

High Fantasy In Ink

By Abigail Mahoney-Cloutier

You could say that I was raised on ink. Max Fleischer, the creator of Koko the Clown and Betty Boop and the driving force behind the first Popeye and Superman cartoons, was my great-great-grandfather. Many of my earliest memories are of sitting on my grandparents' rug, watching the surrealist dancing of black ink on a white background that is the defining mark of many Fleischer cartoons. Something about the constantly morphing, vaguely eerie linework stuck with me even then.

When I was around six, I was introduced to a new form of fantastical art; somehow, I came into possession of a huge, illustrated guidebook-style adaptation of the film *dinotopia*, and the lush, colorful full-page artwork coupled with pen-and-ink sketches of dinosaurs and fantastical machines captured my imagination instantly. Though the book itself has long since lost its binding and been lost page-by-page to the winds of time, it was the beginning of a collection of ornately illustrated works of fantasy that now takes up much of the shelf space in my room and inevitably invades any space I occupy for long.

Though my childhood home was always full to bursting with books, I began collecting in my own right in my early teens. I had found old issues of the cult-classic comic series *ElfQuest* in a friend's father's room, and was quickly taken by the intricate inkwork and sharp contrast of the art. Finding an online database of the comic only deepened my interest, and after I had read through *ElfQuest*, I began to search for other comics and graphic novels that could elicit the same emotions.

I often visited comic shops for hours, pulling books off the shelves and reading them at random. I took an interest in Japanese *Manga*, reading through several popular series but never staying with a particular work for more than a few months. At the same time, I was also diving deeper into the more

obscure parts of global folklore and science fiction, spending hours pursuing little-known myths and mythical beasts and vintage space opera lore buried deep in Wikipedia pages.

Over many years, through chance finds in tiny comic shops and the edges of bookstore's foreign comics sections, I have amassed a collection of obscure, yet beautifully illustrated fantasy books. The sleek, saturated full-page spreads of *Rocket Girl*, the overblown vintage kitsch of *Big Guy And Rusty The Boy Robot* (an incredibly lucky find from a box of discarded books in a basement), the edgy, psychedelic Fae fantasy of *Spill Zone*, and the spare, yet plaintively beautiful linework of *Wolf Children Ame And Yuki*, all co-exist in my library as a fantastical dream-multiverse. Delicate inkwork, a favorite illustration style of mine, spirals and drips from *Milkyway Hitchhiking's* pastel watercolor breezes to *Elfquest's* densely packed monochrome. Subject Matter ranges from *Man After Man's* speculative science to *The Saga Of Rex's* barely-linear heroic epic.

My love of these drawn worlds has grown beyond books; I regularly engage in cosplay, the hobby (or art) of crafting detailed, fantastical costumes from found or made objects; I also make small-batch walnut ink from walnuts gathered from local trees, spending many winter days and nights boiling, stirring, and straining the ink until it is as dark and thick as black velvet. I am also an aspiring ink artist myself, preferring a loose, relaxed cartooning style rendered in black pen. My book collection, built up over a lifetime appreciating the intersection of fantastical worlds and intricate artwork, inspires me daily, and hopefully will continue to until the day that I can add my own book to the shelf.

Bibliography

Aiese, A., Allen, B., Ellis, G., Laiho, M., & Stevenson, N. (2015) *Lumberjanes* volumes I-II. Los Angeles, CA: BOOM! Studios

The first two volumes of a feel-good, feminist series centering on a girls' summer camp in the middle of a supernatural forest, drawn in a simple style, charming and fun, a favorite read on summer camping trips.

Appelbaum, Stanley. (1990) *The Complete "Masters of the Poster"*. Toronto, Ontario: General Publishing Company Ltd.

A compendium of the extravagant ink and paint illustrations of the Art Deco period, a useful stylistic reference since high school.

Crabb, John. (2016) *Graven Images: The Art Of The Woodcut*. London, England: The British Library

A collection of annotated ink woodcuts from the European medieval and renaissance periods, a source of inspiration, historical lore, and unexpected bizzare and bawdy humor.

Darrow, Miller. (1995) *Big Guy And Rusty The Boy Robot*. Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Comics

As far as I can tell, the single volume of a beautifully illustrated ode to the *Kaiju* and *Mecha* genres of Japanese filmmaking; centers around two very different robots attempting to stop an apocalyptic monster.

d'Aulaire, E.P. & d'Aulaire, I. (1962) *d'Aulaires' Book Of Greek Myths*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press

One of the first books I truly loved, a wide range of Greek mythology collected, adapted for children, and illustrated stunningly by the d'Aulaire family. This book will always be full of memories for me.

d'Aulaire, E.P. & d'Aulaire, I. (1967) *d'Aulaires' Book Of Norse Myths*. New York, NY: New York Review Of Books

Another mythology compendium by the d'Aulaires, this time encompassing Norse mythology.

Dixon, Dougal. (1990) *Man After Man: An Anthropology Of The Future*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press

A bizarre, documentary-style look at the possible evolution of *Homo sapiens* in future millennia, illustrated in a style reminiscent of vintage nature journals.

Fortune, E. & McDonagh, T. (2016) *Star Wars Galactic Maps*. Glendale, CA: Lucasfilm Press

A book of detailed maps of locations from the *Star Wars* franchise.

Gagné, Michel. (2010) *The Saga of Rex*. Berkely, CA: Image Comics

A unique version of the Hero's Journey narrative, told only through images, that follows a fox abducted to participate in an ancient alien ritual.

Goldstein, S., Goldstein, F. & Sternbach, R. (1980) *Star Trek Spaceflight Chronology*. New York, NY: Pocket Books

A vintage promotional guide to the *Star Trek* universe, featuring technical illustrations of futuristic spacecraft.

Goscinnny, R. & Uderzo, A. (2007) *Asterix Omnibus I*. London, England: Orion Books Ltd.

The first compendium of the iconic series centering around a village of superpowered Gauls that use their druid's magic to fend off the invading roman forces.

Graham, Brandon. (2017) *King City*. Portland, OR: Image Comics

A fantastical, yet strangely realistic portrayal of city life, blending more genres that I can count and utilizing incredible detailed, yet stylized illustration. Centers around a returning student of espionage and his magical cat.

Graham, Brandon. (2016) *Multiple Warheads* volumes I-II. Berkely, CA: Image Comics

In the style of *King City*, follows an organ smuggler and her half-werewolf boyfriend across a post-apocalyptic Russian landscape.

Hosada, Mamoru. (2014) *Wolf Children Ame & Yuki*. New York, NY: Yen Press

A beloved, heartbreaking manga that follows a woman who must raise her half-wolf children alone, after their father, the last of the wolves, dies.

Kui, Ryoko. (2015) *Delicious In Dungeon* volumes I-II. New York, NY: Yen Press

A quirky, lovingly drawn *Manga* series in which a group of medieval adventurers must figure out how to cook and eat the monsters they kill.

Montclare, B. & Reeder, A. (2016) *Rocket Girl* volume I. Berkely CA: Image Comics

A brightly lit comic about a girl who travels back in time to prevent a dystopian future.

Pini, Wendy. (1978-1984, 2014) *The Complete ElfQuest* volumes I-III. Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Comics

The first three collected volumes of the cult-classic fantasy epic following generations of alien elves after they crash on an alternate prehistoric Earth.

Pullivand, A. & Westerfield, W. (2017) *Spill Zone* volumes I-II (volume I signed by author). New York, NY: First Second

A unique series that chronicles the life of two girls living on the edge of The Spill, a place where another world has leaked into ours, destroying a city and warping reality.

Sirial. (2011) *Milkyway Hitchhiking* volumes I-II. New York, NY: Yen Press

The story of a cat that travels through time and space, portrayed in flowing watercolor.

Smith, Jeff. (2005) *Bone* volumes I-IX. New York, NY: Graphix

The complete series re-imagining classic fantasy themes from the perspective of kids-cartoon-esque main characters.

Ephemera

Dressing Gown & Headband Belonging to Ruth Kneitel (Daughter of Max Fleischer)

Elfquest poster, signed by authors

Elf Mage Costume (Assembled From Various Sources)

Home-Brewed Black Walnut Ink

Wishlist

1) *A Distant Soil* by Coleen Doran (Complete Series)

Highly evocative of *ElfQuest*, this space saga has eluded my grasp for years, as I have only been able to find single issues.

2) *The Complete ElfQuest* Volumes 4-5

3) *Delicious In Dungeon* Volumes 3-6

4) *Girl's Last Tour* by Tsukumizu (Full Series)

I've only ever seen the first volume of this, but I was blown away by the starkness of the illustrations. Follows two girls road-tripping through an abandoned post-apocalyptic wasteland.

5) *After Man* by Dougal Dixon

A parallel work to *Man After Man*, covering different animal species' evolution in the distant future.

6) *20/20 Vision* (Complete Anthology)

A collection by many authors depicting possible futures; I was too young for it when I first found it years ago, I would like to revisit it from an older perspective.

7) *Rocket Girl* Volume 2

8) *Giant Days* John Allison & Whitney Cogar (Entire Series)

Much like *Lumberjanes* but for a slightly older crowd, follows three girls as they navigate University life.

9) *Mirenda* by Grim Wilkins

A story told without words, I don't quite know what it's about as I'm about halfway through it as I write this, and the story keeps twisting on me! It's beautifully illustrated and I would like to own it (I'm currently renting it from the library)

10) *Scott Pilgrim vs The World* by Bryan Lee O'Malley (Entire Series)

This series' inking style has been incredibly influential on my own artwork.