

A note from Alan Swerdlow:

First of all, a few words about radio as a medium and the notion of radio drama. It has been called “the Theatre of the mind” because each production takes place in the individual listener’s head. It is the listener who provides the imagery suggested by sound. They, in fact, design the scenery, flesh out the characters and provide the visuals inspired by the sound they have heard.

The radio director works with specialised tools, all of which are sound-based. By skilful use of sound effects, expert performance by actors (who lose most of their tools and have to rely on one alone – the use of their voice), music, ambience, pacing, and – above all – a manipulation of time, profound philosophies as well as engrossing narrative can be conveyed to the literal audience.

Why is time so important? The narrative must be presented within the designated time allocated, but can be expanded, compressed, elided, rhythmic, erratic, formalised and/or utilised as the framework on which the narrative depends. There is a huge distinction between a radio serial (whether it is daily or weekly) and a self-contained one-off drama and different conventions apply to each.

Sci-fi is eminently suited to a radio medium because it is open to interpretation by the individual listener, and, because it is a form that depends so strongly on leaps of the imagination, it invites the willing participation of a listener who is expected to interpret what he or she hears into a very personal visual representation. The listener to a science fiction radio drama can supply what is not possible in an obvious representational depiction. They become complicit in completing the whole experience.

A word from the organiser

Besides exploration of radio as a medium, we hope to encourage the kind of authenticity that uses real experience as a basis for imagination. Your listener may be many things that you are (or know) and may care about...a single parent, a street vendor, unemployed; a young person with a talent for making toys out of wire, a shebeen-owner’s neice; a retired Lenasian taxi driver who likes pottering in her vegetable garden, a victim or survivor of corruption (human trafficking, civil war, rape, accident, illness,...), a 9-year-old in a wheelchair wondering whether it’s possible to study higher mathematics in Braille...a survivor of 10 years in jail trying to start afresh...somebody who has recently been devastated (or thrilled) by her matric results; a middle-class kid – *anything*.

We’re all out here, waiting to apply our imaginations to your play.

The problem here is that imagination *is* based on reality – and “reality” is so different for different people that it can be almost impossible to communicate things that matter. So we tend to evolve “official” realities that everyone understands. We even do official fantasies – dragons, f1 drives...

It’s my statistically educated guess it’s a large majority of us out here who *really* think of pale, male, middle-class mesomorphs as a specific (and – well, actually – even quite boring: they aren’t *us*) minority. You won’t be penalised for conformity – the folk in question exist and are surely entitled to their slice of identification. But we’d *love* a change. Don’t let the pipe-smoking, potbellied (and dead anyway) stereotype-hustling pale male middle-class editors of the past – or the sadly limiting effect they’ve had on our literature – terrorise you. Tweaking stereotypes to make your characters vivid and effective is an absolutely legitimate technique – but use it consciously, and not blindly. You may just find you want to share some of the real world – as *you* know it.