

HERITAGE



ALF RAY

# HERITAGE

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*Flash Gordon*

Volume I  
Number 1a

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Volume I  
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# introduction



In the early 1950's when I was a youngster, there were two major influences on my young life - comic books and television. My family was one of the few to have a TV set in those benign days: an old Crosley that required tremendous concentration to make sense of its dim, seven-inch screen. But make sense of it I did. Some of my fondest childhoods memories are of old TV shows: *Howdy Doody*, *Captain Video* and *Tom Corbett*. Yes, even then I was beginning to show a penchant for s-f. My comic reading reflected that; *Planet Stories*, *Famous Funnies* (with Buck Rogers), and *Weird Science Fantasy* were some of my favorites.

My favorite TV show, however, was one broadcast Saturday mornings. It was called *Buster's Buddies* and had this old man (he was at *least* 40) introducing strange old movies called 'serials'. They were long, continued things which sometimes took months to complete. One became my eternal favorite. That serial was *Flash Gordon*. It had everything; a handsome athletic hero, a dastardly villain, great fights, ray guns, space-ships . . . everything. I rejoiced in it with all my child's heart and watched it religiously every week, never realizing that the "old" man introducing the film was the very hero I admired so much.

Time passed, as time does, and I grew to young manhood. I continued to see *Flash Gordon* any time I could - on TV or, occasionally, at a movie revival. I had, by now, discovered the **Flash Gordon** comic strip in the newspapers, but it was obvious they weren't the same man - the *real* Flash didn't use space suits and stuff, and Mongo was nowhere in sight.

Finally, someone (I don't even remember who) showed me the real **Flash Gordon** - Alex Raymond's **Flash Gordon**. I was entranced; this was the real thing - adventure, fantasy, deft characterizations, exquisite artwork. Perfect. But it was thirty years old! Alex Raymond was now dead; where could I get new stories of what I now regarded as *my* Flash ?

1966. King Comics' first issue of *Flash Gordon* hit the stands.

It was all I'd wanted - - and more. Al Williamson had brought Flash back to life. A couple of issues later, economics and poor distribution killed him again. I vowed if I ever had the opportunity, I would bring Flash back.

You hold in your hands the result of that vow. Of course, such an endeavor is not the work of one, but many. Rich Garrison, my partner and my friend, has been instrumental in the production of this book. In fact, without Rich's efforts, the whole project would probably have folded during my sojourn in Korea.

Al Williamson, whose version of Flash these 6 years ago started this whole thing, has also been more than helpful. Without Al, I doubt the interview with Buster Crabbe would have been half so complete. I also doubt we could have procured much of the fine artwork in this issue without Al's help and support.

I want to thank everyone who has worked on this undertaking; for all have given me everything I expected of them, and a bit more. Especially, I want to thank Buster Crabbe, that great "old" man who *is* Flash Gordon for all the world.

Finally, I want to thank you, the reader, for putting up with this nostalgic mish-mash - - now read one, and enjoy once more the magic of -

**FLASH GORDON**

Doug Murray  
June 1972

DEDICATED TO:

**ALEX RAYMOND**

**and**

**AL WILLIAMSON**

# HERITAGE

Volume I  
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## CONTENTS

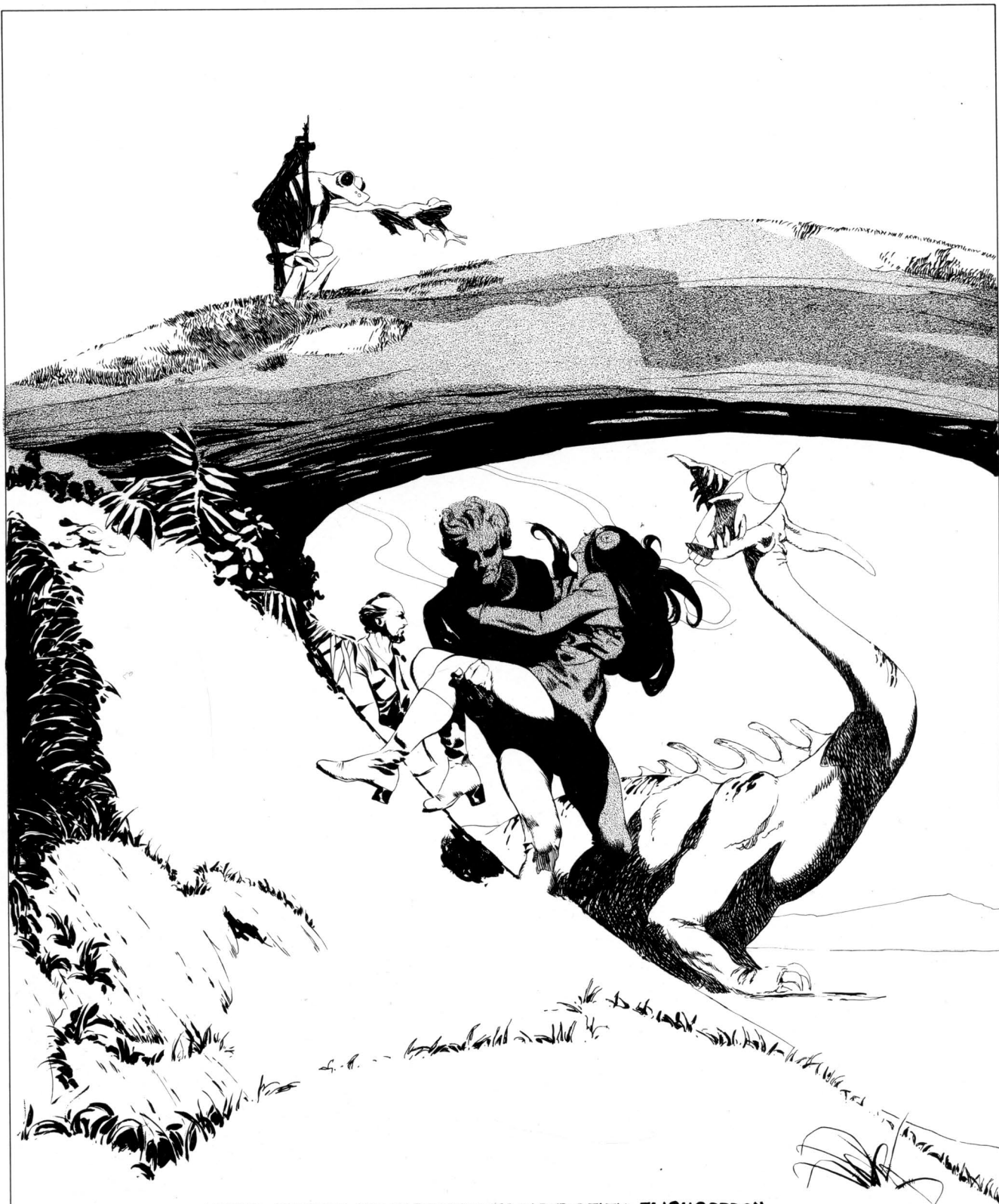
	BEGINNING ON PAGE
"Flash Gordon Faces Reality" by Jeff Jones	6
"Flash Gordon: Super-Serial" by Allan Asherman	11
"A Funny Thing Happened on the Way To Mongo" by Frank Brunner	25
<b>Portfolio</b> by Gray Morrow	30
"A Talk with Buster Crabbe" by staff and friends	35
<b>Portfolio</b> by Kenneth Smith	51
"Crash-Landing" by Michael Wm. Kaluta	56
Covers: Front - Alex Raymond Back - Frank Frazetta	



*Jeff Jones simplicity of form and effective use of mood make him one of the best of the s-f/fantasy artists. Here, with a minimum of dialogue and maximum of technique, he explores some unusual possibilities in "Flash Gordon Faces Reality".*



# FLASH GORDON FACES REALITY



HAVING CRASHED AND NARROWLY ESCAPED DEATH, FLASH GORDON, DR. ZARKOV AND DALE ARDEN RUSH BREATHLESSLY AWAY FROM THE MONSTROUS THING THAT WAS CHEWING ON THE FRAIL ROCKET!



TO GEORGE - J. JONES





THEN THE BEAST, TIRING OF THE INANIMATE SHIP, SPIES THREE SMALL MOVEMENTS SOME DISTANCE AWAY.



ROARING DEFIANTLY, IT LEAPS PONDEROUSLY TOWARD THEM.



TURNING, THE SMALL COMPANY GASPS AT THE BOTTOMLESS CHASM DROPPING BEFORE THEM.



WITH FLASH LEADING THE TRIO MAKES FOR THE ONLY REFUGE OFFERED.

THE ENORMOUS WEIGHT OF THE BEHEMOTH IS TOO MUCH FOR THE RIM OF THE CHASM.



HANGING ON FOR THEIR VERY LIVES, ZARKOV HELPS FLASH AND DALE BACK TO SECURITY!



"HOW'RE WE EVER GOING TO GET OFF THIS PLANET?" DALE EXCLAIMS.

"I THINK BARIN HAD US TRACKED."



"WHAT IF MING DID, TOO?" DALE REPLIES.

"LET'S SEE IF THE RADIO IN THE SHIP IS STILL WORKING."

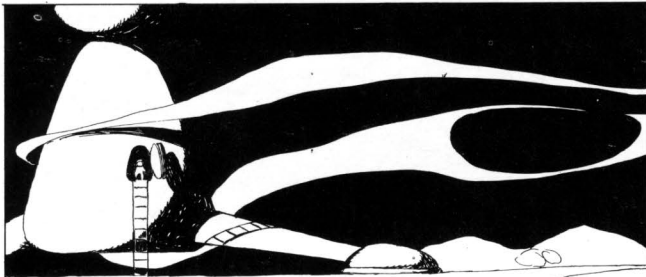


MAKING THEIR WAY BACK TOWARD THE CRASH, A LIGHT SUDDENLY APPEARS IN THE SKY!

"LOOK, FLASH, WE'RE SAVED... UNLESS IT'S MING!"



FLASH PULLS DALE DOWN BEHIND SOME ROCKS, ZARKOV FOLLOWS!



*The Flash Gordon serial is perhaps the most famous and most popular of all time. **Monster Times** editor Allan Asherman explores the reasons for this popularity in an in-depth study.*





R. CRANDALL

# ***FLASH GORDON: SUPER-SERIAL***

by Allan Asherman

IN 1936 THE WORLD was on the verge of being torn apart. The Great Depression had left America shaky, and the fears of the world were upon our country. There was no magic panacea expected to appear and make everything alright. One would have to be manufactured. The time was ripe for escape. The elements farthest from reality became accepted as a temporary salvation from the tension of what was to come

The comic-strip was at its height, and a science-fiction strip called "*Flash Gordon*", created and drawn by Alex Raymond, was high on the popularity list. Science-fiction was being devoured by the public, especially in films.

The logical follow-up to all of this was to attempt to film *Flash Gordon*. But such a venture would not have been possible within the time and budgetary confines of a feature film. Fortunately, there was another type of motion-picture; a paradox of hacked-out production and the precious genius of imagination. The serial.

Thanks to the format of the serial, which has been around since the early, silent days of the cinema, it was possible to dwell on multiple storylines that unfolded during many hours. By using standing sets and stock music, keeping away from costly casts and working at an incredible pace, it was possible for a film studio to produce twelve to fifteen chapter serials. With each chapter lasting approximately thirty minutes, the serials were actually mass-produced super-spectaculars.

Universal Pictures had already purchased screen rights to King Feature Syndicate properties, and had made serials of *Tim Tyler's Luck* and *Ace Drummond*. Now the serial was about to come of age. Universal was about to start production on the most expensive motion-picture chapter-play ever made: *FLASH GORDON*.

**. . . a propaganda film that taught the kids to love America and be suspicious of all else.**

**FLOODS, FIRES;** *all the power of nature gone wild is unleashed upon the Earth. Calmness is no more; violence is everywhere as destruction and panic speed around the world. Nothing like this has ever happened before, and is not likely to occur again; unless the forces of nature are quieted, the Earth will be destroyed. Science is at a loss for an explanation.*

*But science has been looking in the wrong direction. Instead of peering into the shell of our Earth, the instruments of knowledge should have been turned out into space. Professor Gordon, the world's leading astronomer, has discovered the astounding answer.*

*Our solar system has been invaded by a mysterious planet. A small world as planetary sizes go, but large enough to disrupt Earth's gravitational fields and turn our world into a shambles. The crowning horror is that, unless this planet miraculously alters its course through space, it will eventually collide with Earth, completely shattering both planets. It is generally agreed the end of the world is near.*

Professor Gordon, as the serial begins, is seen discussing the one too-slim chance Earth has for survival. Dr. Alexis Zharkov, a brilliant but eccentric scientist, is attempting to design and build a rocketship. It is Zharkov's intention to fly to the mysterious gypsy planet and somehow avert it from its course toward the Earth. How he can possibly do this, even if he successfully reaches the mystery planet, is unknown to Gordon and all the others. An additional catch is that Zharkov, though a genius, has been known to adhere to theories generally agreed to be worthless and discredited. No one quite knows when Zharkov is engaged in serious scientific research or wild speculation. In this case, Speculation is suspected, and so is his failure.

Professor Gordon's thoughts now turn to his son, Flash. Away in college succeeding both as a scholar and athlete, Flash has sent a telegram announcing his intention to return home and be with his father when the end comes. The Professor's colleagues all agree on what an exceptional person Flash is, for travel has now become a terrible hazard. Storms are frequent and the accidents even more so.

Flying home as quickly as possible, Flash is engaged in reading a magazine and eyeing the beautiful blonde seated near him. She doesn't seem too against his eyeing her, as she sees Flash's face and physique are near perfection. He looks like someone who stepped from a mythology book. To Flash, Dale is the same. Beautiful.

Suddenly the plane lurches! There is an outburst of questions and the cry comes: "Bail out!" Everyone is hurriedly equipped with a parachute and people start streaming from the doomed airplane. Just about to bail out, Flash notices the blonde is having trouble. "Ever try one of these things," he asks her. . . "No," comes the reply. Without waiting for additional words, Flash grabs the young woman around the waist and, holding her close to his side, leaps from the plane. Pulling his ripcord, the parachute on his back opens, and they both drift through the storm, into calm air. They land together, and Flash has enough strength to support her and detach his chute

at the same time. He now learns her name is Dale Arden.

At that point, both Flash and Dale become aware that they have landed near an astounding looking aircraft. From the shadows steps a bearded man brandishing a gun, looking for all the world like some disgruntled Bolshevik of the period. He announces himself as Dr. Zharkov. When Flash tells him that he is the son of Professor Gordon, Zharkov's reaction is that the young man has been sent as a spy. It is not a comforting thing to be looked upon as a madman by one's peers. The trigger finger tightens for an instant.

Flash meets the emergency with a friendly laugh, and an attitude of light-hearted innocence. He mentions the crashed airplane, and adds "Parachutes aren't particular where they set you down." Zharkov is convinced that Flash's arrival is an accident, and his hostility vanishes when he remembers his problem. Turning to Flash, he tells the young man about his rocket. It is Zharkov's belief that the gypsy planet is inhabited. He plans to journey to the planet and enlist the aid of its inhabitants to avoid a disaster that would destroy two worlds. "For hours I have waited for my assistant, but he has turned coward. I need a MAN to come with me. Will you go?"

By this time Flash has become considerably attached to Dale Arden. He agrees to go with Zharkov only if Dale can first be taken to a place of safety. Since there is no safe place left on Earth, she must go with them. This is his condition: either Dale goes with them, or Zharkov goes alone. The Doctor agrees. Zharkov, Flash, and Dale begin the strangest journey in the history of mankind.

In a moment of eccentric excitement, Zharkov forgets to turn on the oxygen. The mistake is corrected, but not before Flash and Dale have felt the lack of air. Flash is now beginning to have second thoughts. Zharkov, the great genius, appears to be somewhat of a nut, too. But Flash understands impulsiveness, and the amazing rocketship speaks for itself. Yes, Flash decides . . . if anyone can save Earth, it is Zharkov. Dale, meanwhile, is happy just being with Flash.

The rocket passes through the "dead-zone", an area of space devoid of all force, discovered and named by Zharkov. Becoming used to the rhythms of space travel, the three adventurers are enjoying their ride. Suddenly the small gypsy planet is upon them. Zharkov fires the counter-rockets, and a landing is made with no damage to the craft or the passengers.

The planet proves to have a spectacular landscape. The first living things they encounter, though, are giant lizards. They are saved when a rocket-ship appears overhead and gasses the monsters. Metal-clad soldiers step from the rocket. There is nothing to answer Flash's friendly smile and handshake. "Come" says the leader. "You are to be taken to Ming, Emperor of the Universe!"

With Dale clinging closely to him, Flash is taken to the Court of Ming. It is a spectacular place. Symbols and likenesses, all alien, fill the huge, high-ceilinged room.

The scientific mind of Zharkov wastes no time in starting a conversation with Ming.

Zharkov learns that Ming, a despotic ruler who wishes to conquer the universe, is in control of his planet's movements. The planet, named Mongo, will not collide with Earth, but will pass near enough to it so that all life on our planet will be destroyed. Mongo will be spared because of protective fields. Zharkov knows he must think fast to save Earth. He suggests to Ming: "Why destroy the Earth . . . why not conquer it? Ming likes the idea. For a while, at least, the Earth is saved.

There is no doubt about the situation now. Ming is a madman who must be defeated. With Zharkov as a leader, Flash and whoever else will aid them, must succeed in putting an end to the rule of Ming. And Dale, during this struggle, must be kept out of harm's way.

Zharkov's instant appraisal of the situation is brought to an end. Flash, clearly no diplomat, has attempted to attack Ming, after Ming attempted to touch Dale. Ming wants Flash put out of the way as soon as possible. Dale, Ming has decided, shall become his bride. He has seen Dale's beauty and, as blondes seem scarce on Mongo, she will make a fitting wife for him.

For roughly the same reasons Ming has been attracted to Dale, a beautiful brunette has noticed Flash. She is Princess Aura, Ming's daughter. A calculating, but impulsive woman. The antithesis of Dale Arden she has made up her mind she wants Flash Gordon.

Ming has ordered Flash to be thrown into an arena, where he will fight wild-men. A superb athlete, he holds his own and then wins. It is the first time this has happened, and Ming orders the trap-door opened beneath the arena. Suddenly Aura leaps up, grabs a ray-gun and charges into the arena. She shoots the soldier at the switch, but she is too slow. The dying man activates the lever; the floor opens beneath Flash and Aura.

But Ming does not wish his daughter to die. A net opens under them and stops their fall.

Aura is Flash's first ally on Mongo, and though she has other motives, she proves to be a great aid in the overthrowing of Ming's mad regime. More than once she saves the Earth explorers from destruction.

Early in their adventures, during an air-raid on Ming's Palace, Flash encounters a huge, bearded man. He is Thun, Prince of the Lion-Men, who opposes Ming. Due to a misunderstanding, their first encounter was almost a duel to the death. But, when Flash could have killed he did not. Thun realizes Flash is a friend, and pledges his aid to save the Earth. Thun's people are the only race on Mongo that has not fallen under the domination of Ming. It is Thun who aids Flash in rescuing Dale from becoming Ming's bride.

Prince Barin enters the scene soon after Thun. While Flash and Dale are in an especially tight spot, Barin appears and explains that he should have been the rightful heir to the throne of Mongo. Ming, it seems, killed the Prince's father and seized power. Barin offers his assistance, saying he will help Zharkov rescue his friends, only if Zharkov and Flash would aid him in regaining the throne of Mongo. His offer is accepted by Zharkov.

Barin is a complicated character. Portrayed as not being overly bright, it later develops that he is also in love with Princess Aura. But it is a secret love, as he is fat and has lost most of his confidence. Flash later aids in bringing Barin and Aura together, and they eventually marry.

Flash also fights with Barin at one point in his adventures. Tricking Barin into becoming the "Mighty Masked Swordsman of Mongo". Ming pits Barin against Flash. Fortunately, Barin is unmasked before either has a chance to hurt the other. Flash understands the situation immediately, and his friendship with Barin becomes much firmer.

King Vultan, a ponderous winged leader of the Hawk-Men, starts as an enemy of Flash. In fact, he almost has Flash killed, and attempts to force Dale to become his wife. But when Ming breaks his word of liberty for Flash and his friends, a word sworn by the personal integrity of Vultan, the truth comes out. The Hawk-Men are actually anti-Ming. Vultan had thought things would be safer for his people if he put on a front of loyalty to Ming the Merciless. In the final battle to oppose Ming, Vultan is almost killed. Flash and the winged monarch finally part company with smiles, handshakes and pats on the back.

One villain who Flash never made friends with was Kala, King of the Shark-Men. Kala also fell for Dale, and attempted to drown Flash by pitting him against a giant "octasac." If not for the efforts of Thun, Flash would most certainly have perished. Working together with Aura (It must have been quite tough for Thun, who hated Ming and everything connected with him), the under-water city of the Shark-Men is flooded. Flash, Dale, Aura and Thun escape only to be captured by the Hawk-Men.

Kala was a short, bald, and noisy young ruler, who was fond of wrestling. When he lost a wrestling match to Flash, it was his first defeat. Instant dislike. And when Flash, in the interest of pure honesty, hinted that his prior opponents had LET him win because he was their king, Kala decided Flash must go. Instant hatred. There was no depth to Kala's character, no spark of humanity Flash could kindle into a friendship. Kala was simply a hateful, insignificant man. Even Ming understood this and put Kala in charge of the most useless portion of Mongo; the part that lay underwater.

The High Priest of the Great God Tao, in the service of Ming, also figured in the fight. Combining scientific know-how with mystical deviousness, the Priest was also somewhat

crazy. For this reason, Ming trusted him implicitly. Only with such a mind, which lacked the sophistication and discipline to rebel against him, was Ming safe. The High Priest was his confidant. Since most of Mongo's varied inhabitants apparently followed the great Tao, Ming needed him to prove the will of Tao and their Emperor were one and the same.

There were also non-human monsters encountered by Flash and company. Among these were the giant reptiles that greeted them as they arrived on Mongo.

The "gocko" was a combination of the huge kangaroo, lobster and substantial nightmare. It measured over 15 feet in height, and guarded the catacombs beneath Ming's palace.

The "Octosac", that Kala hoped would kill Flash, was a giant octopus. But, unlike the Terran variety, this one liked to fight.

King Vultan's pet was a huge, horned bear named "Urso", who was presumably of different color and habits as opposed to his Earth cousins.

Also resembling a Terran creature was the sacred "Tigron" that Aura used to find Dale in Ming's catacombs. A weird creature, spending part of its time being worshipped and tended by Tao's maidservants, and some of its hours tracking the scent of people who had fallen out of the favor of Ming.

There were other monstrosities in the service of Tao, such as the huge, single-horned "Orangopoid", an ageless gorilla-type who killed many unfortunates. Aura made up for her mistakes when she imparted the secret of the creature's vulnerability to Flash; a twist of his horn, and the Orangopoid was finished.

But the friends outnumber the enemies. In the end, the Lion-Men stage a massive air-raid. After defeating Ming's rocket fleet, they land and fight their way into Ming's palace. Rather than face their wrath, and terms of their surrender, Ming flees to the catacombs. He commands his High-Priest to open the gates that lead into the flaming domain of the Great God Tao. Moments before Flash, Barin, Thun, Aura and others arrive, Ming passes through the gates. With his arms raised in reverence, his eyes narrowed by the heat, malevolent Ming disappears into the flames.

After the fact that Ming is no more has sunk into all concerned, Barin mounts the throne of Mongo, ruling with his love, the Princess Aura. (When Barin finally summoned up the courage to ask Aura to marry him, Aura had admitted that she had secretly loved him for years. All her fooling around with the Earthman Flash was for the purpose of getting Barin jealous enough to propose.)

Flash has made a great many friends on Mongo by this time, and has had an offer to stay on the planet. But, after all the weird people and their odd motives, countless attempts to kill him, broken promises and generally fatiguing activities, all Flash wants to do is be alone with Dale, on Earth.

His friends understand. Smiles pervade the atmosphere of a united Mongo, but not all the smiles are friendly ones. All but forgotten during the excitement, the crazed High Priest of Tao is still plotting to eliminate the Earthmen. Sneaking to their unguarded rocketship, the Priest secrets a time bomb within the craft. Laughing maniacally, rubbing his hands with glee, he strides away from the doomed rocket.

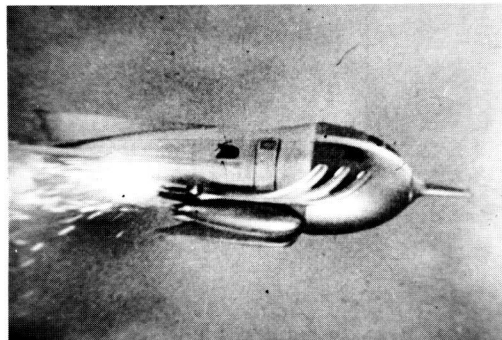
Suspecting nothing of this last-minute threat, Flash, Dale and Dr. Zharkov say their last farewells. Making it clear that the Earth need never fear Mongo again, and that Flash and friends are welcome back anytime, Barin says goodbye. Vultan and Flash part with a smile, a mutual laugh and exchange pats on the back. Prince Thun almost growls his loyalty with a powerful handshake. Aura's goodbye just misses being a tearful one; she wishes Flash and Dale could stay and be neighbors, but knows that they've all experienced too much to remain together any longer.

Boarding the rocketship, the trio start for home. Are Flash and friends, after all their perilous adventures, to meet death at the hands of an insane plotter while all of Mongo is wishing them well?

Fortunately, the High Priest proves to be quite stupid as he proudly approaches Prince Barin and admits to planting his bomb. Barin frantically radios the rocket and, just in time, a search begins. Flash soon finds the bomb, and with the scientific expertise of Zharkov ("Quick . . . get rid of it!"), Flash tosses the bomb through the door immediately before it explodes.

Winging their way back through outer space, nothing can phase the explorers now. But just to play safe, Zharkov radios Earth and asks that all electrical power be killed during their descent, on the chance that their magnetic instruments would be influenced by such energies. Near home, immediately before their landing, Zharkov beamingly turns to Flash and Dale to tell them they're home. But Flash Gordon and Dale Arden, oblivious to all but themselves are staring lovingly into each other's eyes. Zharkov politely looks away, and smiles a fatherly smile. They are home, and safe, and completely happy.

**... a beautiful and vastly entertaining  
motion picture serial.**







Flash helps Dale parachute from the doomed plane.



Zharkov believes Flash is a spy!



Flash admires Zharkov's amazing rocketship.



Aura is Flash's first friend on Mongo.



Thun, the lion man, and Prince Barin also befriend the earthpeople.



Dark, sensuous Priscilla Lawson was a perfect foil to blonde, all-american Buster Crabbe.



Flash easily defeats Kala, the sharkman, in a wrestling match



Vultan, king of the Hawkmen, tries to marry Dale



Flash prepares for the grim "Tournament of Mongo."



Vultan and Flash, now friends, part with a smile.



The high priest of Tao was always skulking about.



All was not intrigue and killing in Ming's palace.



**LARRY "BUSTER" CRABBE**, the same "Buster" Crabbe who achieved world-wide fame as an Olympic free-style swimmer, won the role of Flash.

Buster had started his acting career while still in college, earning a law degree. Paramount Pictures, at the time, was casting for roles in their college-based films, and "Buster" was a natural. Starting with bit-roles, it was not long before he learned enough to graduate to supporting roles. Then, in 1932, won his first starring role in *King of the Lion-Men* (He played Kaspia, a Tarzan-like character). The following year saw Buster starring as Tarzan himself, in Principal's feature *Tarzan the Fearless*.

Buster had followed the comic-strip Flash Gordon, and being a fan of the strip naturally jumped at the chance of trying for the lead role in the serial. His agent felt he could do it, and advised him to try. Not really expecting to get the role (there were many other performers, many with more experience, testing for the part), Buster applied for, and was given a screen test. The testing stopped almost as soon as the studio personnel saw how smoothly he fit the costume. With his hair bleached blonde, Buster was a dead-ringer for Alex Raymond's "Flash". Somewhat to his surprise, Buster got the part and made cinematic history; the intense effort he put into the role, as well as his amazing resemblance to Flash Gordon, was enough for him to breath life into his characterization.

In his movie career, Buster went on to star in serials such as "Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars", "Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe", *Buck Rogers*, *Red Barry* and *King of the Congo*. In a plentiful series of feature-films, done for P.R.C. Pictures, Buster also became the performer most identified with the role of *Billy The Kid*.

Buster's career extended into television, where he starred in the series "Captain Gallant of the Foreign Legion." In that series, his young ward "Cuffy" was portrayed by his own son, Cullen Crabbe.





Jean Rogers, who had the female lead role in another Universal serial, "Ace Drummond", was selected for the role of Dale Arden. Miss Rogers, who portrayed a brunette Dale in "Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars", was blonde in the first serial; probably to provide a visual comparison for "Flash".

Jean Rogers' Dale Arden was very much in character with Raymond's character, displaying a much more forceful Dale than Carol Hughes did in "Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe."

Frank Shannon, who had begun his professional acting career as a Broadway performer, won the role of Dr. Zharkov, which he continued throughout the other 2 Flash Gordon serials. He aptly showed the eccentricities of the Doctor, as well as his brilliance, and his apparently split-second ability to deal with any situation that required a scientific solution. The one possible criticism of his portrayal is not his fault, but the fault of Universal's casting department; Shannon appeared a good deal older and slighter of build than did Alex Raymond's Zharkov. Perhaps a younger man would have been better in the role.

Charles Middleton, an actor who had played straight-man to Harold Lloyd, Laurel and Hardy, and other silent comedians, landed the role of "Ming: Emperor of the Universe". It would have been impossible to find someone of the physical appearance of Raymond's "Ming", as the artist drew the villain with sallow, only semi-human features. Middleton, who was tall and extremely thin, utilized his mobile face and silent-acting mannerisms to create a hate-filled rendition of Ming.

Ming's bald head had to be covered by a plaster-of-Paris headpiece which extended to the actor's eyebrows (an artificial pair of brows, with the appropriate slant, were affixed over the end of the headpiece). Under the hot arc-lamps, Middleton continually sweated off the pounds. The full-flowing robes and collar he wore to complete his characterization didn't help matters either. Middleton had considerable, uncomfortable motivation to act mean to the hilt.

No one else could have played Ming as Charles Middleton did. He even used his long fingers to mimic the way Raymond had drawn the character's hands. His every inflection, mannerism, and overplaying brought beautiful life to Ming the Merciless, and provided a brilliant acting and physical mate to Buster's Flash.

Just the opposite was the characterization of Prince Barin. Barin, a suave, youthful and dynamic character in the comics, was portrayed by overweight, past-youthful character-actor Richard Alexander.

Primarily, a portrayer of muscular henchmen and historical executioners (especially for Cecil B. DeMille and, later, in serials), Alexander was probably cast, because an actor conforming to Barin's physical appearance would have cost Universal more than it could have afforded. So Barin, in the serial, became an embittered, frustrated man frightened that Aura would not love him because of his appearance. Though this image was different from Raymond's, it did serve to instill believability into Barin. A much better choice for the role, however, would have been someone like George Sanders (who in the 1937 United Artists film "Son of Monte Cristo" played a despotic ruler who looked incredibly like Raymond's Barin).





**THE SETTINGS AND SPECIAL EFFECTS** seen in "Flash Gordon" must be discussed together, as most of the sets were derived, at least in part, by the use of special visual, photographic, or miniature effects.

The rocketship of Dr. Zharkov was not designed especially for *Flash Gordon*. It was first seen in the 1936 science-fiction musical, *Just Imagine*. Both the life-sized mockup of the ship, as well as the miniature, were used in that film, although later, they were used to much better advantage by Universal.

The rockets used by Ming and his forces were also miniatures, designed by Universal technicians to conform to design with the *Just Imagine* rocket.

There were other miniatures used as means of transportation in the serial. These include the submarine of the Shark-Men (Which Republic Serials tried to imitate for their *Undersea Kingdom*, done the same year), and the gyro-ships of the Lion-Men.

The Gyro-ships, as their names suggest, were designed to resemble giant spinning tops. From the frenzied way in which Thun was seen controlling his craft, it can be presumed they were hard to manage.

The miniature ships were probably about 1½ to 2 feet in length, and were equipped with burners that made them shed sparks, smoke, or steady trails of vapor. They were guided around the sets by wires, which is why they, at times, started to pivot around in the distant shots.

Since the ships couldn't be seen flying continually against black drops, miniature landscapes were also built. There was an endless belt of clouds, built to revolve at varying speeds, in front of which the ships could be shown as moving, without actually moving the miniatures themselves.

A miniature tower, atop craggy mountains, originally served as the lab in *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935); with a few alterations, this model and a painting done of the miniature for very long-distance shots, became the castle of Ming the Merciless.

The interior of Ming's throne-room was accomplished by means of a "glass-shot." Only the lower half of the set (where the actors played) was real. The walls, windows and pillars of the set stopped dead, all at the same height. A Universal artist continued the set into its upward and finished stages, completing the room in a painting done on a huge pane of glass. The proportions and contrasts of the painting were such that, when the pane was braced in front of the camera; the set and painting were picked up as one continuous, full-size setting.

This technique was very expensive, because of the glass-painting and the procedure by which painting and set were aligned. It was slow and exacting, and has since been replaced by the process of "matting" (super-imposing the artwork onto the film in the darkroom, with multiple exposures, instead of while the scene is actually being photographed).

The sky-city of King Vultan and his Hawk-Men was a tricky business. It existed in two forms; miniature and glass-painting. The miniature was used for closeup sequences showing the city swaying and catching fire.

The glass painting of the entire city,

complete with foundation, was photographed against a black backdrop with "stars" attached. The ray that supported the city was photographically superimposed under the painting. In scenes where the city seems to be swaying in its entirety, it was actually the camera that moved. The rays were superimposed at corresponding angles.

The Hawk-Men presented another tricky problem, as they had the power of flight. Fortunately for the special-effects men, they only flew during one scene: when Dale is kidnapped and taken to the sky-city. This sequence, which is incredibly similar to the abduction of Dorothy by the flying monkey-creatures in *The Wizard of Oz* was partially accomplished by the use of miniatures.

The outside setting for this scene, a rocky, landscaped spot (from a location in *The Invisible Ray*) was duplicated in miniature. The Hawk-Men were also miniatures, as they flew over and swooped down upon the land. The actors who played the Hawk-Men were equipped with wires, and were lowered at angles onto the set. The illusion was probably patterned after the flying Bat-Men created by the special-effects champs Howard and Theodore Lydecker for the Republic serial *In Darkest Africa*.

Even with their fine miniatures department, and their history of science-fiction projects, Universal had never tackled anything like interplanetary travel. Because of this lack of experience, the time limits involved, and the budgetary limitations that kept them from experimenting too much, the outer space sequence in *Flash Gordon* as obvious miniatures. Planets are depicted as having surrounding clouds smoking off into space. The stars are painfully uniform in brightness; the worlds themselves photograph like the miniature clay globes they actually were.

The unknown source for the astronomical footage used in *The Invisible Ray* would have made an excellent source of footage for use in *Flash Gordon*. This footage, showing a meteorite crashing into the Earth and a tour of the solar system is also thought to have come from *Just Imagine*.

The alien creatures were relatively easy to materialize; the "Orangopoid" was a man in a horned gorilla-suit, the "Tigron" an ordinary (tame) tiger, and the "Octosac" a rubber creature interspersed with closeups of a live octopus.

The "gocko", however, presented problems. There was nothing that could be used, except a man in a suit, and the final beast would have to be much taller than the tallest stuntman. In the serial, it appears that Flash is a small toy in the hands of the thing. So the "gocko" was either several men within a huge costume, or a tall stuntman within the suit and a small double for Flash. At any rate it was a gorgeous exercise in special effects.

The costumes created for the serial kept to the general comic-strip guidelines, especially in the case of Ming's stiff-collared robes. Flash did not have his usual headpiece, though his costume certainly looked as if it came from the pen of Alex Raymond.

The background music used in *Flash Gordon* was stock-music from the library of Universal Pictures, combined with re-orchestrated classical music.

Franz Waxman's score for *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), and Karl Hajo's music for *The Invisible Man* (1933) and *The Werewolf of London* (1935) were used throughout most of the serial. Since most of Hajos' melodies were corruptions of Franz Liszt pieces, the music co-ordinators of the serial supplemented these with other Liszt pieces including "Tasso" (also used by Hajos in *The Black Cat*, in 1935) and "Les Preludes". Much of the fight-music came from Liszt's "Piano Sonata in C Minor (re-written for an entire orchestra).

Stock-footage was also used in *Flash Gordon*: for the scenes of Tao himself. Represented as a gigantic idol with moving arms that carried scores of writhing women, this quiet little sequence was definitely from *Just Imagine*.

Later, Universal used still more footage from this feature: Killer Kane's view of his city in *Buck Rogers* was the miniature landscape created for *Just Imagine*.

**TO THE PEOPLE** who saw *Flash Gordon*, in 1936 and who did not follow the newspaper adventures of the hero, the serial meant a variety of relevant things.

Flash was America personified. Despite his Aryan appearance he was a college man. Flash played polo and other American sports. After all, he WAS played by Buster Crabbe who, in his everyday life, assumed the identity of All-American athlete, Olympic swimmer, actor, and law student. (He was recently elected to the swimming Hall of Fame, still acts occasionally, and has completed his law curriculum. He also owns a camp for boys, and is consultant to a number of water-safety-agencies.)

The extremely feminine Dale Arden was his counterpart. Together they fought off the evil forces permeating the world.

Ming was the mysterious Oriental-type, whose threatening origin was unknown. Suddenly upon us, with droves of forces ready to destroy or conquer. Ming was a good example of anti-Japanese feelings at the time.

Where we felt we could be blatantly hostile to the Orientals, the feeling at the time was to coddle the Germans. Neville Chamberlain in Great Britain was speaking about "Peace in our time", and no one wanted to ruin it. And so, the winged Vultan started off as Flash's enemy, but later became his fast, loyal friend.

If the history student wishes to refer to the comic-strip Flash Gordon as a serialized editorial cartoon of its period, then the film version must also be viewed as a propoganda film that taught the kids to love America and be suspicious of all else.

However, when the extremes in motivation are forgotten, *Flash Gordon* can be seen for what it is; a beautiful, and vastly entertaining motion-picture serial based upon one of the world's most popular comic-strips.

*Frank Brunner's Smash Gordon strips have long been a highlight of a certain filmonster 'zine. Here, Frank climaxes the series in "A Funny Thing Happens on the Way to Mongo".*



# SMASH GORDON <sup>IN</sup>

"A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO MONGO!"



SMASH AND ZOOKOFF LOOKED ON IN SHOCK AS DALE DISROBED AND SLID INTO THE STILL OOZING POOL OF WARM BLOOD!!



I THINK DALE'S GETTING A LITTLE WIERD!, SMASH, MAYBE YOU OUGHT TO PAY A LITTLE MORE ATTENTION TO HER !....



OH, WOW!!

.... HMMM MAYBE IT'S TIME DALE AND I HAD A DISCUSSION CONCERNING OUR RELATIONSHIP!

GOOD LORD!... I HOPE SHE DOESN'T USE MY TOWELS!!

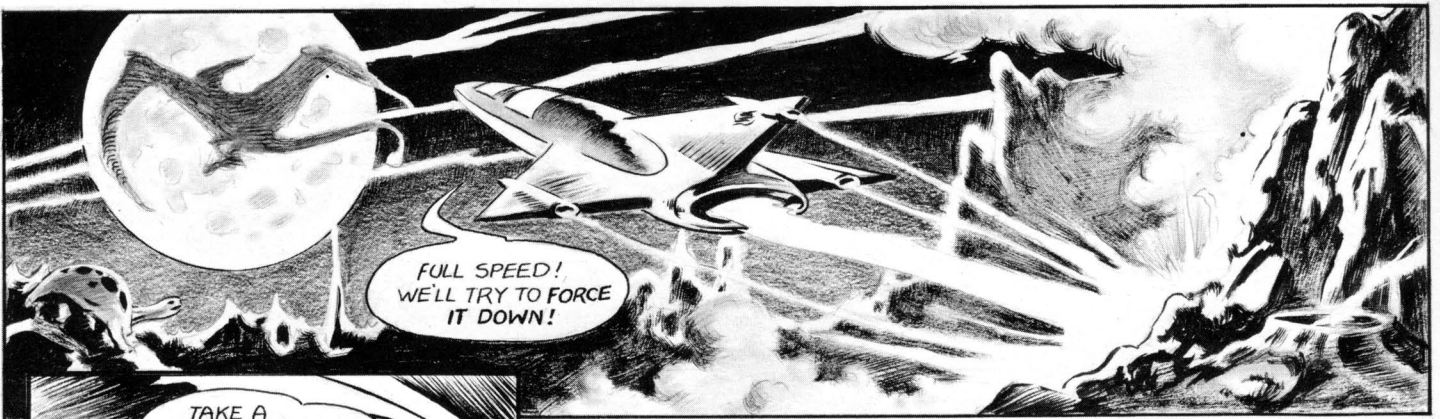


SUDDENLY!..



DON'T SHOOT! SMASH, YOU MIGHT HIT DALE! TO THE SHIP!





FULL SPEED!  
WE'LL TRY TO FORCE  
IT DOWN!



TAKE A  
CAREFUL AIM, SMASH  
AND THEN ...

AIM WHAT?  
WE HOOKED OUR  
LAZER CANNON  
LAST WEEK!



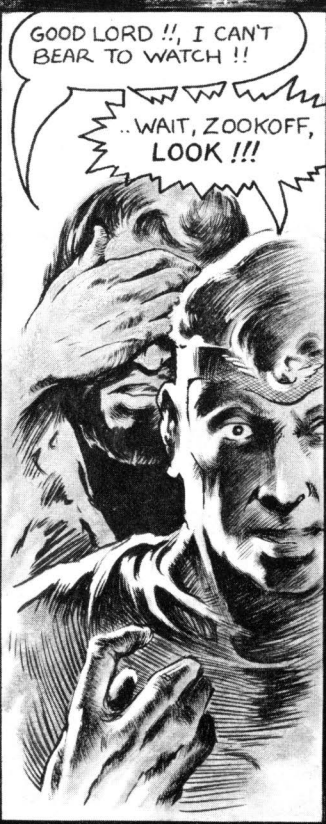
OH WELL, THEN,  
JUST USE THE ROCKETS  
TO SINGE IT'S WING!  
... HANG ON DALE!...



**GGOOSH!**



I SAID....  
GULP... SINGE!!  
...YOU IDIOT....  
GAG!!...



GOOD LORD !!, I CAN'T BEAR TO WATCH !!  
..WAIT, ZOOKOFF, LOOK !!!



FANTASTIC! ...SHE'S DISAPPEARING...



COME TO NOTICE IT, ZOOK-OFF, SO ARE WE !!!

DALE, SHE'S FALLING TO HER DEATH !!....

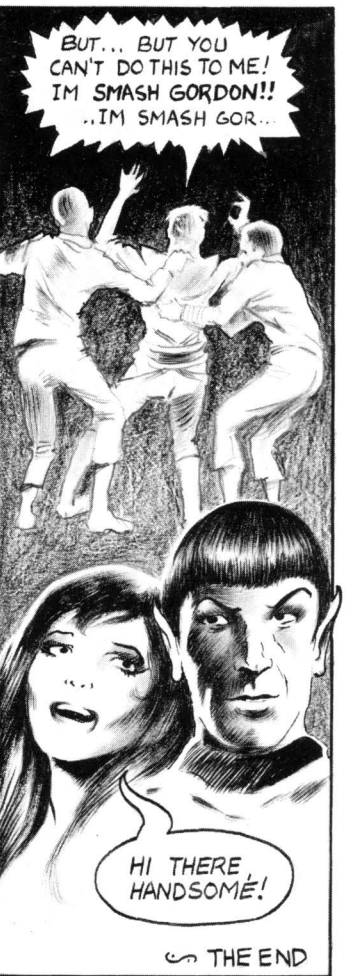
MOMENTS LATER....



JUMPING COMETS WHERE THE HECK ARE WE ???



YOU'VE BEEN BEAMED ABOARD THE STAR-SHIP "ENTERFUZZ" AND YOU, SMASH GORDON, HAVE EXTERMINATED YOUR LAST SPECIES OF WILDLIFE! AND ARE UNDER ARREST AS A MENACE TO ECOLOGY! ..ALL RIGHT MEN, TAKE HIM AWAY !!



BUT... BUT YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME! IM SMASH GORDON!! ..IM SMASH GOR...

HI THERE HANDSOME!

THE END

*Gray Morrow is adept in many fields of illustration; cover painting, strips, interior illustration and movie advertising. Here he uses his skills to show Flash Gordon battling his way through the many perils of Mongo.*









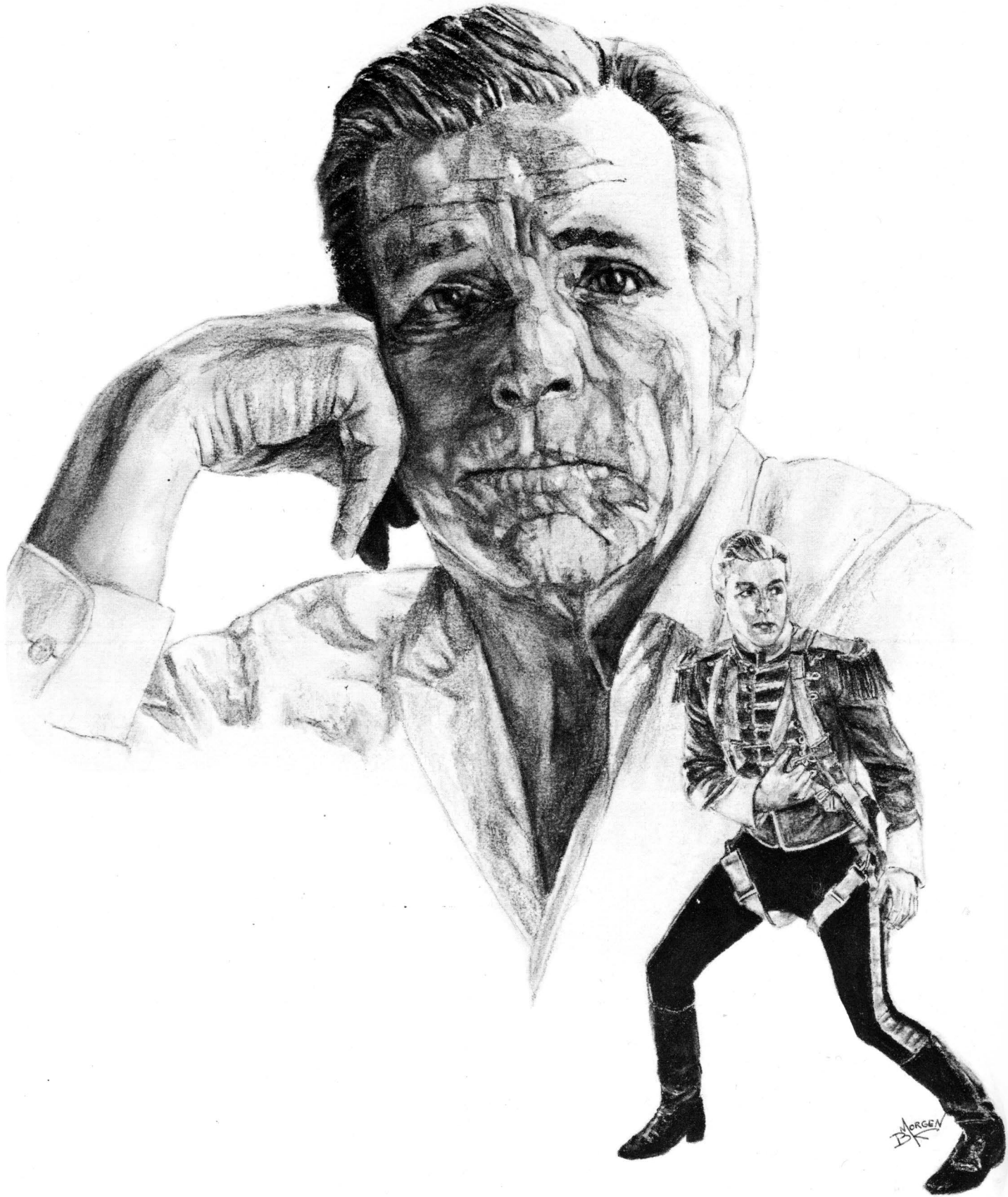
GRAY MORROW





*Buster Crabbe is Flash Gordon. Al Williamson is, perhaps, the greatest Flash Gordon fan. Here, these two men, along with HERITAGE editors Doug Murray and Rich Garrison, come together for a memorable interview.*





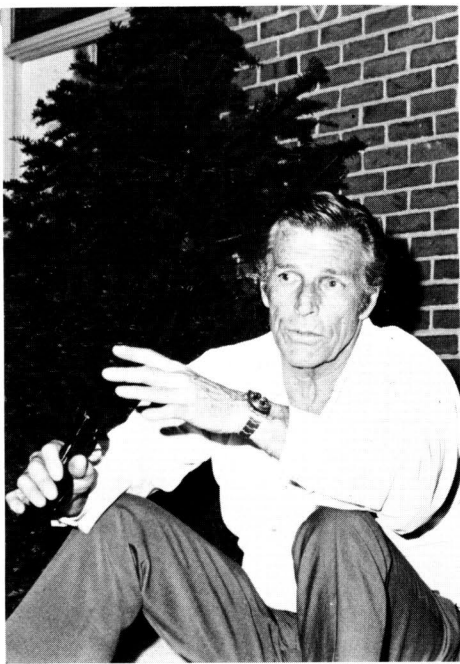
***a talk with***

# ***BUSTER CRABBE***

Pictures from The Comeback Trail by Stanley Koff.  
Candid pictures by Richard Garrison.

## **INTRODUCTION**

*Buster Crabbe has had his whole career affected by one act -- the acceptance of the lead-role in Flash Gordon. If ever one man has become identified with one role he played; it is Buster. Here Buster Crabbe, still vigorous and active despite his 60-odd years, shares with HERITAGE readers the story of how he came to accept this role, and how his life has been affected by it since.*



“... that’s how I did it, skeptically as the devil ...”

**Al:** *I guess a good question to start off with would be: how did you get the Flash Gordon role?*

**Buster:** I backed into it. It was a comic strip, which I followed. After I made the first film, I made a trip to New York to do some promotion for it. I met Alex Raymond, who turned out to be a peach of a guy. You know his background: he liked to oil paint, but couldn’t sell anything, so he got the idea of doing a strip away from the earth, flying around and all ...

Anyway, I’d picked up the *Hollywood Reporter* one day – you know, that’s the scandal sheet in Hollywood. Tells you what’s happening in the studios, what’s in production, what’s coming up, what actors are working, what are not, etc. I read where the following day they were testing (for Flash), so I thought I’d go over. I was working for Paramount; it was 1936 – summer, around August. I ran out there, in those days you always knew somebody on the lot; there was no problem getting in.

I got there and there were fifteen or twenty fellows on the stage. I stood to the side and kind of sized them up. There were two fellows there I knew: one was a guy named George Bergman, a great-looking guy who, I decided, was the man for the part. He was a health guy, you know, with the muscles – took good care of himself. I thought he’d be excellent. There was one other guy I thought, ‘maybe.’ As it turned out, it was lucky he didn’t get the part of Flash Gordon, because two months later John Ford picked him to play the lead in a movie he was making, and overnight it made him a star. The movie was *Hurricane* – the guy was Jon Hall.

In any case, someone apparently pointed me out to Mr. McRea, the producer. He came over and introduced himself and asked me why I was there. I told him it was mostly curiosity and we chatted awhile. Then, out of left field, he asked me if I would like to play Flash Gordon. I was taken aback, and told him I didn’t know, honestly. I always thought (at that time) it would never go. We chatted a bit more and he said, “Well, if you want the part, you’ve got it.” So, against my better judgement, I said okay. He told me they’d borrow me from Paramount and wire me when they were ready.

So that’s how I did it, skeptically as the devil, because I didn’t think the thing would work; didn’t think it was believable enough; flying around, the Hawkmen, the Clay People and all that. . . . Well, as it turned out, the big money-maker that year was a Deanna Durbin picture, *Three Girls in a Boat*, or somesuch, and despite the fact they had a big contract list out – Charles Boyer, Irene Dunne, who was on loan from Columbia, and a lot of others – the Flash Gordon serial was the number two money-maker.

It was the most expensive serial ever made; \$750,000 was a lot of money. It took us six weeks – bing, on the nose – to film. We had to average at least 85 set-ups a day to make the schedule. There was no telling in the morning when you came in what time they were going to let you go home. Every day, from seven o’clock on, we worked. We always had dinner . . . I can’t remember, except on Sundays, having dinner anywhere except at the studio or across the street from the studio, and then going back to work for a couple of hours. We just ground ‘em out. The equipment was heavy – large cameras, slow film; they had big arc lights in those days, hard to move around. It was some job. They stole a lot of the sets that they utilized in the serial, but it still cost \$750,000. It really surprised me doing so well.

We eventually did three; one (more) in ‘38, one in ‘40. In ‘39 they threw me in as *Buck Rogers*, which I never thought was quite as good. I think it was a cheater more than anything. Incidentally, was it true that *Buck Rogers* (comic strip) came out before *Flash Gordon*?

**Al:** *Yes, it came out in ‘29 – Flash in ‘34.*

**Buster:** Well, I read that, but I always thought *Flash Gordon* was the first and *Buck Rogers* a copy, and not a very good copy.

**Al:** *Which of the Flash Gordon serials was your favorite?*

**Buster:** Oh, the first one – and the last one was, you know, a bit of a sneaker – they cheated and stole whatever they could, but it was fun. One of them, I don’t remember if it was the second or third, Jean Rogers



“In ‘39 they tossed in the *Buck Rogers* thing, which I never thought was quite as good.” wasn’t in. (Al & Doug: it was the second.) I missed Jean Rogers: I don’t know why they didn’t bleach Carol Hughes’ hair.

**Al:** *Well, Dale in the strip is a brunette.*

**Buster:** She is? Well, the Dale I knew was blonde.

**Doug:** *Wasn’t Jean Rogers a brunette in the second serial?*

**Buster:** Yeah, you’re right. I saw a piece of the second serial out at Western Illinois the other night and she was a brunette. Speaking of the serial, you’ve seen the Fire Dragon (from *Flash Gordon*) a million times, I’ll bet you don’t know who was in it.

**Al:** *Crash Corrigan? Tom Steele? Was it someone with a speaking part?*

**Buster:** Yes.

**Al:** *Richard Alexander?*

**Buster:** No, he couldn’t have gotten into the Fire Dragon – he was too big. You’ve seen who it was a million times. He was a great one – a young cowboy then, just out from Texas to try to get a start in pictures. The bartender in *Guns Smoke* – Glenn Strange.

**Al:** *Of course, he played one of the guards.*

**Buster:** He played a lot of guards, and I fought him, I don’t know how many times: not only in *Flash Gordon*, but in westerns. He played a lot of heavies.

**Al:** *He played your trainer in The Contender – great movie.*

**Buster:** It wasn’t bad. I starred with Irene Judge. What was the one . . . Oh, *Junge Siren* was the one with Ann Corio. She was a heck of a nice girl. She put all of her younger brothers through school and everything. She was a stripper, but she really took

care of her family. I admired her a lot. Now she's doing *This was Burlesque*. I ran into her in Cleveland. You couldn't get near the place. For awhile she was getting forty grand a week down in the Village somewhere. I don't know how the hell they got that kind of money out of that house, but that's what I was told by an agent. She comes back every year - to New Jersey, Long Island, all over the place.

**Doug:** *Getting back to Flash Gordon, you say you averaged eighty-five set-ups a day. Did that create any problems?*

**Buster:** No, they had it broken down. A fella named George Watson, who worked in the production department, could tell you within a few minutes three weeks before, where you'd be three weeks from then. I didn't believe this until I had to go to the dentist. I asked George when I was going to be off for a few hours. "Thursday," he told me, "you're off from two to four." So I went to the dentist on Thursday. George was great. He watched that production like a hawk.

**Rich:** *Was the serial just a job, or did you have fun with it?*

**Buster:** Well, it was a job, but once you got into it you tried to do the best you could. Some of the dialogue was pretty corny ... for example ... when we land on Mongo, we get out of the rocketship and walk toward the castle. As I lead off I say to Zharkov, "Is the ship all right?"; he says "I've got it securely locked." I don't know *what* the hell being locked has to do with being secure on Mongo, but we walk away and run into the two monsters getting ready to fight. We think we might be attacked, so we start running back toward the ship. Zharkov falls down. Dale and I don't notice he's fallen, and run to the ship anyway; and me, like a big dunce, I try to open the door, and it's locked. I say, "Dale, it's locked!", knowing not a half-minute before Zharkov has told me it's locked.

**Doug:** *Did you have any problems with props falling apart, monsters disintegrating, etc.?*

**Buster:** No, a guy by the name of Eddie Keyes did all the monster things. The cobwebs - you know, they're rubber, blown on. Some of them are too thick; you can't get through ... you fight and fight ... and can't get through. As a matter of fact, I don't think the success of it was due to any one thing, with the exception of Raymond, who had the idea in the first place.

**Doug:** *Did anything really amusing happen filming the serial?*

**Buster:** Nothing really ... well, when we were filming the first one, we go through the trap door at the end of the episode. It was a drop of about twelve-fourteen feet into a net. But it wasn't one of those fire nets that gave ... springy. It was made of

rope, knotted rope, big thick rope. They put in a stunt girl for Priscilla Lawson and I held her on top of me so I'd take the impact. It was like falling on cement. Boom! No give it all. We just stopped; not a bounce.

**Al:** *That first episode had everything; you can't miss with the trap door, but that fight-it was beautiful!*

**Buster:** I use that fight in my film for the colleges. That was a *damn* good fight. Another thing happened there - when they threw me down the stairs, Bob Knight offered me hip pads, knee pads, elbow pads - the whole bit. But I told him, "Hell, no. I can roll down those stairs." Well, I did all right; I hit every corner-I was sore all over.

**Al:** *That fight, though ...*

**Buster:** Well, I'll tell you, there were three wrestlers. The big guy, the big ugly guy, was the mad Russian. He was, at that time, a big draw: always the heavy at the Legion Stadium in Hollywood. We worked out the routines together; there's lots of rolls in the thing. When I picked those guys up, I wasn't doing all the work, they were helping me. Those guys knew leverage. You can pick them up like nothing; they did their own falls. It was one of the better

fighters I did.

**Al:** *I don't know whether you know it, but that torn shirt was a piece of artwork. It was the most beautiful torn shirt I've ever seen.*

**Buster:** They just let it go, and it got worse and worse and worse ...

**Al:** *Speaking of fights, one of the nicest fights I ever saw was in one of your movies, *Swampfire*.*

**Buster:** Well, that was a real fun movie for me. There was one scene in there - in the bar. I'm loaded; Carol Thurston's boyfriend comes and tells me that Weissmuller's come back. I leave the house and go to the little dance in the bar. I'm dancing around, having fun, and I bump Weissmuller. He says something; I say something back. And finally I say to him, with the Cajun accent I'm playing with, "You don't even know how to pilot your ship." So the director says, "Cut. Bus, maybe you'd better change that line to 'boat'."

**Al:** *That fight, though, was very well done.*

**Buster:** Which one? In the bar, or ...

**Al:** *When you regain consciousness, He belts you after you set fire to the swamp; then he tries to start the*



"That torn shirt was a piece of artwork."







"Swampfire was one of the fun pictures for me."

boat; you come to and jump him ...

**Buster:** That was the water fight we did in a little lake. It was October or November – the water was cold as hell. First thing Weissmuller said when he came on the set was, "Where's the brandy?" We hadn't even got in yet! "Where's the brandy!" So they got him a bottle of brandy to keep him warm. He'd take a belt; we'd do a piece of the fight; he'd take another; and so on. I can't take any kind of whiskey at all when I'm cold – never could – it'll come right up.

Anyway, by the afternoon, this guy's feeling no pain. In the last scene we're supposed to go down and you don't know which one's going to come up. No bubbles, nothing. Well, he wasn't holding his breath long enough, and was coming up too soon and spoiling the shot. We did the damned thing about three times, and I thought, "I'll keep him down this time." So I wrapped myself around him and he'd try to go up, and I'd pull him back down – this was about half a minute – enough so I finally let him up. He was spitting and cursing and mad as hell. "God damn you," he hollered. "You are trying to kill me!" He was still half-loaded—so that was how I almost drowned Johnny Weissmuller.

**Rich:** Weissmuller gave a talk at the BOSCON recently.

**Buster:** Have you heard about the Harvard thing? He never got on the stage. There were a lot of black guys there and he always used to beat hell out of the savages in his pictures. They shouted and jeered and wouldn't let him go on. He never did go on.

**Al:** *One of your films I haven't seen, and would like to, was the Tarzan flick.*

**Buster:** It was a serial originally. They cut a feature out of it and ran it in the picture houses, then brought it back as a serial – every Friday night; every Saturday afternoon. It had a pretty good run, but it wasn't a good Tarzan film. It didn't have enough production stuff.

When I was a kid, I was on the high school football team with a guy named Pumps Cyro. The talk around the school was that his older brother was a Hollywood actor who'd played Tarzan. When I got to Southern California and finally got into films, I looked for his name but I never did see it in print. His name was Sam Cyro, but he had a Hawaiian name, Malama or something. Anyway, it turned out that he had been the second Tarzan, but while doing a picture something had happened: they had this bad elephant who was getting worse and worse as the picture went along. In one of the scenes they had driven a telephone pole into the ground and chained the elephant to the pole. Tarzan had to free the elephant, then ride it out of there. The elephant got excited – pulled the pole out of the ground. It hit the guy on the head and killed him. They finished the thing with a double. I don't know if Gene Pollard is the guy who took his place, but he's getting credit now as Number Two.

**Al:** *Another Tarzan, Herman Brix (Bruce Bennett), was a friend of yours, wasn't he?*

**Buster:** We roomed together. I was in school; he was out of school. He'd gone to the University of Oregon. He was quite an athlete – good football player. I think of all the Tarzans, I mean *all* of them, Brix was the best build-wise.

Did you know about his career? He was an oarsman, and a trackman. He got second in the shotput in 1928; got beat by a guy named John Tuck by about six inches. In 1930–31 he was national champion in the shotput; looked like he was going to walk away with the Gold Medal in 1932. In late '31, early '32, he was working out early in the afternoon. A fellow in the ring lost control of the shot. They yelled at Brix. He turned and caught it in the shoulder: tore all the muscles in the area and knocked him out of the Olympics. A guy named Sexton out of the New York Athletic Club ended up winning with a shot about fourteen feet short of where they're putting it now.

**Doug:** *How did you get started in pictures?*

**Buster:** I started off dripping wet. I was working in a stock room and going to college; combining my fourth year in college with my first year of law school, which you could do at that time – it saved you a year. I worked every day from one to six o'clock, and all day on Saturday, and made eight bucks a week. I wasn't putting in enough time on the books and I was a little concerned they were going to flunk me out of the law thing completely, that I wouldn't be able to go on. It was money, basically. I just didn't have enough time to relax and hit the books. When I was offered the *King of the Jungle* thing after the Olympics, I figured I'd do it – if I did get it – because it was a hundred dollars a week. I figured I'd save all the money I could: then I wouldn't have to worry. And that's exactly what I did – I saved my money. Never went back, though.

**Al:** *Lucky for us!*

**Buster:** Well, the plus factor for me were the serials and westerns, especially the Billy the Kid westerns, which were cheaply made and played the B-houses. We made 'em in eighteen days at the start, then when the unions got more money, we made 'em in fourteen days so it balanced off. Some of those things we did in *four days!* Ride the horse, fight like the devil, Bing, Bang – that's it!

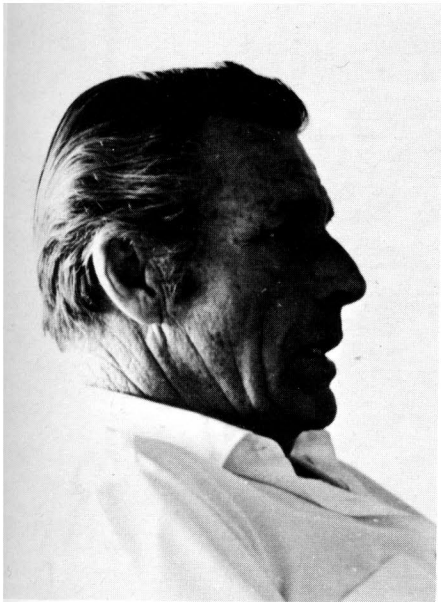
Some of them were terribly written, but when television started to become popular in 'forty-nine and 'fifty they couldn't buy the big pictures, they weren't available to television. So they had to buy whatever they could for the Late Show and the Late, Late Show, et al. The serials went for the Saturday kiddie-shows; the westerns for the evening shows. It kept me alive. It started me all over again.

I didn't know this was happening at the time, but when I came back here to do television I didn't think they would eat up as much product as they started to produce in 1951. They chewed everything up; everything that they could get hold of they sold to television. So, it kept me going. Then the Foreign Legion series was sixty-five half-hours made for television. That was almost six years national hook-up for H. J. Heinz and Co., and then syndication ... I'm trying to get hold of that series now. Nothing's been done with it for eight years.

**Al:** *I thought you owned that series.*

**Buster:** No, we sold them ... there was a deal with NBC and General Mills. General Mills ended up with them and they don't know what to do with them. They've been eight years in a library. Nothing. What we want to do is bring them back, make new negatives – maybe in sepia to brighten them up – and then host them like Dick Powell did on TV





"T.V. started me all over again."

... it's a good clean series. Agewise you can't beat it. A Legionaire uniform is a Legionaire uniform, even though the Legion is no more. A burnoose is a burnoose; an Arab is an Arab. I think it might have a chance. We haven't been able to do anything though: it's been about eight months.

**Doug:** *Your first film was King of the Jungle?*

**Buster:** Right. I thought Sidney Toler was great in that. You know the scene where they get me to the States? I'm in the cage, and the immigration guy comes aboard. He asks, "What's that guy doing in the cage?" Toler says, "Don't go near the cage; that's the Wildman!" "Wildman!" the guy says. "Give me the key." So he gives him the key, warning him all the time that he's a Wildman. Well, he was a Wildman! Over the rail he goes; over the boat's side, and swims to shore.

It was a good cast: Irving Pichel, Douglas Dumbrille, Robert Barret. Douglas Dumbrille was on at the start; he ran the compound where they caught the guy and the lions, then sold them to Robert Barret,

who was with the circus.

**Doug:** *Tell us something about your latest film, The Comeback Trail.*

**Buster:** I've been trying to get Harry Hurwitz - I'm mad at him - I want the thing out. It doesn't do me a damn bit of good in the cutting room. I'll tell you the fault of it: there's so many laughs in it, and Harry hates to cut a laugh out. He shot 144,000 feet of 35 mm. film, and it's got to be cut to 9,500-10,000 feet - that's a lot of cutting! That cuts it to about eight percent of what he had, and he hates to cut a laugh. And he's going to have to. It's a real funny picture.

*Comeback Trail* was a challenge to me. Here's a guy who's been parodying people for forty years doing an ad-lib film. Everything is ad-lib: there wasn't one written line. It's great! Let me explain one scene and you'll get what I mean. . . .

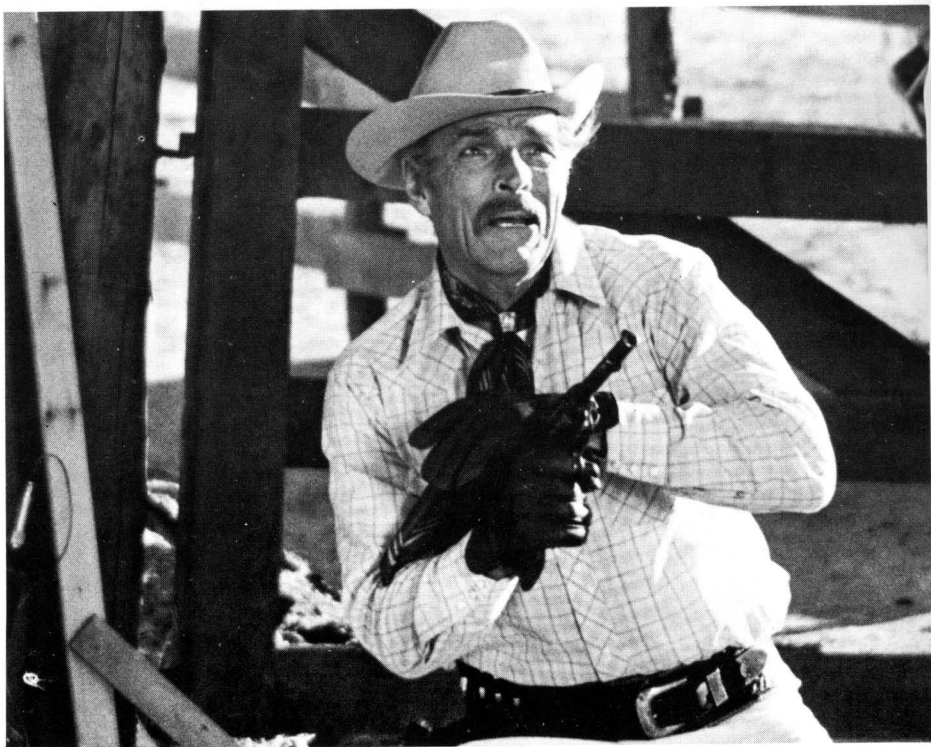
These producers have been making skin flicks - horrible skin flicks. They're losing money: half a million in round figures. They have to do something. They go back to the office to check where they can cut. They owe for raw film, for camera



rental, for gaffers, for grips, for make-up, cast — everything. They come to insurance. The big guy, Chuck McCann, says, "What's this \$12,000 for insurance?" Bob Stats explains to him, "When you make a film, you have to insure it. If something happens in the lab: if the negative is spoiled, if there's a fire, if there's a loss — the insurance company will cover it. If somebody gets hurt . . ." "Wait! What did you say?" "If somebody gets hurt, the insurance will cover it."

With the big fat guy, that starts the wheels to turning. Between them, they decide they're going to make a western, and rather than pick a young guy they might develop into a star, they're going to pick me, Duke Montana. Duke Montana (in the film) was a big western star fifteen years before, but now he's retired comfortably on a little ranch. As Harry explained to me, "You have a little ranch in the San Fernando Valley; you have money; you're comfortable, but you haven't done a film in fifteen or twenty years."

So the producers get the western



It is obvious that Buster Crabbe can still handle action roles.



"What's this \$12,000 for insurance ? "



“The *Comeback Trail* was a challenge to me.”

book out to find their star. They go down the list: George O'Brian, Charlie Starret, Hoot Gibson. The comments are, "No, he's no good," "No, this guy's gone," "He's not my type." And they come to Duke Montana; Bob Stats says, "Forget it, he's dead." Now we all *know* he's the guy they're going to use, but Bob says he's dead. Chuck McCann looks at him kind of funny, but goes on. They read down a few more names and Stats stops him, says, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. Let's check that name 'Duke Montana' - maybe he's not dead." So they look further in the book and find out he's not dead, just retired.

You see what I mean by ad-libbing? You would think, normally, that when they came to the name, Bob Stats would jump on it, yelling that that was the guy! But he doesn't, he says he's dead. It makes a much more effective scene.

**Doug:** *Other than The Comeback Trail, we know you've been spending a lot of your time on college lecture tours. Can you tell us about that?*

**Buster:** You know, this is a nostalgic thing now. I've done twenty-two colleges since last August. It was started by a friend of mine named Bill Glare, of United Films. He started off as a movie buff when he was a youngster. As he got older, each time he could, he bought whatever he could find: the old two-reel comedies, the silents, the whole bit. One summer a friend of his asked if he could supply films for a summer resort's program. He said that maybe he could. He couldn't, really, but he rustled up some movies and kept the program going. You know, they ran movies once, twice a week, whatever ... anyway, that's how he got started.

One thing led to another, and Universal heard about him and gave him a piece of the "eastern-western" states. He did such a good job there that Universal gave him a lot of stuff, including the *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* serials. That's how we got acquainted three years ago, and the reason for the lecture tour involving Flash and Buck - which is what they want to hear about now. How long this will last, I don't know.

Anyway, when he sold the serials to Southern Methodist University, he suggested they have me down to help kick off the series. I didn't know what I was getting into, but I went anyway. It was a lot of fun for me ... I got to speak with a lot of the younger fellas and gals, and the reaction was pretty good. Not long after that first lecture, the American Programs Bureau in Boston contacted me and asked if I'd be interested in taking on more colleges. I said I would when I was available. My set-up is such that some times of the year, this time of year in particular, I'm very busy, what with my swimming pools, big sales push and all. Anyway, I've done twenty-two as of day before yesterday (May 12), when I finished off Western Illinois. There'll only be a couple of dates in the summertime because of summer school, but I've got three or four schools already booked for the fall. This would indicate it will last more than a couple of months-how much more I really don't know.

**Al:** *Well, this started about ten years ago, this interest ...*

**Doug:** *A lot of kids grew up on the serials on TV ...*

**Buster:** So we run an episode of the thing, and I chat about it. You know: how



"Some of the *Billy the Kid* westerns were terribly written."

they made the light bridge; how the Clay Men; how the paralyzer ray; the Hawkmen, the Fire Dragon, whatever. I decided to do something more than that, so I got some film together in a reel. I start with how I think I got into the movies - I know damn well how I got in the movies: it was my swimming-it certainly wasn't my acting. Anyway, I knew that Paramount News had come to the Olympics in 1932, and they had the 400-meters on film. It took me three or four months and the help of a friend, but I finally got it. So I start with the 400-meter, then go into the *King of the Jungle*, and the *Flash Gordon's*. I have a couple of westerns there, too.

I'll tell you what they identify with, over and above the serial. If they don't know about them their fathers and mothers do - it's the *Captain Gallant* thing. When we show that, and when Fuzzy and my son - who's about that big (indicating four feet or so tall) - come on in

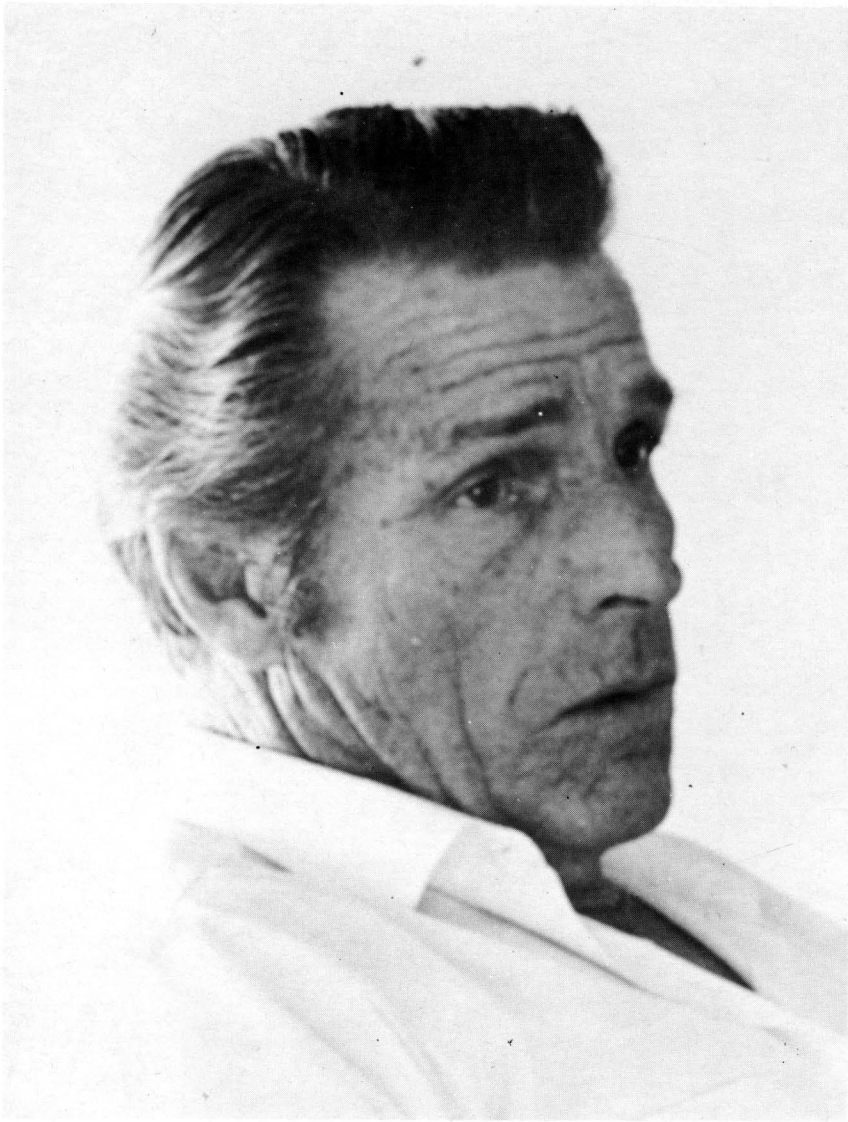


"I got to speak to a lot of young fellows and gals".



BRUNNER '72





"The old serials are a nostalgic thing now."

the introduction of cast, there's a good round of applause. It's a pleasing thing.

**Al:** *How is Cuffy?*

**Buster:** He's fine. Twenty-seven now, big boy: weighs 280. He's in building, also a dealer of ours in that area. He's got three states: New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada. He's got a tough row to hoe out there, because they're not educated to vinyl pools like people are here, with the tough winters and freezing ground and all. He's sold about twenty pools so far in about eight months.

**Al:** *That's not too bad, I guess.*

**Buster:** It's a start, but in order to make fair money he's got to do seventy-five pools (per year). Ours is an inexpensive pool; we don't mark them up like some other companies.

**Al:** *You know, we live very near the Concord, and never got to see you there. You're not working there anymore, are you?*

**Buster:** No, I'll tell you what happened – I really didn't want to go up there anymore every Saturday. I didn't mind doing some summer dates—summer Saturdays—and some convention dates; if there was a mid-week convention and I could come, I would. But I was tied down for *eighteen years*. Every Saturday I was around, I had to go to the Concord. I could never do anything; I could never go anywhere. It was horrible. I just took the bull by the horns and quit. The money was okay and all, but I couldn't go on. So I only worked about twelve week-ends in the last year.

**Al:** *When you were doing Captain Gallant for TV, were you offered the Superman role?*

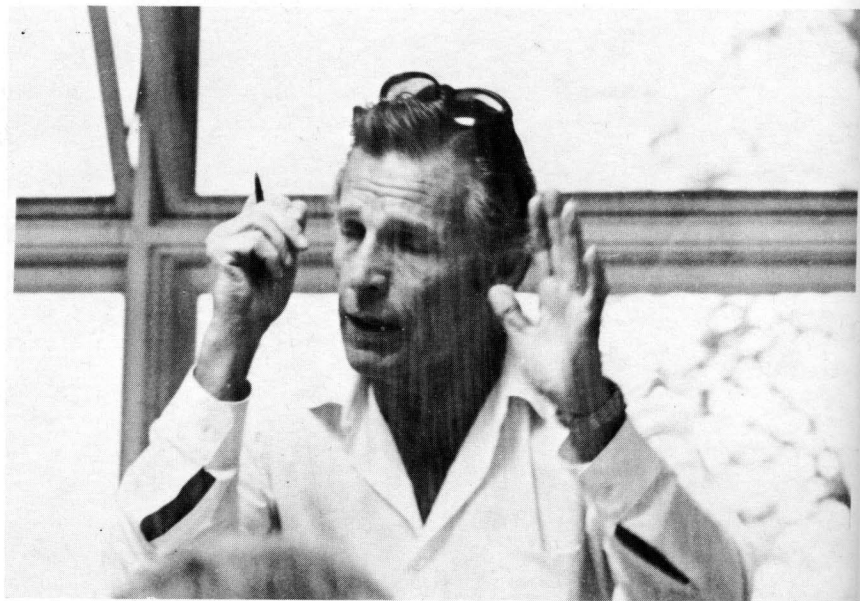
**Buster:** No. There was always one series I wanted to do: one I made a pretty good pilot for. It was a skin and scuba thing, *a la Sea Hunt*, with an independent producer. They figured one *Sea Hunt* was enough, though.

**Doug:** *As an actor used primarily in action-adventure films, what do you think of action films today?*

**Buster:** A lot rougher. I'd say, more blood and thunder. You see a lot of stuff now you couldn't have done ... hell, you couldn't even have *thought* about then ... but great stuff. I just saw *Dirty Harry*: violent as hell ... but good.

**Al:** *Having been in the business all these years, and as a movie buff, do you have a favorite actor?*

**Buster:** There're different guys for different parts. But one of my favorites has always been Brando, from the very start. I was really glad when he came back. You know, he always had a bad reputation: he got directors fired; directors quit; producers quit; everything. I was glad when Bob Evans said Brando had to be the guy in *The Godfather*. I saw the picture twice and he did a tremendous job. There was, apparently, no trouble at all. The director knew just how to handle him.



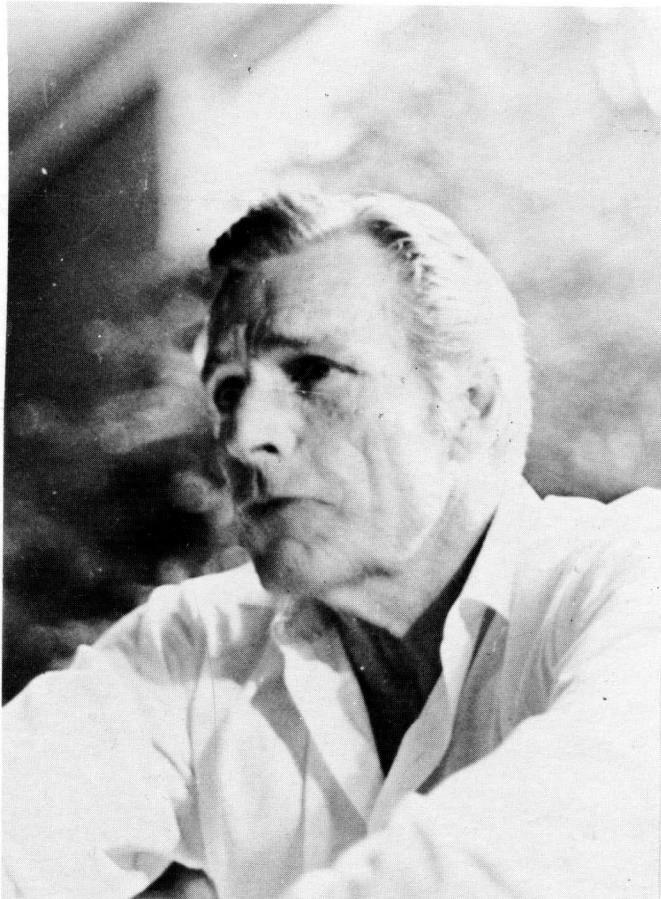
"Eighteen years!"

**Doug:** *Who was your favorite person to work with: co-star, director – anybody?*

**Buster:** *That's easy. My son, in *Captain Gallant*. I enjoyed working with him very much. Of course, we had Fuzzy with us, too. I'd worked with Fuzzy before, in the Billy the Kid westerns. He was like an uncle to Cuffy.*

**Doug:** *You won the Senior Swimming Championships last year in record time. Are you going out again this year?*

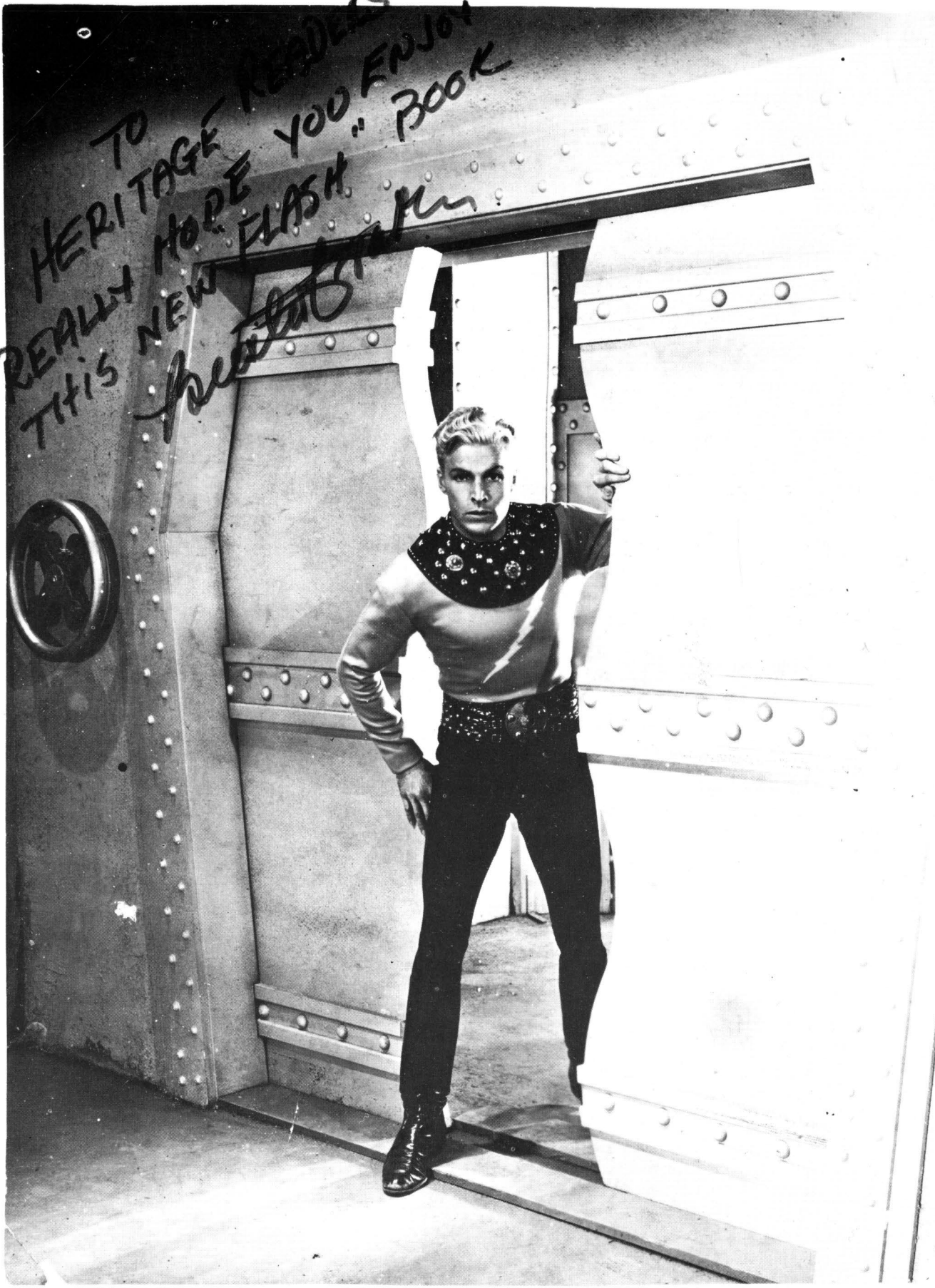
**Buster:** *Yes, I'm going to defend my title. You know, I'm in a great age group; my age is my advantage. I can beat anyone in the world my age. I think it's a great program, though. Swimming is something you can enjoy all of your life, regardless of your age.*



## EPILOUGE

*Buster Crabbe is a man who enjoys many things. He still has a zest for life, and still cares enough about the world to devote much of his time to helping young people. He is a man who has lived live to the fullest and intends to go right on doing so. We at HERITAGE have found much to admire in Buster, and wish him nothing but the best in the years to come.*

TO  
HERITAGE - NEEDLES  
REALLY HOPE YOU ENJOY  
THIS NEW FLASH BOOK  
Brent Starn



*Kenneth Smith has, in a relatively short time, become one of the most popular artists in the s-f/fantasy field. Here, in his inimitable style, he shows us his version of the great Flash Gordon.*





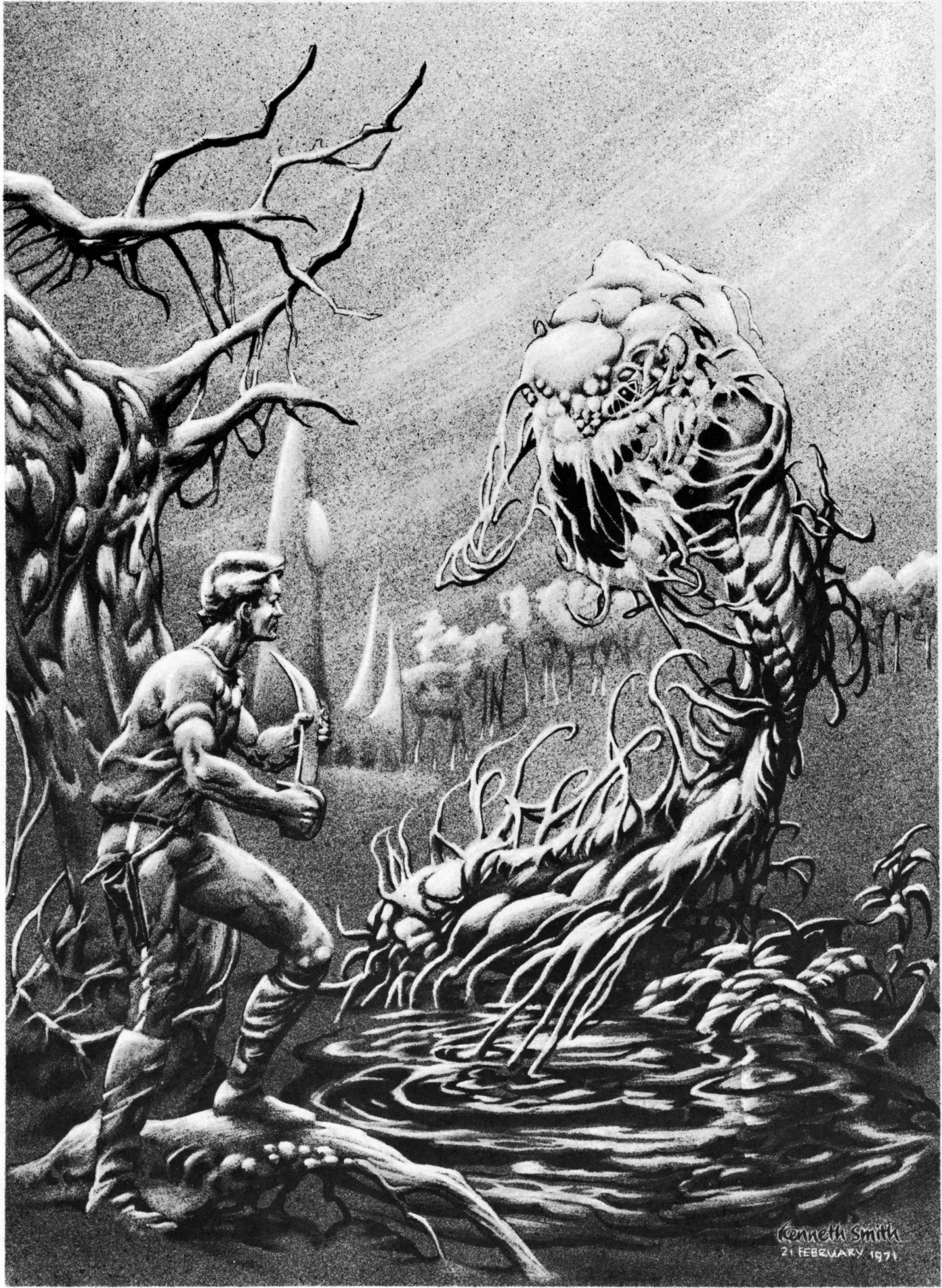
Kenneth Smith  
17 April 1965



Kenneth Smith  
17 MAY 1965



Kenneth Smith  
16 MAY 1968



Conneth Smith  
21 FEBRUARY 1971



Kenneth Smith  
27 NOVEMBER 1971

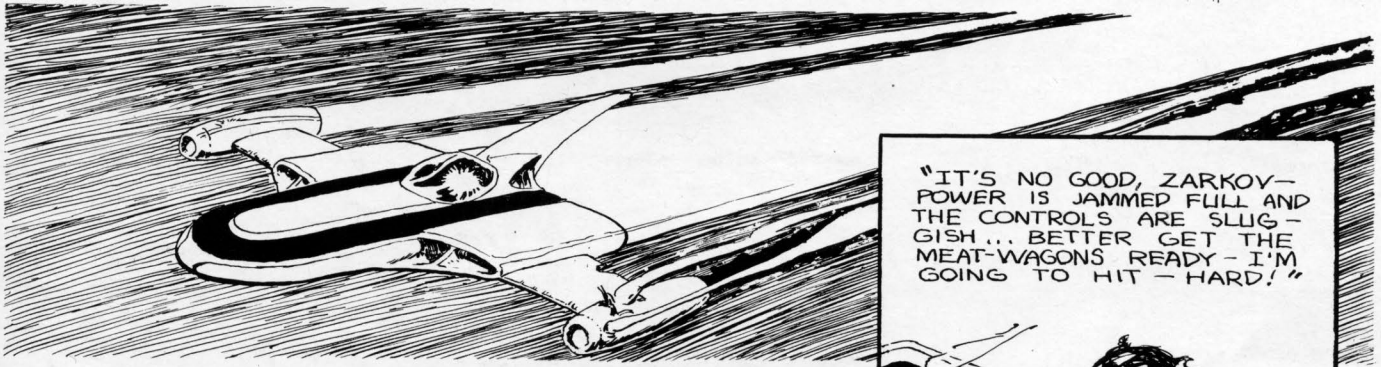


*Michael Kaluta's finely detailed artwork and light touch have earned him a nomination as **Best Young Talent** from the Comic Book Academy. Here, Mike uses his talents to show the ultimate "Crash-Landing".*



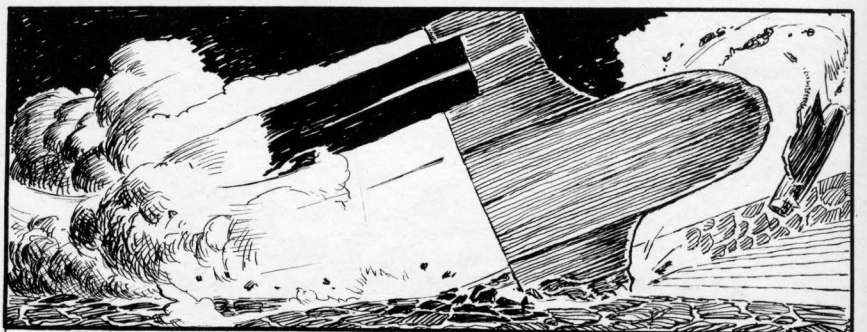
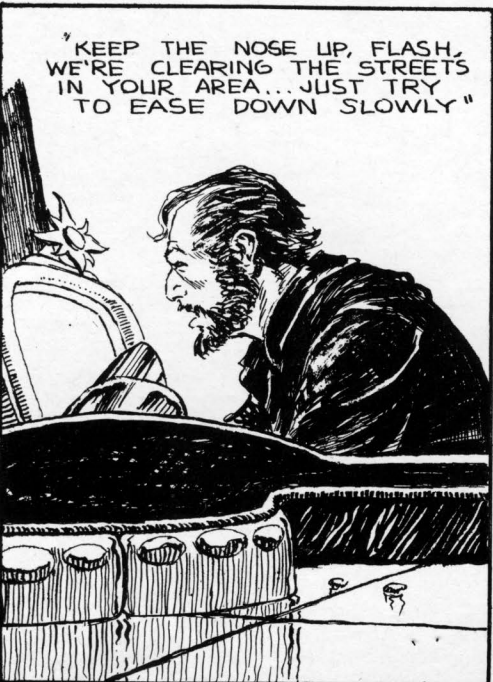
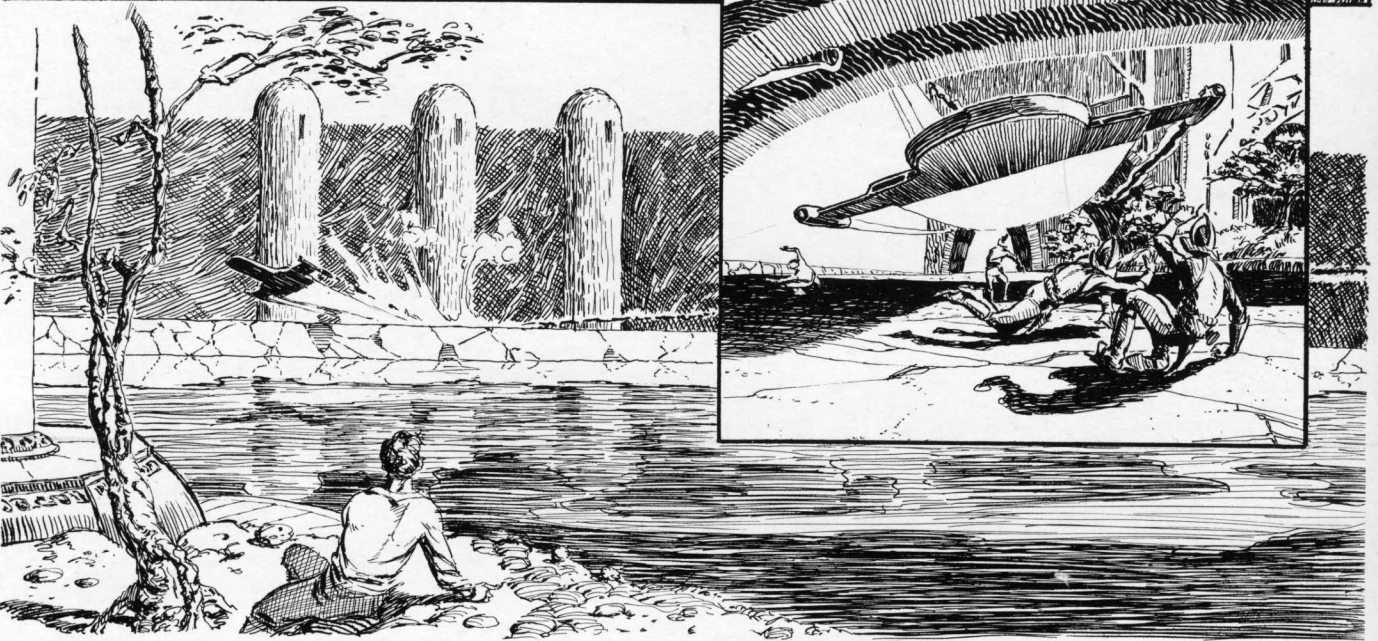
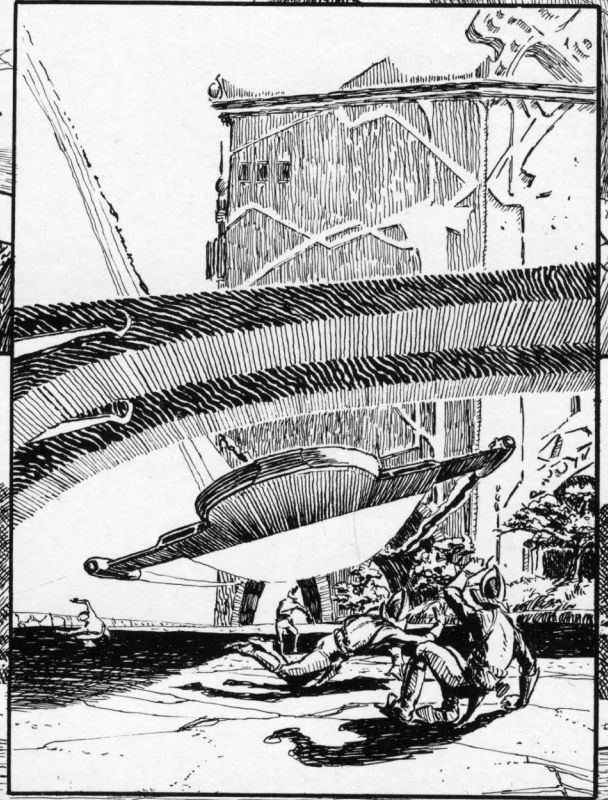
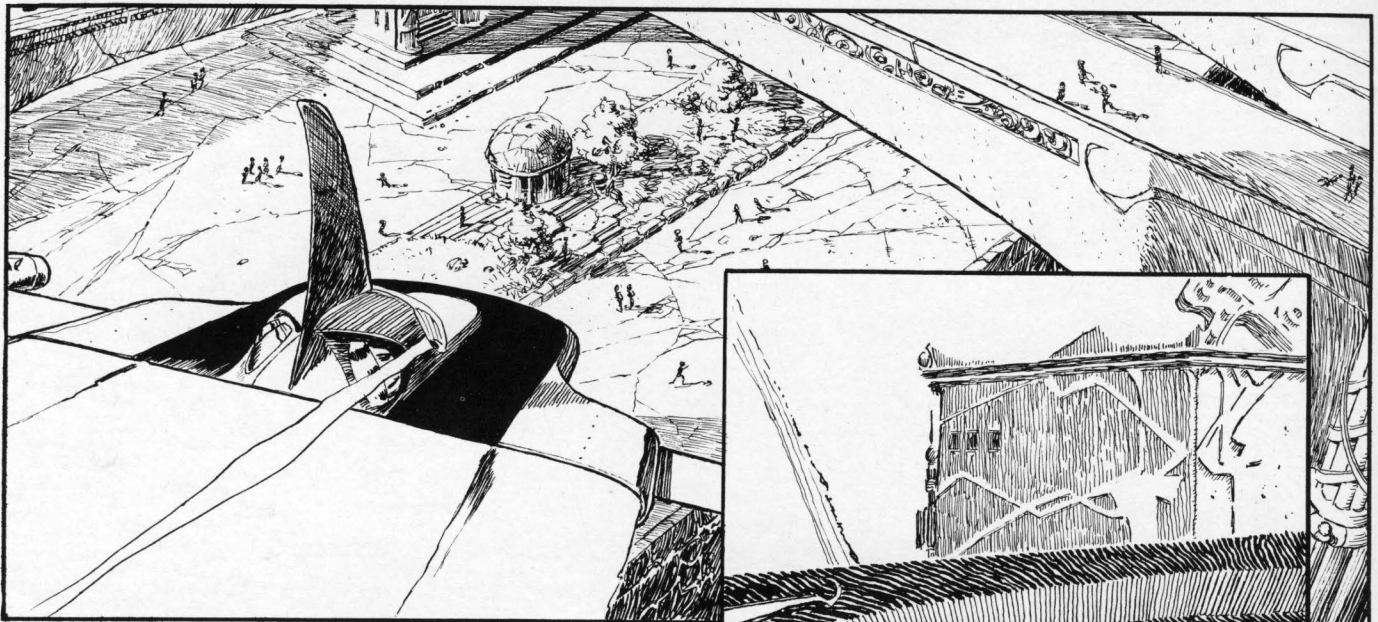


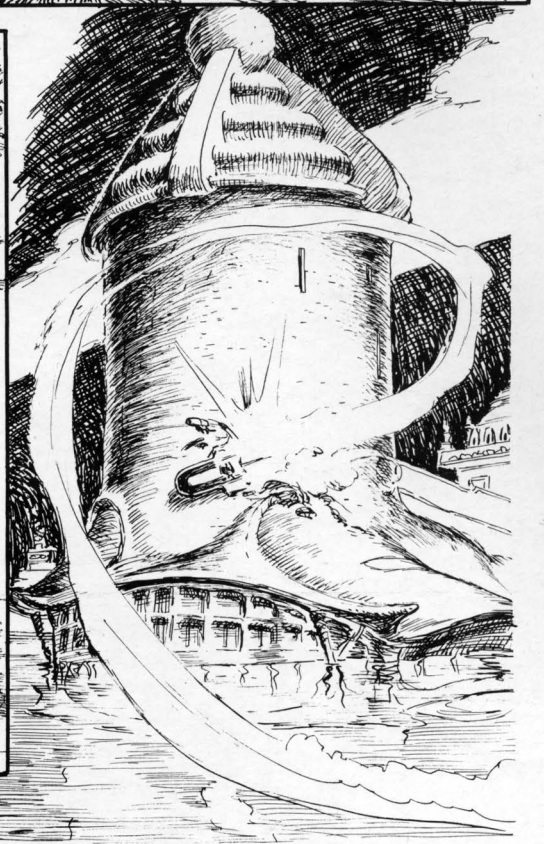
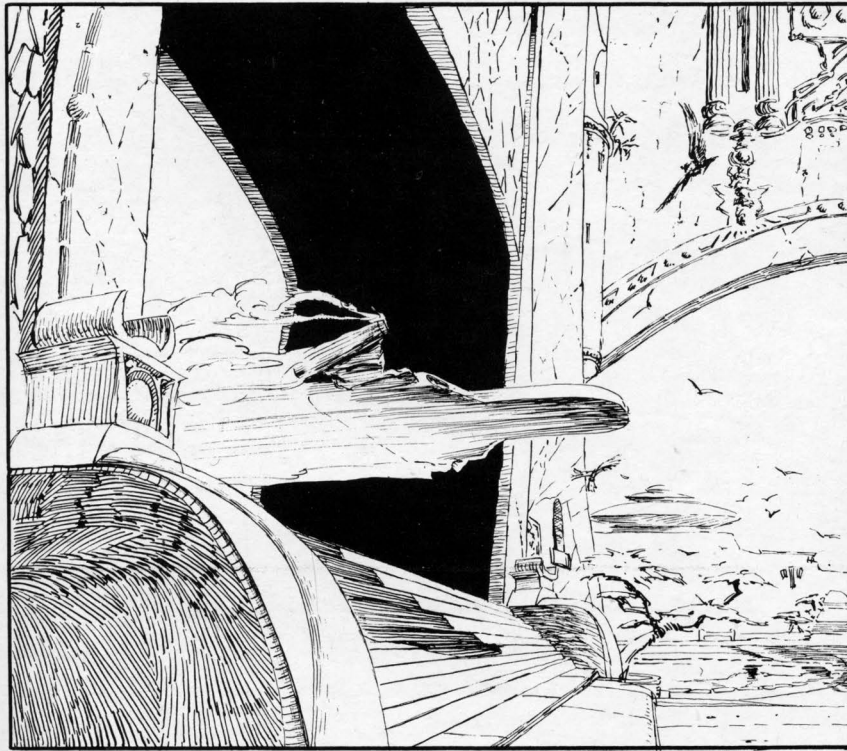
# FLASH GORDON



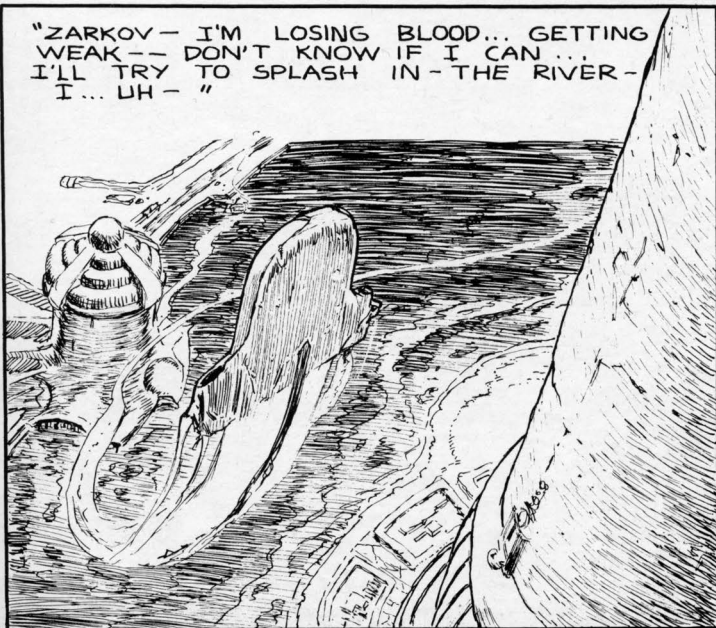
"IT'S NO GOOD, ZARKOV—  
POWER IS JAMMED FULL AND  
THE CONTROLS ARE SLUG-  
GISH... BETTER GET THE  
MEAT-WAGONS READY—I'M  
GOING TO HIT—HARD!"







"ZARKOV - I'M LOSING BLOOD... GETTING WEAK -- DON'T KNOW IF I CAN ... I'LL TRY TO SPLASH IN - THE RIVER - I ... UH - "



"STAY WITH IT, FLASH!"

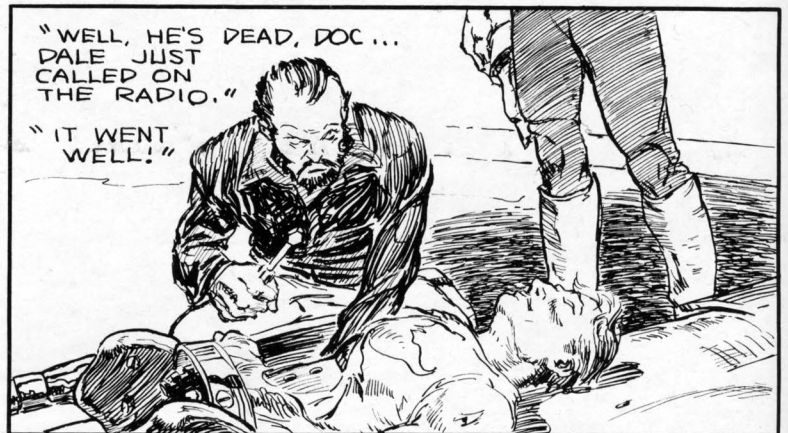




"FLASH! FLASH -"  
ANYBODY LOOKING  
AT THE WRECK COULD  
TELL - NOTHING WOULD  
HAVE SURVIVED IT.  
"I CAN'T BELIEVE  
IT!" CHOKED ZARKOV.



AND IN A SPECIAL WING OF  
THE ROYAL HOSPITAL, AN  
OLD MAN SIGHS TO HIM-  
SELF ...  
"AH... GORDON. YOU  
FINALLY BLEW IT!  
GOOD. NOW I DIE  
CONTENTED."  
... AND SLOWLY  
CLOSES HIS EYES.



"WELL, HE'S DEAD, DOC ...  
DALE JUST  
CALLED ON  
THE RADIO."  
"IT WENT  
WELL!"



"YOU'LL GET OVER IT,  
FLASH. THIS WAY HE  
DIED HAPPY. HAPPY  
AND PROUD. IT WAS  
THE LEAST WE COULD  
HAVE DONE FOR HIM."  
"YOU'RE RIGHT OF  
COURSE, DOC. LET'S  
GO HOME."

THE END

