

# SWORDPERSON

Swordperson #1. Published for the Fantasy Amateur Press Association in May 2013 by Rogers Cadenhead, 135 Jenkins St., Suite 105B #244, St. Augustine, FL 32086. Email: [cadenhead@gmail.com](mailto:cadenhead@gmail.com). Web: <http://cadenhead.org>.

## Just When I Thought I Was Out ...

I am returning to FAPA membership with this mailing after an absence of two years. If you do not recall my last stint, my claim to fame is that I'm the first member here with no connection to the APA's founders. I took the roster spot vacated by the late Jack Speer, which is like succeeding Roger Staubach as quarterback of the Dallas Cowboys. The team

had to endure a decade of Danny White, Gary Hogeboom and Steve Pelluer before drafting Troy Aikman with the first overall pick in the 1989 NFL Draft.

This is a good time to point out that Danny White was underrated. He was one stinkin' Catch from taking Dallas to Super Bowl XVI in 1982.

## When Novelists Wrote 60,000 Words a Week

The following article appeared in the April 19, 1908, *New York Times*. I've added my own observations in the sidebar.

The Harvard man who is devoting himself to the composition of the cheapest melodramas is not the only college man who makes his living writing "thrillers." According to the statement of the largest publishers of the "dime novel," the mantle of Nick Carter and "Old King" Brady has fallen on a young and active staff made up entirely of college graduates, who turn out penny dreadfuls quite as lurid as those of the original "Old Sleuth" himself.

The demands made upon the writers have gone up. Literary finish has never been required, but speed is essential. The best of the college men are now expected to compose 60,000 words a week, providing a new plot every seven days. This is a rate of 40 newspaper columns in each weekly installment, making a daily allowance of nearly seven columns, which is more than a newspaper page.

"Compose" is the proper word for this sort of work, for the tremendous rate of speed makes it impossible for any man to actually write with his own hand that amount of copy. The

The flourishing dime novel publishing industry described in this article would be dead within 10 years.

“writer” dictates to a steneographer, on whose rapidity depends the success of the purveyor of dime novels to the people.

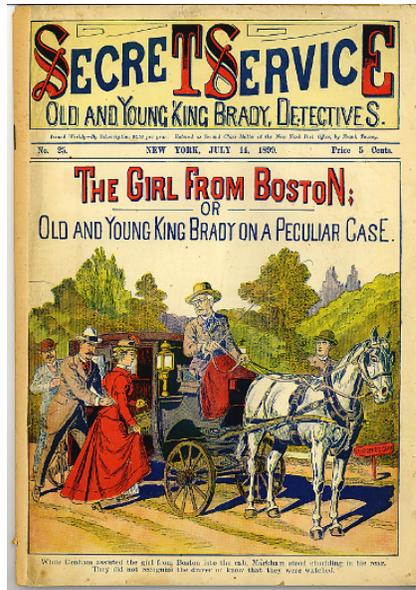
It is this tremendous speed, which is knocking out the older man and causing the authors of the “nickel shockers” to be recruited from the ranks of the younger college men, and the most energetic of these can stand the strain only about five years. This is a change from the days of the “Old Sleuth” who kept at the work for 20 years.

“Old Sleuth” was the nom de plume of Harlan P. Halsey, the first man to introduce the detective story as the main element of the dime novel. This was so successful that the term dime novel has become almost synonymous with some “Sherlock Holmes” mystery story

**Beadle the Pioneer:** The dime novel began as far back as 1860, under the guidance of H.H. Beadle, and was a story of lurid adventure, either on the Western plains or built around some incident of Colonial life. On the covers of these weekly publications was the woodcut of a dime, hence the name for this class of literature. But the credit of making the sleuth the center of the dime novel belongs entirely to Harlan P. Halsey, who received his literary training as a chicken seller and butcher in Washington Market, and his total amount of book education would not have carried him into the grammar school.

Even after he had “broken into” the writing business he always dictated and never handled the pen himself, from a few fundamental lacks in the line of grammar and spelling. Despite this slight drawback for literary achievement, Halsey became an author for one of the weeklies then abounding of which *The Ledger* and *The Fireside Companion* were the leaders.

Halsey’s first genuine hit was *The Fastest Boy in New York*. This title was adapted from Oliver Dyer’s one success, *The Wickedest Man in New York*, a tale of John Allen’s dance hall. The plot, however, was Halsey’s own. After this ten-strike he branched out



One of these college men was Upton Sinclair. While at Columbia he wrote dime novels under the pseudonyms Ensign Clarke Fitch and Lt. Frank Garrison, producing up to 8,000 words a day.

I can't find an H.H. Beadle. Brothers Erastus and Irwin Beadle published the first dime novel with Robert Adams.

Halsey’s niece May Halsey Miller wrote an irate letter to *Times* disputing his lack of an education. He was a “gentleman of considerable culture,” she said. “He was capable of a higher, though less lucrative, class of work, but having taken on himself the responsibilities of married life at the age of 16, he wrote for a living rather than for a reputation.”

into the detective story, as a result of reading a translation of Du Boisgobey's *The Crime of the Opera House*.

An odd point about the entrance of the detective into American literature is the fact that an American took him to France, and the French writers sent him back to the land of his birth. Poe's immortal mystery tales made almost no impression on his own countrymen, but they were received with applause in France, and under the influence of Poe's "Purloined Letter," Gaborlau wrote his "Le 13me Hussards." This first of the French detective stories did not reach America, but it was the book of Gaborlau's follower, Du Boisgobey, which was the literary parent of the "Old Sleuth" tales.

**Clerk Became a Thriller:** An interesting story is told of Du Boisgobey's beginning as an author. Alexandre Dumas, the younger, after writing *Camille*, was at the height of his fame, but his profits, or rather his publisher's, had been sadly cut into by the Gaborlau "thrillers."

The publisher suggested to Dumas that he repair the damage by writing a detective story himself. To this Dumas responded that any old fool could write that sort of yarn, and if the publisher wanted one, why not apply to one of the young clerks in the office.

The publisher took the advice literally and applied to Du Boisgobey, then clerking in the office. The result was *The Crime of the Opera House*, which set all Paris agog and started the cheap detective story in America.

On reading this story, Halsey took unto himself the name of "Old Sleuth" and started his famous series. His success was instantaneous, and immediately another publisher copyrighted the signature "Nick Carter," and this was soon followed by "Old Cap Collier" and "King Brady."

Under these names some hundred writers have at various times contributed to the world's supply of blood and thunder. One of the best known was Col. Ingraham, who began as a writer of Indian stories for H.H. Beadle, but drifted with the tide into the detective field and kept it up until his death a few years ago.

These older writers turned out 40,000 words of gore weekly. Even then the strain was rather heavy. One man who was Nick Carter for some time explained that he worked it by thinking up his plot on Sunday. Then on Monday he started and wrote 8,000

"At no point did the reader see Old Sleuth doubting his abilities, and since the hero expected total success in his work, the reader expected the same. ... Classical detective fiction rarely convinced the reader that the detective hero was in total control of all circumstances. Dime novel detective fiction did." -- *The Dime Novel Detective* by Gary Hoppenstand

Nick Carter moved from dime novels to pulps to paperbacks and was last published in 1990. He switched careers from detective and became a super-spy who named his Luger Wilhelmina, his stiletto Hugo and his poison gas canister Pierre. He kept this weapon nestled beside his scrotum and writers often called it his "third testicle."

words daily, finishing the tale on Friday night. Saturday was devoted to such revision as the story might get, and the manuscript was mailed on Saturday night. The following Sunday was spent in planning another dime novel.

This, of course, was all done with a typewriter, to whom the story was dictated. This same man probably holds the record for speed in longhand composition. He wrote a 60,000-word novel under contract in 10 days actually penning every one of the words.

### “Old Sleuth’s” Salary:

About the highest salary for this kind of work was that received by the “Old Sleuth” himself, who was known to draw \$12,000 yearly for his compositions. The usual salary was \$100 a week, and publishers would frequently offer \$150 to get the man they wanted. At present there is a dispute as to what the rate is.

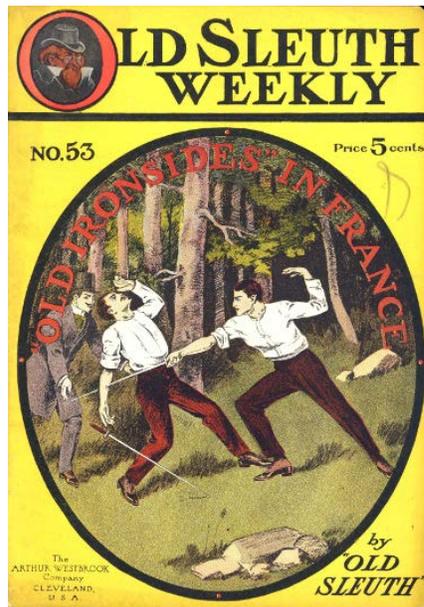
The publishers say they are paying their staff of college men more than the old regulation

prices, while the men who have grown gray in the business say that they are being cut down to as low as \$25 for a 40,000-word story.

Just who are writing — or probably more accurately speaking, who are producing — Nick Carter stories today the publishers are not willing to tell. As they explain, they have competitors in the business and men who can turn out a 60,000-word novel weekly and keep it up year in and year out are rather scarce.

As for the men themselves, they don’t seem inclined to boast about it either. You can find several men who have been Nick Carter at various stages of the game, but it isn’t so easy to discover who he is this year. The same can be said for “Old King Brady” and “Young King Brady” and all of their clan.

The publishers frantically deny that the dime novel is dying out. They insist that the demand is just as great as it ever was; but when one inquired why the publisher who copyrighted “Nick



People used to be called typewriters, who then were called typists, who then were called word processors.

A yearly salary of \$12,000 in 1908 is the equivalent of \$300,000 today, according to S. Morgan Friedman’s Inflation Calculator at <http://westegg.com/inflation>.

Carter” had taken unto himself three magazines, the answer was that although there was just as much demand for the dime novel as they ever was before, it didn’t pay as well as it used to. The statement was made even that the historic dime novel firm wasn’t very proud of this line of work, which is a sad charge from the days when “Nick Carter’s” publishers took Nick Carter seriously.

“Pierre, my tiny gas bomb, resting comfortably between my legs like a third testicle, ready to release its super deadly gas within five seconds after I twisted the two halves ...” — *The Mark of Cosa Nostra*, Nick Carter

## Amazon Contest Pitch for My First Novel

The Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award is a contest for self-published and unpublished novelists that began in 2008. In January, 10,000 people submitted completed novels in the hopes of winning a \$50,000 publishing advance or one of four \$15,000 advances in the categories of general fiction, mystery/thriller, romance, science fiction/horror and young adult. My first novel reached the second round with 400 mysteries and thrillers on the basis of this pitch.

No marriage is without its secrets, but Clemson University professor Jessup Clark accidentally uncovers one that threatens more than his happiness.

A discovered airplane ticket stub reveals that his wife Shani lied to him and took a flight to Chicago when she claimed to be in Atlanta for business. When he confronts his wife about what looks like an affair, she undertakes a ruthless campaign to destroy his life, take away his job and rob him of his freedom.

A happy marriage shatters as she concocts a domestic violence charge and has a mysterious associate punch her brutally in the face, telling the police she was hit by Jessup. A loaded gun is planted in his car, scaring his workplace after a tip is called in to

security before he arrives one morning. A story is planted in the newspaper, sharing Jessup’s darkest family secret to make him look even more guilty.

It makes no sense that Shani, a loving spouse and the dignified daughter of academics, would engage in an extramarital affair — much less go to such extreme lengths to destroy Jessup after getting caught.

While his life is being taken apart piece by piece and the police begin pursuing him over the crimes for which she has framed him, Jessup must uncover the real reason she is doing this — an event that occurred 10 years earlier at an Afghanistan tribal leader’s compound in the Shah-i-Kot Valley.

*The Engineer* is a thriller about marriage and other disasters.

“We have created a fannationalism, a United World Fandom. Someday soon we will have our own apartment building ...” — Claude Degler, *Cosmic Circle Commentator*

## Hugo-Nominated Novelists on Twitter

A lot of science fiction and fantasy authors have adopted Twitter, using the real-time messaging service to inform fans about new book releases, signing events, convention appearances — and in the case of John Scalzi, at least — every single thought that crosses their minds.

A cool feature of Twitter is the ability to create a list of users around a topic of your choosing. Lists make it possible to see all recent messages by those users.

I created a list of the best novel Hugo Award nominees on the service at <http://twitter.com/rcade/hugo-nominated-authors>.

While using this list, I managed to offend one of the authors on it.

When Cherie Priest tweeted that she fed her dog fast-food cheeseburgers from Krystal as a reward, I sent a polite email sharing my miserable experience giving a dog pancreatitis by letting it eat tablescraps. Dogs can't handle high-fat food meant for humans. It can trigger the painful and often fatal condition. Priest responded on Twitter (without referring to me directly), "So did I miss a memo or something? Is today Unsolicited Advice Day?"

On a happier note, I made another one of the authors cry.

In April 2012, Seanan McGuire was nominated for *Deadline*, a book she wrote under the pen name Mira Grant. This was her first best-novel nomination, so I added her to my list.

She tweeted, "I just got added to someone's Twitter list of Hugo nominated authors. Now I am crying again."

Here's the list with author usernames:

- Bruce Sterling: @bruces
- C.J. Cherryh: @cjcherryh
- Catherynne Valente: @catvalente
- Charles Stross: @cstross
- Cherie Priest: @cmpriest
- Cory Doctorow: @doctorow
- David Brin: @davidbrin1
- David Gerrold: @davidgerrold
- Emma Bull: @coffeem
- Greg Bear: @spacegriz
- Ian McDonald: @iannmcdonald
- J.K. Rowling: @jk\_rowling
- James S.A. Corey (Daniel Abraham): @abrahamhanover
- John Scalzi: @scalzi
- Ken McLeod: @amendlocke
- Mary Doria Russell: @mdoriarussell
- Mira Grant (Seanan McGuire): @seananmcguire
- N.K. Jemisin: @nkjemisin
- Nalo Hopkinson: @nalohopkinson
- Nancy Kress: @nancykress
- Naomi Novik: @naominovik
- Neal Stephenson: @nealstephenson
- Neil Gaiman: @neilhimsel
- Norman Spinrad: @normanspinrad
- Paolo Bacigalupi: @paolobacigalupi
- Piers Anthony : @piersanthony
- Robert J. Sawyer: @robertjsawyer
- Vonda McIntyre: @vondanmcintyre
- William Gibson: @greatdismal

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