



SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

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**ISSUE 145 • 26<sup>TH</sup> NOV 2012**

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## **EDITORIAL:**

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**by alasdair stuart**

### **The Buck Rogers Effect**

A coalition government made up of people who hate each other only slightly more than they hate everyone else in the country, New York flooded, a Presidential election between a human being and what appears to be an elaborate satirical android of the Ultimate Privileged White Man somehow unleashed and out in the wild and Doctor Who becoming the online community's favourite whipping boy.

Again.

Good to know we didn't miss much eh?

We're back, and we're in the middle of rebuilding. The last year or so has been massively busy for us all, hugely positive and at times utterly horrific. Life didn't so much get in the way as move in, sleep on the sofa and finish Dragon Age: Origins for us whilst we weren't looking then spoil the ending. The details are both unimportant and personal but the truth is we're back, and we need to change. Unfortunately we didn't sleep through the recession and we have four, maybe five issues worth of funding left. After that we can keep going but we can't pay, which means people will stop submitting, which means we'll die all over again and I really don't want to do that twice in two years. It just seems...gauche.

In the back of this issue is a survey about Hub, what you'd like to see in it and what's about as welcome for you as the Doctor Who mid-season break. Based on your responses we'll then put together a Kickstarter to raise money to pay our authors for the year. If that's successful, we're off to the races. If it isn't? We'll work out some other sporting event to go to.

We've been away a long time, but we're back now and we're coming back swinging for the fences. How about giving us a hand? I promise we'll listen.

## *Incident on Oblomov*

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by eric brown

I knew something was wrong when I settled *A Long Way From Home* in the docking rig and the port manager advised us to prepare for a boarding party.

I turned to Ella, my co-pilot. She was lounging in her sling, reading from her com-screen. I tried to keep my gaze from her lustrous Venezuelan eyes. For a vat-grown premier grade AI, she was disconcertingly beautiful.

"A boarding party?" I said. "What could that be about?"

Ella glanced at me. "Maybe they want to make sure we are who we say we are?"

"This is a human vessel, for pity's sake. Not a Schlocken warship."

Karrie, my engineer, looked across the flight-deck at me. "You read the Almanac?"

"Skimmed it."

Oblomov, Bellatrix IV, was a totalitarian world ruled by a bunch of religious fundamentalists. The spaceport city, Kolotov, was a dour metropolis built along strictly utilitarian lines. From what I could see of it through the viewscreen, it looked as if curves had been proscribed. All the buildings were rectangular monoliths, marching across the foggy horizon like a block graph denoting the equilibrium of the political system that had ruled on Oblomov for the past three hundred years.

Karrie gestured to her com-screen. "Strange beliefs these people have. Makes your cult look almost sane."

That was a dig at my Catholicism. I let it ride.

Ella said, "The human population of Oblomov is descended from the survivors of a colony ship which crash-landed here three hundred years ago. They were religious zealots from Earth, searching for a planet where they could practise their beliefs."

"Which are?" I asked.

Ella stared at her screen, its light washing across her perfect features. "They believe that five hundred years ago the second son of God was born among them. They claim it was he who directed them to leave Earth aboard a colony ship."

Karrie snorted. "Lot of good it did them having God's second son aboard the ship if it crashed on this mudball."

"What happened to this so-called second son?" I asked, though I could guess. He no doubt perished in the crash-landing, martyring himself to the cause.

Ella said, "He was in cryo-sleep when the ship came down. In fact-" she went on, looking at me, "he still is."

"What?"

"That's what it says here, Ed. He's biologically fifteen years old, but he's been in cryo-suspension for five hundred years, two hundred year aboard the colony ship and the last three hundred years here on Oblomov. Every twenty years they thaw him out, he pronounces an edict or two, and then they freeze him again."

I stared at Karrie. "And you equate this crackpot cult with Catholicism?"

She shrugged, playful. "All mumbo-jumbo to me, Ed."

Ella said, regarding me dispassionately, "I must agree with Karrie. One human cult seems to me very much like another, at least when viewed from the perspective of rationality."

"But-" I began.

Ella went on, "All your religions are mere ideas, Ed. Ideas should remain-" she gestured to her head "-in the realm of the intellect. They become dangerous when humans begin to take them as anything more than merely theoretical. And religious ideas are especially dangerous."

"That's true of some heretical cults..." I was interrupted by a chiming that signalled the arrival of the

boarding party.

"This is going to be interesting," Karrie said. "Wonder what they look like? Two headed, six limbed?"

Ella said, "They are human, Karrie. Symmetrical bipeds like you and me."

While Karrie rolled her eyes, I looked at Ella. I sometimes wondered if she was playing Karrie along with her imitation of the ultra-logical robotic stereotype.

The smartware system ushered the locals aboard and instructed its members to ascend the main ladder to the flight-deck.

This took a while, and three minutes later we found out why. Oblomov boasts gravity one and a half times the strength of Earth, and this has resulted over the centuries in the human settlers evolving adaptively: they are short and squat, with something almost Neanderthal about their brutish build.

There were three of them, an impressive phalanx of muscle, facing us across the flight-deck. As if to conform to type, they were black-uniformed and unsmiling.

The brute in the middle nodded to me and said in heavily accented English, "I am Chaplain Rostov, my Inspectors Kurtin and Balatski." He gestured to the unmoving officers at his side.

I introduced my crew and told him our business on Oblomov. We required repair work doing on a couple of grapples that were getting sloppy.

Without comment, Chaplain Rostov handed me a data-pin and said, "The rules and regulations we supply to all visitors. If you wish to leave your ship and visit the city, then study of the files is mandatory. We must insist that you leave aboard the ship all smartware systems including AIs, robots, cyborgs and allied 'droids."

I was about to open my mouth, but Ella reacted before me. "We understand perfectly," she said.

Rostov's gaze flickered, taking in her scantily dressed form. Ella had taken, in the heat of the flight-deck, to wearing nothing but a pair of tight shorts and a halter top.

Rostov said, "We also insist that females adhere to a strict dress code, the details of which you will find on the data pin."

Ella gave him her most human smile and said, "Why, thank you, Chaplain."

I glanced across at Karrie and saw her restraining the impulse to smirk.

The rest of the meeting was given over to business: I detailed our requirements, and Rostov assured me that he would assign an engineer to look at the grapples within the local - eighteen hour - day. Their fee was exorbitant, but we needed the work doing.

Five minutes later the grim boarding party departed, and Karrie laughed out loud and said to Ella, "Consider yourself suitably chastised, female."

I said, "Wonder what they have against AIs?"

Ella appeared pensive as she stared through the delta viewscreen at the spaceport apron. A vast container ship had settled nearby, its running lights sequencing in the quick twilight that preceded Oblomov's short night.

"I wonder..." she said. "Perhaps we'll find out when I accompany you out there?"

I smiled. "Perhaps we might," I said.

\* \* \*

Ella borrowed a pair of Karrie's work dungarees, and their bagginess served only to emphasise her elfin beauty. We sailed through the custom's check: as a sentient AI with equality to human in the rest of the civilised galaxy, she travelled with a visa no different from mine or Karrie's. I saw her smile to herself as the barrel-chested immigration officer handed back her ID-pin.

The city of Kolotov sat on a vast inland plain, without hill or mountain to relieve the visual monotony. The foursquare architecture served only to reinforce the impression of uniform dullness. The people, too - men and women both - seemed like fleshly representatives of the architecture. Weighed down by the pressing gravity, they were muscle-bound and cuboid, and garbed in identical clothing: dun one-piece padded suits with in-built booties, mittens and hoods. The effect was almost comical.

A head taller than the locals, our clothing comparatively garish, we stood out among them and attracted continual stares that soon became unsettling.

"You think they've never seen off-worlders before?" Karrie whispered as we trudged down the main

thoroughfare from the spaceport, a wide boulevard thronged with citizens making their way, presumably, home from work.

Ella said, "Ships' personal often remain within the environs of the port, Karrie. The reputation of Kolotov precedes it, obviously."

The walk was difficult for another reason: try moving in a gravity well one-and-a-half times that of Earth. I was forced into a bow-backed shamble, and felt as if I had a local riding on my shoulders.

Ella gestured down a side-street, a cutting between the monolithic faces of two featureless buildings. "The bar is down here."

Ella had taken the data-pin Chaplain Rostov had given me and, in a gesture of defiance to the authorities, inserted it into her occipital input. The pin not only advised visitors on the customs and regulations of Oblomov, but contained information about the capital city. Consequently Ella was a walking encyclopaedia on the history and amenities of the place.

We had six hours to kill before the engineers repaired the grapples, and Karrie had suggested finding a bar. There was no greater way to find out about a place, she claimed, than to fraternise with the locals, aided by the social lubricant of alcohol.

The bar was subterranean. "In winter," Ella explained, quoting the pin, "temperatures in the capital can fall to minus forty. Many public buildings are therefore built below the surface of the planet and heated by volcanic thermals."

We descended a flight of steps and entered a dark hole in the ground. A circular bar created a hub in the centre of the chamber, around which Oblomovians sat hunched over low tables, clutching identical mugs.

A hundred pairs of eyes turned upon us as we crossed to the bar.

Karrie had changed a wad of currency at the port, and the first round was on her. As we stood at the bar, Ella said, "The only alcoholic beverage is something called shloop - a form of distilled porridge."

"Great," Karrie said, and ordered three mugs of the stuff in English, which the barman had difficulty understanding.

Five minutes later we sat at a low table and sipped our drinks; it was thinner than porridge, thankfully, and not at all bad: imagine viscid carrot juice with the afterburn of whisky.

Ella laid a hand on my arm and nodded across the room. I made out the three-metre tall picture, and then I saw all the others hanging around the circumference of the troglodyte bar.

They all showed the same image of a young boy, staring beatifically into the heavens.

"The Second Son," Ella explained. "His name is Jael. It is considered impertinent to stare at his image for more than ten seconds without making the sign of the Church."

"Which is?" I asked, hurriedly looking away.

Ella, still regarding the likeness, made a circle with her right hand before her face. I saw a couple of locals nod in satisfaction.

Karrie noticed my expression of distaste. "Hey," she said, "what's the difference between that and the sign of the cross?"

I took a long slurp of shloop. "This is neither the time nor the place for theological debate," I said. "I thought we came here to soak up the atmosphere and the local pop?"

Ella was in pedantic mode, as she quoted from the data-pin. "It is considered a crime to become inebriated in the pictorial presence of the Second Son. Punishment is a week's incarceration. One must not touch the image, nor gesture inappropriately towards it. Before leaving a public place where Jael's image is displayed, one must make the prescribed obeisance. Which is the circular gesture before the face, only three times." Then she smiled at me.

"What?" I asked.

"You humans," was all she said.

I looked around at the examples of *Homo sapiens* collected in the bar. "Not sure that description particularly applies here," I muttered.

I was about to suggest we introduce ourselves to a couple of drinkers at the next table, when a klaxon belched its ugly double note, almost deafening us. To a man, the locals drained their mugs, stood and

began filing from the chamber.

I looked at Karrie. "Closing time?"

She gestured towards the bar, where a barman was erecting a wooden shutter all the way around the hub. "Looks that way."

The chamber was almost empty now, with the last of the locals making their way to the exit, their progress slowed by the obligatory gesture of obeisance each made towards the staring representation of the Second Son. We joined them and filed up the steps, gesturing perfunctorily as we did so.

I glanced at my wrist-com. "We could always go back to the ship, but the engineers won't have finished yet."

"I'd like to explore a little more, Ed," Ella said.

We emerged into the alley, turned right and joined the wide boulevard. The crowd that had left the bar was merging with an even greater press of humanity pouring down the thoroughfare. They were heading in one direction, and there was something so regimented about the procession that it struck me as eerie.

"Wonder where they're going?" Karrie said.

"There's one obvious way to find out," Ella said, and set off before we could reply.

We caught her up , and were soon absorbed into the mass of citizens moving en bloc along the boulevard.

"Does the data-pin have anything to say about mass gatherings?" I asked.

Ella shook her head. "They have a national sport, a kind of team sumo, but that's played in small halls and telecast live."

Thanks to our height, we had an unimpeded view over the heads of the massed throng ahead of us, and what we saw was like an artist's rendition of some dystopian hell. The sky was dark and overcast; the buildings grey, the people a similar shade, a vast river of herded humanity heading, for all we knew, to some grisly collective fate... I contrasted this with the many planets I'd visited, brilliant sunlit places with magnificent cities, ebullient citizenry, vibrant live music...

At one point Karrie attracted my attention with a swift elbow in my ribs, and pointed to raised podia beside the street. Standing upon each of these was what I took to be a military official, black-garbed and armed with ugly-looking lasers. I counted a hundred of these sentinel figures, each one gazing down at the passing crowd with expressions so blank they appeared brutal.

For the most part, the crowd looked ahead with an almost bovine impassivity, but those citizens around us obviously found the presence of three bizarre off-worlders a matter of interest. We aroused nudges and whispered comments, and in one or two cases bursts of laughter. I could only assume that our height and thinness was a source of humour.

I asked one inquisitive youth, "What's going on? Where's everyone heading?" I spoke slowly in stilted Galactica, and it was a second or two before he worked out the meaning of my enquiry.

"It is the first of the month," he said in a low rumble, "the Day of Retribution."

I nodded wisely. "A religious festival?"

He stared at me. "Of course not! It's the Day of Retribution."

I smiled inanely, and he said something disparaging to a companion.

Ella murmured to me, "There's nothing on the pin about any Day of Retribution. Perhaps it's something they'd rather keep quiet."

I turned to my informant and posed another no doubt ignorant question. "And what exactly occurs on this Day of Retribution?"

He stared at me, eyes wide beneath a heavy brow. "The guilty are punished," he said. "The righteous are thus affirmed."

"Right..." I said.

Five minutes later we came to a vast square packed with thousands of Oblomovians, and we stood and stared. There was an air of almost palpable excitement in the citizens around us, not unlike that at some important sporting event. Not that this event, we saw, would be in any way sporting.

"I don't think I'll stay to watch this," Karrie said.

I was about to agree, but Ella forestalled me. "I'm staying. The conduct of your fellow humans never fails to amaze me."

In the centre of the square, a great timber platform had been erected, and upon it stood a dozen dignitaries garbed in the same sable uniforms as Rostov's boarding party.

Before them, chained together by their ankles, were six individuals. They were indistinguishable from those citizens surrounding us, except in their postures.

They were slumped, and hung their heads like condemned men.

To the right of this silent tableau stood a timber frame, and the sight of it provoked memories of ancient illustrations I'd seen in history books.

"What are those...?" Ella began. Evidently her memory cache did not contain references to such antiquated barbarity.

Karrie turned to her. "They're called gibbets, girl, and if you do stay and watch you'll soon find out what those ropes hanging from them are used for. Me, I'm out of here. See you back at the ship." She turned and pushed her way through the crowd. I remained standing beside Ella, loathe to leave her and at the same time reluctant to witness what was about to take place.

One of the dignitaries stepped forward and spoke into a microphone. He proclaimed something in Russian, and an appreciative murmur rippled through the crowd.

Ella leaned towards me, translating. "He says that we're gathered to witness the retribution of Jael, the Second Son." She frowned as the official went on, then translated, "The miscreants were found guilty of..." She stopped, staring, her pretty features clouded with distaste.

"What?" I asked.

"Ed, the three did nothing more than write political pamphlets suggesting an alternative method of governing Oblomov. For this they will be..."

I took her arm. "I really don't want to stick around here while these sick bastards enjoy the fun. Let's get back to the ship."

Without a word she nodded. We turned and squeezed our way through the eager press as the official ceased pontificating and the first prisoner was led towards the gallows and the rope fitted around his neck. The citizens around us were straining to gain a better view of the executions, appreciative murmurs turning to cries of delight.

We passed through the crowd, emerging gratefully into an eerily deserted street. I took Ella's hand and we set off in the direction of the spaceport. A second later I heard an urgent hiss behind me.

I turned. A local, in appearance no different from any of the others, had detached himself from the crowd and approached us. He hurried across to me, gripped my arm with fingers as strong as a salvage grapple, and stared into my eyes.

It was a brutish face, but his words made me regret my first impression. "There are those of us who object to what is taking place here, my friend. You might see uniformity, but there is opposition."

He stopped and looked about him nervously, his eyes questing for the black-uniformed militia. Those that we could see, thirty metres distant, were intent on the hangings.

"We are not cattle," he went on. "There is resistance, and one day we will rise and overthrow the despotic regime of the Church of the Second Son!" And with that he released his grip on my arm and raced off around the circumference of the crowd.

Ella stared at me. As we hurried away, the only figures on the wide approach boulevard, she said, "Imagine being a voice of dissent amongst such barbarity..."

"Surely the Federation could do something to stop such injustice?"

Ella grunted. "Oblomov's an important mining planet, Ed. It supplies the Federation with the uranium to fuel its security ships. The Federation wouldn't lift a finger to change things here."

We were silent for the rest of the journey back to the spaceport.

\* \* \*

We were detained at the custom's check for longer than was comfortable as an ape-like officer pored over the content of Ella's ID-pin. For a while I suspected that the official had discerned her status as an AI, and I feared the consequences. Ella detected my unease, and gestured minimally with a tilt of her head.



I followed the movement, and saw that his fellow officers were being just as cautious in the examination of other traveller's identities. Evidently, security had been stepped up around the terminal building. Armed guards patrolled the concourses, some leading native four-legged animals with jet pelts and sickle-equipped jaws.

Five minutes later we were through customs and heading across the apron towards the welcome shape of *A Long Way From Home*.

Beside it, the container ship I'd noticed earlier was now surrounded by a cordon of armed militia. They stiffened at our approach, with the collective aggression of a wild animal, only relaxing as we hurried up the ramp of our ship and sealed it behind us.

Karrie was on the flight-deck, staring out at the container ship. "You two enjoy the entertainment?"

"We quit before it began." I gestured out to the lighted ship. "What gives?"

"Search me. About ten minutes ago the local security got antsy and a dozen troop carriers pulled up and disgorged a hundred goons. They've got the ship surrounded."

"Looks like they're expecting trouble," I said. "How're the engineers doing?"

"Told me they'd be done in an hour."

Ella said, "An hour is still too long to spend on this mediaeval-"

An explosion interrupted her and rocked the ship. At first I thought something had struck *A Long Way from Home* - then Karrie gestured through the viewscreen at the neighbouring container ship.

We picked ourselves up and grabbed the ledge of the viewscreen, staring out. The bulging flank of the container ship had crumpled, and the starboard engine housing was on fire. A hundred militia milled about like confused ants after an attack on their formicary. Seconds later a wailing fire-bowser braked to a halt between our ship and the stricken vessel, ejecting spumes of foam onto the flames. The fire was soon damped, and in minutes the extent of the damage was revealed. The engine was a mangled mess, the outer casing of the starboard flank ruptured in the blast to reveal decks and corridors in naked cross-section.

"What the-" I began.

Ella said, "That wasn't an engine exploding."

"Then what the hell was it?" Karrie said.

"Looks to me like the effects of an attack," Ella said.

More troop carriers pulled up and militia leaped out, surrounding the ship three deep, weapons bristling. Minutes later the squat bulk of a dozen tanks trundled across the tarmac and took up defensive positions around the vessel.

"Wonder why the ship was so important to warrant an attack?" Karrie said.

"There's an old Terran phrase," Ella said, "about locking the stable door after the horse has bolted."

"Don't tell that to the Oblomovians," I said.

Karrie pressed her nose against the viewscreen. "Hey-ho. I think we have company."

An open-topped car sped across the apron towards our ship, and I made out seated in the rear the three officials who had boarded earlier.

"Probably going to tell us to get the hell out," Karrie said.

The vehicle disappeared beneath the hull of the ship and seconds later the smartware system announced that we had visitors. I gave instructions for the boarding party to be shown up to the flight-deck.

"Ella, lay in co-ordinates to hop us across the port. I don't want to be in the way if whoever attacked decides to try again. Karrie, put the kettle on."

She just grimaced at my humour. "Wouldn't give those bastards a-"

"Shh," I said. "They're here."

Chaplain Rostov hauled himself through the hatch and stood before us, flanked by his expressionless aides.

"Captain," Rostov said, "as you can see..."

I forestalled his request. "We'll move just as soon as my co-pilot has-"

His slab face remained unanimated as he said, "By the power invested in me by the ruling government of Oblomov, I am requisitioning your ship in the name of the Second Son."

I stepped forward. "Now just a minute..."

"We require the service of your ship, and its personnel, for the duration of one standard day, after which you will be free to leave our planet."

"We had planned," I said, "to leave in around one hour."

"That unfortunately will not now be possible. However, you will be reimbursed for any inconvenience caused. We calculate this as the cost of the repair to your grapples."

I opened my mouth to protest. I had no desire to do any kind of work for a bunch of despotic tyrants, even if it would cover the cost of repairs.

Something in the eyes of Rostov's henchmen, however, stayed my objections.

I heard Karrie mutter something behind me.

Rostov continued, "If you would be so good as to open the cargo hatch of your hold, Captain, we will make the transfer and leave within thirty minutes."

"Just where do you want us to go?" I asked.

Rostov handed me a data-pin. "These are the co-ordinates: we are flying to the holy city of Tchekov's Landfall, three thousand miles north of here in the Arctic circle."

For the first time, Karrie spoke. I feared she might object, and was relieved when she merely asked, "And what exactly will we be transporting, Mr Rostov?"

He hesitated, as if considering whether to tell us. Instead he said, "This is not the time for explanations." He turned to me. "We will travel in the hold with our cargo, Captain. A cadre of guards will accompany us. If you could make ready for lift-off in thirty minutes..."

I nodded, and watched Rostov and his aides climb from the flight-deck.

"I don't like this," Karrie said.

"What could I have done?"

Ella backed me up, "Refusal to co-operate would have resulted in our having the ship commandeered."

"Ella, open the hatch. I'll fire up the engines." I was about to climb into my sling when Karrie said, "Ed, look."

She gestured through the viewscreen. A covered container truck moved slowly around the bulk of the disabled ship, flanked by tanks and armed militia. It headed for *A Long Way From Home* and passed from sight as it trundled up the ramp.

Karrie said, "They've transferred the 'cargo' from the container ship, Ed." She stared at me. "That means we've become the new target for whoever wanted the ship destroyed."

"Looks that way," I agreed. "Who suggested we stop here for repairs?"

Ella gave me a cool look. "I seem to recall it was you, Ed."

"Well, what do I know?" I grunted.

Rostov communicated with me via my wrist-com. His party and the cargo was safely stowed in the hold, and we could proceed to lift-off.

"Okay," I said, slipping into my sling and inserting the data-pin into the smartware nexus, "let's get the hell out of here."

\* \* \*

Ella piloted us low over a vast expanse of tundra. The night was short on Oblomov, and dawn came as we flew, the blue giant of Bellatrix casting a frosty light across the featureless ice planes to the north of Kolotov. There was something severely beautiful about the aluminium light of the sun as its great dome breasted the horizon. We flew towards it, and the holy city of Tchekov's Landfall.

"Tchekov's Landfall," Ella said, "is where the starship crash-landed three hundred years ago. As such, it is venerated as holy. Not many people live there, only the functionaries who maintain the temple."

Karrie said, "The temple?"

From her position in the sling, Ella said, "Fashioned from the remains of the starship, the temple is where every twenty years the Second Son is brought and resuscitated. He then makes his pronouncement."

"Like the puppet of the government that he is," I said.

"What I don't understand," Karrie said, "is why if he's the supposed son of their God, they keep him on



ice for twenty years at a stretch."

Ella glanced at her. "It makes sense, from the point of view of those in power," she said. "You could say that he's the very symbol of their power. If they control him, they control the people, their beliefs." She smiled. "If they were to let him live a normal life, then he would be seen by the people to be human, and thus fallible. By bringing him back every twenty years, the government is not only promoting the wonder of their Second Son, but securing their continued hold over the citizens of Oblomov."

I stared through the viewscreen at the endless white expanse passing beneath the ship. A thought occurred to me, and I asked Ella, "When was the last resuscitation of the Second Son?"

She accessed the data-pin, then replied, "Precisely twenty years ago."

"You don't think..." I began.

Ella finished for me, "It's entirely possible that the container we are transporting contains the suspended Second Son."

We digested this for a while in silence.

At last Karrie said, "We ought to eject everything in the hold, then see how this corrupt regime survives without its tame puppet."

"As much as I don't like what the government is doing here," I said, "I don't see myself in the role of a murderer."

Ella said, "Of course, we are not one hundred per cent certain that we're transporting the so-called Second Son."

"There's one way to find out," I said, instructing my wrist-com to contact Chaplain Rostov.

A second later his slab face filled the tiny screen, and I made my request to descend to the hold and inspect the cargo.

He replied without changing his impassive expression. "I am afraid that is impossible."

"Can I ask, then, what we are transporting?"

He hesitated, so I said, "Is it the Second Son?"

He consulted someone off-screen, then looked at me and replied, "That is correct. We are taking Jael to the temple at Tchekov's Landfall, where he will give the sacred pronouncement. As guest of our government, and as a token of our appreciation of your help in this matter, you are invited to the ceremonial Pronouncement in the temple."

I looked from Ella to Karrie, then returned my attention to the screen. "We'll be honoured to attend," I said, and cut the connection.

Karrie said, "I'm not sure I want anything to do with these murdering bastards, Ed."

I looked at Ella.

She nodded coolly. "Staying away will only compound our ignorance. It is important to know what one opposes. We should all attend the ceremony."

\* \* \*

The Temple of the Second Son, Tchekov's Landfall, rose from the dazzling ice plains with a spectacular, needle-like beauty: it was hard to believe that the temple was the responsibility of the same people who had built the functional monoliths of Kolotov. It was recognisably the remains of a starship, but the domes at its base added a certain ethereal grace.

Ella put down *A Long Way From Home* a hundred metres from the main dome. Minutes later we watched as the container-truck emerged from the hold and beetled across the ice, attended by tanks and a hundred militia. Evidently, even this far north, the authorities had not relaxed their vigilance.

Ella said, "It is heartening to know that there is some opposition from the people of Oblomov."

I told Karrie about the individual who had accosted us as we left the execution.

"But even if they'd succeeded in killing Jael," she said, "they'd have the government to overcome."

"Without their prime symbol," Ella said, "they would be weakened. Who knows how powerful the opposition is? They might have infiltrated the higher echelons of the government, for all we know, and maybe even the militia."

I was considering the likelihood of this when Chaplain Rostov made contact and invited us to enter the main dome.

I looked across at Karrie. "You coming?"

She thought about it. "Why not? It isn't every day you see a fake Christ manipulated by totalitarian fascists."

We suited up in protective clothing, broke out the buggy from the hold, and left the ship.

The domes were equipped with tree-lined avenues and planted with gardens: it was as if the austerity of their capital city was at the expense of the lavishness expended here. Hundreds of citizens moved about the domes with a sense of purpose, and an air of excitement filled the place.

We climbed from the buggy and were ushered into a reception suite, where servants circulated with trays of food and drinks. A dozen dignitaries stood about, conferring in hushed tones.

Chaplain Rostov approached us. "The resuscitation has commenced," he said. "In one hour, the Second Son will begin his pronouncement."

Karrie said, "And just what might he say, Chaplain?"

He obviously did not detect the cynicism in her tone.

Rostov smiled, though the gesture had all the humour of a fissure in stone. "That, my friend, is beyond the knowing of his disciples. Only God and Jael himself is cognizant of his wisdom. Soon, however, he will share it with us all."

"Yeah, sure," Karrie said under his breath as Rostov moved away.

I glanced across at Ella. She had moved towards the entrance, her head cocked in an attitude of acute attention, as if straining to hear something.

I crossed to her. "Ella?"

Her expression was blank, her eyes glazed. She came from her reverie and stared at me.

"Ella, what is it?"

She shook her head.

Seconds later we were ushered from the reception room and led along a wide avenue towards the arched entrance of a main dome.

The chamber was filled with pews, and perhaps a thousand privileged citizens were already seated. Ella took my arm and indicated empty seats to the rear of the gathering, even though there were spare seats closer to the front. I began to protest, but Ella's stern look silenced me. I wondered what her heightened, cybernetic senses had detected.

I took my seat and stared in silence at the spectacle before us.

The arc of the dome had been constructed to incorporate the sleek tower of the starship, which extended beyond its apex; below the crystal canopy, the ship's fins flared. A long ramp extended from a triangular hatch at the foot of the ship, and along its length a red carpet had been laid.

Karrie touched my arm and gestured at a dozen stands around the chamber, where broadcasting teams readied themselves for the exalted event.

A gasp swept through the audience, and I looked back at the red-carpeted ramp. Three uniformed priests had emerged, and following them on a bier carried by six militia was form of Jael, the Second Son.

He looked tiny from this distance, scrawny and etiolated, like some invalid in the process of recovery - which perhaps was to be expected after spending the major part of five hundred years in cold sleep.

The bearers carried the bier towards a raised platform, on which stood a seat more like a throne. The bier was lowered. Carefully, the Second Son stood and stepped forward, taking his place in the throne and settling himself with composure. He wore a simple red one-piece suit, which contrasted with the pallor of his skin and his cropped black hair.

Only then did the inhumanity of what those in power were doing to this boy fully strike me. It was a sentiment, however, not shared by those around us. Gasps detonated among the crowd, in one or two instances even swooning cries. I saw one man pass out from the momentousness of what he was witnessing.

Beside me, Ella reached out and gripped my arm. "Ed!"

"What?" I grimaced and prized her fingers loose. "What the hell...?" I hissed.

"Ed," she said into my ear in an urgent whisper, "Jael, the Second Son, is not human."

\* \* \*

I stared at her. For a second I wondered if some malign alien entity had taken over the Second Son.

"Ella?" I said.

She ignored me, her eyes rolling to show only their egg-like whites. For perhaps thirty seconds she was locked into the cybernetic trance she entered when communing with the ship's smartware nexus.

Karrie peered around me at Ella. "What gives?"

"Search me," I began.

Beside me, Ella emerged from her reverie and hissed at me. "Let's get out of here!"

"What?"

"We're leaving," she said in a tone that brooked no argument. "As discreetly as possible, let's get the hell out."

"What the hell?" I began.

She shook her head minimally and edged along the row, disturbing pious citizens as she went. I grabbed Karrie and hauled her along, murmuring something about a sudden illness to the glaring faithful. As we approached the exit, I looked back over my shoulder. Jael was leaning forwards, adjusting a microphone that sprouted from the arm of his seat.

"My citizens," I heard him say.

We hurried down the approach avenue towards the external exit. "What were you doing, Ella? I demanded. "What did you mean, he wasn't human?"

"Not now!" Ella said. We came to the sliding portal and the glass panels parted, blasting us with freezing air. We hurried over the ice, and when Ella began running, Karrie and I gave chase.

A minute later we were aboard *A Long Way From Home*. Ella jumped into the co-pilot's sling and powered up.

I slipped into my own sling while Karrie looked on. "I'd like to know what's going on," she said.

Her fingers on her touchpad, Ella said, "You wanted to do something to destabilise the government, didn't you?"

"In my dreams," Karrie grunted.

"Well, I think I've done it."

"What?" I yelled.

Ella stared through the viewscreen and exclaimed. "No time to explain. I think the goons have rumbled us."

Through the delta viewscreen I could see a dozen militia disgorge themselves from the main dome and race across the ice, soon joined by others.

Ella said, "I recommend we phase into voidspace immediately, Ed. Okay?"

The militia out there were followed by a tank.

"Sounds good to me," I said.

Ella lay in the co-ordinates, just as the first shot ricocheted off the flank of the ship. Then the tank joined in and an explosion ripped a hole in the ice metres from the nose-cone. The ship rattled. We hung on. Ella said, "Almost there!"

Then the view of the main dome, the ice, and the angry natives vanished like visions in a bad dream, to be replaced with the marmoreal calm of voidspace.

We lay in co-ordinates for Altair, and hoped the authorities on Oblomov didn't possess interceptor ships capable of tracking us.

"Karrie," I said, "damp the ion signature. Ella, get us up to full speed."

"Already there," Ella said, smiling at me.

"Hope you have a good explanation ready, girl."

I eased myself back into the sling as we left Oblomov far behind us. A tense couple of hours later, we phased into space-norm.

"Now," I said to Ella, "would you mind explaining just what all that was about?"

\* \* \*

Through the viewscreen, Altair blazed as if in welcome.

Ella looked from Karrie to me. "As I said, the Second Son isn't human."

Karrie said, "He didn't look too alien to me, Ella."

Ella smiled. "He isn't human, or alien. He's an AI, a robot, and not a particularly sophisticated one, either."

"An AI?" I began. "But why...?"

"Perhaps the original Jael was killed in the crash-landing," Ella said. "That's why the authorities claimed they'd put him on ice, as a stalling tactic until they found an AI to take his place."

I thought about it. "And their proscription against AIs and other non-human mechanical entities?"

"Because they wouldn't want my kind knowing," she said.

Karrie laughed. "The scheming bastards!"

"So..." I said, "what exactly did you do back there?"

"I transmitted," Ella said, intent on her touchpad.

Seconds later she smiled in triumph and indicated the viewscreen. Altair was gone, replaced with a broadcast I realised was from a pirate station on Oblomov.

News reports showed citizens on the streets, the militia in open revolt against the Second Son regime; a people's government had been declared, and the new regime promised that the old rulers would be rounded up and imprisoned for crimes against humanity.

Intercut with news reports were the images of the Second Son as he addressed the citizens of Oblomov.

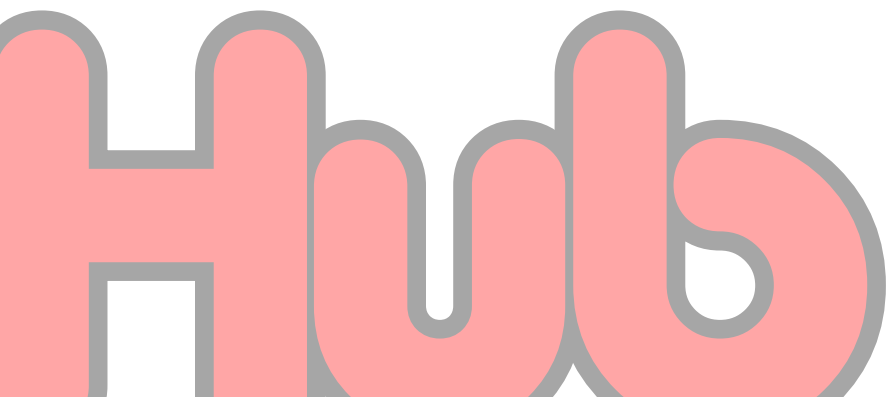
Jael, the AI puppet which had masqueraded as the Second Son for three centuries, leaned forward and relayed Ella's transmitted words.

"My citizens," he began. "The time of lies has come to an end. I call for the citizens of Oblomov to rise up and overthrow this corrupt regime of tyranny and bloodshed..."

I looked across at Ella, but she was concentrating on the screen.

I returned my attention to the broadcast. Before the militia could move to stop him, the AI called Jael opened a hatch in his chest, reached into the cavity and pulled out his processor...

The broadcast finished, and beyond the viewscreen Altair burned. Ella smiled at me and suggested we take a little shore leave down on Altair II.



## Doctor Who – ‘Mara Tales’: Kinda/Snakedance

reviewed by ro smith



**Starring Peter Davison, Janet Fielding, Martin Clunes**  
**rrp £13.49**

*Kinda* is a hidden gem of the Peter Davison era of *Doctor Who*. Like his first story arc (*Castrovalva*), *Kinda* shows a flight of imagination and surrealism that transforms the sometimes formulaic pattern of 80s *Doctor Who* into something rather more special. *Snakedance* is not as forcefully delightful and original, but it has some qualities to recommend it also, not least a wonderful early appearance from Martin Clunes. They are joined together by a common thread – the Mara, a monster who can invade people's

minds, win control of them, and cause generations to submit to a cycle of oppression. A DVD box set containing the two story arcs was released in March 2011.

What really excited me about the release of this box set was that, despite its originality, *Kinda* was created on a tight budget that ultimately let it down in the final monster scene, where the Mara is revealed. The Peter Davison story arc *Warriors of the Deep* is famous for having the least convincing monster of the period. The 'Myrka' is commonly referred to by fans as a 'pantomime horse'. However, in some ways, the presentation of the Mara in *Kinda* was even more disappointing, as the character and story of the Mara had been conceptually so interesting. I was therefore thrilled to hear that they had finally stepped in to add a CGI monster in place of the original – which is not a sentiment you will hear me express very often concerning classic sci-fi.

This box set does not simply represent the release of a classic, it's enabling a classic to become something it could not be at the time. The imagination was there, but the technology and funds weren't. I think it's a really interesting and wonderful thing that they took the decision to give this story what it deserved.

The plot of *Kinda* is this: the Doctor and companions arrive on a beautiful world of lush vegetation. The Doctor, Tegan, and Adric explore the world, encountering a beautiful but alien wind chime. Tegan becomes fatigued in the presence of the chime and sits down to rest, whilst the Doctor and Adric move off to explore the apparently peaceful world.

Unfortunately, the peace and beauty isn't all that it seems. Tegan slips into unconsciousness and enters a surreal prison of the mind where she encounters three apparently ancient and probably mad figures. Two are an old man and woman who play an endless game of chess. They are disturbed by her presence, and both assume that Tegan is herself an illusion – a trick that the other is trying to play on them. She is then isolated from these figures by another – a young man. He asks that she give him permission to use her body to escape, and when she refuses, he torments her, first by leaving her alone in the darkness, and then by creating a perfect replica of Tegan herself, and challenging both Tegans to prove which one of them is real. As they struggle with this, he begins to create more and more of her, until she can take it no more and assents to his demands.

The sequences in Tegan's mind are visually striking and conceptually challenging. I'm not sure that it's philosophically very deep, but for a family show, this is invigorating and original stuff. I'm really pleased that no attempt was made to 'update' the graphics here, as they were already impressive, and demonstrate just what *Doctor Who* could do, even on the sort of limited budget it had at the time.

Whilst this is going on, the Doctor and Adric discover that the world is not as empty as it first appears. As well as the natives (the Kinda) who created the chimes, the planet has been visited by humans who are looking to colonise. Strife has been created between the visitors and the natives, as they have been abducting Kinda for study. There is a fundamental difference in ways of thinking that prevents the

development of shared understanding between the two communities. The Kinda are a largely silent race - only women are given voice, the men communicating via telepathy, with simple emotions. They try to communicate by presenting the visitors with an odd wooden box, which seems overwhelm the stranger's minds. The actions are taken as aggressive by the increasingly tense inhabitants of the expedition's Dome, especially Hindle, whose mind is cracking under the pressure.

The Doctor and Adric become trapped inside the Dome with Hindle and Todd (a female scientist played by Nerys Hughs) as Todd and the Doctor strive to prevent Hindle wreaking destruction on the planet in response to his delusions.

Inhabiting Tegan's body, the Mara is able to escape and infect the Kinda, dominating their minds. The Doctor, Adric, and Todd must act to capture the Mara in its true form when it manifests, with the aid of the wise woman of the Kinda.

This is an unusually rich and interesting story. I imagine it might be confusing for younger viewers, or the inattentive, but it's so visually interesting that I think it would be captivating and stimulating nonetheless. It's also a uniquely excellent story for the Doctor's Australian companion, Tegan. Janet Fielding is the first to concede, in the commentaries, that she wasn't necessarily the best actor to grace the screen with the Doctor. She now works as an agent. However, I always enjoyed her forceful personality. Tegan may not have been as clever as Nyssa, but she accepted no nonsense, and was one of the longer-running companions, working with Peter Davison across all three series, and briefly with Tom Baker before that. Her exit scene at the end of *The Resurrection of the Daleks* is one of the most powerful exits of any of the companions. Yet she is often remembered as simply loud and annoying. I like that she is given more to do in *Kinda*, stretching the character a bit further.

*Snakedance* is not at quite the same level as *Kinda*, but it is still a fun story, and the continuity of returning to a previous monster - the idea that the Mara never fully left Tegan's head - is interesting. Martin Clunes is also a joy as the bored young aristocrat who is seduced by the Mara's power as it rises again to dominate Tegan's mind.

The extras on these DVDs are a mixed bag. If this is the first Peter Davison era DVD you've bought, you may enjoy the commentaries. There are some interesting remarks about the style of filming, lighting, and direction that make modern TV dramas feel so different from shows of the time. However, if, like me, you've already listened to such commentaries on several other Peter Davison era DVDs, they won't really add much. The cast don't really remember the plot of the show, and haven't reviewed the story before watching. They spend most of the time just chatting, reminiscing, and commenting that they have no idea what's going on because they haven't been paying attention. This was fun and delightful the first few times I heard such commentaries, but even this die-hard Peter Davison fan got bored after a while, and this was probably the least informative commentary yet.

On the other hand, the documentary on the Buddhist philosophy that influenced writer Christopher Bailey is genuinely interesting. Again, I don't imagine that anyone who knows much about Buddhist philosophy will find it greatly informative, but it does add to one's enjoyment of what is one of the more intellectually stimulating *Doctor Who* stories.

And I must stress again how wonderful it is that they decided to redo the Mara's climactic appearance at the end of *Kinda*. I only wish they would do this more. Unlike the dreadful 'remastering' of *Red Dwarf* in the 1990s, this is only an improvement, and it's one you can elect to turn off. Although I wouldn't change the sequence inside Tegan's mind for anything, I would have loved to see some of the other moments of primitive animation worked over. What's more, the cast heartily approve. Again and again in the commentaries for his episodes, Peter Davison laments what could have been done if *Doctor Who* had had the technology and money back then that it does now. In many ways, these old episodes are wonderful because they are of their time, but in others, I would have liked to see them adapted, too. Simple things, like darkening the sky at the end of *Arc of Infinity* to give the sense of building doom (as Davidson suggests in the commentary). It looks like he finally got his wish, in this one, and I can only say that I approve. It looks fantastic.

I commend this box set to you. The story of *Kinda* is still one of the more original that *Doctor Who* has



produced, and it has both excellent original effects and a tastefully adapted update. *Snakedance* is not quite its equal, but it makes for a fun companion piece, and adds an interesting note of continuity and character development in a time when stories that spanned more than four episodes were rare.

# FEATURES

## Interview: Adam West

with richard whittaker



What's the difference between being typecast and becoming a pop culture icon? For Adam West, it all comes down to a knowing wink to the audience. In 1966 he went from bit-part actor in TV shows and spaghetti westerns to getting a dream role: To bring a four-color version of DC's *Batman* to TV. It's hard to overestimate the show's impact on pop culture and on West. The producers cranked out 120 episodes and one 90 minute film of knockabout dayglo fun in under three years, creating catchphrases that resonate with people who have never seen the show and boxing West into a niche as campy, hammy actor. It's been almost 46 years since the *Batman* film got its world premier, and it seems that West has finally made peace with the role that defined his career. Now the circle is complete: Instead of him being associated with Batman, Batman stands in his shadow as he has become the ultimate post-modern film star. "The movie has withstood the test of time," he said, "And so have I."

**Hub Magazine: Between the film, the original series, and cameos in cartoons, Batman has been part of your life for four decades. How did you get the part?**

Adam West: I'd been in Europe doing some films (including *The Relentless Four*) after doing a series (*The Detectives*) here with the late Robert Taylor for NBC. Before I left, I did a series of commercials for Nestlé in which I did sort of a James Bond spoof. I found out late that the producers at Fox and ABC had seen those commercials, and evidently I impressed them in so far as they thought, "Hey, this is the turkey to play Batman." I think they liked my sense of humor. You might too, if you get to know me.

**HM: You worked with an extraordinary cast including Burgess Meredith and Cesar Romero, who had a major career prior to the show as a screen heart throb. Add Eartha Kitt, Julie Newmar and Lee Meriweather in as your succession of Catwomen, and that's quite an ensemble.**

AW: I was very fortunate. The trick is always to make it look easy, which is difficult unless you have really good people who know what they're doing and are able to give you something. Then you must always be unselfish and give them something. So it's an interplay, like a good tennis match.

**HM: You made 120 episodes plus the film in a little under three years. That's quite a work rate.**

AW: We were lucky if we got seven days per episode. One time, we got ten days, but other than that it was five, six days. The movie we did in the thirty days during the hiatus period after the first series. I didn't want to do it, because I really needed the rest, but when they mentioned the money, I said, "Of course." I've got the Mitchum attitude: You bring in what you can, you do the best work that you can, you try to bring the something fresh and serve the writer, but then you say, "Send the damn cheque." You can't do anything else once you've done that, because it's all in someone else's hands.

**HM: What was life like on the set?**

AW: It was usually an extremely friendly and humorous environment, and I tried to make it that way when I walked in – light and fun –so nobody would take it seriously, just perform seriously. Everyone understood what it was, and when I first read the pilot script by Lorenzo Semple Jr., I knew in talking to the others that

we were all going to get married and have the same kind of approach, which is a blessing.

**HM: Considering how dark the caped crusader can be, the show had a rich comedic vein.**

AW: We had so much talent, and wonderful people with whom I worked. We didn't have all those modern computer enhancements, the special effects and props they have today. We just slapped on makeup and funny costumes and did it. It took a lot of stretching of the imagination, but that's what we were paid for, to bring something that was some kind of theater of the absurd that, at the same time, the kids could take realistically and extract all those lessons and morality and ethics from.

**HM: Do you ever watch any of the old episodes?**

AW: I'll check into a hotel and I'll turn on the TV and if it's there, I'll watch it and say, "Who is that young boy? Is that me, really? Am I that man running around like a fool in tights?" Once in a while I'll find one on the Internet, or I'll find a pilot that I did called *Lookwell*. It was written by Conan O'Brien and Robert Smigel, and of all the pilots I've done I think it's the one I most regret not doing regularly.

**HM: Like William Shatner and Captain Kirk, or Anthony Daniels and C-3PO, it really seems you've embraced the fact that you've become synonymous with your role as Batman.**

AW: I made an agreement with Batman some time ago. There was a period when I couldn't get anything I was being considered for because of him, and I did some really lousy films. But then I said, if these doors are all closed because of it, then I'd open them by using it. I also decided that I was the luckiest guy in the world - I finally came around to this - because I'd had the opportunity to create a character that became a classic in pop culture. How many actors have had a chance to do this? So I just decided to embrace it and go along with it and have fun with it, because that's what people were doing. People were always so nice and warm and humourful with me, I just try to return it. It's worked, and it's become this enormous ball game in which I can watch myself and use the quirkiest parts of my own personality. You can get away with anything, as long as people sense that you're honest, you have a good sense of humour, and you appreciate their interest. Did you hear about my new DVD, *Adam West Naked*, in which I reveal everything you wanted to know about 120 episodes? I sneak away into the basement, the attic, and other places where no-one can hear me, and I speak directly to you, the camera. It's kind of fun because evidently Fox and Warner have not been able to get together about releasing DVDs of our series. People keep asking me, so I thought I'd go one better and do this thing myself.

**HM: That's put you in that rare situation as an actor of being able to play yourself: Quite literally in *Family Guy*, where you play Mayor Adam West.**

AW: Seth (McFarlane, creator of *Family Guy*) had written a pilot for me a few years earlier. We got along extremely well and I think we share the same comic sensibilities. When it occurred to them to have the mayor, they just called my agent, and he told me about it and I said, "Seth? Of course I'll do it. I love the guy and I know what he does, and for me it could be enormously funny."

**HM: From *Batman* to *Family Guy* and all the projects in between, your humour has always had that surrealist edge.**

AW: You caught me.

**HM: Where does that come from?**

AW: I have no idea, except for a few contributory things. For example, my dad was a very sarcastic guy but very funny, and my mom was a concert pianist and in her own way was a very colorful character, and I think both of my sons have the same thing. It's very important to think funny. It's very helpful because if you think funny and you have timing, then usually it's OK.

**HM: Another actor who takes those kind of comedy risks is Nicolas Cage, who does an homage to you in *Kick-Ass*.**

AW: Nic Cage is a huge fan of mine, and I am of him. We were on *The Today Show* together recently, and he admitted that he emulated me in part. He tried to get my Batmanze timing down and I thought it was kind of fun.

**HM: Something a lot of people may not know about you is that you're also a keen painter.**

**AW:** I've been painting for about 40 years, and it's a whole different experience. You're on your own, you don't need anyone else, and what you do is out there to be judged. I took a breath and said, "What's that in my hand? It's a paint brush. Well, I'll go paint the barn." And then I thought, "No, I'm compelled to paint someone or something else," and I did, and it became accepted in a way. I've done a series of paintings of the *Batman* villains, and they sell. I think they're pretty interesting, and people like them. My painting isn't trained, it's pretty raw, it's primitive and it's a little savage, but there are those that find it fascinating - Maybe in a way that in a madhouse you may find someone's doodlings fascinating.

## Interview: Chris Roberson

with richard whittaker



It's been a pretty good couple of years for comic writer Chris Roberson. The collected edition of the third volume of his creator-owned series *iZombie, Dead to the World*, was published through Vertigo Comics and recently picked up three Eisner nominations; His sci-fi mashup *Star Trek/Legion of Superheroes* comes with the DC seal of approval through IDW Comics; He brought Michael Moorcock's albino sorcerer back to four colour life with *Elric: The Balance Lost* for Boom! Studios; And he had a brief but well-received run on *Superman* in between J. Michael Straczynski's heavily criticized *Grounded* plotline and the DC 52 reboot. What may be less widely known is that Roberson is also an accomplished publisher and novelist.

Through his writing collective Clockwork Storybook he formed links with many major science fiction and fantasy authors, like fellow Texan Joe Lansdale and honorary Texan Michael Moorcock; Then, as half of MonkeyBrain Books with his wife Allison Baker, Roberson has created another print outlet for those authors, reprinting lost classics while also publishing new works and anthologies that pay tribute to icons like Robert E. Howard. Roberson sat down with Hub to discuss how those friendships have shaped him as a writer.

**Hub Magazine: Before you started in comics, you had a pretty successful career as a science fiction novelist.**

Chris Roberson: I would say a 'moderately successful detour.' The goal when I was six was to break into comics, but by the time I was in college I realized how difficult breaking into comics was, so it was, 'Eventually write comics, and in the mean time do novels.' And I never gave up doing either. I was always writings novels and short stories, and in the mean time I was pitching comics to editors. As difficult it as it is to break in as a novelist or short story writer, it's still marginally easier to do that than to break into comics, which is extraordinarily difficult.

**HM: Writing a novel and writing a comic script are obviously very different skills. When you're working on a graphic project, do you have to approach the story in a more visual way?**

CR: You don't have to, but the artists like you better if you do. I'm sure there are writers who don't take that into consideration, but it really works best if it is a collaboration and the writer has anticipated what the artist is going to have to do and accounts for that in the script.

**HM: Aside from being an author, you're also a publisher and editor through MonkeyBrain Books. You had self-published through Clockwork Storybook, the writers collective you set up with Bill Willingham (*Fables*), Matt Sturges (*House of Mystery*) and Mark Finn (*Blood and Thunder: The Life and Art of Robert E. Howard*.) How did you make the jump to publishing other writers?**

**CR:** In the last few years of Clockwork Storybook, it had been a publishing concern. Basically my job was to do all of the page layout and book design and liaise with the printers and do all the distribution stuff and all that kind of business, and my wife has a background in accounting and running businesses. So when Clockwork reached that 30 minute mark in the *Behind the Music Special*, we were just like, 'Hey, we know what we're doing, let's just start a publishing company.' I'd already been thinking about publishing other people's books, although at that point it was going to be through Clockwork. In fact, the first ones we were thinking of was Jess Nevins' companion to the *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. So we were able to get Monkeybrain off the ground within about six months of the dissolution of Clockwork. Once I had a publishing company and realized I could publish anything I wanted, I just started contacting people whose work I liked.

**HM: For a bespoke publishing house, you have a pretty impressive talent roster in your catalogue. How do you pick who to publish?**

**CR:** Probably the laundry list of people who are living writers who have had a big influence on me and that are still working, I think just about all of them I've published at MonkeyBrain. So [Michael] Moorcock, Kim Newman, Kage Baker, we did a short story of hers, we've done lots of stuff with Alan Moore, we did a [Philip Jose] Farmer reprint and he was a formative influence. So it's pretty ridiculous. I started a publishing company just so I could get the phone numbers of everyone that I'd ever admired, and then not use them because I was too afraid to call them.

**HM: All of those authors have a thick Deconstructionist or Post-Modernist strain running through their fantasy and science fiction. Has that affected you a lot during your career as a writer?**

**CR:** That's the kind of thing that's really only clear in hindsight. Creatively, you don't intellectualize those things. Creatively, you respond to those works that you respond to, and it's only after you've had a lot of time to consume and synthesize them that you figure out, 'Oh, this is what I got from that thing.' And I think one thing that all those guys have in common, people like Farmer, Newman, Moore, Moorcock, are people that, first, make no clear distinction between low culture and high. They are adept at drawing inspiration and raw material from both, from literature and from pulp, but they're also not shy about taking their own childhood entertainments and their childhood obsessions, the things that they loved most, and revisiting them and digging into them and seeing what makes them work. Approaching them from different angles, or taking an archetype and then figuring out a way to inhabit it that makes it recognizably that type but also an individual thing. I think you can go through all of them and see that's something they go back to again and again. The other thing is sense of humor. All those guys can do really heavy, dour, *sturm und drang*, fire and brimstone, but at the same time, they tell lots of jokes. So let it be fun, and don't forget your childhood influences, and low and high culture are interchangeable.

**HM: How hard is it, dealing with famous and inspirational authors? How do you edit them, and how has your experience as an editor affected how you deal with your own editors?**

**CR:** To answer your first question first, I really don't. My role as editor is really more impresario. I'm inviting them to perform, and I'm giving them the platform to do whatever the hell they want to do. I do the high level editorial stuff, and then we employ copy editors who know grammar better than I do, but I'm reluctant to even correct their punctuation. So, in several instances I've gotten things from one of those guys, I've gone over it and then I go back to them and say, 'Yeah, I like it, maybe not the best thing ever,' and they immediately go, 'Oh my god, I'm sorry I even sent that to you, I'm going to go and make all these changes, and get it back to you,' and I say, 'OK, that's fine.' But that's a bridge I've never had to cross, because I couldn't bring myself to do it. Fortunately, they're all such consummate professionals that, I think at a certain point, you build in your own internal critic and internal editor. Once you've done enough stuff, you know when you look at it – unless you have some giant oversized ego – when it's not good. I certainly know with my own work, I have trashed entire short stories because, once completed, I've looked at it and said, 'That's not good enough.' So rather than being convinced of my own genius, and forcing some other poor schlub to tell me it's crap, I've decided on my own. So if anything, my working relationships with

editors have been all very positive. Most of what I get are pure collaboration, just like, 'What if you did this, or what if you moved this thing around a little bit,' but I'm hard pressed to think of a time when something just completely didn't work. Now, of course, there have been instances, particularly when submitting things, which is more about editor as gate keeper, they would say, 'I don't want this' because they didn't think they could sell it. But once I was in a working relationship with an editor, I've never had lots of pushback. I've sometimes had to go through a few revisions, but that's more like dealing with a first reader than trying to wrangle someone else's opinions in line.

**HM: Of all the writers that you work with, your strongest personal relationship seems to be with Michael Moorcock. He may be British, but it does seem that he's become an honorary Texan.**

CR: And has been for a while, and as long as he spends a good portion of every year here we'll count him. Texans are desperate for all of the men of letters they can get. Yeah, he's been living in Bastrop [just east of Austin in Central Texas] since the early 90s. I've been an enormous Moorcock fan since the mid-80s when I was in high school, and first started writing his novels read everything and re-read everything every few years. I went to the University of Texas at Austin, and in their library system they had everything and you could literally go to the Perry-Castaneda library and get everything you wanted. Around the time that we had fired up the Clockwork Storybook website, we published review and interviews, and one of the early reviews I wanted to do was Moorcock's then-most recent trilogy of novels, *Blood: A Southern Fantasy*, *Fabulous Harbours* and *War Amongst the Angels*. So I wrote this really long, rambling review, partly about the books and their merits, but partly autobiographical about my experience with Moorcock's work and what it had meant to me over the years. So it went up on this website, and I think it was within two days I got an email that said 'Great review, thanks, M.M.'

I was actually convinced that it was Matt Sturges messing with me, that he had spoofed an email address and was emailing it to me to see what I would do. So I responded back, 'Glad you liked it,' and asked a question that only the real MM would be able to answer, and he answered and we struck up a correspondence and over the course of the next couple of months we sent these lengthy emails back and forth about writing and genre and publishing and pretty much everything.

The whole time, I'm just flipping out. I'm emailing back and forth with Mike Moorcock, and I'm working at Dell Computers at the time and no-one there really understood. A couple of people were kind of impressed, but most people didn't know what the hell I was talking about. My email at the time was @Texas.net, so Mike said, 'Hey, I see you have a Texas email address, where do you live in the state.' I said, 'Well, I live in Austin,' 'Oh, I live in Bastrop, you should come and hang out one day.' I said, 'Oh, OK. I'll do that.' I was terribly nervous and made Matt Sturges come with me. That was his karmic payment on making me think that he'd been messing with me. So we went down, hung out for the day, and over the years I would always send Mike copies of things that I had been doing. A couple of books were dedicated to him, or at least he was mentioned in the acknowledgements. When my wife and I started up Monkeybrain books, one of the first books we did had a blurb from Mike, and one of the very first books we did was a reprint of his history of epic fantasy, *Wizardry and Wild Romance*. My wife and I have dinner with he and his wife about once a year on average, something like that, when they're in the country, and not gallivanting in Paris or Morocco or wherever the hell they go.

**HM: And now you're done *The Balance Lost*, based on Moorcock's Elric series. There have been *Eternal Champion* comics before, but how did this project come about?**

CR: Couple of years ago, it would have been the San Diego Comic Convention in 2009, I was having a late night conversation with a drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other, as I frequently do, talking to a gentleman who at that time was managing editor with Boom! Studios, whose name is Matt Gagnon, and we were just talking about Texas in that general, 'How's the weather where you live? What kind of fast food places are there?' kind of way. He talked about driving through Texas with his then-girlfriend, and I was talking about Austin as a place to live, and I mentioned that we have all these different artists and writers in the Central Texas area, and Mike Moorcock's just up the road. And he, as are a lot of people who are aficionados of Moorcock but hadn't kept up with his current biography, was surprised to find that he was

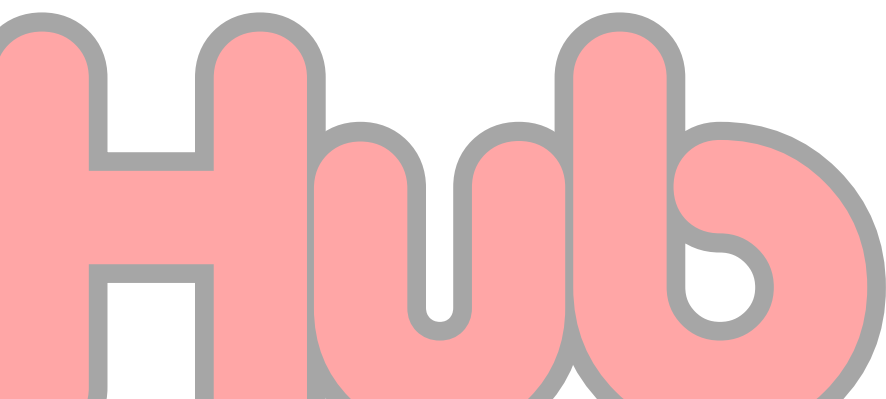


living in Texas. I'm sure he thought he lived in a castle somewhere, but I said, 'No, he lives just down the road' and we ended up having a very long conversation about our favorite Moorcock stories.

That led to many email exchanges about how great Moorcock was, and kind of doing some other work for them, a prequel to Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* That also kind of grew out of those conversations. A few months later, Matt approached me, a little trepidatious, and said, 'Hey, what do you think Moorcock would do if we approached him with the idea of doing comics based on his work, that either he write, or someone else wrote with his permission?' So I said, 'I don't know, you should ask him.' I agreed to put them in touch, and I contacted Mike and told him, 'Hey, is it OK if these guys contact you, they have this question,' and I basically had to boil down to Mike what they were asking, that they wanted to do comics based on one of your characters. Moorcock's response to me was, 'I'd be OK with you writing them, Chris.' Well I guess that means yes. So I wrote back to Gagnon, put him in touch with Mike and his wife Linda, and a few months later they wrote back and said, 'Hey, what are you doing? What's the comic?' And I had to come up with something that everyone would be happy with.

**HM: And so now Michael is letting you loose with Elric.**

CR: I'll point out parenthetically that not only is it Elric, but we have Corum, Hawkmoon's in there, and we have cameos from damn near everybody. In the first three issues we get Oswald Bastobal, Sir Steven Bek, Captain Cornelius, there's an oblique nod to Jerry Cornelius, and not for nothing. Moorcock lives 45 minutes drive from my house and has a cane, so I don't want to disappoint him.





# SURVEY

**give us some feedback...**



Here's a simple survey that we'd like you, our dear readers, to fill in and get back to us. It'll certainly help us shape things in the future...

- What would you like to see more of in Hub?
- What would you like to see less of?
- What sort of regularity would you like Hub to come out on? Weekly with less, or six weekly with more?
- What format works best for you? (PDF/ePub/kindle)
- Are we covering genres that interest you?
- What genres would you like to see us cover that at present we don't?
- We rely on sponsorship and donations to pay our authors and cover our costs. Would you be prepared to back a Hub powered Kickstarter to enable us to break free of this model?

Thoughts and suggestions all welcomed. Please email your answers back to us at:  
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