

## Time Keeps On Slippin'

11-29-09

I meant to update this blog a couple of weeks ago, but as the title says...time keeps on slippin'. So here is some new stuff, in what I consider descending order of importance.

We'll start with

Back in the mid-60s, Ace Books and Ballantine began a program of reprinting the work of Edgar Rice Burroughs in mass market paperback form. The program was immensely successful, partly due to the fact that artists Roy Krenkel, Frank Frazetta and Reed Crandall were allowed to create a new graphic iconography to illustrate Burroughs' prose.

From covers to interior illustrations, these new editions of Burroughs's work jump-started the earlier tradition of illustrated adventure and SF novels.

This approach deeply stirred the imaginations of young readers, and served as the inspiration for a generation of artists and writers...me among them. I've always loved dinosaurs, dating back to movies like Gorgo, King Kong and the DC comic series, "The War That Time Forgot". I've always loved "Lost World" tales...in fact, I don't believe an action-adventure series is worth the name unless it features at least one story where the heroes find prehistoric survivors.

In the Outlanders series, I introduced Thunder Isle, a place wherein an out-of-control temporal dilator snatched creatures from all epochs and deposited them on an island off the coast of California. The name was my tip o' the hat to a similarly named island featured in the second Doc Savage novel, Land of Terror.

Over the years, I noticed that every book in the Outlanders series set on Thunder Isle, either partially or wholly, enjoyed a spike in sales (for you completists, the books featuring Thunder Isle are Purgatory Road, Tomb of Time, Equinox Zero, Mask of the Sphinx and Satan's Seed.) I thoroughly enjoyed writing the Thunder Isle scenes and that triggered the desire to create a genuine "Lost World" book but I was always too busy with OL. Besides, it seemed like all

permutations of the concept had been done so many times, there were only two ways that it could be presented&hellip;either an isolated place is discovered where prehistoric survivors still perambulate or dinosaurs are recreated through some form of genetic engineering.

It boiled down to those two choices&mdash;strange science or equally strange survival. My out-of-control temporal dilator in OL was too SF for the kind of story I wanted to tell. I didn&rsquo;t want to do an alternate reality fantasy tale, either. Various ideas and notions floated through my head for several months.

It all jelled after Melissa and I attended a dinosaur exhibit at the Museum of Natural History in NYC. I came up with a plot that combined aspects of Doyle&rsquo;s Lost World with certain elements inspired by the immortal Milton Caniff and seasoned the whole thing with a light sprinkling of The DaVinci Code&hellip;not to mention more than a few bacon-bits of esoterica I had already introduced into Outlanders.

Over the next year or so I produced a couple of different drafts of Cryptozoica. The final manuscript was shopped around and even accepted by a start-up publisher&hellip;who subsequently cancelled agreements with me and two other writers.

Shortly thereafter, I signed with agent Richard Curtis who had high hopes of placing the book&mdash;until last December&rsquo;s Black Wednesday, wherein the entire publishing industry underwent a massive shake-up not too different from what had rocked the automobile manufacturing industry a couple of months before. Many editors were fired, book contracts were cancelled by the score and advances were slashed to the bone. At the same time, our little ol&rsquo; graphic novel publishing imprint, Millennial Concepts was actually profitable.

The state of &ldquo;traditional publishing&rdquo; did not improve over the next few months. For that matter, it suffered several more &ldquo;Black Wednesday&rdquo; type shake-ups, just not as severe or as well-publicized. During that period, Cryptozoica was under serious consideration at a couple of different houses and ultimately turned down for exceptionally specious reasons: it was too much of a &ldquo;man&rsquo;s book&rdquo; or too much like Jurassic Park (which it isn&rsquo;t and even it was, that would only be a plus) or it didn&rsquo;t have teenage vampires in it.

C&rsquo;mon&hellip;at this juncture in popular culture, any book, movie or TV show that has dinosaurs co-existing with humans is going to be compared to Jurassic Park, just like any book, movie or TV show that has vampires and humans co-existing is going to be compared to Twilight&hellip;regardless of whether they&rsquo;re really similar or not.

After attending a SF writer&rsquo;s conference this past July, I came to the reluctant conclusion that traditional publishing was never going to pull itself out of the pit of fear and denial that it leapt into. It was very much the same kind of scenario that led to the crash and burn of the comics market in the 1990s. The same miasma of desperation and denial hung over the editors and even the writers in attendance like a cloud.

Obviously, the standard, &ldquo;traditional&rdquo; way of doing things was no longer working. In the days following the conference, Melissa and I decided it would be more pragmatic to take matters into our own hands. Because of the relative success of our graphic novel venture, it seemed well within the range of do-ability to publish Cryptozoica ourselves rather than vainly hoping the publishing industry would turn itself around and see the difference between a fad

readership and solid one.

Dinosaurs are immensely popular. They have continued to be. Unlike teenage vampires, fascination with dinosaurs is not a transitory fad. Just a casual glance through listings on Discovery, Science and History Channels will show at least three dinosaur related programs per day. There are magazines like the excellent Prehistoric Times, Yahoo.groups, you name it—all devoted to the study and appreciation of dinosaurs, in both fiction and reality. The audience definitely is there.

But with the current very sorry state of publishing, I felt that *Cryptozoica* needed to have added value. So, after we discussed it with the uber-talented artist Jeff Slemons, the decision was made to turn *Cryptozoica* into an illustrated novel in the grand tradition of the Ace and Ballantine Burroughs editions. Jeff is a well-known illustrator in the RPG field, one of the best dinosaur artists around and a very perceptive guy. He understood exactly what *Cryptozoica* is—a bare-knuckled, epic pulp adventure with heroes, heroines, villains and man-eating monsters. So, yeah—I guess it is a “man’s book”;

One of the problems I perceive with the current crop of thriller books is that very often the main cast of characters are about as exciting as cold dishwater—they come off as very white-bread, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

They’re stock characters from central casting. They’re not really quirky or colorful or very interesting. They might have some superficial soap opera element grafted onto them—like their parents suffer from senile dementia or they have a kid with Asperger’s Syndrome, or they have a brother who is a gay rodeo clown, but those kind of things don’t define characters—they’re mere wrinkles, borrowed from too many After School Specials.

Long-time fans of the *Outlanders* series will recognize the basic template of the *Cryptozoica* characters—“Tombstone”; Jack Kavanaugh, his partner Augustus Crowe, Bai Suzhen AKA Madame White Snake, Dr. Honoré; Roxton, Aubrey Belleau and of course the little gun-totin’ Maori “wild child” by the name of Mouzi.

So you can expect drinkin’ and smokin’ and cursin’ and fist-gun-and sword-fightin’ and hookers and evil midgets and the last survivor of a non-human race and of course—dinosaurs.

And what I’m the proudest of is—it all makes sense within the context of the plot.

Cryptozoica is meticulously researched, grounded in established science and the latest scholarship in zoology, archeology, paleontology and even microbiology.

Out of the 47 books I've written, if any one of them could be considered the penultimate 'Mark Ellis Book', Cryptozoica is it. My ambition was to write a Lost World type of novel that outdoes—well, The Lost World.

If you liked the characters, action, adventure and smart-assery in Outlanders all of these years, then I guarantee you'll love Cryptozoica. You can even look at it as Outlanders done right. If nothing else, the beautiful illustrations by Jeff Slemons make the book a unique and worthwhile investment. You can check out a preview of the art here: [http://www.comicspace.com/slembot/comics.php?action=gallery&comic\\_id=26639](http://www.comicspace.com/slembot/comics.php?action=gallery&comic_id=26639)

The projected release date is early 2010. I'll let you know when it's all firmed up. By then, Cryptozoica will have its own web-site where you can directly order the book and related merchandise. As for graphic novels...we recently signed a deal with a company to make our Millennial Concepts graphic novels available for direct download to Apple I-Phones and I-Pod. They should be available the first week of December.

On that subject...although we have several graphic novel projects in the works, our next one will be Mr. Holmes & Dr. Watson: The Napoleon of Crime. Our first Holmes and Watson book is the most successful of all our graphic novels. Therefore, we decided with the upcoming release of the new Sherlock Holmes movie, the timing couldn't be better than to release another volume, this one featuring five classic clashes with Holmes and Watson's arch-enemy-- Professor Moriarty, the Napoleon of Crime.

As with Mr. Holmes & Dr. Watson: Their Strangest Cases, the artwork is by the immortal Mike Sekowsky, Gil Kane and Frank Giacioa. This book is projected for an early 2010 release. And finally, I'll address some questions that have been raised about Warlord of the Pit, my last OL novel—at least published by Gold Eagle. It was released a few weeks ago.

To be perfectly frank, after nearly 15 years of writing OL to almost the exclusion of all else, I became exhausted by the grind—not only the grind of churning out three to four books a year yet still having to struggle financially, but also of dealing with the ongoing pattern of jealousy, disrespect, deceit and gratuitous control freakism practiced by the former “executive editor” of Gold Eagle. It reached the point where our relationship became so toxic, I could barely bring myself to send him emails, much less speak to him on the phone.

In early 2006, under circumstances I found suspicious even then, I was rushed into signing a new contract, even though I had still three novels outstanding on the current one—I was usually contracted out for six books at a time and generally a new contract wasn't even discussed until I had turned in the next to last book of the preceding one. I found the insistence I sign a new contract unusual, so I opted for one with fewer books than the standard six. My decision wasn't well received.

A couple of months after signing, I learned that recent developments with Gold Eagle had been deliberately withheld from me. I hadn't been permitted to make an informed decision before I signed the contract and I believe then as I believe now, I was rushed into signing that contract before I became aware of them and started asking questions. If I had learned of the new developments before I signed, there was no way I would have accepted the contract as it was.

As far as I was concerned, withholding that information constituted negotiating in bad faith, so I was very angry for a very long period. That situation was the caper of a number of other incidents that stretched back years, including but not limited to my name being removed from the indicia page of three of my OL novels.

That was done to combat the “horror” of me developing a fan-following. It happened right at the time Victor Milan began contributing fill-in books, and apparently the rationale was if my name was no longer in sight, then the reader wouldn't know who wrote what and would take a chance on Milan's books. This was a major breach of contract and I had to threaten legal action to have my name restored. I also requested that Milan's name be put in the indicia of the books he produced.

Unfortunately, when the majority of readers found his books unsatisfactory—particularly his self-reverential resurrection of old characters from a long-dead series—they stopped buying them—which of course, brought down the overall sales of the whole series. This isn't speculation—I have all the royalty statements dating back to 1997 and can track sales.

Even though I have my doubts as to the accuracy of the numbers, it appears the Outlanders series plateaued sales-wise around 2004. It began a slow downslide in 2005.

Oh, there were a few upticks with certain books like Mask of the Sphinx, Children of the Serpent, and Skull Throne (the 10th anniversary book), but sales on all of the GE series have been in a steady decline for years. That's one reason the page counts have been reduced and they've gone with that flimsy matchbook card stock for the book covers and pulp paper that is of the same quality as penitentiary toilet paper for the interiors.

Anyway...my last few years of writing exclusively for Gold Eagle wasn't far removed emotionally from being trapped in a Dickensian work-house. You know...&rdquo;Please, sir...may I have some more?&rdquo;

This was the concept that the ex-executive editor never grasped...if you make the working conditions miserable, then you'd better make the pay attractive. Or conversely, if the pay isn't good, then you'd better do everything else to keep the writer happy with the work itself. You can't have lousy working conditions and lousy money and expect much beyond the bare minimum effort and output. As in other industries, you get what you pay for.

Therefore, contract writers who think they're going to make their reputations or their fortunes on the series I created and that's been associated with me for all of these years are totally deluding themselves.

The OL fill-in writers are being paid considerably less than I when I made the supposed top rate-- and even that rate never included cost of living increases. I made the same rate from 2000 to 2008. By 2007, the money was definitely not enough. The solution offered by the executive editor was for me to just write the books faster, presumably until I dropped dead over my keyboard or contracted a terminal illness as far too many GE writers had done. In my opinion, this was due partly to choking down anger and frustration over a period of years. I had no interest in becoming another statistic.

I'm certainly not the only writer who had their utter and complete fill of dealing with GE and the former executive editor over the last 15 years and walked...off the top of my head I can think of at least six writers and one cover artist.

Now having said that...it doesn't mean I'm going to allow any of the fill-in writers to rewrite or revise history to serve themselves by pretending that the Outlanders series came into existence a year ago and that only their books are the ones that matter.

That tactic might gull new readers temporarily but I seriously doubt there are that many new readers nowadays.

Even so, somebody will be there to remind those few that I created the series, and the books following Warlord of the Pit are churned out by guys who are working with characters and concepts that I provided. This is just a simple matter of numbers, of who has the most books. Even Graphic Audio's most current catalog offers four of my novels adapted to audio; the box-set of my Emperor Wars trilogy and the Deathlands novel, Nightmare Passage.

<http://www.graphicaudio.net/p-559-40-nightmare-passage.aspx>

<http://www.graphicaudio.net/p-596-outlanders-the-imperator-wars.aspx>

I don't expect gratitude for creating the series and keeping it going for all these years so other writers can earn a credential, but I do expect a degree of acknowledgement of who did what; particularly since I didn't quit the series and for personal and legal reasons, I never "passed the torch", so to speak.

Nor do I think that Outlanders is some stunningly original work of SF. I've never claimed anything of the sort; basically the opposite. As I've stated before, the first version was much better, before it was crammed and crumpled to fit a post-nuke setting; and a singularly stupid and irrational post-nuke setting at that.

Also, despite some of the falsehoods that have been put forth by a couple of folks associated with GE, the OL series was not created or even developed under the "supervision" of the GE editors. The former executive editor admitted he didn't understand SF and so his input was minimal to the point of being non-existent. Eva Kovacs was the editor I primarily dealt with when I came aboard in 1995. She oversaw Deathlands, the Executioner and The Destroyer and if there was any "supervision" during the creative process of OL, it came from her. She was a real, genuine editor, not a traffic manager or scheduler.

All the revisionist history won't alter the reality that I accomplished something very few writers have ever done; to create a novel series and kept it going on four-book-a-year schedule for over a decade; I'm certainly unique in Gold Eagle's history. I'm the last writer who will ever create a series and be entitled to collect royalties.

If there are new GE series, they'll be produced by the creation-by-committee system that gave the world Rogue Angel and the long-lived mega-hit Room 59 (yeah, that's some more sarcasm at work). If nothing else, I can take a certain comfort in the knowledge that I won't be at the wheel when the Gold Eagle version of the Outlanders series is inevitably steered onto the rocks.

10-17-09

Yeah, I know&hellip;it&rsquo;s been a long time since my last update. It&rsquo;s not because there wasn&rsquo;t anything to blog about, there was just too much. As I&rsquo;ve posted before, I can barely dredge up enough interest in my own day-to-day activities, much less delude myself into thinking than anyone else finds them less inane than their own. So&hellip;first things first.

Melissa will be signing copies of The Everything Ghost Hunting Book on October 31st at the Annex bookstore on Broadway here in Newport. I&rsquo;ll be there autographing copies of the Nosferatu: Plague of Terror graphic novel&hellip;which, by the way is available for sale at Amazon.com.

[http://www.amazon.com/Nosferatu-Plague-Terror-Mark-Ellis/dp/1449531423/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1255890958&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Nosferatu-Plague-Terror-Mark-Ellis/dp/1449531423/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1255890958&sr=1-1)

Nathan Schoonover, star of the new A&E TV series, Extreme Paranormal will be in attendance as well. The Halloween Event will run from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM. I&rsquo;ve heard talk of free candy&hellip; Here&rsquo;s the promotional flyer&mdash;



I want to mention that two of my fellow novelists, Jon Gunther and Linda Pendleton have new books out&mdash;Soul Runner and Shattered Lens, respectively.

Check &lsquo;em out on Amazon.com and even better&hellip;buy &lsquo;em! Both Jon and Linda are talented, inventive writers and more importantly&hellip;they&rsquo;re great people.

I've been working on several other graphic novel projects for our Millennial Concepts imprint...Gulliver Jones: Beyond the War of the Worlds and a "weird western"—Rio Diablo

I've talked about Gulliver Jones in an earlier blog, so we'll touch on Rio Diablo briefly.

Despite my background in SF, I've been a western aficionado all of my life...in fact, I recently came to a decision regarding my Number One All-Time Favorite Movie and that's the classic Howard Hawks film, Rio Bravo starring John Wayne, Dean Martin, Ricky Nelson and Walter Brennan—not to mention the acting debut of Angie Dickinson.

Rio Diablo is something of a homage to that immortal movie, but with a characteristically bizarre twist. When US Marshal Jim Gage is called out of retirement, he is sent to a town that shouldn't exist—Rio Diablo. There he finds a nexus point of every kind of vice and evil—and not all of it stems from human sources. Rio Diablo will also be Millennial Concepts' first color graphic novel.

However, the biggest news is about this:

After a couple of false starts (and one canceled agreement) my magnum opus, *Cryptozoica* is finally coming out...the best news is it will be exactly the way I want it to be. By collaborating with the beyond brilliant artist Jeff Slemons, *Cryptozoica* will be a return an earlier and-all-but-vanished tradition of printed SF...the illustrated novel.

I'm so psyched about *Cryptozoica*, it deserves its own blog entry...which it will have in the very near future...hopefully within a week or so..More...MUCH more in the very near future.