

**Science Fiction Book Club  
Interview with William F. Nolan (March 2019)**

[William F. Nolan](#) writes mostly in the science fiction, fantasy, and horror genres. Though best known for co-authoring the classic dystopian science fiction novel *Logan's Run* with [George Clayton Johnson](#), Nolan is the author of more than 2000 pieces (fiction, nonfiction, articles and books), and has edited 26 anthologies in his 50+ year career.

An artist, Nolan was born in Kansas City, Missouri, and worked at Hallmark Cards, Inc. and in comic books before becoming an author. In the 1950s, Nolan was an integral part of the writing ensemble known as "The Group," which included many well-known genre writers, such as Ray Bradbury, [Charles Beaumont](#), John Tomerlin, [Richard Matheson](#), Johnson and others, many of whom wrote for Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone*. Nolan is considered a leading expert on Dashiell Hammett, pulps such as *Black Mask* and *Western Story*, and is the world authority on the works of prolific scribe Max Brand.

Of his numerous awards, there are a few of which he is most proud: being voted a Living Legend in Dark Fantasy by the International Horror Guild in 2002; twice winning the Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America; being awarded the honorary title of Author Emeritus by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, Inc. in 2006, and receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Horror Writers Association in 2010.

**Adam J. Meek:** Were you happy with the [Logan's Run film](#)?

**William F. Nolan:** Yes and no. I like the first half of the movie, then it begins to fall apart. After that it ignores the book and goes off on its own. When Logan and Jessica first emerge after escaping the ice cave, Logan says, "It all made sense until Box. . ."

I couldn't agree more!

**Seth A. Milman:** Did you feel visual elements of the film like the crystals on everyone's palms were lacking?

**Nolan:** No, I like the visual elements. They had great sets and costumes as well. The acting was excellent.

**Thomas Keith:** What was it like to collaborate with George Clayton Johnson on *Logan's Run*?

**Nolan:** We had a good relationship. George brought some good stuff to *Logan's Run*. No problems. We had been friends for years before we did the novel and remained close until his death. I miss him. . . he was a real character, and a good writer.

**Eva Sable:** I'm always interested in the process of collaboration... with respect to *Logan's Run*, how were story decisions made? Was it done face-to-face, by phone, by mail? How was the work portioned out? Sometimes you can clearly identify one author's voice over the other, but I never really felt two hands at work on *Logan's Run*.

**Nolan:** *Logan* began as an idea of mine. . . My dear friend—the late Charles Beaumont, a fine writer—asked me to do a class for his UCLA Extension. He said that I should come up with a way to delineate between "social fiction" and "science fiction."

On the way to teach the class, I thought “imagine a fellow turns 40 and buys a Corvette before running off with a showgirl. . . that’s social fiction.” Then I had the idea that “science fiction is when you must turn yourself in to the state for mandatory euthanasia at age 40.”

So I taught the class and thought that would be the end of it, but the idea kept nagging at me, so I wrote a short fragment called “Killerman, Killerman, Leave My Door.” That later became *Logan’s Run* after I explained the idea to Johnson. We agreed to write a novel, and each of us took notes for a year before getting together to create the book, which we decided to also turn into a script.

At the end of the year, we rented a motel room near the ocean and wrote the first draft there in just three weeks. Then I took over for the polish. We tried to give it a “single” voice, a *blend* of Nolan/Johnson.

**Rob Morganbesser: Will we ever get another Logan book?**

**Nolan:** Yes, I’ve been outlining a new Logan novel with my good friend and collaborator [Jason V Brock](#). He’s a real marvel. I call him “Super Beaumont”! He has this idea called *Logan Falls* and wants to take Logan in a new direction, which is exciting. I’ve also written three Logan short stories by myself for various anthologies.

**Eva Sable: Would new Logan’s Run books fall within or outside of the Trilogy timeline?**

**Nolan:** BOTH! I can’t reveal too much about that yet.

**Eric Singer: It’s been over 50 years since the first Logan’s Run novel. Would new ones have to take a new approach to the social commentary or is the original just as relevant as it ever was?**

**Nolan:** Again, *both!* Updates are definitely needed, but the context will be extended. The original book was sort of a reaction to the youth slogan “Never trust anyone over 30.” The point was that society needs the older people to keep it running. We’re seeing somewhat of a resurgence of something now, but it’s more about viewpoints than a physical age. Jason has several ideas about how to update the Logan Universe and the story arc.

**John Grayshaw: Are there still plans to do a remake of the Logan’s Run movie or has that fallen through?**

**Nolan:** After 30 years, and 18 screen writers, it’s still in a holding pattern at Warner Bros. I’d like to see it made before I die, but it doesn’t look like that’s going to happen, as I just turned 91 on March 6<sup>th</sup>. Will it ever get made? Who knows!

**Jesse Bryan: Robert Bloch told of how infuriated he was when he read the Hitchcock script for his book, *Psycho*. Specifically, the shower scene, where Hitchcock downgraded a graphic axe slaying to a mere shadow of a knife going up and down. Only after seeing the film did Bloch decide that Hitchcock knew what he was doing. Were there any similar moments for you during the filming of *Logan’s Run*? Or, conversely, did you face such issues when you adapted Robert Marasco’s book, *Burnt Offerings*?**

**Nolan:** I didn’t care for how Box was portrayed in the film. I envisioned a menacing robot, but in the film he’s just a big rolling vanity table. You could just push him over and run past! Also, all that stuff about the cats is ridiculous. *Who cares?*

[Burnt Offerings](#) was an easy novel to adapt, I thought. I wrote most of the screenplay and [Dan Curtis](#) (of *Dark Shadows* fame) provided the ending. Ironic and tragic, because his own daughter died by jumping off a building while high on PCP. He had to shoot that scene shortly after her death!

I did a commentary track with Dan for the DVD release. It goes into some of the differences between the novel and what we did on screen. . . it's very entertaining.

**David Stuckey: The Sam Space series has a clear influence of Dashiell Hammett, and the crossover between Sci-Fi and Noir Detective fiction is frequent - Do you think they are naturally similar, in the way they both involve characters rationally solving puzzles in their lives? Or are there other similarities?**

**Nolan:** I'm a big Hammett fan. I've written and edited a number of books about him.

I combined [Sam Spade](#) with Sci-Fi to create my wacky Mars detective. I think hard-boiled heroes and Sci-Fi heroes have a *lot* in common. I had great fun with Sam. Of course, every hero wants something, and the key is in *how* they get, or don't get it. The similarity between hard-boiled fiction and science fiction is that they are both *thinking* genres. To get what they want, there's a puzzle to solve, whether it's "who-dunnit," or "how-do-I-do-it."

**Eric Singer: What is the biggest difference between doing a novel and doing a screenplay? Which do you prefer?**

**Nolan:** I've done 14 novels and I've written several screenplays. I enjoy creating both forms. It would be difficult to choose. I think I have a different mood or vibe when working on either. Both are fun. It's all a game! The only difference is, in a novel, you don't have a director, actors, visuals—you have to provide that through your words, but in that case, you have more control over the end result, *and so does the reader!*

**Eric Singer: What is the biggest difference between adapted other peoples' work and writing original pieces? Which do you prefer?**

**Nolan:** Again, I enjoy both. The trick, for me, when adapting someone else's work, is preserving their vision while adding my own "touch" to it. When adapting any work, you are translating from one medium (novel, for example) to another (movie, perhaps). You have to know what to cut, what to emphasize, what to change or add to it to make it compelling for that medium, and maybe even for that director or producer's specific vision. It's a very satisfying endeavor when you can pull it off.

I really like adapting my own work. I've turned short stories into comics, unproduced screenplays into short stories, and so on. Sometimes a change of format can really transform a piece to something new and even more exciting.

**Eric Singer: When writing a screenplay do you get to be present on set during filming? If so, what is that experience like? What have you learned? How does it contribute to the process?**

**Nolan:** I love to be on the set when my stuff is filming. I always try to arrange it. I learned a lot that way—what works, what doesn't. Very valuable.

There have been a few times when I've even been an extra. I got to shoot a machine gun and fall over dead in one of my TV movies.

**Eric Singer: How happy have you been with the finished movies based on your screenplays?**

**Nolan:** I've been satisfied with most of them. When they did my *Terror at London Bridge* movie-of-the-week, not a word was changed. That's unusual.

**Eric Singer: You've written both fiction and nonfiction, what specific enjoyment do you get from the different forms?**

**Nolan:** Each is different. Each is fun. As a writer, you need to embrace all forms of the language. I prefer doing short stories (done 250 so far), but nonfiction can be quite rewarding, especially if you are sharing new information and inciting enthusiasm in your readers.

In fact, I have a book coming out this year from [Dark Regions Press](#) entitled *Writing As Life*, and it groups some of my best nonfiction articles and essays together. Later I'll have an omnibus of my best short stories out from [Centipede Press](#) as part of their *Masters of the Weird Tale* series. Both of those are edited by Jason Brock.

**Eric Singer: Wikipedia says you wrote an unused screen treatment for what would end up being John Carpenter's *The Thing*. How did it differ from the movie that got produced? Did you like the finished movie?**

**Nolan:** I did a long outline based on the original novella ("[Who Goes There?](#)" by John W. Campbell, Jr). I wrote about it in my introduction to the Rocket Ride Books edition, [Who Goes There?: The Novella That Formed the Basis of the Thing](#).

My treatment had almost nothing to do with the finished movie, and more closely followed Campbell's tale. Naturally, I like my version better. The released final picture was a bit too gory for me.

Why did *The Thing* land where it did? They didn't use my idea of his coming to activate a huge spaceship under the ice. I think that would have worked better!

**Eric Singer: My friend loves both [Trilogy of Terror](#) films. Do you have any insights into those productions?**

**Nolan:** The stories were all adaptations of shorts by my dear friend Richard Matheson. Dan Curtis, again, wanted to create a scary set-piece, so Matheson asked me to assist. . . I adapted the first two, and Rich did the last story. *Trilogy of Terror* was great fun to do—but the part that everybody remembers is the "devil doll" chasing Karen Black around her apartment that Matheson wrote!

A funny thing is that Curtis used to keep the doll in a filing cabinet in his office. He'd pull it out to scare his assistant, Ruth, every once in a while!

**Gary Denton: Was being an artist before becoming known as a writer helpful in moving to scriptwriting?**

**Nolan:** Oh, Yes! Thanks to art, I have been able to be far more "visual" with my writing. I've also written comic books with Beaumont and later Brock.

**Gary Denton:** You have earned major awards in dark fantasy, horror, fantasy, and science fiction - which do you think is most satisfying to write, and which do you think you will be most known for in 50 years?

**Nolan:** I tend to enjoy a good shock tale from a writing perspective. As to the other, *Logan's Run* will survive the test of time. I think [my other 99 or so books](#) will likely vanish, but that's okay. Logan will keep running!

**Gary Denton:** You are an expert on the pulps and also have edited many anthologies. Recently it appears much less short fiction is being published. Do you think short fiction and pulpy tales were a product of their time?

**Nolan:** *Very much so!* The pulps gave writers a vast open door. They had to fill some 200 titles a month. Also, magazine fiction in general is gone. There are very few venues left for short fiction outside of anthologies. I've heard that it's because people don't read as much as they used to for quick entertainment (too easy to just look at a screen), and if they invest time in reading, they prefer a longer, more immersive work, such as a novel.

**Gary Denton:** Are the paperbacks and magazines of the 1960s to the '90s much different than the classic pulps? What of the magazines and paperbacks being published since then?

**Nolan:** The old paperbacks were "pulpish", but the new ones simply reflect our current culture.

As far as magazines, it seems to be mostly nonfiction these days. Gone are the days of classic *Playboy*, *Twilight Zone Magazine*, and so on. . . although there are still a few around, such as the print version of [The Weird Fiction Review](#) (Centipede Press), and [Nameless Digest](#) (from [Cycatrix Press](#)).

**John Grayshaw:** You were involved in Sci-Fi fandom in the '50s and published fanzines? What was fandom like at that time?

**Nolan:** Fandom was exciting back then. I wrote for many fanzines as did Ray Bradbury and most writers of the time. Those days are gone. They have been replaced by social media, unfortunately.

**Ed Newsom:** *California Sorcery* is a wonderful anthology. Are there stories about members of the Group--especially Charles Beaumont and Richard Matheson--you could share?

**Nolan:** Too many stories! "The Group" lasted 10 years! Jason Brock is working on a book that covers this era.

Matheson and Beaumont were two of my closest friends, and we had many wonderful times together. . . I sure do miss them both. Beaumont died far too young, at age 38. Such talent they had! But their works live on. If you want to know about this period, I highly recommend Jason Brock's documentaries about Beaumont and [Forrest J Ackerman](#). The latter is the [Rondo Award](#)-winning [The AckerMonster Chronicles!](#), and the former is called [Charles Beaumont: The Life of Twilight Zone's Magic Man](#).

**John Grayshaw:** Could you tell us about your friendship with Ray Bradbury?

**Nolan:** It's all in my poem about our 60-year friendship, "God Bless!" in [Soul Trips](#), and my book [Nolan on Bradbury](#). We did a lot together. Ray was a very dear man. I sure miss him. I was the very first Bradbury scholar, before anyone really understood what he was doing.

**John Grayshaw: Do you recall Charles Beaumont or Ray Bradbury going to Rod Serling and accusing him of plagiarizing some of their stories on *The Twilight Zone*? There was a section about it in the Bradbury biography *Bradbury Unbound*. Did they all have a good working relationship?**

**Nolan:** Early on, when Serling first came to Los Angeles, he wanted Bradbury to have more input into *The Twilight Zone*. Rod had to produce a lot of scripts by the terms of the deal with the studio, and he needed help. Bradbury was someone whose work he deeply admired, so it was natural he would reach out to him. In fact, Ray was the one who recommended a few writers to read for the flavor of the show, such as [John Collier](#), and he also gave Serling copies of the first collections of two of his acolytes— Charles Beaumont and Richard Matheson. They would be hired and go on to create many of the most memorable episodes of the series.

Eventually, Ray sent Rod a few scripts, and one was produced (“I Sing the Body Electric”). Over time, that relationship soured. . . part of this was due to the success Serling had, in my estimation. Beaumont was sort of caught in the middle but sided with Ray as his friend over Serling as his employer. I think this hurt Rod, and he wrote Beaumont a long letter refuting the charges that he had “borrowed” ideas and so on without proper credit. I mean. . . ideas are everywhere. Rod was also fond of his childhood, and Ray can’t copyright childhood. So there was some friction. It got worse over time.

Brock’s documentary on Beaumont gets into this, so I recommend you view that. I also have the feeling Bradbury was a little jealous of Serling, as Bradbury had failed to get a TV series of his own off the ground. He did later, of course, with [The Ray Bradbury Theater](#), but it was no *Twilight Zone*.

**Beth McCrea: Your work is amazing, and your accolades speak for themselves! I'm curious what else has been a highlight for you in the Sci-Fi or fantasy world outside of something you wrote? (For example: Something you read, someone you met, some experience you've had, etc.)**

**Nolan:** It will all be in the new book I’m working on about my life, a memoir titled *Nolan’s Run*. Suffice to say, Charles Beaumont made a big imprint on me (as did Ray Bradbury). Now, the two people closest to me are Jason and Sunni Brock. They are a godsend. Couldn’t live without ‘em!

**John Grayshaw: Who are some of the writers that have influenced you?**

**Nolan:** Over 100 other writers: Cheever, Steinbeck, Bradbury, Capote, Perelman, Chandler, Hammett, Phil Dick, Max Brand, Mailer, Corwin, Matheson, Brock, Thurber, Alfred Bester, Shirley Jackson, etc., etc., etc.

Every working writer should have his or her list. We all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us and should be able to learn from what others do.

**John Grayshaw: What are your hobbies other than writing?**

**Nolan:** In the ‘50s and ‘60s, I was very into motor racing. I wrote eight books and over 150 pieces on auto racing. I do love movies, but Hollywood is getting dumber by the day. They love explosions!

**John Grayshaw: Do you have a writing routine that you stick to?**

**Nolan:** No, I just write every day. And I read a lot.

**John Grayshaw:** What do you feel is your legacy?

**Nolan:** My legacy is *Logan's Run*. I used to say to Bob Bloch, "on your gravestone, Bob, it'll read 'Here lies Robert "Psycho" Bloch', and mine will be 'William "Logan's Run" Nolan.'"

Bob always got a kick out of that!

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