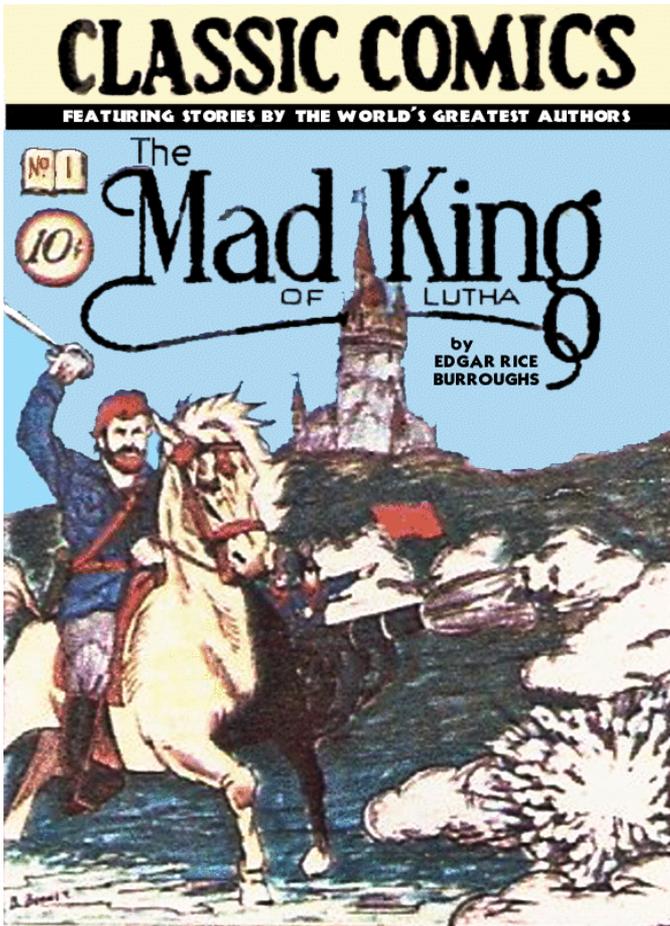


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HARK THE THARK!

WHY DIDN'T *CLASSICS*
ILLUSTRATED PUBLISH
ANY ERB?

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WHY wasn't the above comic book ever published? That's a question I've been asking myself for many years. The cover dates back many years and was prepared by a collector of *Classics Illustrated* comics who evidently liked ERB. Though *Classics Comics* changed it's name to *Classics Illustrated* with no. 35, the March 1947 issue, I believe this cover was created sometime around the big ERB influx of the early and mid 1960s.

Before we examine this particular issue or even ERB, let's look a little at the history of *Classics Illustrated*.

Albert L. Kanter was born on April 13, 1897, in Baranovitchi, Russia, the eldest of three sons. His family emigrated to America in 1904 and settled in Nashua, NH.

Al was working for Elliot Publishing in 1940 after surviving the Great Depression. Elliot published a comic book called *Double Comics* which was a new cover placed on two unsold comics from various publishers and sold as a special. By early 1941, Al, who loved great novels had decided to try publishing a comic book version of classic literature. The first three issues would be published by Elliot but Al would own them. Sometime around October, 1941, the first issue of *Classic Comics* rolled off the

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presses and appeared in stores. It was a 62-page adaptation of Alexandre Dumas famous novel *The Three Musketeers*. There was also a 2-page biography of the author following the story. All this inside a colorful cover.

In 1942, Al formed his own company, Gilberton Co., just for the purpose of publishing *Classic Comics* and Al was off and running. Al published 167 issues in the US through 1962 then sold the rights to the Frawley Corporation who continued publishing reprints and finally two new issues in 1969. But in all 169 issues, there was never an adaptation of any ERB material.

To top that off, the series was continued in some other countries. In a 10-nation joint effort in Europe, 84 issues were published that were never published in the US. In Greece, another 84 using mythology and Greek History were published. And finally, in Brazil, over 100 issues never seen in the US appeared. The Brazilian even reprinted Portuguese versions of other series of similar books and some Dell *Four-Color* issues.

This brings us to the question asked in our title, WHY DIDN'T CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED PUBLISH ANY ERB? Now that we know something about *Classics Illustrated*, we can address the question a bit more informed. There are many thoughts about why and we will try to answer them one by one.

“Edgar Rice Burroughs? Who’s he? Oh! Now I know. He’s the guy who created Tarzan for the movies. We aren’t in the movie business. We want literature.”

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Well, how's that sound to you? It's true that many people of the 1940's, and even today, consider Tarzan the only thing Edgar Rice Burroughs ever wrote...and they think that the Johnny Weismueller version was actually written by Burroughs the way Johnny played him. Well, the facts are that Burroughs sold the movie rights to MGM. In those days you sold complete rights and the studio could do whatever they wanted as long as they said something to the effect that "original story by Edgar Rice Burroughs." What that meant was that they could write a totally new story with no similarity to the original as long as they had purchased the rights to make a movie based on Burroughs' creation.

The only similarity that came out of MGM and Johnny Weismueller was that Tarzan was orphaned as a baby, raised by apes, eventually rescued by Jane and her party, and controlled the apes while living in the jungles of Africa. What they created for the character was that he spoke very broken English after Jane taught him, he used vines to swing through the jungle and, if he needed help, all he had to do was yodel for the elephants. I say yodel because they also invented a yell to be the victory cry of Tarzan (not the great apes—Tarzan was the only one to ever use it).

There have been many explanations of the yell, but others have covered that almost to nauseam, so we'll skip it.

But, as we all know, the movie Tarzan was not the Tarzan of the books so that excuse falls though the floor.

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“Well, yeah, Burroughs did write some other things, but he’s just a children’s writer. We want more mature material.”

Edgar Rice Burroughs did indeed write some stuff that worked for children, but most of the time he wrote material that had the distinct ability to appeal to people of many ages—what makes a classic? I think *Minidoka* is a neat little children’s book ideal for bedtime story time.

Let’s look at his other works though. Jane was kidnaped by a great ape with sex on his mind in a book written in the late Elizabethan/early Edwardian era. Sex wasn’t mentioned directly, but it was quite plain. As a matter of fact, most of Ed Burroughs novels had the heroines facing what the Elizabethan world would describe as *“the fate worse than death.”* From Jane to Meriem, Dejah Thoris, Dian the Beautiful, Witchata Billings, and all the rest faced the fear of rape at one or more times over their appearances. As a matter of fact, it seemed that this was the main reason women were kidnaped. And Queen La was always trying to seduce Tarzan. All this was a children’s writer? I’m afraid I can’t agree with that assessment even though Burroughs did write in a way that it wasn’t overly obvious to a ten or twelve year old reading the stories.

“Okay, Okay! So he’s not a children’s writer. Let’s look at some and see if we can publish them. How about this one, A Princess of Mars? Oh-oh! It says here that the people on Mars don’t even wear clothes. We can’t draw naked people in comics books

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that are to be read by kids. This man must be a pornographer.”

Oh, boy! Here we go again. These people don't even know the nuances of their own language. Let's look back at that book. John Carter, the hero, doesn't say the people didn't wear clothing. As a matter of fact, he goes into some detail about some of the harnesses worn by the Martians. Those harnesses covered large portions of the body and probably acted as armor as well covering all the sensitive areas on the body. We know they must have been sturdy because they had to hold all the weapons carried by Martians—and there were several including two different type swords and a very large pistol. We even learn that those harness are decorated for show. Among the decorations were jewels identifying the wearer and colorful cloths worn sometimes just for vanity. The word Carter used was “naked”. In the Elizabethan Era, a woman who wore a dress that revealed her ankle or her elbows was said to be “naked”. They were a lot more covered than the wrestling divas of today.

No, Edgar Rice Burroughs was not a pornographer. He was a storyteller.

“Okay, you win again! But there's another problem. If we do a Burroughs book, it would have to be Tarzan. Right? And, let's face it, the newspaper strip has been running for quite a while. I even remember them telling Tarzan's origin. It's written a lot better than some others, but people read it for free daily. And anything else would be ignored because no one ever heard of it.”

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I will agree about one thing. The newspaper strips have told the origin of Tarzan a few times. Dell has even reprinted some of these stories in their *Four-Color* series. But their has never been an adaptation done to fit a comic book. *Classics* is a large comic book and could adapt the whole story and use different angles or sizes for the pictures that the newspaper strips can't. Besides, there are over fifty books by Edgar Rice Burroughs that are easily accessible, and many of them don't even mention Tarzan. Why not try some of those?

"That's all a bunch of pulp stories. They were written at so much a word. They weren't written because they wanted to say something like good literature. We want great stuff like Dumas, Twain, Doyle and all the other great writers not some hack."

Let's look at the three mentioned.

Alexandre Davy Dumas wrote the first *Classic Comics* story, *The Three Musketeers* and the third, twentieth, forty-first and fifty-fourth and you plan more. Did you know that Dumas wrote for so much a word and was published in forerunners to the nineteenth and twentieth century pulp magazines. His bibliography lists approximately 400 works over slightly more than twenty-five years of publishing. He went through several fortunes because he didn't know how to say "no" to get-rich-quick schemes or the needs of his friends. Because of the eventually huge success when his stories were published in hardback, he is remembered as a great writer, but he was simply a literary hack, but a good one. He wrote three novels starring D'Artagnan, but the US

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version of the third is so large it is usually cut into a minimum of three books and usually into four. There's one of your elite who wrote for the same reason as Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Samuel L. Clemens—Mark Twain—began writing as a newspaper reporter. He was bored and loved to tell stories, so he began putting them in as fillers in the newspaper. Sam was a storyteller first and foremost and would have been happy just spinning his yarns in the office if he hadn't found out he could make *money* from his storytelling. He began writing and seeking publishers. He was a great success and lived to an old age happily doing what he loved. Even as an old man, he would sit on the porch and tell stories to whoever listened. Too bad he didn't always write them down. It's true that Sam knew how to write a good story, but he would never have been heard of if he hadn't found out how profitable writing could be. So we see that Sam was a man paid to write who wrote many stories and articles just for the money. It is wonderful that his imagination was so fertile that his stories continue to thrill millions. But, by the definition given, Sam wrote for money, but he wasn't published in pulp magazine even though he was in newspaper. So, Sam Clemens is truly one of the great authors even though he wrote for money.

Arthur Conan Doyle was a great pulp fiction writer. His number one creation was originally published in *The Strand Magazine* in the late 1800s. Sherlock Holmes was a total pulp character. His story were formula-ridden and you always knew the

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outcome. What you didn't know was how he would solve his cases. That was what made the stories work. Over sixty Sherlock Holmes stories punched out nearly every month because Doyle needed the money. Doyle had other characters as well, Professor Challenger and Sir Nigel Loring come to mind. With the professor, Doyle used a loose science fiction idea or two for a few stories and Sir Nigel was a knight in the Crusades. But it would ever be Sherlock Holmes whose adventures would pay the bills. Doyle was knighted for his writing, even though it was repetitious, and ended his life living in comfort. But still, Doyle goes down as a pulp author who wrote for money.

Many other authors in *Classics Illustrated* wrote mainly to pay the bills. Think of some of them with me: Stevenson, Verne, Bret Harte, William Shakespeare, Anthony Hope, H. Rider Haggard, Talbot Mundy and others. No, you can't refuse Edgar Rice Burroughs because he wrote for the money and was published in pulp magazines.

"Well, he hasn't stood the test of time. Our writers are from the previous century and further."

The Bounty Trilogy was written between 1932 and 1934, all three parts were done in *Classics Illustrated* in 1952-1953. *The Ox-Bow Incident* was published in 1940 and adapted in the May, 1955 edition of *Classics Illustrated*. Arthur Conan Doyle died in 1930 and the first of his stories (*The Sign of Four*) appeared in *Classic Comics* in 1944

"That's different. 'Mutiny on the Bounty' and 'The Ox-Bow Incident' were two of the big movies of

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the thirties and forties and we really wanted to adapt them, so we made mutually advantages arrangements with the publishers. But we can't do that with Edgar Rice Burroughs. Even if we wanted to adapt his stuff, Dell is publishing comics for him."

That's true, Dell has been publishing Tarzan for years and they did three John Carter of Mars issues in the early fifties. So they might have the exclusive comic book rights to Edgar Rice Burroughs material. I have to admit you may have finally found the proper reason you can't adapt Burroughs material to *Classics Illustrated*. You might have to deal with Dell for their permission and if they think you are going to publish, they would rather not share with you, so they would probably do it themselves.

Besides that, after Burroughs death in 1950, everything became totally corporation run and the officers of the corporation didn't create new comic book contracts until 1972 and by then *Classics Illustrated* was no longer in the publishing business.

So that's my opinion as to why you have never seen a *Classic Comics* adaptation of "The Mad King". It was never published. I personally believe the cover heading this article was created sometime between 1963 and 1970. Gee, that sounds like me, but it wasn't!