

There is always (or at least usually) that moment when, sitting down and contemplating the crisp greenness of the unspoiled stencil, one wonders just what to do with this particular stencil out of the almost limitless variety of possibilities

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Or at least I, Dave Van Arnam, of 1730 Harrison Ave, Apt 353, Bronx, NY 10453, frequently experience this...

NYCON 3 -- hiphiphoooray!!!!

Here today, for instance, I thought of serving up a hot steaming portion of STAR GLADIATOR for comments, then decided I didn't want to spend an hour trying to find a good section to quote only to leave off more discouraged than ever when I couldn't find one (I did spend five minutes at the task; and actually the trouble is more that, within the limitations of the 30,000 word limit covering three years of a man's life, everything I've done has been as it were double-duty writing: everything in it theoretically is there only to advance the story, i.e. there is no space for quotable set-pieces per se; does that make sense?)

I had never expected to learn how to write fiction on-the-job, as it were, but that's what's happening. Actually, not too many other ways of learning exist; your optional alternates pretty much narrow down to writing complete books before they're sold, or after. Now it's always good to get a few hundred thousand words under your belt before you actually try to go out there in the cold cruel marketplace and sell editors on your novelization of the cosmic all. That's what I did -- with my 3 drafts of AS THE SONG IS SUNG (my greatamericanovel), ending up with a 50,000 word Van Arnam elephant (I presume Ted's got his own Elephants some where...), and with fandom, or more specifically FIRST DRAFT. You have to have some facility with words; and only a few have that facility without considerable practice beforehand.

But after you can string out an idea or an incident with reasonable smoothness, simply to go out and start selling unwritten books...in a way I suppose I still can't quite grasp this. It seems not really possible that the art and craft of constructing a novel and executing it more or less according to plan is considered by the experts -- the editors, experts ex officio -- a relatively minor matter compared with the basic matter, simple facility with words.

What I find so upsetting (or at least vaguely upsetting) is that I had always had an image of the act of novel-writing as a comparatively high-purposed thing by people who knew all the arcane mysteries of constructing a sufficiency of relevant incidents from the basic plot level down to the tiniest details of sentence construction designed to forward the action by subtle juxtaposition of precisely effective words...

\*whew\* I'm getting a little carried away by my rhetoric here, gang, let's pause for station identification and a cup of coffee...

In fact, let's knock off until next week. I've got to put my clothes on and scoot off to work... +++++ Hoping you are the sane...

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