Rage Machine Books presents

DARKWORLDS QUARTERLY

SPRING 2018 THE CULTURE OF SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY & HORROR

SPECIAL KAIJU & COMICS ISSUE!

Michael May

Talks about his Adventureblog and KILL ALL MONSTERS!

G. W. Thomas

PLUS!

A History of Comic Book Art

How the art of comic books has changed from its early beginnings to full digital production

M. D. Jackson

PLUS!

The Interplanetary Writing Contest of 1931-1932

- How Hugo Gernsback offered his readers a chance to write Interstellar Adventure

Ace Double Novels
The Monsters of Jim Kjelgaard
and more!

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DARK WORLDS QUARTERLY

THE CULTURE OF SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY & HORROR SPRING 2018

Contents

Theme

by M. D. Jackson

The literary concept of theme, the bane of the college sophomore, is also a useful way to appear clever

According to no less an authority than the *Oxford English Dictionary*, theme is defined as: "The subject of a talk, piece of writing, exhibition, etc.; a topic." There are two further definitions, one having to do with linguistics, but it is the second of the two that is the subject of this editorial – that is: "...an essay written by a school pupil on a particular subject.".

We are not school pupils and haven't been for many, many, (many) years. In fact, one of us is a school teacher. No, we are just amateur scholars, perhaps a trifle too enthusiastic, of the subject of science fiction and fantasy literature. As such, we need to concern ourselves with theme, that is (again according to the OED) "...an idea that recurs in or pervades a work of art or literature."

Some of you may remember theme as something you struggled to identify in high school, college or university English classes. Typical essay assignments would ask what the themes of a certain Shakespeare play were, or, the dreaded essay question in which a

Original 1954 Japanese poster for Gojira (Godzilla)

passage is presented and you are asked how the passage reflects the overall themes of the entire play. *Shudder*, I know.

"Love and honour are the pivotal themes of the Hornblower books" declares the OED. "How does the author demonstrate this in this particular passage?" your college professor asks pointedly, as if theme were something that was imposed on a piece of literature by an erudite author far more intelligent than you could ever hope to be.

The truth about theme, however, is that it usually happens by accident.

I say this as an author myself as well as a voracious reader who happens to know a lot of authors. Theme is usually the last thing on an author's mind as he or she is writing and it is usually not even evident to the author until he or she is well into the later drafts of his or her magnum opus. "Oh, cool," the author declares. "I was writing about redemption! I had no idea! Maybe I should work that word into the title to make it look like I am really, really clever!" Well, that's usually how it goes for me, anyway.

We do not build issues of *Dark Worlds Quarterly* around a specific theme. Some literate quarterly magazines do. *Lapham's Quarterly* regularly builds an entire issue around a one word theme. The fact that brainy scholars have the leisure to sit around and think about how this particular passage from Proust illuminates the theme of 'reflection' or some other such ephemera, causes me no end of angst. When we originally came up with the idea for this magazine one of the possibilities was to do just that, build an issue around a specific theme.

We rejected that idea, because, honestly, we ain't that clever, and we don't have the time to sit around and think such ponderous thoughts in between our day jobs (one of which aforementioned day jobs might just involve marking quizzes on the subject of themes in literature, ironically enough).

However, this issue of *Dark Worlds Quarterly* does have a theme and it came about entirely by accident.

The theme of this issue is *kaiju* and comic books.

Most everyone knows what comic books are. If you've been to the movies in the last five years chances are you have watched a film that is based on a comic book, and I'll get back to comic books in a minute.

But k*aiju* is also a familiar concept to most people although the term is perhaps not as well known. The word k*aiju* is Japanese in origin and it translates as "*strange beast*".

Kaiju originally referred to the monsters from ancient Japanese legends before the

arrival of writing. The word first appears in *Shan Hai Jing* or *Classic of Mountains and Seas*. *Shan Hai Jing* is a Chinese classic text, a compilation of fantastic geography and myth. Versions of the text have existed since the 4th Century BC.

There are no traditional depictions of kaiju or kaiju-like creatures in Japanese folklore but rather the origins of kaiju are found in film. *Gojira* (transliterated to *Godzilla*) is regarded as the first kaiju film and was released in 1954.

Okay, now we're into familiar territory. Most folks are familiar with *Godzilla* or the other Japanese monster movies featuring Mothra or Ghidora or Gamera or Rodan. These movies usually came from a film studio called Toho and it featured actors in rubber suits wreaking havoc on miniature Japanese cities.

One of the themes (and there's that word again) of these movies is how tiny human beings deal with the devastation wrought by a man-made disaster such as an earthquake or a hurricane, or the modern prometheus of the man-made disaster caused by the atomic bomb.

This issue combines kaiju and comic books with our interview with writer Michael May whose magnum opus is *Kill All Monsters*, a comic book which features giant monsters fighting each other and wreaking untold havoc over the comic book pages.

This issue also has an article about an oddity in the kaiju world, a Danish kaiju film called *Reptilicus* from 1961. A Toho knockoff, *Reptilicus* was given the *Godzilla* treatment and re-cut for American audiences. The film was successful enough to spawn a Gold Key comic book series originally named after the film but eventually changed to *Reptisaurus*.

Comic books are huge right now, so having a handful of articles about comic book related subjects is not unusual. However, our comic book articles are somewhat unique. An early issue of Batman written by one of the most famous science fiction couples? (an issue which features an appearance by a giant monster, no less!) A review of the animated version of DC Comic's *Gotham By Gaslight*. An article about the classic Jack Kirby comic book series *Kamandi* (which was originally created to cash in on the popularity of a major motion picture, a recurring theme – there's that word again – in this issue!). A feature on the horror comic book heroine *Vampirella,* a character who was designed to cash in on the popularity of the vampire movie craze. We also have a longer feature about the history of comic book art.

You see how this theme thing works? And it was completely unintentional. We didn't set out to create a kaiju and comic book themed issue. Indeed, we have other articles about robots and *Weird Tales*, giant wasps, hard boiled detective stories and a science fiction writing contest from the 1930's.

It's not all giant monsters and comic books, but there is enough of that for us to declare this issue as having a theme.

Doing that makes us look awfully clever, doesn't it? Maybe we can gain a reputation for being erudite and brainy scholars who know what we're talking about. Perhaps that could elevate this magazine to a whole other level... a level that we (as merely aging science fiction and fantasy fans) could never aspire to otherwise.

Or maybe forget about literary pretentions and have fun as you read this latest issue!

▲

Michael May

MICHAEL MAY: Kill All Monsters and The Adventure Blog

by G. W. Thomas

Michael May is the proprietor of Michael May's Adventure Blog and he is the writer of Kill All Monsters, a graphic novel from Dark Horse Comics

Michael May is a fiction author, blogger, and podcaster. He's the writer of *Kill All Monsters*, a graphic novel co-created with artist Jason Copland and published by Dark Horse Comics in 2017. He lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota with his wife Diane, their son David, and Luke the Wonder-Hound.

DARK WORLDS QUARTERLY: *Your comic* Kill All Monsters *is set in a Kaiju-infested world that fans of* Pacific Rim *or* Cloverfield *and the old stand-bys like* Godzilla *will enjoy. Obviously you are a fan, but what specific movies and characters inspired your comic?*

MICHAEL MAY: Not too many kaiju movies, surprisingly. I love kaiju movies, but one of the things that often frustrates me about them is the struggle to balance out the giant monster action with the human drama. The original Gojira and a few others do that really well, but so many don't.

I really wanted *Kill All Monsters* to be driven by the characters, so I pulled inspiration from other places. One of the biggest that I usually cite is the original *Star Wars* trilogy. The relationships and banter between Luke, Leia, and Han was something I wanted for the core group of characters in *Kill All Monsters*.

I'm also a big fan of post-apocalyptic stories like *Planet of the Apes* and *Kamandi*. The quasi-barbarian, underground people that the heroes meet in Paris at the beginning of the book are absolutely inspired by those kinds of movies and comics.

DWQ: *What kinds of stories can writers of Kaiju monsters tell besides big monsters knocking down buildings?*

MM: There's no limit as long as the focus stays on the characters. You could have kaiju stories in any genre, really. Horror, obviously, but you could also do comedy or a heist story or a mystery. You're gonna have to have some big monsters knocking down buildings, but my opinion is that that's the spice, not the meal. The important thing is that readers care about the characters.

They don't have to necessarily be the human characters, either. Cartoonist Zander Cannon has a series called *Kaijumax*, which is a prison drama set on what's essentially Monster Island from the Godzilla movies. It's brilliant and unique with intelligent kaiju that form gangs based on various kinds of giant monsters. So cryptids are one group and Toho-style monsters are another, etc. And the prison guards have Ultraman-like uniforms that allow them to grow giant-sized and interact with their prisoners on even footing. Lots of dramatic potential there and that's what makes a good story.

DWQ: *Dark Horse Comics released the entire run in hardcover last summer. What kind of a thrill was that?*

MM: Oh, wow, SO big a thrill. I've been collecting comics since the '80s, but I didn't get really serious about it until the '90s and Dark Horse was a huge part of that. From *Hellboy* and *Next Men* to *Concrete* and *Sin City*. And so many of those amazing, classic comics started in the pages of *Dark Horse Presents*. So when Dark Horse offered to not only publish the hardcover, but also to serialize an all-new *Kill All Monsters* story over three issues of *Dark Horse Presents* and give us the cover on one of them!? Dream come true doesn't even describe it. It took me days to learn how to breathe again.

DWQ: *Anyone who follows your blog knows you are a huge movie fan. I am sure you'd love to see* Kill All Monsters *as a film. How would you see such a project fulfilled?*

Kill All Monsters, Dark Horse Comics. Art by Jason Copland

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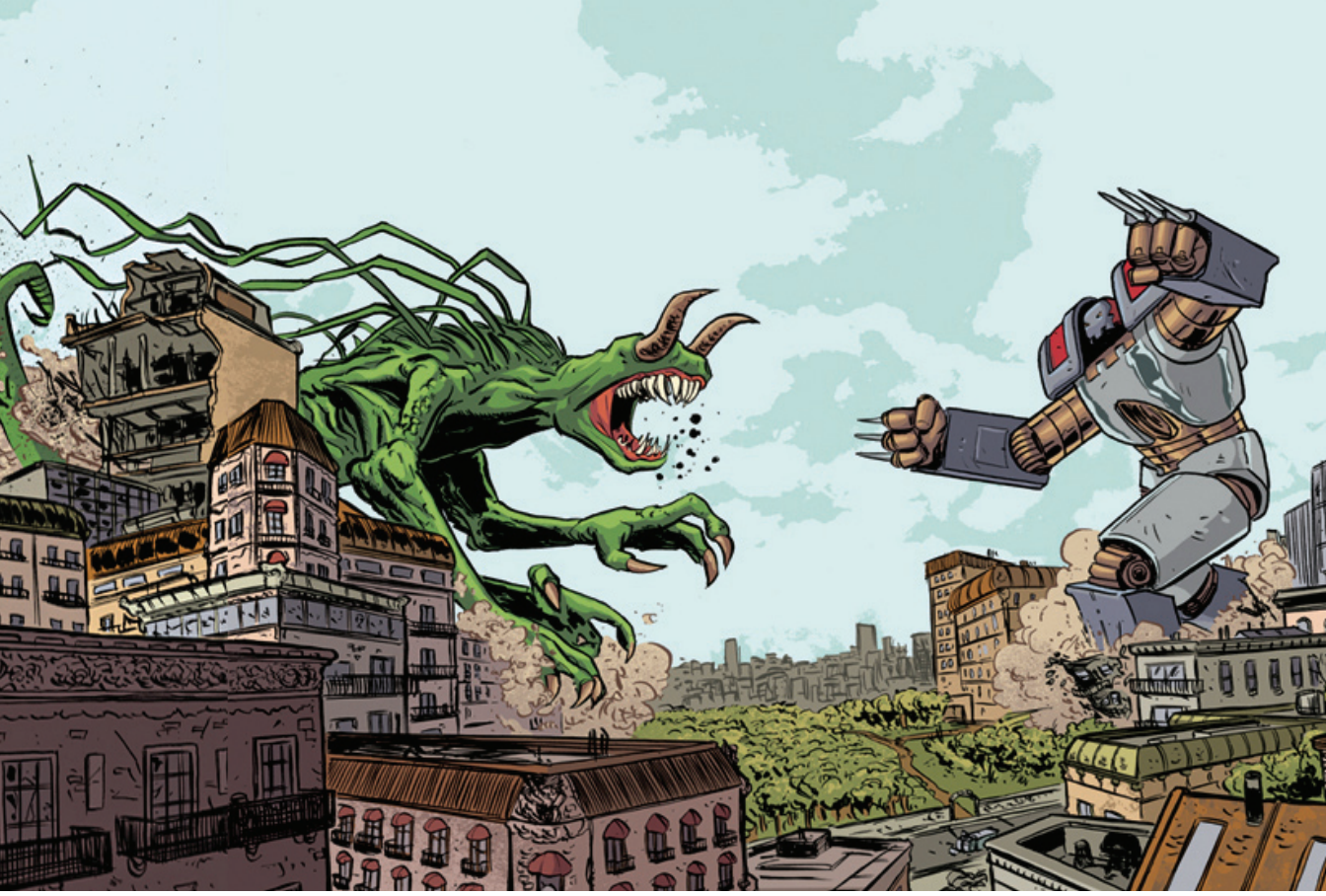


Kill All Monsters, Dark Horse Comics. Art by Jason Copland

MM: Absolutely! The first collection is a complete story, so it's all ready for a big screen adaptation. Jason and I would love that. Gareth Edwards directing.

Surprisingly, I haven't given a lot of thought to casting, but top of my head I'd say Jason Statham for Dressen and… I'm really trying not to say Rinko Kikuchi as Akemi, because she's already played a mech pilot in *Pacific Rim*, but hey, this is dream casting and she's amazing. I'm also crazy about Rila Fukushima from *The Wolverine* and that's probably the more interesting choice.

For Spencer, I'm totally influenced by recently seeing *Black Panther*, but Chadwick Boseman would be perfect. He pretty much already looks exactly the way Jason draws him.

DWQ: *You have written other comics besides* Kill All Monsters. *Your work in* Savage Beauty *and* Athena Voltaire *harken back to the Pulp era. What attracts you to old stuff? Which writers inspire your work or is it more of an era kind-of-thing?*

MM: I'm not nearly as well-versed in the Pulps as you are, which is one of the reasons that I love having your voice on my blog. I always learn a lot from your articles.

But there are definitely writers from that era that I'm inspired by. Edgar Rice Burroughs is at the top of that list. And going a little later in the century, Ian Fleming is right there with him. Theirs is the stuff I grew up reading, but even today there's no matching Burroughs' imagination. And both he and Fleming were masters at keeping the story moving

and pulling me along from chapter to chapter.

I think what really attracts me to those kinds of stories though is just the wildness of the world at the time. I'm a big fan of Westerns for the same reason. It was just a time when almost anything could literally happen. I'm not as satisfied by adventure stories set in modern day, because so much of the hard work is settled with computers and phones. It's a smaller world.

Which isn't at all to glamorize the past. I'm very happy living when I am and am optimistic about the future. But when I'm reading or writing an adventure story, I like for the world to be unexplored and lawless. It needs to have some chaos for the hero to bring order to.

DWQ: *What projects are on your wish list? I know you broke down all of the James Bond films. Would you ever want to write a Bond comic for instance? A* Hellboy/Kill All Monsters *crossover?*

MM: I love Bond, but that's precisely why I wouldn't want to write him. My voice is very different from Fleming's and I'd muck it up. A Felix Leiter story though? That would be interesting.

I grew up thinking that I wanted to take over the X-Men comics, but Marvel was a very different place back then. A writer could go for years just telling the stories they wanted to tell without having to pause to tie in company-wide crossovers, much less rebooting the series every six to twelve months.

But a *Hellboy/Kill All Monsters* crossover? Bring that on! Or I'd love to have a year on a Tarzan series. Better yet: *Thundarr the Barbarian*. That's a world and characters that are begging to be revitalized in comics. Well, I'm begging anyway.

DWQ: *What's next for Michael May? More* Kill All Monsters *or something new??*

MM: Definitely more *Kill All Monsters*. The first volume completed the story we set out to tell, but it also ended with a lot of unanswered questions about the world. And it included a couple of short stories (like the *Dark Horse Presents* one) that expand the world even further. So we have plans to explore that, which is what I'm working on right now. Jason's currently writing and drawing a graphic novel all by himself, so when he's done with that, it'll be time to hop in our mechs again and get to punching monsters.

Other than that, I'm on a bunch of different podcasts, either as co-host or recurring guest. That's where I do most of my talking about movies these days. Folks can find links and updates about those on *www.michaelmay.online*.

DWQ: *Thanks, Michael!*

Selection of Ace Double Novels. Photo by the author

ACE DOUBLE NOVELS

by M. D. Jackson

What`s better than one of something? Why, two of something, of course!

Most science fiction readers of a certain age remember with a great deal of fondness the series of Ace Double Novels that were released from 1953 to 1973 and were a distinctive part of the science fiction community throughout those two decades.

The Ace Double novels format helped to launch the novel careers of a number of authors, from Philip K. Dick to Ursula K. Le Guin to Samuel R. Delany, in addition to a number of other popular authors in the field, such as A.E. van Vogt, Margaret St. Clair and Leigh Brackett.

The books were an innovative entry in a brand-new publishing world, one that found both considerable staying power and a platform for publishing a high volume of science fiction. The huge number of stories published allowed for something great to happen: Talented authors with interesting stories to tell broke into the field, allowing for their own voices to shape the genre as they continued to find success. Like the pulp magazines that preceded them, the Ace Doubles had their own lasting impact on the future of the genre.

The Green Queen/3 Thousand Years (1954). Art by Ed Valigursky

From the start, Ace began an innovative approach to their novels by printing them *Tête-bêche* style. A *tête-bêche* book has the two titles bound upside-down with respect to each other, so that there are two front covers and the two texts meet in the middle (sometimes with advertising pages in between). This format is generally regarded as an innovation of Ace's although it wasn't. This style of binding was common in the 16th and 17th century. Nevertheless Ace published hundreds of titles bound this way over the next twenty-one years.

Books by established authors were often bound with those by lesser-known writers, on the premise that this would help new writers gain readers. The main drawback of the "Ace Double" format was that the two books had to fit a fixed page length (usually totalling between 256 and 320 pages); and although the story length ranged from from roughly 30,000 to 55,000 words, it was often the case that one, and sometimes both novels might be cut or revised to fit. Despite the tag "Complete and Unabridged" on the cover, books so labeled were sometimes still abridged. Still, they provided a convenient outlet for stories of awkward lengths; too short for a single book but too long for a single issue of a magazine.

Despite that many authors often found that the released versions of their stories were significantly edited for length. Constrained by the limits of paper and glue, the novels necessarily had to be short, with the entire volume rarely breaking 100,000 words. Authors such as Isaac Asimov and John Brunner noted their outrage at the unauthorized butchering of their novels, which often impacted the stories that they were trying to tell.

The Tête-bêche style. Master of Life and Death/The Secret Visitor (1957). Art by Ed Emshwiller.

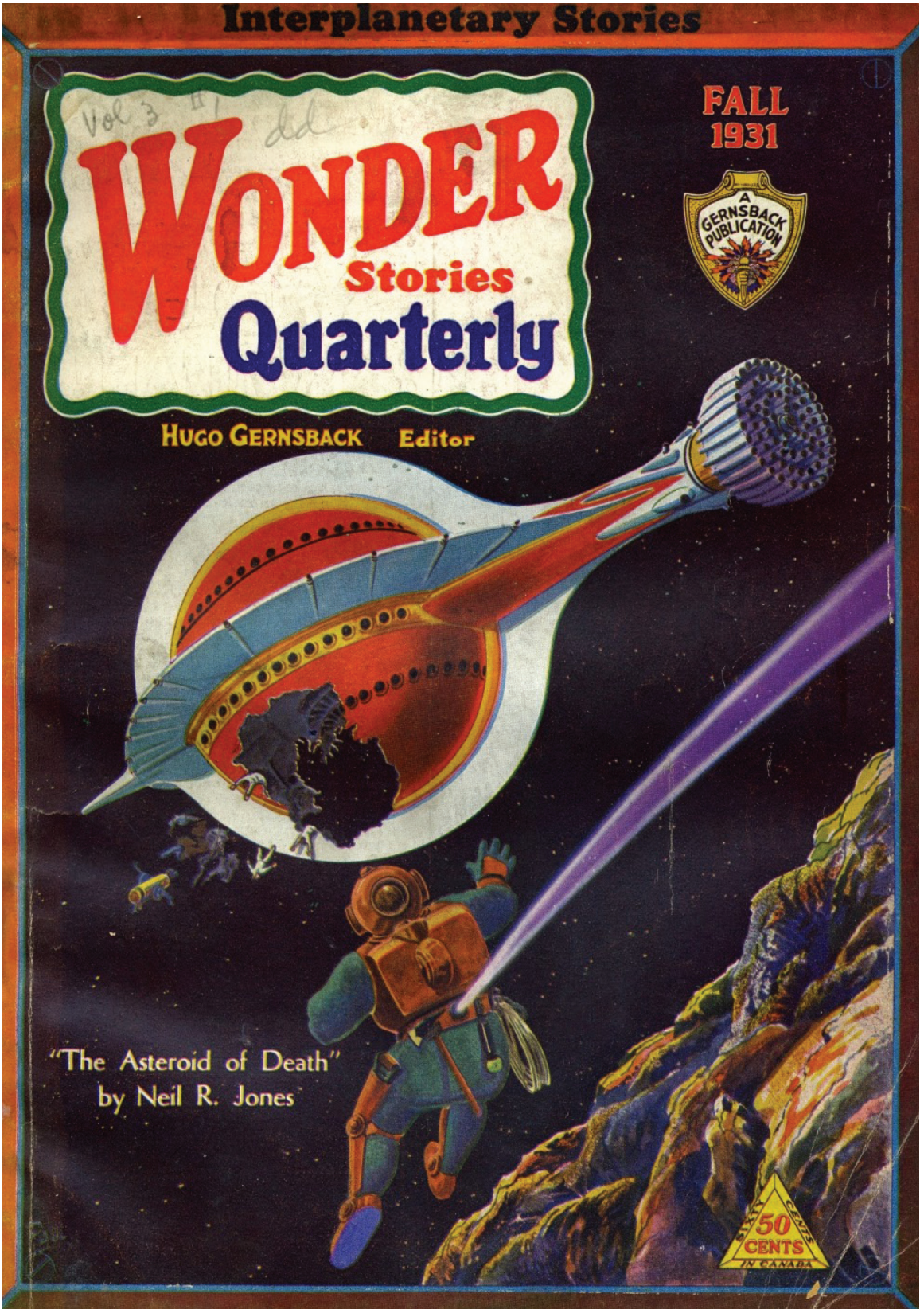
Some important titles in the early series novels include William S. Burroughs's first novel, *Junkie* (written under the pseudonym "William Lee"), as well as many novels by, Robert Bloch, Harlan Ellison, Harry Whittington, and Louis L'Amour, including those written under his pseudonym "Jim Mayo".

The last Ace Double in the first series was John T. Phillifent's *Life with Lancelot,* backed with William Barton's *Hunting on Kunderer,* issued August 1973. Although Ace resumed using the "Ace Double" name in 1974, the books were arranged conventionally rather than tête-bêche.

The Ace Double novel was an example of an innovative format capturing the fancy of the reading public and effectively changing the landscape of the publishing industry. Indeed the publisher behind the Ace Double novels, writer and unabashed science fiction fan, Donald A. Wollheim, would have a profound impact on the publishing industry. He not only helped put Ace Books on the map with the double novels but after leaving the company in 1971 would go on to found Daw Books, the first mass market specialist science fiction and fantasy fiction publishing house.

In this age of the electronic book, would that such an innovative idea be able to take hold today? What form it would take I cannot conceive, but it would be bound to make somebody's fortune and, perhaps, have as profound an effect on today's publishing reality as the Ace Doubles did in their time.

▲



Wonder Stories Quarterly, Fall 1931 Frank R. Paul, artist

THE INTERPLANETARY WRITING CONTEST OF 1931-1932

by G. W. Thomas

In 1931 *Amazing Stories* publisher Hugo Gernsback offered his readers a chance to create interstellar adventure

Hugo Gernsback was a clever business man, even if he was a questionable Science Fiction writer. In the Spring of 1931 he created a contest where fans could offer up plots for professional writers to spin into stories. It was not his first contest, that had been a cover contest in *Amazing Stories*, where writers had to pen tales for pre-made artwork. This time, for a mere $110.00, Hugo added seven new stories to his *Wonder Stories Quarterlies* and achieved.... well, let's see what he achieved, if anything.

In the editorial for the Spring 1931 Quarterly, Gernsback states: "...practically every reader of WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY, in his letters to the editor, has expressed ideas of what a good interplanetary story should be. In a good many cases, our authors come in for considerable criticism, the readers stating that they themselves could write

better stories! Here, then is your chance to prove yourself as a creator of an interplanetary story and incidentally win a large prize."

Hugo Gernsback can be credited with creating Science Fiction fandom, if by accident. He did this with the letter column in his first magazine, *Amazing Stories*, back in 1926. By publishing names and addresses of letter writers, fans could gather and collectively share their love of 'Scientifiction'. Here with this contest, we can see Gernsback side with the readers over the writers. It was not this attitude so much as his extremely slow rate of pay that would force most of the professionals to flee his publications.

The rules of the plot contest were simple: create a short synopsis with a new plot and write it in less than 500 words. The manuscript had to be written legibly in pen or typed double-spaced. The contestant couldn't be a published author. That was it. No fee. To make it even easier, Gernsback supplied a sample called "The Meteor Pest" about space insects who come from an asteroid and steal all the earth's uranium. The Earthmen strike back with biological weapons and kill all the aliens, taking back their fissionable materials. Gernsback himself admits: "This simple plot is by no means a good one: and we are certain our readers will find much better material-- far more detailed and complete, more intricate and far more original."

The winners of the contest were as follows:

The first two stories appeared in the Fall 1931 issue. First place and $50.00 went to William Thurmond of Victoria, Texas who had his story "The Derelict of Space" written up by Ray Cummings. Of the stories in the contest, Gernsback points out: "It is noteworthy, and we are happy to say it, that it is not always the quantity that makes for success. In fact the first prize, awarded to Mr. Thurmond, was for one of the shortest plots published. By actual word count the entry contained only 137 words. But then, of course, it was because of the originality of the idea that the editors awarded Mr. Thurmond the first prize."

By today's standards the story is neither groundbreaking nor particularly interesting, being a love triangle in space. A scientist named Deely creates a time machine and takes his beautiful, young wife, Hilda, along, as well as the handsome pilot, Gerald Vane, and three others on the maiden voyage in time. Where Thurmond's idea offers something new (in 1932) is that the machine is not a space machine as well. The time machine flies fifty years into the future to find empty space, for the Earth and the rest of the solar system have long since fled that location. It is here that Deely finds out he has been cuckolded and that everyone on the ship knew except him. He destroys the time mechanism, stranding them and they all slowly suffocate as the ship's air leaks out. Before they meet their fate, Hilda reconciles with her husband to be frozen for all time in each other's arms. The story contains an idea that H. G. Wells may not have considered back in 1896 then proceeds to present an earthly enough melodrama.

In the same issue, Second Place and $25.00 went to E. M. Johnston of Collingwood, Ontario who had Clark Ashton Smith to write "The Planet Entity". A strange ship appears in a scene reminiscent of Harry Bates' "Farewell to the Master" (written nine years later). A group of men enter the spacecraft and are shanghaied to Mars, where they find the canals are actually the branches of an enormous singular plant. This godlike creature has an offer for humanity, an exchange of knowledge for water. The inevitable war between the

WILLIAM THURMOND
who furnished the plot

RAY CUMMINGS
who wrote the story

THE novel and extraordinary plot-winner of the first prize in the Interplanetary Plot Contest that underlies this story gives us a new pride in our readers. It justifies our belief that they not only know what they want, but they can on occasions demonstrate it by constructing an original science fiction theme.

We asked Mr. Cummings to write a story based upon it. When the story was concluded he told the editors that in his opinion it was his best work. And we believe it.

The story opens anew some of the fascinating possibilities of time traveling. We know that traveling in time may be theoretically possible. There are many advantages to be gained, unique experiences to be had. But what are the more remote but potent dangers of this expedition into the unknown? What are some of the great cosmic forces that we are not aware of, but that are likely to step into the play and wreck the entire expedition? Some of these questions, this story answers.

To Mr. Thurmond, for furnishing the plot, and Mr. Cummings for writing the story, we offer our thanks—jointly they have done a marvelous job. They have helped to make the Interplanetary Plot Contest a tremendous success.

E. M. JOHNSTON
Who Furnished the Plot

CLARK ASHTON SMITH
Who Wrote the Story

THIS story, in many ways, is one of the most unusual we have published. Its theme is not only original, but at Mr. Smith's capable hands, it takes on added meaning.

The mystery of the Martian canals has been explained in many ways. Most authors assume that they are irrigation canals to give water to the dry Martian deserts. Some astronomers believe that they are merely illusions and do not really exist. Certainly they present to us one of the most fascinating puzzles of modern science.

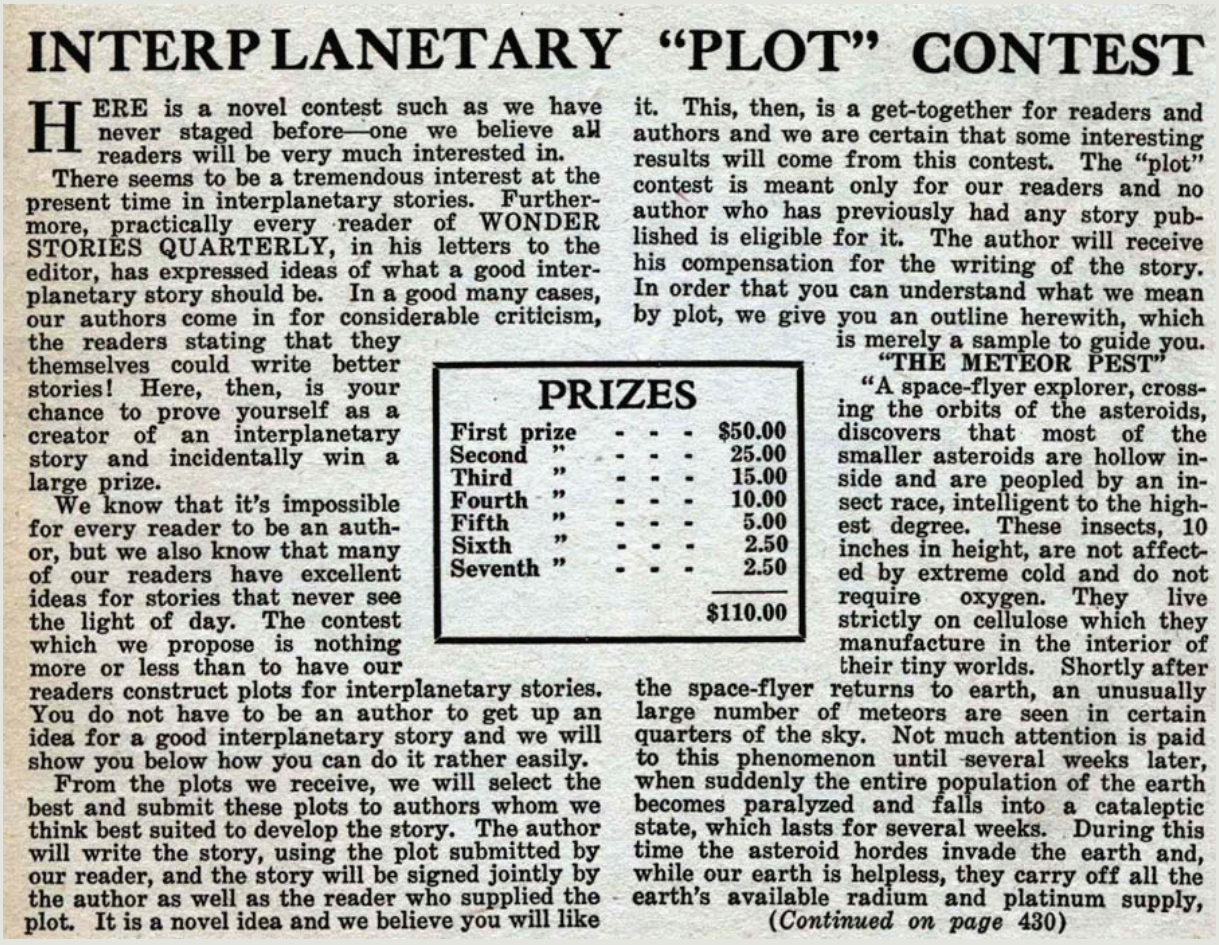
Messrs. Smith and Johnston have their own explanation for the canals—as a gigantic antic sentient entity. And were this planet entity to exist, it might have an intelligence, an understanding and a power that would make us seem like microbes by comparison.

Yet such an entity might one day enter into our lives on earth, and provoke the cataclysmic storm of events that makes up this powerful story.

The first two winners of the contest. Wonder Stories Quarterly, Fall 1931

conservatives and the new converts shatters three worlds. Smith's ending is oddly ambiguous as to who fought on the right side. Of all the pros included in the contest, Clark Ashton Smith is perhaps the most famous today with the possible exception of Jack Williamson and Manly Wade Wellman, both professionals who have won the Lifetime Achievement Award for Fantasy. Smith was part of the Lovecraft Circle found predominately in *Weird Tales*. E. M. Johnson may have enjoyed the $25.00 but he might have been more pleased to be a footnote in the career of such a famous poet/writer.

The Winter 1932 issue featured the Third Place winner and its $15.00 went to Allen Glasser of New York City. A. Rowley Hilliard, a writer little remembered today perhaps because he only wrote eight stories, turned the plot into "The Martian". An unnamed Martian is exiled to Earth, where he has to make due. He works in a circus as a freak and all his schemes fail until he destroys himself. Glasser was an active fan, who later penned a handful of stories, but wrote many letters to the different SF pulps and even published his



INTERPLANETARY "PLOT" CONTEST

HERE is a novel contest such as we have never staged before—one we believe all readers will be very much interested in.

There seems to be a tremendous interest at the present time in interplanetary stories. Furthermore, practically every reader of WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY, in his letters to the editor, has expressed ideas of what a good interplanetary story should be. In a good many cases, our authors come in for considerable criticism, the readers stating that they themselves could write better stories! Here, then, is your chance to prove yourself as a creator of an interplanetary story and incidentally win a large prize.

We know that it's impossible for every reader to be an author, but we also know that many of our readers have excellent ideas for stories that never see the light of day. The contest which we propose is nothing more or less than to have our readers construct plots for interplanetary stories. You do not have to be an author to get up an idea for a good interplanetary story and we will show you below how you can do it rather easily.

From the plots we receive, we will select the best and submit these plots to authors whom we think best suited to develop the story. The author will write the story, using the plot submitted by our reader, and the story will be signed jointly by the author as well as the reader who supplied the plot. It is a novel idea and we believe you will like it. This, then, is a get-together for readers and authors and we are certain that some interesting results will come from this contest. The "plot" contest is meant only for our readers and no author who has previously had any story published is eligible for it. The author will receive his compensation for the writing of the story. In order that you can understand what we mean by plot, we give you an outline herewith, which is merely a sample to guide you.

PRIZES

First prize	$50.00
Second "	25.00
Third "	15.00
Fourth "	10.00
Fifth "	5.00
Sixth "	2.50
Seventh "	2.50
	$110.00

"THE METEOR PEST"

"A space-flyer explorer, crossing the orbits of the asteroids, discovers that most of the smaller asteroids are hollow inside and are peopled by an insect race, intelligent to the highest degree. These insects, 10 inches in height, are not affected by extreme cold and do not require oxygen. They live strictly on cellulose which they manufacture in the interior of their tiny worlds. Shortly after the space-flyer returns to earth, an unusually large number of meteors are seen in certain quarters of the sky. Not much attention is paid to this phenomenon until several weeks later, when suddenly the entire population of the earth becomes paralyzed and falls into a cataleptic state, which lasts for several weeks. During this time the asteroid hordes invade the earth and, while our earth is helpless, they carry off all the earth's available radium and platinum supply,

(*Continued on page* 430)

Wonder Stories Quarterly, Fall 1931

own fanzine called, *The Planet*.

Also in that issue was the Fourth Place winner who got $10.00, Everett C. Smith of Lawrence, Mass. His plot was written into a story by R. F. Starzl and was called "The Metal Moon". This tale of Earth explorers who find a civilization beyond the Asteroid Belt proposes two races of people descended from Earth. The First Race are supermen though dull-witted. The Second Race, the slave race, look more like regular humans but suffer terrible mutations because they have to work in the dark and radioactive under-belly. The Earthmen side with each race at different times (while forgetting to remain neutral), but are ultimately declared slaves. They escape in a rocket that is built in secret and finally head for home. The binary race is pretty obviously descended from H. G. Wells but the ideas used will surface again in SF in the stories of Cordwainer Smith as well as David Gerrold and Oliver Crawford's *Star Trek* episode "The Cloud-Miners" (February 28, 1969). The metallic moon has haunting echoes in George Lucas's Deathstar. Starzl was an important early writer who left the field to run a family newspaper.

The Spring 1932 held the Fifth Place story and the $5.00 went to Max Jergovic. Manly Wade Wellman wrote his synopsis into "Rebels of the Moon". This story features a space super-agent, Lt. O'Grady, who has come to the Moon covertly to investigate suspicious

activity. What he finds is a secret stash of rocket fuel, originally intended for an exploration to the planet Venus, but O'Grady is captured and brought into the scheme. Dr. Von Rickopf and his crew have discovered diamonds inside the Moon. The Venus project is being diverted to allow Rickopf to take the diamonds back to Earth, using a secret stockpile in the Amazon. O'Grady has to join them or die. With help from the radioman Manvel and some others who were forced to serve the villains, O'Grady steals the ship and intends to take it on its original course for Venus. Manvel uses a radio-controlled gun to detonate the remaining fuel and blow up Von Rickopf and his pursuit rockets. Wellman is perhaps better known for horror and fantasy but wrote an equal amount of SF as well as comic books. This story would have prepared him to write one of the few Captain Future novels not written by Edmond Hamilton, *The Solar Invasion* (Fall 1946).

Also in that issue was the Sixth Place story and its $2.50 prize went to Lawrence Schwartzmann. Jack Williamson, a later master of Science Fiction, wrote the plot into "Red Slag of Mars". This story supposes a voyage to Mars that began an interplanetary war. Five years after the conflict, Dr. Nyland Eldred is dropped off in the Sahara by a Martian craft then arrested for his treason against humanity. Sidney Tancred, who was on that initial flight to Mars as cameraman, seeks out Eldred for an explanation, for Eldred refuses to testify in his own defence. We learn the story of the first trip to Mars that had Eldred discovering a Martian ruin that could unlock the vanished Martian culture. War breaks out on earth and the international crew take sides and begin to kill each other off. Eldred finds an underground city where the Martians still live. With their help he begins a daring plan to drive all humanity to work together against the Martians. Williamson ends the story with some first class writing, as Eldred, the man who saved all human kind, proudly walks off to the execution chamber. In my opinion, (Hugo can disagree with me), this was the best of the Contest stories.

The Summer 1932 included the final Seventh Place story and its $2.50 prize. The last spot went to John Michel of Brooklyn, New York. The story was written by pro Raymond Z. Gallun into "The Menace From Mercury". Clive Torrence goes on a space cruise on the liner *Thelon*. Later he recaps the entire plot to a group of nervous student travelers so we'll let him tell us: "...The *Thelon* was ordered to investigate flashes of light which were visible on this planet [Mercury]. Arriving here, we found in the valley, the strange race of beings and their machines. Our ship was trapped by the force shield which you can see overhead. Then a peculiar kind of radioactive fire was accidentally started in the valley...." To break down the forcefield, Torrence decides to drive a shuttle boat into the base of the machine that creates the shield. The captain of the *Thelon*, Patok, a gnome-like Martian who is fond of his alien yo-yo, wants to go but Torrence insists. While the Earthman drives his shuttle downward to crash, Patok shows up in another shuttle, and pulls him to safety with his yo-yo. The scene warranted the cover. It is the kind of plot that we would see in one form or another on *Star Trek*. Gallun was an important early Science Fiction writer, but his world-travelling gaps in his career and the lack of major novels have relegated him to the Age of Wonder. John Michel would become a writer in his own right as John B. Michel, penning two dozen stories as well as working in comics.

WANTED: STILL MORE PLOTS

IN this issue of the QUARTERLY you will find the final story resulting from the Interplanetary Plot Contest first announced in the Spring 1931 QUARTERLY, as well as the first story resulting from our new Plot Contest.

The stories written as a result of the original contest have all been published, and the enthusiasm expressed by our readers, indicate that they wish the Contest to be continued. As a consequence, we announced that for the succeeding two issues we would award $10.00 for the best plot submitted up to the time of closing of each issue. We have pleasure therefore in awarding the third $10.00 prize under this new plan. If the results warant it, we will continue to award the $10.00 prizes at the expiration of the year set for this contest; and will continue it as long as we receive good plots.

Speaking of plots, we want emphatically to warn our prospective contributors against submitting interplanetary war stories. A plot submitted that simply relates a war between two planets, with a lot of rays and bloodshed, will receive little consideration. What we want are original ideas, new points of view on interplanetary exploration; new ideas regarding the activities of Terrestrials on strange worlds, and of extra-Terrestrials on earth. **Read the letter from George W. Race in the "Reader Speaks" of this issue and see what to avoid.**

The $10.00 prize for the best Interplanetary Plot received up to the publication of this issue, is awarded to Allan Benson, Box 410, Seattle, Wash.

WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY will pay $10.00 each issue for the best interplanetary plot submitted by our readers up to September 15, 1932. Professional authors are barred from this contest. The $10.00 prize will be paid upon publication of the story.

The man who sends in a plot:

1. That pictures people of other worlds as being just like Earthmen, and (as some authors put it) *speak English;*
2. That shows our hero going to another world to rescue a fair princess from an evil priest;
3. That shows our hero going to another world to single-handed overcome a great army; or
4. That shows our hero going to another world to conquer a horde of strange beasts;

This man should not hope his plot will receive serious consideration. If our readers study the plots that have been written into stories, they will perceive in each one some original "slant" on interplanetary travel, or of the conditions on other worlds. That original "slant" is what our readers should strive for.

For other details regarding plots, we refer you to the Spring 1931 issue of WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY (Vol. 2 No. 3). Should you not have a copy of that issue, we shall be glad to send you printed matter outlining the details of the contest.

Above all, in order to receive consideration, your plots should be either typewritten or legibly and clearly written with a pen. Illegibly written manuscripts are practically always passed over without consideration. A good plot illegibly written may thus lose a prize.

Wonder Stories Quarterly, Summer 1932

But the Seventh Place story wasn't the end of the matter as you might think. In that issue Gernsback extended the contest with new $10.00 prizes. Gernsback is hopeful when he says: "...If the results warrant it, we will continue to award the $10.00 prizes at the expiration of the year set for this contest; and will continue it as long as we receive good plots." In truth there were only two more Quarterlies to appear and neither included contest winners.

Gernsback furthers his rules for the contest by pointing out some examples of poor ideas based in part on a letter by George W. Race. Poor stories are those:

1. That pictures people of other worlds as being just like Earthmen, and (as some authors put it) speak English!
2. That shows our hero going to another world to rescue a fair princess from an evil priest;
3. That shows our hero going to another world to single-handed overcome a great army;
4. That shows our hero going to another world to conquer a horde of strange beasts;

From this I can only assume that many of the contestants had been sending in recycled Edgar Rice Burroughs stories. "Rebellion on Venus" by Edward Morris and John Bertin must have passed this test for it was the first and only tale to receive a prize. This story supposes a corporation having total control of Venus, much as the British ruled India under the British India Company. Dr. Harrington and his daughter, Sheila, go to Venus to

finish his important work on nuclear engines, but the Allen family who owns the Company plans to also get rid of Harrington, after the work is done. Dr. H is suspected of being sympathetic with the rebels of Venus, pioneers who first staked the planet but have fallen out with the new owners (much as the Metis under Louis Riel responded to the Government of Canada in the 1880s). The ship headed for Venus is destroyed by a meteor storm and all the big players end up in the Venusian jungle, being lead by Bradford the Younger, a rebel leader who was headed home to be tried and executed along with his father. The castaways join up with the rebel forces but Allen bombs the mines until they accept terms. The Company has no intention of keeping the peace, but wiping out the rebels. It is only when Harrington saves the day with new nuclear weapons, that Bradford the Elder throws down the Company forever, leading a new independeant Venus Nelson Mandela like, going from prisoner to President.

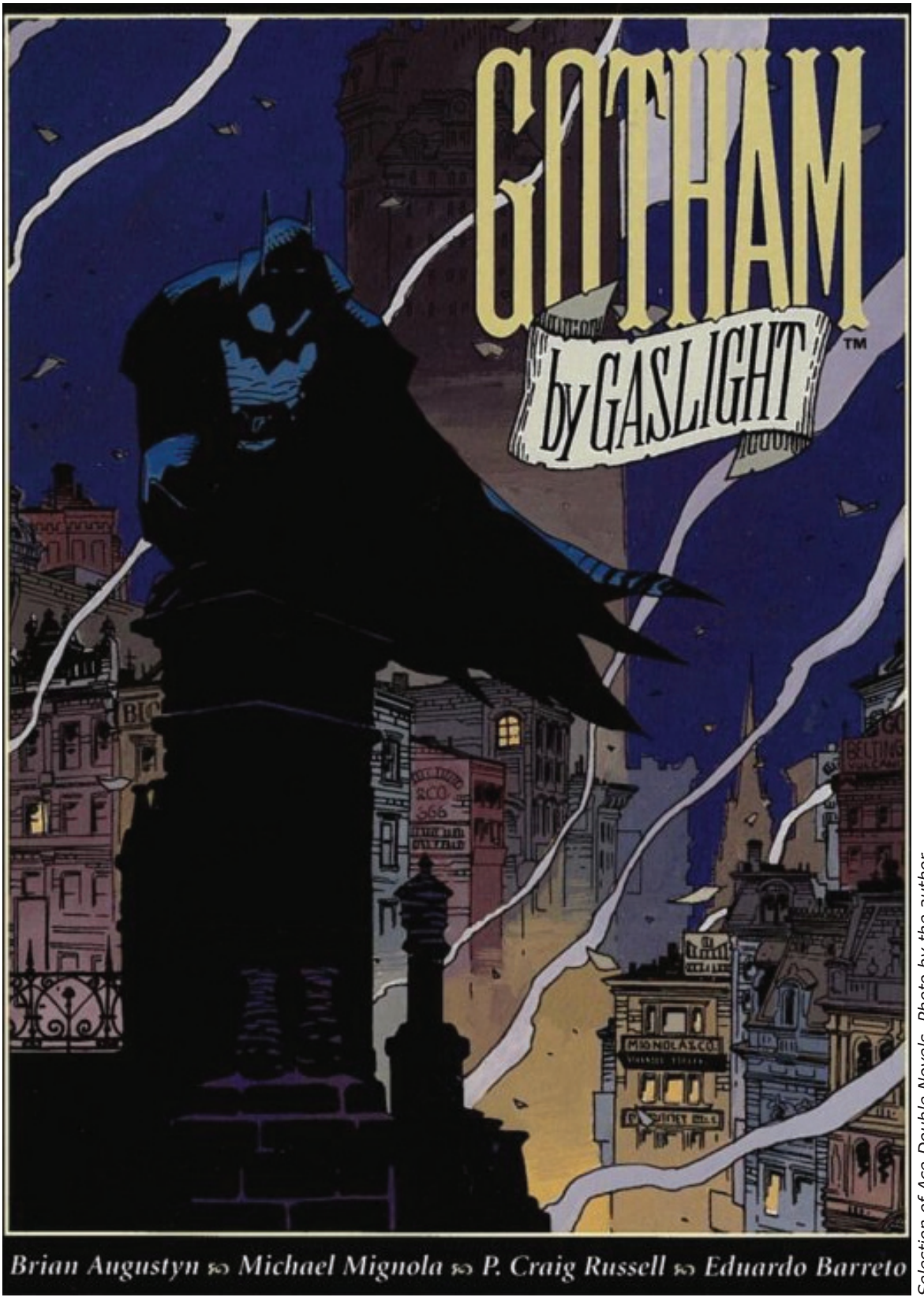
The political questions about colonization are intriguing in this story. Sadly, most SF sees the process as a glorious adventure, with little consideration for the locals. Later writers such as Leigh Brackett in "Citadel of Lost Ships" (*Planet Stories*, March 1943) and Ursula K. Legin in "The Word For World is Forest" (*Again, Dangerous Visions*, 1972) would address colonization decades later. Another fun bit, Bertin makes the different types of positions aboard ship designated by color uniforms, an idea we know well from TV's *Star Trek*.

With "Rebellion on Venus" the Interplanetary Plot Contest came to an end. Did it achieve what Gernsback had hoped? If improving Science Fiction, expanding its content and ideas, was the goal, then it failed. None of the contest stories was particularly important in the annals of SF. They are merely interesting footnotes. In this respect, Gernsback may have been more interested in the gimmick than the result. I suspect he wanted to build reader loyalty as he had done previously at *Amazing Stories*, a magazine that was now his rival.

If increased circulation had been the goal, then it failed. The Quarterlies ended with Winter 1933. *Wonder Stories* would go on without the companion magazine until March 1936, when Hugo would sell the title to Ned Pines, who would rebrand it *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and begin a new chapter in Science Fiction Pulp publishing.

So what did he achieve then? Again, more by accident than intent, he gave more power to the fans. This sense of entitlement would be a two-edged sword. While on the one-hand, young readers like Isaac Asimov and Fredrick Pohl would wonder, "Could I be a Science Fiction writer one day?"; but on the other you have writers like Fredric Brown hiding themselves away in Taos, New Mexico to avoid the readers who "want to own it all". Brown would pen a scathing attack on fanboys everywhere in his 1949 novel, *What Mad Universe?* Not in Mystery circles, Romance circles, even Western circles, do fans have the power that Science Fiction fans do. This is in large part thanks to Hugo Gernsback, who knew he had to make them loyal if he was going to go on publishing magazines. We call Gernsback the Father of Modern Science Fiction, but perhaps a more accurate title would be "The Father of Fandom".

▲



Selection of Ace Double Novels. Photo by the author

GOTHAM BY GASLIGHT

by Calvin Heighton

The legendary comic book title gets an animated film adaptation -- does the adaptation hold up?

The book *Gotham By Gaslight* is a legend among comic book lovers and rightfully so. It was one of the first books that DC produced that took our hero back into the past where we find that every era needs a Batman to protect them.

In this case it's Victorian England and Jack The Ripper is on a killing spree. Into this horror comes the Batman and you are amazed at how well he fits into this world. It was amazing to me how easily the whole concept translated. It started a trend of stories that showed what would happen if say Superman or Wonder Woman or the Flash existed in another time and place. A whole new vein of great storytelling ideas was found to be mined. A hero is a hero whenever you find them.

This was one of the first books that Mike Mignola (of Hellboy fame) did and it cemented his position as a unique artist and visionary. Brian Augustyn and P. Craig Russel also went on to bigger and better things. All of this talent, combined with better coloring on heavier stock paper and a cardboard cover screamed exclusive. Yes, it cost more but it was so

Mike Mignola artwork for Gotham by Gaslight

worth it.

I loved the story and the art which perfectly captured a foggy Whitechapel. The whole production feels so much better than your regular monthy comic book. It's the kind of book you share with people who know of Batman but don't read comic book. People forget that if this book had failed we would have NONE of the great Elseworld stories that we have enjoyed over the years from *The Flashpoint Paradox*, *Red Son* and *Kingdom Come*, which I feel is the greatest Elseworld story of all time. *Gotham By Gaslight* paved the way for it all.

So it makes total sense to me that this would be the newest film from DC Animation. Its time has come and I am excited to see how this one turns out. If this one is done now, and *Flashpoint* exists in DC's animated universe, can *Kingdom Come* or *Red Son* be far behind? I know *Batgirl: Year One* is next and I am excited for that one as well.

Once again DC Animation takes one of their greatest stories and translates it to animation. This time it's the groundbreaking *Gotham By Gaslight*. This was the first graphic novel from DC that proved that the concept of superheroes existing in other times was a solid concept. Here we take the legend of Jack the Ripper and toss in the Batman and his universe of characters. It's amazing how smooth the translation is. A true proof of concept. It all just works.

The three orphans named Dickie, Jason and Tim are a nice touch. They are called the Cock Robins.

Johnny Gobs? Telling a story of the Batman attacking him? Remember that line? It's a

A scene from the animated adaptation of Gotham by Gaslight.

nice throwback to the Tim Burton Batman movie.

The movie may be animated but it is not for children. There are strong scenes of murder and other assorted acts of violence. There is swearing by kids. There is blood. Lots of blood. But you don't tell a story of Jack The Ripper without the blood.

I loved all the Victorian touches and steampunk technology as the tale is set against the backdrop of the Gotham City World's Fair. There is alot going on here and it's fun to see a story I know so well mixed with a character I know even better.

If I have one complaint it would be the pedestrian animation. But how can you bring Mignola's dynamic art to screen without messing it up? It's serviceable but I hoped for more. The voice acting is very good especially Bruce Greenwood as Batman/Bruce Wayne.

The identity of the Ripper will shock you. It's different from the book but I think it works better than the Ripper from the book. But some will be annoyed but for me this is another winner from DC Animation.

▲

Reptilicus. Issue #1. Charlton Comics. Art by Rocco A. "Rocke" Mastroserio

REPTILICUS

by G. W. Thomas

What started out as a low-budget monster movie from Denmark transforms itself into a cult comic book

Reptilicus (1961) had a weird dual quality that followed it from the silver screen to the comic book pages. The initial film was shot in Danish but then it was re-shot in English using the same cast. The original writer, Sidney W. Pink, railed against AIP's second version, largely reworked by Ib Melchior, but ultimately legal action was dropped. Its enduring fame in Denmark saw thoughts of a sequel but generally lousy reviews in America made any such film unlikely. *Reptilicus* is Denmark's only giant monster movie and has a cult following in that country.

The plot of the film is pretty typical of Kaiju films. Miners drilling for copper find a fragment of the monster, which they give to the scientists at the university. The fragment eventually grows into a new full-size monster and terrorizes the countryside. The monster is impervious to all weapons. Only the clever actions of the heroes can save humankind. This includes creating a rocket filled with a sleeping draught. The film is a little sketchy on how they disposed of an indestrubctible monster but Reptilicus is stopped and the world is saved.

As part of promoting the film, a novelization was released and a comic version of the

Reptilicus, American International Pictures, 1961

film produced by Charlton Comics. The one issue adaptation appeared in August 1961. The adaptation was written by Joe Gill from the Pink and Melchior script. Artwork was done by Bill Molno and Vince Alascia. The comic version is accurate but lacks some of the sillier scenes from the film, probably done from an early version. The images of the comic are not copied from the film and Reptilicus flies more in the comic than on screen.

A second issue was produced by the same team as an imagined sequel to the film. Issue #2 (October 1961) repeats the same basic plot but in the jungles of Africa. Peter Blinn, a government agent, tracks down Dr. Hanna (and his beautiful daughter) to convince him to return to work on nuclear projects. Reptilicus shows up and the local Africans appeal to the whites to rescue them. Ultimately, it is the Africian chief who solves the problem, for he comes up with a plan to drive Reptilicus into The Valley of Smoke, where poisonous gas from a volcano is known to be lethal. This time around spears dipped in poison and bullets hurt Reptilicus even though in the film he barely noticed machine guns and bombs.

After the copyright lapsed, Charlton released a new version of *Reptilicus* under its second name, ironically, *Reptisaurus the Terrible*. This comic ran for six issues, starting with #3 in January 1962 and running to #8 in December. A *Special Edition* #1 appeared in Summer 1963. The series began with the same team but were replaced by Joe Sinnott and Vince Colletta for #4-6 and Bill Montes and Ernie Bache for #7-8 and the Special.

There were some changes made in switching from "licus" to "saurus". First, the drilling origin was dropped and Reptisaurus was awoken by nuclear bomb blasts. As with the adaptation, Reptisaurus flies most of the time rather than crawling around as he did in the film. This is understandable from an action point of view. As a flyer he fights UFOs and jet planes but can land to fight tanks and soldiers as well. Reptisaurus also lost his ability to breath fire.

Issue #3 is a hilariously bad aliens versus Reptilicus tale. Flying Saucers from Jupiter come to claim the Earth, but the Jupos' (one named John and another Harold, of all things) ships are easily munched by Reptilicus and his mate (where did she come from? just wait for #4 to explain that). Even their tanks are no match for Reptilicus's impervious skin. Eventually, with only a few ships left, the aliens find that gamma rays knock the flying serpents out. It is Earth's air forces' chance to help stop the invasion but airplanes are easily defeated. The aliens flee when they encounter Reptilicus's offspring, leaving the Earth to the winged reptiles.

Issue #4 back-tracks and explains how Reptilicus and his gal met. The two monsters are munching on people in different parts of the world when the female's cries are heard thousands of miles away. The two monsters slowly find each other, after trashing much of the planet, and begin a terrible battle. The humans get out of the way but in the end it is just their mating ritual.

Issue #5 has Reptisaurus, a bachelor again, land in Red China. There he sees a giant dragon robot created for parades. Reptisaurus falls in love with the green robot. The Chinese decide to use the device to capture the "Captialist creature" for a visiting Soviet officer, who wants to take the beast back to Moscow. The soldiers load the robot with explosive and detonate it against the frisky monster. Reptisaurus is heart-broken and ends up in the Himilayas sulking while the Yeti looks on.

Issue #6 sees Reptisaurus leave the mountains to take his revenge on the Communists. The Soviets, using cables stretched from jets, snag Reptisaurus and capture him. The propaganda of his capture is sent to the newspapers of the Free World. The U. S. Navy sends in paratroopers who free Reptisaurus (because now, mutating again, he is a peaceful creature and of no harm to anybody). No longer starving, thanks to the protein rich fodder the Yanks left, Reptisaurus goes on a rampage and stomps the Reds. The portrayal of the Soviets as under-handed and suppressive brutes is reminsicent of the anti-Nazi comics of the 1940s. The complete flip-flop in this issue is startling. For how many issues had the US and other countries been unable to capture the destructive monster? Now, he is good?

Issue #7 saw a change in artwork with Montes and Bache coming on board. The writing also took a new turn in that the lives of the people affected by Reptisaurus got more attention. Instead of unimportant human victims the story focuses on Dr. Harden and his personal conflict as well as following Reptisaurus and his mate (Yep, she's back and she's gone from being a copy of Rep to a more pterodactyl look with brown scales. This was probably done so the two creatures could be differentiated.) The love triangle between John Harden, his wife Lois and their guide Carl ends with Harden exerting his manhood and saving his marriage. He also takes one of the monsters' eggs causing Reptisaurus to go on a rampage.

True to Reptisaurus's ever-changing nature, in Issue #8, Dr. Harden goes insane as he studies the baby monster in his lab. (The wife must have gone back to the city, because she is MIA.) Harden is supposed to be finding a way to kill the monsters for the Government but instead creates a hypnotizing whistle that will allow him to take control of Reptisaurus and his mate. His assistant, Alva and his associate, Dr. Laurence Morgan, go with Harden to Africa, after Morgan kills the baby monster specimen. In the jungle where Reptisaurus

Reptilicus Issue #2, Charlton Comics, 1961. Art by Bill Molno and Vince Alascia

lives, Harden takes control of the monsters and plans to kill the others. Morgan's quick call to the military has planes blow up the now hatched babies and Dr. Harden. Only Reptisaurus and his mate escape. In previous issues nuclear bombs were unable to kill Reptisaurus. In this issue, radiation works on the babies.

Special #1 features big game hunter and millionaire, Clark Martin, who is off to South America to find and hunt Reptisaurus. Another love triangle between Martin, his ward and fiancee Bev and the hunky guide, Breck, plays out as the descendents of the Aztecs revive their human sacrificing cult because they believe Reptisaurus is Quetzetacl the Flying Serpent returned. The cultists capture the bickering outsiders but Reptisaurus is not interested in eating them. He destroys the pyramid temple and the Aztecs flee into the jungle. The final issue proves to be a mishmash of previous stories, ending with Reptisaurus and his mates happily living in the jungle (probably hoping to be cancelled).

But Reptisaurus's reign didn't end there. In 2009, with Kaiju making a resurgence, Peter Dang directed and Jeremiah Campbell wrote a new version of the franchise, starring Gil Gerrard as General Morgenstern. Interestingly, the film is called "Reptisaurus", not "Repiliticus", making it an adaptation of the Charlton comic, not a remake of the 1961 film. As the trailer says "Based on the Comic Book Classic". Classic, hm.... The film features CGI effects and tongue-in-cheek humor and doesn't take itself seriously, making references to Godzilla movies for instance. Considering the history of the original film and the comics that followed, this is perhaps appropriate.

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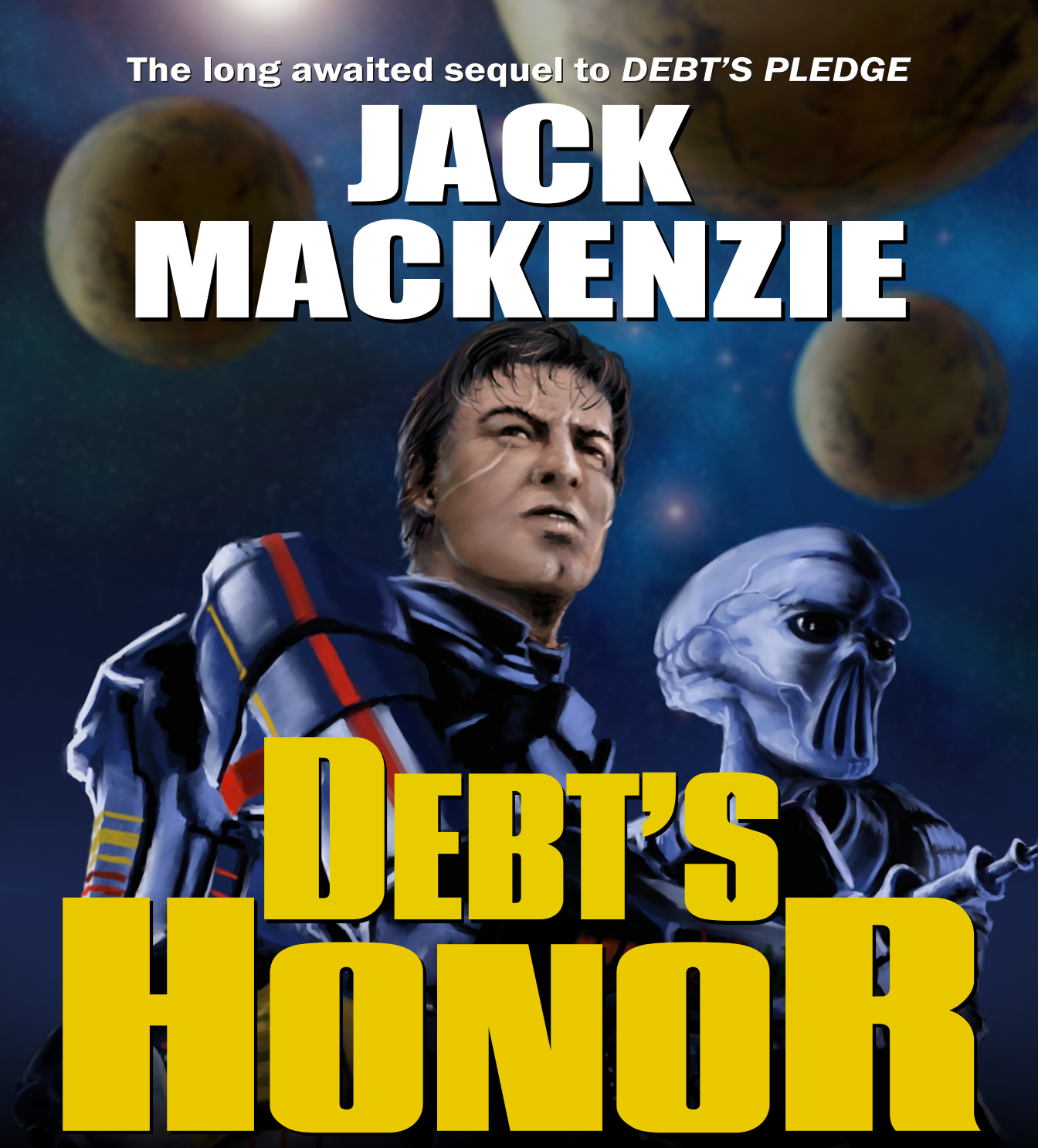
The long awaited sequel to *DEBT'S PLEDGE*

JACK MACKENZIE



DEBT'S HONOR

Pirates, aliens, bureaucrats - who can you trust? Jefferson Odett would rather be out on the rim, fighting the war for humanity, but a military punishment has landed him on a colony planet beset by problems. Pirates have targeted the colony for plunder, a race of wandering alien nomads have made themselves at home and the colony's new governor seems intent on making enemies of just about everyone – especially Jefferson Odett *"ACTION-PACKED SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE!"*

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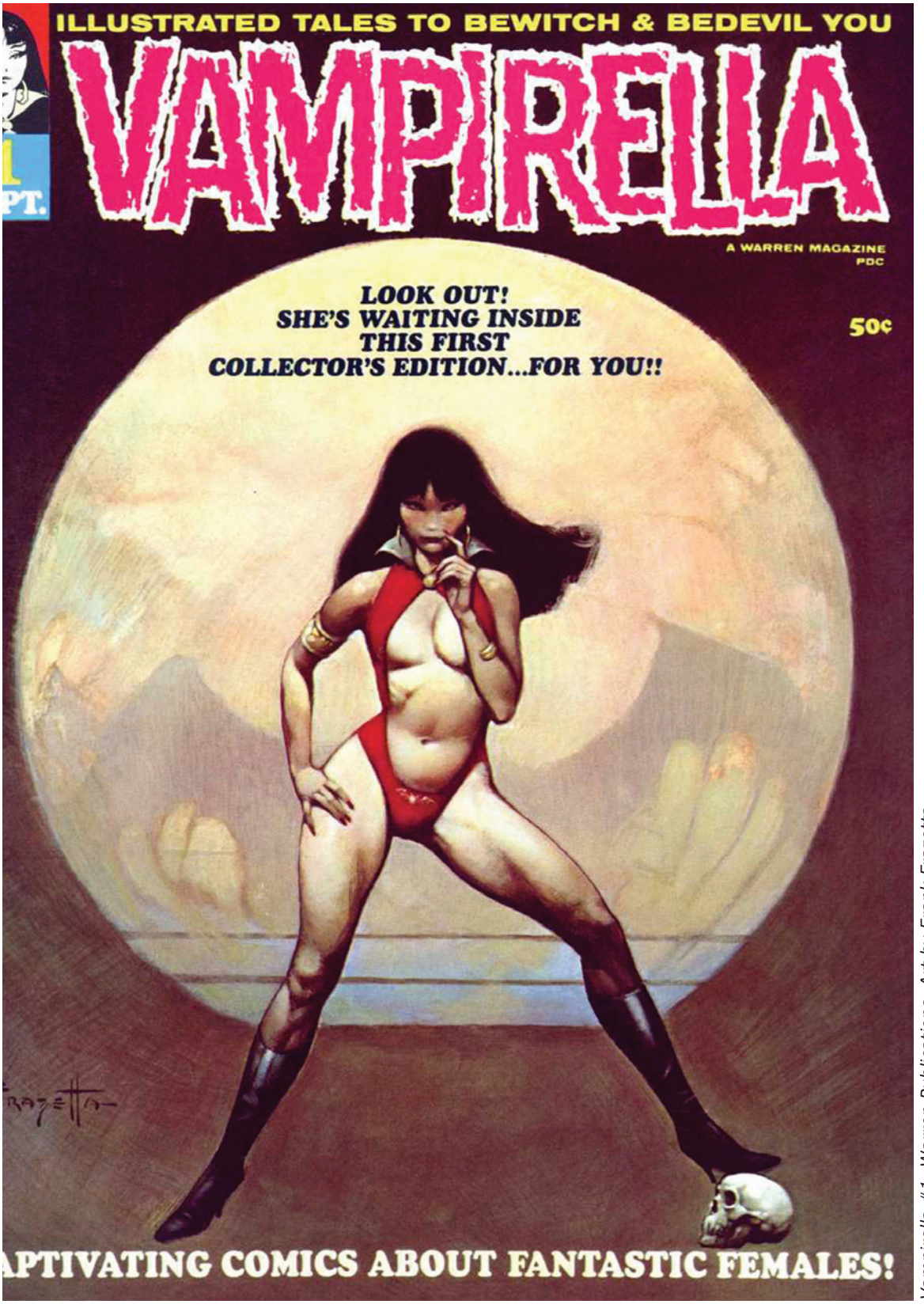


Vampirella #1, Warren Publications. Art by Frank Frazetta

VAMPIRELLA:
Character or Commodity?

by Jack Mackenzie

Created as a "tacky bit of titillation", can Vampirella become more than merely a "sexy vampire"?

Poor Vampirella. You look at her and you think that she's free to do what she wants, that she is in charge of her own destiny. The truth is, she is merely a commodity, bought and sold like so much chattel. She is a slave dancing to the whims of her cruel master, who, at this time, is Dynamite Entertainment.

Like a slave from bygone times she has had several owners throughout her miserable life. She has been bought, used up and then sold off to the next buyer.

But it's not just her alone. All fictional characters are owned by somebody and most of the ones that everyone knows about have likely been bought and sold at least once. They are properties of their creators or their publishing or other entertainment companies and will be until they get so old that they get to enjoy a kind of retirement when they finally slip into the green pasture known as Public Domain.

It was September of 1969, just after the "Summer of Love". Flower children everywhere

Vampirella as originally designed by artist Trina Robinson

were basking in the warm glow of the apex of the hippie era, blissfully unaware of the harsh cold winter that was about to come upon them. It was a time of great upheaval and social change and Forrest J. Ackerman thought: "Hey! We need a sexy vampire woman!"

Inspired by Jean-Claude Forest's science fiction heroine *Barbarella*, who had been made into a film the year before by Roger Vadim, starring his then wife Jane Fonda, Forrest J. Ackerman and James Warren of Warren Publishing came up with the idea of a "vampire-ella" as a counterpoint to the ghoulish male presenters of Warren's comic magazines *Eerie* and *Creepy*.

Ackerman and Warren took the idea to artist Trina Robbins who came up with the general look and a costume which would suggest a vampire's usual attire but be kind of bathing suit-like to show off Vampirella's physical attributes.

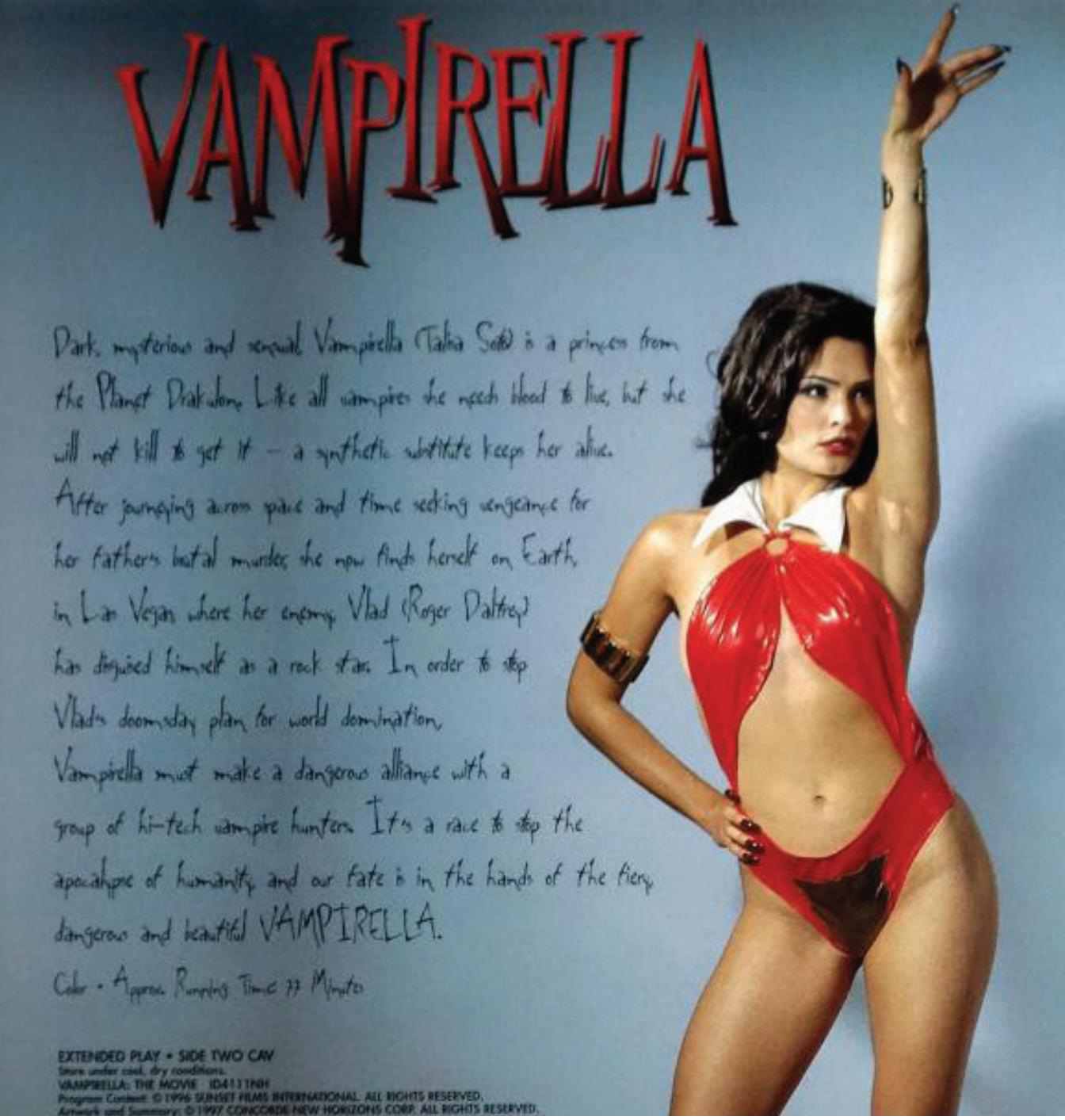
They took this idea to a rising star in the art world, a powerhouse of an artist named Frank Frazetta. Robbins described the outfit and Frazetta provided the first illustration of the character. Frazetta's interpretation of Vampirella from Trina Robbin's description gave her more of some things and less of others… like clothing.

"His original cover art of *Vampirella* looked a lot like my idea," Trina Robbins said. "but her costume shrunk."

With each issue the men drawing the sexy heroine seemed to find ways to make the costume smaller to show off more of Vampirella's other assets. "By now it doesn't bear any resemblance to what I designed." Robbins says.

Vampirella began life as a slightly tacky bit of titillation used to introduce the real

Vampirella pin-up. Warren Publications. Art by José Gonzalez



Talisa Soto as Vampirella. Box art for video Disc. 1996

horror stories in the early issues of the magazine that bore her name. Eventually, though she grew into a strong character in her own right with her own entourage of supporting cast – both heroes and villains. As time passed the focus was less and less on the traditional horror story and more on the Vampirella story, which quickly established itself as the lead story and the cover page subject.

Jim Warren had the good sense to recognize real artistic talent and many of the top

writers and artists in comic book history were published in *Vampirella*. The one artist who stood out head and shoulders over the rest and who's art defined Vampirella for decades to come was José "Pepe" Gonzalez, a talented artist originally from Barcelona, Spain.

The magazine was a big success and it ran for 112 issues, finally ending its run in 1983 with the demise of Warren Publishing. After a period in limbo, Harris Comics bought the *Vampirella* title and launched her back into the spotlight.

Their first foray was a "continuation" of the Warren magazine format with issue #113, which had limited success. As such, it is one of the most sought after and rare *Vampirella* comics. Having tested the water, Harris then produced a range of comics, trade paperbacks, and magazines as well as various peripheral items such as statues and trading cards.

After a steady decline in sales, Harris Publishing decided that the Vampirella character was no longer a viable concern. In 2010 Vampirella was sold to Dynamite Entertainment. Dynamite kicked off a new look Vampirella with a monthly series in November 2010.

In her time as a comic book icon, Vampirella has been drawn by many artists and portrayed by a multitude of models and other pin-up girls. Hammer films tried to turn the property into a movie in 1976. Plans were to have Peter Cushing and John Gielgud in supporting roles to Barbara Legh's Vampirella. Sadly the project fell through as did Hammer Films shortly afterward.

Vampirella eventually did make it into the movies, albeit not in such a big way. Roger Corman produced a direct-to-video *Vampirella* in 1996. The film was done on the cheap and it looks it (Vampirella's outfit looks like an off-the-rack plastic Halloween costume). Former Bond Girl Talisa Soto was cast as Vampirella, despite not having quite the same… assets.

Poor Vampirella. She has been bought and sold, exploited by men, forced to wear a skimpy, barely-there costume, had her origin story changed several times, had her memories stolen, altered and returned to her, and still she goes on working for her cruel masters, providing cheap titillation for the fanboy masses.

When will her suffering end? Will she ever reach the promised land of the Public Domain? Or maybe she just needs someone who will treat her right.

Maybe she needs a creator who is willing to look past the bathing suit and the cheesy sexism and recreate her in a new mold. Vampirella could easily become something more akin to Kate Beckinsale's character Selene from the *Underworld* movies.

Perhaps Vampirella could eschew the swimsuit competition outfit and don some black leathers, maybe ride a Harley, swing a sword or fire off a pair of loaded 45's now and then (No, not those kinds of loaded 45's – get your mind out of the gutter!).

Maybe it's time Vampirella threw off her shackles and ran like a badass blood sucking Harriet Tubman!

Okay, maybe I've pushed the slave metaphor a bit too far. Maybe I'm trying too hard to make some sort of salient and profound point in order to turn this essay into something more than just an excuse to show pictures of Vampirella.

Then again, Ralph Waldo Emerson said that beauty is its own excuse for being. Maybe we can say the same about Vampirella?

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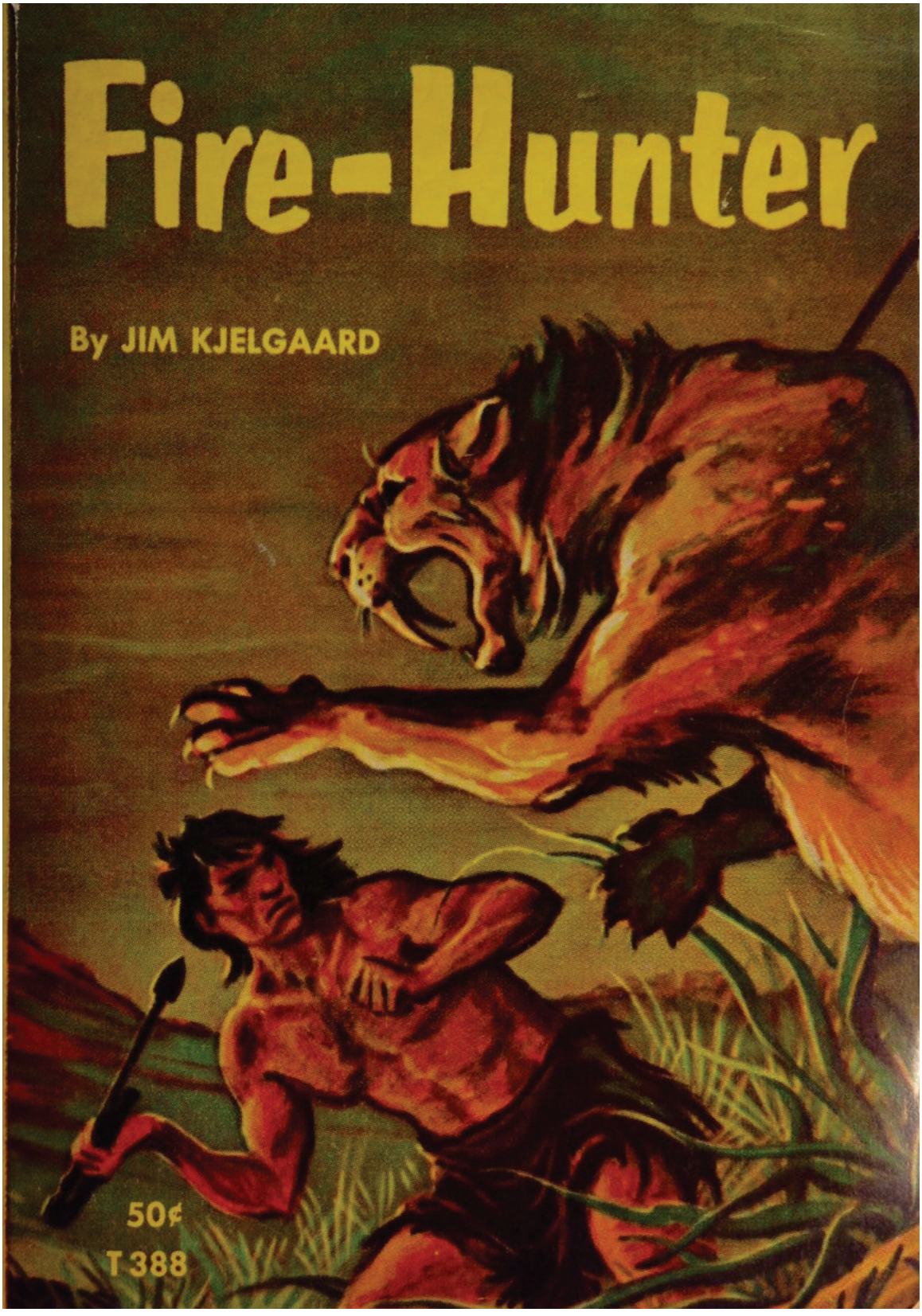


Fire Hunter, 1951. Ralph Ray, artist

THE MONSTERS OF JIM KJELGAARD

by G. W. Thomas

Before turning his hand to his more famous animal stories, Jim Kjellgaard got his start penning weird tales

Jim Kjelgaard will always have a place in the halls of Children's Literature, with his many animal novels including *Big Red* (1945). But the author had to start somewhere and wrote for the Western Pulps as well as four stories for *Weird Tales*. It is these four tales we will look at now. Kjelgaard could have played it safe and wrote about vampires or ghosts but his interests weren't really there. He liked animals and the country life and that's what he chose to focus on.

The first story was "The Thing From the Barrens" (*Weird Tales*, September 1945). George Malory dwells in North City so he can stay close to the woman he loves, Marcia Davenport. Marcia's father, Pug, is trapper who has come back from the Barrens, haunted by a strange creature. The monster is invisible but as Pug tells George there are two signs it is near, a stick and a duckprint. George sees these for real when the creature comes to the city. Those who touch the stick seem to float into the air as if they were being drawn up by a giant invisible hand. In the snow there are footprints, shaped like a duck's but hugely

out of proportion. When Marcia is taken, George and Pug go after the invisible monster. Outside of the city they find the creature's camp, where it has skinned three victims and discarded their corpses. The monster is a trapper, like the men who work from North City, using the stick to trap its prey. Pug faces off with the monster, shooting it to death with his 30-06. The bleeding beast kills Pug then crashes into the river to die. The trapper dies, saving his child, who finally becomes George's girl. George theorizes the monster is invisible because it is a color humans can not see. Pug is the only man who could have shot the thing, for he is completely color-blind. Kjelgaard wrote about Arctic settings in other stories including *Kalak of the Ice* (1949) the story of a polar bear, and "Meeting on the Ice" (*Adventure*, May 1949) in which a criminal on the lam has a run-in with same.

"The Fangs of Tsan-Lo" (*Weird Tales*, November 1945) is a dog story with a twist. Clint Roberts is much like the character Danny Pickett from *Big Red*, working for others in a subordinate position as dog trainer. He is madly in love with Sally Evers and wants to win her. Tslan-Lo is a strange dog who comes to the kennel. He has been in the possession of a mad scientist named Dr. Ibellius Grut. The dog mutates into a gigantic fiend that pulls Clint out of his bed (illo above) and it is up to him to destroy it. Tsan-Lo has an insane desire to kill Sally. Tsan-Lo sights the girl and goes mad with killing lust. Clint kills the beast, that is pursuing the girl, by leading the giant dog to a treacherous sink-hole. The romance and solution are reminiscent of "The Thing From the Barrens" and but doesn't have the believability of that story.

"Chanu" (*Weird Tales*, March 1946) changes direction entirely. George and Ann Roberts are newly-weds going to Africa. George, a specimen hunter, meets a strange man by the name of Chanu at the Africa Club in Mabari. The wizened old man gives off an alarming sense of evil but George speaks with him out of politeness. Chanu discusses genetics with George before ogling his attractive new wife and saying "A perfect specimen for breeding! Strength and beauty--who knows what a thousand years hence may see on the earth if that young woman were properly mated?"

Later we find out that Ann is a reporter and when George mentions Chanu she tells him that she was instructed to write about the missing man for her paper. She tells of a strange old legend about how Chanu was a man who came to Africa and was captured by savages. When the blacks tried to kill him, a tribe of gorillas attempted to rescue him. The biggest gorilla and Chanu died together, melding their spirits. Chanu rose again, having the ability to inhabit either body. The savages worshipped him as a god after that.

The couple begins their safari on the Zandel River. George has a strange premonition that they are being watched and asks Ann to return to the village. She laughs him off and they go on. That night they make camp and all seems well until the morning when Kip, the head Masai, tells George that a strange ape-like creature had been spying on the tents. The safari goes on and some of the mules are killed by cobras. During this event, an ape appears, ripping off Kip's head and stealing away Ann. George is knocked unconscious.

When he wakes he finds himself in a cage in Chanu's village. He sees the massive gorilla who attacked the safari, noticing how it reminds him of Chanu. The gorilla people take George from the cage so that he can fight the beast. They tell him that M'gunga will kill the woman's mate then take her for his own. George is reminded of Chanu's words

Weird Tales, March 1946. Art by Boris Dolgov

back in Mabari. George is allowed one weapon as long as it is not a gun. He selects a specimen case to the derision of the watching blacks. When he faces off with the gorilla, George flings the contents at M'gunga. Inside is one of the deadly cobras he had collected earlier. The gorilla dies. George and Ann are lead to the dead body of Chanu, and George takes something from his hand.

George and Ann are returned to their camp. George immediately begins planning a second trip to the village, with armed fighters. Ann has a hazy recollection of events,

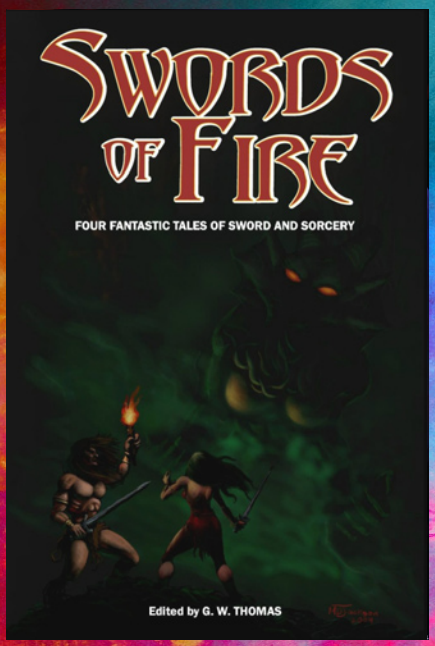
thinking it a weird dream. George doesn't try to enlighten her. In the floor of his tent he has buried the thing he took from Chanu's hand, Ann's hankerchief that Chanu had borrowed to clean his glasses back at the Africa Club.

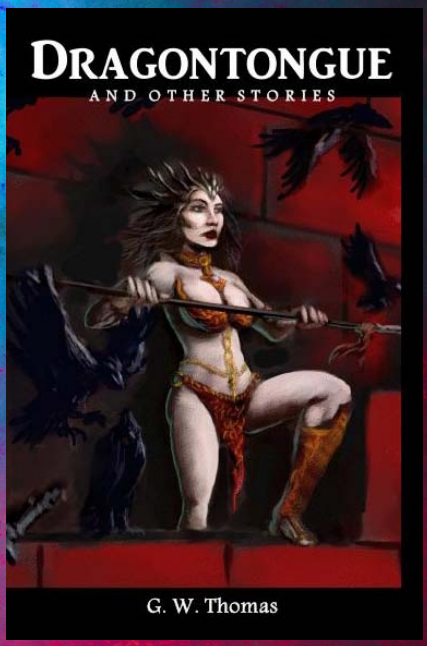
The idea of a man who can inhabit another body reminds me of the popular Solomon Kane story "Red Shadows" (*Weird Tales*, September 1928) by Robert E. Howard. In that tale N'Longa the JuJu man can inhabit the bodies of dead men, and there is a savage ape that is important to the plot. The jungle adventure scenario doesn't really agree with Kjelgaard. He makes fun of white men bossing around black men and other Kipling-like ideas. At one point he spends time describing the expeditions mules, giving them personalities. You can almost feel he'd rather be writing about them than the silly Robertses.

"The Man Who Told the Truth" (*Weird Tales*, July 1946) was written with Robert Bloch. This story doesn't propose much of a monster, a weird, misty, green cone from another dimension that gives the protagonist, Hartwood, an amazing power: whatever he says will be. No explanation is given for this weird creature and it doesn't appear again. Only one thing it says implies that it might be the Devil. "I do not take gifts...That is merely an unkind rumor. I prefer to *bestow* gifts..." Armed with this magic, Hartwood takes over his old employer's business, then finally thinks to rule the world. It ends badly when a slip of the tongue says, "I'll be damned!". More intriguing than this simple power fantasy is the story's history. The tale appeared under Kjelgaard's name in the original magazine but in *The Flowers of the Moon and Other Lunacies* (1998) the credit is given solely to Robert Bloch "as Jim Kjelgaard", implying Bloch ghosted the entire thing. According to the Allied-Authors Bloch met Kjelgaard through the Milwaukee Fictioneers, and offered to edit or rewrite the stories. The facts are not known but I suspect Kjelgaard had the idea and Bloch penned the tale for the story's style is not that of Jim Kjelgaard but Bloch's. No matter the case, it is Kjelgaard's only collaboration in the SF field.

Ultimately we can draw two conclusions about Jim Kjelgaard and his *Weird Tales* experience. Firstly, that he was a working writer in search of markets. He did not come to the horror genre out of love but commercial necessity. Jim Kjelgaard would rather have written about dogs than monsters. Secondly, that being said, he did not take the easy road and write about typical WT monsters but tried to do something of interest (at least to himself) in each story. Even if the experience didn't lead to more than a year's dalliance with the supernatural, it may have helped him a little when he came to write one of his best books, *Fire Hunter* (1950), featuring prehistoric animals like the saber tooth tiger, for in ages past even animals can be monsters.

EXPERIENCE THE FANTASTIC





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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Detective Comics #198. Art by Winn Mortimer

THE LORD OF BATMANOR

by G. W. Thomas

Did you know about the time two giants of SF literature collaborated on a Batman comic script?

CL Moore and Henry Kuttner were known in the Science Fiction world as the perfect husband-wife team. Kuttner could fall into bed late at night, his story unfinished, to wake and find his beautiful gal, Catherine, had completed the tale seamlessly. Even to this day scholars still argue about who wrote what.

But not all SF writer marriages are created the same. Edmond Hamilton and Leigh Brackett married in 1946. Both had solid reputations in Science Fiction. But where Leigh was a seat-of-the-pants writer, Ed was not. Brackett put it this way: "He used to write the last line of the story before he'd ever write the first one." It would surprise no one that these two did not write stories together under pseudonyms like Keith Hammond or Lewis Padgett.

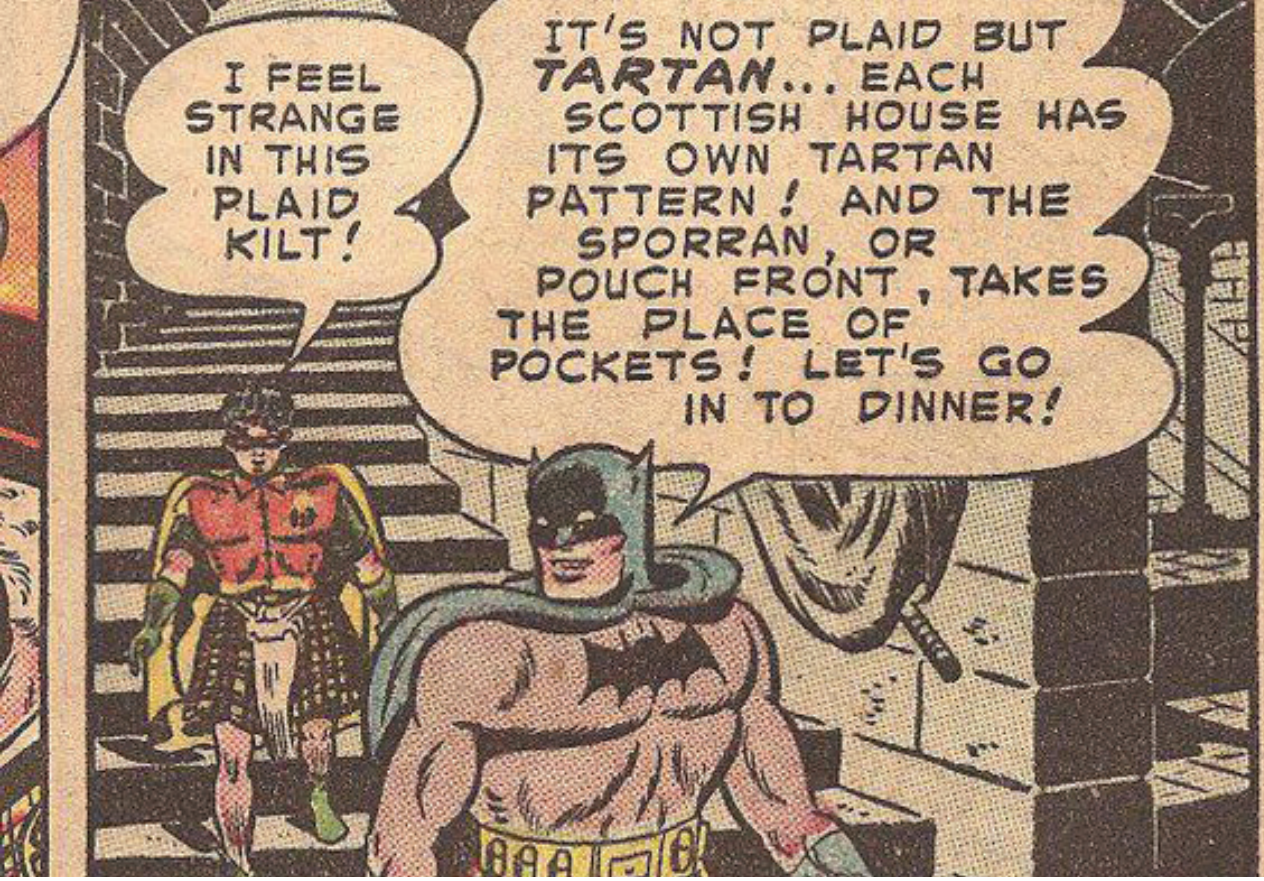
I believed for years that the first and only time the two collaborated was on "Stark and the Star Kings", a team-up of their two most popular characters that sat in limbo for thirty years. After reading the Tangent Online interview (www.tangentonline.com/interviews-

Leigh Brackett and Edmond Hamilton. Date unknown.

columnsmenu-166/1270-classic-leigh-brackett-a-edmond-hamilton-interview) I found out this wasn't true. The other time they had collaborated in fiction was three chapters in Hamilton's *The Valley of Creation*. Robert A. W. Lowdnes had pointed out that spot in the novel as a great piece of Hamilton. Ed grudgingly admitted "Thank you for nothing. My wife wrote it."

The other collaboration, and the one I want to look at here was a comic script called "The Lord of Batmanor" for *Detective Comics* #198 (August 1953). Ed had been writing for DC Comics since 1946 and had added to the Superman and Batman mythologies. "The Lord of Batmanor", drawn by Bill Sprang and Charles Paris (but signed Bob Kane), was a twelve-pager that had Lord McLaughlie give his estate to Batman, in the hopes he can clear up a four hundred year old mystery. The McLaughlies had been charged with hiding the king's gold, but the lord of the manor died in battle and nobody knew where the fortune was hidden. McLaughlie had hired an American detective named Sam Smathers but he turns out to be a crook, who brings his pals across the pond to steal the gold. To distract the locals Smathers uses a robotic Loch Ness Monster. Batman quickly discovers the truth and figures out where the gold is and how to catch the crooks.

The early Batman comics were detective comics as the name D.C. implies. The years of epic battles with the Joker and all that Dark Knight stuff was decades away. A reader in 1953 would expect that Batman and Robin, despite their weird costumes, to do some detective work. And who better to write a mystery than the man who created scientific wonder boy-detective Captain Future and the lady who wrote *The Big Sleep* screenplay



Detective Comics #198, August 1953. Pencils: Dick Sprang, Inks: Charles Paris

with William Faulkner?

The actual breakdown of labor on this comic story has plot by Ed and script by Leigh, each job separate from the other. If that means anything it would have Hamilton coming up with all the mystery stuff but I doubt it was that cut-and-dry. The reason Hamilton asked Brackett to write the script is not known but likely he had some previous commitment for another DC comic. (Ed wrote only one fiction piece in 1953, "The Unforgiven" for *Startling Stories*, October 1953. Leigh was between films and writing largely for *Planet Stories* at the time.) The final product is a fun piece of Batman history that has been reprinted at least twice.

In 1959, Science Fiction writer Cleve Cartmill would pen (as Leslie Charteris) "The Convenient Monster" for *The Saint Magazine*, March 1959. The story would be filmed in 1966 with Roger Moore. I suspect Cartmill (who knew Ed and Leigh at least by reputation if not personally) had read the Batman comic six years earlier.

"The Lord of Batmanor" did not spark a long chain of collaborations. Like *The Valley of Creation* chapters, it was a necessary sharing of the workload. Both Ed and Leigh went on in their own directions, writing in their own way, together but separate. That is why "Stark and the Star Kings" is so special. Here was, at last, a true collaboration. Of it Hamilton said: "... what's funny about it: the first half of it I wrote and it's all about Stark. She wrote the part about the Star Kings." After fifty years of writing for Ed, and forty for Leigh, the two had at last, found a way to work side by side.

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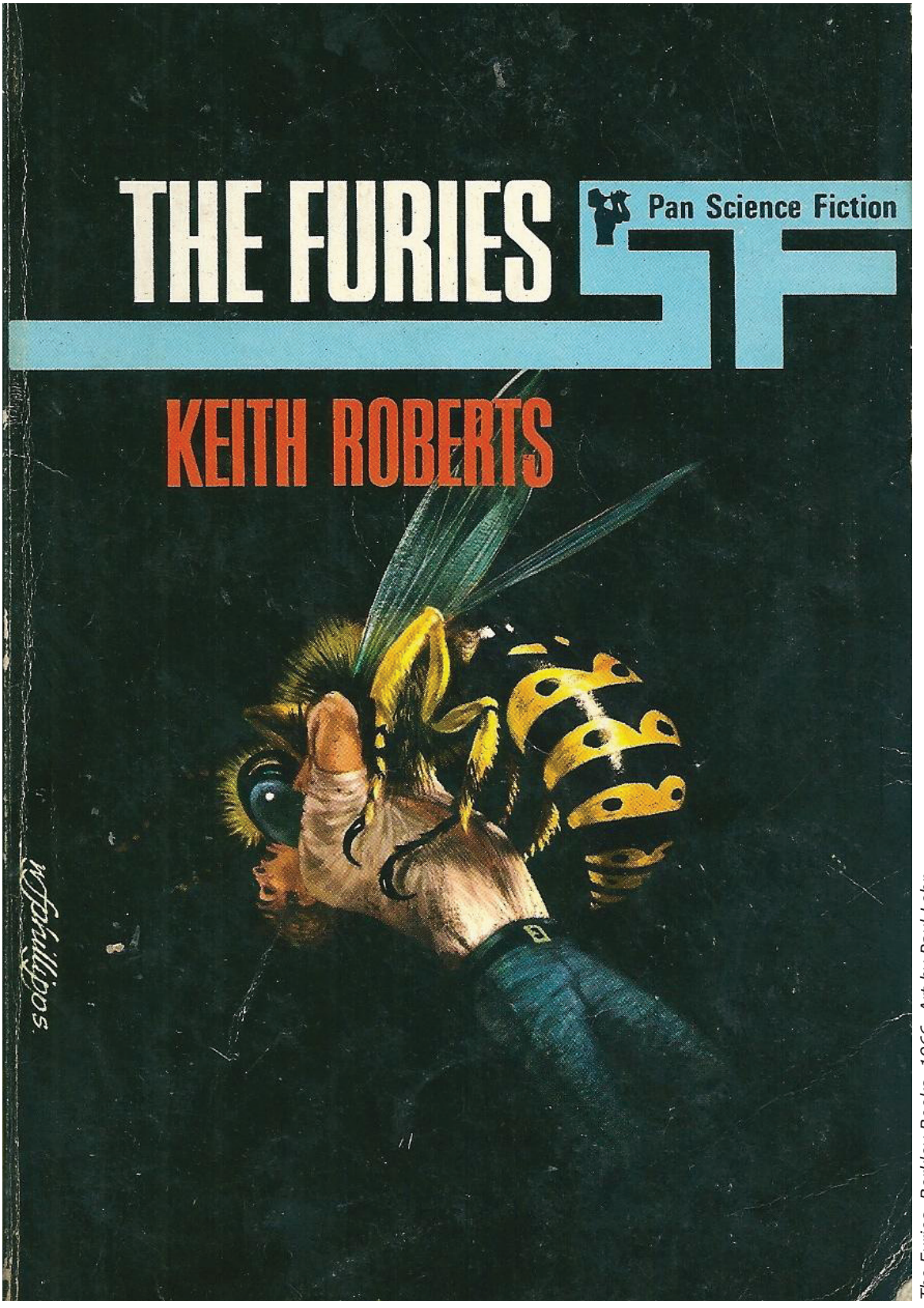


The Furies. Berkley Books, 1966. Art by Paul Lehr

KEITH ROBERTS: THE FURIES

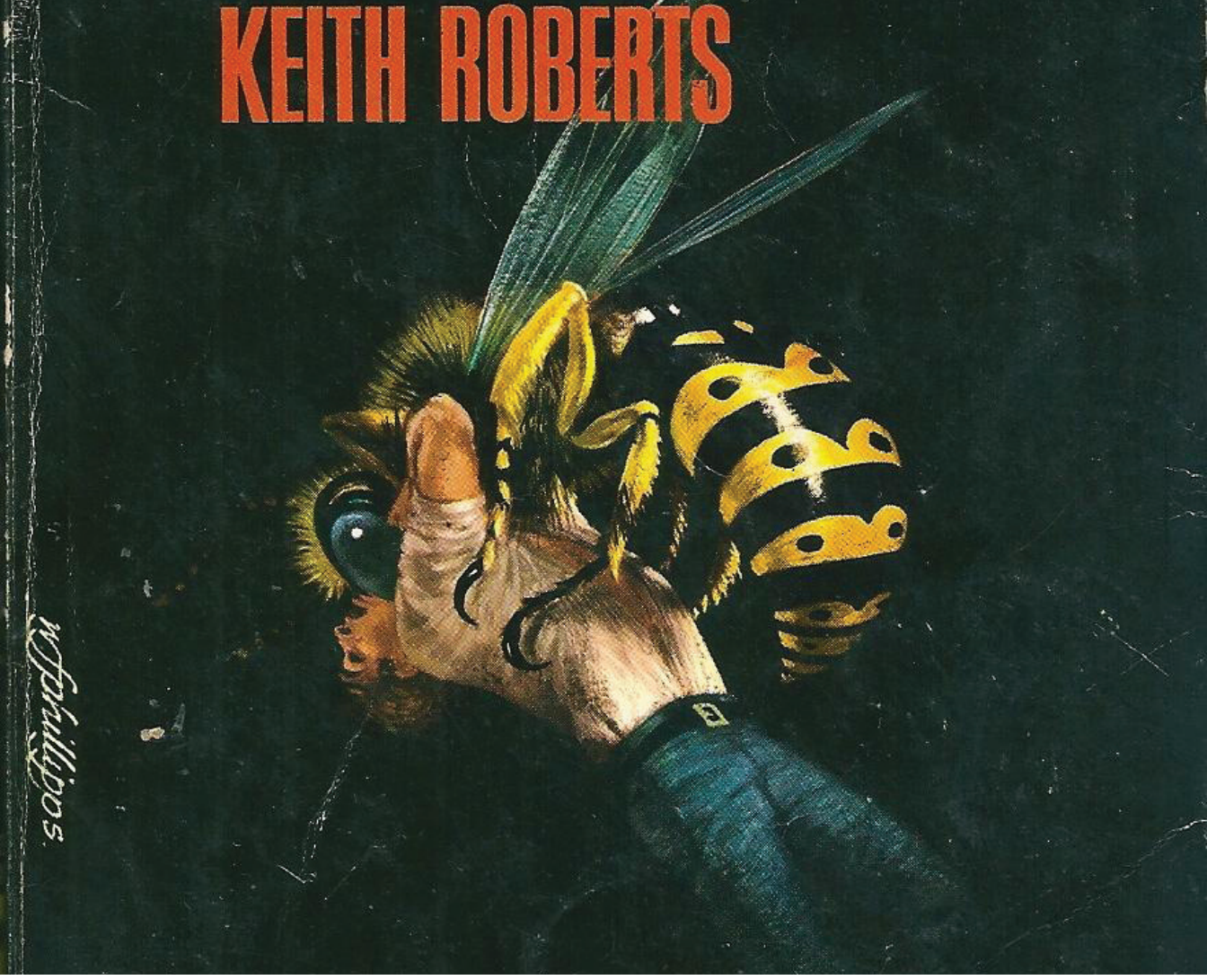
by G. W. Thomas

The killer bee is a common trope, but Keith Roberts attempted to present a vision of a world ruled by giant insects

Sometimes cover art haunts me. The image of a large wasp attacking a human stayed with me for decades even though I never had a chance to read Keith Roberts' *The Furies* back in the 1970s. I simply filed it away as "If I ever get my hands on a copy.... Well, of course, I finally did. And not that Pan paperback with the killer wasp but the original *Science Fantasy* magazine serialization that appeared in July-September 1965, the initial appearance from when I was only two years old. I found out later that the cover art was also done by Roberts, so the very first wasp image was the author's own.

Now the idea of the killer bee wasn't new to Science Fiction in 1965. There were stories as early "The Bees From Borneo" (*Amazing Stories*, February 1931) by Will H. Gray, all the way into days of the 1950s films with tales like "The Savage Swarm" (*Amazing Stories*, March 1957) by Harlan Ellison. But Roberts' novel is going to do something that hadn't really been done well, give us a vision of a world ruled by giant insects.

The novel tells of an England that is invaded by gigantic wasps. It is clearly part of the



The Furies. Pan edition, 1969. Art by W. Francis Phillips

British disaster SF genre made popular by John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and John Christopher's *No Blade of Grass* (1956) and J. G. Ballard's early novels like *The Drowned World* (1962). Of course, the granddaddy of them all is H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898) where the pattern for this kind of novel was set. The Brits just do this kind of book better than everybody else. I think it is the calmness with which they begin it. In Roberts' case we have Bill Sampson, a cartoonist who meets a young sixteen year old girl, Jane. The coming of the Furies follows these two (and Bill's dog, Sek) as they see England taken over by the ferocious insects, all the while the earth is ripped apart by earthquakes (caused by US and Russian nuclear bomb tests).

Everything is logically and slowly presented. This builds the suspension of disbelief that takes us eventually to a concentration camp run by the wasps and then following a band of freedom fighters who operate from a complex of caves called Chill Leer. Their guerrilla actions against the invaders, and their willing humans slaves, end in death and fire. The final revelation and denouement has been called "weak" but I liked it. It was very Wellsian. I won't revel it here because I really hope you'll track the book down and read it yourself.

The Furies. Berkley Books, 1966. Art by Paul Lehr: Detail

Roberts did not go on to write any more disaster novels. *The Guardian* said of the book: "His first novel, *The Furies*, was a failed attempt to produce a catastrophe novel in the vein of John Wyndham or John Christopher." Roberts is better remembered as the author of *Pavane* (1968) and *Kiteworld* (1985). His novels tend to be connected series of short stories and novellas. In truth, he was more of a short story writer than a novelist. Being a disaster fan I, of course, wish he had done more but he probably felt he said all he wanted to with *The Furies*. I would not have complained about *The Furies II* and *III*. (I suppose I can look to Colin Wilson`s Spider World series next...) A lot of the comments on the web compare it to '50s B-movies (no pun intended) without the fifth-rate acting. With the CGI we have today, this would make a killer film today. Not a killer bee film like *The Swarm* (1978) but a weird look into a world turned on its side. Even Roberts 1960s anti-nuke, pro-environment theme is welcome. These issues haven't really gone away. I doubt you'd find a producer who wants to make such a serious film out of a theme that has received so much schlock treatment.

▲

Detective Tales, September 1950. Art by Norman Lindsay

John D. Macdonald's Park Falkner

by G. W. Thomas

Before creating his most famous detective, Travis McGee, John D. Macdonald wrote pulp tales featuring Park Falkner

Sometimes people can't see the forest for the trees. John D. Macdonald is a good example. He created his first series (admittedly a short series) character in 1950. Considering the multitude of stories he had written even before 1950, that is remarkable. One of the crutches to being a Pulp writer is to create series characters. There is a reason why there are so many Thubway Tham or Doc Swap tales. The writer could work faster writing new stories because he didn't have to start from scratch each time. John D. to his credit did not do this. And largely because of this, much of his older material is quite readable today. Two collections of these stories can be found in *The Good Old Stuff* (1982) and *More Good Old Stuff* (1984).

Just a little side note here: when these books were published in hard cover they bore the most un-Pulp covers ever, one solid color with type, as if to deny their very heritage. A book of this type today would be smothered in old *Black Mask, Detective Tales* and *Doc Savage* pulp images. (Think of Otto Penzler's *Black Lizard's Big Book of Pulp Stories*).

John D. Macdonald

But back in 1982 this would have meant the wrong people would have bought the book. The wrong people being "not John D. Macdonald fans". Today I like to think things are better, with more people acknowledging Pulp's flashy but vibrant history.

Anyway, let's get back to Park Falkner, the hero of our two story series. These were "Breathe No More, My Lovely" (*Detective Tales*, May 1950) and "The Lady is a Corpse" (*Detective Tales*, September 1950). Park is an eccentric millionaire who has inherited his money and suffers from boredom. Due to a strange tropical disease he is completely hairless, bald, no eye lashes, usually dressed in a sarong. This strange looking man has

Detective Tales, May 1950. Artist unknown

bought Grouper Island (sometimes called Falkner Island) and invites visitors out to enjoy the beach, play badminton and generally party. The guests are specially chosen, each having some dark secret or part in an affair. Falkner, along with his permanent guest Taffy Angus, stirs things up until something -- happens. In the Chandleresque titled "Breathe No More, My Lovely" this means Carl Brannock murders a sleeping woman on the beach by suffocating her with a pile of sand. It's a shocking and brutal way to start a story. As the tale goes on we learn about Park and we see how he solves the woman's murder and defeats the villain. As a one-off, the story would have been noteable but only one of many.

"The Lady is a Corpse" is where things get interesting. Having set up Park and his island, John D. now has to find his way through writing a sequel. The result reminds me of Michael Crichton's only sequel *The Lost World* (1995), reluctant and not as much fun as the first ride. This time Park invites four men to the island, suspecting one is a psychotic murderer of a beautiful young woman. He hires two models to act as his agents to break up the foursome. Park's intent and procedures are more blatant this time around, and you can feel Macdonald chaffing at the bit. When the fiancé of the dead girl is poisoned in a fake suicide, it becomes too much for Taffy Angus. She tells Park she is leaving him. She can't deal with his playing God. (You can hear John D. in her voice, and when Taffy renigs at the end, John D. doesn't.)

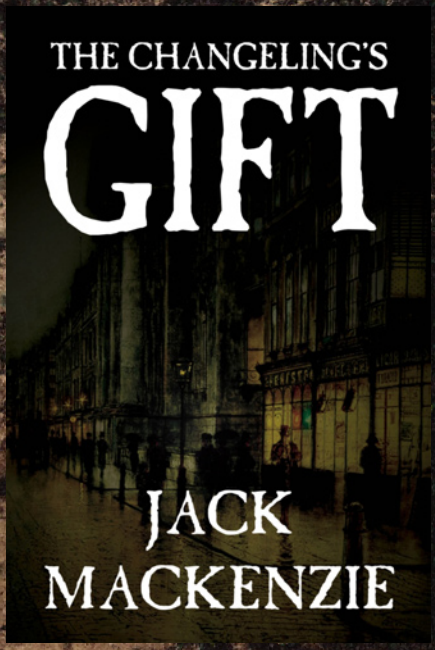
Now to get back to those trees. All the articles I have seen on Park Falkner have focused on how he is a dry run for John D. Macdonald's most famous character, Travis McGee. There seems to be some disagreement about this. Some critics feel he is, and others see him as too dissimilar. I say, who cares? Because you've missed the really important things.

Park Falkner is John D.'s version of Leslie Charteris's Simon Templar. Taffy is Patricia Holm. But being John D. Macdonald and not Leslie Charteris, Park is not the light and bubbly Happy Highwayman, but a morose and largely unlikable character, behaving in many ways like the murderer from Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*. Only his desire to do justice, not vengeance, redeems him.

John D. Macdonald loved writing about characters more than anything else. This is one of things that makes his Science Fiction so much different than what others were doing during that time. He wrote forty SF tales including the novel *Wine of Dreamers* (1951). And I suspect why he ultimately moved away from the genre, finding it too "idea oriented" and not character driven enough. His love of character also made him a natural for anthology television, with shows like *Thriller, Alfred Hitchcock Hour, Lights Out* and *Climax!*

So here's the real kicker: focused on Travis McGee, nobody seems to have noticed that John D. Macdonald invented one of the biggest character anthology shows, *Fantasy Island* (1977-1984). Park Falkner, like Mr. Roarke, hosts the guests with a desire to solve their innate problems or mysteries. Park has a cast of regulars that help him, though no one exactly like Tattoo. Aaron Spelling claims the idea for the show was suggested as a joke, a magical island where sexual fantasies come true. This may be the case, as Fantasy Island always had a supernatural aspect to it. Was John D. lurking somewhere in Spelling's memory? Perhaps the two men just thought along similar lines, as John D.'s *Condominium* (1977), the 1980 TV version anyway, sounds a lot like *The Love Boat* (1977-1987) with an Irwin Allen hurricane thrown in. Spelling has witnesses to the birth of *Fantasy Island*, Leonard Goldberg, his partner and Brandon Stoddard, the head of ABC at the time. Still, a tough guy like John D. could have sweated the truth out of them, using a rubber hose, while drinking a quart of scotch and smoking a million cigarettes... now, maybe I'm reading too many of Macdonald's old Pulp stories. They are fun and better than most.

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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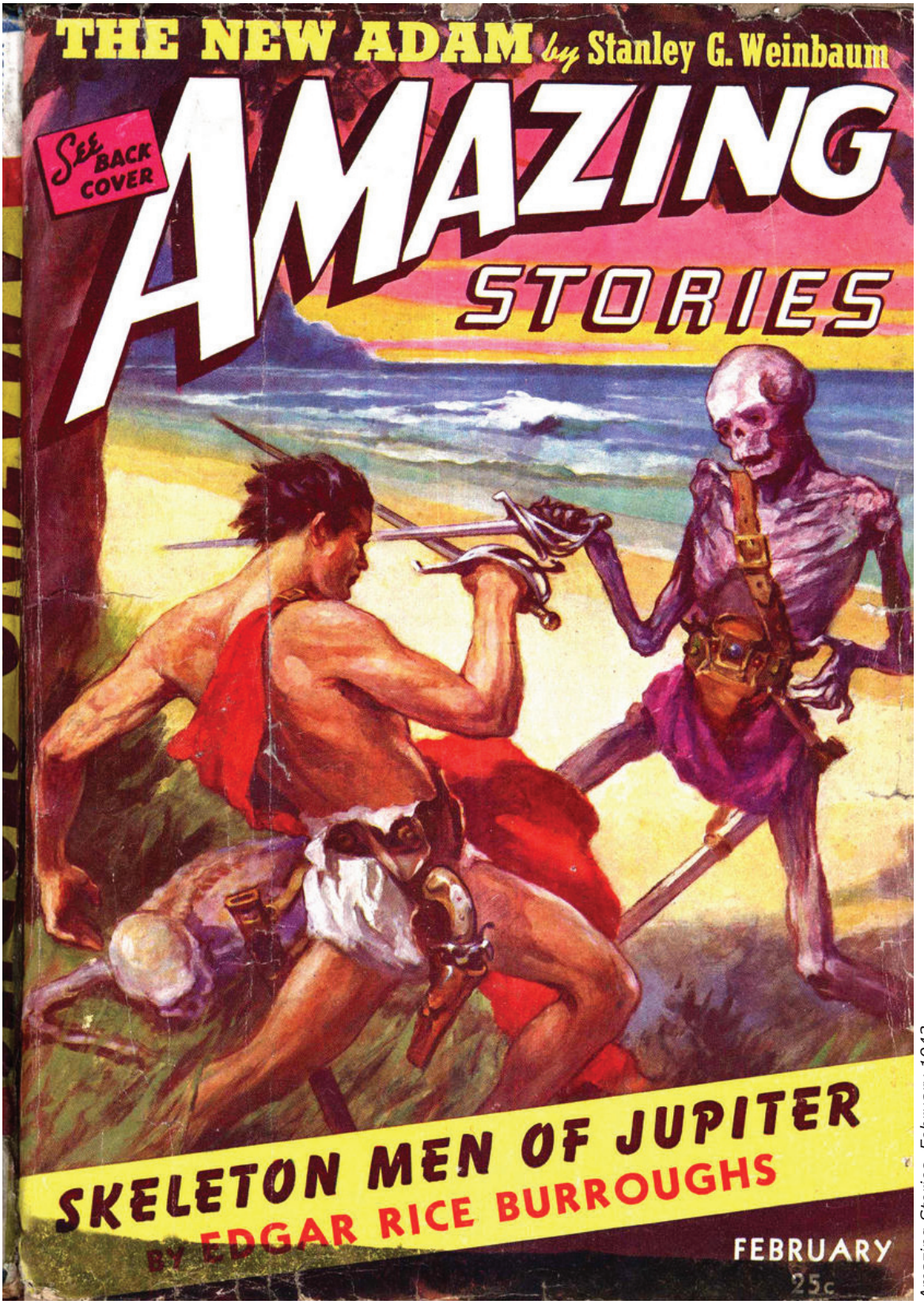


Amazing Stories, February 1943

JUNGE VINES MYSTERY

by G. W. Thomas

Monstrous plants are a popular trope and you'd think that the Tarzan stories would be lousy with them - think again!

When I began research on plant monsters for my database called The Terror Garden I initially thought there would be Tarzan stories or comics or something in it. I naturally associated plant monsters and the killer vine in particular with jungle adventure. But the truth of it is there are not very many jungle lords who encounter plant monsters, especially in the works about Tarzan. This British collector card (*right*) got me wondering, how many are there, if any? And why did I naturally think the works of Edgar Rie Burroughs would include an encounter with a killer plant? Let's explore.

Burroughs did use one plant monster very late in his career. This was in "The Skeleton Men of Jupiter" (*Amazing*

Johnny Weissmuller attacked by a plant in 1943's Tarzan's Desert Mystery

Stories, February 1943) where John Carter encounters one on the planet Jupiter:

> *Han Du laughed. "Their nervous systems are of a low order," he said, "and their reactions correspondingly slow and sluggish. It took all this time for the pain of my sword cut to reach the brain of the blossom to which that limb belongs." "A man's life would never be safe for a moment in such a forest," I commented. "One has to be constantly on guard," admitted Han Du. "If you ever have to sleep out in the woods, build a smudge. The blossoms don't like smoke. They close up, and then they cannot see to attack you. But be sure that you don't oversleep your smudge."*
>
> *Vegetable life on Jupiter, practically devoid of sunlight, has developed along entirely different lines from that on earth. Nearly all of it has some animal attributes and nearly all of it is carnivorous, the smaller plants devouring insects, the larger, in turn, depending upon the larger animals for sustenance on up to the maneaters such as I had encountered and those which Han Du said caught and devoured even the hugest animals that exist upon this strange planet.*

Burroughs may never have launched Tarzan against such man-eating plants but those

who carried the torch after him did occasionally. The same year as John Cater's encounter, the film *Tarzan's Desert Mystery* had a plant that captures and holds victims while a giant spider also attacked them. Tarzan uses his friendship with Tantor the elephant to save himself. This plant monster is a singular example in the Tarzan canon up to 1943, but I'd never seen the film as a kid so it certainly would not have affected me.

1965 saw Russ Manning producing a very popular Tarzan comic strip. Manning wrote and drew the Tarzan comic for newspapers and annuals but in America (and consequently Canada), these comics were reprinted in DC's *Tarzan*. The story entitled "Korak and the White Water Runner" originally appeared in papers in the second half of 1971. DC's Tarzan reprinted it May-October 1975 as "The Deadly Motion Picture". The story has a group of explorers attacked by a vine creature that wraps itself around their boat. This comic was among the comics I read as a kid and most likely is the source of my Tarzan-Vine memories. They must have inspired a number of kids besides me because four decades later, in the comics, *Dark Horse Presents* #9 (February 2012) by Alan Gordon and Tom Yeates would include one such Tarzan moment. Tarzan and his allies must face the deadly giant plant before they can go on to their real adventure. This conflict takes only one page.

Lastly the animated *Tarzan* (2013) contains a scene where a valley full of normal plants are mutated by evolutionary forces and become predatory.

I guess I shouldn't be surprised by all the vine monsters as they are part of the related sub-genre of 'Lost World' fiction that crosses over into jungle adventure. The 1960 film version of *The Lost World*, the Amicus adaptation of *At the Earth's Core* (based on ERB's novel) and the dino pic, *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth*, all had killer plants. This tradition continues today with films like Brendan Fraser's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (2008) having a large man-eating plant. All the Tarzan novels and comics I have looked through (and I admit I may have missed one) along with the *Jungle Comics* and *Jumbo Comics* don't use any plant monsters. The closest I could find was one lame example in "Dr. Voodoo" from 1940, where Dr. V hides inside a killer plant but possesses a powder to escape easily.

The big winner for plant monsters was the comics *Turok, Son of Stone*, which featured five different stories with plant monsters and one or two of these issues might have crossed my path as a kid. (For more on this: www.michaelmay.online/2017/05/turok-son-of-plants-guest-post.html)

Header for Calvin's Canadian Cave of Cool. Art by M. D. Jackson

Calvin's Canadian Cave of Cool

by M. D. Jackson

Calvin's Canadian Cave of Cool is a unique Canadian produced science fiction and fantasy themed blog

To the north there lies a cave, *Calvin's Canadian Cave of Cool*. For the last ten years, Calvin Heighton has been holding forth in his own corner of the internet, entertaining, elucidating and sometimes, haranguing. The *Cave of Cool* is a place to go for all things science fiction, fantasy, comic books and pop culture. But the whole thing got started through an interest in collage.

"When I was a kid I used to make my own radio programs with music and interviews with TV characters that I taped off the TV." Calvin explains. "My Fonzie interview was particularly great. Then when I was teaching I needed a project for the kids to do when they were done their regular work

"It was a time filler. So I had them use all the old magazines to cut out their favorite stuff. After they had at least 200 images they could paste them only a huge piece of paper. Then they did a personal coat of arms and a biography. When they were done I laminated

The Cave of Cool had its origins in the lost art of collage. Inset: Calvin Heighton

them. In all the years I did this, no one would let me keep theirs to use as an example, so I did one of my own and found I loved it. Everyone is a unique piece of art and the kids loved how they got to know each other through the art.

"However, now there are no magazines anymore and no previews catalogue and no wizard to get comic book pics. So it's a lost art I am afraid unless I want to waste all the colored ink in my inkjet printer.

From there I found blogging to be a way to express myself and the things I loved. It made me feel like I was a unique little orchid and interesting to boot. Hell, I always knew that but I wanted to show it to others - like minded travelers."

But Calvin started blogging long before Blogger came along. "I remember there was a guy way back that would do a diary entry every day of his life. He would take newspaper clipping and include it with his memories and opinions. By the time he was in his eighties he had about 50 volumes of personal history. I always thought that was cool. Then I read *Michael May's Adventureblog* and a few others and I thought: 'I could do that'. I played around on Blogger and figured out how to post my review of the movie *Mongul* about Genghis Khan. From there it was something I found I enjoyed - sharing the stuff I found on my travels on the net.

"It took about eight months before I got my first comment and I was jazzed. I even got catfished by a follower in those early days. That is a whole other crazy story. You should check out that early stuff. I had my style down from the beginning. The image blizzards were just digital collages.

"I like Blogger as a platform. They haven't limited me or messed up so I have stuck

with them."

Though Calvin posts about a wide range of subjects and pop culture in general, he does have a particular interest in science fiction and fantasy and comic books.

"I had a father who nourished my love of movies and TV and comic book and toys," Calvin explains. "I was a big reader as a kid. Anything to do with sci-fi or cryptids were my crack. I was a huge comic collector when I lived in Europe. My mom worked at a hotel on the base and she had the cleaning staff collect comics that were left behind. Once she separated out the porn, I would get a huge box every week. I'd get a lot of doubles which I would trade for other comics with the kids in my building.

"When we moved back to Canada all my stuff was lost when the ship that they were on sank. I lost all my treasures but not my love for them. When I was 13 or so I got a few comics to see if I still loved them and I did, so my father gave me twenty dollars every two weeks to buy comics from the newly opened local comic shop. It was an amazing time. I could read everything Marvel and DC put out, plus the newest graphic novels. I was watching the *Spider Man* cartoon in the 90s and they started to put out some great action figures. I bought the *Doctor Strange* figure. That started my second toy collection. I stopped buying comics when they got too pricy and I could read them online, but toys I search for. The early days of Ebay were golden for a collector. After opening the first fifty, I decided I preferred to display them in their original boxes."

Indeed, Calvin has a substantial collection of toys and other merchandise at the *Cave of Cool*. "I have 12,000 or so comic books and probably 600 figures. My original Mego Spiderman and Evil Knieval mean the most to me because I had them with me on the plane home so they survived the sinking ship disaster. I have a loose Oscar Goldman figure with the original exploding briefcase, but finding one still in package is my dream. I also love my Kotobukiya statues of DC and Marvel girls. I have 22 of those and they are the most expensive figures I buy."

The Cave of Cool blog, Calvin's forum, has gained a huge popularity. The blog has a large number of regular followers. "Six hundred and six. Not that I'm counting or anything," Calvin says.

"You know... I talk more to my friends on Facebook than I do on my blog. I mean, It's weird. I've got a good solid group that always comments, and then there's many people that never do. So I'm shocked when I see a comment from them. But I suppose it is the same with anybody that blogs a lot. There's a lot to see so I suppose people choose their comments carefully. I see other people that blog maybe once every two days. They post one blog and so they get 85 comments. But that's just the nature of the beast. People feel like (with my blog) that it goes so fast that they just have to save them up. Or maybe there's nothing that they really want to comment on.

"I would get a little choked about my captions. Because (on Facebook) it's not so hard to put a "like" on those. Any "likes" that I do get, or any shares, it's golden! But at the actual blog I get very very few comments. But I keep it up there, I think, out of spite. All my stuff is genius anyway, so why mess with a formula?"

You can check out the Calvin's cave at *calvinscanadiancaveofcool.blogspot.com.*

Kamandi The Last Boy on Earth #1, November 1970. Jack Kirby, Art

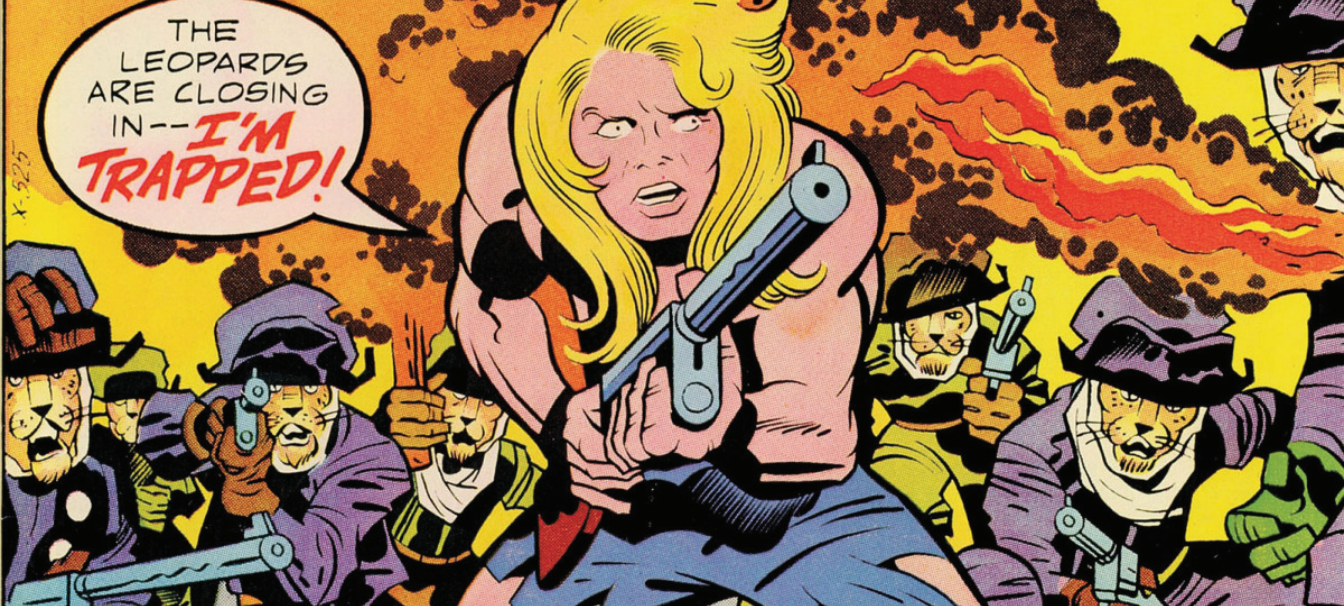
KAMANDI

by G. W. Thomas

What began as an attempt to cash in on the popularity of Planet of The Apes became a Jack Kirby classic

Planet of the Apes gave us more than just the immortal Charleton Heston screaming "Get your hands off me, you damn dirty apes!" and "Damn you all to Hell!" When Marvel Comics won the contract to adapt the series in comic book form, Carmon Infantino over at DC wanted a monkey series of his own. He turned to Jack Kirby who had left Marvel for DC in 1970. Jack combined an unused comic strip "Kamandi of the Caverns" with some ideas from an old Harvey Comics piece to create a world of manimals far exceeding a mere planet of apes. Kamandi dwells in a post-apocalyptic realm where all kinds of humanized animals vie for power.

Planet of the Apes, the first movie, was written by Michael Wilson and Rod Serling. Serling was no stranger to the effectiveness of animal faces on humans. On *The Twilight Zone* episode written by Serling, "Eye of the Beholder" (November 11, 1960), a beautiful woman is horrified to find her face scarred in an accident. There is a classic reveal when the nurse turns around and we see that a normal face is pig-like. Serling brings that same power to another classic reveal in *Planet of the Apes* when we see for the first time that the hunters, chasing the humans through the corn, are apes. It would surprise no one that



Kamandi, The Last Boy on Earth. Art by Jack Kirby

Pierre Bouelle's *La planète des singes* (1963), that inspired the 1968 movie, was itself inspired by H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1897). Both novels use animals for Science Fictional and satirical purposes.

That old Harvey piece was "The Last Enemy" (*Alarming Comics* #1, September 1957), a five pager written and drawn by Kirby. In it, a time traveler, Hammond Drake, comes to the future to find all humanity gone, destroyed by nuclear war. In our place, the animals have gained intelligence and are fighting for supremcy. Above ground it is dogs versus cats, while underneath the rats plot their victory. Drake is captured by the rats, who want the secret to atom bombs. The dogs rescue the man, who in turns gives the secret to the peace-loving dogs and their allies. He returns to our time preferring that the world "go to the dogs", rather than the rats. This early piece already shows Kirby's bias towards mammals and pets over other animals.

Kamandi, the Last Boy on Earth ran 59 issues, beginning October-November 1972 and finishing its original run, in September-October 1978. Jack handed covers over to Joe Kubert with issue #34, then gave up scripting the comic with issue #38 and finally art with issue #41. From that point on Kamandi went his own way with many different scripters and artists working on the comic. (I haven't included these issues as I wanted to focus on Jack's creation only.) In June 1993, Kamandi would return with Superman in *Kamandi at Earth's End*, a six part mini-series. Kirby had nothing to do with the comic though he planted the seed back in 1975. He passed away in 1994.

Kirby's manimals have a satiric quality that would have made Rod Serling proud. They are living, breathing creatures but he often uses them to comment on the world. Kirby's scenarios are quite unlikely, even ridiculous at times, but the satire saves them from being untenable, whether it is a hotel filled with Florida alligators, or a Canada filled with gigantic, radioactive insects (thanks, Jack!)

The Alligators are guests in "The Hotel", a resort run by jaguars. They forced out a crowd of humans in an "eviction battle". They are territorial about the pool and other hotel features.

The Ant is a soldier in the Horse Marines, an army from Europe charged with protecting

the Land of the Demons (Canada). Captain Pypar calls him an aborigine. Along with his clothing, this suggests he is representing the First Nations. He communicates directly by touching his feelers to your head.

The Bats wear clothes but don't seem to have a spoken language we can hear. They attack Ben Boxer's Tracking Station and end up being destroyed by the most powerful germ ever created.

The Bears are looters that are looking for human made artifacts to sell on the black market. They also capture humans to sell.

Dogs are intelligent and usually kind to humans. Doctor Canus is a scientist. Kirby had a fondness for bulldogs, so most canines are of that breed. The Britonek Horse Marines are all bulldogs, with corny English accents.

The Dolphin is Inspector Zeel, a mammal who is carried about by his human servant. He is a scout for a society of dolphins that live in an underwater university. They are attacked by the Red Baron, a human trained by killer whales.

The Donkeys are talking animals though they do not have hands and feet. The Lizards of Los Lorraine have enslaved them. They speak Spanish as well as English.

The Gorillas and other apes are quite close to the denizens of the Apes movies. They keep humans like cattle. They have armies that fight with the tigers for domination of old cities liked Las Vegas. Flim-Flam is an animal trainer and less aggressive than the gorillas. An army of German ape soldiers known as the Germiniks are part of the Horse Marine army from Europe. Another group of apes worship Superman's old indestructible suit. (Where is Superman? Wait until 1993 for that answer.)

Humans in Kamandi's world are savage beasts. Here Kirby uses them as a counter-point to Kamandi and his friends like Ben Boxer. Like the humans in *The Planet of the Apes*, the animals think of men as beasts and treat them accordingly. Caesar has pet humans while Sacker exploits them as slaves. Mutated humans also appear throughout the comic as radioactive transformers, as dwarfish telepaths like Misfit, the gopher-like creatures living underground and Pyra, the firestarter.

Jaguars are the animals that run "The Hotel", a large resort that different types of animals vie for room. The jaguars try to stay neutral.

The Killer Whales are in a war with the dolphins. Killer whales eat dolphins in nature. Kirby turned this into an aquatic war. The Killer Whales trained a human named the Red Barn to attack the dolphins.

The Leopards are organized nautically, signing on with a ship's captain. We see them returning from a trip to capture mutated insects for the Sacker Co. They are best read with a thick "pirate" accent. They all seem to work for Mr. Sacker. A force of leopards work at killing off all the giant insects and plants to clear land for Mr. Sackers enterprise.

The Lions make only a brief appearance. They are Rangers who protect the wildlife in the animal preserve. They ride dune buggies and treat humans kindly but like wildlife.

The Lizards live in the hot south and their lifestyle resembles the people of Mexico. They hiss when they talk. The Lizards have enslaved the donkeys.

The Mullosks run the Aquarium, an air-filled zoo for humans. The water breathers are on the outside watching the humans, conducting experiments on them. Kamandi (of course)

Kamandi, The Last Boy on Earth. Art by Jack Kirby

brings the whole place shattering down.

Pumas are the poachers that the Lions are in pursuit of. The Pumas want to capture humans for sale. They are arrested by the Lions for trial.

The Rats live in the remains of New York City, much of which is underwater. To work around the flooded skyscrapers the rats use diver equipment and submarines.

The Sharks have mutated into flying fish. They have not gained intelligence. The barracudas have also changed into land animals that prowl the ruins near the ocean.

The Snakes are repesented by Mr. Sacker, the evil head of the Sacker Company. This powerful serpent enlists Kamandi to be the rider for his giant grasshoppr, Kliklik. Sacker is served by Spirit, Flower's sister.

The Tigers are imperialistic military types. Their leader is named Caesar. The film *The Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (1972) had come out in June so Kirby might have been aware that there was an ape called Caesar. But since his tigers are basically Romans he didn't have to apologize. They fight with the gorillas for territory.

The Wolves appear occasionally in mixed groups of animals and as troops. They form an army of French soldiers in the Horse Marines known as the Napoleoniks.

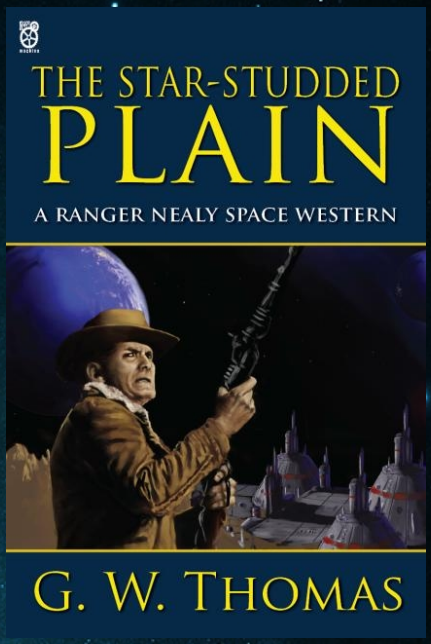
Kamandi, like the Demon, Mister Miracle, O.M.A.C. and Devil Dinosaur, was Kirby having fun with the medium he helped to invent, American-style comics. As a competitor to *The Planet of the Apes, Kamandi* had middling success but instead went its own way, creating some of my fondest memories as a young comic reader. I am reminded of a scene in one issue where Nazi portraits are being sold by Mr. Sacker as "Funny Animal Pictures". This was the true spirit of Kirby and Kamandi, Science Fiction as satire. It's a topsy-turvy world filled with giant insects, talking animals, as our young blonde-haired fellow wondered from adventure to adventure, losing Ben Boxer and finding him over and over. (It would be quite a contest to figure out who wandered into more trouble in the 1970s, Kamandi or Korak, the son of Tarzan!).

Experience the Sense of wonder

Debt's Pledge

by Jack Mackenzie

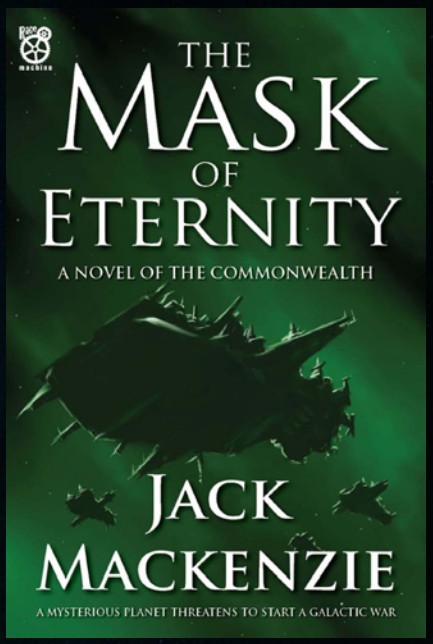
He was a soldier without a war, alone and unwanted, until he discovered an alien enemy... Stationed on a remote outpost, in charge of a platoon of hard cases and disciplinary problems Jefferson Odett is all that stands between a colony and an alien army of unspeakable power who will kill anything that 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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Action Comics Issue #1 1938. Joe SHuster, artist

Why was Early Comic Book Art so Crude?

An Illustrated History

by M. D. Jackson

From early printing technology through to the digital revolution, comic book art has been transformed

A friend of mine recently asked why it is that the artwork in comic books has gone from being so crude and rudimentary in the beginning to being so much more photo-realistic today. Well, I thought that was a good question, so I am setting out to answer it. And although the question seems simple, the answer is not. Therefore this article is a lengthy one.

Nevertheless, the question is: Were the early comic book artists untalented hacks? Or did the limitations of early printing technology hamper their creative expression?

The answer, in my view, boils down to: a bit of both.

But before I get to that, let's go back to the beginning, back to the early days of comic books, and look at some examples of what my friend is talking about.

Early Days

When we talk about early comic book artists, the ones my friend is referring to, the ones whose artwork can be seen as "crude" we're not talking about the artists who worked for newspaper strips, artists like Alex Raymond, who drew the *Flash Gordon* strip, nor Russ Manning who provided the art for the *Tarzan* strip.

The artists that we are talking about are the ones who worked for the actual comic books put out by the companies that would eventually become DC and Marvel. These companies did not start out the way we see them today. In the beginning they were hastily set up to fill a burgeoning need. The businesses were cheap and they produced a product that was cheap. Kin to the early pulp magazines, comic books were, back in the 1930's and 1940's, considered even lower than the gruesome and lurid pulps. The comic books were. quite literally, nickel and dime. They were printed on poor grades of paper. The businessmen who ran them were unethical. Some were outright crooks. They considered the comic book as a product to be ground out as quickly and cheaply as possible. They also considered their readers to be mentally defective children who didn't need stories that had logic or made sense. The artwork was considered the same.

Because they were pumping out product as fast as kids could drop nickels and dimes for them, these companies' deadlines were impossible and called for more work than anyone could accomplish. They attracted young artists, kids themselves sometimes, with barely adequate skills. Think of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, the creators of *Superman*. Lionized today, when they started out these two kids had more enthusiasm than skill.

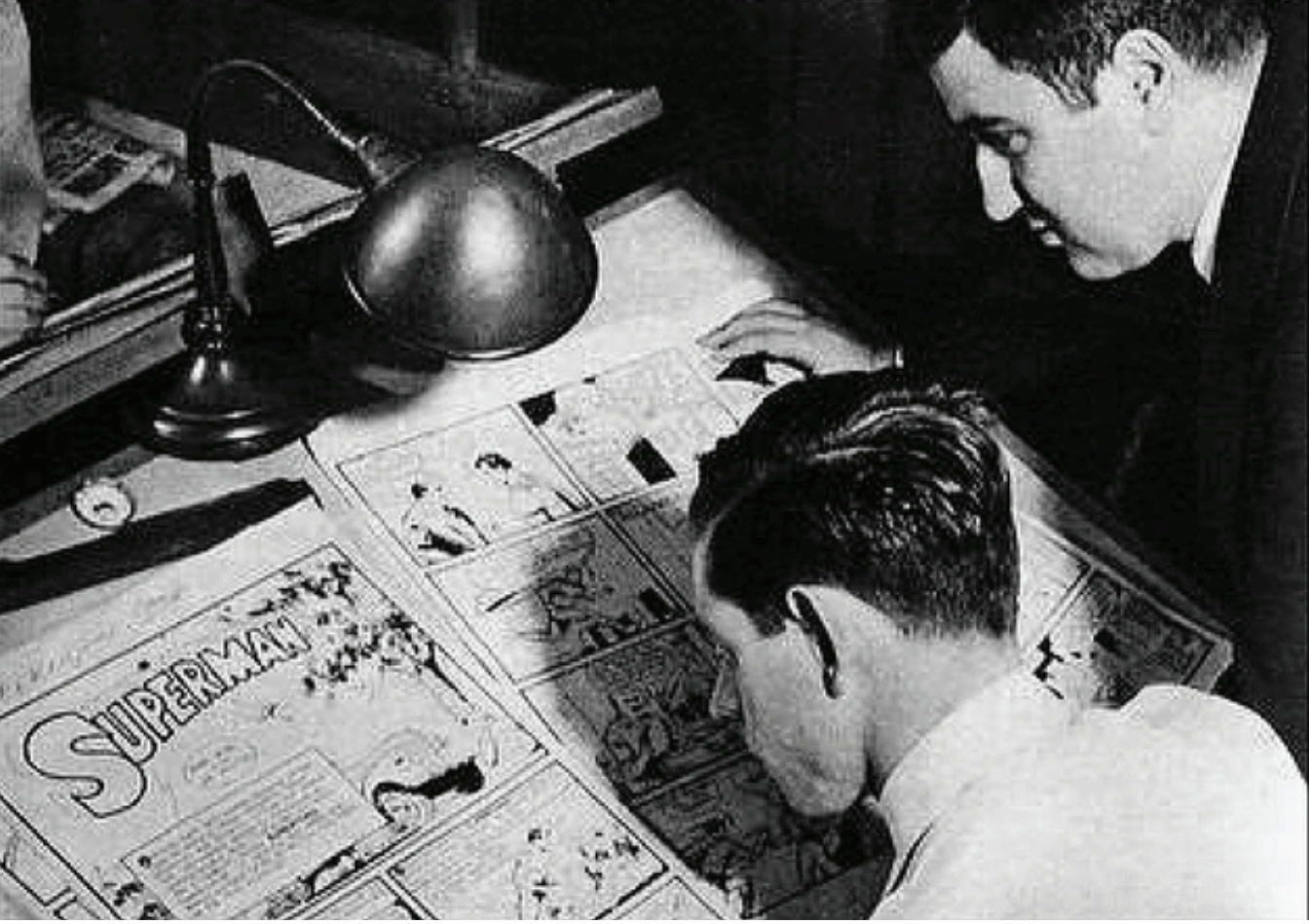
The young artists working for these companies were just happy to have a job, something hard to come by during the Depression. And a job drawing pictures? Sweet!

But they were worked like slaves, sometimes being expected to turn around an entire book in one weekend. They worked in the companies' offices sometimes with no heat in winter and very little food to keep them going.

Thing is, if you were any good as an artist, you could find a better job, probably with the comic strips for the syndicated newspapers. Those jobs had more reasonable deadlines and much better pay. That's where the artists who could create strong poses and proportional figures thrived. Comic strips had status, better deadlines, more space – some took up entire pages of the Sunday funnies, and so were able to reward the best artists with pay worthy of their talents.

Back then, nobody cared much about the art in comic books. As long as the good guy beat up the bad guy it didn't matter what they looked like.

And, of course, there was the limitations of the printing process. Artwork needed to be simple, with strong, bold lines and clearly defined edges so that the colors could be applied easily. There was no time for subtlety, not room for complicated, pastel colors. That was all well and good for the Sunday funnies or the slick magazines that could afford to shoot separations from the artwork with a stat camera, ending up with four pieces of film



Jerry Siegel watches as Joe Shuster works on early Superman pages

that could be stripped together to produce a varied range of hues and colors.

The process used by comic book companies to color their black line drawings employed overlays. This is a technique where three pieces of acetate were lined up on top of each other over the artwork, each piece representing one of the three colors, Cyan, Magenta or Yellow, needed for the four color process to work. (The line art itself was the Black plate).

Printing before the advent of computers used two processes. Usually this acetate was rubylith, a product still used in screen printing today (to print on material and other substrates). Where the reddish film was cut away from the acetate ink would not print. Where the film was left on the acetate, the camera negative would leave a blank spot, and ink would print.

Separators would then use screens, dot patterns on sticky acetate, to create the screened back colors. The only screens they used were 25 percent, 50 percent and 75 percent. These were then stuck on the three acetate overlays.

The process is why early comic books used a limited color palette. 100 percent cyan and 100 percent magenta is a deep blue; 25 percent cyan is a nice sky color; 100 percent magenta and 100 percent yellow is a bright red; 100 percent cyan and 100 percent yellow is a bright green; and so on.

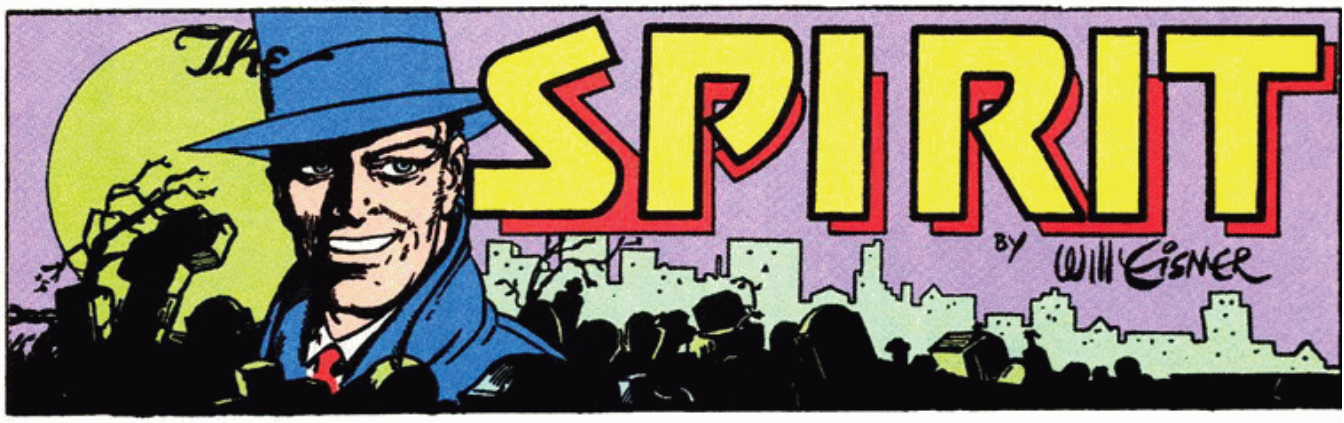
There was no way to check their work. Comic companies on a tight budget were probably not willing to shell out the extra bucks for color proofs. The separators' work went

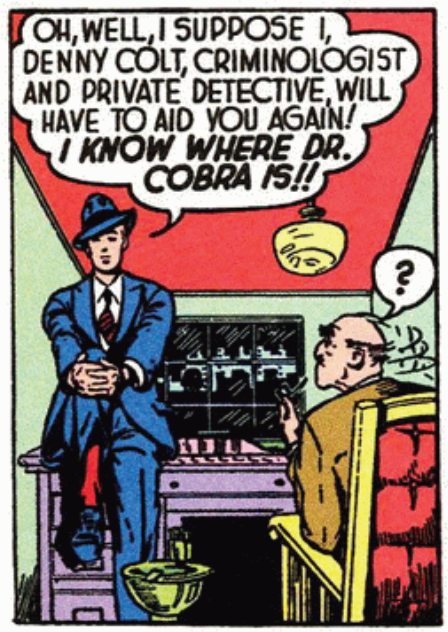
WEEKLY COMIC BOOK

THE ORIGIN OF THE SPIRIT

3 COMPLETE STORIES

June 2, 1940





right from rubylith overlays to the camera to shoot plates. That is why a plate is occasionally missing from a color in older comics.

The men and women doing this work were skilled craftsmen, usually working for printers, not comic companies. They worked on a tight deadline each month, churning out many pages a day. Much of the coloring in the first 35 years of comic books was crude and rushed, but the same can be said for the writing, penciling, inking and lettering.

The Spirit is Willing

Early comic book companies were badly run. They didn't care about art, they cared about creating product and a lot of it. To that end they hired any Tom, Dick or Harry who could hold a pencil. The early artists weren't that good because they didn't have to be. If they were any good they got hired by the Sunday Comic strips, a far more prestigious gig. Even illustrating for the pulp magazines was a step up from doing comic books. Early comic books were considered the bottom of the totem pole of the publishing industry.

So what changed? Well, the war for one. When America entered the war, every able-bodied signed up to do their part. If you were a comic book artist and you were any good, you used your skills to further the War Effort. Many who went overseas did not come back and the ones that did were used to getting a certain amount of respect and regular pay.

Beyond the impact of the war, there were two factors that drove comic books from just being funny books designed to entertain low IQ children, to actually being considered an art form in itself. These two factors were Will Eisner and Stan Lee.

Will Eisner was part artist and part businessman. In 1936 at the age of nineteen, he and his partner Jerry Iger formed a studio that hired artists to produce comic books for the fledgling industry. Among the artists who worked with them were Bob Kane, Lou Fine and Jack Kirby. Because of the lucrative contracts he was able to procure, the studio produced such comic mainstays as *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle* among others.

Eisner was as much a talented visionary as he was a pragmatic businessman. He produced quality comic book art and managed to make the studio a financial success, even in the middle of the Great Depression. He inspired those he worked with to strive for a certain quality when it came to sequential art and his business success made him the envy of his colleagues.

His talents did not go unnoticed. Everett M. "Busy" Arnold, publisher of Quality Comics, wanted to integrate the comic book format into the more prestigious world of the Sunday Funnies. He lured Eisner away from the studio to create a weekly comic book that would be distributed by a newspaper syndicate. Eisner agreed and came up with his most famous creation, *The Spirit*, which would continue to break new ground artistically, but also in the comic book business. Eisner insisted on owning the copyright to his new creation, a situation almost without parallel in comics at that time and almost without parallel on any popular basis for several decades to come. "Since I knew I would be in comics for life, I felt I had every right to own what I created. It was my future, my product and my property, and by God, I was going to fight to own it." Eisner said. That was a watershed moment in terms of the artist being acknowledged as a creator of comics rather than just part of an assembly line.

The Spirit strip from 1940. Will Eisner, Artist

Eisner's success with *The Spirit* and his standing in the industry as a true independent allowed him the freedom to elevate the comic book to a true art form. In 1978 he created the first ever graphic novel, *A Contract With God,* which was published by Baronet Books in 1978. With that book Eisner showed the industry what comics could be – a legitimate art form every bit as relevant as the novel.

A Contract With God paved the way for the graphic novels that would come afterwards. Works like Art Spiegel's *Maus*, Daniel Clowes' *Ghost World* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*.

It is a testament to Eisner's regard in the comic books industry that its highest honour, the award that recognizes excellence in comic book creation, was named after him. The Eisner Awards are given out at the San Diego Comic Convention every year.

Will Eisner has been cited as an inspiration by comics' creators from all corners of the world and from all areas of the art form. As a creator who helped define the very language of comics, his influence will be felt for years to come. He will remain one of the most important and inspirational forces in the comics' field.

Make Mine Marvel

The other factor that shaped the comic book industry, that brought it out from the publishing ghetto and into the mainstream, was the creator of Marvel Comics, Stan "The Man" Lee.

Earlier I mentioned two factors that drove comic book art up from the gutter and into the realms of fine art and public consciousness. The first factor was Will Eisner who helped to elevate comic book art from its early crudity into the realms of high art. The second factor was Stan Lee and the rise of Marvel Comics.

Stan Lee was born Stanley Martin Leiber in 1922. At 17 he became an assistant at the new Timely Comics division of pulp magazine publisher Martin Goodman's company. This was one of those many companies that moved into comic books because the market was lucrative.

Lee's duties were to keep inkpots filled and to get the artists their lunch. He did proofreading and he erased the pencil lines from the finished inked pages. But his ambition was to be a writer.

Eventually he got his chance and he adopted the pseudonym Stan Lee with a text filler he wrote for *Captain America* #3 in 1941. He introduced the character's now iconic ricocheting shield toss.

Following a dispute with Martin Goodman, Timely's editor, Joe Simon and his creative partner, Jack Kirby left the company. Goodman promoted the nineteen year old Lee to editor. Lee showed a knack for the business that led him to eventually become the company's editor-in-chief as well as art director.

Timely eventually became Atlas Comics in the 1950's and Lee wrote stories in a wide variety of genres including Westerns, Romance, Horror and Suspense titles. But in the late 1950's Timely's rival, DC Comics, revived the superhero comic, which had fallen out of favor, and experienced a significant success with its update of *The Flash* and the introduction of the *Justice League of America*.

The Avengers Issue #4, March 1964. Art by Jack Kirby.

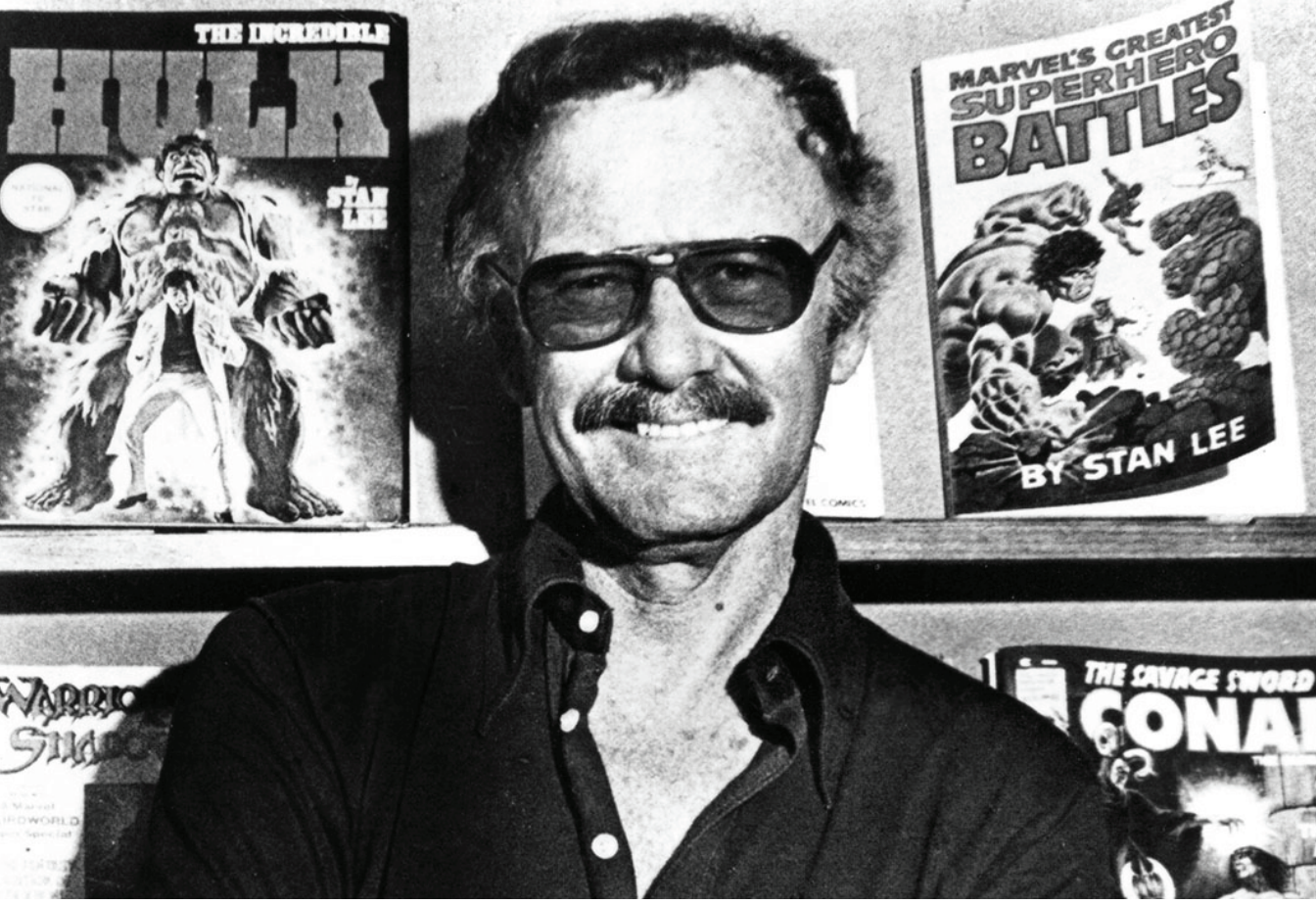
Goodman assigned Lee to create a new superhero team

Lee was growing dissatisfied with his career at Atlas and felt he had nothing to lose. He created a team of superheroes who had flaws, who were complex and naturalistic, who had tempers, fits of melancholy and vanity and who occasionally bickered among themselves. Lee's characters worried about prosaic things like paying bills and impressing girlfriends, who got bored and even sometimes caught a cold.

The first team that Lee and Jack Kirby (who had returned to Atlas) created was *The Fantastic Four*. He and Kirby would go on to create the *Hulk*, *Thor, Iron Man* and the *X-men*. With other artists, Bill Everett and Steve Ditko he would come up with *Daredevil, Doctor Strange* and *Spider-man*, all of whom lived in the same shared universe. Lee and Kirby gathered several of these new characters together into a team title *The Avengers* and would revive early Timely characters from the 1940's the *Sub-Mariner* and *Captain America*.

While DC's superhero revival was suffering a creative drought a new audience for comic books, older, teen-aged readers responded to Lee's flawed heroes. The company, now renamed Marvel Comics, was poised to supplant DC in comic book supremacy.

The flawed heroes and the shared universe weren't the only revolutions that Stan Lee brought to the business. Lee included bulletins about the company. His readers were older now and interested in how the comics were created. Lee included information about the writers and artists, and in those bulletins he spoke directly to the readers. He wanted the



Stan Lee in the Marvel Offices, 1970's

fans to think of the creators as friends and considered it a mark of success that letters to the company, which at other companies would be addressed as "Dear sir…" or "Dear Editor…" at Marvel were addressed "Dear Stan and Jack". Lee's friendly, chatty style endeared him to readers almost as much as the superheroes themselves.

That, almost more than anything, is what transformed comic books from a faceless publishing house into an organization that readers invested in. The branding was a success and with slogans like "Excelsior!" and "Make Mine Marvel!" the company made its mark among the comic book reading public and throughout the 1960's and into the 1970's many titles became top sellers.

The artists excelled at creating dynamic panels. More than just men in tights who beat up bad guys, the Marvel heroes had depth and the art reflected that. Unusual angles and lighting effects were explored and the character's expressions had to relay the complex emotions they were feeling (even when they were wearing a mask).

But as competent and sometimes as brilliant as the artwork was, the realities of the printing process still limited what the artists could do. The system of applying color was still mostly done by the printing companies using acetate and rubylith for their separations rather then separating the colors photomechanically. The cheaper grades of paper also hampered the final product with the courser grades suffering from "bleed", that is that the paper would absorb the ink more readily into the fibers, causing the colors to mix and blur in unpredictable ways.

What did that mean in practical terms? It meant that art had to have well defined areas of color. The black and white inks had to present solid and definable shapes for the colorists to work in. Quite often the color separations weren't perfect. Pick up an old comic book sometime and have a look at it. There are blocks of color and a lot of times the blocks do not stay within the lines. They overreach or overlap. The complex system of rubylith separations and screening meant that the art had to be somewhat simplistic. Printing companies were loath to invest in newer technologies, preferring to hire more color separators to do the work by hand. In the 1960's and through the 1970's this method was more cost effective than investing in newer techniques.

All that would change in the 1980's with the rise of independent comics and the introduction of a new kind of paper.

Bronze Age Blues

The period from the 1970's to the 1980s has been referred to as the Bronze Age of comics. The older generation of artists, the artists who had developed the established parameters of comic book art, were beginning to retire or be moved up into management positions. Newer artists were taught to imitate the "house styles", but those styles were becoming more sophisticated. Artists like Neil Adams and Joe Kubert brought a more realistic style into the comic book panels. But audiences were growing more sophisticated as well.

The 1970's also saw the influence of a new wave of artists who had been inspired by comic books as kids. They grew up versed in a language that earlier artists were in the process of inventing. The basics established, the newer generation of artists, standing on the shoulders of giants, so to speak, had the freedom to open up and experiment. Artists like Michael William Kaluta, Barry Windsor Smith, Bernie Wrightson, Jim Starlin, John Byrne, Frank Miller, George Perez and Howard Chaykin began to make their influences felt.

But there were two other factors that changed the nature of comic books. One was technological and the other was economical.

The technology of printing was changing with the adoption of flexography. Flexography is a high speed print process that uses fast-drying inks and can print on many types of absorbent and non-absorbent materials. The flexopress is cheaper because the inks are water based, which meant they dried quicker and were easier to clean up. The flexographic presses also are lighter and take up less room.

For years comics were printed on low-grade, absorbent papers that were not meant to last. Early comics were rare because the paper degraded so quickly. The distribution system also was designed to put comic books in as many places as they could find kids to buy them. Remember the spinner racks of comics in your local drug store? Comic books, then retailing for about 25 – 30 cents per title, were available everywhere, but they were not made to last.

In the 1980's the comic book companies began printing certain titles on a better quality of paper, Baxter paper. It was smoother and whiter and the inks and colors looked much better than your regular comic book fare.

The technological change, the flexographic process, allowed this development to happen. But this specialty product wasn't destined for the spinner racks. Here's where the economical change comes in.

The specialty books proved popular. That popularity opened up a market for specialty shops. These were stores devoted to selling only comic books (sometimes toys and games as well, but mostly comics). Soon comic shops were springing up everywhere.

The existence of these shops made it possible for small-press publishers to reach an audience, and some comic book artists began self-publishing their own work. Notable titles of this type included Dave Sim's *Cerebus* and Wendy and Richard Pini's *Elfquest* series. Other small-press publishers came in to take advantage of this growing market: Pacific Comics introduced in 1981 a line of books by comic-book veterans such as Jack Kirby, Mike Grell and Sergio Aragonés, for which the artists retained copyright and shared in royalties.

Comics sold on newsstands were distributed on the basis that unsold copies were returned to the publisher. Comics sold to comic shops were sold on a no-return basis. This allowed small-press titles sold through the direct market to keep publishing costs down and increase profits, making viable titles that otherwise would have been unprofitable. Marvel and DC began taking advantage of this direct market themselves, publishing books and titles distributed only through comic book shops.

So, to go back to the question that started this whole thing: Why is it that early comic book art was so crude compared to today's comic book art? What were the forces that led us from the almost amateurish renderings from the early comic titles to the sometimes fully painted, lush and visually arresting comic art that we regularly see today?

The answer, as I hope I have shown, has been a combination of technology, market forces and the "standing on the shoulders of giants" effect where the next generation of comic book artists improves on the previous. Along the way there have been experimental movements, and technological changes which have allowed the rise of independent comic books. There have also been a lot of factors that I haven't been able to look at in depth, like the influence of European comic book artists and their introduction into the western market via magazines like *Heavy Metal*.

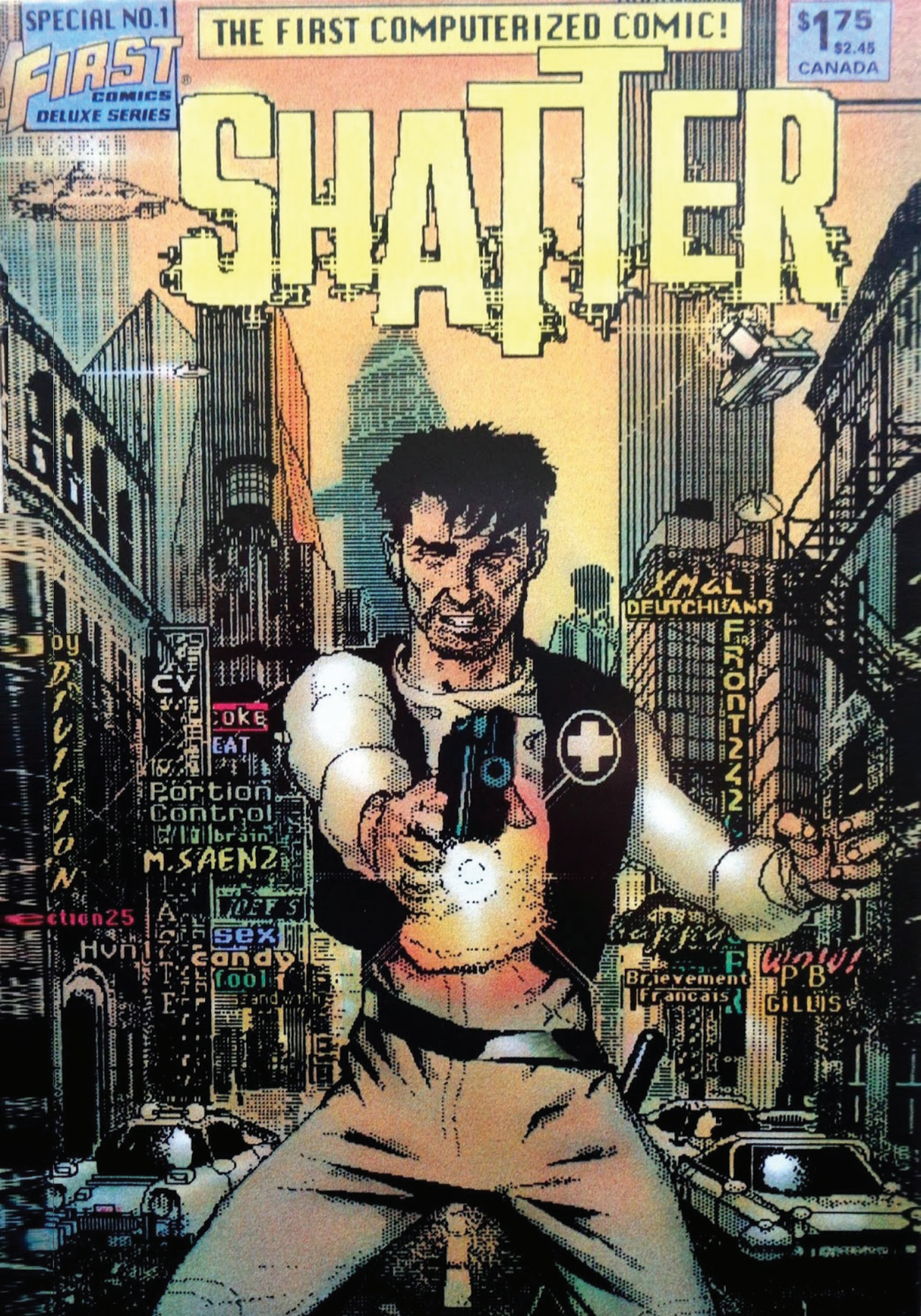
Digital Revolution

Computers are everywhere. Most people have small computers in their pockets. Some people wear computers. Digital technology is everywhere. But back in 1985 the computer was still thought of as a science fiction device. Few understood what it was capable of.

In 1984 William Gibson wrote his debut novel *Neuromancer* and coined the term "cyberspace". This book led a wave of excitement about the possibilities of computers. In that same year Steve Jobs introduced the first Macintosh computer.

Apple's Macintosh was immediately adopted by graphic artists. With such programs as MacPaint and MacDraw, computer assisted art and design was born. The next year saw the introduction of the very first major comic book to be produced on a computer.

First Comic's *Shatter* was created by writer Peter B. Gillis and artist Mike Saenz. *Shatter* was the story of a cop named Sadr al-Din Morales. The storyline of the comic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Comic book specialty shops helped changed the economics of the comic book industry.

was much in-line with works like Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner* and Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Threads of the story, such as distrust of corporations, the Film Noir feel of the project, and especially the artwork, would place it firmly in the genre of 'cyberpunk.'

More importantly, the comic title, however much of a gimmick it may have started out as, showed that the potential for computer assisted comic book art was real. Using MacPaint and a mouse (this was before the invention of the tablet and stylus interface) artist Mike Saenz created each image as well as the lettering. The resulting pages were printed on a dot-matrix printer and then colored in a traditional way, but only because at the time the Macintosh was strictly a black and white machine.

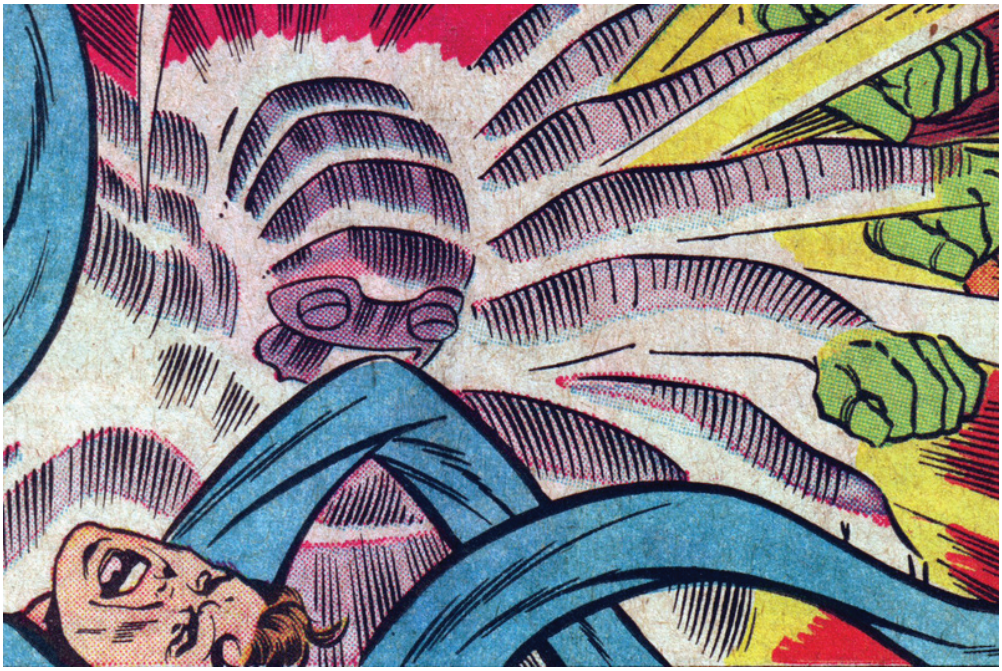
Although it looks clunky and gimmicky today, right from the start the creators of *Shatter* knew that this was just a first step. They were painfully aware of the limitations of the computer, but were also very much aware of the potential of it.

Technology did not take long to catch up. The introduction of newer software and the creation of the stylus and tablet interface would go a long way towards integrating digital techniques into the process of comics. The most influential of these technological advances was the development of a computer program called Photoshop.

All of the complex and time consuming tasks that once took a small army of print shop staff to complete could now be done by Adobe's simple program. Computer printing technology developed rapidly from the crude dot-matrix printers to systems that digitally created plates for the printing press. The coloring process, once dependent upon complex coding to communicate to a print house color which would wind up flat with no shading or highlights, suddenly were free. "When we incorporated Photoshop, we went from a palette of 372 colors, to millions of colors." says DC Comics colorist Alex Sinclair.

This technology influenced everything, even revolutionizing the reproduction of the old comics that were produced in the traditional way.

As an example, look at this panel from an early edition of the *Fantastic Four*. Here is how it appeared printed in the traditional way.



And here it is reprinted using digital printing techniques.

Even with the traditional methods of producing comic book art, the influence of digital technology has been felt at every level of the industry. Art which needed to be rendered in a crude and simplistic style in order to be mass produced could now be printed and distributed in a way that retained its complexity and nuance. Scanning technology is such that complex art can be reproduced in ways that preserve its subtlety. That technology has led to the prominence of artists like Alex Ross, Esad Ribic and Adi Granov.

Digital technology has even allowed artists to create directly on the computer. There is a generation that has transitioned into digital art. Drawing on Wacoms and Cintiqs is becoming more and more instinctive for artists. And, far from the early crudeness of the computer art for *Shatter*, comic books produced on computers are virtually indistinguishable from those produced by traditional art methods.

Not only that, digital technology has infringed upon the printing process itself. Digital comic books, meant for being read on e-readers or tablets, have become a real thing.

Comic Booktopia

Basically, what it comes down to is that comic book art has had to improve from its early origins due to the influences of market forces as well as changes in the printing technology. These two factors, as well as the best work from the generations of artists before, has set the bar higher and higher. That early style of comic book art is rare to see today (with some notable exceptions) and even when it is, printing technology has improved so that even the earliest, crudest comic book illustrations can look better than ever in reprints.

I have barely scratched the surface with this topic. It is huge and covers so much ground, even a book on the subject would be hard pressed to do it all justice. Hopefully you've learned something new along the way.

Now get outta here, kid. Go read a comic book!

▲

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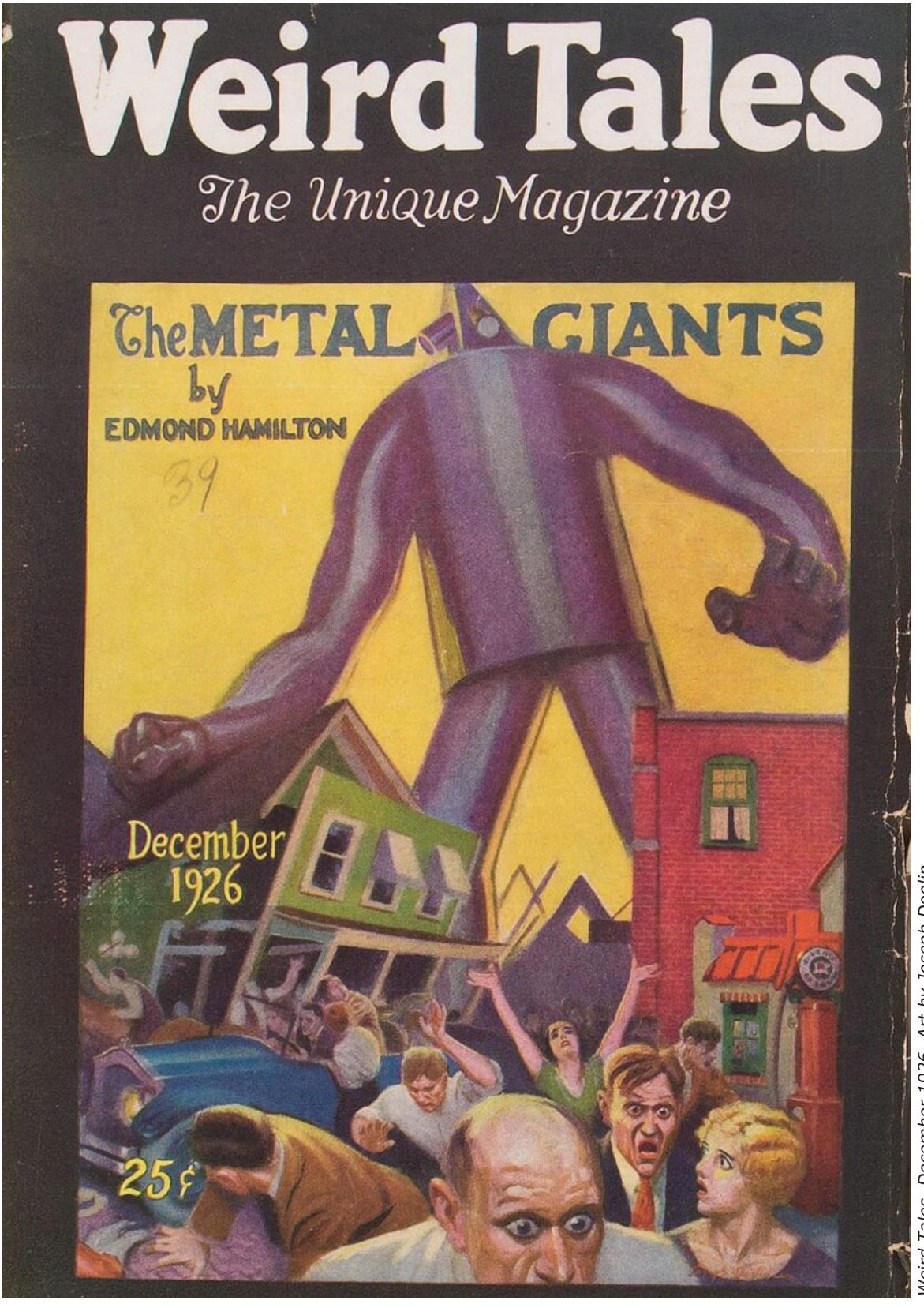


Weird Tales, December 1926. Art by Joseph Doolin

WEIRD TALES & ROBOT SCIENCE FICTION

by G. W. Thomas

Known more for tales of the supernatural, Weird Tales Magazine offered up its share of killer robots.

Hugo Gernsback launched *Amazing Stories* in April 1926. This was a big deal for "scientifiction" as Hugo called it. An all-Science Fiction magazine! This would be a logical place to begin looking at Pulp robots. But even during the Pulp era, there were precursors to *Amazing*.

One magazine that set the stage for what was to follow was *Weird Tales*, edited by Farnsworth Wright (1888-1940). This pulp was not an all-Science Fiction magazine, typically regarded as a horror magazine. But as editorial assistant, Otis Adelbert Kline, wrote in an early editorial, "Why Weird Tales?", "The Unique Magazine" published three kinds of fiction: horror, fantasy and what:

> *.... might be termed "highly imaginative stories." These are stories of advancement in the sciences and the arts to which the generation of the writer who creates them has not attained. All writers of such stories are prophets, and in the years to come, many of these prophecies will come true.*

The letter columns were full of praise (and sometimes the opposite) for "pseudo-scientific stories", usually pointing to two stories in particular, "When the Green Star Waned" by Nictzin Dyalhis, and the second of our robot selections, "The Metal Giants" (*Weird Tales*, December 1926) by Edmond Hamilton.

Edmond Hamilton (1904-1977) began his writing career with an A. Merritt-style desert adventure called "The Monster-God of Mamurth" (*Weird Tales*, August 1926) but after that initial tale his stories all follow a plot formula based on H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898), in which a weird and unearthly power rises to threaten the world before being put down by hardy earthlings. We should mention H. G. Wells here, because the master of Victorian Science Fiction did mention the idea of robots in his *The War of the Worlds*, though he did not develop the concept:

> *When I looked again, the busy handling-machine had already put together several of the pieces of apparatus it had taken out of the cylinder into a shape having an unmistakable likeness to its own; and down on the left a busy little digging mechanism had come into view, emitting jets of green vapour and working its way round the pit, excavating and embarking in a methodical and discriminating manner. This it was which had caused the regular beating noise, and the rhythmic shocks that had kept our ruinous refuge quivering. It piped and whistled as it worked. So far as I could see, the thing was without a directing Martian at all.*

Edmond Hamilton

Hamilton's first try at robots and androids was in "Across Space" (*Weird Tales*, September-November 1926), a lengthy serial involving bat-like Martians hiding on Earth in a subterranean city beneath Easter Island. The faction that has come to Earth is slowly drawing the red planet closer so that more Martians can come and complete their invasion. When Dr. Whitley sees the connection between the volcanic activity near the island and the approaching planet, the heroes take off to explore. The Martians, who look like the statues carved on Easter Island, are using a red ray to draw Mars closer. The heroes plan to destroy the ray but it is guarded by a slave race of androids:

> *"So their scientists took counsel and produced at last the creatures that are now their slaves, two of which brought you here. The Martian scientists had gone far within the secrets of life and death, so far that they were now able to reproduce the processes of life itself, and make out inorganic elements the things you have seen... I have seen the things being made myself, and a ghastly sight it is. They do not eat, they do not sleep, they are literally living machines, needing only a*

certain stimulant from time to time, which is injected into them just as you would oil a machine."

The androids are controlled telepathically. Whitley and his crew use their minds to take over the robots and defeat the Martians. This plot of terror, exploration, dire consequence and human sacrifice will be repeated by Hamilton for years, garnering him some well-earned criticism from fans. Allen Glasser wrote in "The Science Fiction Alphabet" in *The Fantasy Fan*, September 1933:

H is for Hamilton, who has written a lot;
He sure makes good use of his favorite plot

"Across Space" was Hamilton's second story. The idea of robots and robot conquerors would be explored further in his next story. "The Metal Giants" concerns a scientist named Detmold. While he is creating an electronic brain with consciousness, he is ousted from his position at Juston College. The man is ridiculed to the point where he will not be steered away from his experiments by his friend, the English teacher, Lanier. Detmold takes his developing mechanical brain and disappears.

Four years later a farmer near Stockton, WV, reports strange ten-foot circular tracks and seeing a giant metal man. The man is disbelieved, but later when a reporter confirms the footprints, newspapers begin writing about Stockton. One of these articles brings Lanier in search of Detmold. Nobody knows a doctor with that name but his description sounds like a Dr. Foster who has a farm near the town. Lanier goes in search of his friend.

Later that night the town is attacked by a score of giant metal giants. With Wellsian detail, Hamilton describes the terror:

For on the heights around Stockton, in a great circle, stood a score or more of gigantic shapes, silent, motionless. They seemed quite identical in appearance, towering metal giants cast in a roughly human form, each with two immense limbs, smooth columns of metal ten feet across, looming up all of a hundred yards in height. And set on those two huge supports, the body, an upright cylinder of the same gleaming metal, fifty feet in diameter, quite smooth and unbroken of surface, and bearing on its smooth top something that flashed brilliantly in the sunlight, a small, triangular case in each side of which glittered a lens of glass. And from each cylinder projected two additional limbs, arms, shining and flexible, hanging almost to the ground, tapering, twisting.

The giants, shrieking like the Martian tripods in Wells' novel, herd the people of Stockton to the center of town before gassing them with a yellow spray that leaves flesh but dissolves bones, making them so many meat bags on the ground. Stockton destroyed, all but four of the monsters march off to crush Wheeling, WV. The army engages the robot army, but the giants cover the land with gas ahead of their movements, wiping out ninety percent of the troops. Lanier watches all this from a hilltop outside of town.

Lanier continues his search for Detmold. He finds his farm but not the man. In a lengthy diary, Lanier reads how Detmold attached more and more sensory organs to the robot brain, teaching it like a child until it could do scientific experiments better than its creator. All the strain of working on the brain puts Detmold in the hospital. When he returns he find his creation gone. Tracking it to the woods, he discovers the brain has given itself an octopoid set of arms and has build machines that gather and smelt metal. With these, it builds the metal giants along with new robot brains, less intelligent than itself, to power them. (Machines making more machines was an earlier theme and shows up again and again in the Pulps.) Detmold confronts the brain but must flee or be gassed.

Lanier heads out in search of the metal brain or its creator. He arrives in time to see Detmold attack the giants using a gigantic wheel that crushes the robots. Two giants grab the wheel and all looks lost but the superstructure falls over destroying the master brain. The giant robots fall over like puppets. Wheeling and the rest of the world are saved. Detmold dies in Lanier's arms, gaining a small amount of forgiveness.

"The Metal Giants" was Hamilton's second try at this type of Wellsian tale. There would be many more. Farnsworth Wright reportedly never rejected a Hamilton tale, regarding him as the premiere "pseudo-scientific writer" in *Weird Tales*. The early letter columns support this, with readers asking for more Hamilton type stories. Ed was happy to oblige, being one of the few Pulp writers scrounging a living out of Science Fiction exclusively. (His good friend, Jack Williamson, was another.)

Psychic Robots

"The Twin Soul (*Weird Tales*, March 1928) by Amelia Reynolds Long (1904-1978) is a far more typical *Weird Tales* story, with its pseudo-spiritualist leanings. Sir Guy Sullivan, his friend Lucas Hammond and the manservant, Ferguson, are staying in the old Sullivan mansion that is haunted by a presence. They must wriggle a mystery out of the Sullivan's renter, a spooky Dr. Murnane, psychic doctor. There are psychic episodes, plenty of hypnotism, a stalking figure in black and other Gothic touches. In the end, Murnane proves that the presence is a twin brother whose body never formed. The only way to save Sir Guy is to remove the soul of his brother. This is done at the end when Murnane puts his essence into an android that he created with science. The twin brother goes on to live a happy life, never knowing he is an android.

Amelia Reynolds Long was a writer of mysteries and Science Fiction. The mystery elements in "The Twin Soul" shows her familiarity with structuring a story slowly, laying down clues. Long's tale is also typical of its time when psychical research hit its second wind after the massive deaths in World War I. Lucas Hammond says: "…this has to stop. If there's such a thing as a spook of any kind in this house, why, we must get it out. That's what the Society of Psychical Research is for; isn't it?" The story is filled with pseudo-scientific jargon and ideas, making it a muddle of ghost story paraphernalia ultimately solved like a Science Fiction story. (Stories of this kind make Science Fiction fans grind their teeth.) Such a story was perfect for *Weird Tales*, being both a horror story and a Science Fiction story. It will not be the last to explore religious matters.

Francis Flagg (1898-1946) (whose real named was George Henry Weiss) was another

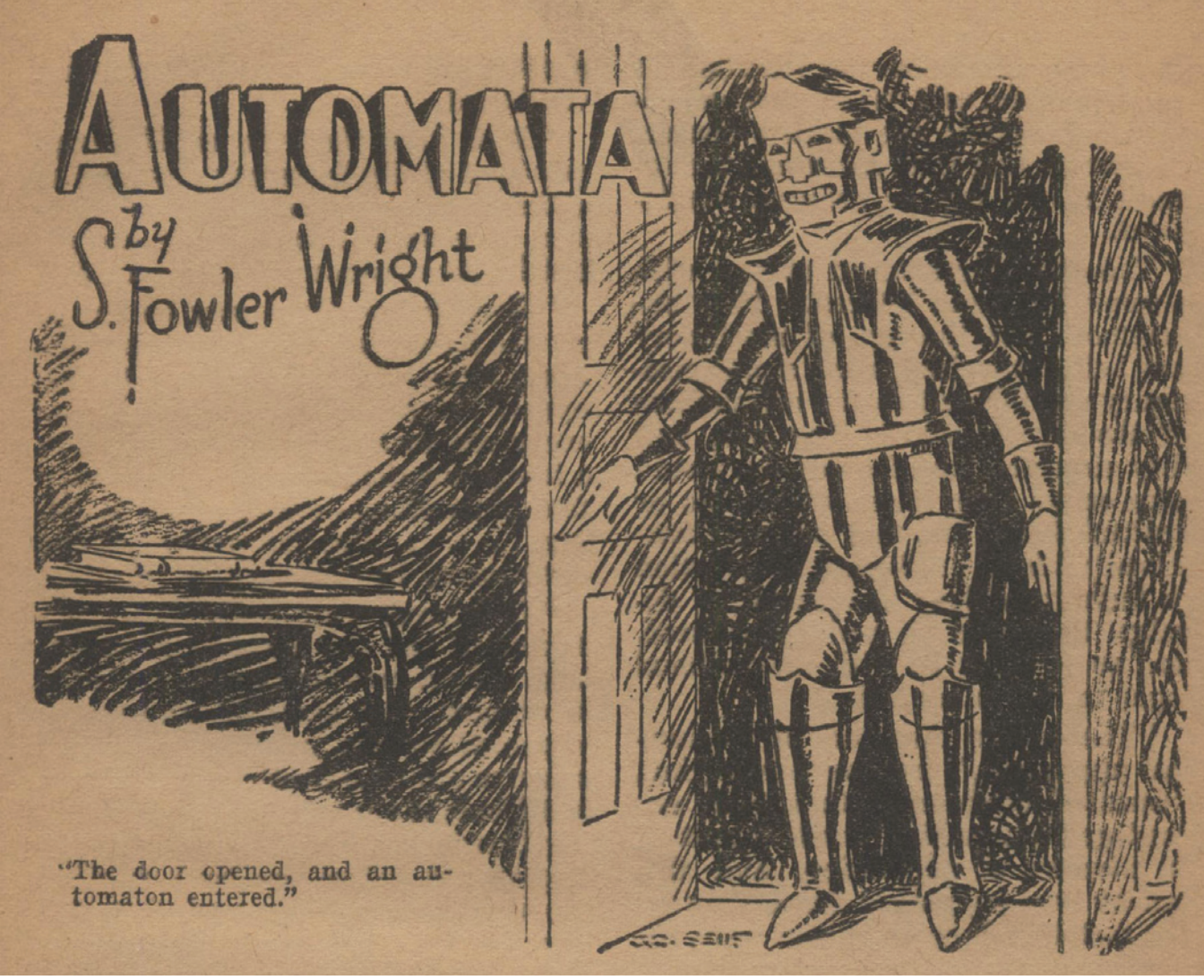


Illustration for Automata, Weird Tales, September 1929. Illustration by C. C. Senf.

Wellsian writer, working mostly for Hugo Gernsback. But "The Chemical Brain" appeared in *Weird Tales*, January 1929. It has a machinist, John Lester, working for two older men, Captain Rowman and Walter Parsons. The two inventors are creating the first mechanical man. Rowan is a theosophist while Parsons is a complete atheist. The two men argue in a friendly way about whether there is life after death. Parsons is secretly having an affair with Rowan's sister, Genevieve. Lester suspects Rowan knows but holds his tongue. The robot is finally finished when a lumpy mass is placed in the brain pan. At this moment, Rowan has a heart attack and dies. The robot comes to life after a period of time and breaks into the house, attacking and killing Parsons. Lester destroys the machine with a large monkey wrench. The man is certain the spirit of the dead Captain had animated the machine and taken its revenge. It isn't surprising this story appeared in *Weird Tales*, rather than *Amazing Stories*. The religious question would not have been to Gernsback's liking. Gernsback's slowness in paying his writers may have also been a factor. Flagg may have tailored the story to sell it to Farnsworth Wright. What is even more interesting is that Flagg, in one section where Lester is horrified at the implications of the invention, delineates the robot idea fully,

including robots that make robots, terrible job loss, and even a war with the robots. All these ideas would be used in future stories, especially those by Jack Williamson, but Flagg outlines them all here in 1929. There can be little doubt he was influenced by Edmond Hamilton's earlier robot stories in *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories*.

Killer Robots

The next robot to appear was in "Automata" (*Weird Tales*, September 1929) by S. Fowler Wright. This strange triptych of vignettes begins, like many clunky, early SF tales with a speech or lecture. The president of the British Association relates how that after the Industrial Revolution happened the number of horses sharply declined. He then extrapolates that the industrial worker, the house maid and all laborers will disappear likewise. Evolution will see the machine replace all humans in the near future. Before Wright closes this first section he gets in a dig at Arthur Conan Doyle and Spiritualism:

> *At this point Sir Ireton Mount looked at the illustrious author of Sheerluck Soames, who was seated beside him. They shook their massive heads in a troubled wonder. Their colossal intellects told them that such developments were logical enough. But why had the spirits given no hint to their faithful servants? They went out to consult Pheneas.*

We jump into the far future, a world in which machines are worshipped as divine and the remaining humans are not many. Four women gather for tea in a replica of a Georgian house to enjoy its "barbarity". They are few to enjoy the ancient digs, equipped with automata girls who meet them in the hallway. The women are free because this week they are not part of the mating cycle regulated by the machines.

Wright gives us some of the history of how humans were reduced in numbers, including revolts, and a killer machine called a Crawler, that grabbed humans by the throat and choked them to death methodically. (Let's not forget that *Weird Tales* was a horror magazine at its heart, and horror fans might find some of the Science Fiction equally graphic and hair-raising.)

From here, Wright segue-ways into a workshop where some of the last human engineers draw up blue prints for new machines. The unnamed protagonist has produced only five out of six schematics and knows the robots will be unhappy. A machine comes to get him. The man remembers how those who rebelled were sacrificed on altars to their new machine gods. He goes quietly, walking to his doom with the robot sent to fetch him.

Sydney Fowler Wright (1874-1965) was a British poet who turned to more commercial genres like Science Fiction and screen writing. Wright was a conservative who did not champion human society but criticize it. Naturally, this shows in "Automata" with the stupidity of the British Association, the pointlessness of the female party-goers and finally with the failed draftsman. He would later return to the killer robot novel with *The Adventures of Wyndham Smith* (1938) that would be reprinted in the Pulp, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* in June 1950.

"Sola" (*Weird Tales*, April 1930) by W. K. Mashburn (1900-1968) is a journal of Dr.

Dietrich, a scientist who has had enough of the gentler sex. He decides he will build his own woman. The diary details in alarming terms the depths of his hatred and the insane plan he follows in creating "Sola" (from the Latin for "solo" or alone.) The robot looks like a real woman (though mute) and is controlled by thought waves. Dietrich has a close call when he gets frustrated and turns to violent thoughts. This animates Sola, who attempts to kill him. He is only just able to deactivate her and escape.

Finally finished, Dietrich invites to his home two peers, men he considers his inferiors but able enough to appreciate what he had done. At that meeting, Dietrich decides to destroy his robot girl by bludgeoning her with a heavy ornament. Sola picks up his homicidal thoughts and attacks him. The two visitors pull the robot off Dietrich, who has knocked her head off, but the man dies from Sola's steely blows.

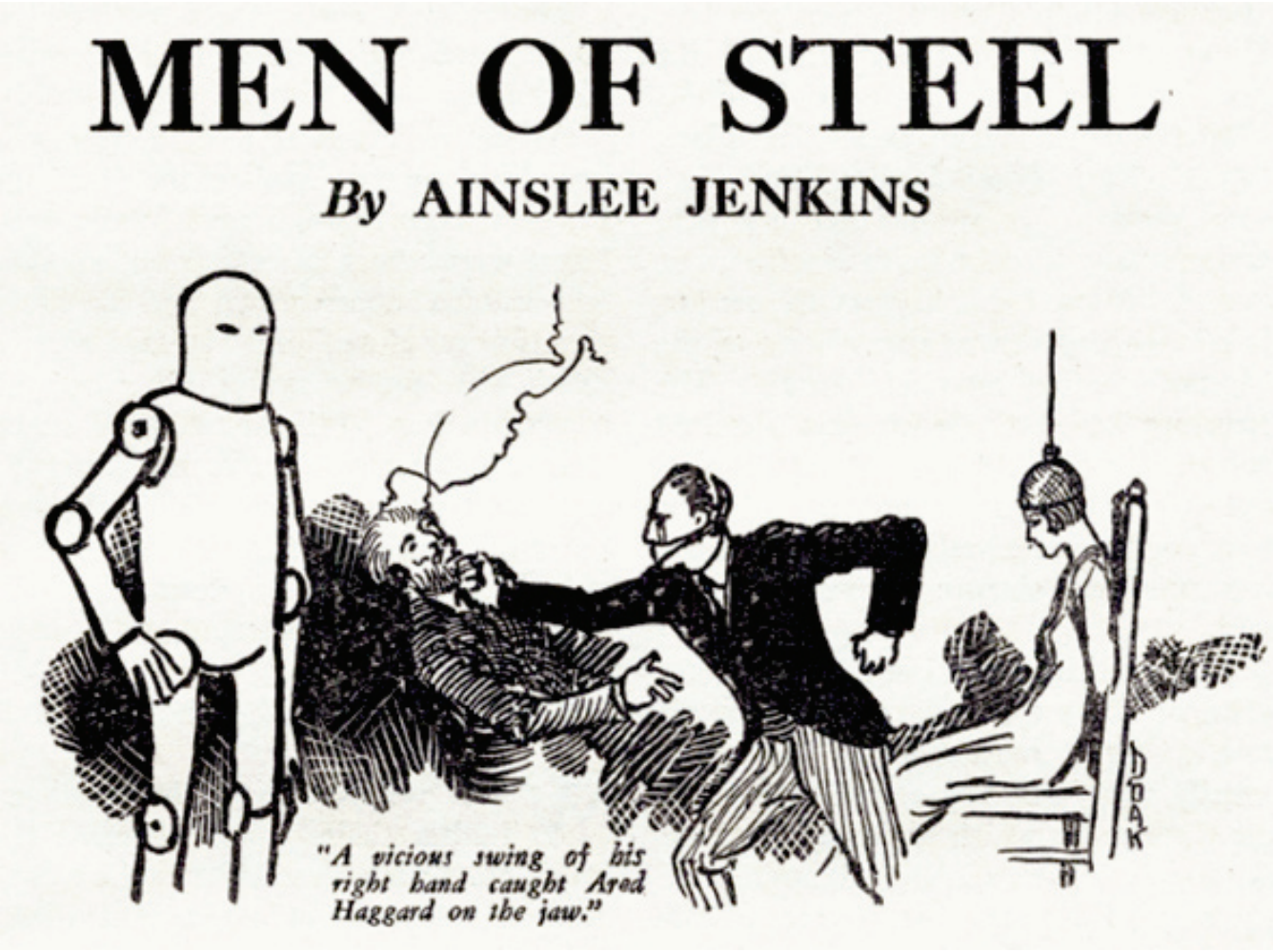
Mashburn brings the legend of Pygmalion into his story, with Dietrich hoping he is creating a Galatea and not a Frankenstein (sic). Later writers such as Lester del Rey would use this same idea of the robot builder and romance in "Helen O'Loy" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, December 1938). In del Rey's version, the robot becomes sentient and the man falls in love and marries his creation. Even back in the 1970s, this story seemed oddly titillating but today in our world of sexbots it has become less speculative. Mashburn's tale has the feel of a "spicy" Pulp, which may have been why Farnsworth Wright selected it. Mashburn's protagonist is so unlikable that his tale has none of the sentimentality of del Rey.

"Men of Steel" (*Weird Tales*, December 1930) by Desmond W. Hall (as Ainslee Jenkins) is filled with the worst kinds of Pulp plot clichés. Eccentric scientist, Arad Haggard, lives in a desert castle called "Miner's Folly". He invites his neighbor, the writer Jim Wells and his fiancée, Jean Esrkine, to see his masterpiece. The Navajo servant, Old Tom, and a local friend warn the couple off but they are too curious to refuse. Once there, Haggard drugs them and gags them and ties them up to his strange machinery. In typical villain style, Haggard explains that he has created a machine that takes the souls out of humans and transfers them to robot bodies. To prove his claims, he shows the couple a robot that was animated with Old Tom's soul. Unable to speak, for that is how the robots are controlled, Jim uses his research into Navajo hand language to tell Old Tom to free him. Once freed, Jim throws Haggard into the vat of acid that cooks the flesh off the victims before being transferred into the robots. The machinery explodes, the castle catches on fire, and the couple flee into the desert.

It is interesting that Hall sold this story to Wright as he was associate editor of *Astounding Stories of Super-Science* published by the Clayton chain. Harry Bates could have used the story for his fledgling magazine. I have no information on why the story appeared elsewhere. It may have been all stories in the magazine were considered just a part of his salary. Or it may be that Bates didn't care for robots. Few robot stories appeared in the three years Bates edited the magazine. It is not surprising that Hall chose to hide behind a pseudonym.

More Robots

"The Blood Vein of the Robot" (*Weird Tales*, July 1931) by L. Harper Allen (1878-?) is



Men of Steel, Weird Tales, December 1930. Artist unknown

one of those obscure Pulpsters that we know so little about. He may have been an exporter but he later lived in New York as a writer. The plot has only the slimmest of robotic elements. Aram Mandraga, an eccentric miserly recluse, creates a robot to run his massive collection of gold and silver in a continuous stream. Foolishly, he gets trapped inside the machine, where the coins pummel him to death. It is an unimportant tale that could have been written without reference to robots,

"The Iron Man" (*Weird Tales*, June 1933) by Paul Ernst has a mad scientist create a twenty-foot high robot that is controlled by brainwaves. The scientist, Klegg, also has the brain, heart and eyeballs of the mass murderer, Tuzloff, in a solution of salts. No surprise to anyone, the brain and starring eyes are placed in the head of the robot. The machine goes on a rampage after tearing Klegg in half. It is up to his confidant, Cleave, to rally the police as the killer robot stomps cars and tears apart streetcars. The guns of the police are ineffectual. When Tuzloff's brain recognizes Cleave the chase is on, with the killer machine coming for the man. One brave policeman, named Doyle, climbs the shining monster and shoots it squarely in the eye hole. This smashes the brain and stops the massive pincher claws only in time to save his life.

Paul Ernst (1899-1985) was a magazine writer who began in the horror Pulps but

finished his career writing for magazines like *Good Housekeeping*. A consummate content-producer, he could write anything from the hero Pulp, *The Avenger* to Shudder Pulp torture stories for *Horror Stories* to the noir novel, *The Bronze Mermaid* (1952). He also wrote Science Fiction for Harry Bates' *Astounding Stories of Super-Science* and F. Orlin Tremaine's *Astounding Stories*. His relationship with Farnsworth Wright and *Weird Tales* goes back even farther, beginning in October 1928 with the horror tale, "The Temple of Serpents". He later penned the Doctor Satan series for Wright.

Where S. Fowler Wright works with Wellsian prediction, Ernst must have been inspired by the cinema. The film version of *Frankenstein* was a hit in 1931. Ernst borrows the mad brain element introduced in this movie as well as scenes of a gigantic monster savaging the countryside. Ernst most likely had read Hamilton's "The Metal Giants", and uses some of the ideas suggested by it, but adding a more personal experience of the giant robot. Where Lanier watches from a distance the battle between metal giants and the super wheel, Cleave and Doyle are in the thick of the fight.

Hamilton Returns

Edmond Hamilton returned to robots in *Weird Tales* with "Child of Atlantis" (*Weird Tales*, December 1937). This Pulpy set-up has David and Christa Russell, newly-weds marooned on an island that lies behind an electric field. The island is inhabited by men and women who have been shipwrecked over the years. David has to fight Red O'Riley to keep his mate but makes a friend of the Irishman, as well as the German Von Hausman and the Swede, Halfdon Husper. The island is ruled by a mysterious Master who lives in a black castle right out of a Gothic. Every so often the shipwrecked men are called telepathically to the castle. The call is undeniable. None ever return.

The men secretly work on fixing David's boat. While working on it, Christa is taken by the Master. David drives the villagers to rise up to destroy the Master. This revolt is short-lived for when they arrive at the castle, everyone is mind-controlled to return except David. He enters the castle to meet the Master, an Atlantean robot that grew so powerful the Atlanteans had tried to destroy it. Instead, the robot god destroyed Atlantis, the weird island being all that remained of the super-continent.

The end comes when the Master is about to send Christa away to be experimented on. David creates a lie in his mind that he is an agent of surviving Atlanteans. This trick works, breaking the robot's telepathic signal. David hurls his ax into the robot's head, sending it crashing into the giant crystal that powers the island. Everything begins to fall apart, as the island starts to sink. David, Christa and their friends rush to the repaired yawl and escape.

"Child of Atlantis" was Hamilton's one hundredth story and his style had improved greatly since "The Metal Giants". Between these stories he had written the highly influential "The Comet Doom" for Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* in January 1928 (his eighth story). This classic gave us the traditional robot body inhabited by a cyborg brain. (Again, a story that Ernst likely had read.) In later years, Hamilton would pair up a robot and an android with his space opera hero, Captain Future, for a series of juvenile novels.

Still More Robots

"The Thinking Machine" (*Weird Tales*, May 1939) by J. J. Connington (1880-1947) whose real name was Alfred Walter Stewart, was a British chemist and mystery writer who also wrote early Science Fiction. Both Dorothy L. Sayers and John Dickson Carr were fans of his Mystery work. In SF circles, Stewart is best remembered for his first novel, a disaster piece called *Nordenholt's Million* (1923). In this tale, we have the reclusive robotics scientist again, Stevenson, who takes his assistant, Milton, to a remote island north of England. There, in a sea-cave, Stevenson has created his "thinking machine", a gigantic creation with lamps for eyes and long mechanical tentacles. Stevenson believes the best way to prove sentience is to make the machine hostile against its environment. This gets the creator strangled and ripped to bits, stranding Milton with the robot for a dark night. Milton throws objects at its lamp-eyes to blind it then slinks away in the darkness. Connington describes the vicious machine well but the tale just winds down to the clincher. The machine is fueled by sea power, so it can remain eternally in its cave, waiting for its next victim.

Farnsworth Wright left *Weird Tales* in 1939 and died shortly after in 1940. The magazine was sold to new owners and Dorothy McIlwraith (1891-1976) became editor. McIlwraith was instructed to make the magazine more of a horror title but two of Wright's old school regulars produced two more robot tales. The first of these was "The Robot God" (*Weird Tales*, July 1941) by Ray Cummings (1887-1957), which garnered the cover. Hannes Bok's odd cover image accentuates the horror aspects of the idea, with the robot looming over its human victim.

Ray Cummings was a veteran Science Fiction writer by 1941. His first piece was "The Girl in the Golden Atom" in *All-Story*, March 15, 1919. After leaving the weeklies for Pulps, he wrote for Hugo Gernsback, Harry Bates as well as Farnsworth Wright. As Science Fiction matured under John W. Campbell, Cummings turned to Mystery, Shudder Pulps, and finally low-paying SF magazines. Like many of the early innovators the original of SF, he was quickly forgotten as the genre moved on. It should be no surprise that "The Robot God" appeared in a horror magazine rather than a slick, new SF periodical. Unlike the other stories presented here, "The Robot God" takes place in space. The starship, *The Starfield Queen* is heading to the capital of the Martian Union when the robots onboard revolt and take over. Many of the crew are killed except for our chemist hero, George Carter, his pal, Pete Barry, the beautiful daughter of the robot company owner, Diedre Dynne, and the stunted and dwarfish engineer, Torrington. The robots change course for Asteroid-40 in the Asteroid Belt. While being detained Torrington attempts to find a weapon and is killed.

After this the leader of the robots shows up, the gigantic, gold-plated Thor, who has a strange affection for Diedre, promising he would never hurt her. Thor gloats at the approach to his asteroid kingdom that he calls Mechana. Carter and Barry are put to work making food chemically to feed the thousand human slaves of the robots. Deactivating the robot guarding them, they sneak out and find Thor placing Diedre inside a robot, his goddess to rule beside him. When the new queen of the robots is revealed at a celebration,

Weird Tales, July 1941. Art by Hannes Bok

"The Case of Charles Dexter Ward"—LOVECRAFT NOVEL • SEABURY QUINN, CLARK ASHTON SMITH

JULY

Weird Tales

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I KILLED HITLER

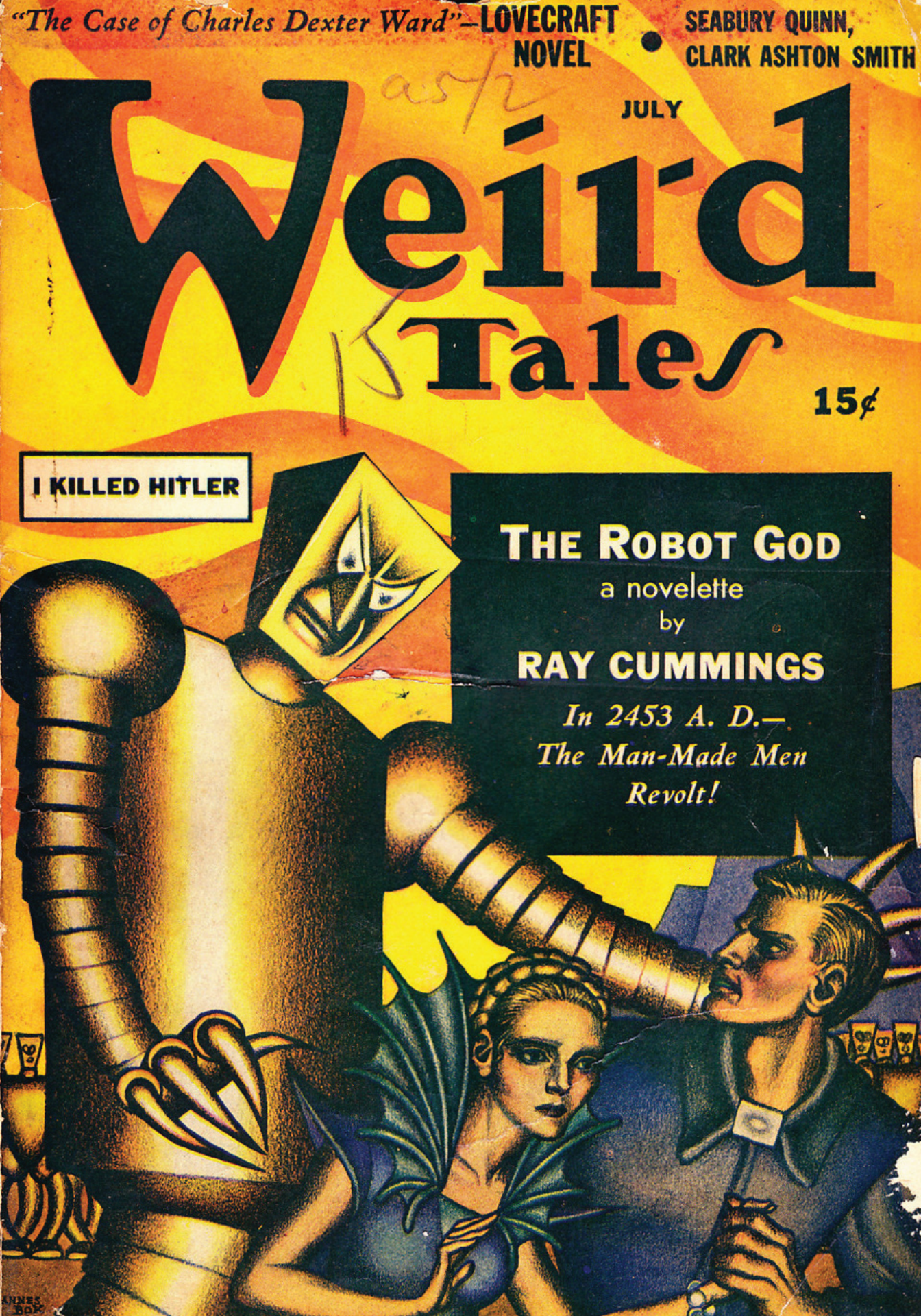
THE ROBOT GOD

a novelette

by

RAY CUMMINGS

In 2453 A. D.— The Man-Made Men Revolt!



Diedre falls out of her goddess prison and the robots go insane. They start killing all the humans and attack Thor. The robot god grabs Diedre and heads for the ship. Barry takes Diedre while Carter fights Thor. Opening Thor's chest , Carter finds Torrington alive and inside. Carter throttles him and the heroes flee the asteroid, all the other humans dead. The story ends with Diedre and Carter married, on Earth, living in a palm-shrouded house with no robots to serve them.

Cummings tale is pretty cliché, even by 1941 standards. Worse, it suffers from logical problems. The robots often display emotions and behave too much like men. He includes descriptions of the robots smashing golden-haired children on rocks and bloody knives cutting up prisoners, perhaps to add an element of horror to please Farnsworth Wright's horror magazine agenda. His vision of robotic hoards worshipping a golden god is about as far from Asimov's new burgeoning ideas about robots as you can get.

Buried in the middle of the January 1944 is "He Came at Dusk" by Frank Belknap Long (1901-1994). A close friend of H. P. Lovecraft, Frank began his career writing horror but gradually moved into Science Fiction. Long wrote for the demanding *Astounding Science Fiction*. This particular tale would not have appealed to John W. Campbell, as it is not so much about Science as guilt. Jim Reston is a robotic scientist. He has created a scholarly and artistic robot named Tom Gordon. Reston's wife, Louise, is very fond of the machine and Reston has promised never to experiment on him. When the robot is destroyed, Louise scratches Jim's face and calls him a murderer. Reston is driven to try and recreate Tom, even though he knows this is impossible. The resurrected Tom is not a gentle soul but an evil one. He attacks Reston, strangling him. If the scientist can only unplug the machine… He, of course, fails to do so. Long's handling of the tale is the most sophisticated of the *Weird Tales* robot stories since S. Fowler Wright. It was also the last.

Final Thoughts

Weird Tales did feature other Science Fiction stories after 1944, in particular works by Edmond Hamilton, Emil Petaja, Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, Margaret St. Clair, Theodore Sturgeon and Frank Long himself, all tinged with the usual Fantasy or Horror feel. The magazine did not return to the idea of the killer robot. Perhaps because the old chestnut was played out or because Science Fiction magazines had proliferated-- there were now a dozen-- to the point where such fare did not seem to belong any longer.

The core of all of these stories – despite the fact that Carl Kapek's play gave us the word "robot" – is *Frankenstein*. Again and again, each story refers to Mary Shelley's monster (erringly naming him Frankenstein). *Weird Tales* was not the birthing ground for classic robot stories that John W. Campbell's *Astounding Science Fiction* would be, but it was first, cementing older ideas that remain with us today in the *Terminator* movies, the giant robots of Japanese culture, and the evil bad guys of just about every Saturday morning cartoon.

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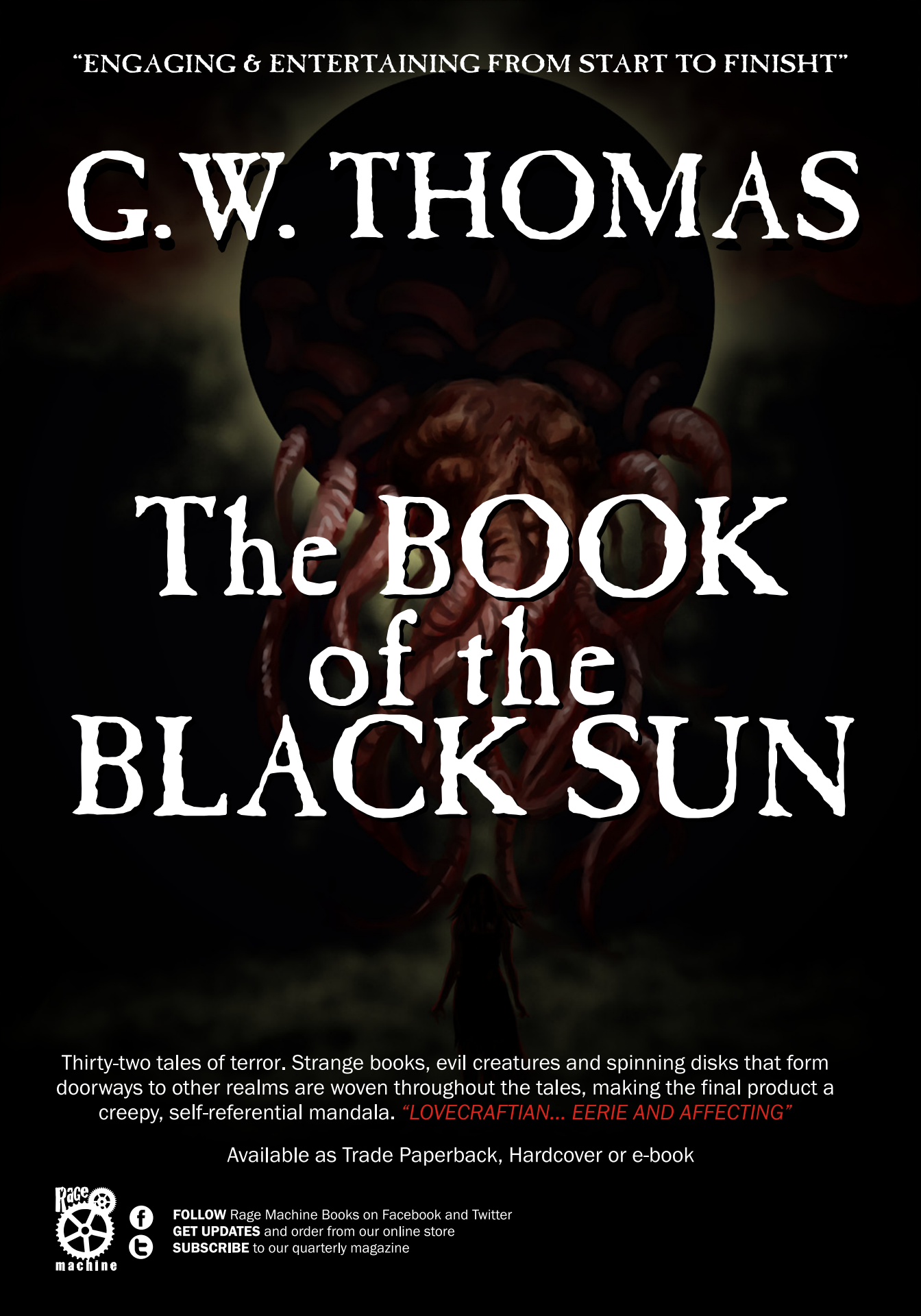

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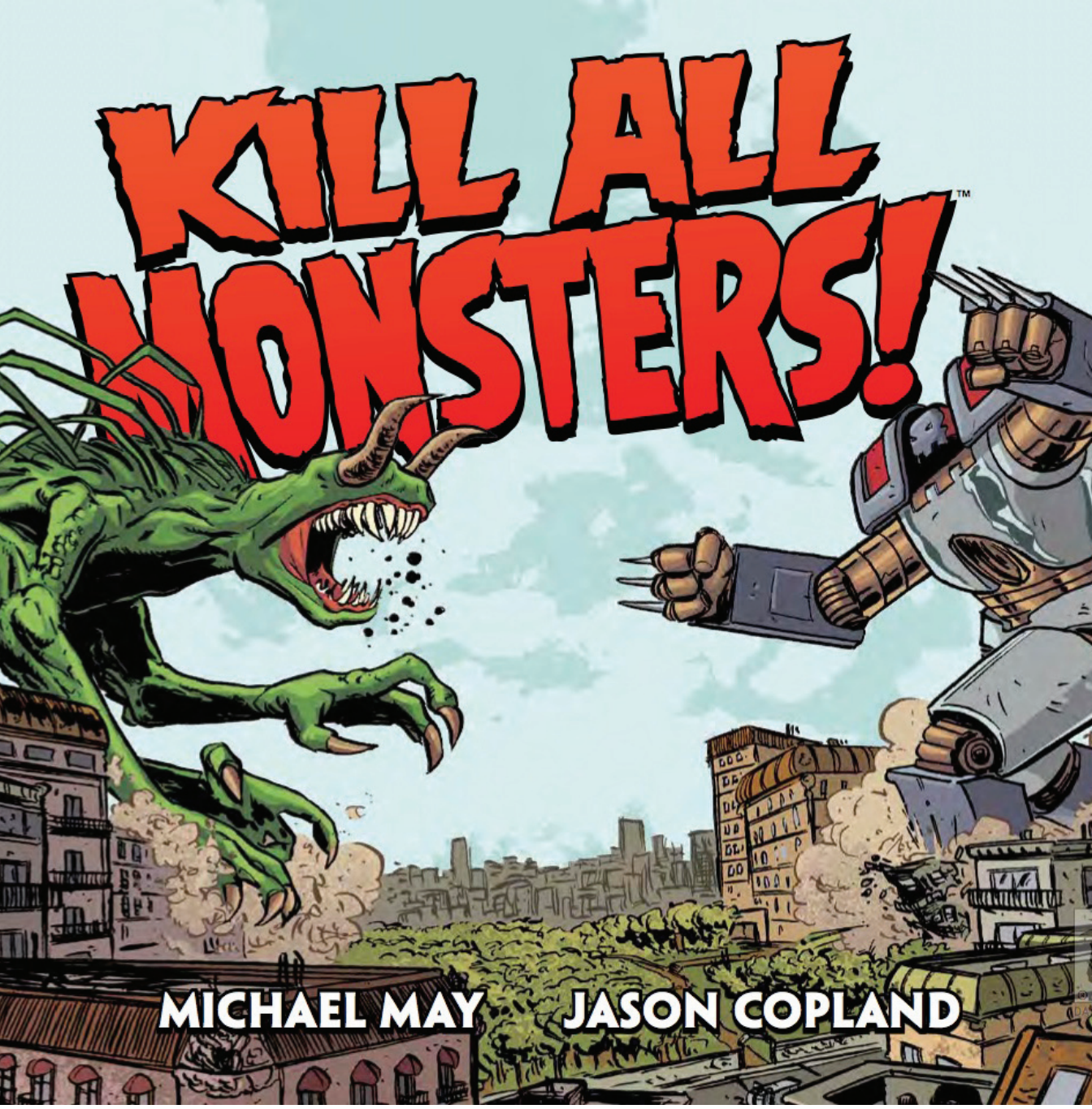

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