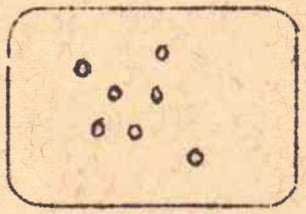
Pleiades Pimples

January 1960

#1



(Andy & Jean Young: Printers to The King)

Pleiades Pimples,
a one-shot, is sprung upon an unsuspecting world by Bob Tucker, Box 702, Bloomington, Illinois, U.S.A. And thank you for the rich harvest of fanzines you've been sending to me. I turn to you and your fanzines for companionship because all my dirty pro friends have gone Hollywood to write interminable television scripts. The turncoats.

About our cover:
"I don't like the idea of placing anything on a fanzine's cover but the title, ish, and number, and illo." -- Vic Ryan's letter to the editor in Hocus #11. Hello, Vic.

Alas, That Great Planet, dept:
"Inside The Moon, a science-fiction film, will be produced ... in Sweden with Curt Siodmak set to direct. Lon Chaney jr. and Karen Stefanee ((dig that!)) are the stars who will be seen in a setting depicting life on the great planet." --Hollywood news item.

(which is a subtle way of leading you on to the next .....)

Your Own Five-foot Shelf of Appleboxes:

This is a somewhat personal, somewhat candid commentary on the science fiction book business from A to Z (but skipping O, P and Q for security reasons). It is not my intention to cut throats but to reveal some inequities; it isn't my intention to wander off the path, either, but I always do it so bear with me or skip back to the comics. This applebox review was brought on by a letter published in a fanzine and by a heartless omission in a popularity poll taken prior to the Detention (and prior to every other recent convention).

The letter was actually published about five years ago (in Psychotic, I think) but I've never forgotten it. Someone asked why S-F writers bothered to write novels when, apparently, more and easier money could be earned by writing fifteen shortstories and selling them to the reprint anthologies after their magazine appearances? And the cruel omission was again noticed when the Detention Committee conducted a poll to determine who and what should receive the Hugo Awards. There was no category for original hardcover novels. To be sure, there was a novel award, but the wording of the question (and possibly the spirit of it as well) invited the assumption that magazine serials were what the Committee had in mind. And if I recall rightly, a magazine novel (which later appeared in paperback) won the contest.

I don't quarrel with the winner, but I protest the freeze-out.

There are writers (in and out of the science fiction field) who have written one or more original science novels of varying worth, but who have never appeared in Astounding or Galaxy --- or any other magazine in our microcosmos. Fred Hoyle, for example, or George Stewart. This lack of a serial sale seems to prevent their running in the Hugo

race, mostly I suspect because fans don't read the hardcovers unless the book club reprints them a few years later --- or because they seem to think that last year's serials were the only novels published. I have long held that one of the greatest literary crimes committed by American fandom was the almost total ignoring of Stewart's EARTH ABIDES. That novel was stunning, astonishing; it was far better than LONG LOUD SILENCE or any other title in the same category except THE 24th HOUR. It over-shadowed Hubbard's "Final Blackout" (Astounding, April-May-June, 1940) which fans still discuss with awe. But if it received a single mention in the awards of five or six years ago, I've missed it. British fandom held their sights higher, happily, and gave Stewart an International Fantasy Award for his book at the London con that year. I've long forgotten what serial won the contest here.

If we are to have an award for novels, let it be an award for novels. Let each novel stand or fall on its merits, and let the serials do likewise in a separate category.

Give some thought to the very embarrassing situation which may confront us some day: some news magazine (one of those which have panned us unmercifully in the past) may attend a convention and carefully note the honors we pass out. The novel award may, as usual, go to a relatively insignificant serial while a truly good science fiction novel published in the mundane world may pass unnoted. Can you imagine the press notices we will deserve -- and surely get?

All right, back to the original question: why not write fifteen short stories and make more money than from writing a novel?

The answer depends on who you are and where your talents lie: on who is writing the fifteen stories and who is writing the novel. It also depends on several other curious factors which may or may not exist on the day a manuscript arrives at an editor's office. Is he in a foul mood because she repulsed him last night? Has his circulation toppled and his budget been whacked to hell and gone? (Once, magazine "A" rejected a short story of mine, but a few weeks later magazine "B" bought it. "A" and "B" have the same editor. The story was finally printed in magazine "A" but at "B" rates. You can't figure them out.) General conclusions are difficult to draw because no two writers sail the same course, enjoy the same luck, or maintain the same degree of platonic relationships with their respective editors. (Book publishers seem to favor the employment of female editors, whereas magazine publishers are the reverse.) It would seem that a Silverberg, a Leinster, or a Sheckley may well expect a better income from short stories than from novels because shorts are their stock-in-trade, and there is always the possibility of an anthology later. But please note that Bloch and Asimov do very well in both fields. Finally, there are the careworn hacks like myself who leap and shout with glee once every five years when a single short story is sold. One writer may earn as much from fifteen short stories as another will earn from a single book, but it would probably be disastrous if they exchanged places.

Speaking personally, I don't think much of the short story market because I fare so poorly in it, and because the rates are ridiculous. Top rates are said to be three or four cents a word, and perhaps they are, but a penny or a penny-and-one-half is still being paid in many places both high and low. Reprint income earned from those stories won't make a wealthy man of you either; an anthology sale may bring

you twenty to forty dollars. In hardcover books the reward is much greater, but be warned that the work is much, much harder. If you are exceptionally lucky your reward may be equal to one earned by John Christopher, who retired (?) to Switzerland with his modest fortune.

I know a young man who has written one book --- just one. He sold it to a well-known publisher the first time out. He also sold it to a magazine for a one-shot "complete novel" appearance. And then to a TV program, and then to a book club, and then to a paperback publisher, and then to a British hardcover publisher, and at last reports the novel was working its way down the chain of small European publishers. The young man has collected something like $5000 to date, with more to come. Previously, this chap had written twenty or thirty short yarns (several of which were reprinted in anthologies) but to the best of my knowledge, all the income from all the stories does not begin to approach the income from that single book. (He is now thinking of writing his second novel.)

But you shouldn't expect to reap the same reward; that kind of selling streak is the rare example and not even respected old pros can manage it. Consider: I know another not-so-young man who wrote four books in a fifteen-month period, and managed to sell one of them for a total of five hundred dollars. He quit in disgust and went into television writing, and I can't say I blame him. These two extreme cases represent the best and the worst in writing science novels -- or rather, rewards of such writing. The ordinary hack falls in between.

You want to write a book, eh?

Nearly everyone does, it seems, or nearly everyone thinks he can. But if you are serious about it, if you are faunching to hurl your precious sixty thousand words at a waiting fandom, I'm willing to give you a helpful shove. You'll need every shove you can muster before the Great Day arrives -- that glorious day when you stand beside Big Hearted Howard's table at the con, autographing books as fast as he can sell them. I've already said it is hard work; long, rough, tedious work, but it is also great fun. I stay with it through good years and bad because it is more fun to write a book than to write a dozen fanzines from cover to cover. There is more freedom and less censorship in novels than in any other literary form I know, including the Broadway stage but excluding certain fanzines. The writer need not worry about slanting for anyone; he may ignore Gold's pets, he may praise or kick psi, and he may twaddle about ball-bearing mousetraps to his heart's content. If the story is entertaining, well done, and written with a taste on a level with today's norm, the book editor will read it without bias or prejudice. The publisher may not accept it for any number of business reasons, but the editor will give you a very fair reading. There are a few taboos which differ from one publishing firm to another, but unless you've written a deliberately perverted novel you aren't likely to encounter them. (Don't submit a book containing cannibalism to Rinehart -- or one mentioning a certain sex act either. See Norman Mailer's DEER PARK, and his November 1959 Esquire essay.)

How fast do you think? How well and how rapidly can you plot? How fast do you type? Can you write an acceptable book in one draft, or must you rewrite it two or three times to make it move smoothly?

The answers will provide an inkling to the amount of time nece-

ssary to complete a novel. I think and plot about as fast as the next fellow, I suppose, but am a painfully slow typist. Once in a great while I can finish a book in six months, utilizing every spare-time hour available to me, but such instances are rare. Some eight to twelve months is the normal gestation period, and sometimes this is forced out to fifteen months when spare-time is in short supply. (But for the sake of Roscoe and your wife, don't give up your job! Work on the book only in those spare hours.) There are some professional mystery novelists who do a book in two or three weeks time, but they make a total career of it. And they have a bankroll to back them up. I understand that Asimov has produced more than thirty books in ten years; and I know that Bloch is a rapid writer and typist, although their work schedules are not known to me.

The different publishers look for novel manuscripts in different lengths, depending upon the sum they wish to spend on production cost. Like magazines, one or two pages cannot be added at the end of the volume because you've written a few hundred words too many; expensive signatures of ten or twenty pages must be added, or none at all; and unless your name is Hemingway they won't be added --- the extra words will be deleted somewhere in the interior of the story where the gap will not show (you hope). Anything from fifty to eighty thousand words may be acceptable, according to the policies of the publisher, but the preferred lengths seem to be between sixty and seventy thousand. (Rinehart sets an upper length of seventy thousand for those science and mysteries they expect to market at $2.75 and $2.95.) I've had two opposing experiences with British publishers, however, and am in the dark as to what they really want. Some years ago Rinehart made me trim a few thousand words from WILD TALENT to stay within their limits; but the London house decided the book was too short, and not only were the few thousand words restored, but still more were added, making the London edition the longest of them all. Recently, another London publisher accepted an 85,000 word novel, and promptly whacked twenty-five thousand words from it to fit the size they wished to publish. So where do I go from here, Boyd?

You surely know that a story of any length should be typed on good white paper, double-spaced, using one side of the page only. Don't waste money on expensive paper --- spend it instead on several typewriter ribbons and keep changing them when they tend to fade. An editor might give you a break and wade through a faded manuscript if she suspects it has merit, but the union linotypist doesn't give a damn about your epic although he does worry about his eyesight --- and you pay if he can't read your typing. There are double reasons for double spacing. The first is to help that linotypist, to render each page more readable; and the second is to leave room between the lines for corrections. Feel free to write in or type in all necessary corrections between the lines, for that is where the editor puts them and you may as well be a jump ahead of her. Don't worry your pretty little head about possible mistakes in grammar and punctuation --- plug along as best as you can and rest easy with the knowledge that your editor will mop up for you. How she'll mop up! She'll twist sentences you had considered perfect, she'll throw out colons and semicolons, she'll even question your use of colloquialisms not familiar to her. And you may as well forget the dazzling typographical tricks, unless your name is Alfred Bester -- she will wash those out as well. (I had trouble keeping "ghoodminton" in LINCOLN HUNTERS; fought a pitched battle with

printers to retain a horse named "Kehli" in a mystery novel.)

Leave generous margins all around the page, nice wide margins because the editor, the designer, the make-up man, the printer, and the printer's proofreader all will want to doodle on your margins. Not one of them will take the trouble to write a separate note or letter. Why should they, when your margins are so inviting? It seems to be an occupational pastime and they will commit to margin all their whims, fancies, innermost thoughts and beard mutterings. The editor throws in those few corrections she couldn't cram between the lines, and will write notes to you on the margins; the make-up man puts his doodles there; the printer and the proofreader will make their secret signs there. I have old manuscripts in the file attesting this: the designer will write a lengthy letter of instruction to the printer across the tops of the first few pages, telling the printer how to do every little thing (no matter how small) necessary to get the book into production. Showing dimly beneath all this bland handwriting are the opening sentences of my epics. I don't understand how the linotypist managed to separate story from instruction. On margins: I use pica type and content myself with 200 to 250 words per page. It seems an adequate number and the doodlers are happy.

To make the most of all opportunities (which will be explained below) there should be three copies of your novel. The first and second carbons should be on white paper, with the last carbon on ordinary yellow paper. This is your copy; put it away in the desk and await the emergency which will surely come sooner or later --- you will receive a tearful plea from someone, confessing they have lost the manuscript --- please rush another copy. (It happened to me last year) Copyrighting a typed manuscript is pure nonsense; it marks you as a greenhorn. (I know a local would-be writer who not only copyrighted his short stories before mailing them out, he duplicated each one on a mimeograph or something and mailed out twenty copies to twenty separate editors simultaneously.) If you request it, and you should, the publisher will copyright your novel in your name on publication day. Avoid the other marks of the greenhorn: the manuscript is bound up in some fashion with stiff paper covers (like a bulky fanzine), it is tied with pretty ribbon, it has an illustrated title page, or perhaps a few pages are slyly stuck together to see if an editor pried 'em apart and Read Every One. Omit all this nonsense.

The editor wants nothing from you but a neatly typed manuscript contained in a stout box, with each and every page in free fall. When shipping the manuscript, pack it securely, wrap in heavy paper, and bind it with strong cord. If you will assume that it is destined to go around the world three times by mule train--and pack accordingly -- it will arrive in New York in fair shape.

A writer who does not have an agent will ship one copy to a book editor and the other copy to a magazine editor. It is quite legitimate to make the same story work for you simultaneously in two separate fields. Railway express is sometimes cheaper (but not faster) than first class mail; choose the cheapest way, and buy some kind of service that will supply you with a written record of the shipment. I prefer mail, certified, with a return receipt requested. At the same time, mail separate letters to separate editors informing them the manuscript is on the way, and also informing them that the other copy is being submitted to the other field. Keep the letters

brief and strictly to the point; don't sing praises of the wonderful epic you are permitting them to read, don't tell them your life story, don't let them know your Aunt Martha declared the story was the finest piece of literature written since Homer came home from the sea. (Or was it Jason? Oh, well.) The editor is quite capable of judging your story, and he will weigh it better than you possibly can. If he wants your life story to print on the back jacket he will ask for it, along with your photograph. And he doesn't care a moldy fig for Aunt Martha's opinions -- she cuts no ice with him. Finally, make provisions for returning the manuscript to you, at your expense, if it is rejected. It probably will be, sad to say.

So simply go down the lists of publishers and magazines again and again, repeating the submission routine until you make a sale. Or until your funds are exhausted and you rejoin the beatnickles.

A writer who has an agent is spared these repeated expenses; both copies of the novel are shipped to him (employing the same insurance safeguards -- you may trust the agent but not the mails) and the agent will make the simultaneous book-and-magazine submissions for you. He will also unwind the red tape and handle other business details which inevitably follow. You are free to relax, and sweat. If the novel is going to be rejected twenty times, an agent who lives in or near the Big City may as well be standing outside of twenty doors to catch it. (And please note that if an agent is willing to wait and catch, your script does have some merit. Some agents are as sharp as editors, some are former editors, and some are agents-and-editors simultaneously; they can spot a stinker as quickly as anyone and will not wish to waste their time attempting to sell the unsalable. If your story is hopeless, a competent agent will return it, telling you why it can't be sold. More -- much more -- on agents later.

But just for the hell of it (and to lighten these drab pages) lets assume you have sold; let's assume that your thrilling space-opera, PLEIADES PIMPLES has been accepted by one of those twenty editors. Thirty or sixty days after you mailed off the manuscript, thirty or sixty days of sweat, tears and beating your wife, there suddenly comes an airmail letter (or a telegram) announcing the stupendous news. You will be included on their next year's list. Give yourself one full day to come down off the ceiling and sober up, and read that letter again. You will now discover a few minor details you overlooked the first time. (1) The editor wants a new title. He will tactfully point out that PLEIADES PIMPLES isn't an eye-catcher, that it will not inspire enthusiasm among their salesmen (who are the dirty dogs who must go out and beat the bushes to earn money for you), that it won't move copies off the shelf. The editor will be so helpful that he will suggest a few likely titles and invite you to choose one. Running your eye down his list, you will read such inspiring titles as VANDALS OF THE VOID, SLAVES OF SATURN, BEYOND OUTER SPACE, and SANDS OF MARS. Resist these; resist the editor. Of course, you will have to supply a new title, but beat your brains for something original and salable --- don't let him thrust those hoary old things off on you. (THE LONG LOUD SILENCE came about in just that way; I resisted Rinehart's well-meant suggestions, and browsed through a thesaurus searching for words of contrast. "Loud" and "silence" fell into place after some hours.)

Back to the letter of acceptance. (2) you will find that the editor also wants some revisions. It matters not that you have written

the futuristic GONE WITH THE WIND, he wants revisions. And you will supply them. In time, the editor will send you a lengthy letter outlining all the revisions wanted, and you will groan and curse and beat your wife once again --- for the dolt is asking you to eliminate the very best passages in the book! All those pretty little paragraphs or significant scenes which you fashioned so carefully, so lovingly, are to be thrown away! The editor is an ass --- of course he is. But the paragraph and scenes come out --- if you don't take them out he will . (But if you take them out, sometimes you can slip them back into a new place in the manuscript --- disguising them so well that he will never recognize them. That is, sometimes you can. And sometimes he may catch you at it, too.) Point (3), the letter advises you that the publisher's "standard contract" is being mailed under separate cover.

A "standard contract" is a printed contract offered to writers who do not have agents, or to any writer willing to accept the publisher's terms without quibbling. WARNING: do not do business with any publisher who asks you to pay a part of the production costs! Reputable publishers pay the entire production and marketing costs themselves (with one legitimate exception) but the "vanity publishers" will soak you a few thousand dollars for costs. And if you are willing to go into the hole for the sake of egoboo, I have nothing but pity for you.

Eventually the "standard contract" arrives in the mail. Whether or not this contract is entirely fair to you depends upon your point of view, your newness to the field, and how long you've gone hungry. Many agents and writer's organizations do not regard it as fair because the publishers tend to keep fifty percent of too many things for themselves. A competent agent will not accept the contract as is; he will negotiate to modify it, or he will reject it out of hand and write a new one --- a contract more to his client's advantage. But if you are a first-timer standing on the doorstep to fame and fortune (as I was, as we all were), you will probably sign it, and take on an agent later. The contract will run to several pages and will include these more important points:

(1) You are to receive an advance payment of about $250.
(2) You are to receive a sliding scale of royalties, beginning at ten percent for the first five thousand copies sold. (That is, you are to receive 29¢ for each copy having a retail price of $2.95.) The royalty rate will climb after five thousand copies have been sold.
(3) You are to receive complete sales statements twice a year, and a royalty check covering sales for each half-year.
(4) You are to receive six free copies of the book for yourself, and you may buy as many as you wish at the wholesale price.
(5) The book will be copyrighted in your name.
(6) You guarantee the publisher that the book is original with you, and not copied from Heinlein or someone; you guarantee that it's free from libel; and you promise to pay all costs and hold the publisher blameless if he is hauled into court because of the book.
(7) You agree to submit to him the next two books you may write; that is, he gets first choice at accepting or rejecting them.
(8) You agree to make all necessary revisions.
(9) You agree to share with him, fifty-fifty, all money earned by the book after he publishes it (all subsidiary monies).
(10) He agrees to print, publish and distribute the book at his expense. He will advertise it as he sees fit. He promises to publish

it within one year from a certain date, or else all rights revert to you (and you are free to peddle the novel elsewhere).

Point number 9 is the bone of contention, the big reason why many agents and organizations do not consider the contract a fair one. It means that every time the novel is resold to another medium after the original appearance, the publisher gets one-half the profits you made from the sale. It means that when PLEIADES PIMPLES is taken up by a book club, or a paperback house, or a television studio, or a movie producer, or a foreign publisher, the original publisher receives half of the cash paid to you for such sale. It means that if you succeeded in selling the second copy of your manuscript to John Campbell, and John was so late getting it printed that the serial did not appear until after the book was out, you must give the publisher half the money John paid you. (But on the other hand, if John published the serial well ahead of the book publication date, you keep all the money for yourself. You must endeavor to sell "first serial rights" and try to get the serial published first; do not allow the serial to actually be a reprint if you can help it.)

And so we come to the agents.

Having or not having one depends on you, on your rugged individuality, on your sense of economics. An agent can do many things for you (such as seeing to it that a serial is published before the book); can make more money for you than you can generally make for yourself; and can fend off an astonishing number of headaches that might otherwise come your way. An agent can also be the most ornery, cantankerous creature on the face of the earth. Personally, I can't see that a writer needs an agent if the writer does only a few short stories and then quits -- there is little point in an agent handling a short story which will earn him (the agent) only three or four dollars. But the steady writer who produces many stories a year, year after year, will be greatly benefitted by an agent. The man who writes a book is tread-ing a perilous path without one. Agents will bargain for you, cry tough for you, extract better terms resulting in more money for you, read every contract with gimlet eyes for you, represent you and your N-a-m-e all over the world, and the very best ones will not accept the "standard contract" at all, but write their own and struggle to cram it down the publisher's throat. (By "best," I mean those agents with superior business sense and bargaining skills, coupled with scrupulous honesty. They exist, but they may be difficult to find because they seldom if ever advertise. They have no need of advertising -- client word-of-mouth recommendations are all they need, and they are so busy they couldn't handle the extra business produced by advertising. Many of the better ones cannot advertise --- they belong to a guild which forbids it, and which provides a code of ethics.)

In return for their services, agents charge you a sliding scale of fees. The scale will vary from one agent to another, but in general their charges are these: for sales made in the United States and Canada, ten percent of the sale price; for sales made in the United Kingdom, ten or fifteen percent; and for sales made elsewhere throughout the world, fifteen to twenty percent. They make the sale, arrange the contracts, collect the money, deduct their fee and remit the balance to you immediately. They will also take you to lunch, dinner, and the theater when you visit New York -- if you're a good boy.

As mentioned earlier, skillful agents will not accept the "standard" contract but will strive to modify it, or to compose their own. When they write their own (as mine does) the differences are sometimes startling to behold. Compare one of these tailor-made contracts with the details of a standard job as outlined on page eight:

(1) You receive a down payment of $500 or $1000.
(2) You receive a sliding scale of royalties, beginning at 10% for the first five thousand copies sold, then moving to 12½% for the next three thousand copies, and then 15% for all over eight thousand sold.
(3) You receive the same twice-a-year statements and checks, but with this difference: if the novel is taken by a book club, then the money paid by the club to the publisher must be passed along to you within thirty days.
(4) You receive ten free copies of the book, with the right to buy more at the lowest wholesale price.
(5) The same copyright protection applies, but if you wish to use a pseudonym the agent will take copyright in his name, and then reassign the rights to you, thus protecting your anonymity.
(6) You make the same guarantees as to originality, libel, etc.
(7) You agree to submit to the publisher, for his acceptance or rejection, your next (one) science fiction novel.
(8) You agree to the necessary revisions.
(9) You agree to share with the publisher, fifty-fifty, all reprint income earned in the United States and Canada.
(10) All other earnings are yours, and yours alone.
(11) The publisher agrees to costs, printing, advertising, etc.
(12) All money will be collected by the agent, and the agent is to be your only representative in these matters.

Point one should be more throughly explained: although I call it a "down payment," it isn't in the usual sense of that term. It is an advance against royalties, a sum to bind the contract, but it is not an outright gift or purchase. If your book earns a thousand dollars after it goes on sale, the publisher remits to you only $500, because you have already received the first $500 payment. (But if your book is a flop and fails to sell even five hundred dollars worth of copies, the loss is the publisher's, not yours. You do not have to return the advance money.) Sometimes, in specially conducted contests, an outright gift is made in addition to the advance against royalties, but this gift is clearly labelled as such, and does not figure in later royalty statements.

Point three is an important one, in that the book may be taken up by a big, wealthy book club which will pay perhaps thirty thousand dollars in advance. Without this protective clause, the publisher has the right to keep that money until the next semi-annual payday is due; but with the clause he must send along to you, at once, your share of the loot. And take it from me, friend, you can get awfully hungry while waiting six months for the next check to arrive. (And the big book clubs have taken science fiction you know. Ask Arthur C. Clarke.)

Point seven: the publisher gets the first refusal option on your next science fiction novel only. If you write an historical epic and wish to submit it elsewhere, you have the right to do so --- although it really wouldn't be the wisest thing to do.

Point nine: the original publisher may share with you only money

earned on reprint sales in the United States and Canada. This means that he may receive his half-share of the profits when the book is taken up by the book club, or the paperback publisher, or if a magazine or newspaper wishes to print it as a serial. Point ten means that he gets absolutely nothing if your agent sells the book to the movies, or to television, or to a London publisher, or any other publisher anywhere in the world. (And even this does not satisfy agents as to fairness; they are agitating to take away from the publisher any share of paperback reprint money. In general, these agents hold that a book publisher is entitled to all the money he can earn while selling his edition in North American bookstores -- but nothing more.)

Point eleven should be elaborated on, as I mentioned earlier that there is one legitimate cost you are expected to pay towards production of a book. After a novel is set up in type, proof-sheets called galleys are struck off and mailed to you for proof-reading. You are expected to read them carefully and correct all errors which somehow got by the editor and the printer. There is no charge for correcting and re-setting in new type those errors caused by the printer, but a certain charge is made when you correct your own mistakes or when you change the text in any way. So you will save money by making all corrections and changes before submitting the manuscript to the editor --- let the story go to the printer in its absolute final form. Union linotypists get high wages, and you will find yourself paying a part of his wages to reset something that should have been corrected many months earlier. Even the best editors let your mistakes slip through -- as I learned when I misplaced the Illinois River.

But we are still assuming that your epic, PLEIADES PIMPLES (under its new title, of course) is rolling through the printshop on its way to the bookstores. You are an ordinary writer with ordinary talent (like me, remember?), and you are prepared to open an ordinary bank account to receive the incoming wealth. You dreamer. What follows is an accounting of what may be expected if the usual breaks come your way --- you may fall into a sinkhole and garner as little as $250, or you may hit a jackpot of sorts and retire to Berkeley.

If the second copy of PLEIADES PIMPLES sold to a magazine, and the magazine serialized it before book publication, you would receive what ever word rate the magazine happened to be paying this week: one cent ot three cents per word. Assume that you've written 60,000 words. But if it did not sell to a magazine, if John sent it back with a thoughty rejection slip, don't throw the copy away -- send it to England. Ted Carnell might be interested, as well as the London hardcover houses.

Upon the novel's acceptance by a New York publisher, the advance may be $500. After publication, and after six months of sale, the sliding royalty scale comes into play. Most science fiction novels today retail for about $2.95, making your share 29½ cents a copy. And you may as well ignore those larger percentages for over five thousand copies and over eight thousand copies. Heinlein earns them, but you will not. The sad fact is that most science fiction novels today sell less than five thousand copies, and quickly die. Some barely live to see two thousand copies sold. If the New York publisher has arranged for a Canadian edition to be published simultaneously with his own, you will earn half (that is, 5%) the usual royalties on such Canadian sales, but the two countries combined will not sell five thousand copies of the book. We just don't buy books at that price. So PLEIADES

PIMPLES is chugging along at the usual rate, and in a year's time will have sold about 3500 copies in North America --- and you have a bit over a thousand dollars due you. The publisher has already given you an advance of five hundred dollars, and by and by you receive a second check for the remainder due: another five hundred odd dollars.

That second check, coming with the first statement-of-sales you've ever seen, is one of the most discouraging things on earth. It causes you to realize how few fans -- or even people -- buy science fiction. The trick is to hang on, to keep your mundane job of washing dishes or shoeing horses, or whatever, and wait for the payoff. Sometimes it comes, and it can come in relatively spectacular fashion.

Pretend that the Fantasy Book Club has decided to pick up your PIMPLES. It is a small club as clubs go --- nothing like the Literary Guild with their fantastic royalties, but the Fantasy outfit isn't to be ignored. Your share of the book club's advance is likely to be $125, and six months or a year later you may earn another four or five or six hundred dollars from them, depending upon how many club members decided to buy PIMPLES. But sit tight and keep hoping for that payoff. The paperbacks are more easily obtainable than a movie or television sale, and if PIMPLES is worth anything at all, it will probably be reprinted by some paperback publisher. Science Fiction is hot now.

Some paperback houses buy original novels directly from you, or from your agent. I haven't the slightest idea what these sales are worth; you'll have to ask someone who places his novels with the Ballantine people. The advantage to such a sale is that the receipts are all yours --- there is no hardcover publisher to share with; but the disadvantage is that there is no hardcover edition for egoboo, and no book club appearance. Of course, you are still free to place the story with some magazine before paperback publication.

Paperback books are a world unto themselves, and their sales fluctuate wildly; you cannot rely on a definite sales pattern as in hardcovers. (Paperbacks do not like to be called "pocketbooks" for that is the brand name of one particular company.) There are good and bad paper publishers, fabulously wealthy ones and downright miserly ones. Your luck, and the size of your jackpot, will depend on which reprint house decides to take a chance on PLEIADES PIMPLES. A reprint sale isn't necessarily dictated by the success or failure of the hardcover, nor by good or bad reviews following a hardcover; I've seen very poor hardcover books reprinted in paper, and very good ones ignored -- so have you. Cast a glance over your shelves, separating the wheat and the chaff. Literary merit does figure in the decision, but it seems that the question most seriously considered is "will it sell?" More than once I've seen my dogs picked up and reprinted by paperbacks, and on at least two occasions I've seen better ones (those which I think are better ones) entirely ignored. (An agent does not usually figure in these paperback reprint sales; the paperback house buys directly from the hardcover publisher, and pays him directly, which is why he keeps half of the receipts.)

If PLEIADES PIMPLES is snapped up by Nadir Books, you've had it, Joe. This is a shoestring outfit operating out of an attic in the Bowery or some such place. Nadir Books is blessed with a part-time editor who doesn't know an ion drive from a cloud chamber; it employs a news-stand distributor who is firmly convinced that none but illit-

erate Indians live west of Buffalo; it is so short of ready cash that it can afford to print only fifty thousand copies of a title. You may get an advance of $250 from such an outfit and if you are very, very lucky you may get another two or three hundred later on when their miserable little edition is sold out. Their distribution is so poor that the book will not enjoy a decent chance. It is another sad fact of life that some hardcover publishers will sometimes sell novels to these shoe-stringers, usually on the excuse that no other paperbacks were interested in the novel, and that this was better than nothing. It is a bad excuse because it throws away a book that might be more valuable later on; it might be more profitable in the long view to not reprint the novel now, to hold it for future years when you have a better reputation and the better companies will come looking for yarns to reprint. They do, you know, as soon as you've made a noisy splash in the literary world. Go ask Jack Kerouac.

On the middle rungs of the ladder are the centerfield companies, the paperbacks which neither suffer miserable circulations nor enjoy the greatest sales. The great majority of New York paper houses seem to fit into this category. These companies can be expected to pay an advance of a thousand, or perhaps fifteen hundred dollars. Usually this amount will equal total earnings, but once in a while you may be surprised to receive another few hundred or another thousand dollars. They calculate the average sales and pay an advance based upon that average -- and unless PLEIADES PIMPLES surprises everyone, you'll find their calculations to be very near the total sales figure. Advances aren't returnable and they don't want to give money away.

You and I will both be happy --- nay, overjoyed! --- if PIMPLES is picked up for reprinting by one of the truly big wheels, by one of the handful of paperbacks which rule the roost. You'll find yourself in, and can afford to quit the horse-shoeing job for a few months. These companies have large print orders, tremendous circulations, and even have promotion men in the field who visit news-stands and push their titles. (These promotion men may even call on you, wining and dining you, and try to persuade you to come into the field with them to help promote your own book. Go ahead if you feel like it, but be prepared to pay your own expenses. They won't.) One of these outfits may be expected to pay an advance of fifteen hundred to two thousand dollars -- again, they have calculated in advance the number of copies they can sell, and pay accordingly. Generally speaking, the paperback royalty rate is as follows: 1¢ a copy for the first hundred thousand copies, and 1½¢ a copy for over a hundred thousand. It is possible to draw as much as 2¢ a copy if PIMPLES should edge up toward the million mark. The usual first printing is one hundred thousand copies and the nicest thing that can happen to you is to learn that they are going back to press for a second printing --- you may wind up with a quarter-million copies in print. Three or four thousand dollars (for you, with an equal amount going to the hardcover publisher) isn't an unusual sum to earn from these large paperback houses.

Now do you understand why we hacks hang on, waiting for the pay-off? We know damned well the hardcover edition will falter after a few thousand copies, and we know that the book club may ignore us entirely in favor of a Jules Verne novel, but we also know there is a decent chance one of the paperback publishers will pick us up and recoup those six or ten or fifteen months of work.

That which follows the above may be peanuts or it may be another bonanza. Sometimes a reprint magazine will publish PIMPLES and pay a few hundred dollars; sometimes a newspaper will run it as a daily or weekly serial and pay perhaps fifty dollars. Foreign publishers may put out large printings in the tens of thousands, but because of the unfavorable rate of exchange the income does not match the circulation. In the tight contracts mention above, foreign editions are considered as new books all over again, not reprints from New York, and the New York publisher does not share in the profits. The well-heeled agents will have offices (or representatives) all over the world to spread your name and fame to the four winds.

Ted Carnell may decide to serialize PLEIADES PIMPLES, so again the trick is to arrange for his serial to appear before some London house brings it out in book form. London houses usually buy the rights to print and distribute the novel all over the English-speaking world except North America, and they pay advances of fifty pounds ($140) or one hundred pounds ($280). After that the book must earn its keep on the regular royalty scale, and years later you may discover odd copies popping up in the damndest places: Tasmania, Hong Kong, Singapore, or the English colony in Japan. (Hello, Helen Wesson.) The European market is currently going after science fiction the way Ray Palmer went after flying saucers, with each country a separate market (or in some instances, separate languages are separate markets, with one publisher crossing international boundaries to serve a whole language market.) PIMPLES may see several editions in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, West Germany and Austria, France, Italy, sometimes Spain, and in Japan and Argentina. The man in Italy may pay forty dollars (with income taxes deducted from that) and the man in Japan may pay three hundred (with Japanese income taxes deducted from that). The pleasant thing is that these sales are scattered over one or more years, having staggered paydays; it is a constant source of pleasure to find odd checks appearing in the mailbox throughout the year. You may be wondering where your next bottle of Jim Beam is coming from when lo! the anonymous man in Spain sends you fifteen dollars (with tax deducted).

I can offer very little information on those queer, mysterious moguls, the television people. I know only that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation will buy a published short story for a sum between $125 and $500. They rework the yarn into script form and televise it. And as mentioned very early in this piece, I know a young man who got one G when his book was converted into an hour-long television show.

Equally mysterious are the ways of those peculiar people, the Hollywood Producers, but if you deal with them at all you must have an agent. They insist on it, but even if they did not, you had better have one. Hollywood contracts can run to twenty or thirty pages of microscopic print and the various things which are thought of, and included, would stagger you. It isn't necessarily true that you become a rich man overnight if Hollywood decides to take PLEIADES PIMPLES. Did you read that report in a fanzine a few months ago about James Blish? Some shoestring producer offered him the lordly sum of $750 for a book ("VOR", I believe.) There may be some truth in the rumor that Blish is now sticking pins in a doll which resembles that oaf. But on the other hand, it is decidedly untrue that Bloch received a cool half-million for his mystery, PSYCHO. (He now has gold-plated knobs on the john in Weyauwega, but that is neither here nor there.)

There is no "going rate" in Hollywood, no purchasing norm. They will buy for as cheap a price as they can chisel, and you must sell for as high a price as your agent can chisel.

I realize that I will not be believed, but I turned down an offer of ten thousand for LONG LOUD SILENCE. If that entire sum could have been mine alone I would have accepted, but another man was involved: the script writer. This scripter (who turned in the most miserable piece of junk imaginable!) was to have received half the sum, plus his secretarial costs. And after my agent had deducted her hefty chunk, I would have wound up with a net of about four thousand. I may be the supreme fool, but I thought that SILENCE was worth more than that.

(But geez, you should have read that horrible script -- I actually did the movie fans a favor by killing the deal. Every trite cliche , every worn bit of hackwork seen in pictures since the invention of the talkies was thrown into the script and throughly ground. Ugh.)

You need a hep agent for movie sales because those nasty producers will seize for themselves every possible right you fail to keep for yourself. A book is not simply purchased, made into a movie and then forgotten. There may be sequels to the original movie, or re-issues, or later sales to the midnight shows on television, or some attractive character from the book (and the original movie) may be held over and placed in new pictures which are written to order. Do you remember a popular picture of several years ago called "The Egg and I" ? Betty MacDonald wrote the book. I hope her agent protected all rights, because a couple of somewhat-popular characters named Ma and Pa Kettle appeared in the book and the picture. You know what later happened to Ma and Pa Kettle --- and currently, they are even appearing in a cartoon series. Hollywood contracts should be written so as to provide additional payments to you for every additional use of the book, or the picture, or the characters, or the events therein. And if the flic inspires a television serial ("The Thin Man") you should get paid for that, too. So long as someone is making money from your original material, you should too. After all, it's your brainchild.

PLEIADES PIMPLES is some kind of a success, or perhaps it is a successful failure. There remains two matters to interest you, Joe Neopro: taxes and reviews. (Excluding a third matter which you must handle as you see fit: damned fools who stop you on the street and ask you where you stole the plot, or who wrote the book for you.)

Taxes and reviews, the twin plagues.

You are now a businessman, a dirty capitalist, like it or not. If you wish to save as much of that filthy lucre as possible, you will have kept a careful record of every penny spent in writing and selling that novel. A detailed record, with dates, and receipts. Along with your regular 1040 income tax form, you file another one called "Schedule C, 1040," which makes provisions for manufacturing and selling losses (paper, ribbons, postage, agent's commissions, publicity and promotion, legitimate expenses while attending the convention, and odd other items which aided you in writing or selling the novel. If you spent money to earn money, legitimately, you are entitled to deduct most or all of that spent money. If PLEIADES PIMPLES earned you only a thousand bucks, the tax people do not expect you to pay taxes on the entire amount. Writers are usually entitled to many deductions other

taxpayers do not enjoy, but as I'm neither a tout nor an attorney, you are advised to consult a tax expert well before December 31st.

And the reviews; ah, the reviews! Of course you will be itching to know what Sky Miller, damon knight, Floyd Gale, and the scores of anonymous newspaper reviewers had to say about PIMPLES. (It is best not to know what some of them will say.) There are many professionl clipping bureaus in and around New York, and for a fee (which is tax-deductable) they will round up all the reviews in all the newspapers they can lay their hands on, and mail the clippings to you. After that you sit back and sulk. Reviewers and critics are an interesting lot, and worth a separate article all to themselves (which will appear in SKYHOOK any month now) but in general you may put some trust in Sky Miller and damon knight, plus a very small handful of educated newspaper reviewers. The bulk of the newspaper reviewers know as little about science fiction as that part-time editor of Nadir Books mentioned earlier, and you will find them discussing things or attitudes not visible in your novel --- or worse, they'll dismiss it as another Buck Rogers opera after reading the jacket blurbs and the first ten pages. (One ignorant lout claimed that in LINCOLN HUNTERS, I had Honest Abe zooming through space in a rocketship!)

And that's about it.

Your comments, criticisms, additions and corrections are invited.

* * * * * *

Blushingly, my own additions and corrections:

Page 3: Herbert Best wrote the matchless novel, THE TWENTY-FIFTH HOUR (Random House, 1940), not "The 24th Hour" as I had it. An abridged version appeared in Famous Fantastic Mysteries, August 1946. I've freely admitted drawing on this powerful novel for LONG LOUD SILENCE, and I believe Hubbard did the same for "Final Blackout." There has been much talk of "adult science fiction" lately --- perhaps Best was two decades ahead of his time. Briefly, the book treats with a brother and sister remaining alive in this hemisphere, and a commander and his small body of troops remaining alive in Europe. Eventually the family duo and the commander come together. I've been recommending this book for almost twenty years (whether you want science fiction or "mainstream" novels), and here I am still plugging it.

Page 11: about that "one legitimate cost" you are expected to pay when you alter or correct your galleyproofs. I neglected to say that a certain amount of such alteration is free, and that you are charged only for the amount in excess of your free-limit.

About a year ago, more or less, some fanzine critic was castigating Doubleday because Doubleday rushed a novel into print, after only the first chapter of the serial had appeared in Astounding. I suspect that Doubleday deserves a low bow rather than condemnation; probably they were saving the author's bacon for him. It is likely that both Doubleday and Astounding were operating on unusually tight schedules, and Doubleday deliberately held up the book until the first chapter could appear, so that the serial would not, technically, be a reprint. Thus, they allowed the author to keep his serial money. It gripes me to find fans criticizing matters of which they are ignorant.

- BT