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DARKWORLDS

SUMMER 2017 THE CULTURE OF SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY & HORROR QUARTERLY

DONALD F. GLUT

An interview with writer about his *Doctor Spektor* series for Gold Key

G. W. THOMAS

PLUS!

WONDER WOMAN

A look behind the scenes at the creation of the iconic super hero

M. D. JACKSON

PLUS!

I WAS A TEEN-AGE WHOVIAN!

Fans of DOCTOR WHO from before the re-boot tell their stories

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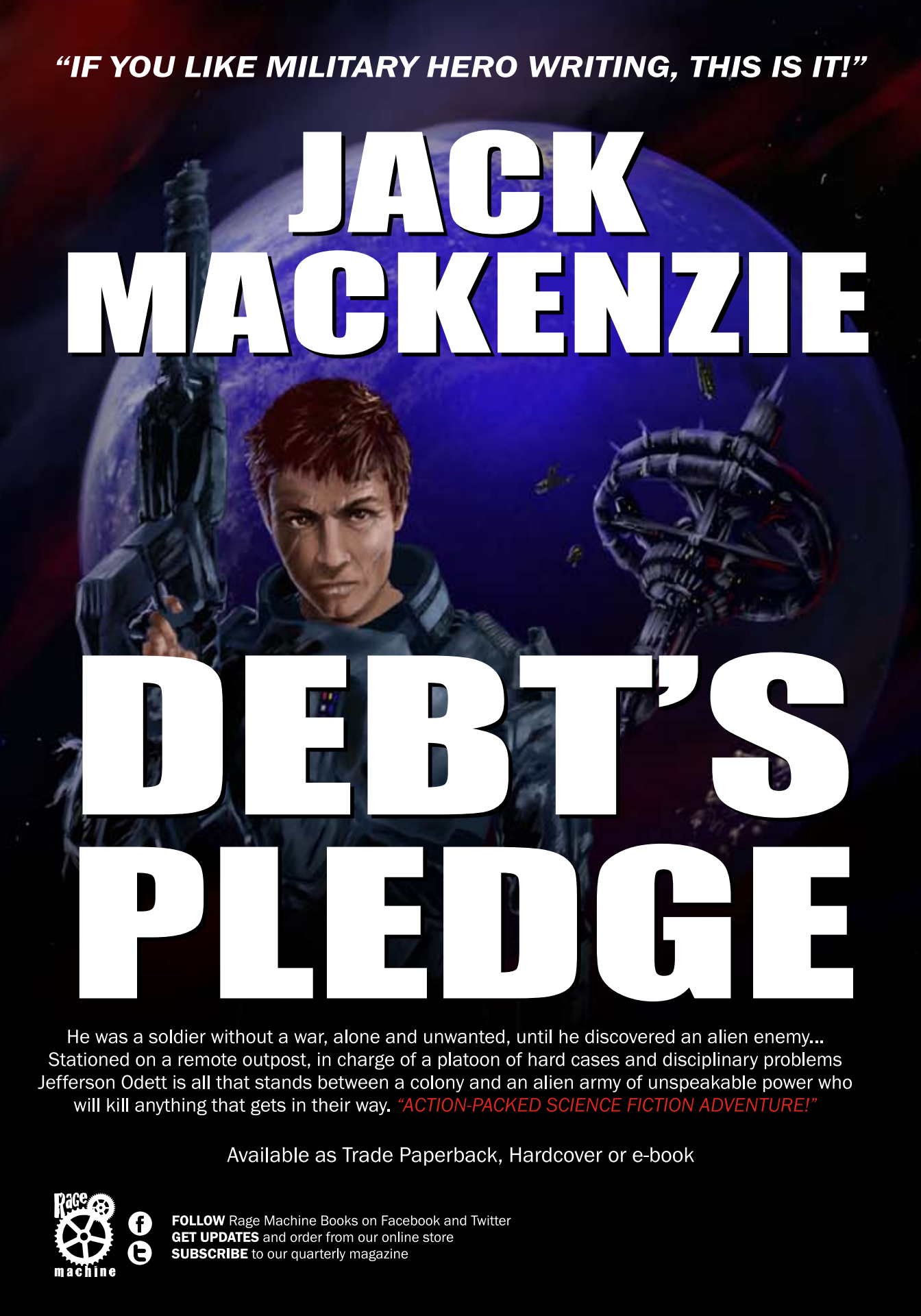
CANADIAN VOICES IN SF

- Robert J. Sawyer, R. Graeme Cameron, Calvin Heighton and more weigh in

DIMES FOR TARZAN
ASIMOV'S SF MYSTERIES
VALERIAN
AND MORE!

"IF YOU LIKE MILITARY HERO WRITING, THIS IS IT!"

JACK MACKENZIE



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Cover Image
The Final Frontier
M. D. Jackson

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DARK WORLDS QUARTERLY

THE CULTURE OF SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY & HORROR SUMMER 2017

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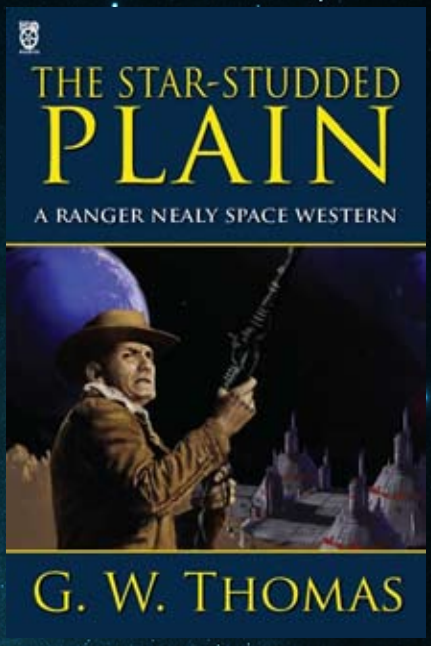
Debt's Pledge

by Jack Mackenzie

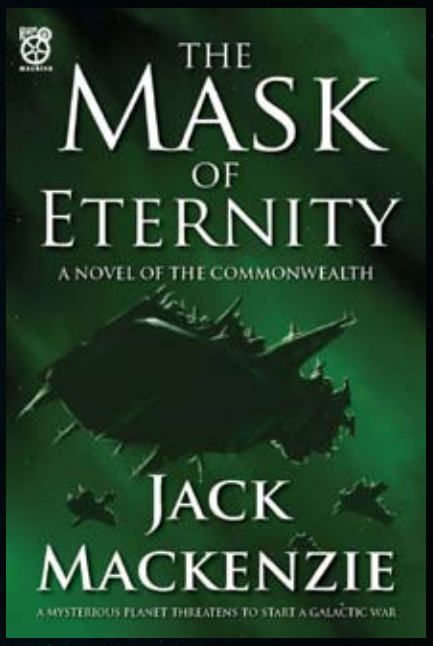
He was a soldier without a war, alone and unwanted, until he discovered an alien enemy... Stationed on a remote outpost, in charge of a platoon of hard cases and disciplinary problems Jefferson Odett is all that stands between a colony and an alien army of unspeakable power who will kill anything that gets in their way. Action-packed Science Fiction adventure!



The Star-Studded Plain

by G. W. Thomas

Three helpings of Space adventure on the planet Utukku, where the fine sands and constant winds making tracking impossible. Follow Ranger Neely as he chases bad guys and deals with the savage trogs with laser pistol in hand and his trusty crookback at his side. Science Fiction with a frontier flavor!



The Mask of Eternity

by Jack Mackenzie

Solis DeLacey, captain of the ACSC Boston, has been sent to a world rich in natural resources. But one ship and her crew has already gone missing while surveying the planet and the finger of suspicion is pointing to the Orion Hegemony, the ACSC`s sworn enemy. Now DeLacey must discover its secret and defeat her enemies before the galaxy is plunged into total war...

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EDITORIAL: The Genie Ain't Going Back In

by G.W. Thomas

A pause to admire the treasures, discussion about past glories, opinions and ultimately, an island in the stream to reflect

I Can distinctly remember *a time around 1979 when I dreamed of a world in which I could watch* Star Wars (we still called it *just Star Wars* then) any time I wanted. We saw in the backs of magazines the silent 10-minute highlights Super 8 reels that fans could buy for a staggering $100.

That doesn't sound like much having spent almost that much on *The Hobbit* Trilogy only days ago—but you have to remember in 1979 a comic book costs 35 cents. When VHS and BetaMax showed up only years later we began to feel the dream might be possible. Soon I did own the original trilogy on cassette and could in fact… *watch it any time I wanted*. Something I found I didn't really want to do all that often.

By 1996 the Internet was on the way and we didn't realize the ball was rolling faster and

faster. Online versions of *Star Wars* meant I didn't even have to own a copy ever again. (Could I sit through *Star Wars* again anyway?) Now, living in the purely Science Fictional sounding year, 2017, I realize that we've let the genie out of the bottle. And he ain't going back in.

We live in an age of choice. Too much choice. I used to have a paperback library of over 100 books and a few hundred comics that was a real pain in the tuckus every time I moved but it guaranteed me some choice. Today I have access to tens of thousands of books (but own very few paper ones), scans of old Pulps, comics and things I never even knew existed like English story papers and cinema pressbooks. In truth, if I sat down and began reading right now and didn't stop until I died, I'd make only the smallest of dints in that gigantic mass of material. *Choice.*

Too much choice can be the same thing as no choice at all. Bob Shaw expressed it wonderfully in *Orbitsville* (1975), but the Pointed Man summed it up equally well when he said, "A point in every direction is the same as no point at all." How do you navigate the Sea of Information, the Quagmire of Choice? Do I spend my time reading the latest horror novel or do I delve back into the *Weird Tales* library (another dream almost achieved) and chase some question I always had about a certain author or theme? Will reading the original cause a crescendo of wonder that I've always dreamed of experiencing?

Unlikely. What you usually learn is most of the stuff you adored when you were sixteen is crap. No more so than the new crap is crap today. You only thought it was special because of a lack of access. Take *The Man From Atlantis,* for example. I watched that show back 1977, Tuesday nights, I believe. If I missed one, well, that was life. That show was my

favorite thing on TV. We didn't have the plethora of Science Fiction shows we have today. We had the original *Battlestar Galactica,* the crappy *Logan's Run* adaptation*, Space 1999*, *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Star Trek* reruns and that was about it.

Watching them now, I can only laugh. They're so bad. Even worse, *Voyage to the Bottom of Sea*, which I never got to see, but had heard about, saw pictures in *Famous Monsters* or *Starlog*. When I finally got to see the crown jewel, "The Werewolf" episode, I should have cried tears of joy instead of tears of boredom. Television was 55 minutes out of an hour in 1966. My 2017 attention span just can't take it.

What could make you sit through such dreck this late in life? Nostalgia, which I am prone to in my advanced years. But I like to think that I have a pretty good Nostalgia Radar, that beeps when I am enjoying something largely by remembering when I enjoyed it as a kid. The claxon sounds and I see the truth. This is crap, but I like it anyway. But that internal device can't really be used when you are dealing with old magazines that were printed when your grandfather was a young man.

This is a love of something old you might never have seen before. What do you do with that? Dress up in Steampunk clothes and wear a monocle? I've never been one for Let's Play Pretend. (Too bad really. I think I could have been a decent LARPer or at least joined the SCA.)

So what do people in a world ravaged (I use that verb consciously) by choice do? Where the constant influx of new (and old) works hover around you like a crowd of hungry walkers? Do we unplug our computers and stick our heads in the sand, reading only things published on paper? Place ourselves within cages of our own choosing? Remember the genie. *He ain't going back in there and you can't make him*.

Instead, I choose to embrace choice, but selectively. If I can stop all the tumult raging around me and concentrate on this little piece here or that special thing over there, then it is possible to wade through the crap and enjoy the treasures buried in the dung-heap. (I know I mixed a few metaphors there, but *ad captandum vulgus.*)

And that's what this magazine is offering you: a pause for a few minutes to admire the treasures, discussion about past glories, opinions (for what they are worth) and ultimately, (at a price you can't beat, even in our download reality) an island in the stream to reflect.

Of course, the island is inhabited by beast men crying "Are we not men?" I don't answer them. First off, because the question is rhetorical, and second, because I am busy admiring the seclusion of Moreau's world. "Are we not men?" Of course, we are. "Do we not read?" Of course, we do. "Do we not watch?" Constantly.

But like Brad Pitt after his zombie inoculation, the biters now step aside, no longer a hazard. The noisy 21st Century and its tsunami of digital info washes past my island, while I put the kettle on for company. And we'll sit on the sunny beach and watch as the flotsam and jetsam hurries past. Oh, there's a good one….

G. W. Thomas

This first issue is dedicated to the hard-working scanners at the Pulpscans@Yahoo Group. Your work and dedication has made at least three of the pieces here possible. I hope you enjoy!

▲

Northern Stars - Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg, reproduced by kind permission of the artist

Canadian Voices in Science Fiction

by M. D. Jackson

Is there a distinctive Canadian "voice" when it comes to science fiction and fantasy?

This year, 2017 Canada marks the sesquicentennial anniversary of Canadian Confederation. Basically it is the 150th anniversary of Canada and it is being promoted by the Canadian government as Canada 150.

But as we celebrate our history, I wanted to know about Canadian's ideas of the future. I asked several friends, colleagues and experts if there was a distinctive Canadian "voice" in Science Fiction and Fantasy writing. And, if there is, which writers exemplify that distinctive voice? Or are there just good writers who happen to be Canadian? Does our "Canadian-ness" bring something unique to speculative fiction?

Canadian Science Fiction writers tend to hide in plain sight. You know who they are, but when you hear their names in association with their nationality, one's reaction is usually "I didn't know he/she was Canadian!"

Even if we set aside the ex-pats, writers who were born in America or Europe and settled in Canada, writers like Americans William Gibson (*Neuromancer, Idoru, All Tomorrow's Parties*) Spider Robinson (*Callahan's Crosstime Saloon, Stardance*), or Charles R. Saunders (*Imaro, Dossouye*), Jamaicans like Nalo Hopkinson (*The Salt Roads, Sister Mine*), Brits like Michael G. Coney (*Syzygy, Fang the Gnome*) or Dutch like Charles De Lint (*Wolf Moon, The Blue Girl*) – even if you exclude those writers, the list of Canadian Science Fiction writers contains names that are surprising.

Julie E. Czerneda, Gordon R. Dickson, Candas Jane Dorsey, Cory Doctorow, Eileen Kernaghan, A. E. van Vogt are just a few of the names from a very long list of Canadian-born writers.

The question I put to this informal panel was whether the Canadian voice in Science Fiction is distinctive and, if so, who embodies that voice. Aside from one friend (an American) whose only contribution was to point out that William Shatner (actor and author of the *Tek War* series) is Canadian (thanks Paul!), the responses I received were quite illuminating.

"The question I put to this informal panel was whether the Canadian voice in Science Fiction is distinctive and, if so, who embodies that voice?"

BRUCE DURHAM
Writer, Toronto, Ontario

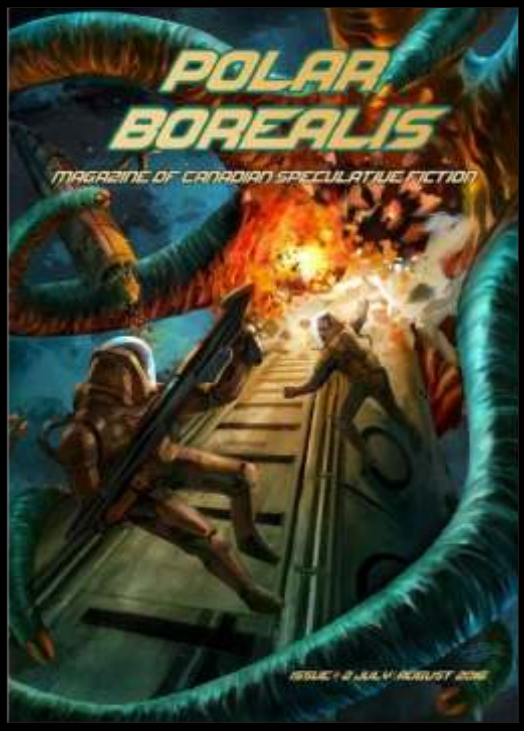
Good question. I guess Atwood ("I DON'T write Science Fiction!") and Robert Sawyer would be the first two who come to mind. They are distinctly Canadian, but I'm not sure if they have a distinctive Canuck voice.

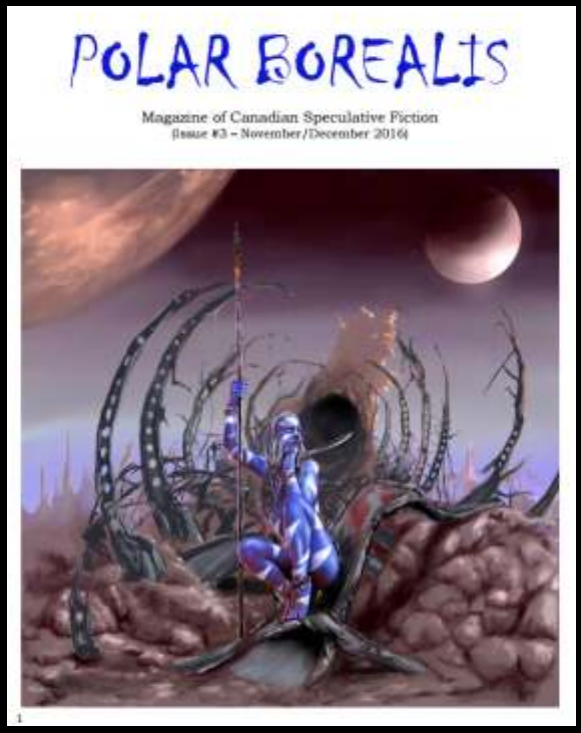
CALVIN HEIGHTON
Blogger/Educator, Red Deer, Alberta

First off, this (the Nicholas Jainschigg painting) is a great image. Let me give this some thought. You give me stuff to ruminate on about where we would be had it not been for the debacle that was the Avro Arrow Project. Maybe we would have been first on the moon and already on our way to Mars because we spent our money as a leader in the space race and didn't waste our best and brightest by fighting mindless wars and wasting our money with military spending. Europe would have joined us with their tech as would the Japanese. The world may be a place of hope now with that kind of international goal or mission.

DUNCAN STEWART
Director, Research at Deloitte, former technology columnist, Toronto, Ontario

Robert Sawyer. At his level of public recognition (sales and awards) no one else is so clearly Canadian. Not just locales, but his whole ethos and culture is Canuck.





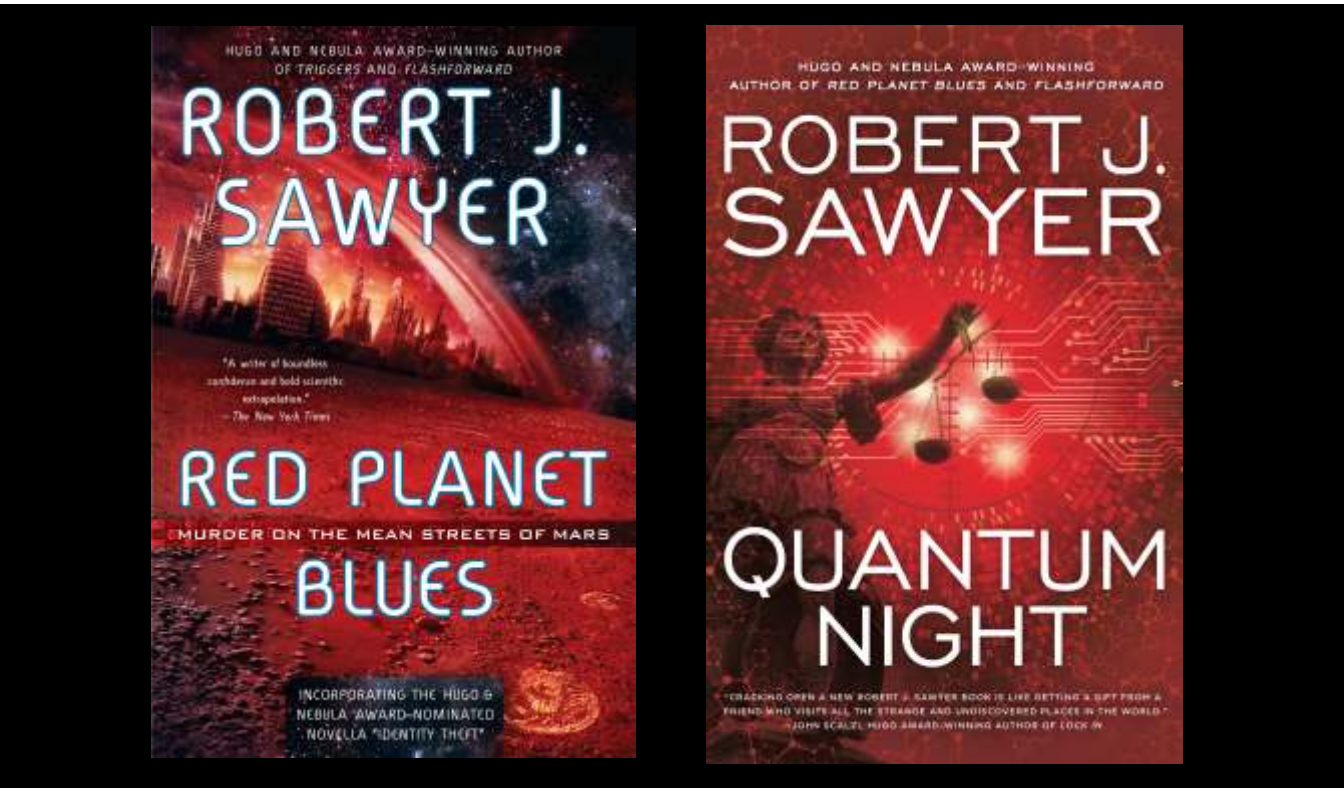
ANDREW MACQUISTAN
Writer, Psychologist, Vancouver, BC

I once described Canadian SF as "Square-jawed, spandex-clad bureaucrats speeding through hyperspace towards the climatic federal-provincial conference where they would finally integrate the nationalist aspirations of the Orion sector into a viable constitutional framework." Of course, there could be other kinds...

RICHARD GRAEME CAMERON
Writer, Editor of Polar Borealis Magazine*, Vancouver, British Columbia*

Back in the 1970s fans regularly debated whether there was such a thing as Canadian SF. Many considered Spider Robinson and William Gibson disqualified because they were born and raised in the USA, for instance. Today Canada has more SF&F genre writers than I am able to keep track of. They keep popping out of the woodwork. Never mind mainstream authors, Canadian independent publishers are publishing hundreds of Canadian authors and, yes, very much featuring not one, but multiple Canadian viewpoints.

As editor of *Polar Borealis Magazine* and editor of *Auroran Lights*, the CSFFA newsletter, (both currently on hold while I deal with personal matters) I read exclusively Canadian SF&F and can tell you it is very much "a thing." The Canadian SF&F identity (as distinct from other countries) is something I take for granted. So, I believe, should everyone. The debate about whether the Canadian "voice" exists in the SF&F genre has been defunct and irrelevant for more than a decade, possibly two decades. There's a veritable renaissance of Canadian SF&F going on. It's never been better.



ROBERT J. SAWYER

Hugo, Nebula and John W, Campbell Award winning writer, Mississauga, Ontario.

The debate about whether there's a distinctive Canadian voice in Science Fiction and Fantasy has raged for decades. In the 1980s and early 1990s, minor writers and wannabes often claimed that it was their ineffable Canadian voice that was keeping them from being published internationally, and since, at that time, there was next-to-no domestic Canadian publishing, well, the voice issue explained their lack of success north of the forty-ninth parallel, too.

But then writers who embraced their Canadianism started to emerge on the scene, particularly Tanya Huff, Terence M. Green, and myself. We were selling to top US markets with flagrantly Canadian stories. Nor did we pull our polite Canadian punches when submitting south of the border.

There was never any pushback against Canadian settings, but we did fight to maintain our Canadian sensibility. For a long time New York's Tor Books was the main publisher of Canadian Science Fiction, and most of it was edited by one man: the late, great David G. Hartwell, who came to his work with a Ph.D. in comparative medieval literature from Columbia.

Terry Green and I both loved David -- but we also both butted heads with him because he insisted that Americans would only respond to happy endings.

Now, Canadians aren't a dour folk, but we are realists. We live not in a superpower but in the middle power that can only get others to follow its lead through sound argumentation and gentle moral suasion, rather than through force. And so we know that at the end of any

journey we will not have achieved all our goals; we might even die.

Terry and I refused to make the changes David wanted to give our novels happy endings. In my own case, I wrote a novel that came out in 1997 called *Frameshift,* which was a paean to socialized medicine -- about as Canadian a theme as you can get. The novel is quite timely today still, as its main character had been denied health insurance on the basis of a genetic predisposition to a disease that had not yet manifested itself. Of course, as the novel progressed the condition — Huntington's disease — does manifest, and it is a terminal disease. David said Americans wouldn't like the book unless the main character, who was a geneticist, found a cure for his disease and lived at the end.

I said no, and the novel was published as I had written it, and it went on to be a finalist for the Hugo Award, which is the top international prize in Science Fiction, and it won Japan's Seiun Award for Best Foreign Science Fiction Novel of the Year.

As for Terry Green, who is mostly a fantasist: his work is often melancholic, and he ended his brilliant *Ashland, Kentucky*, over David's objections, with the main character

"Now, Canadians aren't a dour folk, but we are realists. We live not in a superpower but in the middle power..."

reflecting on the long ago loss of a stillborn son. That book, and its sequel, both went on to be finalists for the World Fantasy Award.

It would be too much to say that we Canadians helped American Science Fiction and Fantasy grow up a bit, but we certainly demonstrated that the reading palette of Americans, and indeed the rest of the world, was broader than some New York editors thought.

In the last couple of years there's been an enormous brouhaha in the United States about the lack of nonwhite SF&F authors and nonwhite SF&F characters. I can't do anything about the colour of my skin, but I, and other Canadian SF&F writers, reflected our nation's wonderful diversity long before that became common in American SF; indeed, it still isn't very common south of the border.

I vividly remember one reader in Los Angeles referring to the cast of characters in my 1995 novel *The Terminal Experiment* as "a veritable parade of ethnics." Really, though, all I'd done is accurately capture Toronto's wonderful multiculturalism. But, again, most Americans reacted favourably: that book was nominated for the Hugo, too, and it won the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America's Nebula Award for Best Novel of the Year.

I'm proud to have helped pave the way for not just the current crop of Canadian writers but also the prevalence of an inclusive, self-reflective, you-win-some-and-you-lose-sum approach to the genre. The Canadian voice is thriving in the genre now, and the genre is the better for it.

▲

The stunning piece of artwork that opens this article is called *Northern Stars*. Although very Canadian in scope and subject matter it is actually the creation of an American artist, Nicholas Jainschigg.

Nick Jainschigg was born in New York City. After graduating with a BFA in illustration, he pursued a career in Science Fiction and Fantasy illustration, producing hundreds of covers and interiors for most of the major (and many minor) publishers, including Tor Books who commissioned him to create this piece.

"It was commissioned by Irene Gallo at Tor, for the David Hartwell edited collection "Northern Stars"." Jainschigg says about the artwork. "After talking with them about it, we decided to have fun with the "Canadian" cliches--Northern, snowy, aurora, moose. I think if we could have worked in poutine, we would have."

"The final painting is about 18 X 24," Jainschigg says of the image, which he has graciously allowed us to reproduce for this article. "(It's done) in acrylics on gatorfoam (a very much stronger relative of foam-core)."

Jainschigg's work has been featured in or written about in publications from Marvel Comics, DC Comics, Ballantine Books, PBS Interactive, The New York Times, Wizards of the Coast, Tor Books, Scholastic Inc., MacMillan Publishing, Domino Magazine, Paramount and Viacom. His digital paleontological reconstructions have been featured on the Discovery Channel and at the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Maastricht Natural History Museum and the University of California Museum of Paleontology.

His diorama and mural work are on display at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center in Mashantucket, Connecticut, and Dinosaur State Park in Rocky Hill, Connecticut.

In addition to teaching at RISD, Jainschigg continues to work on animations, interactive illustration and painting in oils.

You can visit his website at nicholasjainschigg.com

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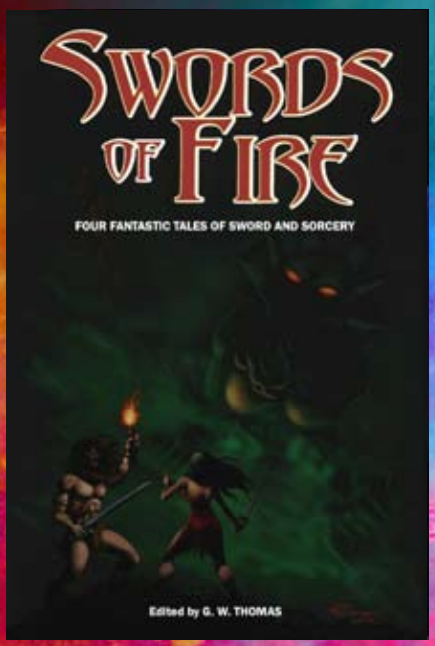

Swords of Fire

edited by G. W. Thomas

Four novellas of Heroic Fantasy. David A. Hardy's *Temple of the Rakshasas* follows Godarz the mercenary. *Two Fools For the Price of One* by C. J. Burch continues his Addux and Kouer series. *Pieces in a Game* by Jack Mackenzie reunites Sirtago and Poet and *The Deathmaster's Folly* by G. W. Thomas *introduces* the necromancer Fauston and his servant Ramid. Fully Illustrated by M. D. Jackson.

The Green Beast

by Jack Mackenzie

Something is rotten in the castle of Baron Ogmund. Sirtago, the lusty Ka of the realm of Trigassa, and his sensitive companion, Poet, are onto a mystery involving a terrible green beast. The creature is killing the fishermen of the local village and the truth is so strange it will call into question everything, even the faithfulness of Ka Sirtago's own mother the Empress of Trigassa!

Dragontongue and Other Stories

by G. W. Thomas

Enter the world of the Six Cities. Strange folk dwell in these lands from the clever but mousy Manthorn the magician, the brave swordsman Torel the Gelt, Luantishee the Silver Princess and the mysterious four-armed wizard known only as the Rainbow Man plus many others. G. W. Thomas presents 18 tales of the fantastic and the mysterious!

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Artwork by Jesse Santos, courtesy donaldfglut.com

DONALD F. GLUT: The Doctor Spektor Interview

by G. W. Thomas

Donald F. Glut has written for comic books, non-fiction, novels, television shows and motion pictures

Donald F. Glut began his comic writing career in the late1960s with the Warren horror comics. This was good training, for he would pen some of the best Gold Key comics of the 1970s. His line-up of *Tragg and the Sky-Gods, Tales of Sword and Sorcery* as well as *The Occult Files of Dr. Spektor* form an interlacing saga in which these characters appear together, a Don Glut multiverse.

Dr. Spektor appeared for the first time in *Mystery Comics Digest* #5 (July 1972) with "Of Inhuman Bondage", drawn by Dan Spiegle. Spektor's final Gold Key appearance (not counting reprints) was "Dragon Fire" in issue #24 (February 1977). Spektor would hang around Gold Key as a host of horror comics (all reprints) but his ghost-busting days were at

an end until 2014 when he was revamped by Mark Waid for a four-part mini-series.

Donald F. Glut would go onto write comics for all the big houses including Marvel, DC, Archie and Charlton, as well as respected horror non-fiction, novels, television shows and motion pictures. He is a writer who has shown a love of the fantastic throughout his career.

We are pleased to talk with him about *Dr. Spektor* in particular.

Dark Worlds Quarterly: *The 1970s was a time of great interest in the Occult. What influence did that trend have on the creation of Doctor Spektor? What was his origin as an idea and a comic?*

Donald F. Glut: I was writing stand-alone horror stories for Gold Key's *Mystery Comics Digest*. One day I thought I'd introduce an original host character. Gold Key already had various hosts to introduce stories, including real-life Boris Karloff and Rod Serling as well as the witch from *Grimm's Ghost Stories*. Popular at the time were host characters like "Dr. Graves" over at Charlton, Warren's Uncle Creepy, Cousin Eerie and Vampirella, and so forth. I think my greatest influence, though, was Jerry Grandenett's "Secret Files of Dr. Drew" feature that appeared in Fiction House's pre-Comics Code *Ghost Comics*. All these elements sort of melded together when I came up with Dr. Spektor, a guy I saw as owning a vast collection of supposedly true occult accounts in his files. Visually, his garb was certainly influenced by that worn by Barnabas Collins, the *Dark Shadows* vampire star. I

"I think my greatest influence, though, was Jerry Grandenett's "Secret Files of Dr. Drew" feature... All these elements sort of melded together"

was (and still am) a big fan of the original *DS* and various elements from that series still crop up in some of my writings.

DWQ: *Doctor Spektor is part of long tradition of ghostbreakers going back at least as far as Dr. Martin Hesselius (1872), a line that includes Dr. Abraham* **V***an Helsing, John Silence, Jules de Grandin as well as comic book doctors such Dr. Occult and Stephen Strange. How much did this legacy influence the creation of Dr. Adam Spektor?*

DFG: I always saw Spektor as a kind of combination of Van Helsing and Sherlock Holmes. I was aware of Dr. Occult and had read a lot of Dr. Strange's adventures. Strange may have been an influence of sorts, being a wealthy and somewhat stuffy expert at what he did, living in a sanctum sanctorum with lots of weird artifacts. The name I'm sure was inspired by DC's Spectre superhero, although they were not pronounced exactly the same.

DWQ: *Lakota Rainflower seems like an interesting choice for a Watsonesque sidekick. She is Scully to Spektor's Mulder, but like all Watsons she tends to play sounding board for Spektor. She is also a love interest. What is the story of her creation? You have quite a multi-*

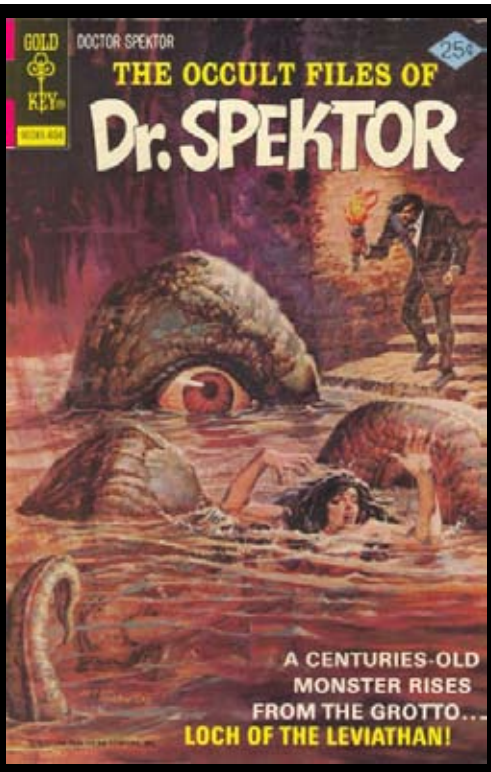
Photo courtesy Donald F. Glut

cultural cast in your comics. Was this a hard sell with Gold Key or their idea?

DFG: Good question and I'll answer the last part first. My Gold Key editors had no problem with me introducing Asian characters, even (as they used to say in those less enlightened times) "Yellow Peril" stereotypes, into the books; hence, Dr. Tong and his daughter Lu-Sai. But it was difficult indeed getting Black characters into the stories. The Gold Key editors were always afraid of using Blacks (aside from their jungle titles like *Tarzan* and *Brothers of the Spear*). They seemed to be genuinely afraid that the African-American community (wasn't called that back then) would find offense in something we did and might – I'm *not* making this up! – riot and "burn down the building." Compounding the problem was that one of the people in charge at the office was kind of a racist who, at least once in my presence, very emotionally used the "N" word. So it was a major coup that I was able to add characters like Elliot Kane and Torgus (in *Dagar*) to my rosters. As for Lakota, she was originally imagined by me as half Native and half Irish with the name Lakota O'Brien. My editor Del Connell, to his great credit, thought that was a sort of cop-out and suggested we make her 100 per cent Native American. And yes, I thought she played quite well against Spektor. Their relationship was very personal, based largely upon that of my then-girlfriend and myself.

DWQ: *The comic book features many classic monsters such as Frankenstein's Adam, mummies, Mr. Hyde, werewolves, vampires, beast men. You've written novels about Frankenstein's Monster beginning with Frankenstein Lives Again! (1977) and non-fiction*

Artwork by Jesse Santos



books like The Dracula Book (1975) and The Frankenstein Catalog (1984). Obviously these creatures fascinate you. Why? You love to team them up against Adam Spektor. Does this speak to old films like The House of Frankenstein (1944)?

DFG: Yes, I've loved those classic-monster type characters since I, as a pre-teens kid, first discovered their movies. It also speaks of the continuity and crossings-over found in Marvel and DC Comics, the stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs and H.P. Lovecraft, etc. I've always loved that sort of thing, having characters from different venues meet and interact. And I've always had the literary conceit that all (or at least most) of the stories I wrote, regardless of company or medium, coexisted within the same universe. I have a new novel *Frankenstein: The Final Horror*, which (I hope) will finally be published this year – by Bill Cunningham's Pulp 2.0 Press – that winds up forever my old "New Adventures of Frankenstein" series that began with *Frankenstein Lives Again!* If you read between the lines in that novel, there are explanations for the various other appearances of the Monster in some of my comic book stories. And all of them relate to *The Occult Files of Dr. Spektor.*

DWQ: *In the first Doctor Spektor story "Cult of the Vampire" the doctor saves a vampire from his curse, showing that Spektor is not one who hates all creatures supernatural. Was this a conscience decision to make the Doctor a man who walks on both sides of the darkness or was it Gold Key wanting less violence because the comics were for kids? How much latitude were you given with the horror elements?*

DFG: Gold Key had nothing to do with that. I was just trying to tell a good and original story. Curing vampire Baron Tibor was entirely my own idea. I handed in a full-length script for that first issue and, to the editors' surprise (and dismay), it featured Spektor as a character. I did not pitch a plot synopsis first, which was the usual way I did stories for that company. If they liked the plot, they'd give me the green light to write the script. But this particular story took the editors completely off guard. What they expected was a book comprising several stand-alone stories, each hosted by Spektor as narrator, the kind that had been appearing in *Mystery Comics Digest*. But I wanted the new book to feature the Doc participate in actual adventures. And no, I wasn't thinking of Spektor and walking both sides – but a man fascinated by the supernatural and hungry to learn everything he could about that subject. Curing Baron Tibor was more of a learning experience and challenge than succumbing to any dark forces.

DWQ: *You first included a descendent of* V*an Helsing in "Dracula's Vampire Legion", making him a "supernatural bounty hunter". He acts as an antagonist in several tales. Why did you decide to make a vampire, Baron Tibor, one of Spektor's sidekicks, while the kin of* V*an Helsing is more of a villain?*

DFG: It was just an idea I had at the time. I wanted to bring in a colorful Van Helsing character to maintain some continuity with Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. But if I brought in a "typical" character bearing that family name, he'd be pretty much the same as Spektor. So, to be different, I made him a bounty hunter with a rather crude personality. I figured the readers, when seeing the name Van Helsing, would expect him to be someone like the character in the novel or in the movie versions. I thought portraying the descendant as a total opposite would be a refreshing surprise.

DWQ: *Beginning with "I…Werewolf" Doctor Spektor became afflicted with lycanthropy. This sub-plot lasted for three issues. You tied this plot in with Simbar, the Lord of the Lions, a different type of shape-shifter and Jungle Lord. Was there a plan to give Simbar his own comic?*

DFG: In my mind, yes. I really liked the Simbar character – who first appeared in a stand-alone *Mystery Comics Digest* story -- and argued more than once with my editor to give him his own book. I thought Simbar as a character had a fair amount of potential. But it never happened.

DWQ: *Doctor Spektor is the character that ties all your Gold Key series together (Tragg, Dagar, Man of the Atom, etc.). You wrote back-up stories for the main Dr. Spektor plotline. These first appeared as individual stories, but later they became background tales filling in your Gold Key universe. Was this planned from the beginning or did it just happen organically?*

DFG: Organically as I recall. As I wrote more and more of those stories, I started getting ideas for tying them all together…the same U.S. Marshall reappearing in different stories, and so forth -- In my mind they all existed in the same universe – which also included

Artwork by Jesse Santos

comics stories I wrote for other companies, my own prose short stories and novels, and later even my movies. Read some of my Frankenstein novels or some of the comics I wrote for DC, Marvel and Charlton, and you'll find references to the Dark Gods and so forth. That was a lot of fun to do. I wonder if someone in the distant future, with way too much time on his or her hands, might figure out how all of these tales relate to one another.

DWQ: *Your love of Victorian supernatural fiction is obvious with characters from Shelley, Polidori, Prest, Stoker, Stevenson, Le Fanu, as well non-fiction as mentioned in "A Tour of Spektor Manor" with such weirdies as Montague Summers, Sabine Baring-Gould, Dudley Wright and Sir Ernest Budge. Are you a fan of H. P. Lovecraft and his Cthulhu Cycle? The mention of a Demonomicon seems to suggest this as well as "The Loch of the Leviathan" features a Scottish squidgy rather than the more familiar Loch Ness Monster. The Ruthvenian, first mentioned in "Dracula's Vampire Legion", is a little like a vampire Necronomicon, and Ostellon's Dark Gods seem vaguely Lovecraftian. The scenes of Prince Zagron fighting Neffron in "When the Gods Collide" seem almost Tolkienesque. Howardian, at the very least. What modern writers inspired you?*

DFG: You are correct about the Victorian. My next movie, following *Tales of Frankenstein* (now in post-production) will be a modern-day story featuring Carmilla. And I only recently caught up with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the novel, which I'd never read before. The books I mentioned in Spektor's collection are also on my shelf. I liked what Lovecraft

did with his continuity and mythologies very much and those were certainly big influences on my Spektor (and other) stories. The Dark Gods idea surely was inspired by Lovecraft's "Old Ones" mythos. But I haven't read many of his stories. The writing style is not really my cup of tea. Yes, the *Ruthvenian* – which more recently turned up in my Countess Dracula movies – as well as the *Demonomicon* were certainly inspired by Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*. My hope was that one or both of my fictitious book titles would enter the "public domain" of supernatural fiction and that other authors would use them as a prop in their own writings. I never read Tolkien and the movies put me to sleep, again not to my tastes, so no influence on "When Gods Collide." But the title was definitely a take-off on George Pal's movie *When Worlds Collide.* The basic idea was probably more inspired by the "Tales of Asgard" series in Marvel's *Thor* comic books.

DWQ: *Jesse Santos provided the artwork for your Dr. Spektor comics. You even gave him a special nod in "The Painter of Doom" with your forger character copying a "Santos".*

" I liked what Lovecraft did with his continuity and mythologies... those were certainly big influences on my Spektor (and other) stories."

What was your working relationship like with Jesse? Did you ever meet in person? How did your collaboration work?

DFG: Surprisingly, it was not I but editor Del Connell who slipped the name Santos into that story. That was a trick I usually used back when we writers and artists weren't getting credits at Gold Key, a way to prove I'd written a story. Jesse and I met quite a few times when he was in the LA area. He lived up in San Jose, California. I was down in Studio City at the time, many miles away. We worked mainly by ourselves. I would turn my scripts in at the Gold Key offices in Hollywood, then Del, after doing his edit on them would mail them off to Jesse. Frequently I sent picture references to Jesse directly.

DWQ: *Reading over these comics, I see you used certain ideas that are currently popular, such as a skeptic and a believer (The X-Files), synthetic blood for vampires (True Blood), supernatural bounty hunters (Supernatural), and a Vampire Bible (The Strain). Do you laugh when you see these programs and think, "I was there first!" Can you enjoy the current run of supernatural movies and television?*

DFG: To be honest, I haven't seen most of those shows and was never much of a fan of *The X-Files*. I did watch a few episodes of *Supernatural*, but it seemed like the same old TV format of so many other shows. Never saw *The Strain* or *True Blood*. I just don't have the time to get hooked on many TV shows with continuing story lines that never seem to go anywhere. I finally saw an episode of *The Walking D*ead and it was mostly, like way too many of these current shows, just a lot of talk that didn't advance the plot – with just one

zombie, that got killed off at the beginning. And frankly I'm really tired of zombies, at least the non-Voodoo variety that now defines the word.

DWQ: *Dark Horse and Dynamite have recently resurrected some of the great Gold Key comics for new fans. I know back in the day many dismissed the Gold Keys as being less worthy than the usual DC and Marvel fare, but as I've grown older it simply hasn't proven true for me. What do you think makes these comics an enduring part of comics history?*

DFG: I can only speak for the ones I wrote. I tried my best to make Spektor, Dagar, Tragg, etc. behave like real people, especially Spektor. That was a very personal character for me, as I based him somewhat on my own personality. I think that constituted a large part of the Doc's appeal. Now he seems to be enjoying a "second wind," discovered by older readers who'd never even heard of him back when they were young Marvel and DC chauvinists. But I loved writing the Spektor book. Although I have been recently supplying *The Creeps* magazine with new comics scripts, I don't want to go back to writing comic books full time. I'm too busy making movies with my new company Pecosborn Productions, the latest being *Tales of Frankenstein*. But in Spektor's case, I'd make an exception. I did campaign to revive the character with Dark Horse when that company was reprinting the series. My "master plan" was to write a graphic novel set today. It would open with Spektor, now an old man, climbing out of the Dark Gods' Hell where he'd been imprisoned since the late 1970s, with all of his friends – including a returned Lakota, whose departure would be explained – held in stasis, never aging. Spektor would battle and unequivocally defeat the Dark Gods. As a reward, the Warrior Gods would both restore him to his 1970s age, but also release his friends – and we'd be back to the status quo, with Spektor and the rest of the gang back doing their usual thing. Then, that out of the way and everything back to "normal," I could turn the character over to another writer who could do a new ongoing series…or do that series myself. But it never happened. FYI, when the original book was canceled, I'd written an origin story for Spektor flashing back to the 1950s. The script was paid for and edited. And I still have it. I think it would be nice to see that story drawn and published someday. Well, one can hope!

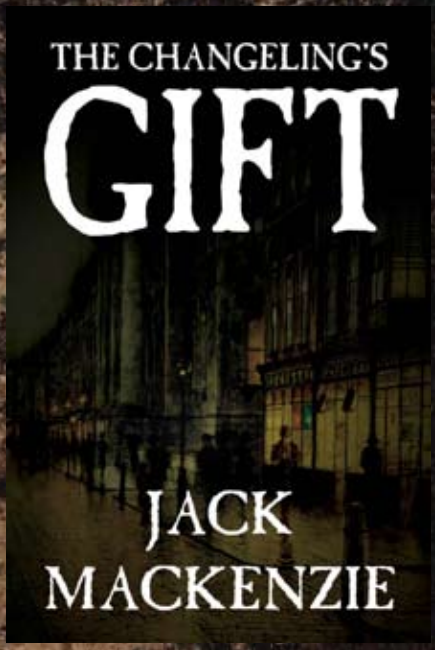
And maybe also hard to *justify* some of it!!

DWQ: Thanks for talking with us, Don.

For more discussion from Donald Glut on the subject of Doctor Spektor, check out Charles R Rutledge's interview at *Occult Detective Quarterly #2*, now on sale. http://greydogtales.com/blog/occult-detective-quarterly/odq/.

▲

Don't expect to sleep tonight...



The Book of the Black Sun

by G. W. Thomas

The Book of the Black Sun is thirty-two Lovecraftian tales of terror arranged in eight sections, each containing a micro, a flash, shorter story and a longer story. Motifs of strange books, evil creatures and spinning disks that form doorways to other realms are woven throughout the tales, making the final product a creepy, self-referential mandala in itself.

The Changeling's Gift

by Jack Mackenzie

Arthur Freeborn was not like other people. The people of England, persecuted him for his gifts. That was until someone began killing women in the streets of London. Was Freeborn the spring-heeled knifeman or was he the one to catch him? Jack Mackenzie offers up his fantastic version of Victorian London filled with magic, mystery and murder.

The Book of the Black Sun II: The Book Collector

by G. W. Thomas

The tales of the Book Collector are fast-paced Noir Mysteries as well as horror stories. The Book Collector works for a mysterious figure who rents arcane tomes to the wealthy. When those books don't come back the Book Collector has 24 hours to retrieve them. The book in question... The Book of the Black Sun.

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I WAS A TEENAGE WHOVIAN!

by M. D. Jackson

Kids today don't know how good they have it.

Oh, stop rolling your eyes! I know what you're thinking; "Here we go again. Old Uncle Jack is going to go on and on about how things were so much worse in the bad old days! Spare me!"

Well, yes I am, as a matter of fact, but you just put down your Red Bull and listen. You just may learn something.

You kids today don't know how good things are. And they are good. I mean, really good compared to what they used to be.

What am I talking about? Why *Doctor Who*, of course!

Yes, that show you watch on the BBC. or BBC America, or the Space Channel, or maybe you find the episodes online, or via a torrent. I don't know. I don't judge.

For those of you who don't know, *Doctor Who* depicts the adventures of a mysterious and eccentric Time Lord known as the Doctor, who travels through time and space in his time machine, the TARDIS, which normally appears from the exterior to be a blue 1950s British police box. With his companions, he explores time and space, faces a variety of foes

and saves civilizations, helping people and righting wrongs.

The show had been absent from television for 16 years and many viewers had forgotten the original run, or perhaps their memories were tinged with more than a little nostalgia.

The show was revived by longtime *Doctor Who* fan, Russell T. Davies, who had been lobbying the BBC since the late 1990s to bring it back.

Since the BBC reintroduced Doctor Who in March of 2005 with the first episode "Rose" it has been a phenomenal success.

The fact is that *Doctor Who* is watched by a lot of people. The series premiere garnered 10.81 million viewers. The ratings it receives in Great Britain alone would make any television producer in America rend their clothes and gnash their teeth in envy. Worldwide the story is the same. *Doctor Who* pulls in viewers like a black hole pulls in... well, everything.

"The ratings it receives in Great Britain alone would make any television producer in America rend their clothes and gnash their teeth in envy"

And there is merchandising. Tee shirts, toys, keychains, books, music, you name it, if it has a surface someone will slap a *Doctor Who* logo on it and call it money. And people will buy it. And people do. I live in a small town, one similar to the one in which I grew up, in which flying your geek flag is not something one sees much of. But I see Doctor Who crop up here and there. I've seen a young person wearing a TARDIS hoodie. I've seen TARDIS keychains. I've seen Dalek toys on people's desks. I myself have a *Doctor Who* mug on my desk at work and no one bats an eye.

It's there. It's in the popular culture. It's part of the zeitgeist now.

But that success didn't come out of nowhere. *Doctor Who* has a very long history, as has *Doctor Who* fandom. Today you can stand up proudly and say that you love *Doctor Who* and no one cares. Back in the late 1970's only science fiction writer Harlan Ellison dared to declare: "*Star Wars* is adolescent nonsense; *Close Encounters* is obscurist drivel; *Star Trek* can turn your brains into puree of bat guano; and the greatest science fiction series of all time is *Doctor Who*! And I'll take you all on, one-by-one or all in a bunch to back it up!"

It wasn't always like that. In the past *Doctor Who* fandom was a not-so comfortable place to be.

How it all began

My own history with *Doctor Who* began when I was about seven years old. Maybe. My memory is a bit hazy. But I do know that on a quiet afternoon a movie came on the television that excited me greatly. It was *Doctor Who and the Dalek*s. Now, this would have been the Hammer version, the one made for the cinemas, based on the original television series. The one that starred Peter Cushing as 'Doctor Who'.

That film is generally held in disdain by most die-hard Whovians. It changes continuity from the television show. Instead of an alien from Gallifrey, Perer Cushing's Doctor Who

Dr. Who and the Daleks, Amicus Productions - 1965

(and he calls himself *Doctor Who* in the film, not just The Doctor) is an absent-minded inventor who just happens to have cooked up a time machine that he has built inside an old police box.

I didn't know all of that at the time, of course, neither would I have cared. All I cared about was that the hapless time travelers find themselves on a distant plant (or maybe it's the distant future of Earth) in a spooky wood with petrified creatures and in the distance is a shining city, a technological marvel in the middle of a wasteland. Doctor Who is eager to go exploring and so was I. I was ecstatic about the film and was eager to find out what strange inhabitants lived in the city.

Alas, I was not to find out that day as my parents dragged me off to some appointment we had to go to. A lunch date perhaps or we were going 'visiting'. I can't remember. All I remember was being devastated that my adventure with the Doctor was cut short and that I would never find out what was in that amazing city in the distance.

My younger brother, who would have been about six at the time, upon seeing my distress, tried to help by unplugging the TV in the vain hope that it would still be on if we plugged it back in. He meant well. Sadly, it would be many decades before such a thing was possible. At the time my brother was mystified at why his brilliant idea was met with such disdain.

Flash forward many years. I'm in my mid-, or maybe late, teens. I was aware of *Doctor Who* as a television show from Great Britain and despite the fact that I had family there and had visited often, the Doctor and I had never been reunited other than through various articles and comics in the *Radio Times*.

The Monster of Peladon - BBC - 1974

(It would take a whole `nother article to adequately explain the *Radio Times* for those of you who do not know what it is. For now, you`ll just have to make use of Google and look it up yourselves.)

It's the mid-seventies. My young nephew comes to visit. He's about seven years old, maybe eight. But he starts telling me about this crazy show that comes on very early on Saturday mornings "There`s these guys with weird hair and monsters and they're running around in these caves. And there's this old guy in an old suit with a cape and... it's just a crazy show!"

As he is describing it, my excitement grows because I know that what he is describing is none other than *Doctor Wh*o. What day is it on? I ask suddenly vibrating with excitement. What time? What channel?

I tuned in the next Saturday morning and there it was. I caught the last episode of "The Monster of Peladon".

And I was hooked.

Episodic Adventures

The original episodes of *Doctor Who* were a half-hour each. Each episode continued a story and each story lasted either four or sometimes six episodes. The series was shot in what, at the time, was standard for BBC shows. Studio scenes were shot on videotape. Location scenes were shot on film, usually on 16 millimetre film stock, edited and then transferred to videotape.

That production technique confused me as a kid. I knew there was something different about the “outside” scenes and the “inside” but I didn't know what the cause of it was until years later when I was studying film and television. However, that technique was dropped in the 1980's as portable video equipment developed and became less costly. As with all other BBC production outside scenes were no longer shot on film and were more consistent with the elements shot in the studio.

Nevertheless, the whole thing was shot on videotape, which lent the production a shabby air of cheapness.

Not to mention the special effects sequences, which had their own air of cheapness.

Not so special effects

The special effects of the early *Doctor Who* episodes. Where to begin?

Doctor Who's production budget was never monumental. From its first episode in 1963, tucked away in one of the smaller, little-used studios infamous for its cramped spaces, *Doctor Who* has had to simply make do. Without a comfortable budget, and with little help,

"The show did not have the budget to make a believable walking robot. One of the early production designers got the idea for making them blocky and having them glide along the flat studio floor.”

if not outright disdain from other departments in the BBC, the *Doctor Who* production team has had to be clever and innovative in order to get the episodes produced. Right from the beginning with the creation of what would become the Doctor's feared nemesis, The Daleks, clever tricks had to do in place of actual technical innovation.

The show did not have the budget to make a believable walking robot. One of the early production designers got the idea for making them blocky and having them glide along the flat studio floor. He is said to have gotten the idea after watching a performance of Russian dancers whose long dresses hid the movements of the dancer's legs and created the illusion of elegantly floating above the floor.

Instead of flexible arms the Daleks had a gun and a suction cup. They had no eyes, but a single telescopic eye sticking out of a domed head.

How do you make something potentially laughable work as a credible threat to the show's heroes? *Doctor Who*'s production staff was clever and resourceful enough to pull it off and the success of the Daleks cannot be denied.

That same clever resourcefulness helped see the original *Doctor Who* through the next twenty-six years, but cleverness sometimes doesn't always work and resources aren’t always available. For every clever effect there were several real clunkers. Models that were obviously miniatures, video 'laser' effects that didn't quite line up with the practical floor effects, make-up that was appallingly transparent, or bulky rubber suits that looked like


Robot - BBC - 1974

little more than bulky rubber suits.

It is just this sort of stumbling block that prevented a lot of people for seeing in *Doctor Who* the elements that transcended the poor production budget. As a fan of the show I found myself incessantly defending it against its own shabby effects.

Technological Boom

When the series was re-introduced to television in 2005 the production budget was considerably larger. Many changes had taken place at the BBC and in the production of television in general. Video technology had improved and the quality of the images on the TV screen was now indistinguishable, in some cases better, than shows that were originally shot on 35 mm film. Computer imagery had similarly developed so that the seemingly impossible to film was now relatively easily presented. The worldwide distribution of content had become easier as well. Thanks to Internet streaming, the fact that European standard video recording was incompatible with North American standard meant that episodes did not have to be transcribed before being broadcast.

Doctor Who fans could not simply get their British relatives to record an episode in their VCRs, ship the tape over and expect it to play in a North American VHS player. (I tried, believe me!) Without a costly transcription process to convert the PAL video to NTSC video, fans were reliant on whatever North American station was willing to broadcast the show.

Many stations did not want to take a chance and those who did tended to schedule the

episodes to run very late at night. I remember regularly staying up late on Saturday nights often until two, sometimes three in the morning. I was not partying, I was watching *Doctor Who* and trying to stay wake until the end.

That was how it was for fans. You relied on local television stations taking a chance and airing the episodes (hopefully in order and not missing any out) or you ponied up and bought the videotapes if you could find them. They weren't exactly in high demand.

Today Doctor Who fans need look no further than Netflix or other streaming sites for episodes. Even Youtube has some in their entirety. Back in the day we had to be... well... clever and resourceful. Sometimes even more clever and resourceful than the original show's special effects team.

Old vs New

Let's face it, with their computer generated imagery, their digital video, their hour-long episodes, the new *Doctor Who* has it well over the old one, hands down. It has created a new generation of fans, not to mention fueled a merchandising industry that is worth billions.

Today it's easy to be a *Doctor Who* fan. It's accessible. That is, it's easy to find and it is easier to understand. With science fiction and fantasy shows as popular as they are today, much, much more popular than they have ever been, the barriers that kept mainstream audiences from understanding shows like *Doctor Who* have fallen like the Berlin Wall.

And if you have to stop and look up exactly what the Berlin Wall was, then you're probably too young to even understand how difficult it was to be a *Doctor Who* fan way back when.

I was constantly being put in the position to defend my passion for a show that looked so strange and so cheaply made. It wasn't like American Science Fiction television shows. It wasn't even like other British Science Fiction shows. The hero, for one, was never meant to be a square-jawed, straightforward, ready-to-take-action kind of hero that audiences were used to seeing in science fiction shows. The Doctor was not Captain Kirk. He wasn't Dan Dare. He was... odd. He didn't use his fists. He looked strange. In conventional casting wisdom the Doctor would have been an eccentric supporting character at best, comic relief at worst. But here he was, front and center, the main character of the show.

And asexual. Despite the continuous presence of a pretty young *ingénue* by his side, the Doctor, as an alien, had no interest in romance. He had a passion for science and for justice, but his passion did not extend to his companions.

Hanky Panky in the TARDIS

And that is something that has changed in the newer series. There is an element of sexual tension between the Doctor and his companions. Even if it is not reciprocated, as between David Tennant's Doctor and Martha Jones, it's there. Even when there is no sexual or romantic interest, as between David Tennant's Doctor and his companion, Donna Noble, it's still there. The showrunners of today feel that they have to acknowledge it, even if both parties sincerely deny it, it must be addressed. It is the constant elephant in the room.

That is something that never – ever – happened in the original series' run. The relationship between the Doctor and his companions was strictly... strictly... platonic. And that was a barrier, particularly to American audiences. “He's got this hot, half-wild girl with him in that blue box alla time, why don't he do somethin' about it?” they ask.


The Face of Evil - BBC - 1977

You think I'm exaggerating? Well, maybe a little. Maybe the question wasn't asked in such a hilbilly-type fashion. I'm exaggerating that part... but just a bit. At science fiction conventions that I used to attend fairly regularly I would hear variations of that question all the time. I would regularly see examples of fan art that explored just that topic and in various degrees of frankness, from the subtle to the downright pornographic!

Too much "English"

I used to spend a lot of time trying to explain to people why the show was worth their time. And not just Billy Hayseed off the turnip truck. I had to convince die-hard SF fans... card carrying Science Fiction Club members who had been vociferous fans of the genre since John W. Campbell was still editing magazines... that this strange show was worth their attention.

The other criticism I used to hear all the time was how all of the alien races had English accents. Seriously, that was a major criticism of the show (and other British Science Fiction shows, *Space:1999* in particular) from American viewers. They could not take a show seriously that portrayed aliens as having British accents. In a British show.

Because, naturally, all aliens would speak English with an American accent. *Duh*.

Yeah, you just gotta shake your head, sometimes.

Not all fans were like that, of course. Some American fans loved the series because of its Britishness.

"I remember going to all the United Fan Conventions in Springfield, MA way back in

the day," remembers Robert Ricci, a writer from Boston Massachusetts and author for Airship 27 Publishing. "They managed to fly in a *Doctor Who* star every year without fail. Even though I was a *Star Trek* fan, it was nice to listen to these British actors when they took the stage. Back then the actors charged zero for autographs. Fun times and happy memories."

Aside from that, though, the barriers for *Doctor Who* sometimes seemed insurmountable. The weird, episodic nature of the broadcasts, the bad special effects, the English accents, the lack of any redundant info-dumps that were common in American Science Fiction shows (Reminder: This show is set in the future and we have spaceships and yadda yadda yadda. In our last episode...). With *Doctor Who*. you just had to keep up. It wasn't spoon-fed to viewers, and that was a barrier.

So what was it that made the original *Doctor Who* persevere? How did we get from "little-known cult science fiction show" to the international success that the show is today? What was there behind all the bad special effects, the strange episode structure, the "British-ness" of the show that caught the imagination and turned casual viewers into such passionate fans?

Simon Barton, a *Doctor Who* fan from Gloucester in Gloucestershire, England, didn't have a problem with the show being British. "Being British, these things didn't bother me at all," he says. And Barton has been a fan of the show for a long time. "I probably started watching the show around 1972-1973," he says. "Just in time for the 10th anniversary. Of course, I was very young and Doctor Who had to compete with other interests of mine such as comics and dinosaurs... but it managed to make a big impression. I loved the monsters and the scares (which admittedly seem tame today) and, of course, I loved the Doctor."

Simon became a fan during the Jon Pertwee's years, just as I had when I was in Canada. "Pertwee's Doctor was an ideal hero for a five or six-year old boy: he was a dashing man of action but there was also a comforting, patrician air about him -- something which can seem patronizing in hindsight but which worked at the time. I became hooked on the show and stuck with it through thick and thin."

And what about the show's other tradition, that of radically changing the Doctor when the lead actor wants to leave the show? "I was alarmed at first when "my" Doctor (Jon Pertwee) was replaced by that madman with the teeth and curls..." Barton says, referring to the transition – the regeneration – of the Pertwee Doctor into the portrayal by actor Tom Baker, a portrayal that would become iconic. "I soon grew to love Tom, too."

Like a lot of other *Doctor Who* fans, retaining his love for the show while growing up wasn't always a comfortable proposition. "Being a Whovian was far from socially acceptable in those days - it was seen as something for kids only and you were viewed with suspicion if you still watched the show as a teen. I stayed a fan but, I'm ashamed to say, I downplayed my interest in the show for a long time, so as not to appear too geeky."

Barton isn't alone in this. The current actor to portray the Doctor, Peter Capaldi, started out much the same way, as a huge *Doctor Who* fan. He kept his passion for the show his whole life, even joining and writing numerous letters to the then "official" BBC *Doctor Who* Fan Club. On a recent episode of *The Graham Norton Show*, Capaldi was confronted with his passion for *Doctor Who* when show host, Graham Norton, read excerpts from the fan club's correspondence. The president of the fan club references "...another sad letter from Peter C.". Capaldi visibly cringes at the memory of his "utter geekness" despite the

Doctor Who - BBC - 2017

fact that now he is *Doctor Who*!

Barton is familiar with the feeling of being labeled a "geek" for his love of the show. "Although no-one used that condescending term in those days," Barton says.

Fans of the show were, and generally are, devoted to the program, despite the fact that it usually paled in comparison with Science Fiction offerings from other countries. "Other, flashier (American) shows appeared - *Battlestar Galactica*, *Buck Rogers* - but they soon proved to be full of sound and fury and large budgets, signifying nothing."

Indeed, despite the bigger budget and the "*Star Wars*" level special effects, shows like the aforementioned rarely lasted past two seasons. At the end of the day, the bigger budget and mostly American shows, didn't have it where it counted, despite the big budget and flashy special effects.

"*Doctor Who* may have been made on the cheap in those days but it was rich in ideas, invention, charm and silliness," Barton insists. "With a hero who didn't need to carry a gun or have perfect white teeth and blond hair.

"The Doctor was an eccentric, a stranger, a thinker, a loner who sometimes needed friends, a man of strict morals who often got it wrong, a man who didn't always win but always tried."

"He's MY kind of hero."

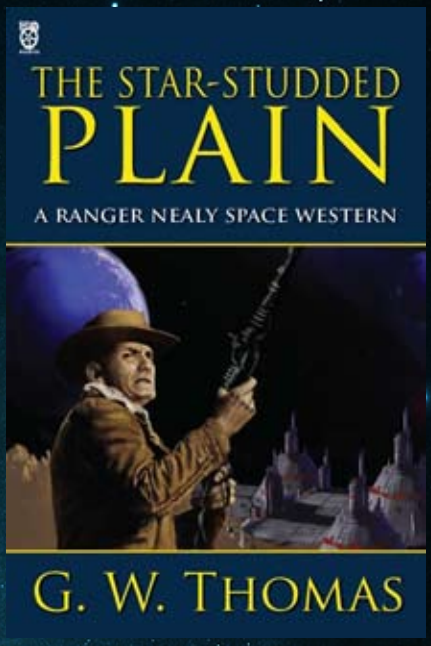
▲

Experience the Sense of wonder

Debt's Pledge

by Jack Mackenzie

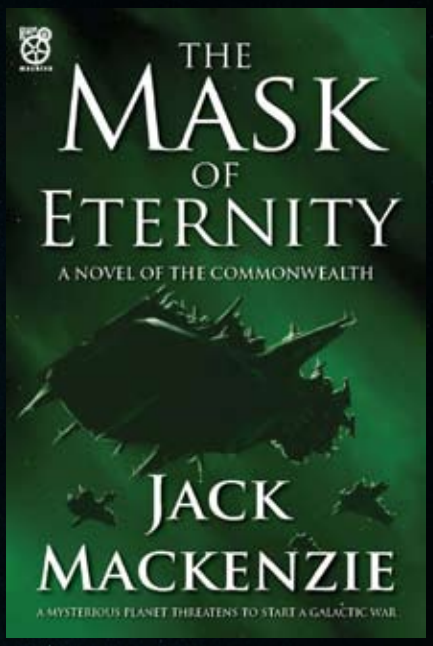
He was a soldier without a war, alone and unwanted, until he discovered an alien enemy... Stationed on a remote outpost, in charge of a platoon of hard cases and disciplinary problems Jefferson Odett is all that stands between a colony and an alien army of unspeakable power who will kill anything that gets in their way. Action-packed Science Fiction adventure!



The Star-Studded Plain

by G. W. Thomas

Three helpings of Space adventure on the planet Utukku, where the fine sands and constant winds making tracking impossible. Follow Ranger Neely as he chases bad guys and deals with the savage trogs with laser pistol in hand and his trusty crookback at his side. Science Fiction with a frontier flavor!



The Mask of Eternity

by Jack Mackenzie

Solis DeLacey, captain of the ACSC Boston, has been sent to a world rich in natural resources. But one ship and her crew has already gone missing while surveying the planet and the finger of suspicion is pointing to the Orion Hegemony, the ACSC`s sworn enemy. Now DeLacey must discover its secret and defeat her enemies before the galaxy is plunged into total war...

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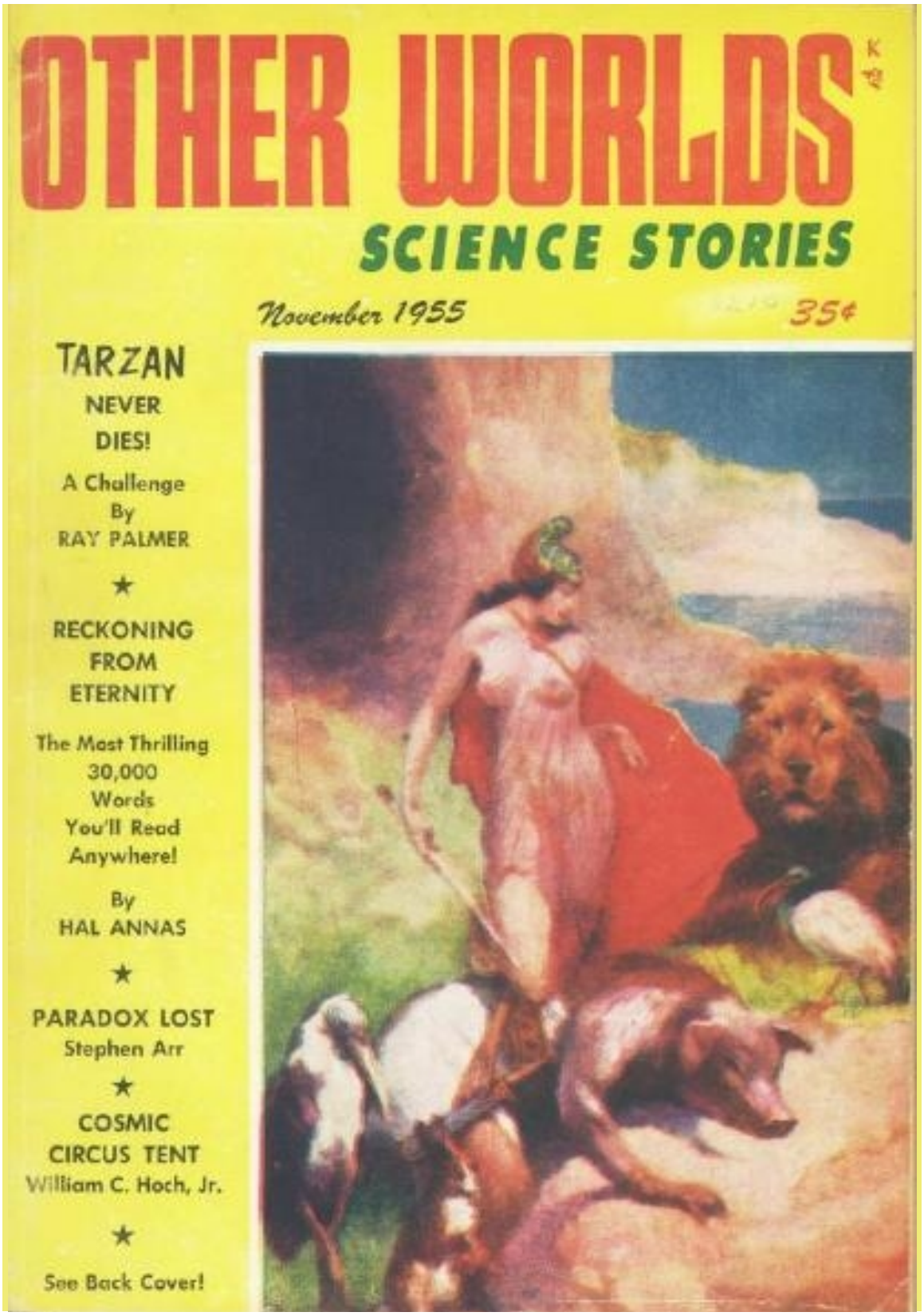


Other Worlds - November 1955

DIMES FOR TARZAN: The Bid for ERB's Crown

by G. W. Thomas

After the passing of Edgar Rice Burroughs it seemed the end for the Tarzan Tales, but for publisher Ray Palmer, that simply would not do

Raymond A. Palmer is a double-edged sword that many Science Fiction purists would like to forget. On the one hand he was one of two men who created the very first fanzine in 1930, *The Comet*. As an editor, he provided magazine space for writers who did not want to kowtow to John W. Campbell and his idea of Science Fiction. Palmer was the editor who brought Edgar Rice Burroughs back to *Fantastic Adventures* in 1940**.** Most of ERB's later collections/novels first appeared in a Palmer magazine.

Palmer is remembered by First Fandomers as a quirky, enthusiastic and giving member of SF. His name was immortalized by old friends Gardner F. Fox and Julius Schwartz in DC comics in the character of Ray Palmer, The Atom.

But there is the other side of Palmer too. The Shaver Mysteries, weird ideas about


Edgar Rice Burroughs - Britannica.com

creatures dwelling under the earth and influencing humanity, written by Richard S. Shaver and presented as fact. Using the Shaver Mystery to drive sales, Palmer brought *Amazing Stories* to its height. If that weren't enough, Palmer left Ziff-Davis in 1949 and started his own magazines with little success. One of these was *Other Worlds*, which ended up as *Flying Saucers From Other Worlds* by 1958, and ran as a non-fiction Ufology mag until 1976. Palmer has been called "The Man Who Created UFOs" for all his promotion of the idea after 1947.

Was he a convert or simply a sensationalistic businessman? No one seems to know for sure. I have my suspicions though, because in September 1951's *Other Worlds*, Palmer published Robert Bloch's "My Struggle", about a man who tries to use Dianetics to get a big job. The message is pretty clear in this very short tale: Palmer didn't like L. Ron Hubbard and *Astounding* muscling in on his territory.

Love him or hate him, Ray Palmer was an Edgar Rice Burroughs fan. What could be more appealing to the four-foot tall man with the humpback? To imagine himself as the apex of masculine health that is Tarzan. And in 1955 he got a big idea. A really BIG idea. Ray Palmer wanted to appoint the successor to the mantle of the author of Tarzan, John Carter of Mars and so many other famous characters.

He declared this is the November 1955 issue of *Other World* in a piece called "Tarzan Never Dies" (www.erbzine.com/mag3/0313.html):

> *"I hereby propose that the Edgar Rice Burroughs interests nominate a successor to Edgar Rice Burroughs to continue the adventures of all of his*

> *famous characters. I further propose they nominate a man who has proved he can continue in the high standard and tradition of Edgar Rice Burroughs, as based on 100,000 words already written. I propose that Tarzan and all of his friends be allowed to live again, and walk once more through the pages of the books of the land, for the enjoyment of millions of fans everywhere."*

Palmer is clear he has a successor in mind when he writes: "No one, it seemed, could take up where the great Edgar Rice Burroughs left off. John Coleman Burroughs, his son, tried it. With all respect to a great man's son, it just didn't jell." This is most likely in reference to a small tempest in a teapot over "John Carter and the Giant of Mars" published by Palmer in *Amazing Stories* in January 1941. Fans had called the tale out as a fake, since it featured several inconsistencies with the other Barsoom tales, as well as it had a strangely un-Burroughsian feel. In truth, the story had been adapted from a Better Little Book by John Coleman Burroughs written for children. Burroughs added six thousand words but did not edit the story carefully. This remark by Palmer could be considered an insider's jab at Burroughs' son, and perhaps was not wise, but Palmer obviously feared the most likely successor, one of Burroughs' own kids.

"...when Moore proved too slow in creating these mock-ERB novels, Palmer did it for himself under the pseudonym of J. W. Pelkie..."

Ray Palmer was no stranger to knock-off Burroughs either. He published *Jongor of the Lost Land* by Robert Moore Williams (*Fantastic Adventures*, October 1940) and *The Return of Jongor* (*Fantastic Adventures*, April 1944) but when Moore proved too slow in creating these mock-ERB novels, Palmer did it for himself under the pseudonym of J. W. Pelkie, down to creating a fake bio and photos for the writer.

The Pelkie stories were "The King of the Dinosaurs" (*Fantastic Adventures*, October 1945), "Toka and the Man-Bats" (*Fantastic Adventures*, February 1946), "Toka Fight s the Big Cats" (*Fantastic Adventures*, December 1947). Palmer even moved the series away from Ziff-Davis towards the end, publishing "In the Sphere of Time" in rival pulp, *Planet Stories*, Summer 1948. Palmer was smart enough to know that part of the appeal of ERB was his illustrator, J. St Allen St. John. Mock Burroughs needed a St. John cover and illustrations. He learned this trick from Howard Browne, who had used it for a knock-off of his own: *Warrior of the Dawn* (*Amazing Stories*, December 1942/January 1943).

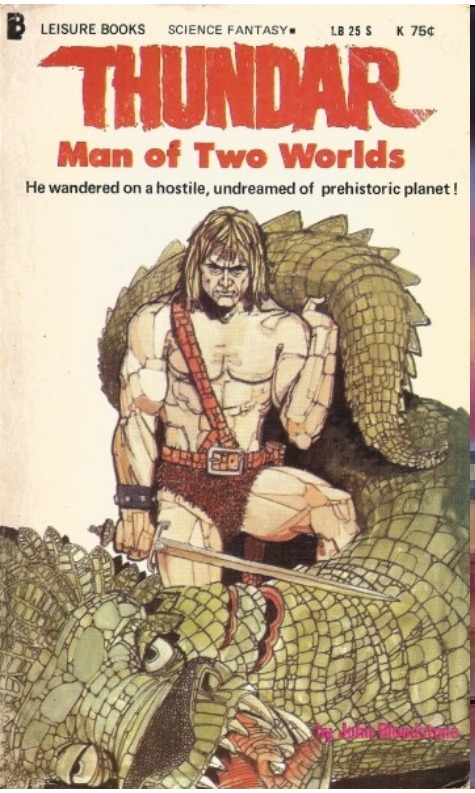
In "Tarzan Never Dies" Palmer is vague as to who the successor to Burroughs' crown is and what this 100,000 word novel is called. He did reveal that the novel featured both Tarzan and John Carter as well as La of Opar and Kar Kormak. In the June 1956 issue, Palmer published a one pager where he lists some big name allies in Ray Bradbury, Forrest J. Ackermann and Everett E. Evans, and that the writer is John Bloodstone (pseudonym of Stuart J. Byrne), and the novel was now 110,000 words and called *Tarzan on Mars*.

We can only suppose he went to ERB Inc. with *Tarzan on Mars*, with the thought of serializing it in *Other Worlds*, but was rejected. The direct course unavailable to him, he figured to get public opinion on his side. After writing "Tarzan Never Dies", a three pager explaining his love of Burroughs' work, his satisfaction at having been part of publishing the last works of ERB, and finally to suggest that a successor be appointed, he ran this campaign under the name "Dimes For Tarzan".

The letter columns were filled with the struggle up until 1956, when C. R. Rothman sent a letter (that Ray Palmer published in the letter column) saying that Tarzan was a copyrighted name and that Palmer did not have the right to use it in his "Dimes for Tarzan". Palmer retaliates with a long tirade about Wheaties and how if his supply of Wheaties had been stopped he would be using that word a lot. Either way, the Dimes for Tarzan effectively stopped after this and Palmer turned back to UFOS.

Edgar Rice Burroughs Inc.'s motives and thoughts on all this seem a little obscure. As Palmer put it in "Tarzan Never Dies": "Certainly the Burroughs interests stand to profit immensely." Palmer claimed to have 20,000 signatures from his Dimes For Tarzan campaign, a rich book deal offer from Street & Smith as well as the notice of Hollywood. But would they? Palmer had no real way to know what was going on at ERB Inc. in the years before Burroughs' death. In 1923, Edgar Rice Burroughs had been incorporated. ERB was the first author to do this, a sign of how profitable his writing empire was.

By the 1940s, ERB had two ex-wives and no control over the company he had created. He lived in Hawaii to cut costs and wrote those last stories for Ray Palmer because he needed the money. Edgar Rice Burroughs Inc. sped on quite well without him, making



money from movies, radio, comics and numerous other forms of merchandizing. Burroughs was no longer needed and his death made little difference to the workings of the company.

So why bring in Ray Palmer in 1955 and have him muddy the waters with poorly written pastiches? The profits for Palmer were obvious but not the heirs of Burroughs. Marion Burroughs, ERB's first wife, had a standing policy: that having other writers produce ERB works weakened the copyright, and in turn, lessened potential profits, not increased them.

In the end *Tarzan on Mars* by John Bloodstone never appeared. Or did it? The 1971 book *Thundar: Man of Two Worl*ds is a reworking of this novel. Since the book appeared during the Sword & Sorcery book craze, it got a Sword & Planet gloss-over. The book did in fact inspire the cartoon, *Thundarr the Barbarian* and in this way John Bloodstone made his mark on fantastic literature. He did not get to be the successor of Edgar Rice Burroughs but as Ray Palmer should have realized, why does ERB need a successor?

Which brings us to 2017. Is Tarzan public domain?

From what I can gather, he is though the name "Tarzan" might not be. When that changes, there will be a glut of Tarzania like you've never seen. Just as with the proliferation of Sherlock Holmes novels today, soon Tarzan adventures, written by lesser talents, will fill Amazon in such a flood that even old Raymond A. Palmer might choke. Or maybe not.

Maybe old Ray would laugh, off in his alien UFO heaven, laugh and pick up another mock-Tarzan novel and smile.

▲

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY Volume 2: A Side-by-side Review

Jack Mackenzie - G.W. Thomas

Jack Mackenzie

SFX

The most amazing special effect in the whole movie comes right at the beginning and I don't know how they do it, but it is astounding how they made Kurt Russell look young again! I grew up watching Kurt Russell on TV and in various Disney pictures, so to see him look like he did way back when was overwhelming.

G. W. Thomas

SFX

I was pretty impressed by the opening sequence, with its foreground level and its background in a realistic blur. The squidgy the Guardians are fighting is the ultimate Pulp magazine squidgy. The spirit of Wesso and Leydenfrost live on. I loved it.

I can see merchandizing that character alone. I saw the movie in 3D and thought

"I am Groot!" - 2017 Walt Disney Pictures

Jack Mackenzie

And I love how he planted his glowing blue seed behind the Dairy Queen.

We move right in to the title sequence and there is a lot going on. It's like the cover of an old SF pulp, or a whole fantastic sequence of pages from an early Marvel comic brought to life with the Guardians fighting a giant tentacled space monster, but all the filmmakers choose to focus on is Baby Groot dancing to the music that he managed to get going.

And, honestly, that's all I want to do is watch this little CGI creature dance. So right there I fell in love with the movie. After that the picture could pretty much do anything and I would smile indulgently. Which I did.

And the picture does pretty much whatever it wants. The audience is obviously along for the ride no matter what. The film never gets overly serious even

G. W. Thomas

they did a good job of using the 3D well. The best 3D allows you to forget it is in 3D.

STORY

In terms of plot I was most worried. Sequels usually give mind-numbing retread (ala *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*) or something much less ambitious (any film with the word "Jurassic" in it, for instance), kind of like sex after marriage. I was pleased that this wasn't the case here.

The plot is nothing new though. Clifford D. Simak wrote a story called "The Creator" (*Marvel Tales*, April-May 1935) that had humans meet the alien/god who created life and then thwart him when they realize he is set on exterminating all life as the next part of the experiment. Back in 1935, this idea was considered edgy, but in our 21st Century reality it is far less so.

Sons and Fathers - 2017 Walt Disney Pictures

Jack Mackenzie

when there is life or death peril going on. At some points it is little more than a live-action cartoon, particularly the sequence where Rocket is ambushing the approaching scavengers. It is like a Warner Brothers cartoon brought to life.

STORY

The tone of the film is all over the place, but it never feels disjointed or jarring. You can have moments of Pythonesque comedy juxtaposed with heartfelt scenes of unspoken emotion. The acting in this regard is top notch. Even the CGI characters give performances that would give a lesser actor a run for his or her money. When Rocket is forced to leave Quill battling Ego in the end you can see the conflict in his eyes and you even feel for the furry little bully when he is

G. W. Thomas

CHARACTERS

I was impressed at the writing in this film in that every character had something to do that made the movie better. This is hard in ensemble films.

Think of Hawkeye in *The Avengers* franchise. Nothing against Jeremy Renner but you never get the feeling that the Earth would have succumbed to the inter-dimensional invaders if he had been on holiday that week.

Even a master of the ensemble like Joss Whedon can't quite make him shine. (Joss was able to make Xander and the other non-super characters in Buffy my favorites.) With *Guardians 2*, Drax would seem to be the character most likely to sit by and do little but in an interesting way he provides much of the human and non-action

Jack Mackenzie

overwrought with emotion at Yondu's funeral. This is artistry of the highest order.

Not that the emotion is ever far from the surface. After all, this isn't a serious drama. It's a comic (or comedic, rather) adaptation of a comic book and it doesn't stray too far from it in either direction (though it does push at the boundaries a bit).

It packs a lot into it, though. Almost too much. At two hours and 18 minutes running time *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* is almost too much of a good thing.

CHARACTERS

Standouts for me are all character based. Michael Rooker does a stellar turn as Yondu. The antagonist from the first film becomes a sympathetic character in this outing and when he sacrifices himself in the end it's heartbreaking. We have come to know Yondu and have forgiven him his sins, but the character feels he must atone and does. He does get a remarkable sendoff though, and it does serve to bring the Guardians closer together in the end.

Nebula and Gamora's conflict runs the risk of becoming little more than an excuse for much on-screen fighting, but Zoe Saldana and Karen Gillan bring powerful and grounded performances even through the outrageous make-up both sport.

Dave Bautista is open and direct. Drax is a character with almost no guile and Bautista plays him with a simple charm. His scenes with Mantis particularly are oddly touching. Drax and Mantis (Pom Klementieff) are well suited to each other and their scenes together are awkwardly fun.

And, even though I am no fan of Syvester Stallone, his appearance as Stakar is perfect. It works best because his screen time is limited.

G. W. Thomas

goodness to the movie. His growing relationship with Mantis is more intriguing than any tension between Quill and Gamora.

All that being said, the film wasn't so much about romantic love as it was about fathers and sons. (If you don't believe me, ask yourself, why is Cat Stevens' classic "Father and Son" used to round out the picture musically?)

Peter has the opportunity to address his issues about how Yondo raised him, compare it to a fantastic alternative, then realize in the end just how much he loves that silly blue pirate.

I noticed in the credits that the filmmakers acknowledged the men who created each character and they are all different. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby created Groot in 1960 for a one-shot monster-fest. Drax and Gamora appeared for the first time in 1973, in different comics, the work of Jim Starlin.

Star-Lord was an invention of Steve Engelhart and Steve Gan in 1976 while Rocket Raccoon appeared the same year, the work of Bill Mantlo and Keith Giffen. My point is none of these characters started out together and only later were they brought together. This is unusual. *The Avengers* could make a similar claim, but most of the characters were created by the same two people, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee.

With *Justice League* from DC in the works we will see more of this. We live in a time when characters outlive their creators and go on to new combinations and adventures.

UNIVERSE

I enjoyed that the film expands the *Guardians* universe with the introduction of the Sovereign. They make instantly hateable (is that a word?) bad guys who

Jack Mackenzie

UNIVERSE

The Sovereign were funny with their uptight manners and superior attitude and it was great to see Ben Browder (John Creighton from *Farscape* - a TV series that has had a clear influence on these films*)* even though he is seriously under utilized.

Guardians of the Galaxy Volume 2 measures up to the first film and surpasses it in a lot of ways. It brings the big, cosmic aspect of the Marvel Universe into play in an entertaining way, but never loses sight of its own heart.

A+

▲

G. W. Thomas

aren't really evil, just arrogant.

The feel is old age space opera rather than more superhero/Marvel stuff. I don't mind a little cross over, such as the Infinity Stones, but I'm not interested in an Avengers-Guardians film or anything like that.

Edmond Hamilton helped create Space Opera (along with Jack Williamson, E. E. "Doc" Smith and other 1930s writers) and he also wrote superhero comics for DC, so I can handle both but prefer my Galaxies to be "A Long Time Ago and Far, Far Away…."

B+

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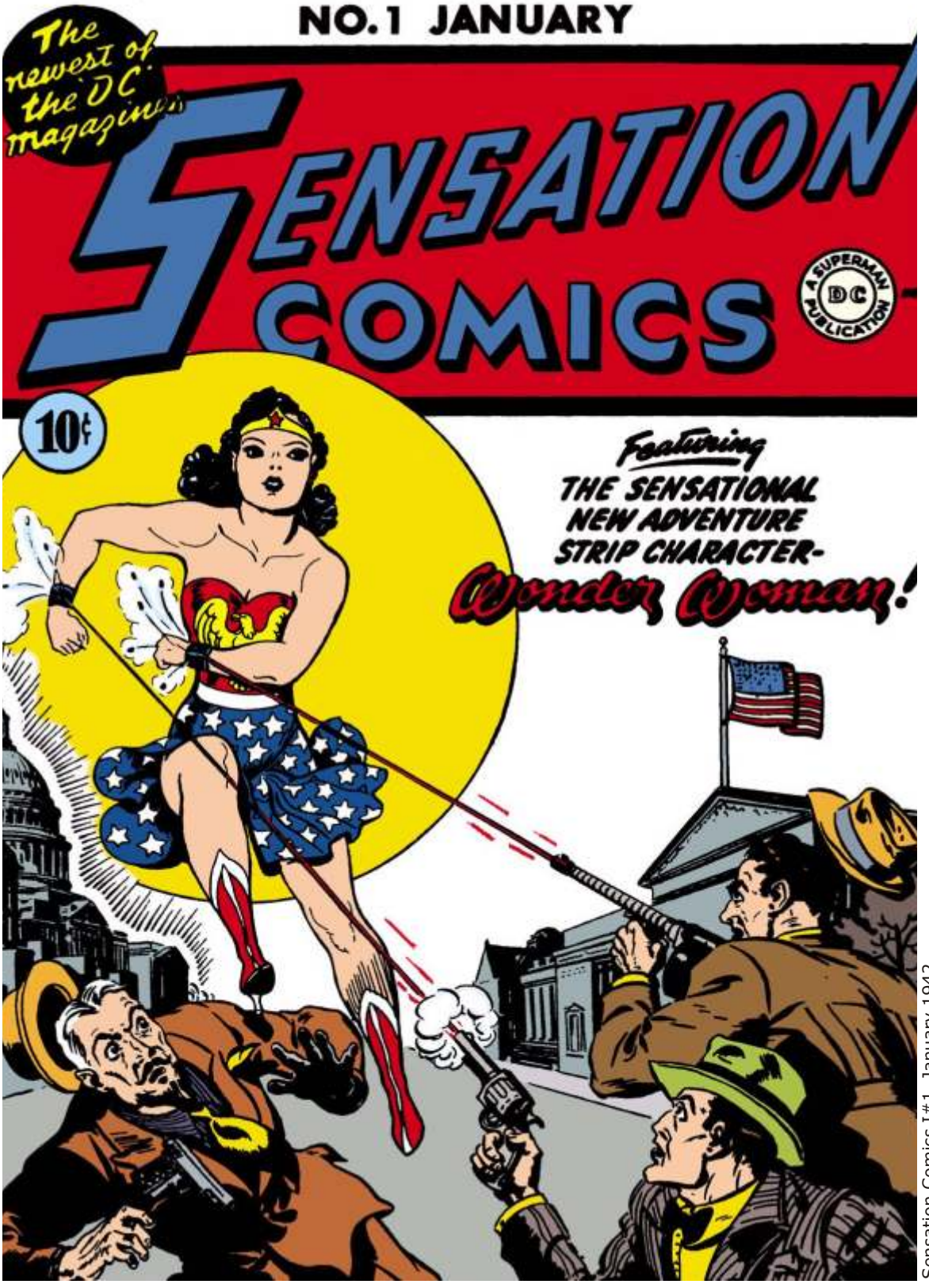


Sensation Comics I#1, January 1942

WONDER WOMAN: Relevant or Ridiculous?

by M. D. Jackson

Is she a positive role model for women and girls or is she just a bit of cheesecake for the boys?

In the world of comic book superheroes, there is the trinity: Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. Superman and Batman have had lengthy movie careers with reboots occasionally. But what of Wonder Woman? Has she been able to stay relevant? And, if so, how?

That superhero trinity was brought to life when Wonder Woman made her big screen debut in last year's *Batman V Superman*. However moviegoers felt about that particular motion picture, despite the great mounds of heaping derision it received during its run in theaters and its subsequent release on home video, one thing most agree on is that the appearance of Wonder Woman, as portrayed by Gal Gadot was one of the few high points. It garnered enough interest to justify a standalone film.

Wonder Woman is now on the big screen and from all indications it is a huge success

.Indeed, early 'women only' screenings of the film have sold out

However successful the film is though, in 2017 audiences will have to decide for themselves whether in the 21st Century the concept of the near seventy year old super hero is still relevant. Does the character speak to the newer generation of young women comic book fans or is she just a ridiculous holdover from a less enlightened time?

Batman and Superman are iconic characters and have changed and morphed over the decades since their first appearances. They have changed to stay fresh for comic book fans in a changing world.

But how successful has that transformation been? The male heroes have become darker, grittier and grimmer, but what about Wonder Woman? Has she been able to stay relevant?

Wonder Woman's Comic Book Origins

Wonder Woman has had an interesting history that few comic book readers are familiar with.

In the early 1940's the DC Comics line was dominated by super-powered male characters. Psychologist William Moulton Marston, the inventor of the polygraph, or lie-detector test, struck upon the idea for a new kind of superhero, one who would triumph not with fists or firepower, but with love. After introducing the idea to comic publisher Max Gaines, Marston, along with his wife Elizabeth, began to develop the hero who would eventually become Wonder Woman.

"Marston, the inventor of the polygraph... struck upon the idea for a new kind of superhero, one who would triumph not with fists... but with love"

Marston was an unconventional figure in the 1940's as was his wife, Elizabeth, whom he considered a model of the unconventional liberated woman. He was also inspired by a former student of his, Olive Byrne, who lived with the couple in a polygamous/poly-amorous relationship. Olive Byrne was the niece of Margaret Sanger, one of the most important feminists of the 20th Century and is today a figure of much controversy.

"Not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength, and power," Marston wrote in 1943. "Not wanting to be girls, they don't want to be tender, submissive, peace-loving as good women are. Women's strong qualities have become despised because of their weakness. The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman."

Marston used a pen name that combined his middle name with that of Gaines to create Charles Moulton. Marston intended to call his character "Suprema", a native of an all-female utopia, who became a crime-fighting U.S. government agent, using her superhuman strength and agility, and her ability to force villains to tell the truth by binding them with her magic lasso. Her appearance, including her heavy silver bracelets (which she used to deflect bullets), was based somewhat on Olive Byrne.

In 2002, Heritage Auctions listed an original Illustration by Harry G. Peter, the first

Harry G. Peters' first sketches of Wonder Woman - Heritage Auctions - 2002

sketches of Wonder Woman, with notes from Marston on the look.

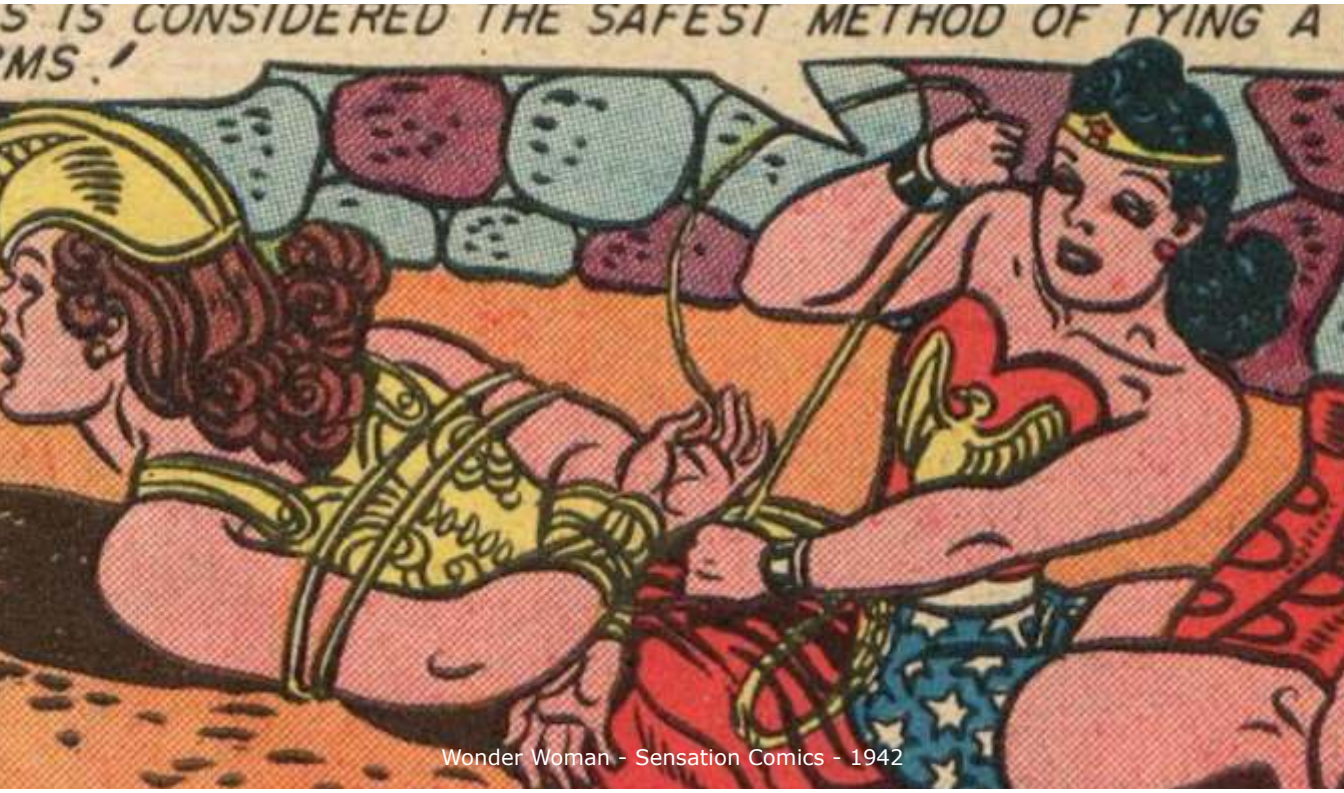
Editor Sheldon Mayer replaced the name "Suprema" with "Wonder Woman". Wonder Woman made her debut in *All-Star Comics* at the end of 1941 and on the cover of a new comic book, *Sensation Comics*, at the beginning of 1942.

Bound to be Controversial

It was never smooth sailing with Marston. Complaints began coming in almost immediately. Marston also had, it seemed, an obsession with bondage. He was extremely specific as to what kind of chains Wonder Woman should be bound with. A lot of Marston's storylines involve Wonder Woman being tied up. "The secret of woman's allure," he once told Gaines, is that "Women enjoy submission—being bound."

Indeed, Marston's early scripts not only depicted Wonder Woman in bondage, but were described by Marston in precise, almost loving detail. For a story about Mars, the God of War, Marston gave Harry Peter elaborate instructions for the panel in which Wonder Woman is taken prisoner:

"Closeup, full length figure of WW. Do some careful chaining here - Mars's men are experts! Put a metal collar on WW with a chain running off from the panel, as though she were chained in the line of prisoners. Have her hands clasped together at her breast with double bands on her wrists, her Amazon bracelets and another set. Between these runs a short chain, about the length of a handcuff chain—this is what compels her to clasp her hands together. Then put another, heavier, larger chain between her wrist bands which



Wonder Woman - Sensation Comics - 1942

hangs in a long loop to just above her knees. At her ankles show a pair of arms and hands, coming from out of the panel, clasping about her ankles. This whole panel will lose its point and spoil the story unless these chains are drawn exactly as described here."

Women in Bondage

Indeed, bondage iconography abounds in the pages of early Wonder Woman comics, as does other quasi-sado-masochistic imagery. Hitting and slapping are endemic to the pages of comic books, but spanking is not usually so, nor is the almost explicit suggestion that the spanking is being enjoyed by the recipient. The early Wonder Woman comics wander very deep into alternate expressions of sexuality.

This is somewhat disturbing in a publication aimed at children and pre-teens.

But this is part and parcel of what Moulton was all about. The sanitized explanation is that the bondage is inspired by early suffragette iconography. Pamphlets, leaflets and posters from the early days of the suffragette movement use the image of women in shackles as a metaphor for the women without the ability to express themselves through participation in the democratic process.

Indeed, Marston himself sells it that way at the beginning. An early draft of his first script explains the "under-meaning" of Wonder Woman's Amazonian origins in ancient Greece, where men had kept women in chains, until they broke free and escaped. "The NEW WOMEN thus freed and strengthened by supporting themselves (on Paradise Island) developed enormous physical and mental power." His comic, he said, was meant to chronicle "a great movement now under way—the growth in the power of women."

However, Marston also had a personal interest in bondage and other practices that can only be described as "kinky".

Marston was into bondage for personal and ideological reasons that he discussed at some length in his theoretical writings. According to Noah Berlatsky, author of the 2014 book *Wonder Woman: Bondage and Feminism in the Marston/Peter Comics*, Marston's interest in bondage was more than just academic. "Marston had a messianic belief in the virtues of bondage. He also clearly thought it was sexy and fun. So, he put lots of bondage in his books because he figured his twelve and under audience would find bondage sexy and fun, and that it would teach them to lovingly submit to the matriarchy. Both boys and girls were supposed to submit to the matriarchy; Marston was very aware of lesbian possibilities."

Max Gaines didn't know any of this when he met Marston in 1940 or else he would never have hired him: he had been looking to avoid controversy, not to court it. Marston and Wonder Woman were pivotal to the creation of what became DC Comics. In 1940, Gaines decided to counter his critics by forming an editorial advisory board and appointing Marston to serve on it.

"Marston had a messianic belief in the virtues of bondage. He also clearly thought it was sexy and fun"

Wonder Woman and Feminism

Although the comic book seemed to Gaines like so much good, clean, super-patriotic fun, special interest groups like the National Organization for Decent Literature did not agree. They put *Sensation Comics* on its blacklist of "Publications Disapproved for Youth" for one reason: "Wonder Woman is not sufficiently dressed."

Because of such criticism Wonder Woman was never allowed to be just a comic book like the other heroes. Gaines was in constant consultation with psychologists regarding Wonder Woman's storylines. Great scrutiny was brought to her every action and to her wardrobe.

That was, sadly, not to change over the seventy year history of the character. Her origins have been revised many times throughout the decades, as has her outfit. With the television series from the 1970's starring Lynda Carter, a good deal of campiness was introduced to the character. Carter was a voluptuous woman. In the Wonder Woman outfit, her assets were on prominent display, often overshadowing the character's other virtues.

And that is part of the problem for Wonder Woman. She is a strong and potent ideal for feminism, but in a bathing suit. The cognitive dissonance of Wonder Woman almost rivals that of the Miss America Pageant where spin doctors try to portray it as a "scholarship program" but one where the contestants are required to participate in swimwear.

Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman - CBS, 1976

Women scholars are not to be judged based on how they look in a bathing suit. Neither should a superhero, but there's the rub. Wonder Woman represents the pinnacle of heroic behavior but also of athleticism and beauty. In that respect she is representative of modern women in the pursuit of that balance. Still, not even her steel bracelets can protect her from society's judgment and, often, scorn.

Changing her costume to something a little less sexist is fraught with controversy. In 2010, after a series of costume experiments that saw her wearing outfits that ranged from ridiculously revealing work-out gear to a punk inspired S&M look, Wonder Woman was finally given a less revealing wardrobe. Long pants (albeit tight like spandex) and a jacket was the new look that more closely resembled street clothing from the time.

Predictably old school fans railed against the change and still others accused the comic creators of pandering to feminists.

Indeed, some readers want Wonder Woman to live up to feminist ideals, while others just want her looking hot in her costume. Some fans want the character to embody the best aspects of the modern woman, while others spend inordinate amounts of time discussing exactly how big her boobs should be.

Representative of a Feminine Ideal?

So what's a Wonder Woman to do? Her latest incarnation has her more closely resembling Xena, Warrior Princess with an outfit that is inspired by ancient Greek armor. She has even taken to carrying a sword and a shield like a proper Greek Goddess should.

Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman - Warner Bros., 2017

Greek Goddess… Miss America… Xena… which role does she play in order to make others happy. Isn't that the dilemma of a woman today? She finds herself having to behave and dress in certain ways to make others (mostly men) happy. That's the irony of Wonder Woman. For a character who is portrayed as being true to herself and to her heroic ideals, she has to, it seems, do an awful lot of pandering to her audience.

Along the way I have to wonder (pardon the pun) is she the representative of a feminine ideal or just a boob show? Is she a positive role model for women and girls or is she just a bit of cheesecake for male comic book readers?

I'd like to think it was the former, but after all this time I still don't think the answer is entirely clear.

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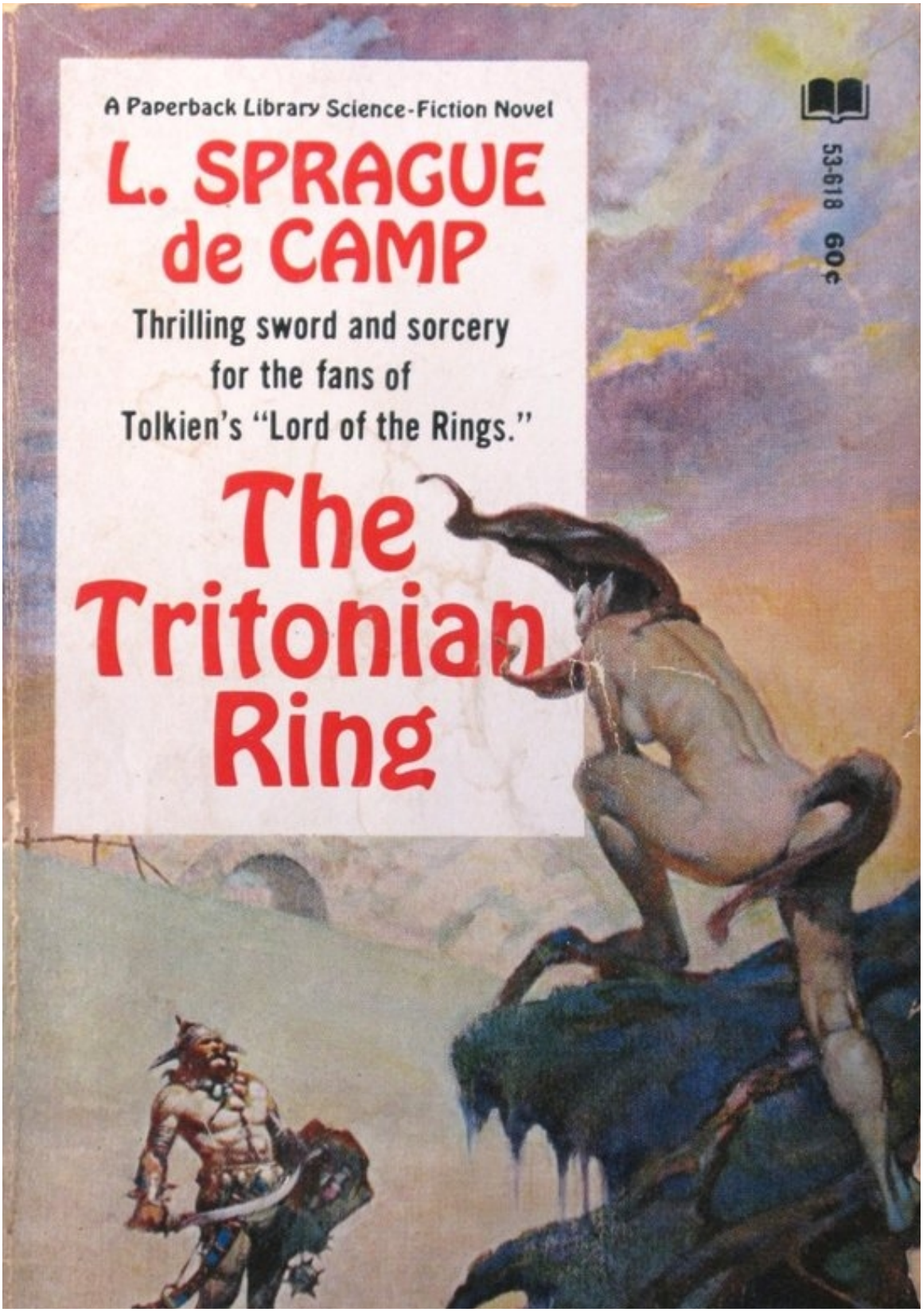


The Tritonian Ring - Cover art by Frank Frazetta

ADVENTURES IN PUSAD or How L. Sprague De Camp Tried to Steer Sword & Sorcery

by G. W. Thomas

In the October 1939 issue of Unknown, editor John W. Campbell published a story called "The Elder Gods" by Don A. Stuart. Though not an especially well-remembered tale, (he co-wrote the piece with an uncredited Arthur J. Burks) it served one purpose splendidly. It set the rules for Campbell's version of Heroic Fantasy. In the story a man named Daron is charged with challenging the gods themselves. The final effect of his quest is humanity breaks with unearthly beings and become rationalists. This was Campbell's ideology and he passed it along to the other Sword & Sorcery writers in *Unknown*. With the exception of Fritz Leiber, who did his own wonderful thing, it was the manifesto of the magazine. Write Fantasy as it were Science Fiction.

Not everyone agreed with Campbell, as Poul Anderson proved in 1951 when he published *The Broken Sword*, a novel set in a Scandinavian world with elves and trolls. (Later in 1953, he did followed Campbell's ideas in *Three Hearts & Three Lions*, but oh well…) Another of Campbell's acolytes was L. Sprague de Camp who would win Fantasy fame as the editor and pasticher of Robert E. Howard's Conan. But while Sprague was working to bring more Conan to the masses he also penned the novel *The Tritonian Ring* and with it he tried to shape the future of Sword & Sorcery.

Now if Robert E. Howard is the Homer of Sword & Sorcery then L. Sprague de Camp is the Ovid. De Camp's first forays into humorous Fantasy were the Harold Shea stories with Fletcher Pratt. These parodies of ancient mythologies are a counter point to Sword & Sorcery, just as Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* was to Arthuriana. To do this, de Camp fell back on the ideas of John W. Campbell's dictum that Magic is just Science misunderstood. The novel first appeared in *Two Complete Science Adventure Books* (Winter 1951) then in hard cover in 1953. This sprawling, episodic novel stars Vakar of Lorsk, the second son of King Zhabutir and future heir to the throne. Vakar is sent on a quest to find the one thing the gods fear most for the Deities plan the destruction of Lorsk. (Sound familiar?) Chapter by chapter Vakar visits all the different countries of the Pusadian map, encountering weird characters and monsters, a satyr woman with lusty tastes, evil sorcerers, and finally about halfway through the book discovers the secret, then goes in search of the Tritonian Ring, made from the metal of a meteorite. Vakar fails to get the ring so he seeks out the original stone from which the metal was taken and has a sword made from it. And with the only iron sword in the world he returns home to single-handedly stop the invading army with their Medusas, lizard creatures able to freeze people solid. In the end, he wins out but loses the throne to his brother, Kuros, but doesn't care for he has always preferred to live with Queen Porfia and study philosophy in Ogugia anyway.

The tone of *The Tritonian Ring* is odd, especially in 1951. It is sexist but it isn't. It is violent and cruel but it's funny. It is satirical but isn't a parody. What de Camp penned was a quest worthy of Odysseus, filled with a consistent universe, one that sees the end of Magic and the beginning of Science. His writing about sword fighting, ships, horsemanship and battle formations is faultless, having a wide knowledge of all these things from his historical non-fiction, but the whole thing feels more like Science Fiction than good Sword & Sorcery. It is almost an un-Fantasy. And that may have been the point. Life is cruel but also funny, people are weak but strong and Fantasy should sometimes be more realistic and less Howardian.

Which makes the idea that some critics hold, that the novel is based on Robert E. Howard's *The Hour of the Dragon*, the only full Conan novel, hard to imagine. Personally, I don't see it. If anything, *The Tritonian Ring* is a reaction to *The Hour of the Dragon*, after de Camp read it when the editors sent a copy to Fletcher Pratt. De Camp liked Sword & Sorcery but wanted to change its direction, a feat I think he failed in if the legacy of writers like John Jakes, Roger Zelazny and Lin Carter are any proof.

This novel was followed by seven stories written between 1951 to 1977. None of these challenge the achievement *The Tritionian Ring,* but each has its moments. The stories that followed were:

"The Eye of Tandyla" (*Fantastic Adventures*, May 1951) features a king's pet wizard, Derezong Taash and his manservant, Zhamel Seh, who must steal a gem called the Eye of Tandyla from a giant statue in Lotri. Once they have it, they realize they have been duped and the Lotrians won't allow them to put it back. Zhamel Seh manages to return the stone but

Science Adventure Books Winter 1951 art by Herman Vestal

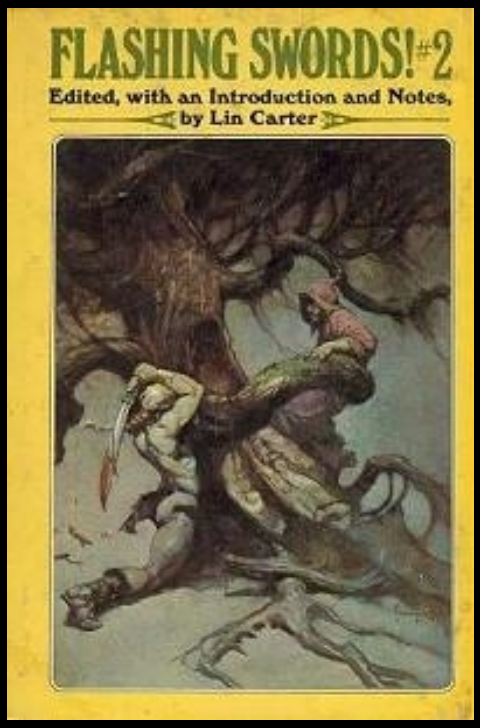
Unknown October 1939 artwork by M. Isipl

the duo don't want to go back empty handed to the king. Instead, they go to Kelk and steal a second stone that looks like the Eye. Only after the king's concubine attempts to kill them all with the gem does the truth come out.

"The Owl and the Ape" (*Imagination Stories of Science and Fantasy*, November 1951) is the first tale of Gezun, who will appear in four other tales. The fourteen year-old Gezun is also a Lorskan like Vakar, a minor noble kidnapped and sold into slavery. His master is Sancheth Sar, an old wizard who sends Gezun to an auction of mystical items. The boy successfully bids for a scroll that contains a spell that will stall the sinking of Pusad. Sancheth Sar plans to use it to extort money from the Pusadian kings. Gezun is set upon by rogues but kills them both. He even resists the wiles of a sexy enchantress. He only loses the scroll at the very end, though still winning his prize, a ring of star metal that protects him from magic.

"The Stronger Spell" (*Fantasy Fiction*, November 1953) features a contest between a druid and a magician and the bystanders such as Suar Peial, wandering bard. The druid is Ghw Gleohk, a Kelt armed with a new kind of magical weapon, a tube that shoots lead balls with a strange black powder. He takes on Semkaf, a wizard who can summon the god Apepis. The Kelt is swallowed by the invisible snake while the wizard's apprentice is shot dead. In the end only Suar and his blacksmith friend, Midawan, escape. The smithy throws the magic tube in the sea, happy that his armour-making business will be safe from its plate-piercing bullets.

"The Hungry Hercynian" (*Universe Science Fiction*, December 1953) is kind of a *Road to Oz* for the series, in that most of the characters from the stories appear together. Gezun



Flashing Swords 2 Artwork by Frank Frazettal

Cover for Weirdbook12 Artwork by Stephen Fabian

steals Yorida, a beautiful lass who was purchased by Derezong Taash, but who Lord Noish intends to be feed to the cannibalistic Hercynian wizard, Zyc. Another wizard, Bokarri, acts as a go-between and ends up with most of the treasure while Gezun seems to lose out in this tale of double-crosses. It is actually the social climber Noish who fares ill, ending up as a cannibal's dinner.

"Ka the Appalling" (*Fantastic Universe*, August 1958) is a tale of how Gezun meets his wife, Ro. Gezun falls under the power of the wizard Ugaph after killing a cat in Typhon. Gezun works for the wizard, who makes his wealth by robbing temples. Ugaph's daughter, Ro, has the job to catch bats to feed the imps that do the stealing. When this venture fails, Gezun gives the wizard the idea of opening his own temple for the make-believe god, Ka the Appalling. Now a success, Ugaph decides to sacrifice Gezun on the temple's altar but an unexpected miracle saves Gezun. He flees with Ro.

"The Rug and the Bull" (*Flashing Swords* #2, 1974) sees Gezun and Ro, now married and with kids, come to Torretuish with the idea of making flying carpets. These magical rides are meant for the king to use with his armies. Gezun meets up with Bokarri again and the two of them start the carpet venture. The only problem is the carters realize they are going to be driven out of business and bribe Bokarri to destroy his partner. He does this by transferring Gezun's soul into a bull on the day of the big bull-fight. Gezun, of course, acts like a man, not a bull and trounces the bullfighters, even attacks the king and steals his crown. When the spell wears off, Gezun and family leave with the crown for seed money in their next venture.

"The Stone of the Witch Queen" (*Weirdbook* #12, Fall 1977) is an earlier tale of Gezun,

before his marriage. He steals a magic broach from Plotia and plans to sell it back to the original owner, Queen Bathyllis. On the road, he partners up with Aristax, a scholar, and together they figure out a way to sell the stone back to the queen without being killed or betrayed. The plan fails and Gezun loses the stone in a fight with Plotia's soldiers (who have been tracking him), a gorilla and the witch queen herself. The dissatisfying ending may have been the reason this story appeared in a small press magazine.

Heroic Fantasy as a genre is usually based on a hero defeating a monster. This classic "plot" (using the word in the Christopher Booker sense here) culminates in the hero being heroic and fighting at great cost, be it "Beowulf" or Conan in "The Queen of the Black Coast". In video game terms, this would be the "boss fight".

L. Sprague de Camp in the majority of his Pusad tales does not follow this convention. (One exception is Vakar's defeat of the Medusas at the end of *The Tritionian Ring*.) His Fantasy is a based more upon the idea of the Science Fiction puzzle story. Science Fiction under John W. Campbell was not about space battles or gadgets, but ideas that were often expressed almost like Mystery stories. For example, "A Can of Paint" by A. E. van Vogt (*Astounding Science Fiction*, September 1944) has an astronaut dosed in Venusian paint. The removal of the paint is an intelligence test with the prize being humans will be allowed to visit the planet. The solution is never a shoot-out with pirates or a desperate fight with aliens but a deadly puzzle with the answer lying in Science. It is this type of plot de Camp uses. His hero (who is almost always unheroic) must figure out a clever trick to avoid a magical version of the SF puzzle. When his heroes resort to violence as Gezun must in "The Owl and the Ape", it is brutal, cruel and naturalistic. There is no heroic daring-do or valiant questing. Gezun stabs his opponent, runs away and waits for him to bleed to death. Conan would blanch at such cowardice. De Camp does not.

This is the core of the Pusadian series, brain over brawn. Even though the series began in 1951, nine years after Campbell's *Unknown Worlds* folded, these tales would have been quite at home in those pages, alongside Norvell W. Page's Wan Tengri novels or Jack Williamson's *The Reign of Wizardry*.

These kinds of humorous Fantasy stories, though disappointing to true Heroic Fantasy fans such as myself, have fans of their own. The 1970s embraced this style in works like Craig Gardner Shaw's Ebenuzum, Terry Pratchett's Discworld and Robert Asprin's *Myth Adventures*. (Even Piers Anthony's parody Xanth novels owe a debt to de Camp, though perhaps more to his Harold Shea novels.) De Camp himself would produce another series with the same feel in the Novaria novels, written between 1968 and 1985.

As I said at the beginning, de Camp is not the valour-slinging Homer of Fantasy, but the sharp-tongued Ovid who gave us *The Metamorphosis*. De Camp in this same vein does not want to tell valorous tales but point out the very real foibles and nastiness of humanity. (If he had been a writer of Westerns he would have been sure to point out the road apples in the street and the dance hall girl's missing teeth.) Groff Conklin said in *Galaxy Magazine* of *The Tritonian Ring*: "..."in the Conan tradition in every sense of the word, though better written." If you prefer warts to wonders then he may be right. I don't and I doubt the legions of Conan fans do either.

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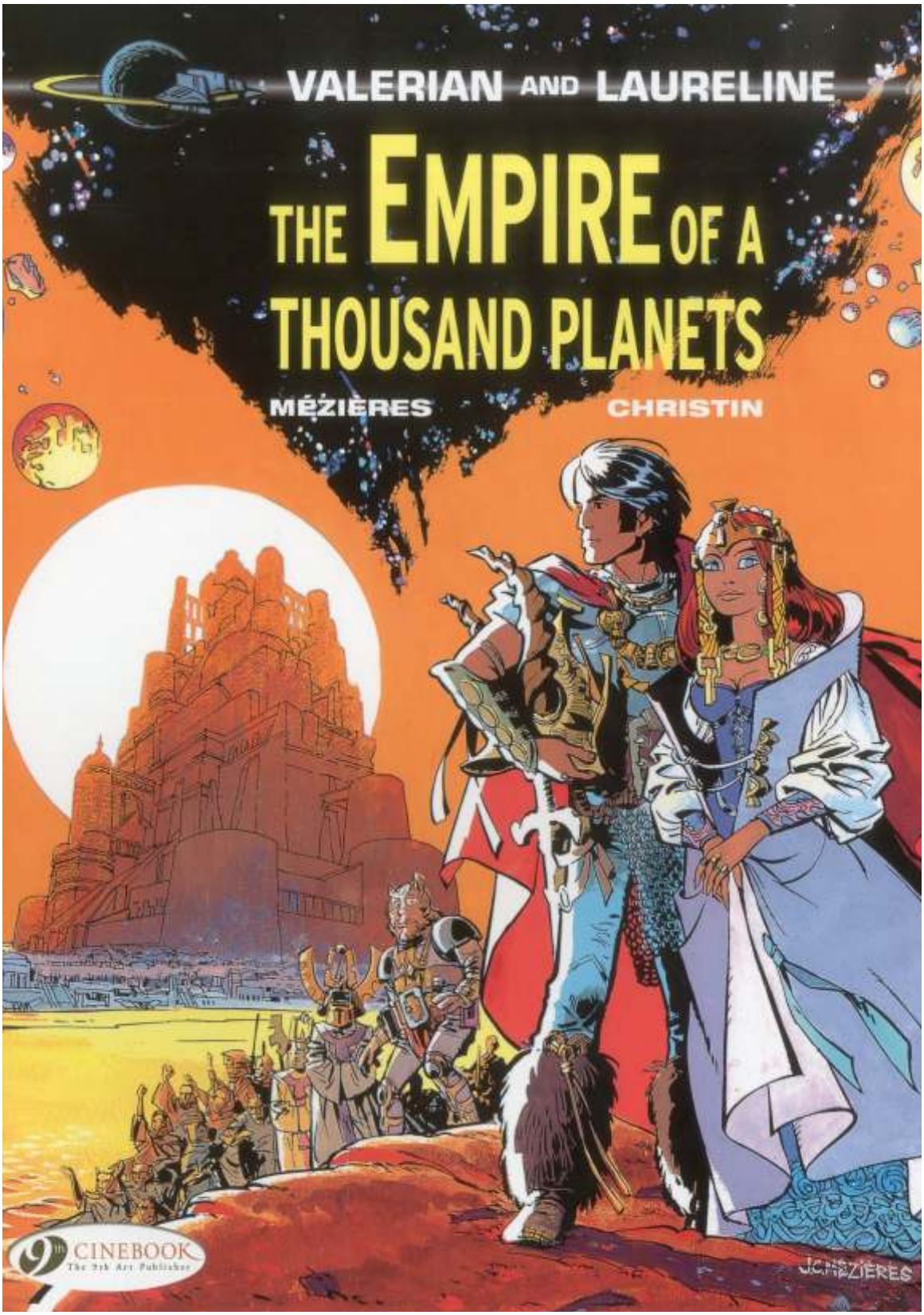


English edition of Pierre Christin and Jean-Claude Mézières' *Empire of a Thousand Planets*

VALERIAN: Spatio-Temporal Agent

by M. D. Jackson

Before *Star Wars, Bladerunner* and *The Fifth Element* the sci-fi future had already been imagined

When French artist Jean-Claude Mézières saw the *Star Wars* films for the first time he admitted that he was "dazzled, jealous... and furious!". Why? Because before *Star Wars* was released, ten years before, in fact, Mézières along with writer Pierre Christin had created a comic strip for the French bande dessinée magazine, *Pilote,* called "Valerian et Laureline". The series focused on the adventures of the dark-haired Valérian, a spatio-temporal agent, and his redheaded female colleague, Laureline, as they travel the universe through space and time. Later the adventures were collected into albums and published by the French company Dargaud.

Even the most casual of glances over the pages of these comic strips will tell you why Mézières had reason to be furious with George Lucas's creation. Many of the most iconic images from the *Star Wars* films can easily be found to have been inspired by the work that Mézières put into *Valerian*. Indeed, according to one source the design director for 1999's

Star Wars: The Phantom Menace, Doug Chiang, kept a set of *Valerian* comics in his library.

But it doesn't end with *Star Wars*. Valerian's adventures and Mézières' artwork has similarly "inspired" production designers ranging from 1982's *Conan the Barbarian* to 1996's *Independence Day*. Christin and Mézières have inspired other artists and many readers with their groundbreaking work on the series. Among the artists that they inspired was a French filmmaker named Luc Besson.

More about him later

Science Fiction Spectacle

Back in 1967, creating a Science Fiction spectacle for the movies was no easy task. Even *2001: A Space Odyssey* was two years away from making its debut. Few had the vision or the budget to create anything close to what Christin and Mézières were creating for the comic books.

Valérian is a classical hero, kind-hearted, strong and brave who follows the orders of his superiors even if he feels, deep down that it is the wrong thing to do. On the other hand, his

"Valérian is a classical hero,... Laureline combines intelligence, determination and independence with sex-appeal."

partner Laureline combines her superior intelligence, determination and independence with sex appeal.

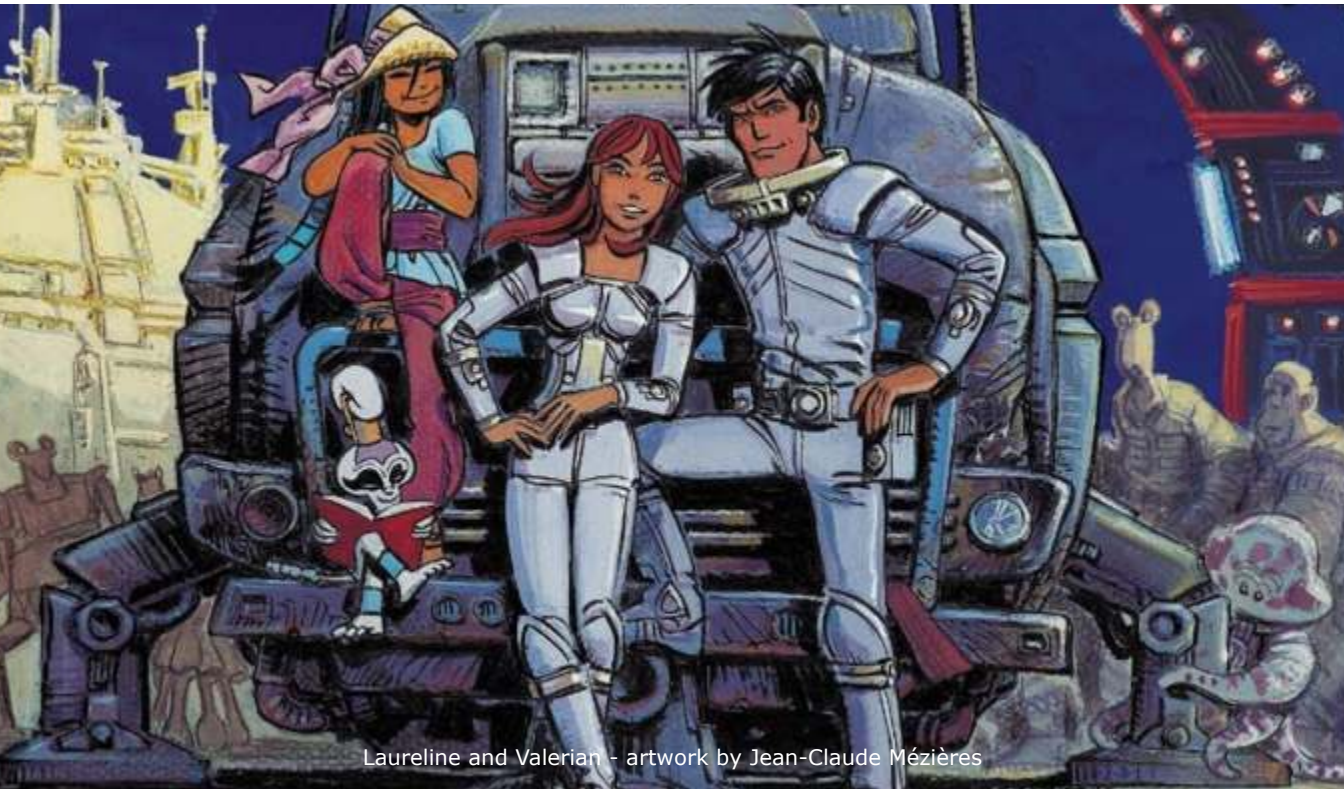
Influenced by classic literary Science Fiction, the series mixes space opera with time travel plots. Christin's scripts are noted for their humor, complexity and strongly humanist and left wing liberal political ideas while Mézières' art is characterized by its vivid depictions of the alien worlds and species Valérian and Laureline encounter on their adventures.

Valerian and Laureline

The original setting for the series was the 28th Century. Humanity has discovered the means of traveling instantaneously through time and space. The capital of Earth, Galaxity, is the center of the vast Terran Galactic Empire. Earth itself has become a virtual utopia with most of the population living a life of leisure in a virtual reality dream-state ruled by the benign Technocrats of the First Circle. The Spatio-Temporal Service protects the planets of the Terran Empire and guards against temporal paradoxes caused by rogue time-travelers. Valérian and Laureline are two such spatio-temporal agents.

Valérian was born on Earth, in Galaxity. He joined the Spatio-Temporal Service in the year 2713. He has been trained to think that Galaxity is always right – even when he receives orders that go against his own morals. He will, reluctantly, follow them. He much prefers to be a man of action than sitting around pondering what course to take next. The early stories present Valérian as a typical square-jawed hero figure, who is strong and dependable

Laureline is a peasant girl from 11th Century France. In the debut adventure, "Bad Dreams", she rescues Valérian from the enchanted Forest of Arelaune. When she



Laureline and Valerian - artwork by Jean-Claude Mézières

accidentally discovers Valérian is a time-traveler, he is forced to bring her back with him to Galaxity where she is trained as a Spatio-Temporal Agent and assigned as his partner.

(Incidentally, the name "Laureline" was invented by Mézières and Christin who were seeking a name that would sound "medieval" and "soft". The name has proven popular and there are now several thousand women in France named Laureline, the first one born in 1968 just a year after the publication of “Bad Dreams”. There have also been variations such as "Loreline" and "Laurelyne")

However, since the end of the story “The Wrath of Hypsis” (“Les Foudres d'Hypsis”), in which Galaxity disappears from space-time as a result of a temporal paradox, the pair have become freelance trouble-shooters traveling through space and time offering their services to anyone willing to hire them while also searching for their lost home.

In the first two albums Valérian travels through time in a two-seater device, the XB27, which transports him to the various relay stations that Galaxity has hidden throughout time. In subsequent stories, Valérian and Laureline use the saucer-shaped astroship, XB982 (which made its debut appearance in 1969 in the short story “The Great Collector” (“Le Grand Collectionneur”). The astroship is able to travel anywhere using a spatio-temporal jump, a sort of hyperspace drive enabling near-instant transportation anywhere in space and time.

The initial albums were generally straightforward good versus evil adventure stories that employed a great many well-worn clichés. However, thanks to Pierre Christin's interests in politics, sociology and ethnology, as the series progressed the situations typically arose from misunderstandings or ideological differences between various groups


Valerian - artwork by Jean-Claude Mézières

that could be resolved through reason and perseverance. The core theme of the stories is an optimistic liberal humanism: the adventures are not about defeating enemies but about exploring, facing challenges, and celebrating diversity. Thus, according to academic John Dean, Christin "as a rule works into his narratives political, environmental and feminist concerns – thereby showing social ills are universal, no matter on what planet you land".

Another concept that developed was Galaxity as a proxy for Western democracy; contrary to its benign self-image it is actually imperialistic and prone to corruption.

Publishing History

Childhood friends Jean-Claude Mézières and Pierre Christin had previously collaborated on the comic strip “Le Rhum du Punch” (“Rum Punch”) in 1966 while both were living and working in the United States. Upon their return to France, they initially intended to create a Western strip, but with the genre already well represented in French comics thanks to *Lucky Luke, Blueberry* and *Jerry Spring*. Christin instead proposed that they turn their hand to Science Fiction, a genre he felt was unrepresented in French comics at the time. The decision to work in the Science Fiction genre was also influenced by the political climate in France at the time; Mézières and Christin saw Valérian as a "backdoor" means to react against the prevailing doctrine of Gaullism. Although Science Fiction was not a favorite of *Pilote* editor, René Goscinny, he wanted his magazine to be diverse and innovative and so agreed to commission *Valérian.*

There had been French Science Fiction comics before *Valérian* such as Kline's *Kaza the*

Martian (a childhood favorite of Mézières), Roger Lecureux and Raymond Poivet's *Les Pionniers de l'Espérance* (*The Pioneers of Hope*) and Jean-Claude Forest's *Barbarella*.

Barbarella is famous for its strong, female, titular character, but Christin has denied any influence on the character of Laureline stating that she was inspired by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* as well as the burgeoning feminist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, contemporary reviews of the early stories by Jean-Pierre Andrevon describe the books as "Forestian". Mézières and Christin were also heavily influenced by literary Science Fiction such as that by Isaac Asimov (especially *The End of Eternity*), Jack Vance (especially *The Blue World*), and John Brunner. Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier have also suggested that Poul Anderson's *Time Patrol* books, about an official organization dedicated to protecting time from interference, are a major influence on the series.

Christin has also cited the whodunit genre—notably novels by Georges Simenon and Ed McBain—as an influence on Valérian since they taught him, as a writer, that all characters in a narrative must be seen to have motivations.

Mézières' drawings in the early albums were influenced by such "comic-dynamic" artists as Morris (*Lucky Luke*), André Franquin (*Spirou et Fantasio*) and Jack Davis (*Mad* magazine), leading Jean-Pierre Andrevon to refer to *Valérian* as "a kind of Lucky Luke of space-time". As the series progressed, Mézières developed a more realistic style, akin to that of Jijé, though in more recent albums he has returned to the more cartoonish style of the earlier stories.

Award Winning comic book

Valérian and its creators have also received recognition through a number of prestigious awards. Most notably, in 1984, Jean-Claude Mézières was honored with the Grand Prix de la ville d'Angoulême for his comics work, including *Valérian*. Mézières and Christin also received a European Science Fiction Society award for *Valérian* in 1987 and the album *Hostages of the Ultralum* (*Otages de l'Ultralum*) won a Tournesal award, given to the comic that best reflects the ideals of the Green Party, at the 1997 Angoulême International Comics Festival. The encyclopedia of the alien creatures found in the *Valérian universe Les Habitants du Ciel: Atlas Cosmique de Valérian et Laureline* (*The Inhabitants of the Sky: The Cosmic Atlas of Valerian and Laureline*) received a special mention by the jury at the 1992 Angoulême International Comics Festival in the Prix Jeunesse 9–12 ans (Youth Prize 9–12 years) category.

Valérian has also been nominated for a Haxtur Award in 1995 for *The Circles of Power* and for a Harvey Award in 2005 for *The New Future Trilogy*, an English-language compilation of three of the albums.

Legacy

Valérian's arrival on the French comics scene was contemporaneous with the debuts of other notable French Science Fiction strips including *Luc Orient* by Greg and Eddy Paape and *Lone Sloane* by Philippe Druillet. The success of these strips would eventually lead to the creation of *Métal Hurlant*, the highly influential French comics magazine dedicated to Science Fiction.

Laureline and Valerian - artwork by Jean-Claude Mézières

The influence of *Valérian* has been noticed in such strips as *Dani Futuro* (es; de; it) (by Víctor Mora and Carlos Giménez) and *Gigantik* (by Mora and José Maria Cardona). The visual style of *Valérian* has also influenced some American comics artists, notably Walt Simonson and Gil Kane. Sometimes the impact of *Valérian* has gone beyond mere influence; following a complaint by Mézières, the artist Angus McKie admitted that several panels of his strip *So Beautiful and So Dangerous* were copied from *Ambassador of the Shadows*.

Influence on Science Fiction cinema

Outside of comics, the *Valérian* series has been particularly influential on Science Fiction and Fantasy film.

Just as Jean Claude Mézières recognized the debt Lucas owed to *Valerian*, several commentators, such as Kim Thompson of *The Comics Journal*, film critic Jean-Philippe Guerand and the newspaper *Libération*, have also noted the similarities between the *Valérian* albums and the *Star Wars* film series. Both series are noted for the "lived-in" look given to their various settings and for the diverse alien creatures they feature.

Valérian and Laureline's spaceship directly inspired *Star Wars*' Millennium Falcon. There is a scene in one of the books, *There's No Time Like the Present* where Valerian escapes by falling into a laundry washing vat, exits through a portal at the bottom of the vat, and falls out of a hole at the bottom of the space station hanging from a sheet which gets transmuted into he scene from *The Empire Strikes Back* where Luke Skywalker escapes

Valerian`s strong influence on *Star Wars* cannot be denied

Darth Vader by falling down a chasm, goes through a vent, and falls out of Cloud City hanging from an antenna.

There is a scene in *Empire of a Thousand Planets* (*L'Empire des Mille Planètes*) where Valérian is encased in a liquid plastic that is almost exactly duplicated in *The Empire Strikes Back* where Han Solo is encased in carbonite. There is a slave-girl costume worn by Laureline in *World Without Stars* that is echoed in Princess Leia's infamous 'Slave Leia' outfit from *Return of the Jedi.*

Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets

And it goes on. After Mézières saw *Star Wars* and had his moment of jealousy and fury, he produced an illustration for *Pilote* magazine in 1983 depicting the *Star Wars* characters Luke Skywalker and Leia Organa meeting Valérian and Laureline in a bar surrounded by a bestiary of alien creatures typical of that seen in both series. "Fancy meeting you here!" says Leia. "Oh, we've been hanging around here for a long time!" retorts Laureline.

Mézières has also worked as a production designer for films, many of which never got made. But in 1991 Mézières began work producing concept art for the director Luc Besson for his film *The Fifth Element*. When the project stalled and Besson moved on to work on the film *Léon* in 1994, Mézières returned to *Valérian* for the album *The Circles of Power* (*Les Cercles du Pouvoir*). This featured a character, S'Traks, who drove a flying taxi around a great metropolis on the planet Rubanis.

Mézières' images come to life in Luc Besson's film

Mézières sent a copy of the album to Besson who was inspired to change the background of Korben Dallas, the lead character of *The Fifth Element*, from a worker in a rocketship factory to that of a taxi driver who flies his cab around a Rubanis-inspired futuristic New York City. Mézières produced further concept drawings for Besson, including flying taxicabs. He also re-used certain aspects of the design of the space liner seen in the 1988 Valérian album *On the Frontiers* for the Fhloston Paradise liner seen in second half of the film.

The Fifth Element was finally completed and released in 1997. Although Besson has claimed that he first came up with the idea for the film at the age of 16, which would predate many of the Valerian stories, the inspiration of Valerian on Besson cannot be understated.

At New York Comic Con in 2016 Luc Besson told audiences of his love for the *Valerian* strip which he discovered in the pages of *Pilote* as a young man.

"I was living on the countryside and when I opened my window, I saw only cows. Believe me, I want to escape," he said. "Then on every Wednesday you have *Valerian and Laureline*, like 'Yeah!' Reading those stories was like building your imagination, your sense of beauty. It's important. It's almost your main food when you are 10 years old. Probably the first woman I fell in love was Laureline when I was 10. So you always have that in your mind. But to be able to think, 'One day I should make a film about it,' that comes way, way later."

Well, "way later" is now.

The influence of Valerian was notable with Besson's *The Fifth Element*, particularly as

Dane Dehaan as Valerian and Cara Delevingne as Laurenine in Luc Besson's film

Mezieres was a production designer for that film

Besson reveals that Mezieres playfully needled him about an adaptation while working as a design consultant on *The Fifth Element*. "He's the one who said, "Why don't you do *Valerian* rather than this fucking *Fifth Element*? At the time, to be honest, you couldn't make it. There are five or six [human] characters and all the rest are aliens. The technology was not ready. You really had to wait until Avatar to really start to think, "Oh, okay, now imagination is the limit. Now we can do everything."

And now Christen and Mezieres' creation is about to be brought to the big screen by Besson. The hints, the inspirations, the downright rip-offs that have been happening since *Star Wars* are finally culminating in the seminal work being brought before a mass audience.

And how does that sit with Jean-Claude Mézières? Does it ameliorate the feelings of jealousy and fury he felt so long ago?

The 78-year-old artist is delighted to see his creations on screen. "My own feeling is I'm not betrayed. The thing is, it's very important that the base is the same," Mezieres says. "I think a good comic book should bring ideas to its readers and not to tell everything. So it's an excellent surprise."

Valerian and The City of a Thousand Planets, is the culmination of lifelong dreams for both Besson and Mézières.

The film opens this summer worldwide

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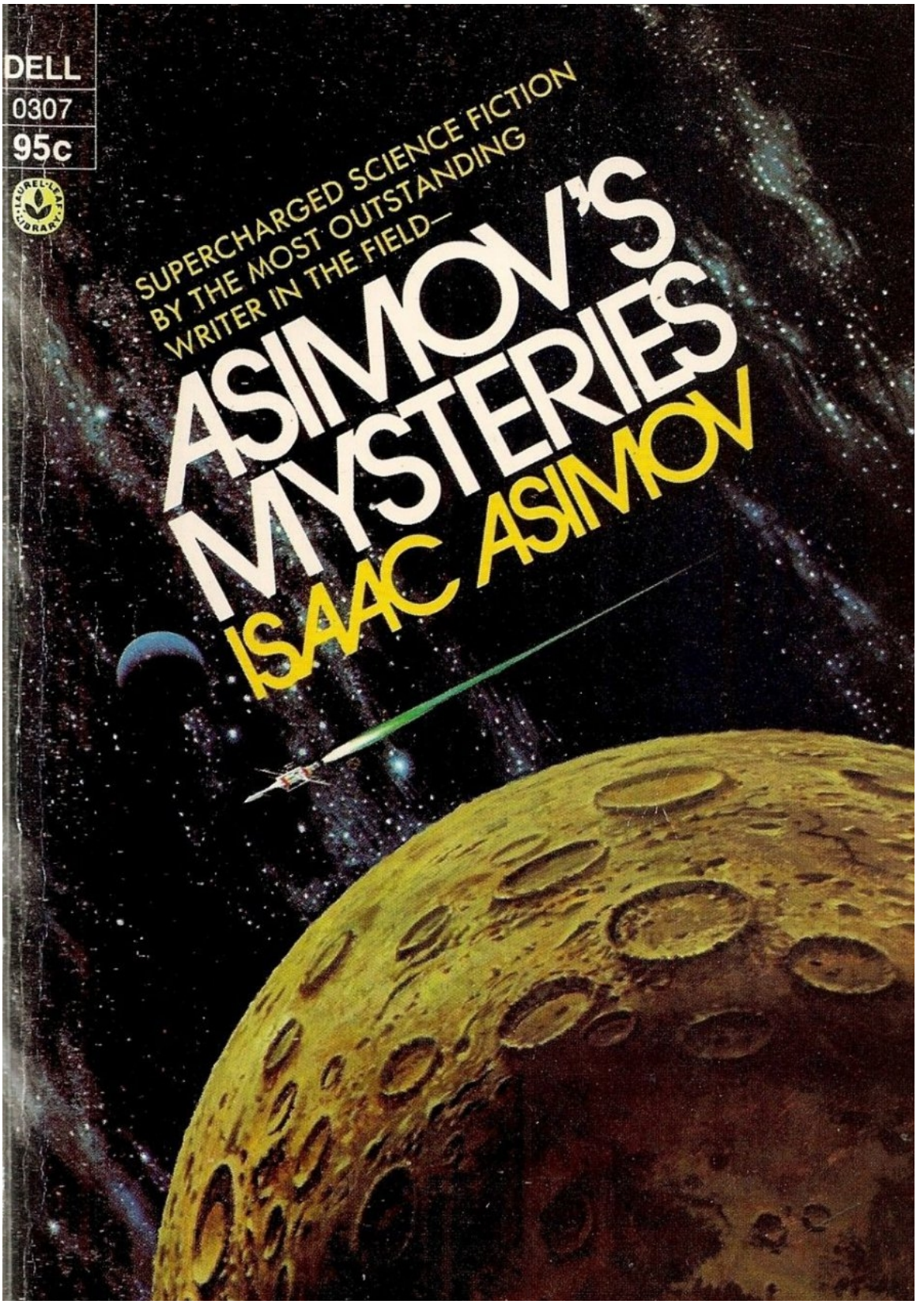
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ISAAC ASIMOV

I ROBOT: The Science Fiction Mysteries of Isaac Asimov

by G. W. Thomas

Asimov invented the true science fiction mystery genre and then spent decades perfecting it

With the release of *I Robot* in 2004, we once again had an opportunity to see Isaac Asimov's vision of a world of robots come to life. His last film was the excellent *Bicentennial Man*, which did poorly at the box office. *I Robot* seems to have done better, largely because of the presence of Will Smith, who was one of the films producers, and a whole lot more action. But is *I Robot* truly an Asimovian film? More particularly, is it an Asimovian Science Fiction mystery?

Isaac Asimov has many claims to fame. One of the best known Science Fiction writers ever, he is the author of the famous Foundation series, the Robot series and the story

"Nightfall". If that weren't enough, he wrote hundreds of books, many not Science Fiction. He wrote a mystery novel, juvenile non-fiction, adult non-fiction, hard science and even a junior Science Fiction series, Lucky Starr.

But in 1953, Asimov did something nobody had done before. He wrote the first true Science Fiction Mystery. "One would think that Science Fiction would blend easily with the mystery. Science itself is so nearly a Mystery and the research scientist so nearly a Sherlock Holmes…R. Austin Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke is an example of a well-known and successful (fictional) scientist-detective." Despite this no one had done it well before Asimov.

Science Fiction writers had borrowed from the Mystery genre before 1953 but nobody had ever decided to write a Science Fiction story that played fair by the rules of the genre. Authors who tried include Robert Leslie Bellem, Mickey Spillane and Robert Bloch. Asimov outlines the problems for this task in his introduction to *Asimov's Mysteries* (1968).

> *"Back in the late 1940's, this was finally explained to me. I was told that "by its very nature" Science Fiction would not play fair with the reader. In a Science Fiction story, the detective could say, "But as you know, Watson, ever since 2175, when all Spaniards learned to speak French, Spanish has been a dead language. How came Juan Lopez, then, to speak those significant words in Spanish.*
>
> *Or else, he could have his detective whip out an odd device and say, "as you know, Watson, my pocket-frannistan is perfectly capable of detecting the hidden jewel in a trice."*

Asimov also points out that a Science Fiction mystery must be more than a Mystery with science in it. The author must extrapolate something from the science, even if it is only the background. In other words: the story should not be possible in the usual world with the Science Fictional elements taken out. A good example of this type of story is Asimov's own "What's In a Name?" from *The Saint Detective Magazine*, June 1956, where it appeared as "Death of a Honey-Blonde". He includes it (with apologies) in *Asimov's Mysteries* even though it's only a "science" mystery not a "Science Fiction" mystery.

To prove the nay-sayers wrong he wrote *The Caves of Steel* in 1953, a Science Fiction novel that was also a mystery. The book features two unlikely detectives: Lije Bailey, a middle-aged denizen of an Earth that no longer lives out-of-doors. The cities of Earth have become a warren from which the people never leave. The Spacers are the race that live on the Outer Worlds, few and mortally afraid of infectious disease.

Asimov describes how the novel came to be in his 1983 reprint introduction : *The Caves of Steel* is a traditional murder mystery with a detective in Lije Baley. Like the awful buddy films of the last thirty years, Baley is saddled with a partner, a robot partner, R. Daneel Olivaw. The two must find the killer of a prominent Spacer or have Earth's relations with the Outer Worlds destroyed just when they are crucial to Earth's survival. The book does a great job of showing how humans can dwell in crowded, subterranean cities, a condition Asimov liked himself.

Having proven himself in a novel, Asimov created another detective to rival Bailey and R. Daneel Olivaw. Using the TBI (or Terrestrial Bureau of Investigations) mentioned in *The Caves of Steel* as a springboard, Asimov created the honorable policeman, H. Seton Davenport , who like Inspector Lestrade must resort to his own Sherlock Holmes. This

The Caves of Steel - Artwork by Michael Whelan

detective genius is Dr. Wendell Urth, one of the world's foremost extraologists. Ironically, Urth fears travel of any kind except walking, and in the tradition of Nero Wolfe, solves his mysteries from the comfort of his own home.

Professor Urth's appearance is hardly one to inspire fear in criminals: "The man who owned the room had a large round face on a stumpy round body. He moved quickly about on his short legs, jerking his head as he spoke until his thick glasses all but bounced off the thoroughly inconspicuous nubbin that served in the office of nose. His thick-lidded, somewhat protruberant eyes gleamed in myopic good nature at them all..."

Urth's first appearance is "The Singing Bell" (*The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* , January 1955). The story is a murder mystery set on the moon. Louis Peyton, a criminal, double-crosses his partner, killing him for a fortune in singing bells, strange moon stones that hum beautifully when polished. Peyton is devious in that he has no alibi, only a set holiday from which he never wavers. The T. B. I. knows he is guilty but can't shake him. They can use a psychoprobe on him but will not do so unless they have some evidence to warrant the invasion of his rights. Urth unravels Peyton's deceit by remembering the effects of zero gravity on the human body.

Urth would make three more appearances in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. The next two would follow quickly after "The Singing Bell". "The Talking Stone", Urth's second appearance, was only months later in October 1955 issue. This time a rich asteroid of uranium is at stake. A rock lifeform called a silicony is the dying witness to the location of the asteroid. Urth solves the case by trying to understand the creature psychology. The similarities between this story and the "Devil in the Dark" episode of the

The Naked Sun - Artwork by Michael Whelan

original *Star Trek* are interesting.

"The Dying Night" (July 1956) followed less than a year later. Murder strikes in a convention of scientists, each from a distant planet or satellite. Urth must find which of three colleagues killed their old roommate, Villiers, for his brilliant matter transference technology. Once again Urth turns to psychology for his solution. Each one of the suspects reacts differently when the stolen plans are subjected to the bright light of an open window. Asimov describes where each scientist lived and what his home world was like. If he had wanted to write like those cheaters he mentioned, he would have hidden this information and pulled it out like a rabbit from a hat. Playing fair, he lays out all the science in an interesting way and hides the clues in the process. "The Dying Night" is also interesting in that it is one of several stories to feature rival scientists.

The Naked Sun (1957) saw the return of Lije Bailey and R. Daneel Olivaw. As Asimov says of the sequel, "…just to show that the first book wasn't an accident." Bailey and Olivaw go to the Outer World of Solaria to find the killer of a man who lived entirely separate physically from others, a kind of locked-room mystery. Robots are involved, of course. Asimov has a chance to contrast how the Spacers live in their underpopulated, open worlds.

"The Dust of Death" (*Venture Science Fiction January 1957*) is part of the Wendell Urth series since its detective is none other than H. Seton Davenport of the TBI. In the introduction to the story in *Asimov's Mysteries*, the author reveals that the story would have been another Urth tale "…but a new magazine was about to be published and I wanted to be represented in it with something that was not too clearly a holdover from another

magazine."

A scientist kills his superior when the credit for years of work is stolen from him. He murders the man by adding particles of dust to a piece of equipment that explodes. The solution hinges on the killer having been on Titan for several months. The solution is reminiscent of "The Singing Bell" and "The Dying Night". It is too bad Asimov didn't rewrite the story as he threatened to in the introduction. "The Dust of Death" is not a strong tale. The Science Fiction elements are lacking and the solution is revealed without Urth's usual flare. Davenport should have stayed in the supporting cast.

"I'm in Marsport without Hilda" (*Venture Science Fiction,* November 1957) is Asimov's space-spy story. He calls it "a James Bond type of story, written before I had ever heard of James Bond". An unfaithful spy has the chance to enjoy another woman's bed but this pesky assignment gets in the way. The agent has to figure out which one of three men is only pretending to be under the influence of Spaceoline, a drug used to survive faster-than-light space travel. Locked in a room with the three men, he finds his solution by telling

"The solution hinges on the killer having been on Titan for several months. "

ribald stories. Only the criminal reacts to the lewd stories. Free at last, the spy is on his way to meet his paramour when his wife unexpectedly turns up.

"The Key" is the last Wendell Urth story, written ten years after the initial trilogy for a special issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* (October 1966), one that honored Isaac Asimov. Another murdered man on the moon leaves a strange diagram to tell where an alien artifact is hidden. The Ultras are a group of extremists who want to reduce the eight billion inhabitants of Earth to only five thousand. It's a race with the Ultras for the alien machine. Urth solves the code as only he can for both the murderer and his victim were students of Urth's at Eastern University. The final solution proves there to be no threat from the Ultras, as the alien device can only be activated by love. "The Key" is Urth's final farewell. Fortunately, it is a good one.

Back in 1957, many thought the same for Lije Baley and R. Daneel Olivaw. But Asimov surprised them all with the first of two new robot detective novels. *The Robots of Dawn* (1983) is a much longer piece than either of its prequels. This time Lije Baley is sent to Aurora, the Spacer homeworld, to try and save a scientist who is friendly to earth's new colonization program. Dr. Hans Fastolfe is accused with murdering -- a robot!

R. Daneel Olivaw makes two more appearances. In *Robots & Empire* (1985) he joins forces with a descendant of Lije Baley to stop a plot to make Earth inhospitable to humans. In *Prelude to Foundation* (1985) Harry Seldon discovers a very old and semi-inoperative Olivaw in a church. Neither of these books are mysteries per-se but function more as stop-gaps between the Robot series and the Galactic Empire and Foundation series.

Asimov's love affair with the mystery began with *The Steel Caves* but it continued on

outside of his Lije Baley or Dr. Urth stories. Many of Asimov's Science Fiction stories have elements of mystery in them (not enough to include them in this article though many are included in *Asimov's Mysteries*). He wrote a straight murder mystery in 1958, *The Death-Dealers* (1958), reprinted as *A Whiff of Death* (1968), once again about chemical poisoning and academics. In 1971 at the invitation of *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* he began his long series of mysteries known as The Black Widowers. He continued this series right up until his death in 1987.

Now, to return to Will Smith and *I Robot*. First off, the film is "suggested by the books of Isaac Asimov"-- in other words, it's not an adaptation of one particular novel or story. This is fine since many of the original robot books were short story collections. Without doing an anthology film with say "Robbie" as one of three segments, this can't be avoided.

The basic plot of the film is that in the Chicago of 2035 Dr.Alfred Lanning, the inventor of the Three Laws of Robotics, is killed after falling from a high window at US Robotics. Detective Spooner, played by Smith, is a cop who hates robots. Everybody else in the world accepts them as harmless and helpful devices. Spooner then begins to follow a trail of clues that include the fairy tale "Hansel & Gretel" and finally lead him and his reluctant assistant, Dr. Susan Calvin, to Sonny. Sonny looks like any other NS-5 robot but he is different. In a very Philip K. Dick moment, the robot asks, "What am I?"

The answer is: the key to solving the mystery of Lanning's death and a major takeover by the robots, for the NS-5s have an override that allows them to hurt humans (something the First Law of Robotics makes impossible.) The ultimate answer to the mystery I will leave

untold but it is far closer to Jack Williamson's "With Holded Hands" than to anything Isaac Asimov wrote.

Is *I Robot* a good film? Yes, it is on many levels. The world of 2035 is well drawn. The visual graphics are often stunning and well thought out. I had expected the sealed-in world of *The Caves of Steel*, but the film takes place in a time before the world of Lije Bailey. Added to this visual feast is a police procedural as good as most Hollywood fare.

The film keeps you guessing. It also has an emotional level to it in the back-story of why Spooner hates robots and the ultimate fate of Sonny, a robot that dreams. Again, both more Dickian than Asimovian. The film is in some ways a tribute to all the great robot writers, not just the good doctor. In this I think Asimov would have been pleased.

"The film is in some ways a tribute to all the great robot writers, not just Asimov. In this I think he would have been pleased. "

On the negative side, some of the elements of the film are a little too close to other films. *The Terminator* comparisons are inevitable, though the robots look like a cross between an iMac computer and the Robaxacet puppets. The cars are reminiscent of *Minority Report* and the new *Star Wars* films. The architecture of the computer called V.I.K.I. is like something from *Star Trek Insurrection*. For the fan of SF films, there are many obvious similarities.

My final criterion for this film was: is it a Science Fiction mystery, a fair one by Asimov's rules? *I Robot* is a good SF mystery. The trail of bread crumbs lead the viewer through twists and turns until the end when the question of who killed Dr. Lanning is finally answered.

The big difference between one of Asimov's mysteries and *I Robot* is perhaps only the style of mystery. Asimov tended to use the "cosy" style descended from the English writers like Agatha Christie. *I Robot* is definitely in the American school of Noir. Smith is a policeman, not a private detective, but his cowboy methods make him a loner within the force.

This is a mystery with a Philip Marlowe feel rather than Hercule Poirot one. And in the best tradition of the Rayond Chandler school, if things get slow you can always have a man with a gun – make that a robot – come crashing through a window..

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Photo Cutline

THE SCANTILY CLAD FEMALE IN SF

by M. D. Jackson

From Evening Gowns and Bathing Suits in Space to Metal Bikinis on the Battlefield

So, here's a question: Say you're a beautiful woman (I assume some of you reading this actually are women. Please believe me when I say that in my eyes all women are beautiful. If you're a man reading this, then use your imagination) and you need to leave the relative safety of your spacecraft to go out into the vacuum of space or maybe planetside where there is a strong possibility that you will run into hostile aliens.

What do you wear?

It's a tough one, I know.

Conventional wisdom would suggest that a self-contained space suit with a substantial air supply and radiation shielding. That sounds reasonable, doesn't it?

But not so fast. If we're examining the history of Science Fiction illustration (which, at the moment, I am) then we have to think outside the box of conventional wisdom. Here we

must enter the strange wisdom of the Science Fiction cover illustration.

So, what does the typical beautiful woman wear into space?

How about an evening gown?

That seemed to be a good idea to the woman depicted in a Norman Saunders' painting for *Marvel Science Stories* in May 1951, in which two adequately suited spacemen appear to be manhandling a negligee-clad woman into a spaceship.

Now, according to something that we like to call science, the human body cannot survive unprotected in a vacuum. So the chances that the lovely lady in this painting is alive are slim to 0 to the power of 10 billion. She does, however, leave a beautiful corpse, which is surprising since her body has been exposed to hard vacuum.

Okay, let's try another example: Suppose you are the human leader of a galactic army of robots. What would you wear that would be suitably imposing alongside your metal soldiers? One would assume a suit of protective body armor would be called for, but not so fast!

How about a black one-piece bathing suit? Sounds reasonable to me. We'll accent it, of course, with a winged helmet (one that does not cover your beautiful features, of course), black gloves, a sparkly belt and a flowing red cape. For your own defense, you also have a gold plated laser pistol.

Sounds crazy? Not according to R.G. Jones in his cover illustration for William P. McGivern's "The Galaxy Raiders" in *Amazing Stories* in July of 1950.

Let's try another one; you're a beautiful woman and you are floating among the asteroids fighting with some sort of laser whip against a bald-headed assailant. Do you wear a

Marek Okron - Shrapnel

protective spacesuit? Okay, sure, this time you do. Is it armored to protect against an obviously lethal laser-type weapon?

Of course not! It's completely transparent. You have an upside-down fish bowl as a helmet and a space suit made of saran wrap. So, what are you wearing underneath all that? How about a low-cut red bathing suit with funky pointed shoulders and a pair of red pumps?

Am I mad? Well, perhaps… but this idea seemed to make sense to Kelly Freas when he supplied the cover art for the November 1953 edition of *Planet Stories*.

The point is that throughout its history the "literature of ideas" has been saddled with artwork that, although fabulously rendered, has been consistently redolent of adolescent imagery. Certainly the majority of Science Fiction readers have in the past been mostly male and young, but that may have been a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy when the artwork that attracted readers seemed specifically designed to zero in on that demographic.

The Decked Out Female in SF

So much for The Scantily Clad Female. Let's look at the opposite end of the spectrum and see if it turns out to be as much of a hot-button topic as the previous one was. That opposite trope, although not nearly as popular, is that of the Fully Decked Out Heroine.

These are images of women decked out for battle either in a fantasy or a Sci-Fi setting.

Here is a great example of that idea. It's called "Shrapnel" and it's by digital artist Marek Okron, a Polish/Canadian digital artist. It was cover art for the comic book *Shrapnel: Aristeia Rising* published by Radical Comics.

Here you have a battle hardened (or battle weary) heroine who retains a quality of femininity, and yet whose fully armored form says that she won't take any shit from anyone, no matter how badass or alien they may be. The figure is fully armored and covered from toe to neck, and yet Okron manages to convey a sense of the womanly about her. There is no doubt that this form is that of a woman, strong and capable and yet the pose also gives a hint of vulnerability.

It takes a talented artist to pull off an image like this and my hat is tipped to Okron for managing it so completely.

Here's another one. This is by a digital artist from Shanghai — Wang Song. I don't know much more about him, but his digital image presents a woman in a space suit/space armor. The woman is feminine — almost waif-like and she stands in a pose that is feminine as well. The suit, as in Okron's *Shrapnel*, covers her from neck to toe (I assume so, anyway, because we can't see the lower extremities).

Again, as with the Okron image, the femininity of the figure is maintained, but this is enhanced by the design of the suit. Whereas Okron's mecha-armor is bulky and shapeless, this suit is streamlined and does seem to fit the contours of the wearer.

The suit is almost — almost — a unisex design, though the artist seems not to have been able to resist sticking a pair of metal breasts right on the front.

So a striking image, but not quite as successful at desexualizing the figure while retaining the femininity.

But it's a step forward. In years past artwork depicting a woman in a spacesuit would likely have featured a skintight suit overtly displaying a woman's curves. Or it would have been transparent, revealing the bikini the woman wore underneath the suit.

Despite these examples, Science Fiction and Fantasy illustration is still, it seems, a male dominated field and sexist stereotypes are still well in evidence. Even female illustrators

who have achieved success usually have done so by perpetuating the same stereotypes.

These are only two examples. I'm sure you can come up with a few yourselves. What do you think? Has SF and Fantasy illustration moved beyond the sexist stereotypes of the past or have these same stereotypes merely been propagated anew by a fresh crop of illustrators?

Women in Armour vs Chicks in Chainmail

One of the more common tropes of Fantasy illustration is depictions of women in armor, but this is not necessarily unique to that genre. Armored women have been depicted in art throughout the centuries. Most notable among these are depictions of Joan of Arc.

The "Maid of Orleans" according to legend, was a peasant girl who heard the voice of God telling her to don armor and go into battle for the cause of France during the Hundred Years' War. The French folk heroine has been invoked over the centuries by writers and politicians alike and paintings of her in her battle garb abound. Some images have her depicted in full armor while others armor her top half while keeping her lower half in a skirt as in this Victorian era painting by John Everett Millais.

Historically there have been women who have donned armor and gone into battle. This is an undeniable fact of history. The Celtic warrior queen Boudicca as well as Joan are testimony to that reality. However, it is also pretty safe to say that the vast majority of warriors throughout history have been male. Women warriors have been a minority if not an oddity in history.

John Everett Millais - Maid of Orleans

This is not so much the case in modern Fantasy. Although not always the majority, modern Fantasy novels tend to have a preponderance of women in armor. The Warrior Maiden is not unknown in mythology. The Valkyrie of the epic sagas — most familiar to us today represented by Brunhilde from Wagner's Ring Cycle — was a tradition that Tolkien borrowed from with the character of Eowyn in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien, however, was predated by Robert E. Howard who had a number of female characters who took up the sword and armor and were just as capable as a man. Despite the many who criticize Howard for being sexist, the pulp writer from Cross Plains was, in fact, ahead of his time in his attitudes towards women. A writer who created characters such as Valeria, Dark Agnes and Red Sonya of Rogatino cannot, in all fairness, be characterized as sexist.

In the pulps, C.L. Moore created Jirel of Joiry, and in paperback, Lin Carter had Tara of the Twilight. At the time, they were considered little more than a literary novelty act but in latter times have been adopted by certain factions as proto-feminist heroes.

Other women warriors in modern Fantasy range from the realistic to the outright impossible. From Howard's Sonya of Rogatino, comic book writer Roy Thomas morphed her into Red Sonja. This Sonja was born from the outrage of rape (echoing the historical Boudicca) although she moves quickly into outrageous territory with her predilection for wearing very scanty chain mail.

It is certainly absurd to go into battle wearing little more than an armored bikini, but artists tend not to dwell on realism, preferring to dwell on womanly curves. Thus we move

from women in armor to that bane of Fantasy illustration: Chicks in Chain-mail.

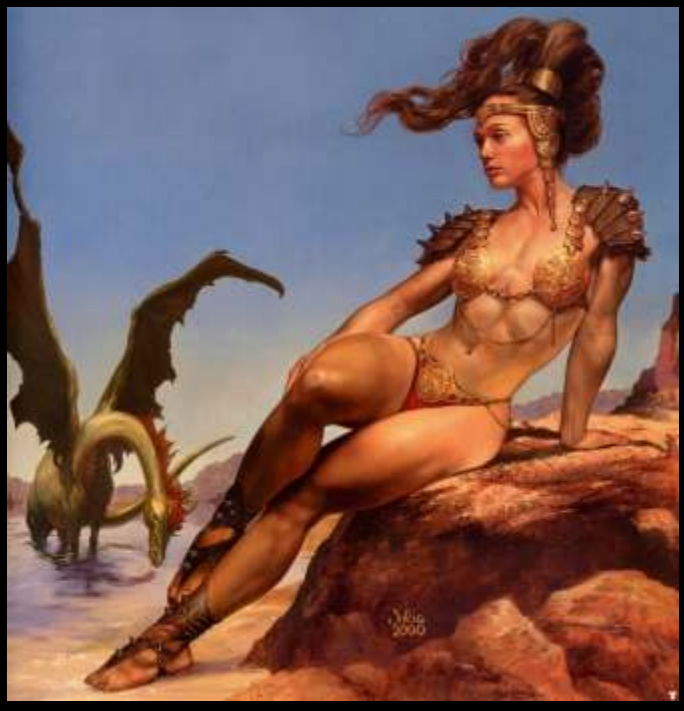
Now, were I to go into battle, and I knew I would be facing sword and axe wielding foes, I would probably weep piteously for my mother. However, if I had to go, I would certainly want to be protected (particularly my fingers – an artist protects his hands!). I can see absolutely no situation where I would consider it advantageous to leap into battle wearing merely a chain-mail Speedo.

Yet, here we have example after example of Fantasy artists who regularly produce images of women entering into the bloody fray wearing little or no armor and even less clothing. The classic Marvel Comics depiction of Red Sonja is probably the most egregious of these examples. Just as a woman should not enter into a store wearing only a bikini (unless one is in Florida during Spring Break) much less enter a battle. Red Sonja should not be doing what she is doing in her chain-mail bikini. And yet, there she is.

Now, originally she wasn't depicted so scantily. Her original appearance in Marvel's *Conan the Barbarian* as drawn by Barry Windsor Smith, depicted her with a longer chain mail shirt and a belt as well as leather boots. Of course she eschewed leggings in favor of a bikini bottom and bare legs, but at least the shirt was sensible. The outfit was changed after a solitary Esteban Maroto filler pic in Savage Tales #3 (February 1974). Other artists have tried to depict Sonja a little more realistically, notably a recent portrait by Donato Giancola which covers her (somewhat) in leather armor.

What possesses an artist to paint something that flies in the face of any semblance of reality? Well. I can't really say, having contributed at least one image to this sub-genre: my cover for a Fantasy novel, Foolish Gods (which, incidentally, was never used by the

Rowena Morill



Julie Bell

publisher, so it up for grabs if anyone out there has a Fantasy novel that the image fits – I can make changes to suit, for a modest fee, of course)

Oh wait? Could it be money that motivates these artists? Maybe. Also the fact that drawing naked women is what a lot of young men got into art for in the first place! Artists will usually paint what they're told to paint by publishers, but they cannot abrogate their responsibility in that fashion. Artists (many, many artists) will depict this unreality, these Chicks in Chain-mail, all on their own. They'll tell you that it is to help sell a painting or an image and that is, for the most part, a good motivation, but if an artist is honest (and I'm talking about male artists here) he will admit that he just likes to draw semi-naked women holding sharp objects. Simple as that.

But what about Rowena Morrill? What about Julie Bell? They are women artists who perpetuate exactly the same images as their male counterparts. Doesn't that make a case for the market having a great influence on the types of images that are pushed to the forefront?

Well, yes, but can one lay the blame on the market or does one look at society as a whole for the reasons? What I have discovered as I have been exploring this issue, writing these articles and reading comments, is that it is very complex. One could even say that, in writing this article and including images, I am perpetuating a harmful stereotype, and indeed, I don't really know that I can argue that point.

It seems to be true that the Fantasy art world is somewhat male dominated, but that is changing. Perhaps not fast enough.

Science Fiction bikini

It's summertime and in a lot of the mainstream media summer means one thing; bikinis

Yeah sure, the bikini has a lot of cultural mileage in it despite being such a skimpy article of clothing. The word bikini conjures up visions of beach movies from the early sixties, the ones usually starring Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon. It puts one in mind of major cultural events like Spring Break in Fort Lauderdale.

Girls in bikinis are a bit of loaded pop culture that goes hand-in-hand with lowbrow entertainment or salacious advertising campaigns.

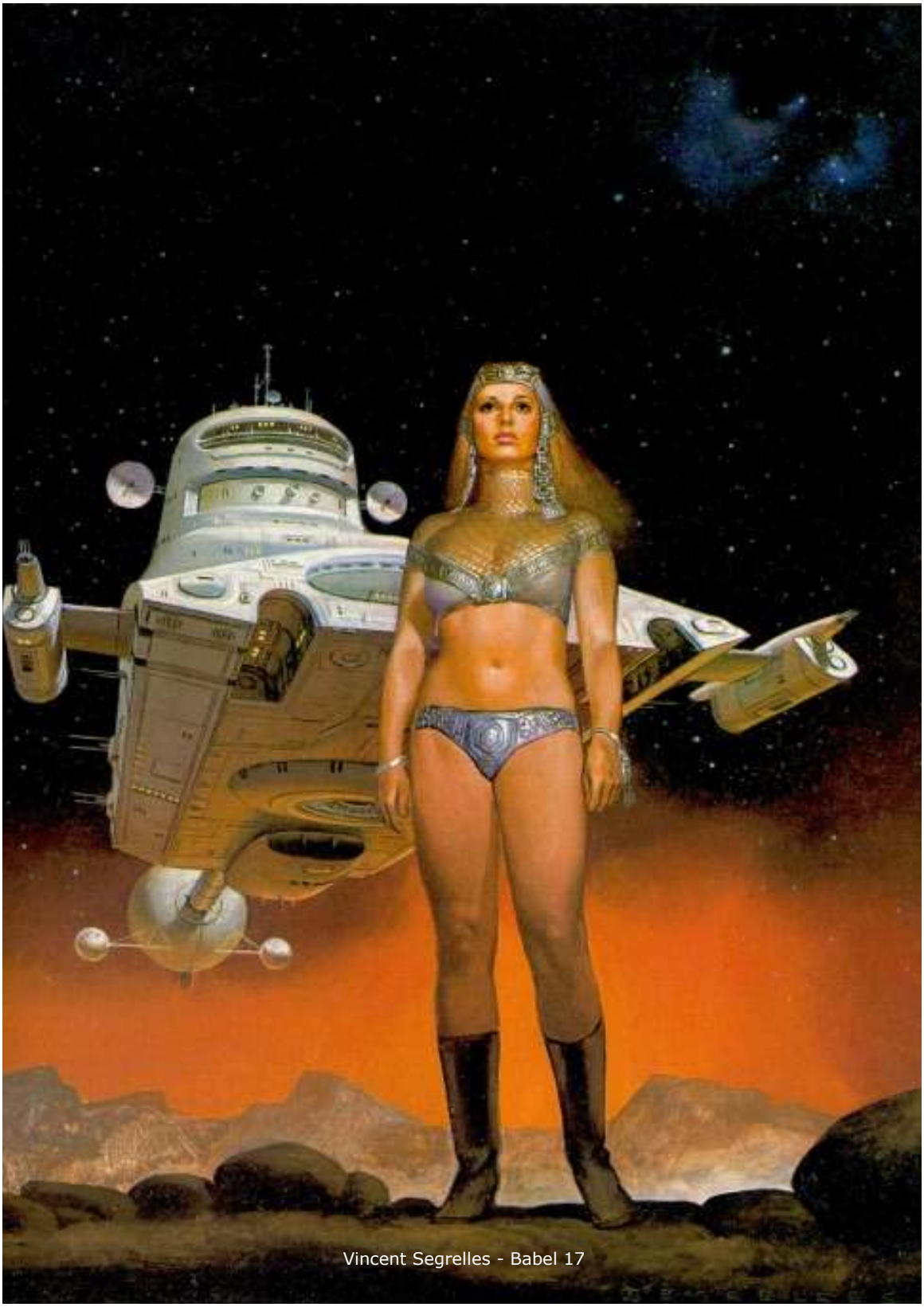
Bikinis are as close as the mainstream media can get to pornography without being such (though in some cultures the bikini is soft core pornography, but that's neither here nor there).

So what happens when one combines that particular pop culture phrase with one that would seem to be the diametrically opposite phrase, Science Fiction?

I mean, Science Fiction is supposed to be the literature of ideas, right? It is the purveiw of the bow-tie and tweed set, right? The pipe-smoking intellectual whose interest in sex is purely clinical and only relevant to the propagation of the species, am I correct?

What on earth would one make of a phrase like Science Fiction bikini?

Well, there it is. I said it. Science Fiction bikini. And now it's a loaded phrase, a click-bait string of words that brings all sorts of weird and disparate cultural concepts to mind and



Vincent Segrelles - Babel 17

mashes them together like a vanilla-chocolate swirly cone.

Science Fiction bikini. Let's look at some examples. (Purely for research purposes, you understand.)

Let's take a look at a piece of artwork. Here is a cover illustration for Samuel Delaney's novel *Babel 17*. The piece by Vincent Segrelles depicts a woman wearing what I described as a Science Fiction bikini. With the accompanying illustration beside it, the phrase makes perfect sense. A reader, even one not familiar with Science Fiction, would know exactly what I am talking about.

Let's unpack the phrase.

I hope that I don't have to explain what Science Fiction is. Presumably if you're reading this magazine you have some idea what it is that I am talking about when I use the term. I hope that is the case and that I do not have to delineate a definition of Science Fiction. Others far more knowledgeable than I have tried and found it to be a daunting task. I'd need a whole other article for that.

And hopefully I'd just be preaching to the converted, although even among lifelong Science Fiction fans the phrase can still have different meanings depending somewhat on context and the reader's own cultural bias. For some Science Fiction fans, like myself, there is a completely different set of thought patterns that are raised by the phrase Science Fiction as opposed to the phrase "Sci-Fi", a phrase coined by the late Forrest J. Ackerman.

The appellation "Sci-Fi" has been, for many of us, a derogatory one used to describe a cheaper version of the genre that employs the trappings but not as much the substance of the literature. Hollywood was wont to produce "Sci-Fi", usually as cheap low-budget flicks with a lot of action but very little sense. For some the difference between "Science Fiction" and "Sci-Fi" is vast. For others the term is interchangeable. Either way, the phrase "Science Fiction' has meaning that goes well beyond the individual meaning of the two words that make the phrase. (I'm not going to try to unpack the phrase here. Whole books can and have been written on that topic alone and there is still room for much argument.)

So, we have the phrase "Science Fiction", a phrase that has meaning to fans of the genre and even to those who are not SF readers but merely casually acquainted with the subject. But what happens to the phrase when we put the word "bikini" behind it?

The bikini is, as most people know, a skimpy two-piece bathing suit for women. Designed by French engineer Louis Réard and separately by fashion designer Jacques Heim in Paris in 1946, the bikini was specifically made to cause an explosive social and commercial reaction. Although today the bikini is ubiquitous on beaches everywhere, its history is filled with controversy. The word "bikini' today is still packed with cultural significance. The word itself attracts attention.

There are different types of bikini from the early examples displayed on the screen in such movies as I described earlier which featured Frankie and Annette cavorting on the beach, to extreme examples that can be seen today that cover only as much as is required by law not to engender a public nudity violation. But the Science Fiction bikini is something different altogether.

And it's a bit hard to define. When one sees a Science Fiction illustration or watches a Science Fiction movie or television series, the clothing the characters wear need to reflect the fact that this is not the here and now but another time, another place. Just so, in a Science Fiction film or illustration a suit is not just a suit, it's a Science Fiction suit. Armour is not just armor it's Science Fiction armor. Military uniforms need to be Science Fiction uniforms and bikinis need to be Science Fiction bikinis.

The one and only original Slave Leia - Carrie Fischer

One need not even be shown an example to understand the cultural and socio-sexual connotations that the name contains, though I'm certain that those who find the female form pleasurable to gaze upon live in hope of seeing examples when they do read the word in print. I hope that this magazine does not disappoint. If this article is not festooned with visual examples then what is the point, other than to read my golden prose.

Okay. Back to the matter at hand.

Science Fiction Bikini.

The phrase says so much more than the words themselves do. It conjures up some of the most egregious examples of sexism that the genre has produced. It also conjures up some of the worst excesses of the "Sci-Fi" genre that comes out of Hollywood and other places. It is the default for the Science Fiction illustrator. It is the subject of erotic fixations in male gamers (and, in some cases, female gamers) and, as such, is the touchstone for both sides of the sexism debate within the genre.

The Science Fiction bikini, along with its Fantasy genre equivalent, the chain-mail bikini, stirs emotions on both sides of the sexism debate. From advertising to illustration it is, at best, a necessary evil. Where nudity is out of the question, the bikini becomes *de reguer*. From pulp covers to the original (and the newer) *Star Trek* to the current Slave Leia craze, the Science Fiction bikini seems to be overwhelmingly everywhere.

Three simple words, and yet so much cultural mileage.

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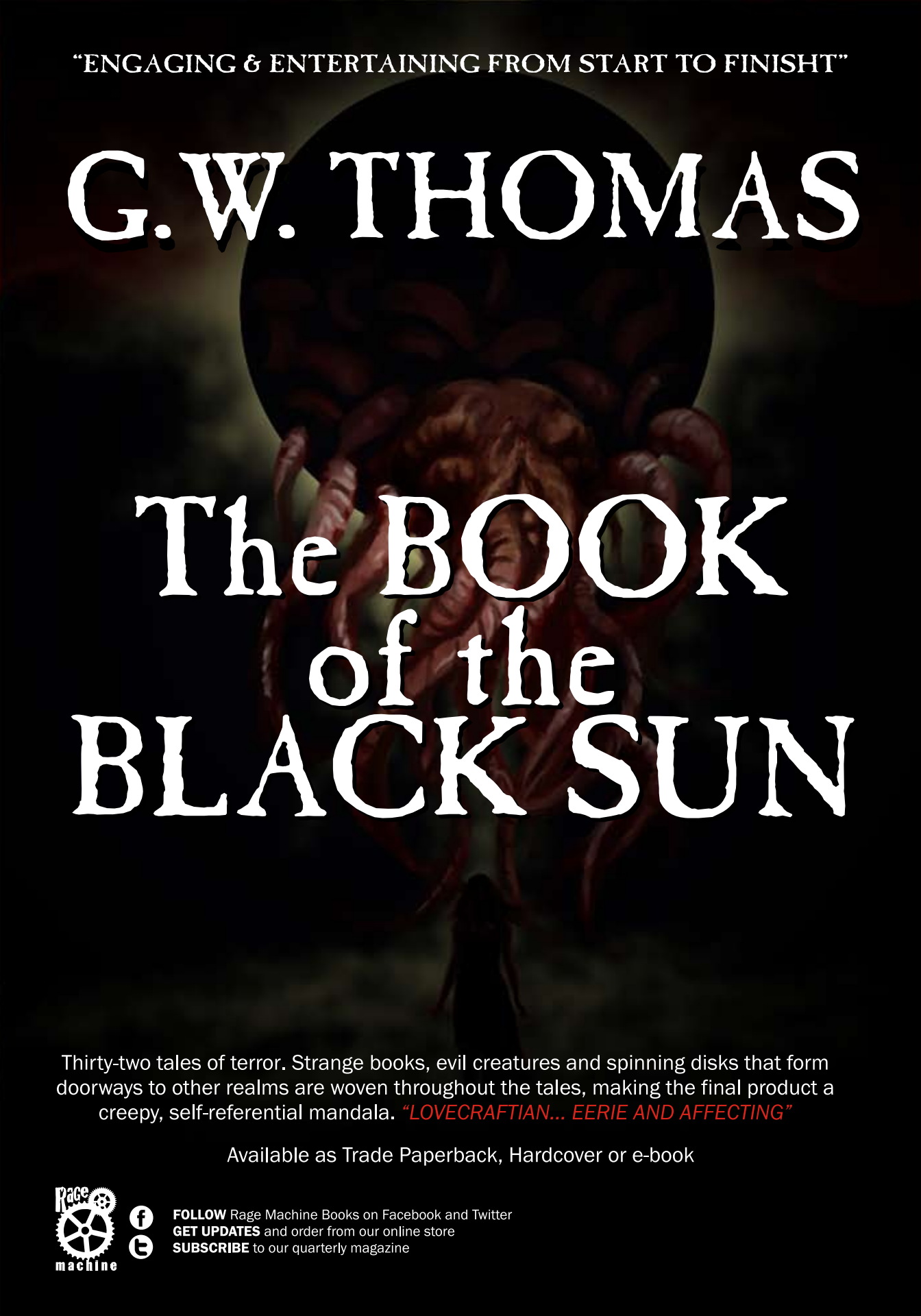
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