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## AUTHOR NEWSLETTER

# Herb Hughes

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Second Quarter, 2020

### **CABIN FEVER!**

Cabin fever is, perhaps, not as bad on a writer as it is on other people. We're used to sitting at the keyboard for hours, alone with nothing more than our imagination. And determination.

But I've still got a bad case of cabin fever, so some of you are probably climbing the walls, clinging to a vertical surface with nothing more than your fingers and toes. Stir crazy notwithstanding, I sincerely hope you are all safe and doing as well as can be expected.

It is a great time to sit in a comfortable chair and read some books. I'm not necessarily trying to plug my novels. Instead, I recommend one of the best books I've read in a long time in the article titled **READING RECOMMENDATION** below. A good novel can help keep cabin fever at bay while taking you on a grand adventure. It can also enlighten and broaden your world at the same time. If you've recently read a great book, let me know. I might want to read it, too.

### **FEATURE ARTICLE – WHAT IS SCIENCE FICTION?**

Some people love science fiction and will read nothing else. Others deplore it. But what is science fiction? If you'd have asked someone at any time in the last century, the likely answer would be "stories about the future." But that is far too simple an answer.

You could write a doctor's thesis on the definition of science fiction. But you'll need to work quickly, because what is traditionally considered science fiction is changing.

In the past, science fiction was the broadest field in fiction. As writers with wonderful imaginations, such as Neil Gaiman and Mitch Albom and many others before and since, stretched the boundaries of science fiction even further, a new term came into use, speculative fiction.



Actually, the term is not new at all. Robert Heinlein coined the term speculative fiction in 1947, but it has only come into common use in the twenty-first century. The modern use for the term speculative fiction is: “stories that take place beyond our known world.” So, speculative fiction is the umbrella term for all books that speculate beyond our known science, time frame, location, and societal interactions.

The current definition of science fiction on Google is:

Fiction based on imagined future scientific or technological advances and major social or environmental changes, frequently portraying space or time travel and life on other planets.

For most people, this definition has never changed. But what was considered science fiction forty or fifty years ago was more than this. So the field has narrowed as the overall term of speculative fiction became more and more popular.

Star Trek, Battleship Galactica, and Star Wars are commercial examples of what most consider science fiction. But does Star Wars fall within the definition above? The stories take place in the past, “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.” Even so, no one would deny that they fall under the realm of science fiction because they show how our future might look. (But it won’t. Star Wars movies, while fun to watch, are poorly grounded in science.)

There are many science fiction novels, such as Phillip Jose Farmer’s Riverworld series, which take place after death. The characters are people from our past. For example, Mark Twain is a prominent character in Riverworld. Like Star Wars, the time frame for the stories in these novels could well have been in the past. But no one would deny that these are science fiction. (It’s hard to say for Riverworld as the characters are alien “reconstructions” of people who lived on Earth. The time frame is indefinite.)

There are countless novels where characters in the present go back into the past via time travel. Or people and creatures from the past are brought into the present. Many of these have nothing to do with the future.

Horror stories are often considered a sub-category of science fiction. Many of them take place in the present, not the future. A mad scientist whips up a monster in his lab and, voila, you have a horror book. But it could take place at any time: past, present, or future.

So the time frame is not as firm as the definition of science fiction suggests. Take the word “future” out of the definition, and it works much better.

Much of science fiction consists of what I call galactic ‘shoot-‘em-ups.’ The books in this area have either multiple human civilizations on different planets or human civilizations mixed with alien civilizations. Wars fought with highly advanced spaceships and weapons erupt between these different groups. I find it amusing that they often have weapons that can destroy an entire planet in a few seconds, while the spaceships battle it out with beam weapons that do limited

damage. Indeed, some spaceships take numerous hits and live to tell about it. Star Wars is guilty of this. Still, we accept the impossibility of it all and enjoy the story.

So the term science fiction is more limited than it has been in the past, and, perhaps, more accurate. It and many other genres come under the umbrella term speculative fiction.

[One quick side note. The term sci fi, a shortened version of science fiction, was hated by science fiction writers and avid fans alike in decades past. But it held on and has become a much more accepted term nowadays. I've even seen science fiction writers use it.]

Perhaps some of you enjoy science fiction or a particular type of science fiction such as prison planet stories (like *Killing Rhinos*) or galactic shoot-'em-ups or time travel. I enjoy reading in many fields of science fiction, but the galactic shoot-'em-ups are my least favorite. They tend to be too much alike.

I doubt I will ever write in the galactic shoot-'em-up area. I prefer the science fiction paths less traveled. Some of my stories, such as *A Bloody Wonderful War*, fit under the broader term of speculative fiction but not science fiction.

There are many writers with wonderful imaginations who continue to stretch the boundaries of genre definitions. If you feel like you've got a good hold on the definition of science fiction, buckle your seat belt. It's bound to change.

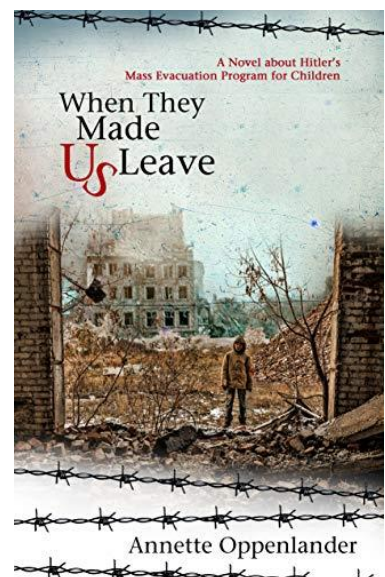
NOTE: Many of the ideas expressed here are my personal opinions. You may look at it differently. Let me know what you think. I just might agree with you!

## **READING RECOMMENDATION**

If you are a reader, you already know that you can visit many other worlds from the comfort of your recliner. George R. R. Martin summed it up well when he wrote, "A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies... The man who never reads lives only one."

Today's readers have more choices, more worlds to see, than ever before. The invention of the Print On Demand (POD) machine in 2008 and the growing access to internet sales outlets such as Amazon opened up the market for Indie books.

What is an Indie book? It is a book that has been self-published by the author or published by an independent (read 'small') publishing company, one not affiliated with the Big Five publishing companies in New York. The monopoly those five companies enjoyed for decades has eroded and will erode further as the years pass.



Being an avid reader, this has been a boon for me. The Big Five have become so formularized, getting away from them has opened new worlds and presented new thoughts. Most of my reading nowadays is books by self-published authors or books from small, independent publishers.

Nothing is perfect, of course. There is a downside in that there is a wide range of quality among self-published books. There are a few that are just plain awful. It makes you wonder why the person who wrote one of these books thinks they are a writer. Unfortunately, the handful of awful books give Indie books a bad name.

Most Indie books, however, are entertaining. There are often a few typos, but it is usually easy to read through them. And books from the big five publishers are not exempt from typos.

Many Indie books are excellent. In fact, some well-established writers are selecting the Indie route over a publishing contract from one of the big five. (The reasons for this will make a good article in the future!)

When writers are not forced to follow a “proven formula,” the result can be spectacular. You can get fresh new views that you don’t see from the big five. A great example is a book I recently read, *When They Made US Leave*. This novel is wonderful, the best of the best.

I know reading is very subjective, that readers tend to stay in a specific genre and rarely venture out, but I believe virtually everyone would enjoy reading *When They Made US Leave*, by Annette Oppenlander. The story and the writing are that good.

*When They Made US Leave* is woven around Hitler’s evacuation of children to camps in the countryside to protect them from allied bombing but, more importantly to Hitler, to indoctrinate them into Nazism, to raise the next generation of German soldier. This novel shows a side of World War II that few of us have been exposed to. The book will grab you from the start, sending you through smiles and tears, laughter and heartbreak.

I prefer not to summarize books in my reviews. The summary is available on Amazon at the link below. Instead, I will say there are very few books that, when I’ve finished reading them, make me lean back, take a deep breath, and say, “Damn. I wish I’d have written that.” *When They Made US Leave* is one of those rare books. I highly recommend it.

*When They Made US Leave* is available on Amazon at:  
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07YWXPSR8>

## **POUNDING THE KEYS – THE GREAT BRAIN ROBBERY & BEYOND**

*[Pounding The Keys is a regular feature about my current novel in progress.]*



Drake Blast has solved The Great Brain Robbery!

All five phases of the editing process are complete, and the publication process has begun. One of the great artists in our area, and quite possibly in all areas, Mutt Suttles, is working on the cover. As soon as Mutt finishes, publication will be completed. The Great Brain Robbery should be available from Amazon and other book outlets within the next couple of weeks.

The formats available include paperback and eBook. It will also be available for free on Kindle Unlimited for anyone who has a subscription. If you are an avid reader and have made the transition away from hardcopy, you might want to join Kindle Unlimited. For \$9.99 a month, you can read as many books as you'd like. There are, literally, millions of books available on Kindle Unlimited.

Next up is the Science Fiction novel, A War With God. It is, in fact, well underway. I refine a novel at least a dozen times after the initial draft is complete. One of the important steps, at least for me, is to get away from the book for a week or two between refinements. This allows me to take a fresher, less biased look at the book when I get back to it.

During breaks from The Great Brain Robbery, I spent much of the time working on A War With God, so the novel is already around 20% complete. I expect to have it published before the end of 2020.

## **JUST FOR FUN**

*[Writer's jokes and quotes. Something to make you smile.]*

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**What has 15 actors, four settings, two writers, and one plot?**

632 Hallmark movies.

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The dubious privilege of a freelance writer is he's given the freedom to starve anywhere.

- S.J. Perelman

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Asking a working writer what he thinks about critics is like asking a lamppost how it feels about dogs.

- Christopher Hampton

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A screenwriter receives a parrot for his birthday. The bird is fully grown, with a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary. Every other word out of his beak is an expletive. The writer tries hard to change the parrot's behavior: he says polite words, plays soft music, anything he can think up to set a good example. Nothing works.

He yells at the bird, and the bird yells back. He shakes the bird, but the bird just becomes more angry and rude. Finally, in a moment of desperation, he puts the parrot in the freezer. For a few moments, he hears the bird squawk, swear, and scream. Suddenly, there's a deathly quiet. The

writer is frightened, thinking he might have injured the bird, so he quickly opens the freezer door. The parrot calmly steps out onto the writer's extended arm, and says, "I believe I've offended you with my rude language and behavior. I will endeavor at once to correct this problem. I am truly sorry and beg your forgiveness."

The writer is astonished at the bird's dramatic change in attitude, but before he can say anything, the parrot continues, "Might I ask what the chicken did?"

## **BLAST FROM THE PAST**

*[For the first five issues of my newsletter, I will feature one of my previously published novels, discussing where the idea came from and how it developed.]*

# **The Joystick Murders**

Since the second Drake Blast adventure, The Great Brain Robbery, will be published soon, our Blast From The Past for this issue is the first Drake Blast novel, The Joystick Murders.

Several years ago, I had a fleeting thought about a murderer that used other people to commit the crime. He did not pay them. He controlled their movements, forcing them to kill someone else against their will. I thought the idea had potential (for a novel – I have no desire to hurt anyone) but was not sure how the bad guy would control people so that they would carry out his dirty work. He would need something like the old video game joystick.

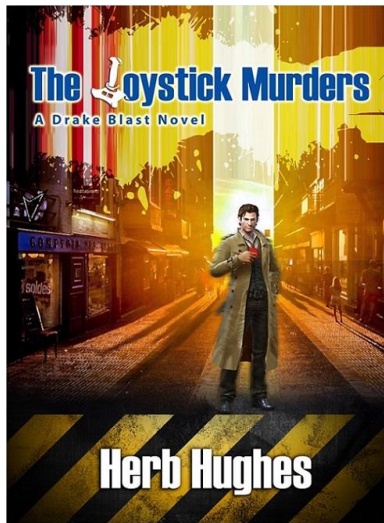
It would be technically possible to connect to someone's nervous system and send the signals that would control their body. Indeed, rudimentary forms of this have been done in the laboratory. But it would be highly complicated to control every movement of another human being. The simple video game joystick had to be updated to a joystick 'booth' with cutting edge technology.

The plot of The Joystick Murders began to form. Though I didn't know his name or what he looked like at the time, I had a bad guy. He controlled other people from his joystick booth, making them commit assassinations. I needed a good guy to counter this bad guy, so Detective Drake Blast "poofed" into existence. That's the way my characters tend to show up. One moment they're not there, the next moment they are.

Then I realized that this idea was only one case. Drake Blast would have many cases to solve, so I was looking at a series of novels.

The world needs another detective series, right? 😊 There are plenty out there, but I wanted to make mine a little different. I decided to set it in the near future, the 2040s. The technology of The Joystick Murders was far beyond our current level of development but could plausibly be attained by then with the diligent effort of a mad genius.





Setting the series in the future opened up a world of possibilities. I read an article where a prominent scientist thought we would be routinely using implanted chips to increase our brain's ability, essentially making us cyborgs, by the year 2050. An intriguing idea. I decided to bring implants into the book.

So the characters in *The Joystick Murders* received implanted chips in a variety of types. As I was writing the book, I thought about the possibility of bad guys cutting people's heads open to steal their chips. There are many reasons why they might want to. Financial gain is probably the least of these. As I considered the possibilities, the second Drake Blast novel, *The Great Brain Robbery*, was born.

Not long before *The Joystick Murders* was published, I was watching a news story about the leader of a third world country siphoning off a sizable percentage of the aid that the US had sent to their impoverished nation. I gave it some thought, added several twists, and the third Drake Blast novel was born, *A War By Any Other Name*.

Some months after publication of the first Drake Blast novel, my brother, Kim Hughes, a career engineer in the space program, and I were discussing an article he had read. He said it would make a great novel. I agreed, and the fourth Drake Blast novel, *The Guilt Of Age*, was born, but with an intriguing twist I can't discuss!

The second Drake Blast novel will be available in a few days, so I've got two more to write. But there are more simmering on my brain's back burner. Considering it takes six months to a year to write a novel, I think I'm falling behind!

I took some heat from one or two reviewers of *The Joystick Murders* about Drake Blast going off on philosophical tangents. One reviewer said there was a lot of 'filler' that had nothing to do with the plot.

I pride myself on being objective. I sat back and looked at it and decided the reviewer was right. I had made a mistake by letting Drake run his mouth about things that had little to do with solving the case. A statement or two is okay, but not several pages. If the reader does not agree with Drake's philosophical stand, he will probably dislike the book no matter how good the story is. Better to stick to the story and eliminate the extraneous material.

So, in writing *The Great Brain Robbery*, I stayed on plot. The novel is much shorter and much more effective. Because it is better, I made the painful decision to go back and rewrite *The Joystick Murders* to take out the 'fluff.' I removed approximately eight thousand words from the original book, did some refinement to the rest, and will republish soon. If you want to read *The Joystick Murders*, please wait until mid-May when the shortened version is published.

## **The Joystick Murders**

306 Pages

Formats:

eBook \$2.99

Paperback \$14.95

Available for free to Kindle Unlimited subscribers

<https://www.amazon.com/Joystick-Murders-Drake-Blast-Novels-ebook/dp/B01N1PFZWK>

Average Ratings:

15 Amazon ratings – \*\*\*\* 4.53 out of 5 stars

2 Goodreads ratings – \*\*\*\*\* 5.0 out of 5 stars

*[A quick note on Amazon average review ratings: There is a problem with the Amazon algorithm that computes average review ratings. For instance, Amazon shows the average rating for The Joystick Murders as 4.1. There are ten 5-star, four 4-star, and one 2-star reviews. If you do the actual math, this yields an average of 4.53. The same is true for most books on Amazon. No need to bring this to their attention, though. Amazon is quite accomplished at ignoring problems with their software.]*

## **HERB'S COOKING CORNER**

### GREEN OLIVE PASTA

[This recipe is available on the web in its original form. My version is a one-pot meal.]

Serves 6 to 8 – Total Time: 20 to 30 minutes

#### Ingredients

1 lb. hamburger  
1/2 lb. mild or regular sausage  
1 lb. thin spaghetti (regular spaghetti is okay)  
2 tablespoons unsalted butter  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 1/2 cups of coarsely chopped mild olives  
4 cloves garlic, minced  
Juice from one medium-sized lemon  
1/4 cup coarsely chopped parsley leaves  
Fresh ground black pepper  
Kosher salt  
1 cup shredded parmesan cheese

#### Directions

1. Brown the hamburger and sausage then drain. Set aside.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.
3. Break the pasta into halves or thirds as desired. Add to the boiling water and cook to 1 minute less than al dente (1 minute less than package directions).



4. Reserve 1 cup of the pasta water then drain the pasta.
5. Meanwhile, heat the butter and olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat.
6. Add the olives and garlic. Cook until softened and fragrant, 3 to 4 minutes.
7. Remove from the heat and stir in the lemon juice.
8. Return the skillet to medium heat and add the pasta and reserved pasta water.
9. Toss and stir the pasta as it simmers until the sauce thickens, and the pasta is al dente, about 1 to 2 minutes.
10. Add the parsley and a few generous grinds of black pepper.
11. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Since the olives are salty, you may not need to add salt.
12. Remove from the heat and stir in the parmesan.

Dip into bowls, garnish with a few sprinkles of shredded parmesan, and enjoy!

## **RECENT REVIEWS – THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE SUBLIME**

*[This section covers the reviews/ratings of my novels posted in the first quarter of 2020. Readers have many different viewpoints, tastes, and opinions. I respect that and, as a personal rule, do not comment on any specific review. There is one exception to this below.]*

### **[Conecuh](#)**

Amazon Review by Joy

January 1, 2020

\* 1 out of 5 stars

Only 7 percent into the book and there was vulgar language and graphic sex scenes. Wish I hadn't spent the money. The reviews were wonderful. That's why I bought it. Wish I could have my money back.

*[Author's note: Joy strongly objected to the rape scene and quit reading the book at that point. I try not to respond to reviews as they are so subjective. I will say that I believe the scene is necessary to establish the character of a specific Union soldier. Over 450 Union soldiers were tried for sex crimes during the civil war, so it was not uncommon. (Experts estimate there were thousands and quite possibly tens of thousands that went unreported.) I handled the scene as delicately as I could while still allowing it to have the intended effect. Regardless of what Joy said, there is no vulgar language.]*

Amazon Review by David E. Raby

January 22, 2020

\*\*\*\*\* 5 out of 5 stars

I enjoyed the good story and the history lesson that came with it. It is hard to imagine what living during the Civil War must have been like, but Conecuh describes it well.

Amazon and Goodreads Review by Big Red (Robyn Echols)

January 23, 2020

\*\*\*\*\* 5 out of 5 stars

I enjoyed the research that went into this novel. The characters were believable, some noble, some degenerate depending on how they responded to wartime experiences. I enjoyed this romance as the characters kept missing each other as they dealt with various difficulties. The main character was loosely based on the life of a historical person, which added depth to the plot. A good read for those who enjoy Civil War stories.

Amazon and Goodreads Review by Beverly Duckworth  
February 11, 2020

\*\*\*\*\* 5 out of 5 stars

Conecuh is a novel based on the Civil War. The book is historically correct. The book is a love story where the main characters find each other after the war.

Goodreads Review by Mary  
January 2, 2020

\*\*\*\*\* 5 out of 5 stars

Held my attention from the first page to the last

Goodreads Rating by Amanda  
January 2, 2020

\*\*\*\* 4 out of 5 stars

### [Killing Rhinos](#)

Amazon Review and Goodreads Rating by Mel Sprink  
March 1, 2020

\*\*\*\*\* 5 out of 5 stars

Unexpectedly Good - Interesting characters- think Indiana Jones and Crocodile Dundee good with Jurassic Park monsters thrown in as well. It has a horse named Killer in it. What is there not to like about this book? Most importantly, it includes the whole story, does not leave you hanging and waiting for the next book. I hate those stories that should be completed in one book but are divided into three. I avoid them like the plague.

Thank you for reading my newsletter.

While my novels are receiving great reviews and comments, I need your help to spread the word. PLEASE PASS THIS NEWSLETTER ALONG TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY, and ask them to do the same. Thank you.

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[herb@tennesseeyankeenovel.com](mailto:herb@tennesseeyankeenovel.com) or [herbhughes1994@att.net](mailto:herbhughes1994@att.net).

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Thank you,  
[Herb Hughes](#)