

# MALTON BOOK FESTIVAL CREATIVE WRITING

Writing for publications is a different discipline from essay writing or writing professional reports, as taught at school or university. Companies run courses on this – eg. the London School of Journalism. The London School of Journalism used to provide a general correspondence course for £100, and would refund the whole fee to people who were unable to make at least that amount of money out of creative writing. I did the course, and did not qualify for a refund! Some of these notes are based on their ideas.

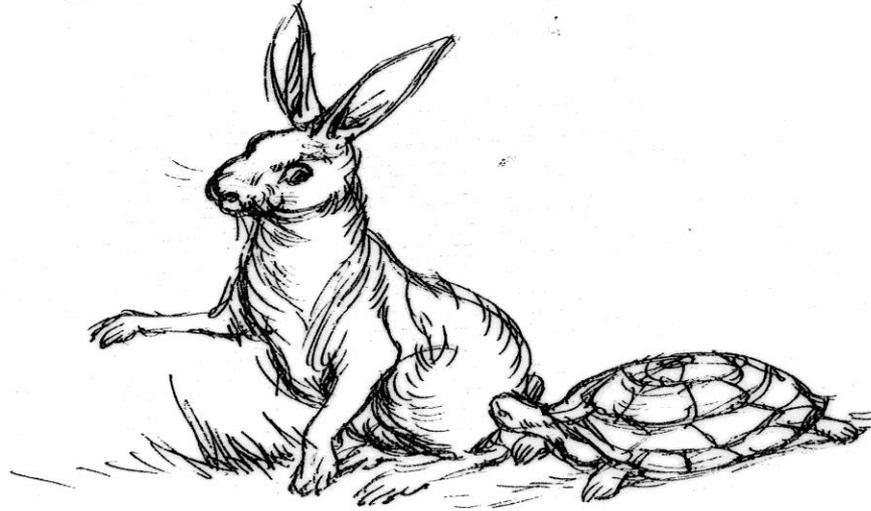
# CREATIVE WRITING – SHORT STORIES

## ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS:

- ▶ The message or theme which the story is written to prove
- ▶ At least two characters
- ▶ A beginning, development and an end.
- ▶ At least one scene with a conflict (or challenge) between at least two of the characters.

NB “Conflict” in this sense does not necessarily mean an argument or a fight.

Take examples from Aesop’s fables – eg: the “hare and the tortoise”. This is a very simple short story which contains all the necessary ingredients.



*The  
Hare and  
the  
Tortoise*

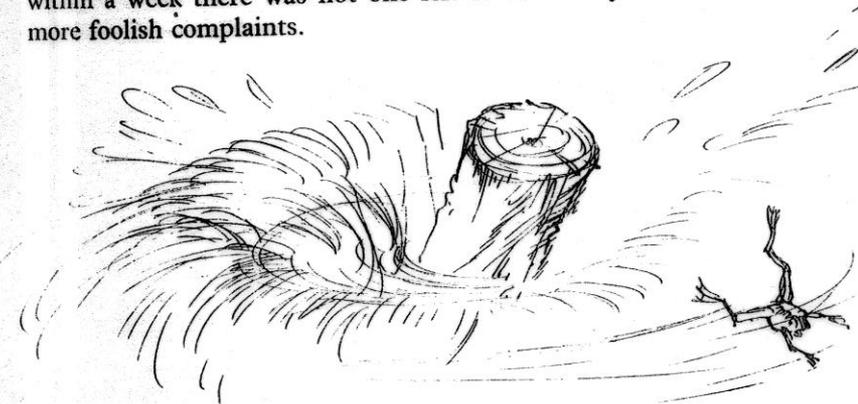
*Aesop*

ONE day a cocky hare ridiculed the short feet and slow pace of the tortoise. The tortoise laughing, said: "Though you are as swift as the wind, I can beat you in a race." The hare, thinking this was quite impossible, agreed to a race. They decided that the fox should choose the course and fix the winning post. On the day appointed for the race they started together. The tortoise never stopped for a moment, but went on with a slow and steady pace straight to the end of the course. The hare, trusting to his sure swiftness, was not at all worried. He lay down by the wayside and fell fast asleep. At last he woke up and ran as fast as he could to catch up, but he found that the tortoise had already reached the goal, and was comfortably dozing after her efforts.

THE frogs, piqued at having no established ruler, sent ambassadors to Jupiter to ask for a king. He, seeing their simplicity, cast down a huge log into the lake. The frogs were terrified at the splash and hid themselves in the depths of the pool. But when they saw that the log remained motionless they swam again to the top of the water and forgot their fears. Before long they became so familiar with their new king that they would climb up and squat upon him, and croak loudly. After some time they began to think themselves ill-treated in the appointment of so inert a ruler, and sent a second deputation to Jupiter to pray that he would set over them another sovereign. He then sent an eel to govern them. When the frogs discovered his good nature, they sent yet a third time to Jupiter to beg that he would once more choose for them another, stronger, king. This time Jupiter, thoroughly annoyed by the frogs' demands, sent them a heron who feasted so well upon his subjects that within a week there was not one left to make any more foolish complaints.

*The  
Frogs  
asking for  
a  
King*

*Aesop*



# The Hare and the Tortoise – How the story works

**The message:** more haste: less speed.

**The characters:** These do not need long descriptions because they embody the characteristics of animals. We don't need to be told that the hare is a fast runner, and that the tortoise moves slowly. No further elaboration is required.

**The beginning:** The hare and the tortoise meet.

**The first conflict scene:** the tortoise challenges the hare to a race;

**The outcome and second conflict scene:** the race.

**The outcome:** the tortoise wins the race by steady plodding, whereas the hare is overconfident, stops and has a rest.

Now, you try and analyse the next three stories from Aesop's Fables .



THE mice summoned a council of war to decide what they were going to do about their great enemy the cat, who was always attacking them. Among the many plans they devised, the one that found favour was to tie a bell around the neck of the cat. Then, when the mice heard the bell tinkling, they would have time to run into their holes and hide. Everyone agreed, but when it came to choosing a mouse to “bell the cat”, no one could be found who was willing to do it!

*The  
Mice in  
Council*

*Aesop*

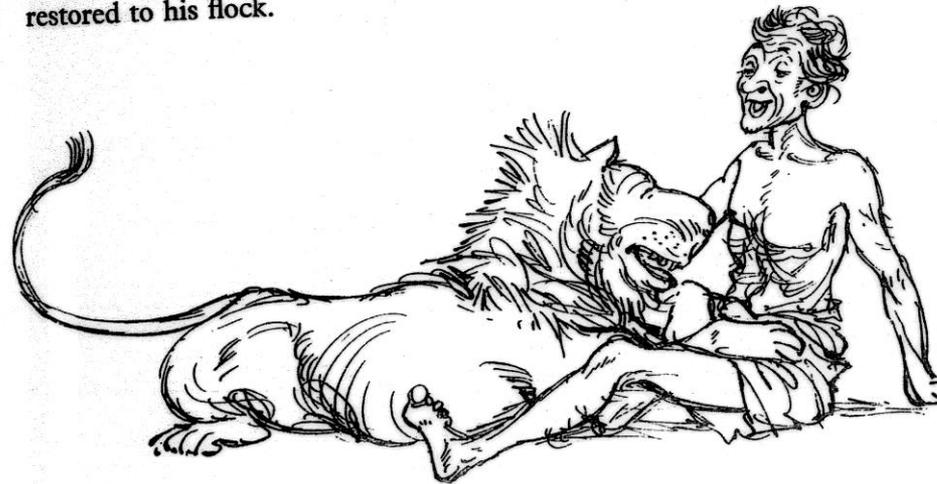


A LION, roaming through the forest, trod on a thorn which became painfully embedded in his paw. Soon afterwards he saw a shepherd, and coming up to him he wagged his tail as if to ask for help. The shepherd boldly placed the lion's paw upon his lap, and discovering the painful thorn gently pulled it out. The lion, relieved of the pain, joyfully returned to the forest, only to be trapped by hunters and sent captive to a distant city.

Some time later the shepherd was wrongfully imprisoned and condemned to be thrown to the lions. Now it happened that the lion chosen to kill the shepherd was just the one he had healed in the forest, and on being released into the pit the animal at once recognized his former friend. Instead of attacking, he approached peacefully and placed his paw tenderly in the shepherd's lap. The king of that country heard this wonderful tale and ordered the lion to be set free again in its native forest, and the shepherd to be pardoned and restored to his flock.

*The  
Lion and  
the  
Shepherd*

*Aesop*



# CREATIVE WRITING – THE NOVEL

## *THE NOVEL*

The essential ingredients are the same as a short story, but there are more characters and more conflict scenes or “chapters”. However, because novels are more complex than short stories, attention has to be given to the following additional features:

- ▶ **Cliff Hanging**
  - ▶ **Message**
  - ▶ **Viewpoint**
  - ▶ **Plot**
  - ▶ **Catharsis**
- 

# THE COVER

Some people say that the cover sells the book. It certainly helps. The binding may be all the reader will see on the bookshelf.

So the binding should encourage the buyer to pick the book off the shelf and look at the front cover.

If that appeals, he will look at the back, and if the back interests him, there's a good chance he will read the first few paragraphs of the first chapter.

He may then make up his mind if he wants to buy the book.

# THE NOVEL – THE MESSAGE

**A MESSAGE** (or theme) is essential for every story, whether it is a short story or a long historical novel:

## **TYPICAL MESSAGES:**

**Detective stories:** “Murder will be found out”  
“Crime doesn’t pay”

**War stories:** “It is sweet and honourable to die for your country”  
“War is ugly and horrible”  
“Who dares wins”  
“No man has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends”

**The spy thriller:** “Fortune favours the bold”.

**The romantic or general novel:** “A man will do anything to win the woman he loves” and vice versa  
“A woman will do anything for the man she loves” and vice versa  
“It is better to have a happy life than a miserable marriage”  
“A sense of duty should prevail over temptation”.

Novels can have more than one message, provided they are consistent and related to each other.  
For example, my novel the Loner has two: “A man will do anything to win the woman he loves” and “The key to success is a healthy mind in a healthy body”.

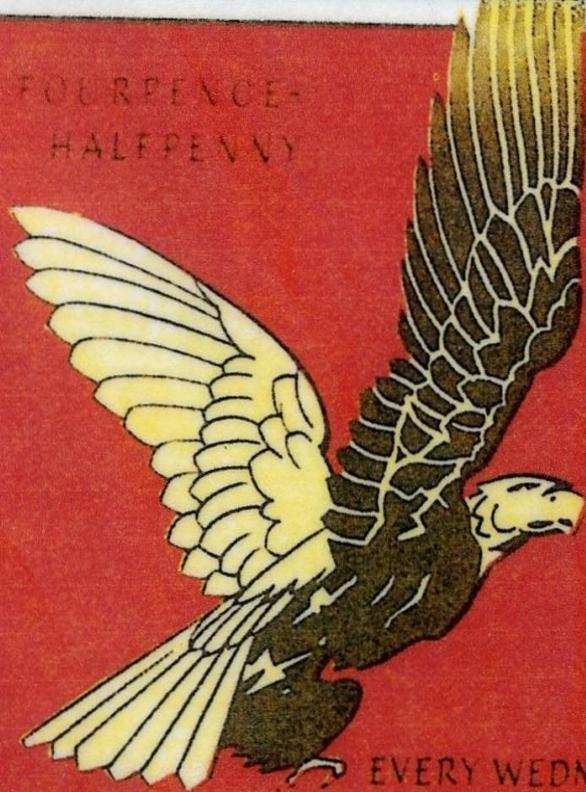
# THE NOVEL

## CLIFF-HANGING

In order to maintain reader interest, no chapter should end with all the conflicts in the story resolved. There must be at least one unresolved conflict to make the reader want to start the next chapter. This is often described as a “cliff-hanger”. There can be many conflicts going on at the same time, and the skill is to keep building the pace and number of unresolved conflicts into an ever quickening and deepening crisis with a climax at the end. All the “loose ends” (ie the unresolved conflicts) have to be tied up before the end of the last chapter.

This can be seen from comic strips like this one – every instalment has end with a cliff-hanger to get readers to buy next week’s issue.

FOURPENCE-  
HALFPENNY



EVERY WEDNESDAY

# EAGLE

COMPANION TO GIRL, SWIFT AND ROBIN

AUGUST 1955 VOL. 6, NO. 31

## DAN DARE

PILOT OF THE FUTURE

in *THE MAN FROM NOWHERE*



BACK TO "POSEIDON",  
LIVELY, DAN!

WHAT ORDERS,  
COMMANDER?

**THE STORY SO FAR:** Searching for the wreckage of the mystery spacecraft from outer space, Dan and Co. descend to unexplored Pacific depths in "Poseidon". At 5,000 fathoms, they take refuge in a cavern to escape the attack of a submarine shark. While Commander Lex O'Malley examines the vessel's hull for damage, Dan discovers the wrecked spaceship with lights still blazing from her portholes! When Dan and Lex look inside, they see that the three strange occupants are still alive!

WE'LL SEND A SIGNAL ON THE DISTRESS CHANNEL. THE MARKER-BUOY WILL RELAY IT TO SPACE FLEET AND ADMIRALTY. WITH ANY LUCK, THE HEAVY SALVAGE GANG WILL BE THERE WHEN WE SURFACE.

HOW LONG WILL THAT TAKE?



ABOUT TEN HOURS!

LET'S HOPE THE POOR BLOKES INSIDE CAN LAST THAT LONG.



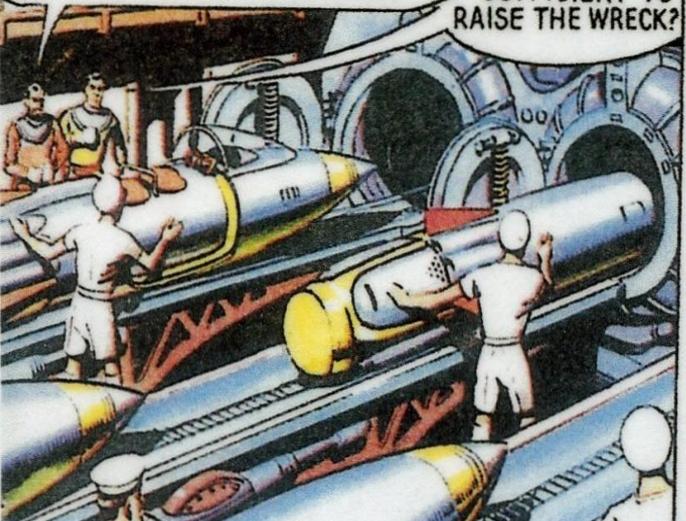
BREAK OUT THE CABLE-CARRIERS - ALL SIX OF THEM! JUMP TO IT!

AYE, AYE, SIR!



THERE ARE OVER SIX MILES OF CUPRAZITE CABLE IN EACH OF THOSE BABIES, WITH ELECTRO-MAGNETIC LIMPET GRAPPLES.

I'M WAY OUT OF MY DEPTH! WILL THAT BE SUFFICIENT TO RAISE THE WRECK?



IT'S GOT TO BE! YOU AND I WILL RIDE THE MOTHER-CARRIER, WITH RADAR-CONTROL ON THE OTHERS.

TORPS!

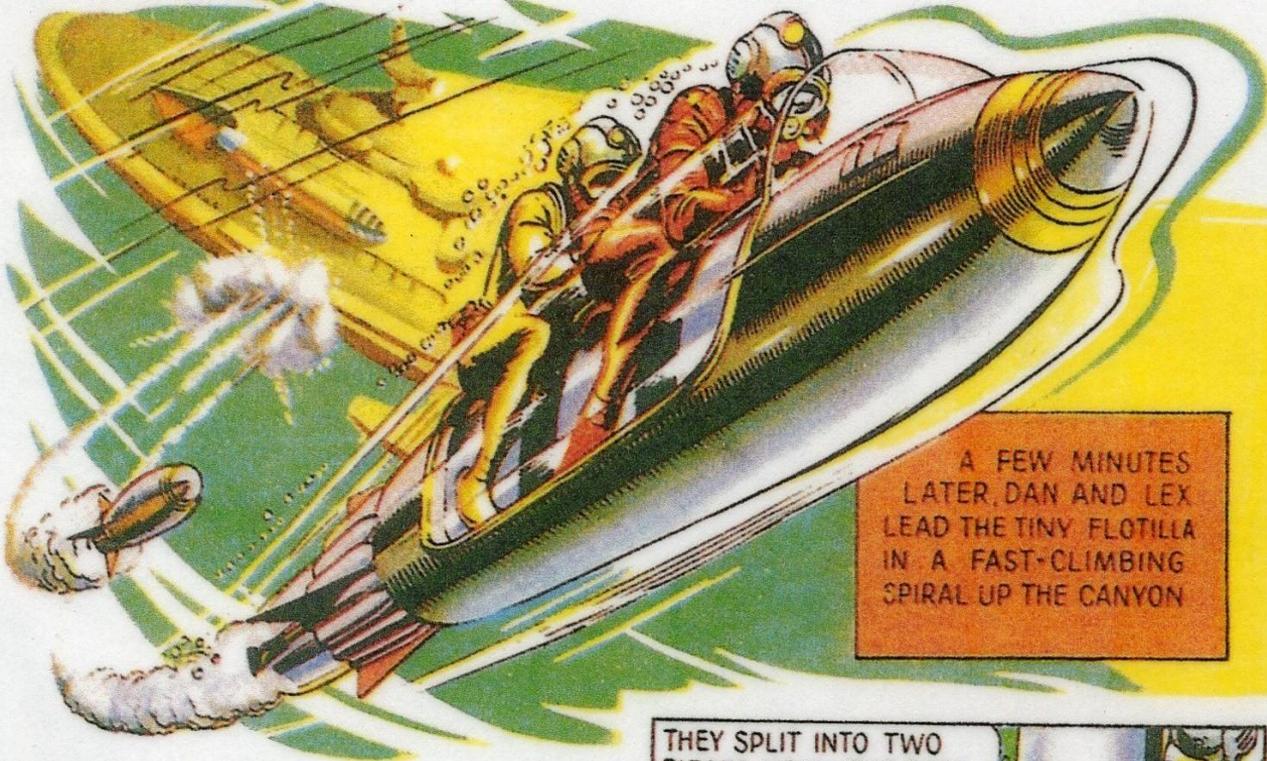


LET GO A MAGNA-FLARE - SET TO BLOW AT 1,000 YARDS, BEARING 6X4B.

WE'LL NEED ALL THE LIGHT WE CAN GET FOR THIS JOB.

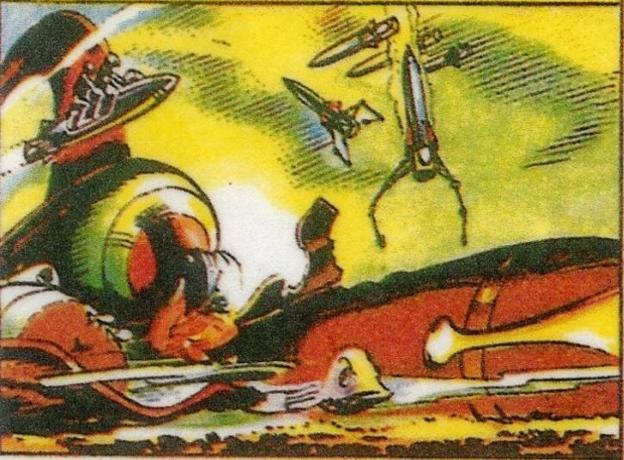


AYE, AYE, SIR!



A FEW MINUTES LATER, DAN AND LEX LEAD THE TINY FLOTILLA IN A FAST-CLIMBING SPIRAL UP THE CANYON

WITH THEIR MAGNETIC LIMPET-GRAPPLES EXTENDED, THE CABLE CARRIERS ARE DEFTLY MANOEUVRED ON TO THE WRECK .

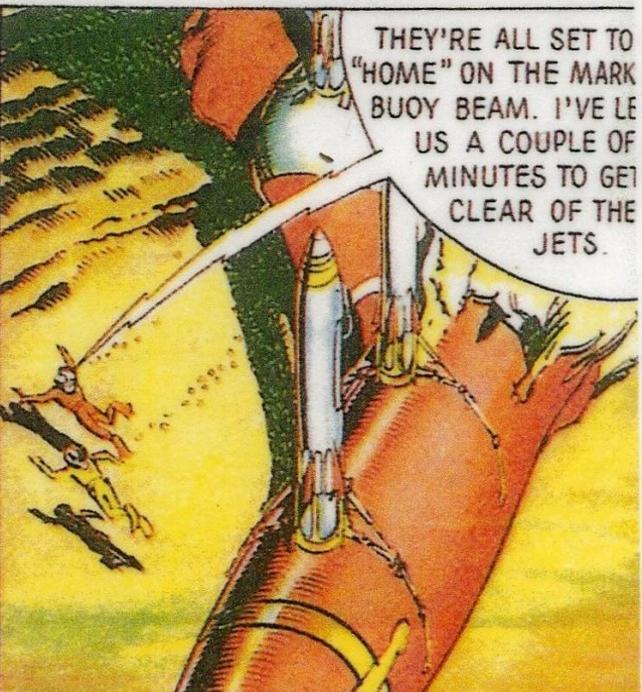


THEY SPLIT INTO TWO PIECES NOW—THE BASE STAYS GRIPPING THE WRECK, WHILE THE TOP PART WHIPS UP TO THE SURFACE WITH THE CABLE.



OUR VIBRATION'S HIT THAT SUPER SARDINE AND IT'S DRIVING HIM CRAZY!

OUR BIG PROBLEM! GOING TO BE GETTING OUT PAST THAT BLIGHTER WHEN WE START SURFACING!



THEY'RE ALL SET TO "HOME" ON THE MARK BUOY BEAM. I'VE LET US A COUPLE OF MINUTES TO GET CLEAR OF THE JETS.



HERE'S A HIDEY-HOLE!  
IN YOU GO!

I'M WITH YOU,  
SHIPMATE!



AS DAN AND LEX  
TAKE COVER, THE  
AQUA-JETS ON THE  
CABLE CARRIERS  
START THEM OFF  
ON THEIR LONG  
JOURNEY TO THE  
SURFACE . . .



LET'S HOPE THAT  
FINNY FREAK DOESN'T  
GET AMONG THE  
CARRIERS.

EVEN IF HE DOESN'T  
HOW'S "POSEIDON"  
GOING TO GET PAS  
HIM?

BUT IN THE SHADOWY DEPTHS BEHIND THEM, AN EVEN  
GREATER PERIL LURKS!



STICK IT, LEX! I'M COMING!

OUT OF HIS NATURAL ELEMENT, CAN  
DAN DARE RESCUE LEX O'MALLEY  
FROM THIS TERROR OF THE DEEP?  
DON'T MISS NEXT WEEK'S FAST-MOVING  
EPISODE OF "THE MAN FROM NOWHERE."

# THE NOVEL – THE CHARACTERS

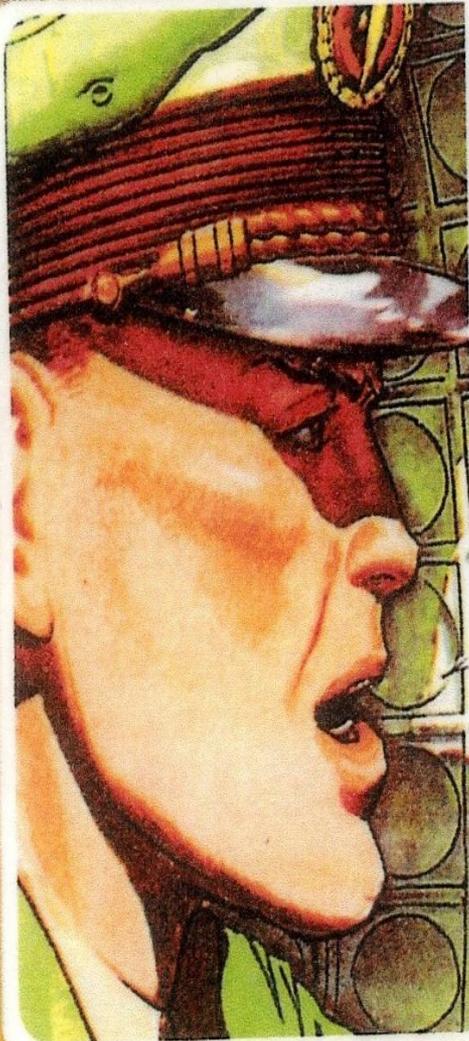
The main characters have to be carefully drawn. Some authors write a short biography of each of the main characters before they start writing the novel. Others start from a very simple sketch which builds as the plot develops.

**As an example, see the following character sketches from Sixties Comic, Eagle’s “Dan Dare”. These characters, simply drawn, kept the Eagle comic going for nearly twenty years.**

One of the characters has to be the key character. His/her job is to attract the reader’s sympathy – make the reader care for him/her, so that when threatened, the reader’s attention is “gripped”. So the key character has to be or become someone the average reader will care for.

In real life, we meet thousands of people, but in fiction it is best to limit the number of the main characters, otherwise readers will not have time to grasp the main features of each character, and there is then a danger of confusion and loss of interest.

Characters can be static or they can change and develop as the story progresses. Typical “static” characters are James Bond, Sherlock Holmes, Inspector Morse etc.



# DAN DARE

## FULL NAME:

Daniel MacGregor Dare

**TITLE:** Colonel, Space Pilot Class 1,  
Interplanet Space Fleet

## FIRST APPEARANCE:

*Eagle* No. 1, April 1950

## DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:

Dashing good looks; 'satanic' eyebrows

**BACKGROUND:** Born Manchester, England, 1967. Attended Cambridge and Harvard. Has saved the Earth – not to mention other worlds – on countless occasions. Strong willed but compassionate, Colonel Dare is always willing to give his enemies a second chance.





## MEKON

**FULL NAME:**

The Mekon of Mekonta

**TITLE:** Supreme Scientist, Lord of the Treens, Illustrious First One of Venus

**FIRST APPEARANCE:**

*Eagle* No. 30, November 1950

**DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:**

Green skin, outsize cranium, puny body

**BACKGROUND:** Born – or rather, genetically engineered – towards the middle of the 18th Century, the Mekon is the ruler of the Treens of the Northern Hemisphere of Venus. Clashed with Dan on countless occasions, always managing to escape to fight another day.

## DIGBY

**FULL NAME:**

Albert Fitzwilliam Digby

**TITLE:** Spaceman Class 1, Interplanet Space Fleet

**FIRST APPEARANCE:**

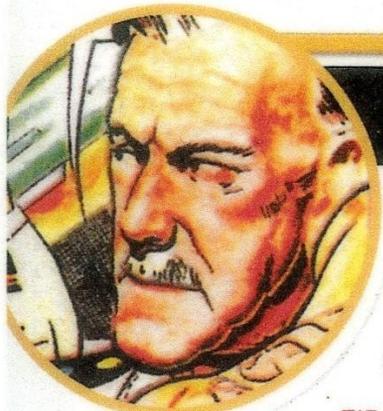
*Eagle* No. 1, April 1950

**DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:**

Portly stature

**BACKGROUND:** Born Wigan in Lancashire, England, 1960. Has served as Dan's faithful companion on numerous adventures. After a long trip into space, loves nothing more than to return home to his wife and four children, enjoy a game of football, do jigsaws and sleep.





## SIR HUBERT

**FULL NAME:**

Sir Hubert Gascoigne Guest

**TITLE:** Marshall of Space, Interplanet  
Space Fleet

**FIRST APPEARANCE:**

*Eagle* No. 1, April 1950

**DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:**

White hair and moustache; stiff upper lip

**BACKGROUND:** Controller of Interplanet Space and one of the pioneers of space travel. He was a crewmember on the first mission to the Moon and commanded a ship on the first mission to Mars. Should have been retired long ago.



## PROF. PEABODY

**FULL NAME:**

Jocelyn Mabel Peabody

**TITLE:** Professor of Plant Biochemistry

**FIRST APPEARANCE:**

*Eagle* No. 5, May 1950

**DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:**

Only woman in Dan Dare; strawberry-blonde hair

**BACKGROUND:** Born Morten in Gloucestershire, England. Expert on geology, nutrition, agriculture and botany. Seconded to the Venus expedition in 1996. Subsequently appointed permanent special advisor to Fleet Exploration and Research Department with honorary rank of Pilot/Captain.



## HANK

**FULL NAME:**

Henry Brennan 'Hank' Hogan

**TITLE:** Captain and Space Pilot Class 1, Interplanet Space Fleet

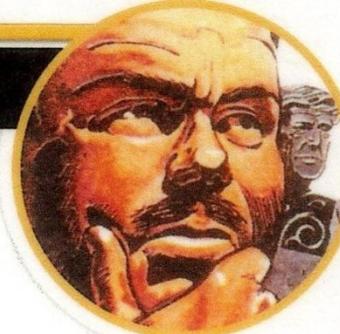
**FIRST APPEARANCE:**

*Eagle* No. 5, May 1950

**DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:**

Blond hair, glasses; Texan/Irish twang in voice

**BACKGROUND:** Born 1971 in Houston, Texas, of an Irish family. A very efficient pilot who hates red tape and bureaucracy, he is close friends with Major Pierre Lafayette.



## PIERRE

**FULL NAME:**

Pierre August Lafayette

**TITLE:** Major and Space Pilot Class 1, Interplanet Space Fleet

**FIRST APPEARANCE:**

*Eagle* No. 5, May 1950

**DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:**

Suave black moustache; slight French accent

**BACKGROUND:** Born in Dijon, France in 1970. Possessed of a sharp, mathematical and analytical mind, he is also the 'copain' or pal of Captain 'Hank' Hogan. He's a true French gastronome.



## FLAMER

**FULL NAME:**

Christopher Phillip Spry

**TITLE:** Space Fleet Cadet

**FIRST APPEARANCE:**

*Eagle* Vol. 5 No. 22, 28 May 1954

**DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:**

Shock of bright red hair, hence his nickname

**BACKGROUND:** A Space Fleet cadet from Astral College, 'Flamer' accidentally launched the Mark Plus Eight spacecraft and flew to Space Station XQY, where he was taken prisoner by the Mekon. Rescued by Dan, he eventually helped capture the Mekon.



## LEX O'MALLEY

**FULL NAME:**

Alexander Michael Terrance O'Malley

**TITLE:** Commander, UN Royal Navy

**FIRST APPEARANCE:**

*Eagle* Vol. 6 No. 19, 13 May 1955

**DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:**

Navy cap, beard

**BACKGROUND:** As Colonel Dare is to space exploration, "Lex" is to the underwater world. A famous explorer when he first meets Dan, O'Malley is Captain of the unique submarine/jetfoil craft the *Poseidon*.

# THE NOVEL – VIEWPOINT

The author has to decide how the reader is to be allowed to view the action in the story. He can either be given an entirely **objective** view – he sees events as they happen through his own eyes only like a spectator watching a play.

Alternatively, the reader sees events through the eyes of a character in the story. The reader finds himself absorbed into the character and feels the character's emotions as the story unfolds.

Many authors think the story becomes more dramatic and absorbing if it is written solely from the viewpoint of the key character. However, this does not always work, because it means that the key character has to witness all the actions in the book personally.

In a novel like the Loner, the key character does not become somebody the reader will care for for quite some time. So for the first part of the book, the standard conventions on viewpoint are reversed, so that he is seen only from the viewpoint of others. To compensate, one of the other main characters, who does attract reader care, is given the lead role during this part of the story.

So viewpoint depends on the story. Some are best written from the viewpoint of the key character alone; some, from the viewpoint of more characters than just the key character, and some novels combine different viewpoints in different chapters, and include straight narrative as well.

The following is an extract from my novel, “The Loner” with a “straight viewpoint” – the reader watches the action from a distance, like a spectator at a theatre.

Paul were sitting next to each other in the canteen. Bob looked listless, like a wounded animal. Paul asked him what the matter was. "You look as though you were hung over without being drunk," he said.

"Don't ask!" Bob replied.

"Ah, let me guess, Bob: it's not a girl is it?" Paul was grinning.

"Shut up! I don't want to talk about it."

Paul would not give up. "Don't tell me it's the girl from the dance! Surely not!"

"It could be," Bob conceded.

"I don't believe it, Bob. You must be out of your mind! You were pissed out of your senses! You can't even have started to get to know her."

"It's worse than that: she left without even giving me her telephone number. I'd just like to see her again – while I'm sober. I've been such a fool."

Just then Paul noticed Mark join the queue at the self-service counter. "You know," he observed. "I could have sworn that Mark over there knew your girl and her friend."

"Really? I don't believe it! Well, what are you waiting for? Call him over then." He stood up and waved. "Mark, my friend," he called loudly. "Come over here. We've kept a place for you."

Mark looked pleased and surprised with his newly discovered popularity, and duly arrived, complete with plate of bacon and sausages. "W-what do you w-want?" he asked hesitantly.

"Aye, it's good to see a friend like you. Sit down, lad, and enjoy your lunch with us. It was so good to see you at t'dance. Tell me, my friend: how did you like it? Fun wasn't it?"

"I-I d-don't know. I-I'm no good at d-dancing. N-no girl is interested in me."

"You didn't seem to be doing so bad," Paul rejoined. "What about the girl who had you in her arms when the lights went out?"

Mark's face turned bright red with embarrassment. "I-I er er," he stammered. Then he turned to Bob and asked: "W-was it f-fun for you?"

Bob could keep up the pretence no longer. Strangely, Mark's stammer was annoying him. "Don't ask!" he said sharply, glaring at Mark and willing him to be silent.

Mark shrank back.

Paul laughed. "Don't worry, Mark," he said with a grin. "Bob's not going to eat you! He's got a problem: it's called woman trouble!"

"Aye, that I have," Bob agreed. He relaxed and continued in a more

affable manner: "I'm sorry, Mark. I didn't mean to take offence. There's just something we'd like to know: do you remember the two girls you and I got up to dance with – right at the beginning? The one with the long curly dark hair and her blonde friend?"

Mark couldn't remember.

"But you did know some of the girls who were at the dance, didn't you?" Paul asked.

"Er...er...only the t-two riding school girls."

"Ah," said Bob, briefly recalling Sue's love for horses. "Mark, could they have been the same girls you and I danced with?"

"I-I d-don't know. P-possibly!"

"Do you know their names, Mark?"

Mark told Bob their names were Fiona and Sue.

"Ah Sue! That sounds like her. Was Sue the blonde, Mark?"

Mark confirmed that she was.

Bob turned to Paul. "You know, Paul, it's such a long time since I last went riding," he said. "I think it's time for a refresher. I could do with a change from caves." Then, turning to Mark, he added: "When's your next riding lesson, Mark? Would you mind if I came along with you?"

The next passage from “The Loner” shows “character viewpoint” – the reader becomes one with the character, feels the character’s emotions, and sees the action through the eyes of the character.

which is crowned by the peak of Ingleborough. He asked where the cave was. Bob pointed up the mountainside and said: "Up there."

So they climbed up the steep escarpment. Poor Mark had hardly had any exercise recently, except horse riding, and he was not used to hill-walking. So the climb to the cave almost exhausted him. Fortunately he was not the only inexperienced caver, and he was able to keep up with the rest of the team.

After several hundred feet, they reached the brow of the first escarpment; but, to Mark's disappointment, he saw that this was followed by a second steep ascent. Eventually they reached a plateau and crossed the Fell to the cave entrance. There they threw themselves onto the ground and took a rest. Mark sensed that, if he was worried about getting wet underground, his underclothes were already soaked with sweat.

The cave entrance was a hole in the ground with a stream running into it. They filled their carbide lamps with water, lit them and entered the cave. A low, narrow, winding passage led into the hill.

The roof seemed to rise and soar as they went downwards. The low passage became a twisting vertical fissure; but in spite of its height, it remained so narrow that there was room for only one caver at a time.

If Mark had expected to see an array of spectacular formations, perhaps columns spanning and supporting the emptiness of vast underground caverns, he was disappointed. There was only the grey rock of the passage, and the ever present sound of water – a running stream passing under their feet, now trickling along gently, now gushing down a rocky shoot, and at the end, filling the whole of its dark surroundings with the roar of a waterfall.

The experienced potholers had dispersed themselves among the novices to help them, particularly the girls. Mark found himself in front of Bob, while Bob's girlfriend, Sue, followed behind him. They were in no hurry, and were only too eager to demonstrate the correct footholds and to support the girls, particularly in their descent of the less straightforward climbs. Some paused for photographs, while others goaded them on with the strains of "Why are we waiting," sung to the melody of "Oh come all ye faithful."

Mark was surprised to find how capable he was. Footholds were not difficult to find in the awkward sections. Vertical drops of several feet could be bypassed or avoided by chimneying, or by traversing above the floor of the passage. It was fascinating to discover that, whereas the width of the passage might not allow much room for manoeuvre, in the three

dimensions of the rock fissure, there was considerable scope for movement up and down. Mark had hardly asked for help, scarcely felt more than a few tremors of fear and anxiety, when he was told he had climbed down an eight foot and a ten foot pitch without a rope or a ladder, although on asking where these hazards were supposed to have been, no-one seemed to be sure of their precise whereabouts! Mark was enjoying himself. There was something about the darkness, the size of the cave, which he liked. It was the sense of being part of a team facing a hostile environment.

Then they heard the roar of a waterfall. They had caught up with Dave and Pablo, who were leading. They had fastened a rope to a rock projection, and the rope hung loosely down a short waterfall. Mark peered down into the darkness. The water plunged about eight feet into a pool, and, after that it plunged down another step, and by the sound of it, down several more unseen steps. Dave and Pablo disappeared over the edge. It was Mark's turn next. He was worried.

Bob tried to put him at his ease. "These are the cascades," he said. "It's easy really. All you have to do is to hold onto rope, and walk backwards down waterfall."

"But I'll get wet."

“Not if you walk down the waterfall. Use your legs to push yourself away from the water.”

Mark was not convinced. He still hesitated.

Bob turned to Sue. “You go first,” he said.

Sue did as she was bidden, and soon her shout was heard announcing that the rope was clear.

Mark followed. It was a curious experience to walk downwards, with rope over shoulder, body erect, in a horizontal position, with a waterfall spraying between your legs. Mark was afraid the rock would be slippery, that he would lose his grip; then he felt confident, and he was at the bottom of the cascades before he knew it.

After more passage, Mark heard the roar of another waterfall – a much louder roar this time. A moment later he emerged into a small chamber. At the far end, the stream plunged down a short shoot to the right, before it was lost to sight in the darkness. Straight ahead, but also at the far end of the chamber, the floor sank into a vertical crack. Dave and Pablo were slowly and carefully unravelling the wire ladders they had brought with them, connecting them up, and feeding them into the crack, so that they hung, as a single ladder, directly downwards but away from the waterfall. Someone was uncoiling a rope, while the rest sat and

# THE NOVEL – THE PLOT

The plot has to develop through the characters. The characters will respond to each conflict (or challenge) in the way that suits their personality. It follows that the best way to allow the plot to develop is through the interaction of the characters. This can mean that the plot can sometimes twist and turn in ways the author did not expect when he started writing the book.



# FICTION – CATHARSIS

“CATHARSIS” – not essential, but can be very effective when used.

This is a Greek word for a sense of an “emotional release or cleansing” experienced by the reader – the sort of feeling that can bring tears to a reader’s eyes due to pity, fear or relief. In the case of tragic stories, this happens when the key character dies or is killed, largely as a result of a personal weakness (or even strength). In love stories, this can happen when the key characters finally realise they are in love. In other stories, this can happen when a long lost relative or friend is found and recognised. In a detective story, there is the moment when the villain is recognised and apprehended.

NB. A story does not have to fit into one of these categories for catharsis to apply. For example, in a detective story, the villain may have found himself in circumstances over which he has no control, and this can turn out to be the motive for the murder. The exposure of the villain and his subsequent sticky end can then be given a “tragic” dimension.

# PUBLICATION

Three kinds:

- ▶ Commercial publication
  - ▶ Vanity publishing
  - ▶ Self publishing

# COMMERCIAL PUBLISHING

It is very difficult for a new author to find a publisher, no matter how good the book. Publishing companies, like all other companies, will always prefer a safe product which they know they can sell without taking risks. So existing authors with an established track record, or well known celebrities from politics or show business will always have an advantage. There is huge competition and the market is saturated with books. Add to this the impact of computer DVD's and sites like Amazon which force publishers to give them a huge discount, and profit margins have reduced as a result. This all tends to produce a downward spiral which makes publishers even less inclined to take risks with novels by unknown authors.

Commercial publishers will often stick to books which fit into familiar “formulas” or models (eg. a “Mills and Boon type story; a “James Bond” type thriller; a “western” etc.), because they know that books which follow the formula will probably sell. So, there is an opportunity to write to a formula which a publisher is known to publish a lot of books in.

Conversely, commercial publishers also like to see originality – something in your book which no other novel has etc.

# SELF-PUBLISHING – HOW TO START

Let us assume you have written your book, that it's on your computer "Word" programme, and you want to get it published. You are considering "self-publishing".

You have spent hours and days over your personal labour of love, which you can't imagine anybody could possibly *NOT* want to read!

There are many companies who would just love to take your money and produce a book for you. How do you know if it is going to be worth taking the matter any further?

One first needs to recognise that readers' judgement is entirely subjective. What bores one reader might fascinate another. What pleases the author may be of little or no interest to anybody else.

The best way forward is to test the book on people you know. To do this you first have to produce some books. This may seem a circular argument, but fortunately the Internet makes this possible at very little cost.

# SELF-PUBLISHING – THE INTERNET

There are sites like LULU.com where you can upload your “Word” copy of your book, produce a cover, and order copies of your completed book. The quality is unlikely to be as good as what you would expect to find in a professional publication. The books are produced on a “print on demand” basis – ie. you can order as many or as few as you want. The drawback of “print on demand” is that this is far more expensive per book than to do a print run of say 500 or 1000 books. However, at this stage, you don’t need more than thirty or so copies, and in Lulu’s case, there are no set up charges, and you only have to pay the price of each copy you order.

A copy of “The Loner” as produced by Lulu is on display.

# TESTING YOUR CREATION

Once you have uploaded your book, you can sell it – at least at “cost” price. You should then follow up on your readers – even to the extent of pestering your buyers until they’ve read the book and are able to let you know what they think of it.

Be warned, many of your readers will have no confidence that a self-published book can be any good – “if it’s any good, it would have been published main stream”, is what most people think! So it may be a while before you get any feedback.

For example, my first attempt at the Loner was nearly 30 years ago. I did not find the knack of novel writing until I got half way through. This became painfully evident when I found that the friends who read the typed manuscript were plainly struggling through the first half, but finished it very quickly after they’d got half way through. This was also confirmed by a critic who I paid to review the book. So I did not take it any further.

A few years ago, whilst temporarily unemployed, I set about re-writing the Loner. I reduced its length by about a quarter, cut down the number of characters, tightened up the plot, almost completely re-wrote the first half, and re-arranged the second half. This time, when I sold the LuLu version, I got an enthusiastic response from most of the buyers. It’s always difficult to know if people are trying to please you because they know you, but as an unexpected enthusiasm came from some people who had no reason to want to please me, I was satisfied that generally the enthusiasm was genuine. I paid another critic to review the book, and received a good and encouraging report.

I also asked readers to rate the Loner out of 10 (where 1 is awful, 5 is average and 10 is excellent). Most readers rated the book between 6–8 – ie above average.

# SELF PUBLISHING

If you are satisfied your book deserves more, you can progress to a full publication.

There is a wide range of printers who do self-publishing. Some will produce books not much better presented than Lulu at an extortionate cost which leaves little room to make a profit or get your money back. The more respectable printers will call these “vanity publishers”, and their prospectuses will go to some length to explain why their class of self-publishing is much better than that.

So how does one know which companies to use? There is an annual publication known as the “Writers and Artists Yearbook” published by A&C Black. This will tell you who the reputable self-publishing companies are. I chose “Matador”.

The more books you publish, the less the cost per book, but this assumes you are going to be able to market a massive number, when you have no idea how popular your book is going to be. So it is not a bad idea to start with a small run of, say, 500 copies.

# AFTER SELF-PUBLISHING

Assuming you now have a product which is as well presented as any published book, you are in a position to establish a track record – and not just of sales. You can send the book away to be reviewed. Your local newspaper may be willing to do a review, for example. The Loner so far has some good reviews, including one from the Gazette and Herald, and another from Descent magazine, and two from established authors.

You can set up a web-site for the book with photographs which are too expensive to print in the book, and with notes of reviews and what readers say about the book and much else besides.

One can hope that if the track record is good enough, you might be able to get a mainstream publisher interested in buying the copyright and doing a full scale publication. If there is a track record, the risks of taking on that unknown author may reduce.

# MARKETING

Most reputable self-publishing companies will retain a stock of your book. They will also get it an ISBN number. The ISBN number is the key to the books trade. Once your book has an ISBN number, it can be ordered from the publishing company at any time through any book shop or library – while stocks last.

Some companies will go further and actively market your book for you and sell it to bookshops or on-line book stores, like Amazon. Matador does this.

There are drawbacks. Most of the bookshop chains buy indirectly from a wholesaler. The wholesaler will require a discount. Amazon, for example, requires a 60% discount. The publishing company may add their own charges. So one is unlikely to make a fortune out of selling a self-published book.

One way of improving your return is to market the book to smaller independent book shops. They can order direct from the publisher. They will still require a discount of between 20% and 30%, but if this and the publisher's fee is deducted you might make a small profit.

If you break even, you may wish to do another print run, in which case you will not have to repeat the set up costs.

# AND FINALLY.....

Unless you are a known author with a mainstream publisher interested in your work, you should not expect to make a living out of writing books. However, if you like creative writing and have a story to tell, and are able to write in a way which appeals to readers, this can be a very rewarding hobby, and one which can be done without wasting huge amounts of money.

Many famous writers started with books they have self-published and which no self-respecting mainstream publisher would have wanted to accept.

# CREATIVE WRITING

- ▶ For more information on “The Loner”, visit [www.the-loner.co.uk](http://www.the-loner.co.uk)
- ▶ To buy a copy of “The Loner”, visit [http://www.troubador.co.uk/book\\_info.asp?bookid=1020](http://www.troubador.co.uk/book_info.asp?bookid=1020)
- ▶ Buy your “kindle” ebook “The Loner” now at [http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Loner-ebook/dp/B004KAA7FY/ref=sr\\_1\\_28?ie=UTF8&qid=1342456072&sr=8-28](http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Loner-ebook/dp/B004KAA7FY/ref=sr_1_28?ie=UTF8&qid=1342456072&sr=8-28)