

A Talk

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**Lecture notes c. 2000
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Preliminary notes
for a talk

VTRD

Some forty odd years ago, I was carrying the youngest child in her carry-cot down to the kitchen to take my turn with the early-morning chore when I was literally stopped in my tracks... The sensation was as though all the nerve endings from feet to shoulders had suddenly gone red hot. I lifted the cot to the kitchen table & slowly climbed the stairs to say that I would have to give up my turn. Norma called the Dr. It had been a heart attack. I was off school for some months. Fortunately, the Head is the least missed. The school soldiered on under the capable guidance of my deputy.

But it made me think. It could happen again. I should be making better provision for the family. I decided to try my hand as a writer. Hit on the penname John Rankine.

By coincidence I saw an advert in the Guardian. There was to be a new publication 'New Writing in S.F.' The Editor was asking for contributions. I send in a story "Two's Company". It appeared in the first edition of New Writing, and was reprinted ~~mentioned~~ in a critical analysis of Social Trends with such other contributors as Brian Aldiss & Ray Bradbury.

F. J. Cornell then decided to set up a Literary Agency. Asked if he could represent me as an agent. I continued to write as John Rankine. He said it was time to write a novel.

There's a big difference in writing a Novel. It's relatively easy to get your head round a short story of 5/6 thousand words.

but a Novel of 70+ thousand is another matter.

Why choose a niche genre like Science Fiction? I had read one or two novels in that line. They seemed to speculate about possible futures in a logical way. Everybody must wonder about why they are a living organism. Seemingly the only one who sees the world through one particular pair of eyes?

Also they were created as works of pure fiction like Gulliver's Travels or Tolkien's adult fairy tales. They were, for the most part, ^{allegories} moral tales for our time, which could be created from the top of one's head without knowing a lot of real detail about real jobs.

The plot: an exploration ship makes a planet fall in an empty quarter to make repairs. Its engineers work out that they need to move the ship to a point where taking off would use minimum fuel.

The divide the ship into sections, mount on tracks, begin the tow.

They are opposed by a huge brain which has been formed in a huge pit of biological debris washed by the planet's own magnetic flux, etc. These events reveal the strengths & weaknesses of the characters themselves.

Interstellar Two-five. Dobson Readers Union Corgi.
Dobson Books.

Continued to write short stories & two or three novels each year.

Opened a second channel with a new name & 'From Carthage Her I Came' Dulich, German, American paperbacks & Robert Hale publisher.

Meanwhile in another part of the forest the series 'Space 99' was afoot. It appeared as a TV series. Then in book form. Some S.F. writers gathered at Pinewood studios to meet producer & plan the books. I was contracted for several from shooting scripts & three originals using the characters.

Altogether I had forty-two novels published. The last one was under a third name R. M. Douglas and I change of subject - A Historical Novel.

The Nude Market folded. A second Historical Novel is still unsold & I have not pressed it. I am too old to start again ...

The practical steps to writing a novel - a genius simply sits down with a pencil & writes it out. The ordinary writer makes a plan.

To go 70+ thousand words needs an emotional charge. a plan. an idea. a framework.