing for the pulp market. You need encouragement, constructive criticism, and financial support. Pulp magazine editors will give you just that while you gradually but surely climb the ladder to the top.

Now what is a pulp paper story? A pulp paper story is simply a story that appears in a pulp paper magazine. It gets its name from the paper on which it is printed--a paper made from wood pulp. But the technique for writing such a story is no different from that for writing a story for the slicks. And this should be whispered: The writer who has really learned to write as artist or able craftsman, can also write "potboilers" for revenue only as often as necessary, certain of hitting the bull's-eye of prompt acceptance nine times in ten. Whispered yet more faintly, most real writers do. By and large, pulp paper magazines are edited for people of simple tastes, whose prejudices

and general background have not been adulterated by cloistered college halls. Characters act because of love, duty, fear, hope, or other finite feelings.

Standard magazines, for whom I work, publishes at present thirty-five magazines. What kind of material do we want? Well, here is the kind of stuff we need. I have classified this material under eight general headings:

1. Adventure;
2. Aviation;
3. Detective;
4. Love;
5. Pseudo-science;
6. Sports;
7. Western; and
8. Western Love.

There is not enough time to dwell at length on the nature of each one of these general subjects. I have prepared a prospectus on the Western Story, as a sample, for your examination. If you are interested in any of the other subjects, a post card or a telephone call to our office will bring it to you. Address Leo Margulies, M - a - r - g - u - l - i - e - s, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y., telephone Va. 6-4424.

We pay from one cent to five cents a word for stories. These stories may range in length from 1500 to 7,000 words for the magazines to the 30,000 word novelette, which we sometimes publish in pocket book form.

You are professional writers and I assume know the basic principles of writing a good story. But as you approach the task of a practical craftsman a short outline from a working man's point of view may not be amiss: Let us divide it into three premises: The first premise is what I call the magical rule of three. There are only three things a human being can possibly want:

1. Possession. To acquire something--whether money, marbles, or a mate.
2. Retention. To hang on to what he has against all odds.
3. Pursuit. To chase the fellow who somehow deprived him of point 2, retention, or has thwarted him in point 1, possession.

The second premise is: How to apply the first premise, the magical rule of three, to the story form, and that is also divided into three:

1. The leading character who wants one of these things.
2. A situation which presents obstacles to the hero's attainment of his desires.
3. The working out of a solution to the mess or the demonstration that a solution cannot be worked out.

The third premise is: How to plan and divide your story, also divided into three:

1. Presentation of your main characters with their problem or problems.
2. Unfolding the dramatic action of your story to reach the point where the piled-up complications seem impossible of solution.
3. Spring your climax with the proper answer to the riddle or problem and then quickly clear the mess away.

That's all there is to it. The first, last and constant requisite is that the story must entertain. Learn to distinguish a story plot from an incident, dramatic action from simple narration. Remember, successful story writing is thirty percent of what you

say and seventy percent of how you say it. Avoid blind alleys that lead nowhere. And above-all, do not pad your story.

Now, just a little additional "pointing the way" may be useful, coupled with a warning word.

Often an interested editor, or a literary advisor whose intentions are kindly, may say, "Study the magazines," with the implication that it pays to try to imitate the work of other writers whose stories are being published.

This is rather dangerous counsel. Study, as such, is always profitable--if the study is made with understanding; if the study is directed, with knowledge, to an examination of how other writers have achieved a given effect.

Imitation is never anything but destructive. And it is never profitable for the budding writer at first to pay too much attention to the production of other writers. One who wants to make a life-time profession of writing could do nothing worse.

Take it for granted that it is really not at all difficult to learn to write a particular type of story for which there may happen to be a present demand. The formula for work of that kind you already know.

Working at writing, interested yourself, you will, quite naturally, be looking somewhere for a word of approval. That's where we come in. We want to help you. But also there will, very likely, come a time when some story, finished, will demand to be read to an appreciative audience--maybe a friend whose good opinion you value.

No harm in that. Read to anyone who will listen to you. They will tell you, no doubt, that your work is very good--"better than a lot of the stuff they see in the magazines."

Don't believe it. The chances are good that not one of your friends is a professional critic really capable of judging the value of your work. Opinion must be colored by a personal desire to please, however tactfully that may be covered by some little objection.

If you are in the least doubtful about your work when completed, that, without going further, is the only opinion that you need. After that the value of criticism depends on its being constructive--showing you how, and where, you can make that work better. It may not make you feel so good, but it will be a lot healthier for the work that you hope to do. Do what Paul Gallico said here at our first meeting: "Be your own editor."

Today many magazines are filled with the work of well-known, professional writers, seemingly very fortunate, who, apparently, repeat the same story over and over again with scant variation, and always meeting cheerful acceptance. This looks like rather an easy trick to perform--and how easy to repeat it!---invent a character, then follow that one character through any number of easily invented situations. The same thing is true of using the same plot. It is, in fact, almost as easy as it seems --but don't follow that road. You will very likely fall into a deep rut. Here is an actual case that I had to deal with about a month ago. On October 5, 1944, I wrote an author's literary agent as follows:

"Bill just can't seem to understand what we mean when we say a western story is 'the same old plot.'

"For, that's what's wrong with Devil Take the Man. It's the same old plot. About the roving cowboy who blows into a town and busts up the plans of the local land-grabber who has just foreclosed on the pore ole widder woman's ranch. Now let's say it again: About the roving cowboy who blows into a town and busts up the plans of the

local land-grabber who has just foreclosed on the pore old widder. And let's say it again a third time: About the roving cowboy who blows into a town and busts up the plans of the local land-grabber who has just foreclosed on the pore ole widder.

"That is why I don't want this story. There are touches of humor which are very good--if they had been properly carried through, the story would have been a real Mulford job, but: About the roving cowboy who blows into a town and busts up the plans of the local land-grabber who has just foreclosed on the pore ole widder.

"See what I mean?"

It is almost as easy to become identified with the production of one particular kind of story, as so many fairly competent authors have done. But often a sudden stop is set in the very middle of such brilliant literary careers. Written out, maybe, or maybe the fashions have changed, or maybe the very dependable audience has simply grown tired of that particular story, and from that particular author will have nothing else.

So pay no attention to the well intentioned advice which would tell you that you must "specialize"--must write one kind of story, and only one, if you would be successful. As an amateur author, do not even think of writing a "series of stories". Think twice about it if ever, as a professional writer, you should be asked to choose between sacrifice of variety and a series of easy payments easily earned.

Quite often, in every writer's career, there will arrive some new temptation to take the easy way. It is usually easier to take the way that seems the most difficult.

Real success in writing means, finally, only one thing: certain publication, and the support of a constantly growing public. Such success will be slow in arrival, and permanent when it arrives--not dependent on "publishing conditions" or editorial favor.

Be sure of this: there is no magazine in America today that does not extend a cordial reception to the new writer who has something new to say, and can say it commendably. The further fact is that no editor, whatever his editorial reputation, could hold down his job very long without bringing in new thought to old pages. It is a happy day in an editorial office when a manuscript reader finds a new story, under a new name, that is fit to print. It is then that the editor begins to think about an increase in salary.

Good stories--suitable, of course, to the needs of the publication. A story may be a good story for an adventure-pulp publication, like those we have, without necessarily being instantly acceptable for Harper's or the Atlantic Monthly. This is a simply conclusion--but one that is often ignored by hopeful young writers. (Here add the statistics on the number of chances an expert writer has to be published in one of the slicks in the course of a year, comparing this chance with the steady work for pulps at good pay.)

Before closing, I have been asked to say something about padding. I shall make it as brief as is consistent with clear exposition and tell you about two actual cases that came up recently in our office.

Development of the story plan should proceed directly from the opening without perceptible break or hesitation; it should follow the line of a clear, logical and regular exposition of theme and motif. There must be rigid exclusion of all unnecessary material; inclusion of all material required for complete understanding and the formation of the story as a well-rounded whole. Now what do I mean by that? Well, to make it clear, I shall have to turn back to what you may consider elementary and

talk about incidents, events, and situations.

First the incident. Each incident in a story is any one thing that happens: each thing-in-itself which the author notes and records--a remark, a gesture, an action, interjected information, details of appearance recorded by the author, or noted as observed by a character--any one thing which, complete in itself, can be set apart from any or all other incidents in the story. Now, each included incident should have some definite interest or significance of its own. No incident should be included in the story except for one of four reasons:

1. It is, in itself, sufficiently interesting to warrant inclusion.
2. It is required in explanation, or to build up a necessary picture.
3. It is needed to carry forward the story in definite relation to the incidents that follow it.
4. It is retained for the purpose of compelling a desired reaction in the mind of the reader.

Let's repeat these. You can write them down if you wish. . . .

In any story which is really well-written, the writing can be dissected sentence by sentence, incident by incident, with every recorded incident finding its place under one of the classifications that I have given you. Any incident that cannot be so classified falls under the term "padding", the bane of all editors, and should be cut out of the story.

Second, what about the event? The mark of the event is that it ordinarily fixes a "turning point" in the story. A point is reached where the narrative strikes out in a new direction as determined by all the previous incidents and events. In practical application, the event may be an action, a decision, a meeting, a loss, a crisis, a reversal of opinion, a change of circumstance or location, the introduction of a new element in the story--anything, in fact, which will certainly influence every incident and event that follows. There are only two reasons for the inclusion of an event in your story and these are:

1. Because, as described from the past, it affects the lives of characters in the present.
2. Because, as described in the present, it will affect the future life of a character in the main line of the story.

Since there are, and can be, no other defensible reasons for the inclusion of any event in a story, whatever the length, a little thought will show how effectually this generalization will dispose of the use of unnecessary or extraneous material; particularly the inclusion of any "sub-plot" in a story--an awkward, amateurish practice which tries to tell "two stories in one"--and fails to tell either.

Third and last is the situation. The situation is developed as the sum of previously recorded events, in the relation of circumstance to a character, by force of any character's internal reactions, or in the relation of characters to each other. The situation always presents a problem which a character, or group of characters, must solve. Each situation considered in the story must have an inherent dramatic value; it must be potent with emotional possibilities. This is the test of its value in the story. Now let me illustrate by the two actual cases that I have referred to. ((Two letters, one to "Dear Jack", and James A. Harris for Gerson Goodman.)) . . .

All such little hints as I have been giving you are, of course, useful. But all they prove is that even when one can write stories, there is still something to learn. Finally, it should be clearly understood that it is not sufficient just to learn "how the

thing is done"--not at all the same thing as being able to apply the newly acquired knowledge.

It is practice, plus knowledge, and practice long continued, that finally arrives at a qualified perfection. The writer can never learn to write without writing--writing unceasingly--although I hope that what I have said here may lighten your burden and shorten your path.

Read, study, write! Observe, record, write! Write and reject. Write and destroy. Write! As many hours each day, or week, as it is possible to crowd into the time at your command.

Never dare to be satisfied for very long at a time with the result of even the most careful effort. And remember that the aspiring author must always be his own most useful teacher and most unsparing critic. Be your own editor--satisfy your own mind that it is your best. No one else can do your work for you. And when you have done that, send us your manuscripts and your road will be made easier by regular checks coming your way.

THE galaxy POLICY EJLER JAKOBSSON

(Talk Delivered before the Annual Open Meeting of the Eastern Science Fiction Association, October 17, 1971)

By now all of you know that I'm a dropout back in school. One thing everyone here must have noticed about science fiction is that it's a contagion--and a permanent one. Once you've been exposed by actually working with it--you never really walk away from it. So I'm here.

I'm not going to try to tell you or anyone for as long as I live what else science fiction is--or even what I think it is--simply because I don't know and won't know--nor will anyone else--until the last story is written. Nor will I argue with anyone else's definition of it--I think that all attempts at definition are to the good, as long as no single definition becomes restrictive. In the course of a rather heated story discussion with an author recently I found myself saying that if he and I ever arrived at an ultimate definition of science fiction we would both be dead--it would be like looking on the face of God.

I've since tried to examine that statement--and I don't really find anything too much wrong with it.

Anyway, as some of you have probably noted, I've tried to keep Galaxy open. My

feeling is that over any given twelve-month period--over any given year--Galaxy should present as broad a spectrum of the best--and most pertinent to the field--science fiction written during that year as its pages can be made to contain.

The word pertinent is the key. Obviously all good science fiction is pertinent--my own view is that it's the most pertinent fiction being written today. Science fiction that is pertinent to the field, however, to me is fiction that either adds a new dimension or uniquely exploits or extends an established one.

What those words best and pertinent on Galaxy's spine actually mean, then, is that what I would ideally like Galaxy to be is a service magazine to the field--a showcase not only of what science fiction is in the widest possible spectrum, but also of what it might be. This posture makes it necessary for the magazine to assume certain obligations--such as occasionally stepping out on a limb.

Probably the most controversial application of this policy has been the publication of Robert A. Heinlein's I Will Fear No Evil in Galaxy. Let me begin this part of the discourse by stating unequivocally that I liked the book. It shocked me. I remember being appalled by much of it at first reading. I remember putting down the manuscript and saying, sometimes out loud to anyone who happened to be within earshot, that not even Heinlein could do what he was doing--or that if he did in the next part of the book what I anticipated he would do, I would stop reading and send back the manuscript--but I didn't stop. I read through an office afternoon, on the train ride home and didn't sleep until I had finished it. And Heinlein did all the things I said he could not do and I knew I had to have the book.

And not only because I liked it.

Brain and identity transplants or switches are not new in science fiction, but usually only the conscious or overt brain functions are transferred. Heinlein had attempted to portray not only the transplanting of the entire organ operating at both the conscious and subconscious levels, but he had chosen a long-lived, well-used, almost a used-up brain that had had a chance to collect all the unbidden thoughts, all the dross of a lifetime.

An object for study.

For me I Will Fear No Evil was both an honest and an entertaining work. Was it a necessary book for Heinlein to write? I spoke to Heinlein and received the impression that it was--no one else had written it. Is it an important book? He thought it was and I still think so. I don't think that brain transfers can ever again be handled as casually as they sometimes were in science fiction before I Will Fear No Evil.

I Will Fear No Evil was therefore highly pertinent to its field in 1970--and for that reason alone belonged in the Galaxy of 1970.

The book is not without flaws.

The composite creature, Joan-Eunice, never came across to me as a sex symbol--as she is presented in the book--or even as a woman. I also felt throughout the story that she was--and realistically had to be--quite insane, psychologically a monster. I feel, however, that some of the criticism leveled at the story has been unfair. I don't see it as a dirty book or even primarily as a sex novel. And despite its unwieldy length it is a carefully structured book. I know. I had to read it three times in order to fit it into the magazine. Curiously enough, I enjoyed it more on each reading.

I think that, particularly during 1970, Galaxy was forced out on the limb a number

of times. I don't know how it looked to you--but from where I sat 1970 seemed a rather strange year in science fiction. I was, of course, working an impossible schedule, one that required me to buy, edit, arrange for illustrations and process into magazine form approximately 130,000 words a month. To find 130,000 words to buy, one has to read at least up to fifty times that many. I think I may have read more science fiction during 1970 than all of you combined.

Though the picture was a little blurred I had a pretty wide-angle view of the field at least as far as unpublished manuscripts offered for publication were concerned. And it seems to me I saw precious little standard or hard science fiction suitable for Galaxy available. When I saw some I pounced. We had Ted Sturgeon's Slow Sculpture of course, not exactly hard science but a gem of a story that, as you probably know, went on to win both the Nebula and Hugo awards. And I hope some of you will remember Stephen Tall's Allison, Carmichael and Tattersall, Bob Silverberg's Downward to the Earth, The Tower of Glass and his Urban Monad 116 series--all easily recognizable in the genre. A. Bertram Chandler, Michael Coney and Duncan Lunan also contributed in this area.

But overall it seemed to me that science fiction was reaching for wider horizons throughout the year and Galaxy also had to reach out into new dimensions to fill its pages.

Galaxy began 1970 with Gerald Jonas's Shaker Revival and continued with Harlan Ellison's The Region Between. Both were fine stories, but if you happened to read them you know that neither was standard science fiction fare. Both, however, did well in Nebula balloting and Shaker Revival went on to become one of the "World's Best" anthology selections. The Region Between made the final Hugo balloting--so that both stories were at least accepted in the field.

But Galaxy had been out on the limb with both--they were simply the best we had to offer in the first two issues of 1970.

There were other instances. Did anyone here happen to read Wilma Shore's Goodbye Amanda-Jean in the July 1970 issue? ((Yes))

This was an odd little suburban idyll in which all human relationships, both casual and tender, were interpreted in terms of cannibalism. Almost mathematically accurate, I thought--hence possibly science fiction. I'd like to take a vote--is it? ((Vote: Yes))

Growth and change are marks of vitality in the field--and it's quite possible that the best science fiction story is yet to be written and that no one now in this room will live to read it. The field is infinitely richer today than it was twenty years ago when I dropped out of school--and it's great to be back.

One other, purely mechanical feature about Galaxy that might help us reach our objective may or may not have escaped your attention. We have had, and I hope will continue to have, a good deal of flexibility in what I would like to call "inner size"--so that regardless of the number of pages per issue we have been able to accommodate vastly varying wordages and virtually any length material.

Top wordage for one issue of Galaxy came, I think, in the August-September 1970 issue, which ran to a total of some 93,000 words in order to contain Jim Blish's The Day after Judgment.

I don't know if what we're trying to do with Galaxy will work out. A good deal will depend on us--can we do it? Just as much will depend on you--do you want us to do it?

I suppose we'll both find out. Thanks very much.