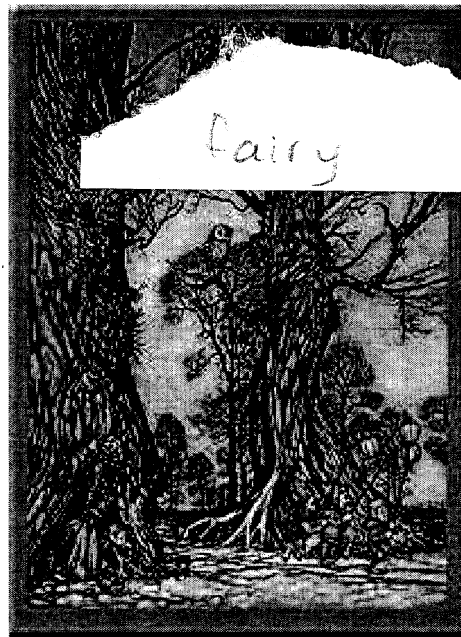


## Breasts and Beasts: Some Prominent Figures in the History of Fantasy Art

“Fantastic art” is, first of all, the eye-catching part of book and magazine covers, sometimes also decorating interior pages. Its announced function is to illustrate the written contents, but its real purpose is to sell the publication by attracting potential buyers first casually—by bright colors and dynamic design—then to the point of active commitment—by the atmosphere and subject matter presented. The popularity of this art form has led to a number of artists being able to go beyond cover pages and book illustrations and create independent artwork, sold to a willing populace. This current state of affairs wasn’t always so, however: this art form’s beginnings were firmly centred between the pages of fantasy literature.

The first artists to gain wide prominence grew to artistic maturity within the ends victorian period in the UK, and the romantic movement in Europe. Illustrators like Arthur Rackham, E.A. Abbey and Edmund Dulac wear these influences very much on their sleeves, creating works filled with lush, moody colour and delicate penwork. Arthur Rackham is best known for his illustrations for the 1905 William Heinemann edition of Washington Irving’s *Rip van Winkle*, populating his images with looming, dark trees, innocent (yet sensuous) fairly maidens, and ogres or trolls “ugly enough to repulse but with sufficient good nature not to frighten.”

E.A. Abbey’s works were created slightly earlier, and bore more influence on American naturalistic and magazine illustration techniques prominent at the time. Working at Harper’s for most of his life, his masterpieces were influenced by both American and continental artists, especially Whistler later in his life. One of his most well regarded series of illustrations was for Harper’s book series *Shakespeare’s Comedies and Tragedies*, published between 1887 and 1909. They reveal his mastery of colour and composition, with characters dressed in jewel-like brocades and posed in high-romantic style. His prowess was so well-regarded that he was commissioned to paint the interior murals of the Boston Public Library in 1890, and those of the State Capitol in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. For the latter, he worked his studies in oil with nude models, and tragically died before the murals were finished; they were later completed by the great John Singer Sargent.

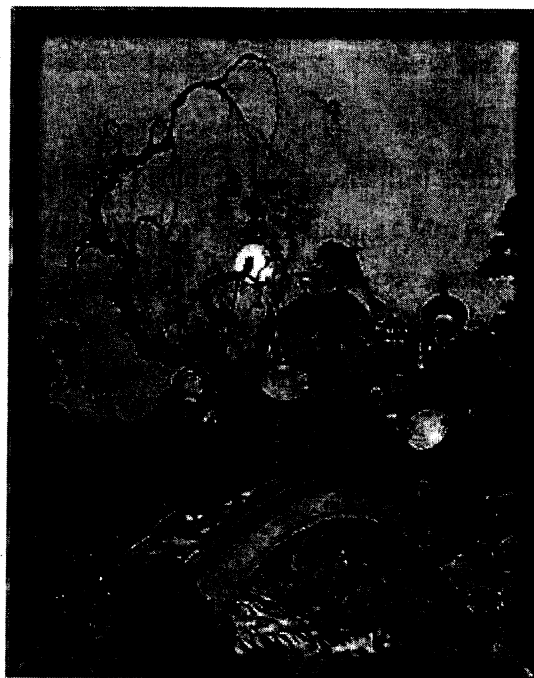


Arthur Rackham

In contrast with E.A. Abbey, the younger Edmund Dulac preferred to work in watercolours, preferring the fine gradations of translucent colour which could be achieved through wash techniques. A native of Toulouse, he moved to London to find work as an artist, eventually working exclusively for the publisher Hodder & Stoughton. His works were designed for the newly-developed process of color separation printing (as I understand it, a kind of offset reproduction process). His early illustrations are unique in that they don't depend upon an ink line to hold their colour, working as if they were coloured ink drawings in themselves. His style during the early part of his career is hazy and numinous, with liberal use of blue for a typical late-romantic, early *art nouveau* effect. This is best seen within his works for the lavish gift books *The Tempest*, *Stories from Hans Christian Anderson*, and *The Bells and other Poems* by Edgar Allen Poe. Later on, he shifted styles and became heavily influenced by Persian miniature painting, which culminated in the illustrations for *The Kingdom of the Pearl*, published in 1920. He had a long career, later working with the magazine *The American Weekly*, and illustrating books right up to his death in 1953.

Another major figure in early fantasy art was John Bauer. Born in Sweden, he is best known for his illustrations in the children's Christmas annual *Bland Tomtar och Troll* volumes of 1907-1910, and 1912-1915, and his works for the book *Fadernas Gudasaga*. His style is quite similar to Dulac's (being mainly constructed within the romantic tradition), though there are also significant Secessionist and

*art nouveau* references within his work, especially seen in his costume design. His work was very popular in Sweden, and helped to create a market for children's fantasy literature there. His early melding of the continental modern art movements and traditional romantic illustrative style greatly influenced the better-known Kay Nielsen.



**Edmund Dulac**

Whilst Arthur Rackham's illustrations and Edmund Dulac's early work were following the stylistically conservative movements of late-romantic art, the prominent illustrator Kay Nielsen embraced the more "modern" styles which were coming into vogue during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These included post-impressionism, fauvism, arts & crafts, the pre-raphaelites, the *fin-de-siecle* decadents, mannerism, symbolism, secessionism, the Birmingham School, *japonisme*, and *art nouveau*.



Kay Nielson

All of these influences were melded together by Nielsen to make a highly-developed personal style. He first attracted attention by his highly stylized illustrations for the Quiller-Crouch book *In Powder and Crinoline*, published in 1913. His second work, (arguably his masterpiece ) further saw the development of his art. It was the challenging *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*, a collection of Nordic tales adapted by Gudrun Thorne-Thomsen published in 1914. These illustrations were considered so definitive that no other illustrated edition of this work was attempted until 1980.

Moving on to more popular genre illustrators, one must certainly mention Virgil Finlay, the most famous fantasy artist of the mid-twentieth century with more than 2,800 published drawings and paintings. His favourite medium and specialty was the scratchboard, stiff artboard coated in white clay, then ink. The ink is scratched away to reveal the white underneath, creating images much like woodcuts. He was also accomplished in the techniques of hatching and stippling, often creating

photographic-level shading effects. His work was seen within the pages of the popular pulp titles *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories* beginning in the mid 'thirties, making thousands of readers instant fans of his work. Even H.P. Lovecraft wrote him fan letters! Later in the 'thirties he did work for *The American Weekly* and illustrated Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. After WWII, his illustrations were published in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, *Fantastic Novels* (where he illustrated a half dozen stories by A. Merritt), *Startling Stories*, *Super Science Stories*, *Amazing Stories*, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Fantastic Adventures*, *Argosy*, and even a few comic books for DC. He occasionally did book commissions as well, including the 1956 *Complete Book of Space Travel*. He won many awards, including the first Hugo ever given for 'best interior illustrator' in 1953. After the demise of the pulp publishing industry, Finlay found it harder to make ends meet and widened his range of submissions, publishing work consistently in astrological magazines up to his death in 1971.

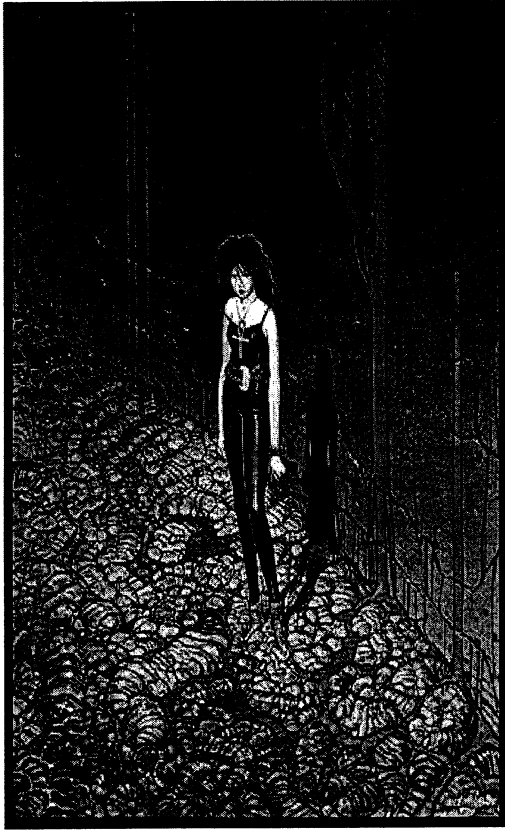
Following in Frank Frazetta is many things: a comic book artist, cartoonist, comics cover illustrator, and fantasy book illustrator, as well as a vigorous self-promoter and avid merchandiser, arguably the most popular fantasy artist of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Born in 1928, Frazetta burst upon the mainstream comic scene in the 'fifties with an incredible explosion of talent and energy. He did series for DC ("The Shining Knight" in *Adventure Comics*), ME ("White Indian" in *Durango Kid* - see image at right), Toby ("John Wayne" in *John Wayne Comics*, with Al Williamson); covers for Eastern (Heroic Comics), Famous Funnies (*Famous Funnies Comics* - the classic "Buck Rogers" covers), ME (*Bobby Benson's B-Bar-B Riders*, *Ghost Rider*, *Straight Arrow*, and *Tim Holt*); and stories (some solo and some with Williamson and friends) for ACG, Avon, DC, Eastern, EC, Standard, and others. *Plus* he was doing his own newspaper strip, "*Johnny Comet*". After a period of hiatus (recovering from the rigours of working under Al Capp on *Li'l Abner*), he re-appeared in 1965 as a painter, doing covers for *Creepy*, *Eerie*, *Vampirella*, and a whole series of *Conan* paperbacks. One of the unusual places his art appeared was in the magazine *Elements*, published by Dow Chemicals in 1973. A full-page color piece and two pen & ink drawings accompanied an article on the future of recycling. After 1973, his work was so popular that he no longer needed to rely on the publishing industry for commissions, instead creating a number of limited edition portfolios on *Kubla Khan*, *Women of the Ages*, and *Lord of the Rings*, all now highly sought after by collectors today. His muscular and heroically posed characters, coupled with a rugged style of working in oils was much-copied, influencing a

whole generation of fantasy artists like Jeff Jones, Berni Wrightson, Michael Whelan, Don Maitz, and Boris Vallejo, among others.

Boris Vallejo (popularly known simply as 'Boris') has gained worldwide attention for his illustrations of science fiction and fantasy, especially those done in the 'eighties; his works appear on the covers of books by such well-known writers as Edgar Rice Burroughs, Alice Chetwynd Ley, Frederik Pohl, Larry Niven, and Lin Carter, as well as in such well-known series as *Doc Savage*, *Tarzan*, and *Conan*. His style was so popular that airbrush-artists the world over copied his style, making many of his themes (especially scantily-clad women with swords) ubiquitous on the sides of souped-up vans driven by young men all over America. His original art is collected all over the world, and he is nearly a publishing empire unto himself - his calendars, pin-ups, and posters are seen all over the world.



**Boris**



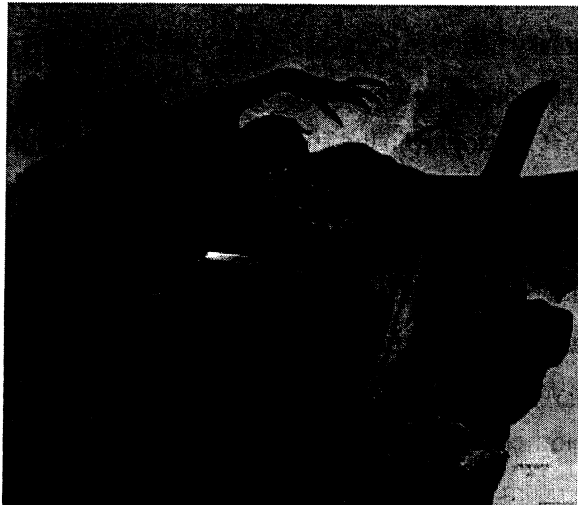
Moebius

Clyde Caldwell is the most popular artist currently working within the Frazetta-Boris tradition of illustration, and has produced hundreds of cover paintings for the Fantasy & SF fields over the last 20-odd years. His covers have been published on books from Ace, Avon Popular Library, Warner Books, Zebra, Houghton-Mifflin, and Doubleday, while his magazine cover credits include *Heavy Metal*, *The Savage Sword Of Conan*, *Epic Illustrated*, *Dragon* and *Dungeon*, among others. There are also posters, limited edition prints, game module and computer game covers, calendar paintings, and portfolios. Since 1992 he has been working freelance, creating his own books and portfolios.

Among the many subgenres of fantasy artists there are those who have more singular visions for their work. A prime example is the French writer and designer of bandes dessinées Jean Giraud, more commonly known by the name Moebius. After getting his start in the comics industry writing strips for small-circulation Catholic magazines, he became widely known after 1971 when he designed the cover of issue 5 of the prominent underground magazine *Comics 130*. Soon Moebius art was turning up on the covers of science fiction paperbacks, in the French equivalent of underground comics (*Le petit Mickey*, *Le Bandard Fou* and *L'Echo des Savanes*), and then, in early 1975, as one of the founding members of Les Humanoïdes Associes (the others were Jean-Pierre Dionnet, Philippe Druillet, and Farkas). Their first publication, *Metal Hurlant*, would change comics forever. The first issue featured a cover by Moebius and Philippe Druillet, as well as the first installment of *Arzach* and of *Major Grubert*. The American incarnation of *Metal Hurlant* is *Heavy Metal* which is still being published today and is filled, primarily, with European reprints. Throughout the seventies, Moebius appeared in every issue. Much of his work there has been collected into albums. Other major accomplishments of the Seventies included costume designs for Ridley Scott's film, *Alien* and storyboards and design for Jodorowsky's *Dune* and Disney's *Tron*, the launch of a new western strip with Charlier, *Jim Cutlass*, and collaborations with both Jodorowsky and Dan O'Bannon. He did a popular series of superhero posters for Marvel Comics in the 'eighties as well as a variety of prints from his own StarWatcher Graphics. His work is

still being published and reprinted, and most of his comics work has been collected and translated into English.

Another prominent 'alternative' Fantasy artist is Gerald Brom (using only 'Brom in his art), who works primarily in the gothic-horror subgenre. He primarily works within the role-playing game market, doing covers for the giant games publisher TSR (the publishers of the *Dungeons and Dragons* series). He has also done cover work for mainstream genre authors such as Terry Brooks, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Michael Moorcock and R.A. Salvatore, to name just a few, and his work has appeared in comics by such heavyweight publishers as DC and Dark Horse; in popular video games like *Doom II*; and in high-profile movies like Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow*, *Galaxy Quest*, and even the blockbuster *Scooby-Doo*. His artistic style has broadened the references used within the genre, calling on Giger, Whelan and several other seminal Gothic-horror-influenced artists for inspiration.



**Brom**

The range of styles and influences seen in the work of the artists mentioned above shows that all fantasy art is not just large-chested women riding monsters into the sunset. Rather, it has a well-developed history, and draws on a wide range of inspirations sourced from around the world. That being said, I still wouldn't be caught dead with a Boris calendar hanging on my wall.

Many thanks to the website for Bud Plant Illustrated Books, (<http://www.bpib.com/illustra.htm>), which provided a great deal of the biographical information needed to write this essay.