

# FUTURE

## SCIENCE FICTION

Robert W.  
Lowndes,  
Editor

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# REJECTION SLIP

By Ben Singer

The story of the desperate scribe who held a gun on the editor is hardly a new theme — but here's a novel twist on it!

"SIT DOWN; I'll be right with you." Jackson left the office and reappeared in a few minutes with a paper cup, which he proceeded to drain. "Now, what can I do for you?"

"Well, Mr. Jackson, I've brought you a story and—"

"Fine," the editor said, looking away. "If you'll just leave it with—"

"But Mr. Jackson, I'll be leaving for my vacation in a few days, and I certainly won't enjoy it—not knowing whether—"

"Okay," the editor said wearily, "let's see it..."

"Hi, Dor-Y," called Gor-T, the censor of *Twentieth Century Stories*. "Have the judges reached their decision yet?"

"Yep. And what do you think?"

"What?"

"They accepted it."

"No! What imbeciles. Wait till I'm promoted to magazine judge; I'll show 'em how to grade a story. Of course, production's your line—you wouldn't really care what they let through."

"Production men have morals too,



*Jackson decided to be discreet about it...*

Gor-T; don't let the old judge fool you. I agree with you about that yarn—I'll bet half of our subscribers will trade their printies in for new models, figuring their sets have gone haywire, when that story comes through."

"Remind me to put in a good word for you next time the old judge has me on the carpet. By the way—specifically what did you think was wrong with the story?"

"Characterization, of course; that mid-twentieth-century editor was completely incredible. Who would believe that the whole responsibility for a format's stories lay with one man? Who would believe he had the power to influence the thought of hundreds-of-thousands of readers? Any outfit that tried that would get the maximum penalty, nowadays; they just couldn't have been *that* primitive in the old days."

Gor-T nodded and then said, "Don't repeat this, but personally, I think the scribe who wrote it—has his time-periods mixed up."

"No!"

"Yes. But there's no sense in telling that to the judges; they'd ask who am I, a lowly censor, to analyze scribes. They might even send me off to a social-super-egotorium for a check."

"Yeah. They might. Remember what happened to Mor-T? He got an avocation permit and started writing non-fiction. Even though the Supreme Judges handed down a decision that non-fiction was legal—they still held the right to restrict its quantity; after all, the basis of our whole economy, our entire society, is fiction. Well, Mor-T was turning out an article *every twelve or fifteen months*. In short, he became a—" He paused nervously and looked around, "—a *hack*," he whispered.

"Careful how you use that word, Dor-Y. If anybody hears, you might be sent off to a slander-sublimation-school. But go on; where is Mor-T now?"

"According to the grapevine, he's been turned over to a literary agent; and I hear the agent has been bearing down on him. Sent him through a supervised story-writing school three or four times already; from what I hear, every time the instructor asks him a question, he answers with—the *cliche*."

Shocked, Gor-T shook his head. "You mean—" he lowered his voice, "—who, what, and why, when and where?"

"Yep. And, listen to this. I hear they might even give him the Blue Pencil treatment—like they did with that female reformer, Ger-T."

"I remember her—a real crackpot. She kept throwing ideological appeal into her stuff. Claimed our whole social structure was wrong. 'Government', she wrote, 'should not be merely words on paper; this system,

wherein a society is controlled by symbolism, is nothing more than an extension of the old saying, *Monkey see, Monkey do*.'"

"How did she ever get it through, anyway?"

"Let's see... as I remember it, a sector technician slipped it into a prime sequence; that was before we had automatic verifiers. The damn thing got a readership of seventy-two percent because he threw her thing in on the middle of a good novel, then stepped up the power to maximum. But they got their just deserts; Boston Prime banished them to an art colony—you'll get a kick out of this—an art colony on the coast of California."

"I pity them. All that warm weather—ugh! Well, I suppose they deserve it. That's life."

*Clang-gnip-gnop.* Gor-T jumped. "There goes the deadline bell; gotta get to the phraseology department. Look, I'm supposed to go over that wretched story and iron out any dangerous significances. Talk it over with you at Sin's *Sin Tavern* after press time. Okay?"

"Okay."



"Hmmm. Are you serious about this?"

"I am, Mr. Jackson."

"Well, I've seen crackpot stories before, but this takes the cake. I'm busy now, so why don't you drop back in a couple of months, or years? We might have an opening in file thirteen."

"If you don't want an opening right now, finish reading my story. This forty-five pointing at you is guaranteed to work even on editors."

"Since you put it that way..."



"The colossal egotism of that scribe. Is he trying to make us seem

like figments of his own warped imagination?" Gor-T asked, heaving the manuscript down for the fifth time.

"How do we know we're not?" Dor-Y answered, reaching for his beer.

"How do we know? Pinch me. Ouch! Is that proof enough?"

"Nope; even pain can be synthesized."

"Are you trying to tell me that a— a whim can have an imagination? What foolishness!"

"Maybe. Think of all the dream-within-a-dream sequences you've censored; and what about subtleties-within-subtleties? They amount to obviation, don't they?"

"Well, you may not believe in yourself, but I'd prefer to believe myself more believable than that anthropomorphic science-fiction editor. If it's a choice between me and that knuckle-head character, I pick me. After all, if you actually believe that hogwash about fantasies-within-fantasies, then why can't the characters have freedom of choice? I choose to believe that we are real and that these—these figments," he pointed to the manuscript, "are figments."

"Yeah, but what if that ancient science-fiction editor prefers to believe us fantasy and himself real? Where'll that leave us?"

"Hmmm. Maybe we'll cancel each other out—or will we?"

"Yes, unless we find some way to write him out of the story. Got any idea how that can be done?"

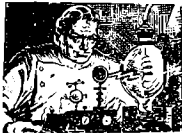
"Why yes, I think I do, since he's the prime character. Good thing the author-character is secondary."

"How?"

"Remember, the author-character had a weapon with him. If he blasts the editor into oblivion, the editor will have no choice; then we can dismiss him from our minds as only fiction." Gor-T started to laugh.

"Then how can he get rid of us?" Dor-Y asked.

"Rid of us? Oh! I forgot all about



that. The moronic scribe who created this monstrosity should be made a free-lance! If the editor writes us out, he'll destroy our whole social system. All he has to do is destroy our function, and then—who knows?"

"Quick." Dor-Y said, "grab your blue pencil and start re-writing, fast! Before he gets wind of what's up."

He raised the pistol and aimed it at Jackson. "I notice you don't like my story, so—" ... He raised the pistol and, leveling it at Jackson, said, "I notice you don't—"

"Forget about grammar and punctuation, there's no time to lose! Those science-fiction editors were devious sons."

"Wait! Hold It," Jackson said, "I'll buy; just let me change the ending."

"Well..." the writer said, lowering the gun.

"Two cents a word!" the editor whispered.

"Two cents a word! For two cents a word, I'd write my own obituary. Sold!"

*To Some Future Scribe: As I sit staring at my typewriter, I wonder if [Turn To Page 81]*

## Rejection Slip

I effectively ended the possibility of your interfering again with the publication of my work. I have suspected all along that it was you who caused me the agony of remaining unpublished.

You have been writing rejection slips into the story of me. Well, I think I dealt you a death-blow in this last story; you were just written out of existence by the characters in my story, the aspiring writer and the editor who feared for his life.

Now if the editor to whom I sent the manuscript only realizes the truth—that he is being controlled by

(Continued From Page 68)

a literary hack somewhere and sometime, then I shall never receive another rejection slip. If, on the other hand, he doesn't believe—

Here comes the mailman.



*Thank you for the opportunity of examining your manuscript. We feel, however, that the characters in your story were not real enough to warrant belief on the part of our readership. We do hope that you will continue to submit...*