Featuring Sal Velluto, Noah Van Sciver, Howard Tayler, Sam Rodriguez, Emily Muto, Adam Koford, Tyler Kirkham, Dorothy Delgado, Galen Dara, and Brian Crane.

GUEST EDITOR: THERIC JEPSON
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S U N S T O N E

Guest editor’s introduction

HOW TO BECOME A MORMON-COMICS SNOB IN FIVE EASY STEPS

By Theric Jepson

HELLO. I’M THERIC. IT’S 2010. AND I HAVE JUST (indirectly) had an appalling experience.

My wife Lynsey was more disappointed than stunned recently when only four women showed up to our ward’s normally vigorous Relief Society book club in July. She was leading a discussion of Persepolis, Marjane Satrapi’s excellent memoir in comics. One woman was two hours late. One pre-announced no-show—who reads 300 books a year and would never just watch the movie instead—said she’d just watch the movie instead. To be fair (and because I know that bookgroup members Karen and Mindy and who-knows-how-many others subscribe to this magazine), our ward attendance at all meetings drops during the summer; but for me, who once eavesdropped jealously on this bookgroup’s incisive discussion of a YA novel, I am saddened to think that many of its literate and erudite members apparently saw Persepolis as only a silly picture book. Satrapi is recounting her child’s-eye view of the overthrow of the Shah’s regime! The Islamic Revolution! War with Iraq! Members of her family are kidnapped and executed! These are heady topics and Satrapi handles them with grace, aplomb, humor, and pain. Persepolis, in short, is great art.

Breaking news: It’s 2010, and though not everyone has heard, the battle over whether comics are art is over. Fine-art museums across the country have been sponsoring comic-art shows, and comics have won or been shortlisted for most major book awards. A 2009 study from Simba Information, a market research and analysis group, found that one in ten adult bookbuyers buys comics. In other words, the English teacher at your local high school may be assigning comic books instead of burning them—where I teach, even history teachers assign comics. So if you’re one of the nine in ten who haven’t bought any comic books lately, consider owning this mag the first R in your repentance process.

Just last year—2009—the memoir-in-comics Stitches, by David Small, won even more than the 14 awards he lists on his website, including ALA award nominations, NPR Best Books, Publisher’s Weekly Top Ten, Amazon.com Ten Best Books, and accolades from the Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, and Barnes & Noble. I could name more if you’re still dwindling in Stitches unbelief.

And 2009 offered plenty more work to convince the skeptical: from R. Crumb’s take on the book of Genesis, to Seth’s Babbit-esque George Sprott, to Logicomix—a dizzying biography of a mathematician. Or perhaps I could interest you in comics journalism—2009 saw the release of books on Katrina and Afghanistan. Or maybe noir murders are more your style? Or hilarious Canadian action? Run a Google search for best and comics and 2009 and see what you come up with. It was a good year.

Maybe you’re wondering now why your university didn’t include Winsor McCay or George Herriman as part of that humanities survey you took freshman year. (Next time the alumni association sends you a letter asking for money, I suggest you ask them if your hard-earned dough will help fund a required course giving the kids a foundation in Famous Funnies—the first modern comic book, made of reprinted newspaper strips—and Action Comics—the first superhero comic.)

But fear not! I, Theric, am not here to kick sand in your face! In five easy steps, I can help you learn enough to not only understand the basics of comics generally, but to become your neighborhood’s first genuine Mormon-comics Snob.

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ThERIC JEPSON is an accidental Mormon-comics snob. He blogs at MOTLEYISION.ORG where vestiges of his snobdom first came to light. He is the editor of The Fob Bible, and his short fiction has appeared in Arkham Tales, Dialogue, and other venues.
STEP 1: COMICS AS ART

SINCE MY GOAL is to make you a snob, I’m not going to spend any time convincing you of the validity of superhero comics or the Sunday funnies. Instead, we’re going to talk about “high-art” comics. To appreciate them properly, you need a grounding in theory. Or at least the capacity to fake a grounding in theory. And since we’re being snobs, let’s start with a current buzzword in academia: liminality. Hey, comics rock the liminal like no other art form!

With comics—or sequential images—the gutter between panels is where the story actually takes place. Words and pictures are placeholders for story—the actual story unfolds within our brains. As our eyes jump across that little strip of white space between panels, our amazing brain dips into the liminal to construct a narrative linking the two panels. That’s how comics work. And if you can drop your fancy new vocab onto an unsuspecting dinner guest, he’ll have no choice but to agree with you.

As Scott McCloud says, “in the world of comics, time and space are one and the same.” How is this accomplished?

Through the liminal.

Now, practice saying it in a mirror. Through the liminal. You’re looking snobbier already.

STEP 2: KNOWING THE SCENE

IF YOU’VE EVER been a snob in any field, you know there are concentric circles of snobbery. Populating the outer circle are those who know only about the excellence everyone else knows; but in the inner circle are those who know of the excellence so excellent that only they know it. I’ll give you some of both.

Chris Ware’s Jimmy Corrigan is one of the most brilliant, complex, and depressing books of any sort I’ve ever read. In The Guardian, reviewer Phil Daoust calls it “a rare and uplifting example of an artistic vision pushed to the limits.” And Peter Schjeldahl, in the New Yorker, describes it as “the first formal masterpiece of [the] medium,” and while we can quibble about the word “first,” nothing else in that quotation is arguable. Anyone who, after reading Jimmy, still thinks comics cannot be great art is not worthy of comics and should just go read Philip Roth.

Knowing about Jimmy Corrigan is step one in becoming a comics snob. You must read it. Then read it again, if your heart can handle it. It’s been about eight years since I last read it, and I still haven’t quite recovered.

If you’re used to simple six-panel pages, you’ll be amazed at the complexity and precision of Ware’s pages. He throws around unique and ingenious layouts that can challenge the newcomer, but, should you need additional motivation to read his work, rest assured that reading Ware will encourage your brain to form new neural pathways, thus staving off dementia by up to five years for every hour spent reading. Guaranteed.

Next, read Craig Thompson’s Blankets, the best young-love story in any medium since, I don’t know, Romeo and Juliet? Thompson’s beautiful, flowing lines are exactly how I wish I could draw.

To be a proper snob, you must know that Art Spiegelman’s Maus took a Pulitzer. You must know that Gene Luen Yang’s American Born Chinese won the Printz and is the best immigrant story in recent memory. You also need to read some Will Eisner if you want to be taken seriously. Reading Kate Beaton’s hilarious historical webcomics and Jeff Lemire’s wrenching paper comics, and Seth’s (one name—like Madonna) cold hermetic retro-ish works will give a Canadian dimension to your snobbery.

Try a few verbal jabs to put the other snobs off their game,
obvious-but-unspoken facts like, “Daniel Clowes is overrated,” or “R. Crumb doesn’t suck nearly as much now that he’s an old man,” or “All Jason characters look the same.”

Now that you’re familiar with some of the better-known names, it’s time to delve into the names of top-notch artists of whom lesser geeks remain ignorant. Try these party-friendly phrases: “Tom Neely’s The Blot offers a master’s course in composition.” “Did you see Dan Zettwoch’s old church bulletin?” “Graham Annable’s Burden was the most startling exploration of sibling rivalry I’ve ever read.” “Joseph Lamber’s Turtle, Keep it Steady!—best musical comic ever?” “I’m not sure if Thomas Ott is inherently awesome or just German.” “Besides being too French for its own good, Nicolas de Crécy’s Glacial Period degenerated into clichés and moralizing.”

Congratulations, you can now hold your own in any conversation.12

STEP 3: FAKING THE BASICS OF MORMON COMICS

NOW THAT YOU’RE an expert in comics generally, you need to become an expert in Mormon comics. Just a few casually placed obscure-yet-earthshatteringly-important facts will be enough to confirm your expertise. Imagine with me:

SCENE: Mormon-minded minglers mingle. YOU are approached by WERF who is holding a copy of the day’s paper. YOU see the comics peeking out, so YOU ask:

YOU: Been reading the comics?
WERF looks embarrassed.
YOU: Did you know that the fellow who does Pickles is Mormon?
WERF: Really?

WERF: Um. Why not?
YOU: Well (Sniff here.), as you know (Arch eyebrows here.), 1992 was a banner year for Mormons in comics. That’s the year Mike Allred started publishing Madman, and he went on to become the Warholian pop master of modern comics.14 It’s also the year James Owen started publishing Starchild,15 and you know how terrific that series is. And, perhaps most important, it’s the year Brad Teare’s Cypher arrived in book form. He has ten volumes worth of Cypher planned and (Lean in conspiratorially here.), I hear he’s started work on it again.16 That was also the year Shauna Mooney Kawasaki illustrated her first kids’ book.17 Would that she published comics more provocative than the ones she draws for The Friend!18

WERF: Uhhh.

Having exhausted your knowledge, excuse yourself to get another gourmet organic root beer, leaving the impressionable WERF thinking that if you know this much about just one year, you must know everything about everything. Occam’s razor insists.

STEP 4: NAVIGATING THIS ISSUE

S UNSTONE, OF COURSE, has always published panel cartoons, from the greats like Pat Bagley and Cal Grondahl, and more recently Jeanette Atwood’s getting-better-every-month take on the Book of Mormon. So it’s natural that SUNSTONE should now present a smattering of what Mormon comics looks like today.

The first thing to note is the breadth of style in these pages: So many Mormons making comics of so many different kinds! Look at Galen Dara’s earthy mysticism (page 60). Witness Nick Perkins’s bobble-headed National Treasure (page 84). Then ask yourself: How could they be more different?

And this collection is just a smattering of what’s out there. Check out Elna Baker’s autobiographical comics on her website (ELNABAKER.COM). Thrill at the competition between Ryan Ottley and Ethan Van Sciver for Most Popular Superhero Artist du Jour. Jake Parker just released his first book, Missile Mouse, and his entry on page 55 just proves that he’ll only get bigger and better with each coming year. Howard Tayler gets Hugo nominations like his brother gets fleas.19 Speaking of getting bigger, Ethan’s brother Noah is looking like a strong contender for Indie Artist of the Coming Decade. And Joshua Smeaton? Alas, I only learned about him the day after submissions were due. He seems cool. Maybe next time, Joshua. Maybe next time.20

Don’t worry about navigating this issue; just let it flow. Skip around. Read what strikes you; then flip a
Comics is going through a stage where it seems like every work needs to include some meta elements. David Small's Stiches is no exception.

few pages and read some more. Expect to be surprised. Be willing to read your favorites six or seven times—and the ones you hate twice as many times.

STEP 5:
ASK—WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MORMON COMICS? WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

Congratulations! I can already see some geeky muscles popping out on your brain. Feels good, doesn't it? And things that feel good make us want to share them with those we love. So buy extra copies of this issue for your friends and family.

Also, type some of the names from the table of contents into Google and joyfully learn that Kevin Beckstrom produces an online strip about Nephite family life (ZARAHEMLATIMES.COM), that Adam Koford has produced hundreds of gags with his oldtimey hobo cats (APELAD.BLOGSPOT.COM), that Patrick Scullin just got a Super Siblings book out, and that Brandon Dayton's Sunstone entry is related to his Green Monk thing. Won't that be exciting! Then you can send that info on to your friends and family too! And if your efforts bring just one soul into Mormon-comics snobdom, how great will be your joy?

Pretty dang great.

And keep your eyes open as we move into the future. Dorothy Delgado is working on a book-length project about her experiences as a young widow; the Morrison brothers are also working on a larger project while Blair Sterrett has his fingers in about a million different projects. What else? Just watch—you'll see.

So read this issue. Share this issue. Then go forth and read some more.

It's a great big Mormon-comics world out there.

Notes

1. Like Japanese soldiers wandering out of the Philippine jungle.
2. The second R is read.
3. See a review on page 84. Though Crumb's The Book of Genesis is often called "controversial," I'm not really sure who's supposed to be mad about it. Fact is, it may well be the best thing he's ever done. Though maybe I should point out that I say this as someone who generally despises Crumb, even if he is widely considered a master of the form.
4. Actually, Yellow Kid strips were compiled into a book first, but that was long enough before Famous Funnies that they feel like a different phenomenon.
5. I am quick to point out, though, that examples of great artistry exist in both formats. Watchmen is the superhero comic with the reputation that just won't stop and I've got bets down that Peanuts will survive as one of the most admired pieces of twentieth-century American art one hundred years from now.
6. Not to suggest that comics have to tell a story. They don't. But I think comics are most powerful when used as a medium of narration, so that's what we're going to discuss.
7. Namedropping is important in being a snob. I hope you're taking notes.
8. As long as we're talking about Scott McCloud, I should mention that it's no longer possible to be a serious student of comics without having read his Understanding Comics. It's a treatise on comics in comics form. Just as it should be.
9. I'm talking U.S. and Canada here, primarily. Any mention of other artists will be purely accidental.
10. Or is that Shaun Tan's The Arrival? They're both so good I can't choose.
11. Again, one name—like Madonna.
12. Just remember this snob trick when someone asks you about something you've never heard of before. Roll your eyes and say, "Oh. That." You can get away with that about four times per conversation, which is generally ample.
13. To the best of my knowledge, the only gender-neutral pronoun to come out of BYU.
14. They'd better. Sheesh. Anyone who claims to know anything about Mormon comics but doesn't know Mike Allred deserves a smack. The only time Mormon comics has become national news is when he quit some high-paying gigs to draw Book of Mormon comics.
15. While Starchild has long been Owen's flagship, honestly he's best known in the business not for his art or writing but for his rabid self-promotion. (Which I find remarkable since I made arrangements at the 2009 Comic-Con to interview him later, yet he's never returned my emails. How does that qualify as rabid self-promotion?)
16. Don't hold your breath. Tearse is mostly pursuing painting these days, but you can see his classy scratchboard-style monthly in The Friend. He has also done a lot of art for Sunstone and Dialogue.
17. I know picture books technically aren't comics, but come on! It's Shauna Mooney Kawasaki!
18. Kawasaki may be the most recognized artist in Mormon circles. Look her up. You'll recognize her line quality immediately.
20. And, after finalizing this essay but before going to press, I learned that the new guy in my ward also draws the crowdsourced webcomic Midtoon. The smallness of our world only proves how dang big it is.
21. In a public, well traveled corner of your house, I presume.
22. Only five bucks at BRANDONDAYTON.COM!
Various reactions
when people
found out I was
a member of The
Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints

Drop me off here, I
don't want you to know
where I live.

Isn't it against
your religion to
work with some-
one like me?

My Mom used to
be LDS, ... but she
gave it up.

I hear we have
something in common,
... we were both
baptized members
of the church.

Why can't you be inspiring
like this LDS woman I
know?

I'm sorry
I'm not her.

That's cool...
**HOWARD TAYLER**

*I'm being serious. Listen to this list...*

GLUCOSE, FRUCTOSE, CORN SYRUP SOLIDS, CONCENTRATED COCOA-BEAN EXTRACT, ASSORTED METHYLXANTHINE ALKALOIDS (INCLUDING CAFFEINE, THEOBROMINE, AND THEOPHYLLINE), SODIUM LAURETH SULFATE, MINOXADYL, BUCKMINSTER FULLERENE, CODEINE, HYPER-EPHEDRINE, NICOTINE, WITH BPA AND BHT ADDED TO PRESERVE FRESHNESS.

SERGEANT, YOU WILL BE DRINKING A VERY HEAVY STIMULANT COCKTAIL CUT WITH SHAMPOO AND INERT ULTRA-TENSILE CARBON.

I don't drink it. I eat it straight.

AND I SUSPECT YOU'RE ADDICTED TO IT. Step away from the tub of happiness.

OUR HEROES ARE CURRENTLY FIGHTING FOR CONTROL OF A LOBOTOMIZED WARSHP.

*If you're new here, the bad guys are the cute, furry ones. You should be cheering for the pile of crap.*

That was a stirring eulogy, Reverend. Thanks, guys. I've never done a funeral for an artificial intelligence before.

It was a truly fascinating application of ancient scripture. Especially the "no man can serve two masters" bit.

We figured as much. Oh?

I think the "Peevy's not in Hell for committing suicide because he had no soul to begin with" argument gave you away.

You're not eulogizing me when I die, even if it means I have to take you with me to make sure.

**WE HAD A GREAT DISCUSSION.** Scriptures were discussed. Testimony was borne. The spirit was there. It was very edifying.

**THEM'S NICE, but you should be doing that in Gospel Doctrine. Not the foyer.**
While it should seem patently obvious to both the concerned reader—as well as to perceptive pedagogues—that gag strips and visual fictions such as those found in this fine magazine should contain captivating images and timely themes, it is the intent of this work to abandon simple (yet perhaps noble) entertainments in order to wrestle with one of the more deeply troubling aspects of modern religious life: the science fictionation of profound and sacred truths. Please do not assume that the representation of these matters is in any way an endorsement of them.

SPECULATIONIZING

written and drawn by Todd Robert Petersen

What if there really is life on other planets?

Your use of the word "really" is kind of disturbing.

Why because you named your kid Anakin?

It's to remind him that temptation is real... okay.

Seriously, if there are lots of planets but only one Jesus, then on other planets the primary kids have to learn about Jesus and other planets. But here we only have to learn about Jesus.

I teach kids about other planets all the time.

Is that in the manual?

Sort of... I teach them about alien Christmas, I have coloring sheets.

You're an idiot.

Other sheep I have that are not of this fold.

There are about eight thousand reasons why that's wrong.

Promise me you don't show Battlestar Galactica DVDs in Primary...
As this graphic demonstration shows, no real good comes from spreading information based on the mingling of scripture and science fiction, no matter how logical and compelling those connections may be. Films such as Star Wars, and television programs such as Battlestar Galactica, are meant to titillate and distract god-fearing people from more sober entertainments, sending many onto horde pornographies of the spirit. It has come to the attention of the editors that apocryphal coloring sheets depicting alien holidays have been in circulation among primary teachers. If your children should bring any such items into your home, please...

Destroy them immediately!
SUNSTONE

Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman . . . Ether?

WHY CHURCH ARTISTS OWE RIC ESTRADA A THANK-YOU CARD

By Theric Jepson

RIC ESTRADA WAS BORN IN CUBA ON 26 February 1928. When he was nine years old, he was “trying to decide what I would be when I grew up. And I said, either I will be a truck driver, because that will help me drive all over the world and see places, or I’ll be a reincarnation of Jesus Christ. Those were my two choices. And I struggled with that for about a year when I was nine years old. Oh! Oh! There was a third choice. Or maybe I could be another incarnation of Tarzan of the Apes, and I could swing on trees.”

This desire to aim high revealed itself in 1941 when, at age 13, Ric gained his first publication credit, drawing the cover for Cuba’s premiere magazine Bohemia (which survived the revolution and is still publishing today).

When Ric turned 19, his uncle provided the money, and his uncle’s friend—a fellow named Ernest Hemingway—who liked his typewriter, his guns, and his Cuban friends—cut through red tape at the consulate to bring him to New York City. Ric would spend most of his life in America and come to call it home.

In New York, Ric began the work for which he’s best known today: comics. He drew for everyone from EC to DC, including stints rendering DC’s flagship characters: Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman.

But this is a Mormon story, and as anyone who’s ever read a Mormon story knows, this story needs a conversion:

RIC ESTRADA: Did I tell you the story of my conversion?

THERIC JEPSON: No, you didn’t.

RIC: Well, I was living in Germany at the time, working as a political cartoonist and journalist in West Berlin, when Berlin was still divided. And one day I got into serious trouble and I slapped my boss—

THERIC: Whoops.
RIC: —and I was so ashamed of it that I came into my room, I got on my knees, and I said, “Lord, I’m so lost. I’m not this kind of person. Please find me.” And, next day, two Mormon missionaries knocked on my door and I knew that was the answer. Very dramatic.

It took me three years while I studied the books. I read the Book of Mormon through several times. I read the Doctrine and Covenants. I read some of the literature they gave me, and three years later, back in my home turf, I joined the Church.

THERE'S NOO MINTED Brother Estrada, then 40 years old, applied the faith of his childhood to his new religion and soon the evidence began to manifest itself in his work. While he was working for Our Fighting Forces, the editor found himself short a story for the issue and asked Estrada to write and draw something to fill the space. Estrada chose the Mormon Battalion as his subject.

In a similar way, a story about the fall of the Jaredite civilization, “Peace with Honor,” filled a suddenly open space in another DC war-comics magazine. It was this incidental work that led to what may be the most widely distributed Mormon comic of all time.

RIC: When I wrote “Peace with Honor,” a missionary brought the comic book to Elder Hugh W. Pinnock of the Seventy and said, “Look at this! This fellow must be a Mormon.” Because it said in the subtitle, “based on the Book of Mormon.” So Hugh Pinnock phoned me from Salt Lake City and said, “I’m in charge of the New Testament stories for children. I’ve looked into your background and see that you’re an active Mormon, and I’d like you to illustrate the book.”

RIC: Well, that’s cool.

RIC: Not only was it cool—let me tell you the other part of the story. They offered me a certain amount of money for the book—it had about three hundred drawings—and I said, “Look, this work is going to take me at least six months to do. I don’t think I can live on that amount of money.” I broke it down for them, giving them a minimum price per picture and they saw that indeed the sum was twice as much as they had offered. We negotiated and they accepted my price. Then, a few months later, the editor of the Church magazines called and said, “Ric, you’ve done us a great favor because the Church—not out of malice, but out of not really knowing what artwork is worth—has been underpaying its artists. As of now we’ll start paying the proper amounts.”

RIC: Oh. Well, good for you!

NOTE

1. This interview originally appeared in a different form on A Motley Vision (motleyvision.org). Quotations have been lightly edited for clarity and space. Ric Estrada passed away on 1 May 2009.
FAME, a noah van sciver story.

I've seen famous people before.

Is that that one guy??

Yes, it was!!

I have my stories, just like everyone else does.

I thought it was Scarlett Johansson. That's my story and I'm sticking to it. Now DROP IT!

I might've been Woody Allen.

He's given me some good advice about how to get along in life.

I might've been Hulk Hogan.

Looked a lot like Grigori Rasputin.

Communists are everywhere, Noah, keep an eye out and be safe.

One year he brought me along with him to a comic convention in Orlando Florida. I hadn't done a comic book of my own yet so I brought with me a portfolio of drawings I had done.

Here's a closeup of my face on the plane ride to Florida.

Adventure Ho!

I learned about the tools comic artists use while drawing, and the things you can afford when you use those tools to draw best-selling comic books.

Oh my God!

That's a Christmas card sent from Joseph McCarthy.

I swear this is completely true!
At the comic convention, I was able to witness my brother's fame. He's a cartoonist. Do you draw for DC?

That guy with the super long hair that is always at the comic shop near you.

I'll never forget this one guy who said:

Ethan is way better, no offense.

Yeah, that's a fact.

Thanks.

Bill the Chicken

I'm such an idiot, I thought I'd find a publisher with this stuff.

I could see it's affects.

DAY #3

Could you draw Hal Jordan if he was a cyan?

I wanted to do my own comic book really bad. Ethan was asking all of these small publishing guys if they would print my comic.

Absolutely Ethan! I'd love to help wash out.

Started an American manga company.

The average comic con panic's hand is encased in an invisible glove of bacteria!

On the plane ride home I read Ethan's Green Lantern book and tried to suppress the red hot fear that rushed through my entire body.

Mommy is that man's skin crawling? Yes, dear, yes.

The end.
RAISING WONDER WOMAN IN MAN’S WORLD

By Ben Christensen

The recently-published Wonder Woman #600 introduces a new storyline that radically alters the title character's look and history. The Greek gods manipulate time in such a way that, in the new history, Wonder Woman's Paradise Island was destroyed when she was a baby. Thus the young Princess Diana had been raised in the outside world—Man's World, as her sister Amazons call it. This new storyline has received mainstream attention largely for its cosmetic changes to Wonder Woman. Reflecting her new urban upbringing, the heroine has a new look, complete with trendy haircut, leather jacket, and, most notably, pants.

While most commentators focus on the costume change, Gloria Steinem, who has long promoted Wonder Woman as a strong role model for girls, is more concerned with the change in Wonder Woman's history than in her clothes. "It's an exact copy of Superman who came as a baby from the exploding planet Krypton," Steinem says. "This destroys her home, her Amazon mother and sisters, and gives her no place to go to gain strength and create an inspiring storyline." I've been reading superhero comics for long enough to know this story with its altered timeline won't last more than a year or so, but Steinem raises interesting questions about exactly what makes Wonder Woman the powerful character she is.

Wonder Woman has always been a character of contradictions. Her earliest adventures in the 1940s, written by her creator, William Moulton-Marston, are dominated both by images of female strength and female bondage—the primary reason the heroine carries a lasso seems to be so villains can use it to tie her up. In a 1962 issue of Justice League of America, Aquaman notes, "While we don't have a permanent chairman—when it comes to cleaning time, we all agree Wonder Woman is boss." Yet ten years later, Steinem fea-"tured Wonder Woman on the cover of Ms. Magazine, holding her up as a symbol of feminism. In recent years, Wonder Woman writers have incorporated this sense of contradiction into the character's in-story portrayal. She is an ambassador for peace who will fight viciously, even kill when necessary, to achieve that peace. She is a harsh critic of "Man's World" who wears (until recently) a symbol of that world, the American flag. She carries a lasso she uses to force victims to reveal the truth but hides her own identity, disguising herself as government agent Diana Prince. I like this portrayal of Wonder Woman because it seems the only honest way to approach the character, and it makes her complex in a way that Superman and Batman are not.

Steinem's criticism of the revised history, that it duplicates Superman's history, makes me wonder whether Diana's upbringing on Paradise Island is a necessary part of what makes her Wonder Woman. After all, the Amazons themselves embody many of her contradictions: warriors for peace, a matriarchal society of women who wear bracelets to remind them of their past bondage to men, an island nation created to transform humanity who remain isolated from all but a select few. "Three thousand years they stayed on their little tropical island while women were treated like cattle all over the world," observes a character in a recent story written by long-time Wonder Woman scribe Gail Simone. Considering her upbringing in this society of contradictions, no wonder Diana grew up to be the complex character she is.

Is it possible, then, for a Wonder Woman raised in Man's World to be the ideal of womanhood Gloria Steinem has lauded in the past? Or will her new background as an orphan spirited away from her dying homeland make her a pale copy of Superman? I'm eager to see how the storyline plays out—whether writer J. Michael Straczynski can convincingly prove Steinem wrong, or if in fact Wonder Woman without Paradise Island is not Wonder Woman at all.
Utah, Utah Valley—home to BYU, the MTC, and some of the busiest OB/GYNs in the world. The LDS Church permeates everything here, from grocery stores that proudly advertise being closed on Sundays to new homes that come standard with basement food storage bunkers. In some ways, this is good. I like the Church’s doctrine of personal revelation, which allows every woman and man to commune with the divine. I like that Mormon culture values education and the arts. But I can’t ignore the fact that our daughters will grow up being taught that men have presiding authority over them while also hearing testimonies about how women are more spiritual than men. How can Jessie and I possibly raise our children with healthy concepts of gender equality in this environment? In many ways, Utah Valley is the epitome of Man’s World.

To make matters worse, despite Jessie’s and my conscious rejection of the more sexist aspects of Mormon culture, many of our life choices seem to reinforce them. For example, I am an uncloseted gay man who has chosen to marry a woman and raise children with her. Jessie is a straight Mormon woman who has chosen to marry a gay man and raise children with him. Although our first daughter, Sophie, is not yet old enough to have the vaguest idea of her dad’s sexual orientation, eventually she will be, and I can’t help but wonder how she will interpret her parents’ decision to marry, and how it will impact her identity. Will she view her parents’ marriage as evidence of their dedication to the patriarchal model and “traditional marriage”? Will her mother’s decision to marry a gay man teach her that being sexually attractive to her partner is unimportant? Will her father’s decision to marry a woman teach her to devalue her own sexuality? These questions haunt me.

Alison Bechdel’s Fun Home, a memoir in graphic-novel form about Bechdel’s relationship with her closeted gay father, gives me a captivating peek into what Sophie’s life might be like. It would be shortsighted and even sexist to assume I can read Bechdel’s past as a precise map of Sophie’s future—reducing each to “the daughter of a repressed gay man” limits the two women to a single aspect of their lives, defined by their relationship with a man—but there is value in examining the parallels, particularly when it comes to the commonalities their fathers share beyond sexual preference. Maybe I can learn from the elder Bechdel’s mistakes, benefit from his daughter’s insights. For example, Bruce Bechdel is a repressed man who vents his frustration through angry outbursts, often directed at his children. A particularly poignant passage describes Bechdel’s labyrinthine house as a metaphor for her father’s unpredictable moods:

**Panel 1**

**Caption:** My mother, my brothers, and I knew our way around well enough, but it was impossible to tell if the Minotaur lay beyond the next corner.

**Illustration:** Her father angrily throwing a plate from the dinner table, with a small caption pointing out the permanent scar it made on the linoleum.

**Panel 2**

**Caption:** And the constant tension was heightened by the fact that some encounters could be quite pleasant.

**Illustration:** Her father reading to her at bedtime.

**DAD:** . . .and at each pull the elephant’s child’s nose grew longer and longer.

**Panel 3**

**Caption:** His bursts of kindness were as incandescent as his tantrums were dark.

**Illustration:** Her father silhouetted in her bedroom doorway, having just turned off the light.

**DAD:** . . . won’t you be my pony girl? Marry me, carry me, far across the sea.

**YOUNG ALISON:** Don’t turn out the hall light.

Before I became a parent, I was never a short-tempered person. Even now, in my interactions with coworkers and the consultants I supervise, with my siblings and parents, with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. With my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jessie, I very rarely get angry and never raise my voice. Yet, with my children, I am all too often the Minotaur with Jesse...
to a child? Does it teach her that she has to tiptoe over broken glass, to perfectly please the Man for fear of his wrath? Another commonality I share with Bechdel's father is perfectionism. And like him, I extend this demand for perfection to my children. I compulsively point out every trivial failure. “Sit properly.” “Close your mouth while chewing.” “Why are you crying? The reason you’re crying isn’t logical.” “Why can’t you remember not to put your toothbrush upside down in the cup? That’s disgusting.” Unsurprisingly, Sophie has adopted my perfectionism. The distress this causes her sickens me. I suspect the reason she’s crying is not the illogical reason she’s managed to vocalize through tears but despair at yet again having failed to live up to my impossible standards. I can see how desperately she wants to please me, yet I don’t acknowledge, nearly as often as I should, how completely she does please me. Perhaps the worst is that I’m teaching her that her value is determined by how much she pleases the male figure in her life.

Still, I can’t help smiling when I see how fully she’s adopted some of my values. Once I found her vehemently arguing with her cousin over whether or not there’s any such thing as “boy toys” and “girl toys.” He didn’t want to play with what he deemed were girl toys, but Jessie and I had taught Sophie that girls and boys can play with whatever kinds of toys they want. This explains why it’s not uncommon to see her in a princess dress, superhero cape and mask, pink purse hanging from her arm while she plays with trucks in the mud.

In my efforts to raise a strong, independent, healthy young woman, I’m my own worst enemy. My efforts are as schizophrenic as those of Wonder Woman’s creator who couldn’t decide whether he was writing a female empowerment narrative or a bondage fetish fantasy. In Wonder Woman’s case, later creators molded these contradictions into a wonderfully complex character, similar to the way Alison Bechdel has drawn from the shortcomings in her relationship with her father to create a beautiful narrative about identity and redemption.

Like Wonder Woman, Bechdel is a champion of truth. Instead of a golden lasso she uses black ink on white paper, but the result is just as magical. She captures the contradictions of the world with her pen and forces them to reveal the truth. When I read about Bechdel growing up in a small Pennsylvania town no less Man’s World than Utah Valley, and with a father no less complicit in that world than I, and I see the strong woman she’s become, a powerful truth emerges: Sophie will not forever be defined by me. Just as Alison Bechdel far surpasses the limitations of her upbringing, so will Sophie.

**S I READ Fun Home, I am touched by Bechdel’s mercy toward her father. Even while enumerating his failures, she expresses a palpable love for him. Throughout the narrative, she references the story of Icarus and Daedalus, noting at the beginning that “In our particular reenactment of this mythic relationship, it was not me but my father who was to plummet from the sky.” The final page of the book returns to this metaphor:**

**PANEL 1**

**ILLUSTRATION:** Front grill of the truck that killed Bechdel’s father.

**CAPTION:** He did hurtle into the sea, of course.

**PANEL 2**

**ILLUSTRATION:** Bechdel as a child, jumping off a diving board into a pool where her father waits with open arms.

**CAPTION:** But in the tricky reverse narration that impels our entwined stories, he was there to catch me when I leapt.

In this final image, Bechdel recognizes that, like her father, she too will sometimes fail. At once, she shows mercy for his failures that have hurt her and allows him to show that same mercy toward her. This kind of give-and-take mercy rings true to me—there is not one perfect being doling out the mercy but a web of imperfect beings freely exchanging it.

I see this same mercy from Sophie. I might be yelling at her one minute but the very next minute, she accepts my apologetic hug and tells me she loves me. The least I can do is show her the same mercy when she fails to meet my high expectations. I always do eventually; what I need to do is get there more quickly, showing mercy in the moment of transgression. But even as I recognize what I need to do to improve, I also recognize that even my best efforts will fall short. Sophie’s mercy helps me feel better about my shortcomings, but it does little to actually make up for them. How then can I succeed in raising a Wonder Woman within the Man’s World of my own creation? To answer this question, I look to the mercy humankind shows by not forcing me to raise my daughter in a void, with only my influence to mold her. Were I to apply Bechdel’s Rule (originally applied to movies in her comic strip Dykes to Watch Out For to my portrayal of Sophie’s life thus far, my narrative would not pass muster:

1. Does it have at least two women in it? Well, I’ve at least mentioned both Sophie and Jessie.
2. Do the two women talk to each other? Based on what I’ve shown thus far, they apparently do not.
3. Do they talk about something besides a man? Uh oh. My entire account of Sophie’s life focuses on her relationship with me. Let me check. . . Crap, I’m a man.

The problem is that this is a personal essay, therefore I am the protagonist, the center of attention, but this isn’t an accurate presentation of reality. In real life, the world doesn’t
revolve around me. The protagonist of Sophie’s life is Sophie. I am but a supporting character—thankfully one of many.

Chief among the women Sophie interacts with is her mother. Jessie embodies that complexity I admire in recent portrayals of Wonder Woman—not because she’s the ideal woman or the perfect parent, but because she’s not. Like all human beings, or at least the interesting ones, Jessie is a jumble of contradictions. On the one hand, she loves to cook and bake, serves faithfully in whatever calling the Church gives her in Primary or Relief Society, and finds that being a mother brings her a lot of joy. On the other hand, she has a master’s degree in Spanish and teaches college courses, she actively participates in Mormon women’s literary communities such as Segullah and Exponent II, and is generally uncomfortable around children. She incorporates her passion for learning into her parenting by teaching our kids about the literature, culture, and cuisine of a different country every week. At the same time, sometimes she just wants the children to go away so she can have some peace and quiet while reading blogs. She consciously lives principles of the gospel that many mainstream Mormons don’t do so well—at—demonstrating responsible stewardship of the Earth and its natural resources, eating meat sparingly, and treating all human beings according to the Golden Rule, regardless of religion, race, nationality, or sexual orientation. Still, every now and then she abandons her green, neo-hippy liberalism and drives the kids to McDonald’s for Happy Meals. Jessie is not the living example of womanhood that liberalism and drives the kids to McDonald’s for Happy Meals. Jessie is not the living example of womanhood that liberal ideas of gender she’ll inevitably pick up from Utah Valley would never ever act as chairwoman of housekeeping for many .

As it turns out, many of the supporting characters in Sophie’s life are women. Among Jessie’s and my closest friends to whom Sophie has and will continue to be exposed throughout her life, are a survivor of rape who has somehow grew up in Utah Valley and come out both ardently feminist and Mormon; and a mother of five young children who is actively pursuing her dreams of acting and singing professionally. Among Sophie’s aunts are a nurse who works for Planned Parenthood and marches for gay rights; a dance instructor who runs a successful studio together with her husband and children; and women with various other successes achieved both in and out of the home. Sophie has no shortage of strong female role models to learn from. As I contemplate the various women in Sophie’s life, I begin to think it is not so important that I shield her from the imbalanced concepts of gender she’ll inevitably pick up from Utah Valley Mormonism and myself. More important is to provide her with multiple influences that together form a balanced concept of gender. Sophie is an intelligent little girl. She doesn’t need me or Jessie or anyone to teach her the one true definition of womanhood; as she grows up surrounded by women who each approach their lives differently, she’ll figure out her own definition.

Perhaps the secret to the success of the current Wonder Woman storyline will be found in a detail Steinem has overlooked. She says that Diana’s new origin has destroyed “her Amazon mother and sisters.” But although the queen of the Amazons is dead in this revised history, early chapters make it clear that several of Diana’s Amazon sisters survive as refugees in Man’s World. In fact, it is her Amazon sisters who have raised her. Wouldn’t these women pass on the wonderful contradictions of the Amazons to their young charge? It is not so much where Diana grows up as who she surrounds herself with that makes her Wonder Woman. In the introduction to a Wonder Woman book published in 1972, Steinem asks, “[D]o women really have to live in a community by themselves—a separate country like Paradise Island—in order to be both happy and courageous?”9 Perhaps it is better for the Amazons to be integrated into Man’s World. With enough Amazons, it might cease to be Man’s World. Bearing this in mind, I have hope that J. Michael Straczynski’s experiment might produce an interesting Wonder Woman after all. And to a much greater extent, I hope that Sophie will learn from the Amazons in her life what she can’t learn from the Man’s World she’s growing up in.

Meanwhile, I will keep trying to be a better parent, or at least to reduce the instances of being an actively bad one. And I will continue to enjoy the moments of mercy, the times when I’m able to overlook Sophie’s imperfections and when she forgives me mine, when we’re able to cuddle up on the couch and enjoy an issue of Super Friends—a children’s comic that, to my delight, features a broad-shouldered yet curvy, strong, feminine Wonder Woman who would never ever act as chairwoman of housekeeping for her fellow superheroes.

NOTES


3. You can buy a poster of this cover at http://store.msmagazine.com/mswonderwomanposter.aspx. The cover reads “Wonder Woman for President.”


8. Reprinted with a little background on the origin of the rule at http://dykestowatchoutfor.com/the-rule. Bechdel credits a friend, Liz Wallace, for the rule itself, so maybe it would be more accurately called Wallace’s Rule.

RAINMAGIC
AN ADAPTATION OF A RUSSIAN FOLKTALE BY BRANDON DAYTON

Once in old Rus, when the devil still roamed the land, there was a girl as clever as she was beautiful.

One day, she wandered deep into the forest—into the hunting paths that the devil roamed, and as she was picking mushrooms it began to rain.

Being as clever as she was beautiful, she took off her clothes, wrapped them in a bundle and stuffed them safely under the root of a great tree.

After the rain had passed, she waited until all but her hair was dry, retrieved her clothes and carried on as if nary a drop had fled the sky.
AT THAT MOMENT, IT HAPPENED THAT THE DEVIL WAS STRIDING ALONG NEARBY. HE WAS STRUCK BY HER BEAUTY, AND AMAZED THAT HER CLOTHES WEREN'T THE LEAST BIT DAMP, WHILE HIS OWN DARK ROBES WERE SOAKED THROUGH.

BY WHAT MAGIC DOST THOU PASS THROUGH THE RAIN AS IF A HOT WIND?

SHOW ME THY MAGIC, AND I WILL SHOW THEE THE POWER BY WHICH I COMMAND THE RAIN.
SO THE DEVIL AGREED.

AND OPENED UP TO HER ALL THE MYSTERIES OF HIS DARK SORCERY.
IN TURN, THE GIRL SHARED HER SECRET.

THY CLEVERNESS WAS ENOUGH TO EARN MY MAGIC, BUT NOT ENOUGH TO DRY THY HAIR. MY SERVANTS SHALL HEED THY CALL, BUT THY BRAID WILL BE THYUndoNG. TO TOUCH IT WILL BE AGONY, AND TO HOLD IT WILL BE DEATH.

AND ON THAT DAY, THE GIRL BECAME THE FIRST WITCH AND MADE MANY WITCHES AFTER HER, BUT EVERY WITCH THAT TOOK HER MAGIC ALSO TOOK HER CURSE. AND THOUGH A WITCH’S FACE MAY HOLD THE PUREST OF BEAUTY, HER HAIR WILL ALWAYS BETRAY HER DARK MAGIC.

BUT ONLY THE WITCH, THE DEVIL AND THE SILENT WOOD KNEW HER SECRET.
CREATING AND PRODUCING a daily syndicated comic strip is something I dreamed of doing since I was a child. And now I have been writing and drawing the Pickles comic strip for more than 20 years, and I feel very blessed to be able to do it. But still, there is some truth to the saying, “Be careful what you wish for. It might come true.” Cranking out a comic strip seven days a week, 365 days a year, and still keeping it fresh and funny is a relentlessly difficult task. Yet I still get a thrill out of seeing my thoughts and drawings in the newspaper and on the internet each day, and I wouldn’t want to give it up.

Years ago, shortly after I began doing Pickles, I was drawing one of my characters, Opal, reading a magazine. I debated about how to render the cover of the magazine. Should I make it just a generic, non-specific cover or should I draw it as an actual cover of an existing magazine? I ended up depicting it as a Redbook magazine, since I thought that was one that Opal might read. Soon after it was published I got word that the editor of Redbook would like the original artwork of that strip to frame for their office. I complied with that request, but it got me thinking, why am I giving free publicity to Redbook magazine? So, the next time I had occasion to have a character in Pickles reading a magazine I decided to make it the Ensign, the official publication of the LDS Church, of which I am a member. I got a lot of positive response from members of the Church—and also a request for the original from the editor of the Ensign. Since then I have continued to feature the Ensign in my strip from time to time. Sometimes I show Nelson, the grandson, reading The Friend or wearing a CTR T-shirt. And now I often depict a picture of an LDS temple on the wall. I do this as kind of a nod to my LDS readers who still seem to enjoy looking for these Mormon icons. And as a former ad man, I guess it is my humble way of doing a little subliminal advertising for the Church. Not that they need my help.

C. L. HANSON
A LONG TIME AGO, IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY ...

YOU KNOW, IT'S NOT SO BAD WORKING FOR THE EMPIRE.

Yeah, I heard the rebels don't even get health care... losers.

SO, LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT: YOU WAIT IN LINE FOR HOURS TO BUY A BILLY BOON, YOU WEAR FUNNY T-SHIRTS, QUOTE YOUR FAVORITE CHARACTERS, & STAY UP ALL NIGHT TO GO TO A WOONIGHT SHOW &... YOU CALL ME A GEEK?!

THE BOYS PREPARE FOR COMIC-CON.

SO, ARE YOU GONNA COME WITH US THIS YEAR POOP?

I DON'T GUYS... THERE'S NO WAY YOU'LL GET ME TO DRESS UP LIKE THAT.

LAST YEAR, COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS.

IT'S TIME TO GO PEALLAH HIRE, I'VE GOT YOUR JERSEYS.
Hey, you know what that flashing red button is?

Which one?

That one, right there, the only one that's flashing.

This one?

Yeah... no, the flashing one, the red one.

Oh, this one?

Yeah.
THAT'S THE DISCO LIGHT.
THE DISCO LIGHT? WHY DO WE HAVE A DISCO LIGHT?
WE HAVE TO GO TO THE DISCO ROOM AND DO COCAINE.
YEAAA... I'M NOT... UH... GONNA DO THAT.
NO, IT'S OKAY. WERTHAM'S DEAD. WE COULD TOTALLY HAVE RELATIONS WITH DOMESTICATED LIVE STOCK AND STILL GET PAID.
BLIP.
BLIP.
NO, IT'S NOT THAT. I BELONG TO AN ANCIENT FRATERNAL ORDER CALLED 'STRAIGHT EDGE.'
THAT'S WHERE I GET MY POWERS.
I CAN GO LIKE THIS WITH MY ARMS...
...AND I DON'T DO DRUGS OR HAVE SEX AT ALL.
SO YOUR POWERS ARE STUFF YOU CAN'T DO?
THAT'S... GENIUS.
Yeah? Have you ever tried not to have sex with someone?
Ooh, yeah. Dude, I want to be STRAIGHT EDGE TOO. I want more POWERS.
WHAT? WHAT KIND OF POWERS DO YOU ALREADY HAVE?

UM.... YOU KNOW I GOT THIS HAT?

AND THE CHAPS. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A DICK.

I WAS CHOSEN BY THE "UNIVERSAL ORDER OF JUSTICE" TO BECOME THEIR GREATEST CHAMPION, HERALD OF A NEW AGE, KEEPER OF THE MYSTICAL CHAPS OF KLAZAK, CUT FROM THE MAJESTIC WINGS OF THE LAST ANGEL OF GOZER.

ARE ANGELS PLASTIC?

'CAUSE THOSE CHAPS ARE PLASTIC.

I'M A VEGAN SO I GAVE THOSE CHAPS A DECENT, GOD-FEARING BURIAL.

I MADE THESE OUT OF A MEMBERS-ONLY JACKET I GOT.
IN THE 11 APRIL 1925 ISSUE OF THE NEW YORKER—seven weeks after that magazine began publication—an image titled “The Rumrunner’s Sister-in-law” appeared. It was drawn by John Held, Jr., a Mormon.

Over the next eight years, 125 of Held’s cartoons appeared in the pages of the New Yorker. Being more or less the official illustrator of the Jazz Age, Held’s work could be found just about everywhere in those days. He regularly contributed covers and cartoons to books and to the era’s most popular magazines: Life, Vanity Fair, Harper’s Bazaar, House and Garden, and Redbook.

Most of Held’s images abound with budding youth, vivacious 1920’s fashion, and colorful urban chic. His cartoons for the New Yorker, on the other hand, take the form of etchings and woodcuts, looking like throwbacks to a much earlier age. Held’s Mormonness peeks out of these peculiar New Yorker cartoons in ways that aren’t apparent in his other work. They evoke a very Mormon view of America’s shifting morals and the consequences of vice. How did these images find their way into the New Yorker of all places?

Held was something of a prodigy. He sold his first cartoon at the age of nine, and at 15 sold one to Life magazine. Then at 16 he landed a job at the Salt Lake Tribune as a sports cartoonist. Held proudly maintained throughout his life that he had no formal art training and that he had only two teachers—his father and Mahonri Young, who also worked at the Tribune until he moved to New York City where he took a generation of Mormon artists under his wing.

Held’s father, Switzerland-born John Held, Sr. was also an artist. An early Mormon educator named John R. Park discovered him while travelling through Europe in search of talent. Park legally adopted Held, Sr., brought him to Salt Lake City, and groomed him to teach art at Deseret University, a position Held, Sr. declined. Instead, he started a successful career as a local illustrator and engraver, contributing illustrations to George Reynolds’s 1888 The Story of the Book of Mormon.

Looking at a few of the cartoons Held, Jr. did for the New Yorker, one first notes their upright tone. They illustrate the consequences of contemporary vices—gambling, drinking, smoking, and womanizing—in the stylistic guise of Victoriana. “The Drunkar’s Wife” (19 December 1925) shows a woman nervously taking a mantle clock to a pawn broker in the middle of the night. This tone is a sharp contrast to the other New Yorker cartoonists of the era—notably Peter Arno, William Steig, and James Thurber—who cheerfully embraced the Prohibition-bashing, sexually adventurous era of the 1920s and early 30s.

Held’s cartoons had titles such as “The Fate of the Cigarette Fiend” (28 November 1925), “The Wayward Son” (27 March 1926), and “She’s Only a Lassie Who Ventured on Life’s Stormy Path Ill-Advised” (28 July 1928).

But Held was a humorist first, his pictoral melodramas showing just enough cheek to allow the reader some ethical wiggle room. It’s doubtful that turn-of-the-century Sunday school teachers, even Mormon ones, lectured on the utility of...
a hat pin in the defense of womanly virtue, as Held’s 8 February 1930 cartoon illustrates. Still, there is no denying that his background informs the cartoons with a certain ethical air and sensitivity to the victims of moral wrongdoing—destitute wives of alcoholics aren’t particularly funny, after all.

Held sometimes even slipped LDS imagery into his cartoons. A ZCMI store sign hovers in the background of “The Subtle Usage of the Clove” (20 June 1931), and the Salt Lake Temple and Tabernacle stand behind Brigham Young in “What Do You Mean a Two Time Man? Said Brigham Young” (23 January 1926). In “The Street Sweeper’s Christmas” (12 December 1925), an angel appears to a crying sanitation agent rummaging through garbage for a toy. The angel is a riff on the Nauvoo Temple’s 1846 angel Moroni.

How did Held sneak all of these cartoons past the magazine’s editors? Was he trying to pull a fast one? Quite the opposite. The legendary founder and first editor of the New Yorker, Harold Ross, was fully in on the joke. Ross’s family had moved to Salt Lake City when he was seven, where he became Held’s high school classmate.

Unfortunately, Held’s life hit the skids in the 1920s. He lost his considerable wealth during the Great Depression, victim of a fraud scheme, and consequently suffered a nervous breakdown. By 1932, the Jazz Age was over, America had a hangover, and Held was finished drawing New Yorker cartoons, his last appearing in the 17 September issue of that year. He moved to Wall, New Jersey, in 1945; spent the remainder of his life on a dairy farm, occasionally publishing a cartoon; and died of throat cancer in 1958.
NEXT UP: BIBBY
MURDER-ISLAND: THE
UNCUT VERSION!

NOW WITH MORE
SWERING!

THAT’S
IT, KIDS!

NO MORE
WORLD!

PACK YOUR
THINGS...

WE’RE MOVING
TO PROVO!

NOT SO
FAST, CHILES!

I’M YOUR FAIRY
GOD-PIONEER!

BUT I DON’T
HAVE ANY PIONEER
ANCESTORS...

WHO ARE
YOU?

AND I’M
GOING TO TELL YOU
A STORY!

IN 1991...

IN A MAGICAL
LAND CALLED
ARIZONA...

I WANT A
A FLUTTER-PONY
STORY!

NO!

I’M GOING TO
TELL YOU ABOUT A
PLACE LONG, LONG
AGO...

THEY BUILT A
BIOSPHERE.

IT WAS A
CLOSED ECO-
SYSTEM.
ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING THINGS THEY OBSERVED HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE PEOPLE IN THE BIOSPHERE...

THE TREES GREW, BUT THEY KEPT FALLING OVER.

IT TURNED OUT, WITHOUT THE WIND TO GIVE THEM RESISTANCE, THE TREES COULDN'T DEVELOP STRONG ENOUGH ROOTS TO STAY UPRIGHT.

BUT THE TREES.

AND SO!

WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE IS THE MORAL OF THE STORY?

UM...

YOU'RE SAYING WE SHOULD MOVE TO SANDY?

HEAVENS, NO!

CHILDREN, THE WINDS OF LIFE WILL GIVE YOU DEEP ROOTS...

WHAT'S ON YOUR WAND?

IT LOOKS LIKE A BISCUIT.

ARE BISCUITS MAGICAL TO PIONEERS?

IT'S A SCONE, ALRIGHT?

WE LIKE SCONES!

IT IS ADVERSITY THAT MAKES US STRONG.
Please, leave me alone...

oof!

Go to hell!

Ahhh!

huff!
We aint done yet.

I'm going to make sure you're dead!

I'm going to chop your damn head off!
“Dammit!”

“I know you’re still alive.”

“Now, how do I get out of here?”

“Man, Miss B. was mean today.”

“No joke, bud.
Hey Zack, let’s kick rocks down on the freeway!”

“Okay, but we can’t get caught.”

“Of course!”

“help... me...”
Sebastian, wait! You hear that?

Hey guys...

Come here. I need help. I'm thirsty.

Where are you?

Down here.

I slipped down this hole.

There was a cave-in.

Can you move the rocks? I'm so thirsty...

We can't.

We should go get help.

I need some water. Do you guys have some water?

Yeah, I keep a canteen in my bag.

Great. Will you bring it to me?

Sebastian?

The hole here is just big enough for you to slide through, Sebastian.

I heard your friend say it. What's his name?

Shh! My name is John.

Okay, I'm coming down sir—with the canteen.

"John's" canteen.
Help me with this!

We need to finish someone off.

Decapitation?

Not this time.

Are you okay Seb?

It's dark down here, but a little light's coming through.
It's okay. A bad man hurt me. Will you hand me the canteen?

Here sir.

So what's the plan boss?

I'm going to pour that entire vat of consecrated oil on that son-of-perdition.

Seb? I've got a bad feeling about... Seb?

Ahhh! Help me! Help...

Oh no! Someone help us!

Thank you Sebastian. I'm feeling much better now.

You've quenched my thirst.

"The Man in the Ground"

Writer: Nicholas West
Artist: Sam Rodriguez
©2010
IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT: YOU’RE WALKING down the street when you impulsively slip into a comic book shop, something you may not have done since you were fifteen. Upon entering the shop, you notice not the large-bosomed, life-sized plastic sculpture of the heroine du jour, but a comic book cover advertising a garish male figure wrapped in a white bodysuit, a jagged red exclamation point slashed across his chest. The guy at the counter scratches himself and says in a nasal voice, “Oh, Madman—good stuff. That Allred. . . .” So you pick it up and open to a random page where you see a tree full of cows, a crowd milling recklessly beneath it. You read the dialogue.

LARGE, SHIRTLESS, LAVA-LAVA-ED MAN: Mahana, you ugly thing. Get out of that tree!
HIPSTER DUDE: Poor guy! His wife turned into those cows up there.
WOMAN WRAPPED IN BANDAGES: You mean. . . ?
GIRL WITH PONYTAIL: Yes. He now has a seven-cow wife.
BIG BLUE ALIEN: What’s a mahana?
DOUBLE-CHINNED, GEEKY FELLOW: I dunno. I don’t speak the lingo, Johnny.¹

At this point, obviously, you have no choice but to pony up the cash and dive into the extraordinary Mormon comic-world of Madman.

MICHAEL ALLRED IS probably best known in Mormon circles for The Golden Plates, his graphic-novel adaptation of the Book of Mormon. But much of his worldly fame arises from his comic character Madman, a reanimated corpse who interacts with aliens, changelings, a man made of vomit, and a scientist who grows himself a giant brain by repeatedly injecting a serum into his tongue.

If you think this milieu sounds like a great environment in which to play with Mormon theology, you would be absolutely right. To the initiated reader, Madman is a kind of Mormon Wonderland where LDS doctrines and stories take on bizarre shapes and work strange wonders. During an interview with Theric Jepson, Allred has explained, “Over time, Frank Einstein [Madman’s normal-guy name] has become me, or at least my filter to express myself. And so he often becomes my sounding board.”²

At first, it isn’t easy to identify Madman’s Mormon underpinnings. After all, the hero starts the series by eating a guy’s eyeball. Cutting off arms, heads, scalps, and foreskins we Mormons can understand, but eyeballs? Though Frank displays spiritual propensities early on as he reflects on the existence of God, the first unmistakable hint that a Mormon is at the story’s helm is the appearance of a fellow who calls himself “Nephite.”

In fact, three Nephites appear at various points in the story. The first Nephite, who could pass as Legolas’s older brother, shows up in a jungle-marooned temple to save Frank and his buddies from an army of “Lamanites” and introduce them to the alien they’re supposed to be rescuing. While Frank explores the Wee Isles, the second Nephite, a Quasimodoesque character, stumbles out of an alley to warn Frank that an attempt will be made on his life. The third Nephite, a young Clint Eastwood, drops the recently shrunken Frank into a well (a baptism metaphor?), bringing forth a full-sized hero.

However, the Nephite characters are only surface manifestations of the series’ deeper Mormon currents. Indeed, Frank Einstein’s very existence is an exploration of one of Mormonism’s foundational doctrines—the premortal life.

Frank is often horrified by how fluidly he can carry out violent acts (the eyeball incident is only the beginning). He can’t remember much about his pre-reanimated self, but he has a feeling that he wasn’t very nice, possibly even evil. He worries about how his former life affects him not only physically but spiritually. “If I kill someone . . . do I go to hell? Forever?” he asks after he has killed at least two people (not to mention the many in his previous life).

Most Mormons have probably had a few similar thoughts. “What kind of spirit was I in the pre-mortal life? Was I valiant?”
Was I a fence-sitter?” Since Satan was able to entice one third of the hosts of heaven to support his plan, it seems that spirits were capable of making bad choices, of hurting themselves and others. In other words, we were capable of sin then, just as Frank was in his former life. Do those sins carry over to our mortal life? How much of who we are and how we act is a result of actions from a time we can’t remember, and how much of that will we be held responsible for?

While on tour with a circus in Madman Comics #4, Frank gets caught up in a fight with a skinless strongman. As they battle their way through a cruise ship, Lehi’s famous utterance, “It must needs be that there is an opposition in all things,” takes center stage as Frank poses questions about the eternal nature of conflict that the Church curriculum department might do well to include in the next Gospel Doctrine manual.

“If good wins over evil once and for all, or vice versa, what then? Where’s the conflict? Where’s the challenge? Doesn’t adversity lead to appreciation? But then, a world without ugly horror would be terrific, wouldn’t it?”

Allred says that he often puts ruminations like these in Madman because “it’s a terrific way to get people talking and asking questions. Theology is in almost all entertainment. I want my beliefs to be reflected in my work.”

Frank provides a full-color example of one reason you should follow the prophet’s counsel to keep a journal. A lovely girl named Joe, who doesn’t seem to mind Frank’s blue skin, falls in love with him while reading his ruminations.

But as with any superhero’s love interest, rocky times lie ahead. In Madman Atomic Comics #7, as Joe descends in a bubble to congratulate Frank on saving the universe, some bad energy, floating around from a recently defeated villain, gathers together and destroys her. Devastated, Frank takes off in his rocket ship and crashes on a Dune-like planet. He heads off alone into the extraterrestrial wastes with a gas can and a mute robot in tow, only to be eaten by a giant sand worm—which promptly explodes.

After many pages of wordless wandering, Frank meets a used-spaceship salesman and is about to close a deal on a vessel resembling George Jetson’s car when a flying saucer beams a woman down. Frank gasps: it’s Joe! No, wait. It’s Luna, a member of the Atomics who tried to save Joe. The figure’s appearance shifts from one woman to the other as it beams a woman down. Frank gasps: it’s Joe! No, wait. It’s Joe, a used-spaceship salesman marries the pair in Madman Atomic Comics #11, a disembodied voice gives a speech that seems lifted straight from the fourth lesson of the old missionary discussions. “We all lived as spirit children before we were sent to this Earth to receive bodies and gain individual experiences,” it says. “With death, our spirits temporarily leave our bodies and go beyond the Veil to the Spirit World, which is divided into Spirit Prison and Spirit Paradise.” When Frank gets to the attic, he meets a male-ish being with purple skin and red hair. The being introduces himself as Zacheous. “We were the best of friends in the pre-existence,” he says, both of them being spirit “children of heavenly parents who live in glory on the celestial planet of Golob.” Zacheous is busy administering to those in Spirit Prison, but the veil is particularly thin at this moment, allowing him to tell Frank that he has his own special mission (to save the universe again, in case you were wondering). 

Upon hearing news from beyond—that both his deceased earth parents and his heavenly parents love him and are proud of him—Frank can only reply, “You’re blowin’ my mind, man!”

**S**O THE NEXT time someone asks you about Mormonism, maybe you should open the “King-Size Super Groovy Special Issue” of Madman and show him or her the first page, where our hero battles a giant robot.

“That’s what we do every week,” you can say.

“Do you fight robots at church?” your interrogator may exclaim, “That’s so cool. Where do I sign up?”

Depending on how hard up your local missionaries are for baptisms, you may or may not turn your conversation partner over to them at this point, suggesting that they make a few cybernetic additions to their lessons. Or you can be honest and say, “Actually, take a look at the little blue text boxes on the page.”


“That’s what we talk about every Sunday,” you explain.

“In the fun wards, anyway,”

As Allred says, “Most of my closest friends in the Church are up to discuss pretty much anything.”

Then turn to the second-to-last page where Frank gets blasted by dynamite set off by a fish-skinned mad scientist. “Progression is the key to all existence,” Frank reflects as he careens through the air. “We are all, in fact, eternal beings. Our souls lived before this mortal realm. But we must progress.”

Mormonism in a nutshell from a Madman.

**NOTES**

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
THE HUMAN AUDITORY SYSTEM IS A MARVELOUS THING ... WHEN IT WORKS RIGHT.

OF COURSE, MINE DOESN'T, ENTIRELY. WORDS, MUSIC, AND OTHER NOISES HAVE ALL HAD TO FIGHT TO KEEP TOP PRIORITY IN A RELATIVELY LIMITED -

> Hey, what's that?

-ATTENTION SPAN.

AS A RESULT, I HAVE AN ODD RELATIONSHIP WITH LANGUAGE. I TRY TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE USE OF WORDS IN CONVERSATION, SONG LYRICS, AND OTHER SUCH THINGS.

IS THAT WHAT HE'S SINGING?

... SOMETIMES TO MY DETRIMENT.

I GET THINGS WRONG ON OCCASION, THOUGH. SO I STILL WIND UP WONDERING WHAT CALIBER OF SHOT A PERSON MIGHT USE IN "PRIESTHOOD ORDNANCE."

FIRE IN THE HOLE!

OR WHY WE'RE TRUSTING THE DEACONS WITH GUNPOWDER, ANYWAY.
When a messenger comes saying he has a message from God, offer him your hand and request him to shake hands with you. If he be an angel he will do so, and you will feel his hand.

Cuando venga un mensajero diciendo que tiene un mensaje de Dios, extiende tu mano y pídele la suya para estrecharla. Si es un ángel, lo hará, y sentirás su mano.

어떤 사자가 와서 자신이 하나님의 뜻을 가지고 있다 면 할 때에는 네 손을 그에게 내밀어 너의 악수하기를 청하라. 만일 그가 천사이면, 그는 그렇게 할 것이요, 너는 그의 손을 느껴라.
If he be the spirit of a just man made perfect he will come in his glory; for that is the only way he can appear. Ask him to shake hands with you, but he will not move, because it is contrary to the order of heaven for a just man to deceive; but he will still deliver his message.

Si es el espíritu de un hombre justo hecho perfecto, vendrá en su gloria; porque sólo de esa manera se puede aparecer. Pidele que te estreche la mano, pero no se moverá, porque es contrario al orden de los cielos que un hombre justo engañe; sin embargo, aun así comunicará su mensaje.

만일 그가 완전하게 된 의인의 영이면, 그는 자기 영광 중에 오리나, 이는 그것이 그가 나타날 수 있는 유 일한 방법일이라 나와 약속하기를 그에게 청하자. 그리하여 그는 온적이지 아니하리 나, 의인의 남을 속일은 하늘의 천사 에 아깝님이라, 그러나 그는 여전히 그의 길을 청한다.
If it be the devil as an angel of light, when you ask him to shake hands he will offer you his hand, and you will not feel anything; you may therefore detect him.

Si es el diablo, fingiendo ser un ángel de luz, cuando le pidas que estreche tu mano, te ofrecerá la suya, pero no sentirás nada; así podrás descubrirllo.

만일 빛의 사자로 나타난 악마 이면, 네가 그에게 약수하기를 청할 때 그는 네게 자신의 손을 내밀 것이나, 너는 아무 것도 느끼지 못하리라, 그러므로 너는 그를 간파해낼 수 있을 것이다.
"PROPHET. IT'S MORE THAN A WORD. MORE THAN A POSITION. IT'S AN IMAGE WHICH CARRIES THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF CONNOTATION AND DENOTATION, AND IT LEADS TO THE UNAVOIDABLE QUESTION...

WHAT DOES A PROPHET LOOK LIKE?

WORDS BY JACOB KUNKLE
ART BY DAVID GREENE

IN MOST OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, THE HOLIEST PEOPLE WERE DISCONNECTED FROM THE WORLD TO VISIT THE ORACLE OR THE HOLY HERMIT; ONE HAD TO UNDER- TAKE AN ARDUOUS JOURNEY TO VISIT HIM (OR HER) IN HIS (OR HER) ISOLATION.

A HEBREW PROPHET WAS JUST AS NON-WORLDLY, BUT HE (IT WAS ALWAYS "HE") DIDN'T WAIT FOR THE ODD SUPPLICANT TO VISIT HIM ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP. HE HAD A HABIT OF TAKING HIS MESSAGE -- OR CONDEMnation AND REPENTANCE, AS LIKELY AS NOT -- TO THE PEOPLE WHO NEEDED TO HEAR IT, UNIN-VITED. BOTH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT...

... AND THE NEW TESTAMENT.

MORMONS ALSO MIX IN IMAGES FROM THE BOOK OF MORMON AND CHURCH HISTORY OF THE YOUNG, ROBUST PROPHET-WARRIOR OR PROPHET-KING.

NEPHI

ARMON

JOSEPH SMITH

CAPTAIN MORONI
...although that image is tempered by the one of Brigham Young, the other foundational prophet of this dispensation. He seems to add a note of "Old Testament" to the restoration.

The institutional prophets of living memory, though, don't cut as striking an image.

Look! Hair color!

Harold B. Lee, 1972–1973
Howard W. Hunter, 1995–1995
Thomas S. Monson, 2008–Present

Spencer W. Kimball, 1973–1985

When we look for a prophet, what do we see? What do we expect to see? And most importantly, where do we expect to see one? Where should we look for one?

For they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord. — Jeremiah 31:34

I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. — Joel 2:28

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. — Revelation 19:10

PAGE 47
1925 John Held, Jr.’s work first appears in the New Yorker

1929 Floyd Gottfredson begins his 40-year career drawing Mickey Mouse comic strips

1947 John Philip Dalby’s “Stories of the Book of Mormon” begins appearing in the Deseret News


1975 Captain Canuck, one of the world’s few alleged LDS superheroes, first appears in print (though it’s not clear if he was Mormon during that first appearance)

1976 First appearance of the Ric Estrada co-created Powergirl

1988 Sal Velluto gets his first professional gig drawing Marvel’s Power Pack, because he once put the heroes’ father in a BYU sweatshirt, rumors exist to this day that the Power Pack is LDS

1990 Brian C. newspaper series sydicate

1992 First issues of Madman (Mike Allred) and Starchild (James A. Owen), and the first appearance of Cypher (Brad Teare) in Heavy Metal magazine (curiously, this is also the year Jake Parker invented Missile Mouse who wouldn’t get his own book until 2009)

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1987 Before becoming the most recognizable artist of safe Mormon cartoonery, Val Chadwick Bugley published the unfairly unpopular Goblin with a small syndicate based in Canada

1990 Brian C. newspaper series tyder's syndicate
1990 Brian Crane's newspaper strip Pickles enters syndication.

2006 Amy Reeder Hadley publishes Fool's Gold, her high-school manga, which eventually leads to an exclusive contract with DC working on projects like Madame Xanadu and Batwoman; she still hasn't published the third and final volume of Fool's Gold.

1991 Dr. Deseret, a drug-addicted Mormon warrior, makes her debut in Captain Confederacy.

1992 First issues of Madman (Mike Allred) and Starchild (James A. Owen), and the first appearance of Cypher (Brad Teare) in Heavy Metal magazine (curiously, this is also the year Jake Parker invented Missile Mouse who wouldn't get his own book until 2009).

1994 Ethan Van Sciver publishes the hyperviolent Cyberfrog; he will go on to become one of the most significant artists of DC's current era, with notable runs on Green Lantern, Flash, and others.

1998 Kevin Bollard publishes X-Statix, the smash hit that led to nine other X-Men-related series.

2000 Howard Tayler's Schlock Mercenary begins appearing online. It has debuted new material every day since.

2006 Amy Reeder Hadley publishes Fool's Gold, her high-school manga, which eventually leads to an exclusive contract with DC working on projects like Madame Xanadu and Batwoman; she still hasn't published the third and final volume of Fool's Gold.

2008 Shannon and Dean Hale team up with Nathan Hale (no relation) to release Rapunzel's Revenge.

2009 Elana Baker publishes a memoir that includes images of her sweet cartoon self; cartoonistas knew all this prose is just a dry run for her upcoming autobiographical comic to be published by Scholastic.
I have preserved the Covenant.

Irad, son of Enoch, whom I took into my confidence... he swore to keep the great secret in the darkness where it has remained since the days of Father Cain.

He spilled his own blood in making the oath.

And now, because he witnessed those secret works carried out, he sought to reveal them to the Sons of Adam... betrayed the bond of trust we had brokered between us.

And for that very purpose was I forced to kill him.
Lamech?
Wh---?

Husband, you return from the hunt early?

Is that not Irad, the son of Enoch?

What is this great evil you bring upon our house, Husband?

Adah... Zillah...

I return because of a pressing matter.

KRASHH!

If Father Cain is avenged seven-fold for killing his brother Abel...

You seek to bring the judgment of Father Adam's God down upon us?

A curse shall come upon this house!

What are you saying, Husband?

That I am a keeper of all great works done in darkness.

That I am Master Mahan.

Truly, I shall be seventy and seven fold. Cain murdered to get gain. I take a life to preserve that which is secret.
The next morning.

You thought the women you took unto yourself for wives were loyal.

But while you slept, they left your tent, rebelled against that trust...

And spread the words of your doings among the sons of men.

Now the Lord of Father Adam has sent a curse upon you and your house, Lamech, keeper of the cattle.

You have brought a great evil upon us all.

And for your crimes, you are cast out forever. If you come among any of the sons of men...
...“You will surely die.”

Mahan.

That name no longer means anything to me.

Ah, but it means everything to me.

It is my whole purpose for doing this.

Come my friend, and you will obtain what you desire most above all else.

And you shall have it.

For I have dominion upon the many waters. There, we will have free reign to take the bodies of the living unto ourselves.

I desire... revenge.

Come, Master Mahan, and we will continue our secret works together.

Mahan’s Story Continues in the Graphic Novel Series,

DEVIL’S TRIANGLE

ON SALE NOW at HallesArt.com
WHO IS THE MOST PROLIFIC ILLUSTRATOR OF the Book of Mormon? Not C.C.A. Christensen, with his brightly colored 1890 paintings. Not Minerva Teichert with her wonderful pastels. Not even Arnold Friberg with his muscle-bound old men and striplings.

My candidate for that title is a man you have possibly never heard of and whose work you almost certainly have never seen: John Philip Dalby.

Phil Dalby was born in Idaho in 1919, spent his youth in Colorado, and served a mission to the North Central States from 1939–41. He remained an active member of the Church his entire life. He was in his first semester of studies at the University of Utah when Pearl Harbor was attacked. When he left school to enlist in the army, his particular talents led the military to send him to the Army Music School in Virginia, where he served in the 707th Army-Air Force Band until his 1945 discharge.

Subsequently, he attended San Diego State, where he earned his B.A.; the University of Utah, which awarded him a master’s; and the University of Oregon where he earned a Ph.D. Phil sang (baritone), directed choirs, directed the band at Utah State Agricultural College (now USU), and taught or served as an administrator at community colleges in the Chicago area and in Florida until his retirement in 1970. Then he and his wife Barbara served a mission at BYU-Hawaii.

Phil passed away in 2004 at the age of eighty-five.

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While an undergraduate at San Diego, he began to draw a comic book version of the Book of Mormon—predating by almost 60 years Mike Allred’s Golden Plates, which is often touted as the first Book of Mormon graphic novel. Phil’s work, “Stories of the Book of Mormon,” began publication in the Church News section of the Deseret News on 1 January 1947, and ran weekly until May 1948. After that it ran sporadically, apparently according to the time Phil had to devote to it: sometimes it ran weekly but then disappeared for a month or two. The last installment I have been able to find appeared on 8 August 1953.

Phil began the comic series with the Book of Ether, headed into 1 Nephi, and carried the story at least through 3 Nephi 16:7.

Each of his strips filled half a full broadside newspaper page; the Church News was not then printed in tabloid size. Early in its run, the Deseret News offered scrapbook covers for people who wanted to clip the strips and paste them into the book, encouraging parents and Primary teachers to use the comic strips to help interest children in the Book of Mormon.

ARDIS E. PARSHALL is an independent historical researcher, writes a history column for the Salt Lake Tribune, blogs at KEEPAPITCHININ.ORG, and teaches her ward’s gospel doctrine class.
HELLO THERE!

HELLO.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
THROWING THESE ASTRONAUTS BACK TO EARTH.

WHY?

BECAUSE IF I DON'T THEY'LL DIE.

BUT YOUNG MAN, DON'T YOU REALIZE THAT THERE ARE MILES AND MILES OF MOON AND THERE ARE ASTRONAUTS ALL OVER IT.
YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

IT MADE A DIFFERENCE TO THAT ONE.
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh.

Adam is our Father and our God—E.Y.

He called her Eve.

And together they were fruitful and multiplied and replenished the earth.
He beheld a virgin, most fair and beautiful.

"...The Inventor of the law of physics and Programmer of the DNA code decided to enter the uterus of a Jewish virgin and get himself born..."

-Richard Dawkins

Behold the Handmaid of the Lord.

Knowest thou the condescension of God?

And Eve became a lone woman...
The tree of life my soul hath seen, Laden with fruit and always green; The trees of nature fruitless be Compared with Christ the apple tree. His beauty dath all things excel: By faith I know, but ne er can tell The glory which I now can see In Jesus Christ the apple tree. Happiness I long have sought, And pleasure dearly I have bought: I missed of all; but now I see This found in Christ the apple tree. I'm weary with my former toil, And I come to the garden of life, From my former toil. I'm weary with my former toil, And I come to the garden of life, From my former toil.
apple core I think

Things I tell myself when I eat apples:
I do not believe in the necessity of breaking teeth to eat an apple,
only in the necessity of breaking skin.
There also ought be no true way
to eat the apple, or to share it.
But I say it again, the skin must break,
even if the skin itself is not eaten.
But there is no need to sunder your ging or it,
or break your jaw. And if you are peeling
or slicing it, be careful with that knife.
Do you hear me? You don't have to hurt yourself
to eat the apple. You don't have to eat the skin,
or seeds, or stem or bruised. God,
you don't even have to eat this apple.
Hey, that nice man, Norman, was right. His mother is home. You can see her through the window.

"Darn! Shucky darn! Fiddle sticks! Dang! Flippin’, flippin’, flippin’ owl!" Billy said.
His thumb hurt, but his spirit was fine.
HOW ABOUT OVER THERE?

DANGIT, WOMAN! PICK A SPOT!

THE REAL REASON JEDI DON'T HAVE WIVES.

WHY YOUR WARD DOESN'T MEET IN THE SAME BUILDING AS THE ZOMBIE WARD

REASON #42: FAST SUNDAY

"I SEE DEAD PEOPLE. THEY WANT ME TO DO THINGS FOR THEM, DAD? WHAT'S FAMILY HISTORY?"

WHY ARE THEY THEN BAPTIZED FOR THE DEAD, IF THE DEAD RISE NOT AT ALL?

1 CORINTHIANS 15:29
Mormon comic book creators have brought forth their own representations of the Book of Mormon and of some important episodes in Church history. These works are similar to those of Christian artists who have depicted the Bible and Christian history. Perhaps the most familiar recent religious comic series is the adaptation of the evangelical Christian bestseller *Left Behind*, but there are many other examples as referenced in the *Guide to Christian Comics* and on various websites. Even indie comic artist Robert Crumb has recently released a graphic novel of the Book of Genesis.

Although LDS comic book creators have produced this type of material, the most recognizable comic book depictions of Mormonism are produced by non-LDS artists who usually depict Mormons in a nineteenth-century Utah Territory setting. Some depictions are positive, but many stories use their Mormon characters as exotic villains or at least suspicious outsiders. Although, like Christianity, Mormonism as a religion has been targeted in the comic book format, these types of attacks are surprisingly rare.

The first Mormon comic creation was published in 1947 by Herald Publishing House (owned by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, now Community of Christ): Henry Anderson's *The First Americans*, subtitled “A Pictorial Version of the Book of Mormon.” It was the first comic book version of the Book of Mormon and focused on the connection between the people described in that book and the Native Americans. Sporting a full-color cover, the book consisted of forty-eight two-color pages (green and white, red and white, blue and white) telling a very condensed version of the Book of Mormon. The volume begins with the story of Lehi’s family's immigration to the American continent shortly before the destruction of Solomon’s Temple (c. 586 BCE.) and ends with Moroni's burial of gold plates in the Hill Cumorah (c. 400 CE). It also includes a short history of the Jaredites, who immigrated to the American continent as part of the dispersion following the building of the Tower of Babel (c. 2100 BCE.)

Other Mormon creators have published comic book adaptations of Mormon history and the Book of Mormon. In 1948, Deseret Book Company published *Blazing the Pioneer Trail*, a stand-alone comicbooklet written by Floyd Larson and illustrated by Forrest Hill, presenting a faith-promoting account of the Mormon migration to the Great Basin in 1846–47. Deseret Book also published Eileen Chabot Wendel's *Stories from the Golden Records* series, which included *The Jaredites* and *Nephi the Valiant*. They contained comic book-style episodes adapted from the Book of Mormon.

But Ricardo Leon “Ric” Estrada (1928–2009) was the first Mormon comic book artist who produced Mormon-themed material for a major comic book publisher. Often dubbed the “father of Mormon comics” for many years Estrada worked for DC Comics illustrating war and romance comics. In 1972, he wrote and illustrated “The Mormon Battalion,” in No. 135 of *Our Fighting Forces*. This story emphasized the loyalty of Mormons who volunteered for military service during the Mexican War even after they had been driven from their settlements in Illinois. Two years later, Estrada provided a fill-in story in No. 169 of DC’s *GI Combat* with “Peace with Honor,” depicting Shiz and Coriantumr battling to the death, which he credited as “adapted from the Book of Mormon.” Thereafter, the LDS Church retained Estrada to illustrate *New Testament Stories* (1980). Other well-known Mormon comic artists, such as Brad Teare, who has illustrated the graphic novel *Cypher*, and Sal Velluto, who has worked for Marvel, DC, and many other comic book companies, have also been retained by the LDS Church. Velluto is an illustrator and Teare an art director for *The Friend* magazine.

During the same period Estrada was working, LDS artist Richard Comely created Captain Canuck. Although the Captain was not specifically identified as Mormon, he occasionally prayed for strength, causing some readers to assume that he was a member of Comely’s church.2

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MICHAEL W. HOMER is a lawyer, Honorary Italian Vice Consul in Utah and a member of The Baker Street Irregulars. He thanks Sal Velluto, Jean-Paul Gabilliet, Massimo Introvigne, and Theric Jepson for their suggestions and sources.
BRIGHAM’S MANY FACES

WHERE ARE YOUR WIVES? CALL THEM FORTH SO I MAY GREET THEM. TRUE, I HAVE NOT MARRIED, BUT THE WOMEN WERE FEW AND OTHERS HAD BETTER CLAIMS THAN I. AND BESIDES, I AM NOT LONELY. MY DAUGHTER ATTENDS TO MY NEEDS.

THE PROPHET WAS IN A STERN MOOD. DESPITE THE SHORTAGE OF WOMEN, JOHN’S REJECTION TO MARRY HAD NOT GONE UNNOTICED, NOR HAD LUCY’S BEAUTY.

THE ELDERS OF THE SACRED COUNCIL OF FOUR DECLARED SHE SHOULD MARRY ONE OF THEIR SONS, DREBBER AND STANGERS’ BEING THE MOST FAVORABLE.

SHE WAS TO BE GIVEN A MONTH TO DECIDE HER CHOICE; IF IT COULD BE CALLED SUCH, THE THREAT IN YOUNG’S TONE AND PURPOSE.

NI har både blivit mormoner! Ni är bundna av våra lagar! Vi måste hålla ihop starkt nu för att kunna behålla vår plats i samhället! Två av våra rikaste män, Stangerson och Drebber, vill gifta sig med Lucy! Hon har en mänsklig att bestämma sig på!

Een Studie in Rood (P&T Productions, 1995)
Classics Illustrated #110, “A Study in Scarlet” (1953)
Brigham meets Tex (Sal Velluto)
La Grande Missione (1955)
A Study in Scarlet (SelfMadeHero, 2010)
In 1992, Mike Allred—who has worked for Marvel, DC, Tundra, Image and other comic book companies—created the critically acclaimed *Madman*, in which one of the Three Nephites (who are mentioned in the Book of Mormon and eventually became the subjects of Mormon folklore) plays a pivotal role. In 2004–2005 Allred also wrote, illustrated, and self-published a comic book adaptation of the Book of Mormon in three full-color volumes (64 pages per volume). The adaptation was entitled *The Golden Plates* and subtitled “The Book of Mormon in Pictures and Word.”

Beginning with the story of Nephi, *The Golden Plates* focuses on the first two hundred years of the Book of Mormon story. The third volume contains a short summary of the prophet Mormon’s preparation of the plates for future generations and ends with the promise: “To be continued.” However, no other volumes have since been released. A hard-cover collection, published in 2005, which combines the three volumes, notes that it contains “the First Book of Nephi through the Words of Mormon.” Because Allred included his testimony on the inside of the front and back wrapper of each issue, he clearly intended *The Golden Plates* to be used as a kind of proselytizing tract.

NON-MORMON CREATORS HAVE also produced comics with Mormon characters and historical themes which are better known than the aforementioned Mormon-created work. For example, many comic book adaptations exist of Arthur Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet*, perhaps the most famous anti-Mormon melodrama ever published. In this, his first appearance in literature, Holmes solves two London murders by investigating events that had occurred in the Utah Territory several decades earlier. The plot revolves around Brigham Young’s attempt to coerce John Ferrier’s daughter into marriage against her will. “*A Study in Scarlet* includes not only graphic descriptions of polygamy but also chilling tales of clerical abuse and murder.”

The first comic book adaptation of *A Study in Scarlet* was drawn by Louis Zansky and appeared in No. 33 of *Classic Comics* in 1947, together with *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Curiously, this seventeen-page adaptation of *A Study in Scarlet* was not included in subsequent printings of this particular volume (in *Classics Illustrated*) even though the
cover retained an illustration from that story: an index finger drenched in blood with the word “RACHE” (revenge in German) written on a wall. The Mormon subplot, however, was not prominent in this adaptation. But in 1953, Seymour Moskowitz illustrated a new thirty-page version of the story that delved more deeply into the Mormon subplot.

This Classics Illustrated story included some very sinister images of Brigham Young and other Mormon characters. At one point, Young confronts John Ferrier and asks him "Where are your wives? Call them forth so I may greet them." Ferrier responds: “True, I have not married. But the women were few and others had better claims than I. Besides, I am not lonely. My daughter attends to my needs.” Young then strikes: “It is of that daughter I wish to speak to you. Elder Drebber and Elder Stangerson each has a son. She must choose one of these two men within a month! It is the order of the Council of the Four! Wo [sic] to him who disobeys their command!”

In 1976, Bill Barry adapted A Study in Scarlet for his syndicated Sherlock Holmes comic strips (the strips were collected into a volume in 1987), but Brigham Young and Doyle's Mormon subplot device were not included in the story. A subsequent three-part adaptation, written by Jim Stenstrum and illustrated by Noly Panaligan, does not mention Brigham Young but Lucy does tell Jefferson Hope that “her Mormon faith would not allow her to marry outsiders.” Thereafter Hope, Lucy, and her father “conspired to flee the Utah Territory.” During the escape, the Mormons kill John Ferrier, abduct Lucy, and carry her back to Salt Lake City, where she dies of a broken heart.

Two other comic book versions of the story, published in 1995 and 2010, capture Doyle's Mormon subplot and depict Brigham Young very ominously. John Ferrier and Lucy are brought before the Mormon prophet, who demands that “they become believers in the Mormon creed.” He later tells Ferrier that “the elders of the sacred council of four decreed that [Lucy] should marry one of their sons, Drebber's and Stangerson's being the most favorable.”

The American West setting of nineteenth-century Mormonism was captured not only by Arthur Conan Doyle but also by European storytellers such as Balduin Mollhausen, Karl May, and Emilio Salgari. Thus, it is not surprising that European comic book creators place Mormons in this same setting. In Italy, for example, the popular comic book series Tex included references to Mormons as early as 1955. Tex Willer is a Texas Ranger who marries the daughter of a Navajo chief. Tex becomes their new chief when his father-in-law dies, and he is often accompanied on his adventures by Kit Carson. Mormons are not always positively portrayed in these stories. The Danites are mentioned in at least one story and the Mountain Meadows Massacre in another. But Mormons are known as much for their independence as for any malevolence. These tales have been reprinted on numerous occasions.
OTHER COMIC BOOK creators, usually motivated by sectarian differences, have been even less kind in their depictions of the LDS Church. Perhaps the most famous example of a sectarian attack is The Visitors, released in 1984 by Chick Publications. This twenty-two-page booklet (less than 5" by 3") was published in black and white, with two panels per page. It contains the story of two Mormon elders who attempt to convince a golden contact to be baptized. When the elders arrive at the contact's home, her niece is present, and she asks the elders about Mormonism's more controversial teachings (e.g., God was once a man, God the Father has many wives, Satan and Jesus are spirit brothers, Jesus was a polygamist, and humans can eventually become gods). Finally, one of the elders becomes confused and admits that he would like to know the “real” Jesus. The older elder drags him from the home, asking, “How could you be so stupid?” and threatening to report him to the mission president. However, this pamphlet was a mere peashooter compared to the scathing, six-issue attack Chick mounted on the Roman Catholic Church.15

Other comic books that contain references to Utah and Mormons include Godzilla, who tromped over Salt Lake City;16 Martin Mystère, who visited the Family History Library;17 and Archie and his friends, who did some research in the Salt Lake City Public Library.18 Comic book artist Will Shetterly created a female Mormon superhero named Dr. Deseret, characterized by her willingness to stand up to polygamous patriarchs.
and by her addiction to performance-enhancing drugs, who appeared briefly in Captain Confederacy, published by Epic Comics.19 Jacob Raven, a Latter-day Saint police detective, has appeared in Spider-Man: The Lost Years and in various other Spider-Man comic books published by Marvel,20 while Latter-day Saint lawyer Mallory Book works in the same office as Jennifer Walters, alter ego of She-Hulk.21

Written by non-Mormons, these stories do not focus primarily on Mormonism, but they do contain images of Salt Lake City in its more modern setting and present Mormons in a more positive light. Likely these types of references to twenty-first-century Mormonism, together with the more classical nineteenth-century images, will continue to be created. Doubtless Mormon creators will continue to adapt scriptures (perhaps Mike Allred will resume The Golden Plates), explain Church history and teachings (as Sal Velluto is doing in “Lives of the Prophets” for The Friend) and include subtle Mormon markers in mainstream comic book stories.22

NOTES


2. Ron Leishman (w) and Richard Comely (a), Captain Canuck #3 (1975), Comely Comix.


5. The story was published as No. 110 of Classics Illustrated and paired with “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” (with the famous “RACHE” tattooed on the cover).

6. An expanded version of the story has also been published in European versions of Classics Illustrated. For example, in 1974, a thirty-two page version of this Holmes story was published in Illustrerade Klassiker in Swedish. This version contains similar dialogue and presents an ominous image of Young, who many readers worldwide can associate with Mormonism.

7. The story appeared in The Book (February and April 1982) and Eerie (January 1983) and was reprinted in graphic novel format by both Innovation Books (1989) and Thorby Comics (1998).

8. See Ricard Longaron, Une étude en rouge (np: P&T Productions, 1995); Ricard Longaron, Een studie in Rood (np: P&T Productions, 1995); Ian Edginton (w) and L.N.J. Cullbard (a), A Study in Scarlet (London: SelfMadeHero, 2010); Ian Edginton (w) and N. J. Cullbard (a), A Study in Scarlet (New York: Sterling, 2010). The quotations are from the most recent version of A Study in Scarlet, published in 2010.


13. Tex Raccoltina #149 (giugno 1968); Tex #153/16 (maggio 1961); Tex #22b/23 (aprile 1962); Tex #65/66 (marzo 1966).

14. Mormon characters have also been depicted in other popular Italian comic books including, La Grande Missione-fotoromanzo Completo #10 (10 maggio 1935); Captain Miki #717 (14 novembre 1965); Storia del West #31 (dicembre 1969); “Il Mormone Rapito,” Jesus #3 (maggio 1976), GEIS Gruppo Editoriale; Skorpio (anno III No. 44, 8 novembre 1979); and Lancio Story (anno VI No. 45, 17 novembre 1980).


16. Doug Moench (w), Herb Trimpe (a), Godzilla #13 (August 1978), Marvel Comics.

17. Alfredo Castelli (w), Martin Mystère Extra #22 (luglio-dicembre 2001).


21. She-Hulk, vol. 3, #1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12 (2004–2005), Marvel Comics.

Okay... I can do this!

I'll never forget my first day of high school.

This place is bigger than I thought!

It was on that day that I saw her for the very first time.

The girl with the white ribbon in her hair.

Hi, I'm Maya. Is it alright if I sit by you?
WHO
BECAME
MY BEST
FRIEND.

IF I TOLD
YOU I HAD
SOMETHING
WRONG WITH
MY HEART,
WOULD YOU
BE AFRAID?

WHAT
DO YOU
MEAN?

KEN...

...I’VE HAD A
HEART DEFECT
EVER SINCE I
WAS BORN. I
JUST THOUGHT
YOU SHOULD
KNOW.

IN CASE
SOMETHING
HAPPENS TO ME...

MAYA...

WE NEVER
KNOW WHAT
WILL HAPPEN
TO US, BUT WE
SHOULDN’T BE
AFRAID...

AND I’LL
ALWAYS BE
HERE FOR YOU
IF YOU NEED
ANYTHING. OKAY?

AT LEAST, WE HAVE TO
TRY AND NOT BE AFRAID.

OKAY.

HONESTLY, I WAS
AFRAID.
WHEN MAYA WENT IN FOR ANOTHER OPERATION, I WAS TERRIFIED.

SON?

MAYA'S FAMILY SAID YOU CAN SEE HER NOW.

THANK YOU DOCTOR.

KEN...

HI, MAYA. HOW ARE YOU DOING?

AND WHEN I SAW HER ON THAT HOSPITAL BED SMILING UP AT ME,

TIRED... THANK YOU FOR COMING TO SEE ME.

I TOOK THE RIBBON OUT OF MY HAIR. I WANT YOU TO HAVE IT, KEN.

I FELT MY OWN HEART SKIP A BEAT.

BUT I CAN'T... IT'S YOURS!

IT'S ALL RIGHT.

A NURSE GAVE IT TO ME WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL AFTER AN OPERATION. SHE GAVE EVERY GIRL IN THE HOSPITAL A RIBBON THAT DAY TO WEAR IN THEIR HAIR. THIS WAS THE ONLY WHITE RIBBON...
WHITE SYMBOLIZES PURITY, RIGHT? MAYBE THAT'S WHY I WANTED THE WHITE RIBBON INSTEAD OF A DIFFERENT COLOR...

I GUESS I JUST WANTED TO BE PURE. MAYBE I COULDN'T BE COMPLETELY HEALTHY IN MY BODY, BUT I COULD TRY TO BE IN MY SPIRIT...

PURE IN HEART... EVEN IF MY PHYSICAL HEART WAS WEAK...

THAT RIBBON HELPED REMIND ME OF WHERE REAL STRENGTH COMES FROM.

SO TAKE GOOD CARE OF IT, KEN.

MAYBE IT'LL HELP GIVE YOU STRENGTH TOO...
That was 15 years ago.
Those were the last words I heard Maya say to me.

And she was right.

That little ribbon did help give me strength.

Especially when I missed her and when I couldn't understand why my friend had to be taken so young.

I'd look at that ribbon.

And remember all that it meant to her.

Daddy!!

The water is so blue!

And now when I look at it......
AND THE CLOUDS ARE SO WHITE! JUST LIKE MY RIBBON!! RIGHT, MOMMY?

Yeah, you're right! It's beautiful.

I can recognize just how much that white ribbon has come to mean to me too.

The End
Families can be together forever

Through Heavenly Father's Plan

I always want to be with my own family

And the Lord will show me how I can.
SALT LAKE CITY—Funeral services have been announced for famed painter Arnold Friberg, who died Thursday at the age of 96….Friberg's breathtaking creation of the parting of the Red Sea was filmed for the movie The Ten Commandments…. The family encourages the public to attend the viewing, knowing how many lives Friberg touched and inspired. —KSL.COM, 3 July 2010

A n article of faith is said to have hung above the easel of artist Arnold Friberg: “I believe in God . . . and DeMille.” Conjoining the Divine with one of Hollywood’s most shameless showmen was intended to be a compliment not to Cecil B. DeMille but to God. Just so: the art of “A. Friberg”—as he signed his paintings and often referred to himself—never seemed so humble as it did grand. Consider his portrayal of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, his famous painting of George Washington in prayer at Valley Forge, or Laman and Lemuel shrinking from Nephi, even as they attempted to do what most older brothers have wanted to do to a cocky younger sibling: kill him.

A friend of the family invited me to the Friberg funeral. Although I was only that friend-of-a-friend and didn’t know Friberg, I was drawn to the occasion by the power of his art in my life. I’d grown up with the Friberg Book of Mormon paintings—they had been completed at about the time I began early-morning seminary. Then in my mid-20s, I’d been surprised to discover how much his Mounties looked like Moroni—as did his Indians. His gamblers. His cowboys. And so on. Arnold Friberg’s art was the monument that first gave size and shape (mainly size) to my faith. So, to me, going to his funeral felt a little like coming full circle, returning me to the faith of my youth in a narrative I had long since resized.

After having lived nearly two decades in the “lone and dreary world” of Texas, my wife and I had decided to return to “Zion.” So I piggy-backed the funeral on to a visit with a realtor in Salt Lake City. But my flight didn’t arrive until half an hour before the funeral began, so I arrived at the Assembly Hall on Temple Square late. I’d tried to stand by for an earlier flight, but Delta’s rules have changed. What used to be free if you stood by on the same day of your flight now costs 50 bucks! I would have paid as much as a double sawbuck, but half a yard seemed too much for the friend-of-a-friend who would not be noticed slipping in the east door at the back of the Hall.

Along with airline rules, the world has changed. My grandchildren are growing up in a world very little like the one Arnold Friberg painted. (Though some will argue it never was.) Today’s people are smaller. Certainly our heroes are smaller. For all the stature of Barack Obama’s Politics of Hope, his reign cannot compare to the rambling romantic presidency of Ronald Reagan, which apparently—by Obama’s unlikely campaign references to our late cowboy president—even he knew. A Jake Gyllenhaal looks comically small inside the bloated production of The Prince of Persia, especially when compared to any performance by John Wayne. Wayne’s unlikely casting as Genghis Kahn was no more believable than Gyllenhaal’s, but unlike Gyllenhaal, The Duke was bigger than the film.

What Friberg had in mind when he painted Nephi and Mormon and the Mounties were the larger heroes of myth, legend, and folklore: the heroes of song and romance, of religion and of Cecil B. DeMille. By comparison to our politicians or the bourgeois little “stars” of modern romantic films—the mere “celebrities” for whom notoriety is synonymous with fame—Friberg heroes are giants, the heroes spoken of in the longhouse and the sweat lodge and the medicine tent, Beowulf and Arthur and Samuel the Lamanite! These are not merely great men. These are men whose feats were of such size as to inspire campfire audiences to give the time and at-
tention and scope required to create a saga about Arthur or Ulysses or Joseph Smith.

But those times are past. A modern critic is more likely to point out Friberg's occidental ethnocentrism, his art's discomfiting similarity to Socialist Realism, and the apparent homoeroticism of his images and imagination. But these are the same critics willing to see a carnal collusion in Batman's mentoring of Robin; who might even argue for a more than fraternal association between Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. They know nothing of the "long thoughts" of youth or the willful dreams every boy has of heroism, or every girl of finding a hero. And if you think that statement is sexist, welcome to the world of Arnold Friberg! In Friberg's romantic world, women are incidental if not invisible. Exceptions to this rule include the occasional Indian maiden caring for a cradleboarded baby, but even the rare Friberg woman looks bigger and stronger than matinee idols of today.

One may argue that like much occasional art, Friberg's paintings have not survived their occasions, that their original audience has outgrown the inspiration the artist sought in size. Whereas Friberg was impressed by the strut and swagger of Charlton Heston, nowadays we invest stardom in the delicate brooding of Leonardo DiCaprio. One may also argue that Friberg's vision of heroic stature is of diminished inspirational importance for girls seeking to discover themselves in his art or for boys of less than Olympian stature.

But criticism employing the "new" tools of art criticism is not only off point but also out of time: it fails not only the times of the artist but those of his natural audience—those seeking the inspiration of size and moment. Not the merely beautiful—which can be small and articulate—but the sublime that requires pipes and drums and size! What girl growing up in the 1950s did not want to date a Friberg Mountie as big as his horse? What boy chosen last for every playground team would not aspire to becoming Moroni or standing righteously in defiance of the debauched King Noah?

I was such a boy, crippled by polio and anxious to believe that virtue is the only power sufficient to make a champion. I instinctively recognized the metaphor of Friberg's art and knew that the size of a man is the size of his heart. The stature of Friberg's cowboys and Mounties and antique Mormons was not evidence of the number of pushups they could muster but an emblem of their heroism and the purity of their hearts. Friberg's Mounties loved their horses. Friberg's Nephites loved their Lord.

So no matter how much education has taught me or life wizened me, I still recognize ironic comment about the sentimentality of Friberg's art as too simple, especially because we have not discovered a metaphor more inspiring to the imaginations of those so young or so hopeful as to believe John Wayne could have been Genghis Kahn anytime he damn well pleased! Likewise, it's too easy to compare the propaganda of the Soviet Social Realists to the unapologetic propaganda of Friberg's occasional art. Friberg was as faithful to his audience as to his commissions.

Like any commercial artist, Friberg went where the commissions took him. But people didn't commission Arnold Friberg if they wanted something intimate: even his small paintings were painted big. His size was heroic, his moment historic, his canvas a marching order. In his most famous painting—George Washington praying at Valley Forge—we recognize that although the moment may be reflective, this is a guy about to do something really big.

Shortly after the democratization of Poland, I visited Warsaw and Gdansk. Everywhere I went, I saw posters of the heroes of Solidarity. I saw not just those I expected of Lech Walesa and the priests who had marched with him, but of the two characters the revolutionaries had taken as the standard bearers of freedom and their own confidence in capitalism: John Wayne and Ronald Reagan. No, not Ronald Reagan in his presidential suit and tie but in the cowboy hat and boots of his B-movie career and host of Death Valley Days. A number of biographies reveal John Wayne to have personally been less a hero than his media image proclaimed. We now know Ronald Reagan couldn't spell. Both facts miss the point: most of us are less interested in the men they were than in the men we need them to be.

I don't know whether Friberg knew about the National Geographic genome project to chart the ancestry of Native Americans. The project evidences that all...
A troupe of Mounties and a bagpiper playing “Amazing Grace” escorted the black, horse-drawn hearse that carried Friberg to the Salt Lake Cemetery; appropriate pageantry for an artist who was a kind of argument against the Hudson River School of painting—not in size, but subject. Whereas those artists diminished people to afterthoughts in the vast canvases of their bucolic scenes, Friberg’s heroes were more dramatic and prouder than any mere tree or valley or river running through it.

As I watched the procession pull away from the west gates of Temple Square, I remembered Friberg’s misquotation of Delacroix: “What moves men of genius, or what inspires their work, is not new ideas, but obsession with the idea that what has been done before is not enough.” The genius Friberg was speaking of was his own. And as I stood at the gates of Temple Square to see the body of Arnold Friberg so splendidly removed, I realized that A. Friberg was likely discovering the gates of heaven to be disappointingly small.

But only until he—painter for The Queen, God, and Cecil B. DeMille (in ascending order)—is permitted to repaint them.

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ELEGY FOR A. FRIBERG

Beat the drums.
Bring out the black horses.
Carry the caisson.
March the red blouses.
Tell the people to come:
The one and many who loved him.
Tell the critics: “We’ve forgotten your names.”

Beat drums. Play pipes.
Grace now saves him.
Death may now take him:
His name now large as his frames.
His art: long thoughts to amaze.
Beat the drums. Lead the black horses.
Play grace on the pipes. Then away.

—CLIFTON HOLT JOLLEY
Mail's here, Dad. Gimmee gimmee!

Wow! My first edition, autographed copy of "The 5000 Year Leap" arrived!

Where'd you get that, Nick?

I won it from Glenn Beck's "Why I hate Woodrow Wilson" essay contest.

"Lord, Sin Who Waa... Doo! is Now Now. Lowdown Scribb." Is this just a bunch of insulting anagrams made from Woodrow Wilson's name?

I was a shoe-in, Ange! Beck loves anagrams; watch!

...the letters in "ACORN" can be rearranged to spell "AN ORC"; so we know they're actually the undead army of evil Lord Sauron!

"Dear lover of freedom,
It has been prophesied that one day the Constitution of the United States shall hang by a thread. At that time, the Latter-Day Saints shall gather to save it.
I hope that this book will be an instrument in the hands of the Lord to save that precious document..."
Hang by a thread? That sounds sorta ominous...

And now our top story...

As our President was bowing to another foreign despot today, a mysterious note fell from his suit coat pocket...

Chief of Staff Emanuel fought off a throng of reporters and scooped up the note, saying it was private correspondence to the president, and not for the public's eyes.

However, a suspicious message was posted on Emanuel's Twitter account mere moments later...

This leaves us with two questions:

- IS the Riddler at large in our nation's capital?
- And more importantly: Why hasn't this president installed a Bat signal in the White House?!

Hey Twitter friends, help me figure this out! Pres really needs 2 know. Don't ask why, it is like super top secret 4 reals! Thx!!!!

@Axelrod O'Reilly pwned you last night, dude! LOS3R!

GREAT SKOUSEN'S GHOST!

It's all right here... the "Committee of the Whole" was another name for the Constitutional Convention and... the "Conglomerate of Compromises" was a term used by some for... GASP!!

Someone's planning to steal the United States Constitution!

Is that bad, Dad?

Yes, son. It's the kind of thing they make summer blockbusters about!
I have to warn the White House!

Homeland Security.
You have to listen to me! The Constitution is in danger!

Not another tea party...
Stop watching Fox News, you hate-mongering racist!

They won't listen! Looks like it's up to me!

Son, take my credit card and book me a flight. I'm going to Washington, D.C.!!

Ooooo!! Yes sir!

Okay, dad; according to the internet, the original four manuscript pages of the Constitution are kept under bulletproof glass in the rotunda.

Guards! Someone is trying to steal the Constitution!

See? All two thousand pages!

Relax, mister. It's safe under our watch.

What!? The original Constitution is only four pages!

A 4-page government document? What country are you from, cousin Balki?

Now scram; my Facebook profile ain't updating itself!
“Filfered under your lav carebakers’ nose…”

It’s gone!

Dad, someone’s on the roof with a document case!

What?! How do you know?

Google, Dad. They see EVERYTHING.

I’ll be creeped out by that later...

THERE HE IS!

STOP!

Senator, WHY! How could you steal the Constitution!

Have you seen the polls, Son?

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid!

And that was really uncalled for...

Polls? I don’t--

The tea parters are threatening my re-election! I was just going to hold it for ransom to get some serious campaign funds.

Wow! That is such a terrible plan in, like, 8000 many ways.

HA HA!

BAP!

WHAP!

He’s getting away!

OOF!

Security here. Situation is under control.

Ow...

Whatta ya know? This book helped save the Constitution after all!

So, isn’t it ironic that a Latter-Day Saint had to save the Constitution from another Latter-Day Saint to fulfill the prophecy?

The War is LOST, Harry.

END
Not your Relief Society president’s Bible

. . . AND CRUMB SAID, “LET THERE BE GENESIS”

By Dallas Robbins

SOMEONE WAS BOUND TO DO IT EVENTUALLY. And R. Crumb is the one. He, the best known of iconoclast comic artists, tackled one of the most revered books in Western culture: the book of Genesis. During a four-year almost-monastic effort, Crumb illustrated all fifty chapters of Genesis—all of them—from God’s creation of the heavens to Joseph’s death and burial in Egypt. He says,

I, Crumb, the illustrator of this book, have, to the best of my ability, faithfully reproduced every word of the original text, which I derived from several sources, including the King James Version, but mostly from Robert Alter’s recent translation, The Five Books of Moses.¹

The cover, which evokes the color and style of the Classics Illustrated books from Crumb’s childhood, proclaims, “The First Book of the Bible Graphically Depicted! Nothing Left Out!” and “Adult Supervision Suggested for Minors.”

As with any R. Crumb adventure, adult supervision goes without saying. But for those who know only the Sunday School version of Genesis, or who simply suffer from cultural amnesia, Crumb’s approach will indeed be a revelation.

With his singular artistic vision, Crumb, godfather of the “underground comix” movement during the late 60s and 70s, has inspired literally thousands of comic artists. Featuring such characters as Mr. Natural, Devil Girl, Felix the Cat, and Joe Blow, his comic stories didn’t simply push the boundaries of good taste; they ignored them. Many of his stories are filled with pornographic perversities, earthy obsessions, racial stereotypes, social satire, and just plain indecent fun where censorship is the only offense. With such a long history of unscrupulous sequential art, Crumb’s turn to Genesis may seem odd. But in the introduction, Crumb shares what attracted him to the first book of Moses:

I, ironically, do not believe the Bible is “the word of God.” I believe it is the words of men. It is, nonetheless, a powerful text with layers of meaning that reach deep into our collective consciousness, our historical consciousness, if you will. It seems indeed to be an inspired work, but I believe that its power derives from its having been a collective endeavor that evolved and condensed over many generations.²

And he saw that he had not won out against him and he touched his hip-socket and Jacob’s hip-socket was wrenched as he wrestled with him.

DALLAS ROBBINS is a freelance writer living in Salt Lake City and is a frequent contributor to the Salt Lake City Weekly and Sunstone. You can read his latest random thoughts at WWW.DALLASROBBINS.COM.
One of Crumb’s primary sources on Genesis, Robert Alter, provides additional reasons for the irreligious to take the book seriously.

Nowhere else in ancient literature have the quirks and unpredictability of individual characters and the frictions and tensions of family life—sibling rivalry, the jealousy of co-wives, the extravagance of parental favoritism—been registered with such subtlety and insight.\(^3\)

The same statement could be applied to Crumb’s own oeuvre. His unpredictable, fractious stories and characters seem to have laid a uniquely appropriate groundwork for approaching the utter strangeness and startling quirkiness of Genesis. His gritty, earthy style reminds the reader that Genesis is a work of literature not bound by the constraints of theology or good manners.

Crumb’s rendering itself is inspiring, with his detailed, almost obsessive pen marks and the unflinching portrayals of moments when one is tempted to look away. The art sometimes has a woodcut quality, utilizing stark contrasts and subtle shades, mirroring the emotional complexity of the stories in the harsh landscape of ancient Palestine. The text, often taken directly from Genesis, could have slowed the story with its ancient diction, but the panels are perfectly matched to it, creating flow, tension, and more than a few surprising and delightful moments.

One such delight is the anthropomorphic portrayal of Yahweh and his messengers, who walk into scenes from stage right or descend from the sky without warning. This image of an embodied God is already familiar to Mormons, but seeing it played out in context gives added meaning to the relationships among God and those he created in his image.

I was often moved by the expressions on familiar characters in familiar situations—for example, the resignation and reticence in Abraham’s eyes as he holds a sacrificial knife above his son, crying to God, “Here I am!”

Another moment that took me by surprise is Jacob’s wrestling the angel until the break of dawn. The earthiness of the panels is comical but reminded me that our mortal frame, when in competition with immortal desires, shouldn’t be afraid to break a little sweat and roll around in the dirt.

As for love and sex, there are poignant moments, as seen in Isaac and Rebekah’s sharing a bed together in joyous intimacy with the accompanying text, “Isaac found solace after the death of his mother.” But there are also visceral moments of sexual confusion—as when Lot’s daughters bed him, believing that they are the last of humankind, hoping to “keep alive seed from our father.” The art evokes sadness while at the same time respecting the women’s desperate rationale.

As with any biblical re-telling, the temptation to “fill in the blanks” is always in the background, and one may wonder if Crumb took too many liberties. “In a few places I ventured to do a little interpretation of my own, if I thought the words could be made clearer,” he admits, “but I refrained from indulging too often in such ‘creativity,’ and sometimes let it stand in its convoluted vagueness rather than monkey around.”\(^4\) While his images may surprise many readers, his written interpretation is kept safely in an appendix, offering his own Midrashic take on several of the stories.

But whether he “monkeyed around” too much or too little, his illustration of the ancient text is a challenging, but rewarding, introduction to Genesis or Crumb or both. In this latest creation, Crumb is at the height of his comic powers, showing that sequential art is not just for superheroes or indie poseurs. Crumb reminds us that as an art form, comics have the ability to contain the intimate and the epic, giving us renewed insight into familiar stories.

NOTES

2. Ibid.
On December 12th, 2025.

Thomas Highmore got a package in the mail.

He tore it open like a hungry carnivore looking for entrails.

Inside it was a telescope.

Back when Tom had been called Tommy, he’d known (as most people do) a girl. This particular girl was named Wendy. He was in love with her.

Wendy told him many wonderful things about fairies being real and about God.

Tom loved listening to her. He wanted to see fairies.

But, of course, it didn’t last. Most things with girls don’t.

By a marvelous stroke of luck, she was also in love with him.

Now he was alone.
Tom took out his new telescope.

He measured its aperture, and its focal length, and its angular resolution.

and its width

its length

and its magnification.

He jotted everything down in a thick, heavy notebook.

Then, he took out the rest of his collection.

Including his new addition.
And he looked through.
He spent the next two months lining them up in all different combinations, searching every corner of the sky.

But he still couldn’t find God.

So, he packed them all up again.

And before climbing into bed, Thomas Highmore made two calls.

Hi, Wendy. I don’t know if this is still your number or not. Today I looked out seven lightyears. Something may have changed in the last seven years, but I didn’t see much.

After that, he ordered another telescope.

That night he slept but he did not dream.

THE END
CONTRIBUTORS

ADAM KOFORD (back cover) is involved in the 700 Hoboes Project and Conan vs. Bear. He curates a webcomic entitled the Laugh-Out-Loud Cats at HOBO-TOPIA.COM, and has been featured on Boing Boing TV and is a regular contributor to DRAWN.CA.

BLAIR STERRETT (pg. 6) received an undergraduate from BYU and a masters from the Center for Cartoon Studies. He directs The Lost Media Archive, an ephemeral/kitch film and music preservation project, and is working towards becoming a college professor.

BLAKE CASSELMAN (pg. 50) is a screenwriter and comic book writer. Along with his work on the Devil's Triangle graphic novel series, his short fiction can be found in the anthology, Pandora's Nightmare: Horror Unleashed. He lives in Salt Lake City, Utah.

BRANDON DAYTON (pg. 20) has worked as a writer, animator, illustrator, storyboard artist, and Christmas-light hanger. His mini-comic Green Monk was nominated for the YALSA Great Graphic Novels for Teens Booklist.

BRIAN CRANE (pg. 24) worked in advertising and publishing before creating Pickles, a newspaper comic strip, syndicated in 1990. It appears daily in over 630 papers around the world. He and his wife, Diana Long, have 7 children and 8 grandchildren.

BRIAN C. HAILES (pg. 50) is author and illustrator of Dragon's Gait and Devil's Triangle. His new series, Continuum, will be published in 2010. He is finishing Passion & Spirit: The Dance Quote Book. See his work at HAILESART.COM.

C. L. HANSON (pg. 24) writes for “Main Street Plaza” (LATTERDAYMAINSTREET.COM) and “Letters from a Broad...” (LFAB-UVM.BLOGSPOT.COM), and is the author/illustrator of the novel Exmormon (EXMORMON.NET). She lives in Switzerland.

COLBY PURCELL (pg. 32) owns four kids and a doting husband, and gets paid to play the piano. She makes webcomics for fun. Lint (PURNCHELLIN.COM/LINT) was her first comic and Pygmalion in Space (PURNCHELLIN.COM/PyGMAliON) her second.

D. HICKS (pg. 27) first ventured in commerce with the purchase of a pumpkin patch. This failed. He found God 15 years ago, though they are still negotiating some details. More of Hicks's work can be found at HERETICSOFCLOUDGAZING.BLOGSPOT.COM.

DAVE BURTON (pg. 66) drew cartoons for the Navy Times in Washington DC during WW II. His paintings have been shown at many galleries throughout Utah. He lives in the SLC Avenues district with his wife Ora. They recently celebrated their 70th year together.

DAVEY MORRISON (pg. 90) is a writer, actor, and filmmaker, recently editing Out of the Mount: 19 From New Play Project. Published in The Provo-Orem Word, and awarded first prize in the Mormon Artist Young Writer's Contest.

DOROTHY DELGADO (pg. 80) has been addicted to Calvin and Hobbes since she was barely able to read. A self-taught artist, she currently works as a massage therapist, doing comics on the side. Her website is CONFESSIONCOMICS.TUMBLR.COM.

EMILY MUTO (pg. 74) is a comic artist from Seattle, specializing in Japanese-style manga. She has an ongoing webcomic called “The Way to Your Heart” EMI-ART.COM/TWYTH. Several of her other completed comic projects can be found at EMI-ART.COM.

G. ENGLISH BROOKS (pg. 43) teaches writing and literature, and is a student in UNR's Literature and Environment program. In his spare time he enjoys Mexican radio, squatting at birds, and inventing poorly attended high-altitude marathons.

GALEN DARA: (pg. 60) atheist mommy sitting at the back of the church with a sketchbook. Permablogger at THE-EXPONENT.COM; GALENDARA.BLOGSPOT.COM; and MININGTHENOOKS.BLOGSPOT.COM. Will soon launch a webcomic at THE-NOOKS.COM.

HARVEY DROKE (pg. 66) illustrated for his LDS mission newsletter and then began drawing professionally in magazines and newspapers in Washington D.C. In 2008, he published a compilation of his political and social comics called Comictures.

HOWARD TAYLER (pg. 7) created SCHLOCKMERCENARY.COM in 2000, new installments appearing online every day since then. Howard paints 28mm miniatures, plays table-top role-playing games, and shifts plates of metal around at the gym with sissyphean zeal.

ISAAC STEWART (pg. 67) has a BFA in industrial design, but does not design factories, a common misconception people have. He recently completed illustration and cartography for Brandon Sanderson’s The Way of Kings. His website is ISAACSTEWART.COM.

JAKE PARKER: (pg. 55) comic book artist, animation designer, and family man.

JAKOB CONKLING (pg. 27) has no formal training or accredited degrees in writing or art. His previous comic works can be found doodled on very important reports made during very important corporate meetings. Email: jakob.conkling@gmail.com.
JAKOB SPJUT (pg. 26) teaches engineering at Quinebaug Valley Community College in Danielson, Connecticut.

JARED GREENLEAF (pg. 46) freelances in illustration, with a job history in graphic design and animation; he is also a closet comicbook artist. He currently attends BYU’s graduate art program. He lives with his wife Keiko and their three kids.

JOHN GOVERNALE (pg. 66) of EXCEEDINGLY CURIOUS.COM, uses drawings by dead artists for his cartoons. He expects that someday one or more of them will punch him in the schnoz for LDS-ifying their work.

KEVIN BECKSTROM’s cartoons (pg. 25) have been published in numerous trade publications, newspapers, newsletters and magazines, including the New Era. Beckstrom has three cartoon blogs: Good Heavens, Zarahemla Times and Beckstrom Buzz.

NATHAN SHUMATE (pg. 46) edits and publishes Arkham Tales, a PDF magazine of weird fiction (ARKHAMTALES.COM), reviews genre movies at Cold Fusion Video Reviews (COLDFUSIONVIDEO.COM), and blogs at NATHANSHUMATE.COM.

NICHOLAS WEST (pg. 34) writes comic books— that’s “comic novels” to you NPR listeners, but really, they’re just comics, people. His work can be found at WESTCRITIC.BLOGSPOT.COM

NICK PERKINS’s work (pg. 84) has appeared in the Utah Statesman and the Herald Journal, and the Davis County Clipper for the past ten years. He writes and draws a webcomic called Cooties. See his work online at CARTOONISTA.WORDPRESS.COM.

NOAH VAN SCIVER’s work (pg. 14) has appeared in Mome, Mineshaft, Not My Small Diary, and regularly in The Comics Journal. His first graphic novel, The Hypo, about Abraham Lincoln’s young adulthood, is in progress. His website is NOAHVANSCIVER.COM.

PABLO AIRTH (pg. 9) is a designer and illustrator living in the Pacific Northwest and one of the creative forces behind The Peculiar Coloring Book. He believes coloring activities should be introduced to adults in Sunday School, Quorum and Relief Society lessons.

PATRICK SCULLIN (pg. 26) holds an M.F.A. in illustration from Cal State Fullerton. He has worked as a business owner, freelance artist, and staff designer for advertising and creative agencies. Read his weekly webcomic at SUPERSIBLINGSCOMICS.COM.

SAL VELLUTO (front cover) has been a professional illustrator for a quarter of a century. He has worked for major comic book publishers (DC, Marvel) as well as for many independent ones (Valiant-Acclaim, Cross Gen, Continuity, Penny-Farthing Press).

SAM RODRIGUEZ (pg. 34) illustrates a monthly feature for The Friend magazine and the comic classic The Phantom (published by EGMONT in Sweden, Norway and Finland, and by FREW in Australia).

SHAWN BOYLES (pg. 67) currently lives the dream of every fourth grader by drawing pictures for a video game company. Sometimes he gets to color the pictures, too. With crayons. You can visit him on the web at SPIKETHESURFDOG.BLOGSPOT.COM.

SIMON SHEPHERD (pg. 42) participates in local medieval reenactment groups; plays alto, tenor, or bass recorder as needed; sings baritone/bass; and recently played the part of Lorenzo Snow in the Kirtland, Ohio, stake production of This is Kirtland!

STEVE MORRISON (pg. 90) graduated from BYU with a BFA in illustration. He has created illustrations for NPR, Highlights Magazine, National Storytelling Magazine, and the Core Knowledge Foundation. His website is STEVEMORRISONILLUSTRATION.COM.

TODD ROBERT PETERSEN (pg. 8) hasn’t done something like this in a long time. He is an associate professor of English at Southern Utah University and author of the award winning novel, Rift, and the short story collection Long After Dark.

TYLER KIRKHAM (pg. 94) has worked on titles such as Strykeforce, Tomb Raider, The Darkness, Transformers, Amazing Spiderman, X-Men Phoenix Warsong, and Ultimate Fantastic 4. He currently works for DC Comics.

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The SunStone Foundation invites writers to enter its annual fiction contest, which is made possible by a grant from the Brookie and D.K. Brown family. All entries must relate to adult Latter-day Saint experience, theology, or worldview. All varieties of form are welcome.

Stories, without author identification, will be judged by noted Mormon authors and professors of literature. Winners will be announced by 28 February 2010 on Sunstone’s website, WWW.SunStoneMagazine.com. Winners only will be notified by mail. After the announcement, all other entrants will be free to submit their stories elsewhere. Publication is not guaranteed, but winners agree to give SunStone first publication rights.

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