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# SPACEWAYS

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## HOW TO WRITE A STORY

by

LYLE MONROE

The first thing to do is to be sure that you have plenty of white paper, second sheets, carbon, etc. If you're short on any of those it's best just to stop everything and run down to the corner to buy what you need—mustn't let anything interrupt the flow of inspiration once it's started. But don't stop to look over the magazine stand—that's fatal.

Okay now—got everything? Let's see; paper, carbon, eraser, ashtray, cigarettes, matches—wups! No glass of water. Step into the bathroom and get it. That brings your face up close to the mirror. Son, you're getting bald. No doubt about it; you can't call that a high forehead any longer. And your waistline isn't looking any too good.

All right, all right! What I need is fresh air. Why not just drop everything and take a run over to the Grand Canyon? Too much time spent at the mill isn't good for a man, makes him stale. It would really be professional work anyhow, gathering material for a western. You remember what they said about "Outlaws' Code"? Well, what if they did? What do they expect for pulp word rates?—Bret Harte?

Anyway, how about a little drive over to the Canyon? You could be back in three days, say four, and your work would be all the better for it. Clear the city fumes out of the head—good line that, better write it down. Wait a minute, you read that line, somewhere. Well, what if I did, one phrase isn't plagiarism. I wasn't going to use it anyhow.

Okay, get back in there and get to work.

Better start some coffee. Great stuff, coffee. Did Shakespeare have coffee? Maybe you could do an intimate essay on that—or a wacky article for Esquire. Couldn't be worse than some of Hemingway's stuff—what's Hemingway got that you haven't got? Aside from a good agent?

You can't afford a trip right now, Grand Canyon, or anywhere. Better write this yarn, then you can do it. Maybe it had better be a novelet rather than a short; there's a car payment coming up—don't forget that.

Back at the mill—Funny what a hypnotic effect a sheet of white paper has. Writer's insomnia, that's what it is. Can't sleep except when facing a typewriter. What's it going to be this time? Western, whodoneit, science-fiction? Science—that's a hot one! Anything more involved than a knife and fork would be just too much machinery for you, chum. What would you do if you were stranded on a planetoid with nothing but a broken-down fourth-order atomic ultraconverter to help you? Remember what you did when you tried to fix the hot water heater? Remember?

Well, how about a horror story? That ought to suit your mood. Add a sex angle and you could throw your heart into it. Pleasant subject, sex. No, the word rate is too low. Better make it science-fiction, then nobody can criticize your technical knowledge of the lowly steer, or guns, or something. Better not be too specific, though—some of those fans can be pretty unrelenting, and they've had highschool physics a good deal more recently than you have.

A man practically has to stand on his head to make a living in this town. I wonder if anybody could use a good press agent?

Anyhow that idea about being cast away on a planetoid isn't bad, isn't bad. Could call it "Castaway Cairn", that's got a nice ring to it and suggests action. Sounds familiar though, Weinbaumish. No, that was "Redemption Cairn". Too much alike. Maybe not, it's not identical and Weinbaum didn't own the English language. No, but he could use it a damn sight better than some guys here in this room.

Maybe the title ought to suggest interplanetary, the cash customers are suckers for interplanetary. Look what they get away with in Buck Rogers. I'll bet poor old Phil Nowlan is known as "Spinning Phil" wherever he's gone. Too bad about Nowlan. Well, we got to die sometime, I suppose. Nowlan, Weinbaum, Farnsworth Wright—

## HOW TO WRITE A STORY

Yes, but we got to eat now. You could bring in the cairn idea by having it be left by another explorer, a guy that the historians don't know anything about and then what he learned—the first guy—saves the second guy in the end. Sounds familiar—wasn't there something like that in the old Astounding, when Clayton published it? There was a mag!—two cents a word and up. Anyhow that was a long time ago and there aren't any new plots—it's all in the writing.

Well, how did he happen to be castaway? Don't worry about that now; get the title down and a good fast hook—you can take that up later.

A hook really ought to have dialogue, better start out with two characters. Two men? A girl maybe, and give a little love interest? Restrained, of course. Or how about a parrot, a parrot that he talks to because he's so lonely. No, not a parrot, a—a Venerian avivox. Now you're getting somewhere, kid. Screwy animals are always copy. Particularly when they are kinda human but strange—outrè. Good word, outrè. It's got body. Too bad these hack writers have worked it to death.

Maybe it would be a good idea to spend a couple of hours digging through Roget for some color words. List 'em—pep up the old style.

Naughty, naughty! Write down that title—you're stalling. Center the paper, backspace one, two, three, four, five, six, seven—

## CASTAWAY CAIRN

by

Hmmm—this ribbon is getting sorta grey. Better change it—editors like nice black copy that they can read easily. Do you suppose that they can read without moving their lips? Stow it, chum, stow it—you've been treated well enough. All you have to do is write it, they have to read it.

I wonder when somebody will invent a ribbon that can be changed without calling out the militia. Better go wash your hands. Now—retype that title. Looks better, doesn't it? Say, maybe this is going to be a good one. What name should it go under? Monroe? You remember what they did to the last one under that name? All but Asimov—good guy, Asimov, knows writing when he sees it. Must drop him a line some time and thank him.

All right, Monroe it is. Now for the hook—

"Think we'll ever see Terra again, you black-billed scamp?" Larry Marston scratched the bony topknot of his four-winged pet.

"'Nevermore!' Arrrk—"

All right, all right. Now you've done it. Now you've got to finish it. You know damned well that if you ever fail to finish a story you've once started, you'll never finish another one.

Go ahead. Get going. Where does it go from there? Or would you rather go back to working for your living?

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