



Why did you start writing?

Well, I don't think it was a matter of a conscious decision that I sat down one day and said "Gee, I'll start writing." I've always been writing in a sense, even before I could write, and I've always been thinking of stories and making up stories. Even when I was a kid and I would play games, I would invent characters, I would play with plot lines, play with stories, tell stories to the other children. So I'm not sure it's something that you arrive at after any sort of deliberation, it's just something, at least with me, that seemed to come with the territory; something I was born with.

I started sending out my stories and publishing my stories first on a fannish level: I was active when I was back in High School in my teenage years in comics fandom, which at that time was just getting started in the United States. I was an active comics fan. So I published in a number of comics fanzines and then finally, when I was in college, made my first professional sale.

You're best known for writing short fiction, and I know that writing short fiction doesn't pay as well as writing novels. Why do you still write short fiction?

Well, sometimes I just have a story to tell that doesn't have enough to it to be a novel, and I'd rather do a good short story or a good novelette than pad it out into an overblown, bad novel

Actually, as my career has progressed, my stories have tended to get longer and longer. I mean, I think if you actually look at my bibliography, very early in my career I wrote mostly quite short short stories. It's been a number of years since I've been able to produce a real, genuine short story. That is to say, something that's short [*laughs*]. Although I write things of less than novel length: I've been doing a lot of novellas and novelettes in recent years.

Is it still difficult to sell novellas? There's a wonderful horror story in one of Stephen King's books about how difficult it is to sell novellas. Do you find this?

It's not difficult for me to sell science fiction novellas. Stephen King has a gigantic name of course, but even he is in a slightly odd position in that he is a horror writer; there is no market for horror short fiction, at least in the United States. There's some semi-professional magazines, occasionally *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* will publish some, but for science fiction novellas there's still quite an active market, and it was a novella, *A Song for Lya*, that was one of my major breakthrough stories early in my career. Won my first Hugo Award, down here in Australia as a matter of fact; at Aussiecon One.

You write a lot of horror nowadays. Why is this? Just because horror stories occur to you, or has the fun gone out of science fiction?

Well, I wouldn't say that. I like to do different things. I have a lot of different kinds of stories I want to tell... science fiction, fantasy, horror, even some mainstream. I loved horror stories when I was



young; I read a lot of them. But then for a period the fun did kind of go out of them. After I'd read everything H. P. Lovecraft had done, in High School, and tried a few other people, I really couldn't seem to find any horror writers that I enjoyed. They didn't seem capable of scaring me anymore. So I kind of drifted away from it, and by the time I started selling professionally in the 70's I was pretty exclusively reading and writing science fiction. But I think Stephen King produced a genuine re-flowering of the horror field. I read and enjoyed King. A lot of people came in after him who were imitators and were not that good, but I think he proved that horror fiction was still viable. I have my own take on horror fiction of course. I don't think it quite fits into the Stephen King category. There's a definite, what I would call "science fiction sensibility" even to my horror fiction.

It's extremely logical, extremely well explained...

Yes, there is part of me that is very Campbellian rather than Lovecraftian, that believes that it does lie in the capacity of the human mind to understand everything, and my protagonists are not driven mad, as Lovecraft's so often were, by uncomprehendable horrors too great for them to imagine.

What do you think of "modern" horror, the splatterpunk tradition and the fact that the movies are getting gorier and gorier and sillier and sillier?

That's a very broad question. I have done panels that have lasted a couple of hours on that.

Certain aspects of it concern me, actually. Let me make it clear that I'm not in favour of any sort of censorship here; I am very anti-censorship. I'm about as extreme as you can get on the whole issue of free speech. But nonetheless, as a reader reading some of these things, I wonder what they say about American society and culture, and I wonder what this trend signifies, as the horror gets more and more explicit and as the focus shifts, as it has so often done, to make the monster the hero instead of the villain of an awful lot of horror films...

I remember the line in *The Skin Trade* where a character attributes a murder to "someone who's seen too many *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* movies".

Right. I have attended a few of those movies where not only what's on the screen is disturbing, but the behaviour of certain members of the audience is very scary.

What are you writing now? What can we look forward to seeing in the near future?

Well, at the moment I'm not in the middle of anything major. I am continuing to work on my *Wild Cards* series, which is an ongoing thing. Right now I'm functioning primarily as an editor on that, although I wrote half of Book Seven (which will be out in August in the United States). That's a



two-person mosaic, myself and John Miller, so it's essentially a collaborative novel of which half is mine.

I have turned in Book Eight and am working on editing Book Nine, but I don't have stories in that yet. I'm simply functioning as editor on that, and the series is continuing beyond that. Until January, of course, I was working on *Beauty and the Beast* television show, but that has ended now, so I'm signed to do a low budget science fiction film (screen play for that), but I can't really talk about that too much. And I'm kicking 'round some new novel ideas and I'm sure when June comes (June traditionally is the month where the new television season kicks up in Hollywood) I may get offers to write or produce some new television show. I would have to consider those, but whether I would go back there I don't know. It would depend on what the show is, what the offer is, is it something that interests me? So, essentially I have a few months off right now.

One of my favourite of your books is *Tuf Voyaging*. *Locus* announced quite a while ago there was going to be a second book, *Twice as Tuf*. Were they lying?

Well, they weren't lying. There may still be such a book, but it's not coming out any time soon. Essentially, I signed to do *Twice as Tuf* and very shortly after signing it I wound up working out in Hollywood, at first on *The Twilight Zone* and then on *Beauty and the Beast*, and those took up an awful lot of my time. And the deadline came and went and we extended it several times for *Twice as Tuf* and nothing ever... I never had the time to produce anything on it. So finally I came to an understanding with the publisher whereby I gave them essentially two of my paperback rights to two other books, *Dying of the Light*, my first novel which they've just re-issued, and paperback rights to one of my collections that has never been in paperback, so they will be doing an edition of that too, and those are in lieu of *Twice as Tuf*. Now, I would still like to write more about that character and I still think I will get back and do that book some day, but exactly when that day will come, I don't know.

The demands of TV when I'm working on a show keep me quite busy, and between that and *Wild Cards* I really can't do a whole hell of a lot. And now that I do have a little time to consider taking on another project, I don't think the Tuf thing is the first thing I really feel like jumping into right now. I'd like to do another novel when I get the time; another non-series novel.

You've mentioned *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Twilight Zone*. What's it like writing a series? *Twilight Zone* would be very different as it's an anthology series... What was your experience with that, how did you get involved in it and what was it like?

Well, I got involved in it almost by happenstance. Phillip de Guerre, who was the Executive Producer of *The Twilight Zone*, is also a big rock 'n' roll fan, and a number of years ago I did a book called *The Armageddon Rag* and Phil optioned it. At that time he flew me out to Hollywood, I had a number of meetings with him to discuss the screenplay he planned to write for *The Armageddon Rag* film, and he did write several screenplays but we never succeeded in getting the movie made, or financed.



But I got to know Phil through this process, and when he got *The Twilight Zone* off and running he took a chance and gave me a script assignment, and liked the result well enough so that when they were short-handed they brought me on board as a Staff Writer (which is about the only Hollywood production title that actually has the word “writer” in it, and so you know it’s the lowest position on the totem pole, as indeed it was). So, I started as a Staff Writer on *TZ*, and worked my way up to Story Editor, and then Executive Story Consultant. And on *Beauty and the Beast* I have been a Producer and then Supervising Producer.

So, *The Twilight Zone* was quite different from *B & B* in some ways because one was an anthology show and the other is a regular weekly episodic series, and yet the two projects had maybe more in common with each other than anything else I’ve ever done, because they were, after all, television, which is a whole world in and of itself, and like no other experience a writer can really have.

In some ways I feel the television was good for me. It was certainly good for me financially [laughs] and it was very stimulating. I mean, I had been a free-lance writer for a long time when I took this job; working at home, getting up every day, taking two hours to have my cup of coffee, going into my office, turning on the word processor, maybe getting something done, maybe not. (I was never a very disciplined writer, which is why my bibliography is comparatively short compared to some of my contemporaries.)

That’s not the way Hollywood works. You come into the office every day, you’re there for not eight hour days, but closer to ten or eleven or twelve hour days. You’re writing, you’re having meetings, you’re taking pitch sessions, you’re going down to the set, you’re meeting with the Director or the prop man. So it imposed a certain discipline on me which was good for me, and it also was extremely stimulating. I mean, it was a whole new world to learn about that I did not know about before, and it involved me in something I hadn’t had for many years; the whole kind of “office setting”, where you actually have to come in and interact with other people.

Hollywood is a strange world, but in some ways it’s the Real World, and it’s good for a writer to touch base with the Real World every once in a while. I think a writer who spends his entire career just doing novels from his study in his home, and perhaps meeting a few people at conventions or occasionally going to a literary cocktail party, loses sight of the real world, of what things are really like out there. And you begin to do a lot of self-referential stuff, which I think is a trap for any writer.

You’ve done a lot of collaborating during your career, apart from your television work. Do you like it, and how do you do it?

Every case is different. It’s like a marriage. I’ve collaborated with Lisa Tuttle, Howard Waldrop, George Guttridge. Who else have I collaborated with? Am I forgetting somebody? [Laughs]

Well, television is collaborative to a degree. *Wild Cards* is collaborative if you like.



Well, with *Wild Cards* I'm functioning more as an editor than as a collaborator, so that's slightly different. Every one of my collaborations was essentially different.

The one with Howard was the first collaboration. That was essentially: Howard and I had been corresponding for many years, we finally met at a convention in Kansas City, 1972, and there must have been something in the water or something because we decided "Hey, let's do a story together!" So, while everybody else was up at the Playboy Club in the convention hotel being served drinks by luscious bunnies, Howard and I were back in our hotel room with Howard's little portable typewriter, pecking away on sheets of yellow paper and, you know, he would write and I would sit behind him on the bed and then he would stop and I would write, and we didn't finish very much of it. We finished a small portion, but then he took it home and wrote some more, sent it to me and so forth.

Lisa and I, we were poles apart to begin with. She was in Texas, I was in Chicago when we started and later Dubuque, Iowa, and we mostly collaborated through the mails, each one of us writing a section, sending it to the other one who would re-write the section the previous one had written and then extend it a certain period beyond that. So it went back and forth to a point that I can no longer tell what Lisa wrote in that book and what I wrote. Occasionally a sentence will leap out that's a Lisa sentence, or one of my sentences, but I really can't tell.

The thing with George Guttridge, that was a very old story. In fact it was one of the first science fiction stories I ever wrote, which had gotten a lot of rejection slips but I'd never been able to sell it. Years later George took it and re-wrote it. So, I did my writing on that story in the late 60's, and he did his writing on that story a decade later.

***Nightflyers* was made into a film a few years ago. What did you think of the film? It was quite different from your story.**

Well, I think it was about 75% faithful, but unfortunately the 25% that they changed had a kind of a ripple effect and made the 75% that wasn't changed not make as much sense as it might have. They made some changes that I approve of and liked and other changes that I don't understand and didn't like.

I think the movie had some good things in it - lovely art direction, wonderful special effects considering the budget which was minuscule (yes, they don't have the special effects of *Star Wars*, but for a three million dollar film, which is what it was, they did a very impressive job) and had some nice secondary performances - but overall I don't think it worked. Alas.

Do you have any other film projects likely to go ahead in the near future?

I have constant interest in *Sandkings*. It's always being optioned, and there has been some interest in *Fevre Dream*, and Phil is still occasionally stirring around and talking about *The Armageddon Rag*, but whether any of these things will actually come to pass I couldn't tell you.



Who has inspired you as a writer? Who are your favourite writers?

There's an awful lot of writers that I like. I think the ones who actually had the most effect on me were probably the writers that I read when I was young. I tend to think that those effects, which you absorb on a subconscious level before you even dream of writing, are the lasting effects. I mean, I grew up reading Andre Norton, reading Heinlein juveniles, reading Eric Frank Russell (who I think is a marvellous author who is too sadly forgotten). Lovecraft: when I discovered Lovecraft I was enthralled by him, for reasons that I'm sure I could understand if I was still fifteen [laughs].

These days my favourite writers are a different list. I'm a big admirer of Jack Vance. I don't know that Vance has had... Vance has had a definite effect on Haviland Tuf, who began in the very first story, *A Beast for Norn*, as my very conscious attempt to write a Jack Vance kind of story, and if you look at *A Beast for Norn*, it's me trying very hard to do Vance. And there are still parts of Tuf that are very Vancian. But other than that, I don't think that Vance has had a profound effect on my writing. I read a lot outside the field these days. People like Larry McMurry, William Goldman, Pat Conroy. That's a lengthy list. I could drop names here all day.

How did the *Wild Cards* series start? I've heard mythology about it.

Well, it actually started as a role playing game. There's a group of writers in Albuquerque who do occasionally game together, and they dragooned me into some of their activities. So I played various games with them and they knew that I was an old comics fan from childhood, so one year for my birthday Vic Milan gave me a superhero role playing game called *Superworld*, which I became the Gamesmaster of. And at least half the people in our particular gaming group were published professional writers, so they created some truly wonderful characters, and as Gamesmaster I created more characters than anyone else. And we played this game incessantly for like a year and a half and put an awful lot of creativity and development into the characters. At which point I finally said, you know, there must be some way that we can actually make some money off this [laughs].

No, the idea occurred to me that it would make an excellent shared world anthology series after the model of *Thieves World*. So, we got people together, we talked about it, and maybe a half dozen to a dozen of the characters made the transition. Now, to make it clear, I don't believe in just writing up gaming adventures. I think that's a good way to get really bad fiction. I mean, games are fun, but they're not books. So, many of our characters, although they had their roots in the game, were substantively changed and adapted as they made the transition. Also, a lot of people who have been involved in *Wild Cards* were not members of the game. I mean, we started with the core of Albuquerque writers but I promptly contacted a lot of people like Roger Zelazny, Howard Waldrop, Pat Cadigan, you name it, who were not part of the gaming group but who I knew had some affection for the pulp heroes or comic book heroes, the whole concept of superpowers, and who I thought would be able to contribute some interesting stuff to the series.



To new writers in general, any advice?

I think this is a tough time for someone new breaking in. I mean, the early 70's, when I broke in, was a much more favourable period.

The short fiction market is still wide open. I mean, *Asimov's*, *Analog*, *F & SF* are constantly looking for new people because you can't make enough money off them, so people tend not to stay long. It's still the best place to establish a reputation, however. I think establishing a reputation in this age where there's so many writers... making your name something readers will remember and seek out is one of the most important things.

One of the smartest things I did in my career, which I did by accident - I certainly didn't plan it - was not write a novel for the first five or six years. Because then, when the novel came out, it wasn't just the novel by somebody nobody ever heard of, it was the long awaited first novel by George R. R. Martin, Hugo Winner! It got me a much larger advance, it got a certain amount of hype, it got reviewed everywhere, it got visibility. And the way it got that visibility, of course, was in the magazines: by having not just an occasional short story, but a lot of short stories in those early years. I had months where I had three magazines come out, all with one of my stories on 'em: cover stories. So, those early short fiction sales to the magazines are still one of the best ways to do that.

In the long run, of course, you have to transit to novels if you want to make a living from being a full time writer professionally. And that's the part that's getting harder and harder to do, particularly if you're a writer of any seriousness and ambition. I mean, I see the Hollywood world that I deal with, and the book world that I come from, are growing more alike every year, and it's not Hollywood that's changing. The book publishers are becoming more and more oriented towards commercial fiction, towards the bottom line. Once, as long as the company was generally making a profit, they would carry a good author for quite a few years and quite a few books until he found his audience and established his reputation. Now if your first book doesn't make money, you're going to have a real hard time selling the second. I mean, that's just the present situation. A lot of people say it's actually a very good market to sell a first novel in. But if that first novel doesn't turn out to be David Eddings or Stephen Donaldson, it's a terrible market to sell your second novel in.

Having been involved in both *The Twilight Zone* and *Wild Cards*, do you think that "shared world" is becoming a serious trend, or do you think that it is just a phase we're going through?

Well, I think there's an element of both to it. I don't think anthologies worked on television, which is one thing to remember. I mean, *The Twilight Zone* was a failure, not even as successful as the original show, which had been in some way a marginal show for five years, however acclaimed it was, (and it was a wonderful show which I watched religiously when I was a kid). Sometime in my speeches here I think I'm going to talk about some of this a little more, but this won't appear till after that, so just to go over some of the same ground: I do think that... all forms of fiction, all forms of entertainment, are moving more and more towards series. I mean, we see people in our field looking at it with very narrow tunnel vision and saying "What's happening to science fiction? There's all these bloody series!" It's not just happening in science fiction, it's happening to every



form of fiction. It's happening to television, where anthology shows can't succeed and people want series shows. It's happening to movies, where you have *Rambo IV* and *Rocky IX*. Anything that's successful now returns with a II at the end of it.

Who do you blame? Do you blame television or...

No, I don't blame television. I think some of this is the evolution of our culture. I'm still groping for some of the explanations of this; I don't have them quite all yet. So, this is not nailed down like an academic paper, but I have the beginnings of some theories on this. I don't know enough about Australia to talk about your own culture with any authority; I've always thought of this in terms of the United States.

If you look at the novel: when the novel was originated it was... the very name connotes newness – “the novel”, it's a new thing, deriving from the Latin root. But the novel was introduced at a time where society was very static, where people were born in a small town and they maybe never got, unless they went to war, more than 30 miles away from the small town they were born in. I mean, people were born in England a hundred miles from London; they never saw London. They lived and died without seeing it. They practiced the trade that their family practiced, they married the girl next door, they stayed married to her for their entire lives, they brought up children who indeed took over the trade when they died. Into this world novels, with their promise of newness, were a breath of fresh air. They would take you vicariously to places you would never go. They would introduce you to a far greater range of people. If you were bored with the seventeen people who you happened to see every day in your village, here was someone else who you would meet, and everyone was new.

Now, you look at what exists in America. When we talk about America today, you have a society that is completely mobile. I mean, I look at my own life. I was born in Bayonne, New Jersey. I went to college outside Chicago, which is a thousand miles away, giving up all my friends in Bayonne, losing track of them, making whole new sets of friends in college. I moved... actually I went to school at Evanston just north of Chicago, and then I moved to Chicago, my college friends scattered all over the United States, and I met yet another group of people as I worked my first few years in Chicago. I taught college in Dubuque, Iowa, again moving, and then I went to Santa Fe, and then I went to Los Angeles. So, I'm in my early forties and I've had like five major moves of thousands of miles in my life, which usually means a completely different set of friends. I've had various different careers: I've taught college, I've run chess tournaments, I've been a writer, I've been a television writer (which is different than being a book writer). I was married and divorced and I've been in various other relationships. (I've been in a relationship now for quite a while.) And I'm stable compared to some people! I mean, there's immense mobility going on.

I think this is currently a culture in which nothing is stable. That is, as far from the culture that produced the novel as you can get. I mean, your profession isn't set, people are always changing it half way through their lives. They get to forty five and they decide “Well, I don't want to be a lawyer any more, even though I was trained for it my whole life. I now want to sail a boat around the world.” They get married, they get divorced, they lose track of all of their friends. Families don't even stay in touch any more. So fiction, which provides us vicariously with the things we don't get in life, fiction gives us stability. I mean, twenty years may have passed, you may have a



different job, you live two thousand miles away from where you started, you're married to someone different, but *Star Trek's* just the same. You can go back there, and here's this little island where Kirk and Spock will still banter with each other, and they're almost like friends of yours who you can always count on to be there. You won't be calling up your old friend and he's changed into someone you don't know. Kirk never changes into someone you don't know. He always stays Kirk. And what I can perceive of the success of series, even within the field, it's always keyed to the characters. There's a very strong relationship with the characters. I mean, you attend a panel on Writing the Science Fiction Novel and you get general questions from the audience about "How do I sell my novel?" "How do you begin when you write a novel?" You never get specific questions about the book. You attend like a *Wild Cards* panel or *Thieves World* panel and you get questions about, you know, "I don't like what you did to Hiram Worchester. When are you going to help him out?" or "Are you ever going to give the Turtle a break?" or "God, I can't stand that Fortunato guy. Is someone ever going to punch him in the mouth?" I mean, people form these intense love / hate relationships with individual characters, and I think that's true of all series.

Thank you very much.

Sure, glad to.