



The Drink Tank 106

THE SYMPOSIUM OF THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE AND
THE CHESLEY AWARDS BY SPRING SCHENHUTH

It is now that I reside in Fremont, California. Circuitous as the nature of my life, it was compelling that I must have that connection. You see, then, I lived in Seattle, in the neighborhood of Fremont. It was, and continues to be the geo-physical Center of the Universe (according to Pacific Northwest Native Americans). It even says so on the Fremont bascule bridge sign to the northbound entrance. "Welcome to Fremont, Center of the Universe, Set your clocks ahead five minutes."

Fremont consists of a rocket ship dedicated on the Center, a Troll under the Aurora Bridge, a neon Rapunzel letting her hair down on the Fremont Bridge, a galvanized group of people (and one unusual dog) waiting for the interurban railway that stopped running in 1939, and perhaps most infamous, a bronzed Vladimir Lenin, beckoning folks to the Fremont Hemp Store. Fremont proudly proclaims "Delibertus Quirkus" (freedom to be peculiar), as its official motto.

Upon my journey to move to Seattle from Great Falls, Montana years ago, I was attracted to this particular district. I lived in three locations in Seattle, but it was in Fremont I found my place of peace and contentment. I strongly believe to this day that the gravitational pull of the Center of the Universe, along



with a strong dose of fate brought me there. Keeping house in the quirky two story apartment building (circa 1909), was an electrifying environment for me. In one of the front apartments was a gentle dragon tamer by the name of Kim Graham, a fellow Montanan. She fashioned clay into marvelous creations, displaying her compositions in the large bay window by the walkway. After a time, she'd rip it up, and start all over again. For those of you who went to WorldCon in 2002, she

created the Chesley Award winning "ConJose Dragon" (<http://www.asfa-art.org/chesley/2003/3d/graham.html>).

In the apartment back of Kim's, lived a newlywed couple. He was from Calgary, Alberta, she was from Eugene, Oregon. Susan worked for Boeing, and Rob worked as an illustrator. I lived directly across the hall from Rob and Sue Alexander. In time, it seemed that the building primarily consisted of residents whose passion was art. It was at this residence that I started Springtime Creations, a very small part time business mostly consisting of strange and "delightfully unconventional" earrings. Springtime Creations, alongside my teaching and weekend stints as an on air announcer for several top rated radio stations, kept me on the go at a lockstep pace. I usually vended (unsuccessfully) at festivals. One festival some fans stumbled upon my booth, and told me my jewelry would most definitely fare better at Science Fiction conventions. For someone who made unconventional jewelry, it seemed the conventions were the place to go. Rob and Susan let me know about a convention coming up called "Westercon". I got my foot in the door, and the rest as they say, is history. I had always loved Science Fiction, and this was my chance to combine the two.

Years earlier, Rob came to me at one point and asked if he could

come up to my school and talk about his life as an illustrator for the chance to photograph kids drawing with chalk. He needed models for his latest concept piece. Since I taught two art classes a day, I thought it would be a nice break for me and the students, and an interesting chance for him to teach. I went to my principal, who agreed, and after all the appropriate paperwork was done (photographing children these days is only by permission), Rob made the trip to my school. He brought his portfolio, taught a little drawing, then away we went to the playground with a bucket of sidewalk chalk. He took many photographs of my students drawing that day on the blacktop. The resulting painting a few months later was astonishing. It was of a small Asian boy drawing a golden underground portal on the sidewalk. Just to look at that painting sent me to another world. It was breathtaking and humbling.

Rob said that it was a collaboration of an idea an author and he had for a book. Sadly, the book never materialized after many visits to New York to different publishers, and the painting sat unseen for a few years in the hopes that the project would be revitalized. Meanwhile Rob, better known for his work in the field of gaming with his *Magic: the Gathering* cards kept busy. In 1996, after five years of storage, *Sinja's*



World was shown at LACon III. It won the people's choice award in the art show. In 1997, Rob sent *Sinja's World* to LoneStarCon's Art Show in San Antonio. Hank, then husband of Kim Graham, ran into me at the Artist's reception to let me know how the Chesley Award ceremony went. It was evident by his appearance he was quite excited. *Sinja's World* had just received the Chesley Award for Best Color Work, Unpublished. He said, "Spring, you need to call Rob and let him know! It's your student. You should be the one to call him. If you don't, I will!" Wow. I was speechless. My cell phone had no signal, so I dashed to the nearest

pay phone to make the call. Rob was stunned. He isn't the sort of person that does things for the fame and glory of awards, but he was thrilled nonetheless. I was thrilled to know I was an integral part of that process. That was nearly ten years ago. He eventually did a print run of *Sinja's World*. I was fortunate enough to receive number three. It hangs proudly over the mantle piece in our home here in Fremont, California. It gives me a little bit of that Center of the Universe I'm longing for. Sometimes I wonder about the child who is now in his late twenties. Would he recognize that little boy if he ever saw the picture? Did he graduate high school or college? Is he doing something meaningful with his life?

We have all gone our separate ways from that place that brought us together. All of us have evolved in our artistic style. Kim has her own studio now in Seattle, making Great Things, and passing that information along in the form of teaching others what she has discovered through her own self actualization. Her website is: <http://www.kimgrahamstudios.com>

Rob and Sue have moved to Oregon and have a family. He has authored two amazing books using his skills as a watercolorist. His website is: <http://www.robalexander.com/index.html>

My hope is that one day I too will get a Chesley, so that the Dayton

Apartments we lived in would take on a more mystic meaning than just an old apartment building in Seattle. My dear neighbors of so many years ago gave me inspiration to pursue my love of art and science fiction. Conventions are a part of my life, and I am proud to know many extraordinary people by being a part of fandom. When I go to Worldcon, it doesn't just feel like a family gathering, it is a reunion. This year in L.A. brought a tone of the impermanence of our existence, and the need for connection was important on so many levels. Living in Fremont taught me a cherished lesson. You carry the Center of the Universe wherever you are. You can see it in Kim's work, you can feel it in Rob's paintings, and you can wear it in my jewelry. If Joseph Campbell ever visited Fremont, I'll bet he set his watch ahead five minutes.



MY OBUVUS PAIN: IN DEFENSE OF FAUX TEENAGE VAMPIRISM

Can you remember what it was like to be fifteen? No, I know you can remember bits and pieces of what you did when you were fifteen, but can you remember how it felt, the troubles, the confusion, the plain and simple sense that you were something different than you were not that long ago. I can remember the feeling and often write about it, but there's a lot that you need to think about when you're looking back at that. I was a kid who was happy for the most part his entire youth. Yeah, there were rough patches, but mostly, good times and lots of them. That makes the odd sense of disjointed anger and undirected lust that much stranger. I had no issues to speak of, but I acted like there were. That's a strange thing but it kinda makes sense when I look at the kids of today, those oddly dressed ghouls that wander the streets of San Jose and look maniacal as they gather in their little covens under the watch of darkness.

You see, I know what those kids are going through and why they've chosen the path they have. They're playing at being vampires and I'm 100% certain that's not a bad thing.

Let's start from the point where it all comes together: Dracula. Dracula, the concept, dates back a few hundred years, but it's the Bram Stoker



novel that really started the vampire craze. In the century-plus since the release of the epistolary piece Since then, films, television, other books and role playing games have taken up the story of the vampire.

That last one is important. It was Vampyre The Masquerade that really started the phenomena that we're considering now. Released in the early 1990s, VtM was heavily marketed towards young people, particularly those in High School. That whole class of kid that takes to Vampires in those dark years are really interesting. They come together in strange ways, often in stereotypical gatherings where one kid watches as another gets the crap beaten out of them only to be walked

home by a new kindred spirit who just happened to read this awesome book which they produce from their backpack. Maybe they run into each other in line at the movies, or that new girlfriend who was so sweet and shy happened to love Anne Rice and Poppy Z. Brite and gave her young man a Rasputina Cd for his birthday. Well, any of those are possible (and I can document at least one conversion for each of those happening) but then there's the other way: Buffy.

Buffy gave a whole generation a new view of what it meant to be a vamp. They made it funny, sexy, beautiful. Spike became the eternal lust object for thousands of young girls. That alone would be enough to turn kids towards the darker lifestyle, but there was more. I loved Buffy, and I used to frequent the various boards and sites that discussed it. Quickly I figured out that everyone on those sites was a teen or a seriously elder fan who had fallen in love with the writing. These groups were interesting especially when I realised how many of these kids were really using vampirism as a sort of coping mechanism.

Let's face it: there are a lot of reasons for kids today to get down with the way the world treats them, especially the way their parents treat them. There's a lot of good parenting too, but let's just say that there's a lot of crap being laid upon the kiddies of

America, especially when things get hairy for young people around 13 or so.

And it's around there that something most important happens. Sometime in the range of 11 to 15, kids realise something that changes everything: some day they will die. It's only during those tough years between childhood and young adulthood that it becomes obvious that no matter what, they are not immortal and that death will eventually come to them. Some who have been raised in a strongly religious background will turn more fully towards religion for it's promise of immortality. Those who don't have



that background, or even worse, those that do but still question, may try and squeeze as much out of life as possible. The stupid/brae among them might go in for drugs, heavy sexualizations and just plain fast living. It's the only way to ensure that when the inevitable comes, they've lived and felt enough to make it all worthwhile. Still more are simply left with an emotional hole and a near complete loss of hope. That's not helped at all by the rush of hormones that accompanies that age bracket. It doesn't surprise me that it's at this point that kids start reading vampire novels and playing Vampire the Masquerade.

The thing is, I think all of these things are at least mildly beneficial. It's far better for kids to be reading than out doing drugs or gang-banging, and it's certainly better than having kids going out and imitating Jackass. The skills required to play VtM are ones that can help in school, including storytelling and clarity of action and thought, but it's more than just a case of being something to occupy idle hands. There's a lot of comfort in the idea of living in a world where there's real immortality, or at least a world where there's the potential for such. Even if it's simply a fantasy that they recognise as such, it's wonderful to be able to escape to that kind of world. Of course, when the lines blur it's gets tricky, but really, there aren't a lot of kids who play VtM and end up deciding that

they're real vamps. Yes, Jerry Springer and Jenny Jones made a living out of parading them out, but really, I've never met anyone who believed it themselves and I've hung out with a lot of these folks. Maybe 1 in ten thousand, one percent of one percent. That's maybe 100 people in the US.

But what's wrong with a strong imaginary life? If you can separate fantasy from reality, and almost everyone can, then why not encourage kids to role play, read Gothic Romances and the latest Carrie Vaughn book? Why not encourage them to a degree, but so much that you actually scare them off (a line that most parents don't seem to understand exists)?

There's some trouble in this business, even beyond the corner cases. The first comes from the religious establishment. I once had a long conversation about this very thing with some serious Christian Bible-thumpers and I pointed out something very strange: every one of my Vampire-loving friends had read the Bible far more thoroughly than any of the Hard Core Christian kids I knew. There's a lot of Biblical reference in VtM and a lot of kids will go to the source for info on Nod and Cain and Abel and so on. I got a lot of flack for saying that it's actually a more fun way to introduce kids to the Bible than Sunday School. Most kids will get razed by the 'normal' kids if they



go in fully for the lifestyle, but they'll also gain a following of those like-minded kids. That's not always the easiest way to live.

That's only the beginning, as it's almost a rule that vampire novels contain vast amounts of sexuality, and much of the recent stuff having heavy doses of heavy sex. That's not a bad thing, as kids gotta learn about strange sexual habits eventually, and in many ways these books have jump-started young folks sexuality. I've personally heard many tales of girls who found themselves with that old familiar feeling

while reading vamp books. Now, of course, this won't automatically lead kids to go out and have awesome strange, blood-soaked sex, but it does make kids slightly more interested in sexual role play. Example: this coming weekend, at some convention somewhere in North America, a young girl in a latez babydoll dress will come to the attention of some young guy in black. They'll flirt and she ask him to bite her neck. He'll do so, tentitively, and she'll love it, ask him to do it again harder. That's not a bad thing in and of itself, but it is a matter that could lead to situations where parents need to think about how to approach their kids.

Yes, it's hard enough to approach your kids about sex matters, but when you may have to talk to them about areas such as edgeplay, you get into areas where a lot of parents are just plain uncomfortable. The easiest way is to stay abreast of the situation. If you see your kid getting into the whole vampire thing, try and talk to them. Buy them the Stoker Dracula or DVD copies of Nosferatu or Bram Stoker's Dracula. Stay informed and give them a little space, but try and keep at least a minor dialogue going. It's never easy to do that with kids, but sometimes you gotta try hard and harder to stay up.

So, there's nothing wrong with a rich, vampire-inhabited fantasy life, so long as parents do their parts and the kids aren't really weird to begin with.



Television makes me smile sometimes. This year there's been a lot of good TV, especially from my network: ABC. And the brightest new light on the brightest network is a show that comes from the television of My People: Ugly Betty.

Telenovelas are no new thing, they've been around for a couple of decades, but they only really started to make inroads into the US in the 1990s. One of the most popular shows of the genre is Yo Soy Betty La Fea from Columbia. That one started around 1999 and was a giant hit throughout the Spanish-speaking world. I've been told that it was the most watched television series in seven different countries, though I think they meant if you took away the soccer games, which are

always hugely rated. Several other countries have their own versions of Yo Soy Betty La Fea, most running as Soap Operas instead of as weekly series. The first of them were Israel's Esti Ha'mechoeret and India's Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahi. Both were very successful. In Germany there's one called Verliebt

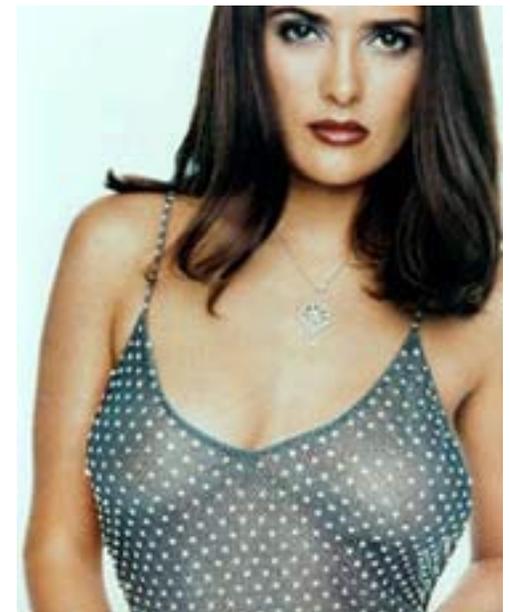
in Berlin, and there've been editions for The Netherlands, Spain and Mexico.

The real genius here is Selma Hayek. She saw the value in Yo Soy Betty La Fea and set up her production company to buy rights and produce a series in conjunction with Touchstone, an arm of Disney. They were originally going to do it as a summer series running five nights a week, which would have been interesting, but also would have pegged the series as a short-timer programme. After initial reactions to the pilot were so positive, they decided to make it a regular weekly series. Very smart choice.

The characters in Ugly Betty are the most important aspect. There's Betty, the unattractive assistant to Daniel, the new head of Fashion

Magazine Mode. Daniel is as wet behind the ears as Betty is brilliant at her job. There's the classic scheming assistant and the Fashion editor, played with brilliant bitchiness by Vanessa Williams, who is trying to unseat Daniel. There's also the on-going storyline where the former Editor of Mode, Fey Sommers, might still be alive.

In addition to the work world, there's Betty's home life. She lives with her father, Ignacio, her sister Hilda, who is one of the hottest women on TV right now in my eyes, and her nephew, Justin. Her father is an Illegal Alien and also once killed a man in a fit of rage. That's slightly annoying as they avoided all the classic Hispanic stereotypes but they had to add the fiery temper thingee to the mix for some reason. It's a tradition that it would be nice to see





go away, but what are you gonna do?

The series has been very strong with it's attitude towards family, beauty and life in general. Betty's Boyfriend, played by some

guy who was in For Your Consideration, struggles with trying to make himself fit into Betty's new world while Betty struggles with her questioning of their relationship and her attraction to a guy at Mode's accounting office. America Ferrera's portrayal is sensitive and well-timed, and she brings a giant load of goofiness and tenderness. She uses everything she learned in Real Women Have Curves each week and it pays off.

I'm hoping that the current ratings success continues for the show. It's the lead-in for Grey's Anatomy, which happens to be number one show of the season. The show usually doesn't win the timeslot, but it does reasonably well, still managing to be a Top Twenty show, which is the best ABC can expect with a popular CBS line-up.

I expect a lot of good work to come for the stars of the show, especially America and the resurgant Vanessa Williams.



That's another 8 pager from The Computer History Museum's Top FanEd. In fact, I'm the only FanEd at the museum. The coming issues include the Zodiac Spectacular and I'm still looking for submitters. You don't have to write about the Zodiac, you just have to write an article and I'll put it in with the most awesome art I've gotten

The Second Annlsh will be out on January 31st. What's the gimmick this year? Well, I already did the 100 words thing, so that's right out, but what about Only using folks who had not debuted in The Drink Tank before the last Annlsh. So, if you're one of those people who either hasn't had anything in the Drink Tank or if you had your first piece anytime since February 2006, send me something.

So, that's another one. Art this go 'round was from ABC TV, the Vamp in Red is Shelly Martinez (aka ECW's Ariel), Blue Fusion, Rob Alexander, Celestial Storms, Omnibunnys666 and Sadiddas.