



STRANGE FREQUENCIES

**Opinions and Editorial
by David Branstetter**

Tales of Fantasy #60

I wanted to take this opportunity to say that's it's a real honor to be inducted into the UFO membership. It feels amazing to be a part of an outstanding group of peers who's mission is to encourage and support it's members. I tend to be opinionated and I've been know to speak my mind on more than one occasion. I hope that I can contribute to this group in a way that both fulfills my obligations and helps stimulate productive conversation. My conversations may include suggesting changes or asking tough questions to the artists involved on a project. I hope that no one sees my "digging" as an attempt to "dig " on anyone else. I feel like anyone who self publishes is my comrade in arms. I thank you for your support and I hope to learn from you as well.

What I think I enjoyed most about Tales of Fantasy was the solid story telling brought about by Larry Johnson doing the series for an astounding 60 issues. When looking at the book from an outsiders perspective I can't help but think that the issue would be nothing more than a standard spaceman and robot story. I was delighted to find that this was not the case. The characters felt like travel weary companions. There was something compelling about the way the characters interacted with each other that helped made them feel real.

The problem with doing a "it's too good to be true story" is that as audience members we're already thinking, "yeah but I know it's going to end bad". We're already trying to figure out which way it's going to go before the story gets going. "Hmmm... an abandoned zoo. This won't go well at all." I kept reading and again the story defied my expectations. I think my favorite part was the partial

Who Man videos left behind. I like how we discover what happens to the planet just as Jesse does. Around page 22 the pace really started to pick up and I was flipping the pages as fast as I could. I liked the sense of chaos portrayed.

Issue 60 is a good “done in one” story without needing 59 previous issues to understand the story. Although it would have been nice to see the characters reference their history or have them inform the audience of an ongoing plot so that it would feel like the characters would have an eventual final destination. “Lost In Space” often had the characters doing one thing while on the look out for the next thing. Even though they never went home it kept the audience anticipating the next move.

I liked how the story essentially worked with just two characters. That kind of isolation can be difficult to write. After all this time alone Jesse is able to keep a pretty upbeat attitude about the whole thing. It didn’t seem forced. The adventure aspect of the book pushes the characters onward in a compelling way. I really hope Jesse eventually makes it back home.

Valiant Effort #3

One of the most difficult things about writing a superhero comic book from a Christian perspective is to make it believable and personable without coming across as cheesy. While I’m not quite sold on the premise that “God created an ancient superhero” I did find the main character pretty relatable. His conversion seemed pretty natural without being too preachy. This is probably more of a reflection of the personality of The Golden Protector’s writers more than anything. They do a great job of setting up a relatable character. We’ve all endured loss and blamed God for it at one point in our lives. This conflict seems pretty natural and is definitely the most relatable aspect of the book. I wish the courtship of his girlfriend would have lasted longer. That conflict, while a convenient place to explain the benefits of Christianity, would have been more heartfelt if it had lasted a bit longer. Such a thing does happen in the real world and again that was one of the more enjoyable passages from this issue.

The most difficult transition occurred when the man became a superhero. It felt like the terror,

heartache, and conflict were gone. The Christianity angle adds a weird conflict because he discovers through his anger the strength and abilities of his costume. He's really torn from a moral standpoint as to what he should do. He also doesn't wonder about if the costume came from God or the Devil. He just assumes that it's a gift from God.

If it's not too late in the story I would suggest adding an element that the costume is ultimately a trap made by Satan. If used too much the Golden Protector believes that his own will is the source of power and not from God. Ultimately the character would become more dependent on himself and begin to ignore God. I think that conflict, being in love with his own power, could ultimately propel the comic and it's stories into some strange and dark territory.

The heroes journey always involves being brought down to a low point and finding the will to overcome it all. I commend Don Ensign and the other creators involved in the book for taking on such a controversial subject and trying to do something new with it.

Ditkomania #90

I just finished reading *Ditkomania #90*. It's my first entry into the larger world of Steve Ditko. I'm not as familiar with Ditko as I'd like to be and I only own a few collections of his work. Essentially he's a major influence of some of my major influences. Learning to appreciate Ditko seems like reading a history book in high school. I say that to emphasize that as a reader I'm not mesmerized by Ditko himself. Or maybe a better way to put it is that it hasn't developed into mania yet. The thing I enjoyed about Ron Frantz's Ditko memoir was that it was able to fill in some of my gaps over the history of comics and independent publishing. For instance I'd heard of the story of how Jerry Siegel was requesting independent publishers to take up interest on some undeveloped properties. I've only heard Dave Sim's version of events so it was nice to see the larger story in place. My favorite passages dealt with the precise descriptions of Ditko's clothes and apartment. Frantz's descriptions seemed to perfectly capture the milieu. Seeing how few photographs of Ditko exist, these descriptions help paint a better picture of the recluse. Being a native Oklahoman I couldn't help to be proud of

all the places that Frantz had mentioned. I had no idea that Oklahoma had such a thriving comic book community.

I do disagree with Frantz's views toward Ayn Rand and how it has affected Ditko's life. Not that I'm a subscriber of that belief system it's just that the Black and White truth is almost always more beneficial in the end. I'm not saying that life has no room for compassion or generosity. I'm simply saying that single-minded dedication to one idea or belief over an extended period of time can bring about radical changes assisted by single-minded determination and commitment (this is not the ideal lifestyle for the lonely). For instance the 300 issue run of Cerebus would not have been possible if Dave Sim had simply said "Well times are tough and sales are dropping. Better quit now". No. He stuck with it through ups and downs, good times and bad. By doing so he was able to overcome all obstacles and obtain a monumental achievement in comic books. As a publisher, Frantz was never committed to seeing a larger project to the end. Granted he was able to develop a relationship with Ditko (to the envy of many), publish new Ditko material, and had the opportunity to live out

some of his childhood fantasy. In that regard he was a runaway success. When the fun went away and reality crept back in it was easy to say, "There's no market for this work". I'm not being overtly harsh when criticizing Frantz. I'm speaking for the experience of being a self publisher for many years. The enjoyment ebbs and flows but the commitment to seeing my work to it's completion is always in the forefront of my mind. Essentially some people can say "I was there" and others can say "I did something". I'm in the position of straddling both of those worlds. At some point I'll have to make a decision to run to either side. I think one of the benefits from observing a man like Ditko is that we can see how that single-minded determination has had a lasting impact on pop culture. In a world where everyone is bending over backwards to "secure a sale" it's beautiful to see someone who brazenly takes the opposite approach. I think because of those principles Ditko's myth and legend will always remain.

**Send you Questions
or Comments to:**

David Branstetter
4212 frisse Ave.
Evansville, IN 47714
strawmancomics@gmail.com