

they will work on recycling projects. Recycling projects are held back through the vested interest of primary materials suppliers and the petrochemical industries.

A mass movement allowing the general public to understand the economics of materials supply and the inequities allocated to reuse and recycling will go a long way toward creating an inertia that can make some inroads into this status quo. Changes in the status quo will create demand for professionals who know how to optimize it.

I hear your complaint, agree with it, and have been working for years to try to do something about it. The tides are changing glacially slow. Your culture can have a greater impact if you look closer to the bottom of the power structure.

Les Platt

Dear Mr. Quachri,

I enjoyed Richard A. Lovett's essay on creating conflict and villains in the January/February 2016 issue of Analog ["Creating Conflict: How to Write Adversaries Good (Bad) Enough to Bring Out Your Hero's Best"]. It reminded me of my mother's love of banana splits—a banana, three scoops of ice cream, whipped cream, sweet topping, nuts, and maraschino cherries. Leave out the banana and what do you have? An ice cream sundae. She liked those, too. Fortunately, the owners of ice cream shops and restaurants have enough sense to offer both to their customers. While I'm sure that their patrons have differing opinions on which is best, each has the opportunity of selecting their favorite from the menu.

Why isn't the same true of science fiction? Lovett pointed out that Story = Character + Setting + Conflict + Plot + Resolution. Leave out conflict, and you have a vignette (read, ice cream sundae). He asserts that nothing much happens in a vignette. That's not necessarily true. Just as much can happen in a vignette as in a story, we just don't have to endure elevated adrenaline levels while we read.

I also wonder about his opinion that some parts of a good, even a great, story can be weak on certain of these elements—unless it's the element that he seems to think is most important (conflict). That's like saying that a good banana split can be weak on some of its components (a small banana, only one cherry,

or skimpy on the sprinkles), but dare not be made with only two scoops of ice cream (something that I've enjoyed on a number of occasions).

Conflict in a story is way overrated.

I began reading science fiction when my maternal grandmother began to forward her well-read *Astounding*, *Galaxy*, *Future*, and *F&SF* magazines to me. The time was the 1950s and '60s. My grandmother and my days in college and graduate school were gone when I finally allowed my own magazine subscriptions to fade away. Why did I stop reading SF? Because it had become the exact opposite of what I loved about science fiction.

I grew up in the heat of the Cold War. Civilization could have ended at any moment. But science fiction predicted that we would survive, spread beyond the Moon and Solar System, and meet the other fascinating "people" of our galaxy. Back then, writers knew how to make use of all of the story components. Eventually, though, conflict became the alpha and omega of science fiction. I found myself asking, "Why am I forcing myself to read this?" So I stopped. If I want a jolt of conflict and the unpleasant physiological changes that it causes, I don't need fiction. I just read the newspaper or listen to the news on TV.

Just as some folks prefer ice cream sundaes to banana splits, some of us prefer low-conflict science fiction to the alternative. I've begun to read science fiction again. I'm very appreciative when I come across the occasional "feel good" SF story.

Please, let us have more ice cream sundaes in our SF diet.

Jack Ryan

Feel Good Science Fiction

*I'm with you, Jack (if I may be so informal). I like a nice vignette from time to time; I've run more than a few in these pages. (You can usually spot them by people complaining that "they're not really stories.") But I think you may be too limited in the kinds of conflict you're thinking of: Not every conflict has to be a harrowing exercise in stress-tolerance. Even when the stakes are quite low (from "What do we do with all these tribbles?" to "What kind of ice cream do I want?"), whether it's Man vs. Man, Man vs. Nature, or Man vs. Him or Herself, it's still conflict. ■*