

Well, heh-heh, here's Dave Fan Arnam here to tell you once more that there was a slight little error in the last issue, which is not the issue of 10 Jun of next year...

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It does look as though I'm gonna be able to scrape up enough money for the Westercon trip, or Greater Trek.

NEW YORK IN '67! Goshwow!!!!

This will no doubt come as a great relief to those who didn't know there was any doubt about it, such as Ted, LeeH, Arnie, Andy, Mike, Robin, and Cindy, but it comes as an even greater relief to me, since as I believed I remarked before I'd not gotten around to saving up any money for the G.T. Which brings us to the weekly feature:

STARVING WRITERS OF AMERICA DEPT.: I called up Don Wollheim half an hour ago. Ted had heard from Terry that THE BLACK MAGICIAN was as yet sitting on Don's desk unread, and that a phone call from me might help if I didn't sound like I was actually pressing.

"Uh, I forgot to mention I'm going on a three-week vacation next week," quoth I. "That's nice," said Don, "I'm going on a two-week vacation tomorrow."

sigh

DEPT. OF THE HIGHER CRITICISM: After the informal writers group meeting last Tuesday, I gave Lee Hoffman a set of carbons to THE BLACK MAGICIAN. That Friday at FISTFA I hesitatingly asked her her opinion.

"Dave," LeeH said, "we've either got to have a long talk, or I've got nothing to say to you..."

My computer-like brain instantly figured this out as a Bad Review, but I got into a discussion with her about writing -- and my writing in particular -- which proved quite enlightening.

I'd been pretty satisfied with most of TBM, tho I knew there were a few spots that needed touching up. LeeH made me see, however, that nearly all of the straight adventure stuff (which I intend, after all, to be some 75% of the book) fell down drastically. It might still sell, but it was not at all what it shd be as action narrative.

It seems to be two basic things that I get hung up on, visualization and pacing. For instance, I have a sword fight in the first chapter which I thot came out pretty well after three revisions. Well, the prose is pretty clean, but the scene, supposedly seen from the point of view of one of the fighters, is described far too objectively. I may include a page or two of it in one of my pre-prepared FIRST DRAFTs for release during the Greater Trek, to give you a line on what I mean here.

Not only is it too objective, with not enough subjective details to really bring it alive, but it turns out that the digressions I thot so highly of were, after all, rather poorly paced. Now, Ted White has been trying to beat a sense of pacing into my head since we started on WHEN IN ROME a year and a half ago, and I thought I was beginning to catch on, finally.

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Pacing is one of the trickier and more fascinating aspects of the craft of writing fiction, tho I suspect that once one gets the hang of it the trickiness wd prove to be not so bad after all.

It's a matter of sticking in your bits of business (a character taking out and lighting a cigarette, say, tho certainly not in THE BLACK MAGICIAN!) and your absolutely necessary sections of background description (the look of the room, the time of the day, all those rather static details that have to be there but which can vastly clutter up an otherwise smooth stretch of storytelling if not handled right) without the reader noticing that you have stopped the story in its tracks to tell him all this.

What I was doing wrong was, in my rewrites, adding too much observed detail at the wrong time, or so I gather. As to just what "too much" and "the wrong time" are, I'm still not completely certain -- I suspect that even if I figure it out, it'd be as difficult to explain verbally as it wd be to explain how one shd do believable dialogue.

And I hope that once I figure out pacing it will come as easily and with as little worrying on my part as to the basic mechanics, as is already the case with dialogue -- and, for instance, about the most I can say about that is that you must write it the way the person speaking wd actually talk. That's a lotta help, huh?

Well, perhaps these things can't be explained too easily; fortunately, it seems not impossible to learn them. I learned about dialogue by writing a Great American Novel that didn't work (most of the characters in it, by the way, were fans -- real fans -- by chance, tho at the time I was not an active fan and had had no intentions of writing what turns out to be a faaan-fiction piece...), and the way I learned was quite simple indeed -- I wrote the dialogue the way the real people the story was based on actually talked. Cheating, maybe, but then I found that I cd make the imaginary characters Talk Real too.

THIS IS DAVE'S MACHINE, TALKING: Actually it isn't -- but this is not DVA at the typer. It is his friendly collaborator and editor, Ted White. "Fill out the rest of the stencil, Ted," Dave told me. Okay:

Actually, one of my own problems in helping Dave with his writing is this very one of verbalization. When I am pacing a story well, I know it and I feel it. When I read something which is well-paced, I also can feel it. And, needless to say, I can feel a poorly paced story as easily. It has something to do with my Native Sense of Rhythm, you see.

But it's something else to communicate this Sense of Rhythm to someone else. "Ummm, Dave... You gotta get a Flow to this..." doesn't really tell Dave what he Really Needs To Know. But that's life, Charlie.

SPEAKING OF WRITING: I am finishing up my first hardcover novel -- a juvenile for Westminster, SECRET OF THE MARAUDER SATELLITE -- which coincidentally enough was due today. Today, however, instead of pounding away at my typer, I am here, doing this. The reason is that Robin and I have dropped in on DVA after doing a taped interview with Stan Lee with Bbob Stewart for CASTLE OF FRANKENSTEIN. I did the interviewing (Bbob says it went well), and Robin shot three rolls of film. Three rolls -- that's not too many. -- Ted White

HOPING YOU ARE THE SANE DEPT.: Hoping you are the sane...

-- dgv