

A Blonde in Africa-an introduction

by Mike Resnick

Africa can cast a spell that makes Merlin look like an amateur. It can grab you from half a world away, pull you to its bosom, and as you spend your last night there prior to going home you find that you miss it already. It has a way of simplifying things, of making you realize what's really important to you; and it can convince you that the very best part of yourself will remain there, waiting for you to return and redeem it.

It can also drive you crazy, and break your heart again and again.

It can show you beauties undreamed of, and horrors equally unimaginable. It is vibrant with life, both human and animal, yet no continent presents such a constant and uncaring display of death.

It is also a place of inspiration. People who would never have considered writing under other circumstances have taken years out of their lives to put their African experiences down on paper.

And when a real writer comes face to face with Africa, you get such masterpieces as Ruark's Horn of the Hunter, Hemingway's The Green Hills of Africa, Blixen's Out of Africa, Markham's West With the Night, and Huxley's The Flame Trees of Thika.

Hunters get that urge, too, and have produced such memorable volumes as Lake's Killers in Africa and Hunter's Choice, Jordan's Elephants and Ivory, Bell's Karamojo Safari, the works of Selous and Boyes and Lyell and Stigand and Percival, and many, many more.

It even affects writers of category fiction. I've written 9 science fiction novels and 22 short stories set in Africa. Other science fiction writers such as George Alec Effinger, Robert Silverberg, John Crowley, and Gregory Benford have recently set stories there. Nor has it escaped the attention of mystery writers such as M. M. Kaye, Elspeth Huxley, and Karin McQuillan, and adventure writers from Edgar Rice Burroughs and H. Rider Haggard right up to Michael Crichton.

What you now hold in your hands is a book by an award-winning romance and science fiction writer, who found Africa just as fascinating as all those who went before her. I know her a little

better than those other writers who came under Africa's spell. I ought to: I'm her father.

Laura Resnick has always been a traveler. She went to Sweden when she was 16. She majored in French and minored in Italian at Georgetown University, the better to make her way through the non-English-speaking world. By the time she was 25 she had lived in England, France, Sicily, and an Israeli _kibbutz_, and had visited close to a dozen other countries.

Then it became time to make a living. Writing wasn't her first choice, but when you've got the touch it's hard to ignore it, and she quickly became a successful romance writer, winning an award as Best New Series Writer.

Before long she had expanded into science fiction and fantasy as well, and in August, 1993, while she herself was evading pachyderms in South Africa's Addo Elephant Park, I accepted the Campbell Award, science fiction's "Rookie of the Year" award, for her. This came a month after one of her romance novels won a major award. (I think she was busy drowning in the Zambezi at that very moment.)

Laura chose to see Africa not as a hunter (almost impossible these days, unless you want only to see tiny portions of Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania), and not as a luxury tourist. Instead, she chose to become an Overlander, a hardy and not-all-that-rare breed of traveler which one constantly encounters in the most out-of-the-way places in the Third World.

This is the first book in the _Resnick Library of African Adventure_, either here at Alexander Books or in its previous incarnation at St. Martin's Press, that does not involve hunting. I chose to run it because, while there have been many accounts of people traveling across Africa in less than sumptuous style, there has yet to be a book that gives you a true picture of an Overlander's daily life.

Overland vehicles set out to tour obscure lands hundreds of times each year; they are becoming increasingly popular not only for students, but for retired men and women living on fixed incomes who nonetheless have a hunger to see the world. Well, there's one thing I can promise you: if you're considering becoming an Overlander, once you finish reading this book you'll know _exactly_ what to expect.

For instance:

You'll learn just how many diseases you can catch in eight months, despite your inoculations.

You'll learn what it feels like to have an entire village go

suddenly berserk and attack your party in the middle of the night.

You'll learn why it's a bad idea to pitch your tent where the previous party had been baiting lions.

You'll learn what it's like to join a pygmy tribe during a hunt.

You'll learn just how many times you have to bribe border guards to do precisely what they are paid to do in the first place.

You'll learn what it's like to be arrested in a Third World country. In quite a few of them, in fact.

You'll learn Tanzanian economics, and why bread comes from Arusha on Thursdays.

You'll experience the thrill of having baby gorillas playing right in front of you.

You'll see an ancient ceremony in which the men of a West African village willingly plunge knives into their own bellies.

You'll travel a dirt road that wends its way through hundreds of live mines.

You'll plunge through the Zambezi's rapids and suddenly find yourself beneath the surface, looking desperately for your boat while downstream the crocs are looking just as desperately for an appetizer.

And you'll have no trouble understanding why, despite all this, there's a bonus section featuring Laura's return trip barely a year later.

Speaking as an editor and not a blood relative (another circumstance you'll never find in Africa), I think you'll find that this is a book filled not only with adventure, but with charm, wit, and insight.

Enjoy.