

Roll of the Dice

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Summer's almost here again--three months of 100°+ weather and high air conditioning bills. I loved summer when I was in school--not because school was out so much as because it gave me more time to indulge my favorite hobby--reading. Long days spent curled up on the couch in the living room or, on the hottest days, on my bed to maximize coolness since my bedroom on the northeast corner is the coldest room in the house, a glass of 7-up or lemonade and a can of peanuts next to me. During the cooler days, my book, snacks, and I would grab a blanket and migrate outside under the mimosa tree that used to grow in the back yard. (Eventually, we had to cut it down because the roots kept growing into our plumbing lines and pipes. The dwarf peach tree that also grows wasn't the same--mainly because it stands only about four feet high, which is inadequate for providing shade.)

How many places did I go by way of Heinlein's juvenile novels--Have Space Suit, Will Travel, Space Cadet, Red Planet, The Rolling Stones, and on and on? How many other fantasies did I find--Susan Cooper's Dark Is Rising sequence, Zilpha Keatley Snyder's The Egypt Game and others? How many mysteries did I solve--Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, Trixie Belden, the Bobbsey Twins?

As I got older, I graduated to Heinlein's adult novels, Isaac Asimov's Foundation Trilogy (Foundation's Edge wasn't published until I was in high school, and I read it in my computer science class when I was supposed to be learning Basic programming), Madeleine L'Engle's Time trilogy, Fahrenheit 451, Animal Farm, 1984, and, I have to admit, some Silhouette and Harlequin romances (not too many; the formula got boring Real Soon). And I branched out into other reading, too, like Agatha Christie, Louis L'Amour, Clive Cussler (my father enjoyed Cussler's books; they were the closest he ever came to reading SF), Alistair MacLean, and a small ton of other books whose titles and authors have faded into the recesses of my memory and which have gone out of print so I couldn't find them again if I tried.

When I was in high school, I joined the Science Fiction Book Club and found whole new worlds that were fantastic to me but were already discovered by the majority of SF readers--Herbert's Dune, for instance, I read about the same time that Zimmer Bradley's Mists of Avalon came out. I also discovered Roger Zelazny via the Amber novels and My Name Is Legion, which I originally picked up because the title reminded me of the Legion of Super-Heroes. (Yes, I was a big comic book fan back then; I still am, sort of--though I only collect about three titles now. There was a time I had a collection of more than 3,000 issues; the collection's down to about 1,000 now.)

Next to actual reading, my second favorite summer pastime was haunting the one used bookstore I knew of that carried a good selection of SF--Donato's Fine Books, more recently known as Amber Unicorn. I was in there so often that Lou and Myrna Donato, the owners, knew me by name. I had checked out a few other used bookstores in town, but they specialized in paperback romance novels--at least, the ones on my side of town did--so I avoided them. Luckily for all us SF readers, there are now more used bookstores that carry SF, both paper and hard back, and I spend lots of time in them still.

After I graduated college and joined the real world of work and bills (hey, wait a minute! Whose idea was this "real world?" Certainly not mine!), I had less and less time to read for pleasure. I still enjoy it, and I make time for it whenever I can. Most recently, I finished J. Asimov--A Memoir and have started the authorized biography of Arthur C. Clarke. Also on my reading list for this summer are Poul and Karen Anderson's King of Ys cycle and Diana Paxson's saga of Fionn mac Cumhall, the Irish hero. Should be a fantastic summer!!