

Revisionist Graphics: An alternate dust jacket for Metropolitan's *A Fighting Man of Mars*

Phil Normand

The story of how Burroughs' seventh Mars novel ended up with its final dust jacket is detailed in part IV of Robert R. Barrett's article, "Edgar Rice Burroughs and Metropolitan Books, Inc." in the Winter 2001 issue of *The Burroughs Bulletin* (Number 45). For me it was an eye-opener.

In November, 1930, Maximilian Elser, Jr. of Metropolitan Newspaper Service decided that *A FIGHTING MAN OF MARS* would become the fourth Burroughs book to be published by them. He asked for a suggestion as to the jacket artist, and Burroughs of course suggested J. Allan St. John who had more than established an association with the Tarzan and Mars books.

Elser wrote that he would contact St. John about the illustrations, but in January, 1931 sent Ed a letter detailing his "new idea" for the dust jacket. He wanted to use the Laurence Herndon cover painting for the May 1930 *Blue Book Magazine* as the front illustration and one-color reproductions of various foreign translations of Burroughs' novels on the back. The back blurb would catalog the details of the foreign translations and also promote *A FIGHTING MAN OF MARS* while the flaps would contain a synopsis of the book along with press notices about *TARZAN AT THE EARTH'S CORE* and *TANAR OF PELLUCIDAR*.

Burroughs had his mind set on using St. John, however, and said that he really couldn't work up much enthusiasm for any other artist. The *Blue Book* cover just didn't appeal to him. Elser backed off the Herndon painting but also closed the subject of using St. John because the artist wanted more money to do the title lettering. Metropolitan felt that they could create a more dynamic look to the jacket. "Mr. St. John is an excellent artist, but, after all, he is rather conventional. What we need is a selling jacket," Elser wrote. He then suggested that they use either Hugh Hutton or Paul Berdanier, both working in-house at the time.

All this came at a difficult time for Burroughs who had been hospitalized in November for epi-

didymitis and, though back home in December, 1930, suffered a relapse and was back in and out of surgery in January. Perhaps too tired from his illness to engage in his usual attention to the details of the illustration of his books, Ed finally told Elser that he could use his own judgement in the matter of the choice of artist.

The resulting Hugh Hutton wraparound dust jacket is generally considered to be the weakest of all the Mars series jackets. It contains none of the strongly rendered action or classic anatomy that St. John was capable of painting. The design is subverted by an asymmetrical composition that puts the center of conflict on the spine and all the interesting details on the back cover. The painting is looks hurried and shows little style.

Hutton became much better known years later as an editorial cartoonist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. His cartoons show that he became much stronger as an anatomist and draftsman. Perhaps he was overworked at Metropolitan.

Elser got the go-ahead in February and by the 27th he told Ed that they had started on the art. The book was published May 15, 1931. Given that there was time needed for color separations to be shot and plates to be engraved, there was barely a month to get the art done. Since Hutton was a house artist, he probably had other assignments during the same period and may not have been able to give it his full attention. Elser said that they (Metropolitan) considered the frontispiece and jacket "excellent." He also said, "We have been supervising drawing of frontispiece and painting of jacket design. . .," by which we might conclude that Elser may have been responsible for the art direction himself. So maybe the fault lies with Elser for the awkward design.

It is a good bet that the idea of putting some kind of emphasis on the spine originated with Elser since *TARZAN AND THE LOST EMPIRE* is the first ERB dust jacket to use a spine motif. Ed must have thought it worked pretty well as a sales gimmick

because he used a spine drawing on all the books published by ERB, Inc. that didn't use a wrap-around jacket.

For a couple of years, after doing the SAVAGE PELLUCIDAR dust jacket, I had toyed with the idea of using the Blue Book cover from the serialization as an alternate to the Hutton on FMM. I believed that it would have made a much more exciting cover. When Barrett's BB article came out I was astounded to learn that not only had it been the original consideration, but that there was a definite statement as to what the whole jacket was to have looked like. I determined to go ahead with the redesign and wrote to Robert asking if he had more information about what books might have been depicted on the back of the jacket.

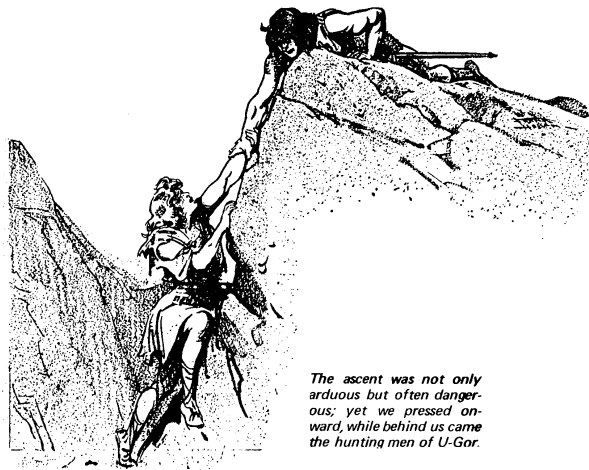
He sent me a copy of a photostat of a group of foreign edition covers which ERB, Inc. had furnished Metropolitan and which had been used in newspaper ads. We can easily assume that they would have used this same art for the dust jacket back panel. The reproduction in this cut is very dark and not really clear enough to use, so I sent a

copy to George McWhorter at the Burroughs Memorial Collection in Louisville, Kentucky and he supplied me with color copies of all but two of the foreign edition covers. Shown on the photostat, but not available in the collection were the Arabic and Polish editions of THE BEASTS OF TARZAN.

After an intensive search, I have not been able to find copies of these covers so I have substituted foreign editions of A PRINCESS OF MARS and THE GODS OF MARS. While in Louisville, Kentucky, for the 2002 Dum-Dum, I took the opportunity to scan the cover from the May, 1930 Blue Book in the Burroughs Collection at Ekstrom Library. The book title lettering has remained the same because it was done in-house as a matter of course.

So, this is what might have been. I hope you enjoy this revisionist dust jacket and that it will find a place in your library.

Phil Normand, APRIL, 2004
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Max Elser's original idea included a "wash reproduction" redrawing of one of Frank Hoban's BLUE BOOK illustrations. Oddly, Burroughs had previously said that he thought that Hoban "made the red men of Mars look like half-wits." An opinion not really borne out by close examination. Ed was probably thinking of an illustration in THE BLUE BOOK by Joseph Chenoweth that was used to promote the magazine serialization. In any case, this is the Hoban spot that Hutton redrew for the frontispiece.



The awkward staging of Hutton's frontispiece overshadows some fairly decent drawing in the primary figures. It bears the hallmarks of an insistent art director demanding that all the story be told in one image. The U-Gorians were likely an afterthought; Tavia and Hadron appear to have been repositioned to the right to accommodate them.

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