

Dave Van Arnam remains at 1730
Harrison Ave, Apt 353, Bronx, NY
10453, as he has for some years now;
Dave Van Arnam wonders why he keeps
repeating this fact.

FIRST DRAFT #156

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THE SFWA BANQUET was a rather wierd
affair for me personally. In the
first place, I find it difficult for
me to construct a believable self-
image of 'Dave Van Arnam is a
professional writer'. I continue to postulate this to myself, adducing
the evidence of three book contracts and an agent who wants more out-
lines, but it's mortal hard. Past thirty it's hard to break out of
the molds of past self-images. As a result, I attended this august
meeting of the East Coast pros with an uneasy conscience.

STEVE STILES FOR TAFF! VOTE!

I was not aware of this uneasiness until I walked into the small
reception area where a cash bar (\$1.50 per drink!) had been set up.
Cindy and I had bumped into Andy Porter and Jack & Phoebe Gaughan just
before reaching the restaurant, and we entered with the Gaughans, which
shd have allayed my nerves.

It wd have, except that the first person we were introduced to in a
room full of total strangers was Damon Knight.

I picture myself as normally either incoherent or uninteresting when
talking with people I don't know (at the same time I'm aware that this
is not actually entirely true, but, self-images do not necessarily cor-
respond with Reality...). At the banquet, most of the people there,
it seemed, were strangers. SF pros, at that. Talk about incoherent...

But it started me thinking about such things, and, later, at the ban-
quet portion of the evening, I worked out some things which begin to
satisfy me, in terms of changing these faulty self-images of mine.

(At this point people like Alan Shaw and Arnie Katz will stop reading
because Van A is just noodling along about himself in the worst FIRST
DRAFT manner, but I shall pay not the least attention to them; the
idea of using FD as a cathartic device for me does not seem unreason-
able, to me.)

One of the stronger Self-Images I have of myself, which sort of wavers
in and out of existence depending on circumstances, is that I have no
particular opinions of my own -- literary or otherwise. Actually, this
is so far from being true that all long-term readers of FIRST DRAFT may
pause for a moment and chuckle, starting with John Boardman. But I
tend, in stress situations, to withdraw inside myself and view the
Outside World so defensively that I freeze up all those opinions to the
extent that I decide they aren't there at all.

This may sound a bit confusing; in the context of SFWA however it shd
easily be clarifiable: I know about writing and literature to a con-
siderable extent, but, oddly enough, not that much in terms of science
fiction itself. My literary theories are literary theories, formulated
from mountains of mainstream reading performed in the stacks of the
library of the University of Florida. So far as they go, they bear no
specific relevance to sf at all. But I have no time, and must continue
next week... Hoping you are the sane...

-- dgv

Null-Q Press
Undecided Publication #249

Three years ago this week, FIRST DRAFT began publication. This sin has resulted directly or indirectly in a number of subsequent sins -- DEGLAR!, now a fantastically successful newszine; Apa F, Apa L, and at least two LArea biweekly apas. Now FD begins its fourth year. ("Will Mankind never rest? To the Space Gun -- and so we end an age!") Well, some day I'll quit. Not just yet, tho.

FIRST DRAFT #158

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24 Mar 67

It's still STILES FOR TAFF!!

CONTINUING FROM LAST WEEK: Last issue was not distributed very widely, as I [1] again missed FISTFA, [2] Forgot to take them to Lunarians, [3] couldn't afford to mail 'em to Fred Patten. As I misnumbered it as #156 (it was #157) and as I'm continuing as best I can where I left off, it strikes me as fortunate that all these things concatenated, as it were, at the same time.

I WAS SAYING... I think I cd simplify my last week's remarks by pointing out the continuing problem I've had the last few years at regionals and cons, and in reading fanzines, in all of which endeavors a constant stream of discussion of the name, nature, purpose, techniques, etc. of science fiction are (quite naturally) a staple of discussion.

I find I don't think about sf this way, or at least that I haven't. There has been very damn little in sf that I cd honestly hold up as Literature -- though in the fantasy field there's a lot more meat on the bones. As a consequence I tend to think that great lengthy thrashings out of "what is sf" and "is sf any good" and "is sf modern" and "is sf this-that-or-the-other" are simply not, generally speaking, in my universe of discourse. Will Ballard's influence ruin sf? Damon Knight's? Harlan Ellison's? Ted White's? Lee Hoffman's? Campbell? Me? Anyone?

I don't think sf can be ruined by anyone. It might be run a bit ragged by this one or another's misapprehension of lit'ry realities, but ruined? Hardly. So I just can't get that Involved with such discussions.

So when I walk into a big group of sf pros, and realize that all those Burning Discussions of the past years' cons and fanzines have engaged my intellekshul faculties not a whit, I start thinking that I don't have anything to say at all. This for me is a Major Realization.

Because I do have plenty of opinions on sf. I just don't think they fit into most of the current arguments. (It also doesn't help that I read my first Tom Disch novel two days ago and haven't read any Ballard novels, but that's another problem.)

What is important in sf? Heh! Fooled you! Because my answer, in spite of what I said above and last week, is "I don't quite know -- yet." And the reason for this is simplicity itself: Theory Follows Practice. As a practicing sf writer, I have not yet discovered what I can do; hence, I'm not sure what I should do. Mythic substructures, idiosyncratic prose, inventive narrative techniques, and the rest of it -- see me next year at about this time. We'll see. (And for those of you hanging on the question of whether Van Arnam will learn how to Talk To The Other Pros, that's still another problem...*sigh*)
Hoping you are the sane...

-- dgv

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Undecided Publication #250
