



hroughout many cultures worldwide, one of the signs of humanity itself is reading; indeed, it has been said that the state of a civilization can be judged by the literacy of its people. Reading and writing offer both individuals and nations the power to record information; to learn about environment and existence; to feed imagination; and to achieve fellowship with all humankind. Every example of writing is subtly—sometimes arbitrarily—influenced by the beliefs of its author and his or her time, and even the ideally objective chronicle of history often renders a given event unrecognizable through many retellings (remember the old children's game of "Whisper Down the Lane?"). Yes, the process has its flaws and pitfalls; nevertheless, our chief tool for furthering awareness of ourselves and our world remains the written word.

Thus the most valuable service performed by a book is precisely that: to add to the knowledge of the reader. However, though gaining acquaintance with one's past and present may be the first and foremost reason to read, increased insight does not come from factual material alone. Fiction also makes a critical contribution toward that goal, especially in fostering acceptance—and, more importantly, appreciation—of the "different" behavior of unfamiliar cultures, for an idea presented in story form often catches the attention and engages the sympathy more effectively than a factual account.

Having been asked to counsel beginning writers as to the best ways to cultivate their craft, I offer the following advice.

One of the questions most frequently posed to an author of fiction is this: "Where do you get your ideas?" The answer is very simple: "*I read.*"

Above all, a writer must be a reader. First, he/she needs to acquire authentic factual information for the construction of stories. Many people accept unquestioningly an author's rendering of historical persons, places and events as correct, so that if such elements of a tale are convincingly presented, they will become fixed in the minds of those readers as true. Thus the foremost duty of the writer is to make certain that such data reflect the most current scholarship on the subject. *Duty* is not too strong a word, for the author often acts as a teacher, and slipshod or—worse—nonexistent research is a form of lying and therefore a violation of trust.

Happily, in addition to representing the known universe in fiction, authentic historical facts can also serve as fascinating jumping-off places for the building of imaginary worlds. Anchoring projections about tomorrow to the science, religion or politics of today will tether the armchair astronaut by a secure, familiar lifeline for his mental spacewalks. In addition, the greater the number of real-seeming details that can be supplied about a created universe, the more believable that country-of-the-mind will be. Writing as an art is twin to painting, with words for its colors; if it is to present a complex, lifelike picture, a rich palette must be accumulated in order to be drawn from—and "drawn" with. Names in particular are—literally—vital; their sensitive selection is often the Pygmalion touch that grants an inert work life. Begin a list of names that sound like

proper ones for the hero/ines, villains, rulers, peasants. Baby-christening books and telephone directories, especially if ethnically diverse, are good places to start.

Read, then, if you would write: history, natural science, sociology, astronomy—and not only what has been discovered in the past in these fields but what is being predicted as a future trend. Examine layouts of cities that were, then look at plans for air- or spaceborne cities that might be. Study swords, then investigate the sonic knives with which surgery is even now being performed. Having laid a broad foundation for your world with such cutting-edge extrapolations, you can then make logical guesses about the smaller aspects of your creation—what your characters could wear, eat, and enjoy for entertainment; how they might govern themselves; what deities they may worship. Keep notebooks in which you can record facts that especially intrigue you, and retain interesting clippings from magazines and newspapers. You may use much or little of your research for any given project; however, you might find that, when dealing with another piece of work, a previously unused tidbit could be employed to form the nucleus of an entirely new plot.



In the early years of the last century, few works of the type we would now consider science fiction or fantasy were brought out in hardcover format by the well-established publishing houses; in fact, until *Sputnik* astounded the world in the 1950s, speculative stories were generally confined to the so-called "pulp." However, after the Russians broke into space, such companies began to actively campaign for book-length tales of imagination.

A core group of authors who had served their apprenticeship in the magazines made the transition smoothly to the new market. In this promotion of popular writing to "real" publication, L. Ron Hubbard, who had written action stories in a number of widely diverse genres, not only saw a chance for himself but perceived an even greater opportunity for others. He believed that newcomers to the imaginative field should be encouraged and nourished. From this conviction was eventually born the L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future Contest, in which fledgling authors might receive experienced critical assessment of their efforts, and recognition, in the form of prizes and publication, for quality work.

For nearly a decade, the privilege and pleasure has been given me of serving as one of the judges for this competition. The many stories of high merit which have been placed in my hands have proven that Mr. Hubbard was emphatically correct in his estimation: that a cadre of leaders-to-be in the field of imaginative writing stands ready, willing and able to deliver its best when given the chance of a lifetime to do so offered by the contest he established. To paraphrase Walt Kelly's Pogo, "We have met the Future—and it is They."