

# Writer's Digest

MARCH, 1950, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS

The news peg--  
backbone of  
non-fiction

My best friends  
are Martians

Greeting card  
verse writing



ROBERT HEINLEIN

ON A SPACE-SHIP SET IN HOLLYWOOD

# Writer's Digest

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# Bet on the Future and Win



By Robert A. Heinlein

SOME ONE (a spy from the whodunit camp?) has been circulating the rumor that science fiction is hard to read and intended only for those with technical school degrees. This is far from the truth. True, there are some clumsily written stories here and there which are dubbed "science fiction" because the author has cluttered them up with implausible, obscure gadgets tagged out with pseudo-Latin polysyllabic jawbreakers, but the great body of well-written science fiction is no harder to understand than *Forever Amber* and the background of the story is usually more familiar to the average reader than the background of a historical novel.

What is nowadays termed "science fiction" is "historical fiction"—of the future. The author attempts to envision what the world may be like for our grandchildren, or great grandchildren, and, in so doing, explores some human problem which may arise in that world of the future. Those human problems remain basically the same—war and love and death and birth. The background scene is changed; the people are not.

It does not take a degree in mechanical engineering to understand that the world may be vastly changed by the imminent development of space travel—as the western world was changed by Columbus. It does not take an intimate knowledge of ballistics to feel the terror and adventure and vast loneliness of the endless depths of space,

nor a professor's knowledge of astronomy to feel the tragic fascination of the ancient, long dead face of our moon.

The problem of "technical explanations" came up in filming the motion picture, *Destination: Moon*. We used a simple, direct solution: don't give the audience mathematical formulae—show them space flight! In a similar fashion in my new book, *The Man Who Sold the Moon*, no special knowledge not common to the average newspaper reader is required because the story is not about the engineering technicalities of space ships but about the human problems of a man possessed by the great dream of spanning space.

In fact, "science fiction" is a poor term—non-descriptive. The older term of speculative fiction is closer to the truth—speculation about what the future may hold, as indicated by all predictable changes, sociological, political, scientific. The possible shape of the future is always fascinating; it has driven people to fortunetellers throughout the ages—and drives them to bet on horse races and stocks.

You may even find that you yourself have a speculative novel of the future working around in your subconscious, waiting to be born. If so, find a typewriter and get it out of your system; it's a game anyone can play.

That's how I got started playing it.

(Reprinted from Feb., 1950, "Bookshop News." "The Man Who Sold the Moon" was published by Shasta Publishers.)