

ROOTS AND A FEW VINES

by Mike Resnick

So I'm sitting there in Winnipeg, resplendent in my tuxedo, and morbidly wondering how many fans have called me "Mr. Resnick" instead of "Mike" since the worldcon began three days ago.

I don't feel like a Mister. I feel like a fan who is cheating by sitting here with all the pros, waiting for Bob Silverberg to announce the winner of the Best Editor Hugo. He goes through the names: Datlow, Dozois, Resnick, Rusch, Schmidt.

He opens the envelope and reads off Kris Rusch's name, and suddenly I am walking up to the stage. Bob is sure I thought he called out my name, and looks like he is considering clutching the Hugo to his breast and running off with it (although that is actually a response common to all pros when they are in proximity to a Hugo), but finally he sighs and hands it over to me, and I start thanking Ed Ferman and all the voters.

What am I doing here, I wonder, picking up a Hugo for a lady who is half my age and has twice my talent and is drop-dead gorgeous to boot? How in blazes did I ever get to be an Elder Statesman?

* * *

Well, it began in 1962, which, oddly enough, was not just last year, no matter how it feels. Carol and I had met at the University of Chicago in 1960. We'd gone to the theater on our first date, and wound up in the Morrison Hotel's coffee shop, where we talked science fiction until they threw us out at 5 in the morning. It was the first time either of us realized that someone else out there read that crazy Buck Rogers stuff (though we might have guessed, since they continued to print it month after month, and two sales per title would hardly seem enough to keep the publishers in business.)

Well, 1962 rolls around, and so does a future Campbell winner named Laura...but the second biggest event of the year comes when Ace Books, under the editorship of Don Wollheim, starts pirating a bunch of Edgar Rice Burroughs novels, and a whole generation gets to learn about Tarzan and Frank Frazetta and John Carter and Roy Krenkal and David Innes all at once.

But the important thing, the thing that unquestionably shaped my adult life, was that one of the books had a little blurb on the inside front cover extolling ERB's virtues, and it was signed "Camille Cazedessus, Editor of ERB-dom". Well, you didn't have

to be a genius to figure out that _ERB-dom_, at least in that context, was an obvious reference to Edgar Rice Burroughs.

A whole magazine devoted to one of my favorite writers? I could barely wait until the next morning, when I took the subway downtown and entered the Post Office News, Chicago's largest magazine store. I looked for _ERB-dom_ next to _Time, Life, Look, Newsweek,_ and _Playboy._ Wasn't there. I looked for it next to _Analog, Galaxy,_ and _F&SF._ No dice. Wasn't anywhere near _Forbes_ or _Fortune_ or _Business Week_ either.

So I go up to the manager and tell him I'm looking for _ERB-dom_, and he checks his catalogs and tells me there ain't no such animal.

I grab him by the arm, drag him over to the paperbacks, pull out the operative Burroughs title, turn to the inside front cover, and smite him with a mighty _"Aha!"_

So he promises to get cracking and find out who publishes this magazine and start stocking it, and I return to our subterranean penthouse (i.e., basement apartment) to await the Good News.

Which doesn't come.

I nag Post Office News incessantly. I nag my local bookstore. I nag the public library. I even nag my mother. (This seems counter-productive, but she has been nagging _me_ for 20 years and fair is fair.)

Finally, I look at my watch and it is half-past 1962 and there is still no sign of _ERB-dom_, so I write to the editor, Miss Cazedessus (so okay, until then I'd never heard of a _guy_ named Camille), in care of Ace Books, and a month later the first five issues of _ERB-dom_ arrive in the mail, the very first fanzines I have ever seen, along with a long, friendly letter that constantly uses the arcane word "worldcon".

Within two months I have written three long articles for _ERB-dom #6_ and have become its associate editor. There is a worldcon in Chicago that summer, not a 20-minute subway ride from where we live, but the future Campbell winner chooses August 17 to get herself born, and we do not go to the worldcon. When she is 8 days old I decide to forgive her and lovingly show her off to her grandparents, and she vomits down the back of my Hawaiian shirt (which, in retrospect, could well have been an editorial comment), and it is 27 years before I willingly touch her again, but that is another story.

There is one other thing that happens in 1962. We are living at the corner of North Shore and Greenview in the Rogers Park area

of Chicago, and right across street of us is this old apartment building, and on the third Saturday of every month strange-looking men and women congregate there. They have long hair, and most of them are either 90 pounds overweight or 50 pounds underweight, and often they are carrying books under their arms. We decide they are members of SNCC or CORE, which are pretty popular organizations at the time, and that they are meeting there to figure out how to dodge the draft, and that the books they carry are either pacifist tracts or ledgers with the names and addresses of all the left-wing groups that have contributed money to them.

We have to go all the way to Washington D.C. a year later and attend Discon I to find out that they are not draft dodgers (well, not _primarily_, anyway) but rather Chicago fandom, and that they have been meeting 80 feet from our front door for 2 years.

* * *

So I wend my way back through the audience, and I find my seat, and I hand Kris Rusch's Hugo to Carol, because I am also up for Best Short Story, and I think I've got a better chance at this, and when I run up to accept the award it will look tacky to already be carrying a Hugo. Besides, Charles Sheffield is sitting right next to us, and he is up for Best Novelette, and he is getting very nervous, and wants to stroke the Hugo for luck, or maybe is considering just walking out with it and changing the name plates at a future date. (In fact, I am convinced that if he does not win his own, neither Kris nor I will ever see _her_ Hugo again. Charles will probably deny this, but never forget that Charles gets paid an inordinate amount of money to tell lies to the public at large.)

So Guy Gavriel Kay begins reading off the nominees, and suddenly I realize that I am not nervous at all, that this is becoming very old hat to me. I have been nominated for nine Hugos in the past six years. I have actually won a pair. Worldcons are very orderly things: you show up, you sign a million autographs, you eat each meal with a different editor and line up your next year's worth of work, and then you climb into your tux and see if you won another Hugo.

It's gotten to be such a regular annual routine, you sometimes find yourself idly wondering: was it _always_ like this?

Then you think back to your first worldcon, and you realize that no, it was not always like this...

* * *

Right off the bat, we were the victims of false doctrine. Everyone we knew in fandom -- all six or seven of them -- told us

the worldcon was held over Labor Day weekend. So we took them at their word.

The problem, of course, was the definition of "weekend". We took a train that pulled out of Chicago on Friday morning, and dumped us in the basement of our Washington D.C. hotel at 9:00 Saturday morning. At which time we found out that the convention was already half over.

(Things were different then. There were no times in the convention listings. In fact, there were no convention listings. Not in _Analog_, not anywhere. If you knew that worldcons even existed, you were already halfway to being a trufan.)

Caz (right: he wasn't a Miss at all) met us and showed us around. Like myself, he was dressed in a suit and tie; it was a few more worldcons before men wore shirts without jackets or ties, even during the afternoons, and every woman -- they formed, at most, 10% of the attendees, and over half were writers' wives -- wore a skirt. If you saw someone with a beard -- a relatively rare occurrence -- you knew he was either a pro writer or Bruce Pelz.

When we got to the huckster room -- 20-plus dealers (and selling only books, magazines, and fanzines; none of the junk that dominates the tables today), I thought I had died and gone to heaven. The art show had work by Finlay and Freas and Emsh and even Margaret Brundage; only J. Allen St. John was missing from among the handful of artists whose work I knew and admired.

They had an auction. It even had a little booklet telling you what items would be auctioned when, so you knew which session to attend to get what you wanted. Stan Vinson, a famous Burroughs collector who had been corresponding with me for a year, bought a Frazetta cover painting for \$70. Friends told him he was crazy; paintings were supposed to appreciate, and no one would ever pay that much for a Frazetta again. I bought a Finlay sketch for \$2.00, and an autographed Sturgeon manuscript for \$3.50.

In the afternoon we decide to go to the panels. I do not know from panels; like any neo, I take along a pencil and a notebook. The panels are not what we have these days, or at least they did not seem so to my untrained and wondrous eyes and ears.

For example, there is a panel with Willy Ley and Isaac Asimov and Fritz Leiber and L. Sprague de Camp and Ed Emsh and Leigh Brackett, and the topic is "What Should a BEM Look Like?". (I have a copy of the _Discon Proceedings_, a transcript of the entire convention published by Advent, and to this day when I need a new alien race I re-read that panel and invariably I come up with one.)

There was a panel with Fred Pohl and a tyro named Budrys and a gorgeous editor (though not as gorgeous as the one I accepted a Hugo for) named Cele Goldsmith and even ***John Campbell Himself***, on how to write stories around cover paintings, which was a common practice back then, and which remains fascinating reading today.

There was a sweet old guy in a white suit who saw that we were new to all this, and moseyed over and spent half an hour with us, making us feel at home and telling us about how we were all one big family and inviting us to come to all the parties at night. Then he wandered off to accept the first-ever Hall of Fame Award from First Fandom. When they asked if he was working on anything at present, he replied that he had just delivered the manuscript to _Skylark DuQuesne_, and received the second-biggest ovation I have ever heard at a worldcon. (The biggest came 30 years later, when Andy Porter broke a 12-year losing streak and won the semi-prozine Hugo in 1993.)

Since we didn't know anyone, and were really rather shy (over the years, I have learned to over-compensate for this tendency, as almost anyone will tell you, bitterly and at length,) we ate dinner alone, then watched the masquerade, which in those days was truly a masquerade ball and not a competition. There was a band, and everyone danced, and a few people showed up in costume, and every now and then one of them would march across the stage, and at the end of the ball they announced the winners.

Then there was the Bheer Blast. In those bygone days, they didn't show movies. (I think movies turned up in 1969, _not_ to display the Hugo nominees or give pleasure to the cinema buffs, but to give the kids a place to sleep so they'd stop cluttering up the lobby.) They didn't give out the Hugos at night, either. (An evening banquet might run \$5.00 a head, and the concom got enough grief for charging \$3.00 a head for rubber chicken served at 1:00 PM rather than six hours later.) They didn't have more than one track of programming. (Multiple tracks came along 8 years later, and evening programs even later than that.)

Well, with all the things they _didn't_ have, they needed a way to amuse the congoers in the evening, so what happened was this: every bid committee (and they only bid a year in advance back then) treated the entire convention to a beer party on a different night. We could all fit in one room -- I know the official tally for Discon I was 600, but I was there and I'll swear that there were no more than 400 or so in attendance; the other 200 must have been no-shows, or waiters, or bellboys -- and

the bidding committee would treat us to a small lakeful of beer, with or without pretzels, and then the next night a rival bid would do the same thing. (You voted -- if you could drag yourself out of bed -- on Sunday morning at the business meeting. A fan would speak for each bid, telling you how wonderful his committee was. Then a pro would speak for each bid, telling you about the quality of restaurants you would encounter. The better restaurants invariably carried the day.)

After the beer blast was over, everyone vanished. The Burroughs people, all of them straighter than Tarzan's arrows, went to bed. We remembered that Doc Smith had mentioned parties, so we began wandering down the empty, foreboding corridors of the hotel, wondering if the parties really did exist, and how to find them.

We walked all the way down one floor, took the stairs up a flight, repeated the procedure, then did it again. We were about to quit when a door opened, and a little bearded man and a thin balding man, both with thick glasses, spotted our name badges and asked if we'd like to come in for a drink. We didn't know who the hell they were, but they had badges too, so we knew they were with the con and probably not about to mug a couple of innocents from Chicago, and we decided to join them.

Turns out they were standing in the doorway to a huge suite, and that their names were del Rey and Blish. Inside, wearing a bowtie and looking not unlike a penguin in his black suit, was Isaac Asimov. Randy Garrett was dressed in something all-satin and not of this century. Bob Silverberg looked young and incredibly dapper. Sam Moskowitz was speaking to Ed Hamilton and Leigh Brackett in a corner; this was many years before his throat surgery, and it was entirely possible, though unlikely, that no one in the basement could hear him.

And every last one of them went out of their way to talk to us and make us feel at home.

Later another young fan wandered in. Much younger than me. I was 21; Jack Chalker was only 19. We sat around, and discussed various things, and then something strange happened, something totally alien to my experience.

Someone asked Jack and I what we wanted to do with our lives. (No, that's not the strange part; people were always asking that.)

We each answered that we wanted to write science fiction.

And you know what? For the first time in my life, _nobody laughed._

That's when I knew I was going to come back to worldcons for

the rest of my life.

* * *

So Guy Gavriel Kay reads off the list of nominees, and then he opens the envelope, and the winner is Connie Willis, and I am second to her again for the 83rd time (yeah, I know, I've only lost 76 Hugos and Nebulas to her, but it feels like 83), and everyone tells me I've won a moral victory because I have beat all the short stories and Connie's winner is a novelette that David Bratman, in his infinite wisdom, decided to move to the short story category, and I keep thinking that moral victories and 60 cents will get you a cup of coffee anywhere west of New York and east of California, and that I wish I didn't like Connie so much so that I could hate her just a little on Labor Day weekends, and my brain is making up slogans, modified slightly from my youth, slogans like Break Up Connie Willis, which is certainly easier than breaking up the Yankees, and I am wondering if Tanya Harding will loan me her bodyguard for a few days, and then I am at the Hugo Losers Party, and suddenly it doesn't matter that I've lost a Hugo, because it is now 31 years since that first worldcon I went to, and it is my annual family reunion, and I am visiting with friends that I see once or twice or, on good years, five times per year, and we have a sense of continuity and community that goes back for almost two-thirds of my life. Hugos are very nice, and I am proud of the ones I've won, and I am even proud of the ones I've lost, but when all is said and done, they are metal objects and my friends are people, and people are what life is all about.

And I find, to my surprise, that almost everyone I am talking to, almost all the old friends I am hugging and already planning to see again at the next worldcon, are fans. Some, like me, write for a living; a few paint; most do other things. But we share a common fannish history, and a common fannish language, and common fannish interests, and I realize that I even enjoyed the business meeting this year, and you have to be pretty far gone into fandom to enjoy Ben Yalow making a point of order.

* * *

A lot of pros don't go to worldcon anymore. They prefer World Fantasy Con. It's smaller, more intimate, and it's limited to 750 members -- and while this is not official, there is nonetheless a "Fans Not Wanted" sign on the door.

That's probably why I don't go. It's true that worldcons have changed, that people who read and write science fiction are probably a minority special interest group these days, that bad movies will outdraw the Hugo ceremony...but the trufans are there.

It just means you have to work a little harder to hunt them up.

One of the things I have tried to do with the new writers I have helped to bring into this field, the coming superstars like Nick DiChario and Barb Delaplace and Michelle Sagara and Jack Nimersheim and all the many others, is to not only show them how to make a good story better, or to get an editor to pick up the check for meals, but also to understand the complex and symbiotic relationship between fandom and prodrom.

Some of them, like Nick, luck out and find it right away. Some, like Barb, wander into a bunch of Trekkies or Wookies or Beasties who won't read anything except novelizations, who are watchers rather than readers, whose only literary goal is to tell second-hand stories in a third-hand universe, and she wonders what the hell I'm talking about. Then I drag her to a CFG suite or a NESFA party and she meets the fandom _I_ know, and suddenly she understands why we keep coming back.

* * *

So I'm sitting in the airport, waiting to board the plane from Winnipeg to Minnesota. I think there are three mundanes on the flight; everyone else is coming from worldcon. Larry Niven's there, and Connie Willis, and maybe a dozen other pros, and one of the topics of conversation as we await the plane is whose names will make the cover of _Locus_ if the plane crashes, and whose names will be in small print on page 37, and how many obituary issues Charlie Brown can get out of it. Then the topic turns to who you would rescue if the plane crashed: Connie and Larry and me, because you wanted more of our stories, or Scott Edelman and me, because you wanted us to be so grateful to you that we'd buy your next twenty stories. (That goes to show you the advantages of being able to do more than one thing well.)

Now, in any other group, that would be a hell of a morbid discussion, but because they were fans, and almost by definition bright and witty, it was the most delightful conversation I'd heard all weekend, and once again I found myself wondering what my life would have been like if Ace had not forwarded that letter to Caz 32 years ago.

And then I thought back to another convention, the 1967 worldcon. I was still very young, and too cynical by half, and when Lester del Rey got up to give his Guest of Honor speech, he looked out at the tables -- every worldcon until 1976 presented the GOH speech and the Hugo Awards at a banquet -- and said, "Every person in the world that I care for is here tonight."

And I thought: what a feeble thing to say. What a narrow,

narrow life this man has lived. What a tiny circle of friends he has.

Well, I've sold 72 books of science fiction -- novels, collections, anthologies -- and I've won some awards, and I've paid some dues, and I don't think it's totally unrealistic to assume that sometime before I die I will be the Guest of Honor at a worldcon.

I've done a lot with my life (all with Carol's help, to be sure). I've taken several trips to Africa. I've bred 27 champion collies. I've owned and run the second-biggest boarding kennel in the country. I've sired a daughter than any father would be proud to call his own. I've been a lot of places, done a lot of things. I don't think I've led a narrow life at all.

But when I get up to make my Guest of Honor speech, I'll look around the room just the way Lester did, and, because I'm a reasonably honest man, I won't say what he said.

But I will say, "With three or four exceptions, every person in the world that I care for is here tonight."

-end-