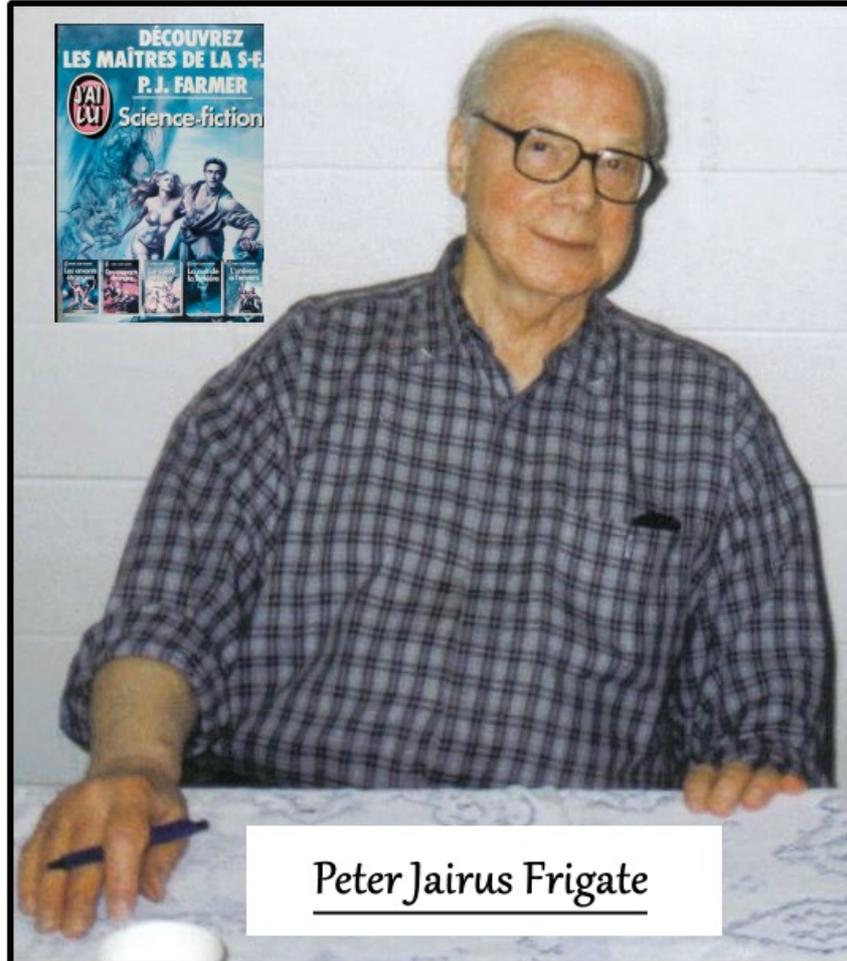


FarmerFan

Volume 1 | Number 2

Winter 2021



**THE MONSTER ON HOLD
IMAGE OF THE BEAST
THE UNREASONING MASK
IRONCASTLE**

FarmerFan

Volume 1 | Issue 2 | December 2021

Wold Newton Day 2021 Issue

Editorial: Happy Wold Newton Day

Celebrating Wold Newton Day 2021.

The Monster On Hold: A Review by Sean Lee Levin

Sean Lee Levin provides an advanced review of *The Monster on Hold* by Philip José Farmer and Win Scott Eckert from Meteor House.

The Devil Had Taken Him by Atom Mudman Bezecny

Atom Mudman Bezecny provides a study of Lars Ulf Larsson from *Image of the Beast* by Philip José Farmer.

The Mysteries of Mibessem by Jason Scott Aiken

Jason Scott Aiken explores the connections between *Flight to Opar* and PJF's re-telling of *Ironcastle*.

PJF's Standalone Science Fiction by William H. Emmons

William H. Emmons reviews two standalone science fiction novels by Philip José Farmer, *Tongues of the Moon* and *The Unreasoning Mask*.

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Editorial: Happy Wold Newton Day



The Wold Newton Monument

Welcome to the second issue of FarmerFan released on Wold Newton Day 2021. It's been a while since our debut issue and I have to thank fellow contributor William H. Emmons for his enthusiasm in regards to publishing this second issue. We were fortunate that Sean Lee Levin and new-comer Atom Mudman Bezechny were onboard with a new issue as well. In this issue we have assembled a variety of Farmerian topics for your reading pleasure.

Sean Lee Levin starts us off with a special advanced review of *The Monster on Hold* by Philip José Farmer and Win Scott Eckert from Meteor House. As I type this no firm release date has been announced for the book but it appears to be close. Keep your eye on meteorhousepress.com for news on this long-awaited novel.

Atom Mudman Bezechny makes her FarmerFan debut with an analysis of Lars Ulf Larsson from Farmer's *Image of the Beast* and his possible connections to other Farmer and Wold Newton tales.

Your humble editor presents a theory connecting the lost city of Mibessem from Farmer's *Flight to Opar* with Gondoroko from Farmer's re-telling/adaptation of J.-H. Rosny's *Ironcastle*.

William H. Emmons provides us with reviews of two standalone science fiction novels penned by Farmer, *Tongues of the Moon* and *The Unreasoning Mask*.

I think we have something for everybody in this issue and I'm glad to see it being released on Wold Newton Day, which is an important day in PJF fandom.

It's my hope that new fans are checking out this fanzine and discovering PJJ's work. With that hope in mind, I think an explanation of PJJ's Wold Newton concept is in order for any new Farmer fans who are now joining us.

The term Wold Newton has become overly synonymous with crossover fiction in recent years, but there is more to Wold Newton fiction than characters crossing over with each other. The brainchild of award-winning science fiction grandmaster and lifelong pulp fan Philip José Farmer, the Wold Newton Family is the precursor to such works as *Planetary* by Warren Ellis and John Cassaday and *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman* by Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill.

Farmer postulated that fictional characters such as Tarzan, Doc Savage, The Shadow, Sherlock Holmes and Fu Manchu were all based on real people and they were connected thanks to a real-life meteorological event.

On December 13, 1795, a meteorite fell from the sky just outside the hamlet of Wold Newton in Yorkshire, England. A monument commemorating the fall still stands to this day. It just so happens two coaches were passing nearby, and their drivers and passengers were exposed to the ionization of the meteor. The group consisted of five married couples, a brother of one of the wives, and the two drivers.

Those present at the Wold Newton event include Sir Percy Blakeney, the titular character from Baroness Orczy's *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and Fitzwilliam and Elizabeth Darcy from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. There were also members of the Drummond, Lupin, Raffles, Lecoq and Holmes families present, just to name a few. The 3rd Duke of Greystoke was also present. These individuals, already of a heroic ancestry which includes figures such as Robert E. Howard's Solomon Kane and Rafael Sabatini's Captain Blood, had their genes further enriched by the experience. The families offspring would then intermarry further reinforcing the traits and ensuring they would not become recessive.

The core of Farmer's Wold Newton Family concept can be found in two fictional biographies of perhaps his two favorite characters: *Tarzan Alive: A Definitive Biography of Lord Greystoke* published in 1972 and *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life* published in 1973. It's in these biographies where Farmer first included the Wold Newton Family tree, as well as his theory on the Wold Newton meteorite being the catalyst for this "nova of genetic splendor" that would give rise to the emergence of remarkable individuals over the coming years.

Farmer's Wold Newton-related material did not end with these two biographies however. He would continue to insert Wold Newton material he uncovered into his own fiction, thus creating a secret history that readers are continuing to uncover to this day. Author and Farmer expert Christopher Paul Carey refers to Farmer's overall body of interconnected work as the Farmerian Monomyth. The fact that Farmer left so many breadcrumbs throughout his large body of work is quite a remarkable feat due to him writing in various genres and for different publishers throughout his career. It was only in the last decade with the reprints from Titan Books that his interconnected work began to be branded by his publishers as a Wold Newton series.

It should be noted that Farmer's erotic underground novel *A Feast Unknown* published in 1969, which features pastiches of Tarzan and Doc Savage actually predates both

biographies. Whether *A Feast Unknown* and its two sequels (without the erotic elements) are directly connected to Farmer's works involving the Wold Newton Family has been debated among Farmer fans for years. The explicit blend of sex and violence in *A Feast Unknown* does not carry over into Farmer's larger Wold Newton body of work. As a matter of fact, Titan Books branded *A Feast Unknown* and its sequels as The Secrets of the Nine: Alternate Universe sub-series when they published the new editions.

The spirit of Farmer's work has continued in prose form with the Wold Newton Universe (a term coined by Win Scott Eckert), which is an expansion of Farmer's Wold Newton Family concept to bring in more elements into the proposed shared universe. This includes new speculative essays using what Farmer dubbed "creative mythography" to make connections and explain inconsistencies within fictional works. There have also been authorized continuations of Farmer's Wold Newton fiction through Subterranean Press and Meteor House in recent years.

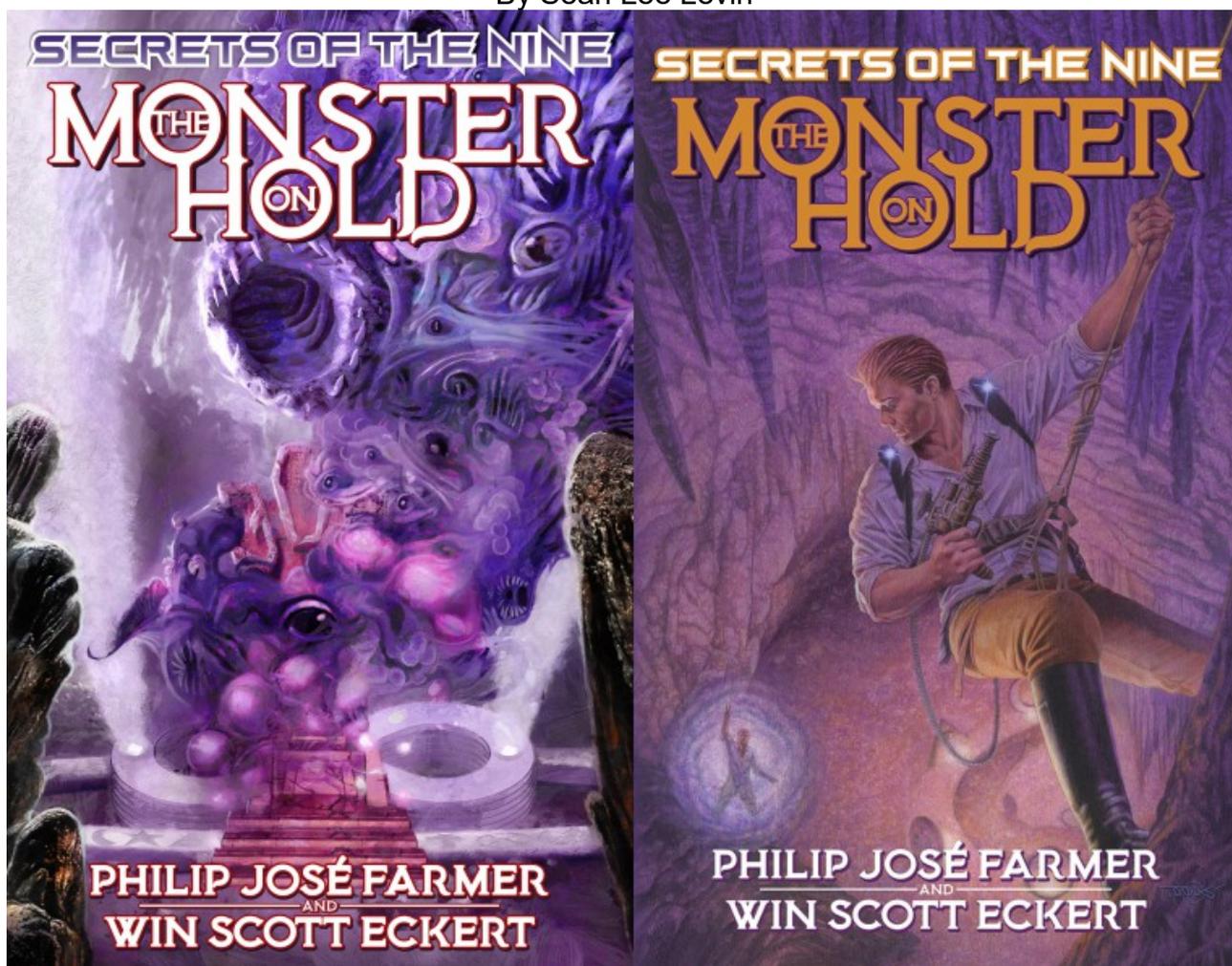
This is just the tip of the iceberg, and I highly recommend visiting woldnewtonfamily.com for further information.

Happy Wold Newton Day, everyone, and I hope you enjoy this issue of FarmerFan.

Jason Scott Aiken
12/13/2021

The Monster on Hold: A Review

By Sean Lee Levin



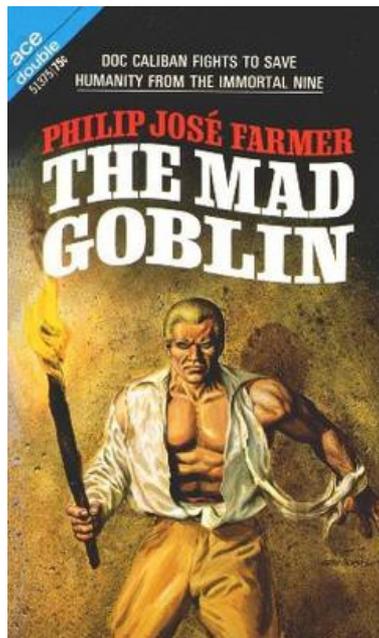
Cover artwork by Mark Wheatley and Douglas Klauba

Philip José Farmer's *Secrets of the Nine* series has long been one of my favorites of his works, with the first book in particular, the oft-misunderstood *A Feast Unknown*, being my third-favorite book by the late Science Fiction Grandmaster. Farmer began writing the fourth book, *The Monster on Hold*, in the 1980s, but sadly never finished it. Luckily, Meteor House, a publisher whose main focus is new editions of, and new fiction based on, Farmer's work, took up the gauntlet, and chose Win Scott Eckert to complete it.

Anyone familiar with Eckert's work knows he is eminently qualified for the role. For over two decades, he has been one of the leading torch-bearers for Farmer's Wold Newton Family tree, a genealogy tying together dozens of literary and pulp heroes and villains who can trace their remarkable abilities to their ancestors' exposure to the radiation of a meteor that struck in Wold Newton, Yorkshire in 1795 (a very real event, by the way). Too, Eckert previously completed Farmer's novel *The Evil in Pemberley House*, and did a superb job. As with that book, it is sometimes difficult to see where Farmer's text ends and Eckert's begins, so seamless is the transition.

The two authors tell a thrilling story, with fascinating cosmic ideas. An aspect of the book that many readers will find intriguing is Doc Caliban's encounters with his parallel universe counterpart, referred to as "the Other" and "Lacewing," whom sharp-eyed pulp and Farmer fans will likely recognize even before his real surname appears in the text. There are also

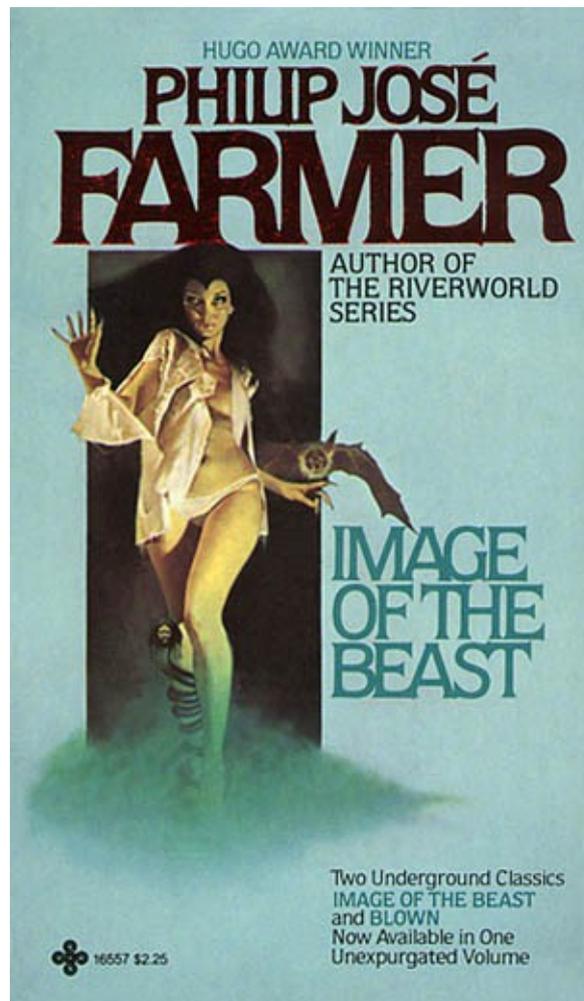
a number of nods to other works of fiction, including many of Farmer's other novels and stories. These references enhance rather than detract from the story, and enrich both the Nine Universe and what Eckert in 1997 dubbed the Wold Newton Universe, giving the reader a fuller appreciation of the interconnectivity of both. Christopher Paul Carey coined the term "Farmerian Monomyth" in his seminal essay "The Green Eyes Have It - Or Are They Blue? or Another Case of Identity Recased" (which this novel draws from), and here we see more than ever that it truly is a *Mono*-myth. I also cannot stress enough how gorgeous the cover by the great Mark Wheatley is. I have not read the bonus materials yet, as they were not included in the advanced reader copy I was provided, but I am sure they are excellent as well. If you consider yourself a Farmer fan, you cannot miss this novel! I have waited years for it to be finished, and it was very much worth the wait.



Cover art by Gray Morrow

*The Devil Had Taken Him:
A Study of Lars Ulf Larsson*

By Atom Mudman Bezecny



*The 1979 Playboy edition of *Blown*, cover artist is unknown*

Wold Newton scholars have revealed throughout the years that the stories of Philip José Farmer contain a vast monomyth, which both clarifies and multiplies the numerous mysteries permeating Farmer's work. Christopher Paul Carey's article "The Green Eyes Have It—Or Are They Blue?" dissected Farmer's Doc Savage novel *Escape from Loki* and uncovered connections between the book's villain, Baron Karl von Hessel, and numerous other figures throughout Farmer's stories as well as pulp fiction as a whole. A brief list of the slippery Baron's alternate identities includes Wolf Larsen from Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf*, Dr. Karl from the Doc Savage novel *Fortress of Solitude*, and Dr. Karl Linningen from the last Doc novel, *Up from Earth's Center*. He is also, perhaps most vitally, the immortal Xauxaz from Farmer's Secrets of the Nine series. There are hints in Farmer's novel *Image of the Beast* that the immortal Baron may have had yet another face.

In Chapter 7 of *Image of the Beast* (hereafter *lotB*), Farmer gives us some backstory on Trolling House, the home of Baron Igescu. The house was built at the dawn of the 19th Century by the mad Don Pedro del Osorojo "in the wilderness of what was to become, a century later, Beverly Hills." Don Pedro's daughter Dolores died of grief in the 1810s and supposedly began haunting the house. Her grief was the result of her father separating her

from her lover, a Norwegian sailor named Lars Ulf Larsson. Upon reading the name “Ulf Larsson” I was taken aback. I found it doubtful that Farmer would include the character of a ship captain in his book bearing the name of the captain from *The Sea-Wolf* without encoding some hidden meaning behind it.

The passage describing Lars Larsson is brief, and does not include a physical description, but it still contains some tantalizing clues supporting the idea that he is the same as Wolf Larsen. Farmer says that “[Lars Larsson] seemed to have lost his sanity over [Dolores]. He neglected his ship and its business, and his men deserted or were thrown into the local jail for drunkenness and vagrancy.” Wolf Larsen was, of course, a notoriously unstable figure, and so seeming (note Farmer’s key word, “seemed”) to lose his sanity over a woman is in keeping with his character. We know that Larsen’s violent nature overlapped with his sexual inclinations—this is demonstrated in the scene in London’s novel where Larsen and his crew kidnap and rape a group of Japanese women. Dolores could have instilled great lust in Larsen, the kind which many often mistake for impassioned love. But Dolores was hardly his victim. After all, as readers of *lotB* and its sequel *Blown* know, Dolores was not an ordinary ghost—she owed her spectral form to the fact that she belonged to a race of alien beings known as the Ogs. The Ogs, like their fellow species the Tocs, could exist in both matter and energy forms. When in their energy form, the Tocs and Ogs could return to physical existence by drawing on human emotional energy. The Tocs thrived on sex, while the Ogs drew their power from violence. Larsson found a sexual match in Dolores, whose alien lusts threatened to exceed his own. When Dolores “died” in the wake of her lover’s disappearance, she reverted to an energy form, and thus was born the legend of the “ghost” of Trolling House.

The story goes that Don Pedro del Osorojo killed Lars Larsson for his involvement with his daughter, either burying him on his property or throwing his body into the sea. The latter fate tellingly mirrors Wolf Larsen’s burial at sea at the end of *The Sea-Wolf*. I believe that Don Pedro was only Dolores’ adopted father; what must have been patriarchal concern over his daughter’s virginity seems more a human motivation than that of an Og. My theory is that Don Pedro and his wife (mentioned by Farmer to be a Castilian noble) had a daughter named Dolores who perished in an accident. The Og they adopted so resembled their late daughter that they gave her their dead child’s name. Unaware of his daughter’s licentiousness, Don Pedro held Dolores to the standards of their era. Codes of religion and honor gave him strong emotional associations with his daughter’s virtue.

This leads to the intriguing detail of Don Pedro’s final fate. The nobleman died not long after his daughter’s passing. Farmer writes that “[he] went hunting into the hills several weeks after [Dolores] was buried and failed to return. Search parties could not find him; it was said that the Devil had taken him.” Is there no better embodiment of the Devil in the Wold Newton Universe than the man who has manipulated so much of mankind’s history? To men like Doc Savage and Lord Greystoke, “Wolf Larsen” was supremely Adversarial, and diabolical in a truly classical sense. With this in mind, it seems clear to me that Larsson, having faked his death as he had and would countless times, murdered Don Pedro once he was away from civilization. That the motive would have been revenge perhaps indicates that Dolores’ death from grief was a fiction perpetuated by her father. Indeed, Don Pedro could have murdered his own daughter, especially after learning that she was pregnant with the Devil’s spawn.

I believe that last detail clarifies why Larsson sought revenge against Don Pedro. We know, from Win Scott Eckert’s “The Wild Huntsman” and others, that the immortal who posed as Wolf Larsen actively manipulated the Wold Newton Family, infusing his own

genes into its ranks and influencing the fateful encounter with the meteor of 1795. While simple lust may have been motivation for Larsson's interest in Dolores, it is more likely that he wished to contribute her Og genes to his great experiment. Perhaps he was interested in siring an heir unbound by the laws of matter—a true superhuman, with abilities even greater than those born from the mutation event at Wold Newton. But Don Pedro's “murder” of Dolores forced her into her energy state, which had the consequence of killing her unborn child. Enraged by this setback, Larsson abandoned his interest in the Ogs, pursuing more grounded ways of enhancing the genes of his heirs—though not before eliminating the man who had upset his scheme.

But the future Baron von Hessel did not entirely abandon his experiments in alien-human hybridization, apparently. Win Scott Eckert has revealed that the Baron's close associate Lili Bugov is possessed of shape-changing abilities hinting at non-human ancestry.

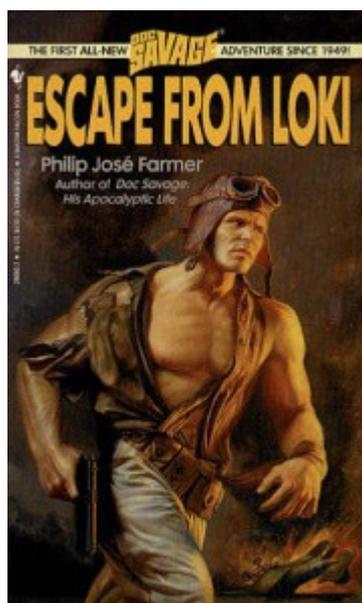
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Cover art by Steve Assel

The Mysteries of Mibessem:

How Hareton Ironcastle unknowingly solved an eight thousand-year-old mystery.

By Jason Scott Aiken



Flight to Opar interior illustration by Roy G. Krenkel

One of the most enjoyable aspects of reading Farmer's body of work is coming across something left unexplained in one story and later finding the solution in another tale. Sometimes the stories are closely related and sometimes the two will only appear to be distantly connected. The connection I'm going to discuss in this article focuses on the former, two stories, novels to be more precise, published by DAW in 1976. I'm sure *Flight to Opar (Flight)* and *Ironcastle* are located fairly close to each other on the bookshelves of many Farmer fans.

Flight is book two of Farmer's Ancient Opar series set in Tarzan's Africa during or shortly following the year 10,011 B.C. The main characters Hadon, Lalila, and their party are fleeing from the dangers of the Khokarsan Empire in the north to the safety of Hadon's home city of Opar in the south. The group encounter numerous people along the way and have more than their fair share of adventures, but the strangest encounter takes place during chapter twenty-two as Hadon relates the history of the lost city of Mibessem.

In this chapter Hadon shares with his party (and the reader) events that occurred around 10,810 B.C. when Bessem, the exiled son of the hero Keth founded Mibessem (or the city of Bessem). Bessem had a falling out with Keth and even killed his own brother. Keth ordered that Bessem should be killed on site should he ever return. So Bessem takes flight from the city of Kethna, located on the eastern coast of the Strait of Keth which connects the two freshwater in-land seas of the Khokarsan Empire. He travels south along the shore of the southern sea (at this time called the *Kemuketh* but this sea will later be called the *Kemuopar*) to erect a city of his own. Bessem utilized the red stone mined from the nearby mountains to build his city on a lowland that Farmer describes as sloping gently toward the mountains. This red stone will come into play later and is a clue left by PJF to help us narrow down the area. Mibessem proved to be a success and many citizens of Khokarsa came to live there, but this was not meant to be.

Strange events begin to happen in the mountains outside the city. The sound of someone or something playing a reed flute begin to be heard. The sound of the flute was said to bring about a madness in the men and attract the women of the city into coming towards the mysterious player. Not long after strange creatures were seen around the borders of the city at dusk, they are described as bestial but were said to resemble the missing women.

Superstition ran amok and rumors began circulating that Bessem had built his city near the land of the demon king who was previously defeated by the Mother Goddess, Kho but escaped with his life. The belief was that the demon king could not physically touch or harm Kho's children in anger, but could use other methods such as driving the men into madness with his flute and luring the women to him so he could love them.

As Hadon is telling the story he describes Bessem as a true hero of old, a man not seen for over two centuries. The mighty hero took up a heavy spear that two strong men of the modern Khokarsan Empire would have trouble handling and ventured into the mountains to slay the demon. He was never seen again and the flute continued to play in the mountains.

In the aftermath of Bessem's disappearance, his city and people vanished. When a merchant ship from Kethna attempted to dock at Mibessem the area was now a swampy marsh with a lone hill where the city of Mibessem was thought to have once stood. The land no longer gently sloped towards the mountains, it was now perfectly flat. The sounds of the reed flute were heard at dusk and the sounds grew louder and louder. The sound of heavy feet were heard splashing in the swamp and the ship's party observed an invisible force that was large enough to move palm trees. Needless to say the merchant party fled and did not investigate further but it is said they did not outrun the noise of the flute until they put many miles between themselves and the swamp.

As Hadon finishes telling the tale to his group, they pass the swamp and the sound of a reed flute is heard, visibly shaking everyone including the hero. Hadon tells the dwarf Paga, "There are no fisherfolk, no villages, in this area. No one would dare live here." Needless to say Hadon's party did not stop to check things out and continued heading towards Opar.

What are the origins of the sounds of the reed flute? What was the invisible force that caused the palm trees to move? Are these supernatural? I don't think so. PJF's Khokarsa/Ancient Opar series may seem like sword-and-sorcery on the surface the

explanations for these events tend to be more science fiction than fantasy. I believe the answers to these mysteries of Mibesseem are held within the pages of Farmer's *Ironcastle*.

Ironcastle is a translation of J.-H. Rosny's original novel but with a Farmerian/Wold Newtonian spin courtesy of PJF. The novel features the titular character Hareton Ironcastle (who Farmer indicates is a relative of the Porter family from the Tarzan novels), naturalist, explorer, and airgun inventor. The novel opens with Ironcastle receiving a letter from his friend and colleague Samuel Darnley who traveled to Africa in search of new plant life. The letter Darnley sends Ironcastle is from Gondoroko, a country in Africa that even in 1920 was little explored. I've seen the name of this country spelled both Gondoroko and Gondokoro, but it seems to appear as Gondokoro in more modern times. For the purposes of this article I'll be referring to it as Gondoroko due to PJF's usage in *Ironcastle*.

Darnley informs Ironcastle that within the swampy interior of Gondoroko, where few men have ventured, he's discovered plants and animals that are so bizarre that it feels like he's on the planet Mars. According to Ironcastle the interior of Gondoroko is taboo country for most of the tribes in the area (sound familiar?). The country itself is difficult to get to and even more difficult to get out of. In his letter Darnley talks further about strange reptiles and mammals and also describes plant-life that is powerful, able to conquer and keep men in check. This piques the interest of Ironcastle who mounts an expedition to seek out Darnley in Gondoroko. It is estimated that it would take Ironcastle two years to reach Darnley.

On the journey to reach Darnley, Ironcastle and his party do indeed come across strange people, beasts, and plant-life in the wilds of Gondoroko. The closer the safari gets to the interior and Darnley's location, the more fantastic and strange are the flora and fauna. It's on the final stage of their journey where I believe they arrive near the site of Mibesseem itself, albeit thousands of years later, and encounter the source of the mysterious sounds and eventually learn how the trees were moved by an invisible force.

Before discussing the origins of the reed flute and the invisible force that moved the palm trees, we should cover the geological Easter egg of the red stone Bessem used to build his city as told in *Flight* and how it relates to not only *Ironcastle* but *Hadon of Ancient Opar* by PJF, *Allan Quatermain* by H. Rider Haggard, and *TDHT* by PJF. The red stone is PJF giving us a rough geographic location for Mibesseem. It is my firm belief that Mibesseem is located in modern day Gondoroko, where the concluding chapters of *Ironcastle* take place. I've included a map from *The White Nile* by Alan Moorehead to better demonstrate the location of Gondokoro (shown as Gondoroko) and the surrounding area. I've also utilized Charles Berlin's map of the Khokarsam Empire (and added a rough location for Mibesseem as M) based on PJF's original map, and Google Maps for modern day Earth to further bolster this theory using the Gulf of Guinea as a reference point on both maps.



Map from the White Nile by Alan Moorehead



Red Pin = Gondokoro via Google Maps

Gondokoro via Google Maps



Key: 1. Mukha; 2. Miklemres; 3. Qethruth; 4. Siwudawa; 5. Wethna;
 6. Kethna; 7. Wentisuh; 8. Sakawuru; 9. Mikawuru; 10. Bawaku;
 11. Towina; 12. Rebha; A. Klemqaba country; M. Mibessem

Map of the Khokarsan Empire by Charles Berlin based on P.JF's original map, used with permission. Thanks, Charles.

In chapter two of *Hadon of Ancient Opar* as Hadon is traveling by boat north from Opar in the southern sea, his party stops for supplies in Sakawuru (designated as 8 on the Ancient Khokarsa map). P.J.F. describes Sakawuru as "the red-granite city." The events of *Hadon of Ancient Opar* occur in 10,011 B.C. according to Farmer's chronology that is included in the appendix of the novel and take place prior to *Flight*.

In chapter eleven of *Allan Quatermain*, Quatermain's party arrives at the city of Zu-Vendis, the modern day location of the Khokarsan city-state of Wentisuh (note how the syllables are reversed and the location of Wentisuh is designated as 7 on the map of Ancient Khokarsa). Haggard reveals this fact about the city in chapter eleven: "The city was, with the exception of this one building, entirely built of red granite, and laid out in regular blocks with splendid roadways between." Wold Newton and pulp scholar Rick Lai places the events of *Allan Quatermain* as 1885-1886.

TDHT is very much the literary younger brother of *Ironcastle* and one of my personal favorite P.J.F. books. The events of *TDHT* take place in October 1918 in the Belgian Congo, and (at least in the beginning of the novel) Tarzan believes he is near the eastern border of the country (for some reason P.J.F. refers to the country as the Congo Free State on one occasion within *TDHT* but the Congo Free State became the Belgian Congo in 1908, well before the events of this novel. I'm not sure why P.J.F. used both terms within *TDHT*). The eastern area of the Belgian Congo geographically borders modern day South Sudan where Gondoroko is located. Later on in the novel Tarzan is able to see Mount Kilimanjoro in modern day Tanzania in the distance. Within Tarzan's travels he comes across blackish-red stone cliffs and a stairway cut out of blackish-red rock. Like the safari in *Ironcastle* Tarzan also encounters strange people and animals. But the strange creatures Tarzan encounters are not the solution to the mysteries surrounding Mibessem, this is reserved for the concluding pages of *Ironcastle*.

Towards the conclusion of the safari's journey in *Ironcastle* the Scaly Men are encountered. These are the "humans" that inhabit the strange land surrounding the area Mibessem once stood thousands of years ago, and where Gondoroko is located in modern times. They are described as thus in Farmer's *Ironcastle* adaptation/translation: "They stood upright, even though their legs ended in boar-like hooves, legs like those of lizards. Their bodies were covered with translucent scales mixed with greenish hair, and their heads were unlike anything human or animal. Shaped like cylinders, with a sort of mossy cone on top, they were the color of green malachite. The triangle-shaped mouth seemed to have three lips. The nose was merely three elliptical holes. The eyes were at the bottom of the cavities, the edges of which were saw-tooth shaped. Eyes that shone with a variable phosphorescence, purple, orange and yellow. The hands had four claws opposable to three others."

Ironcastle actually comes across two different groups of Scaly Men, one is more antagonistic and make their home within the red-granite cliffs and are referred to as the People of the Red Circus. The second group of Scaly Men are allied with *Ironcastle*'s friend and colleague Samuel Darnley. One thing both groups have in common is their method of communication, whistles. Darnley describes the method as thus: "They do not enjoy the use of articulate speech but they can express themselves perfectly with the use of modulated whistles. These simultaneously comprise high sounds, harmonies some alternances, certain repetitions also, as well as brief notes and long ones. The number of combinations at their disposal, in all truth, is more numerous than that of our syllables. They seem to have no sense of aesthetic beauty. Men and women among them, if I dare call them that, are drawn to one and other only by the qualities of the sounds which they

can produce.... A strange music that makes no sense to our ears or to the ears of birds. However it must hold a beauty unknown to us. Rhythms without any resemblance to ours.”

From these passages I think there is a very good chance the bestial creatures the citizens of Mibessem observed on the outskirts of the city were Scaly Men. There was not just one being playing a reed flute, but an entire race who were communicating with each other. That's why the Kethnan merchant ship continued to hear the flute playing even as they sailed far from the site Mibessem once stood. It is important to note that the Scaly Men were present in the original Rosny version of *Ironcastle*, but the entity that caused the palm trees to move is not. The culprit behind this mystery is pure PJF.

The concluding chapter of DAW's version of *Ironcastle*, chapter twenty-five, is all PJF and not present in the original Rosny version. This chapter shares parallels with the Mibessem chapter in *Flight* and I believe it holds the key to figuring out the cause of the palm trees moving on their own.

We've talked about how the fauna in this particular region of Gondoroko is on the strange side, but the flora is just as fantastic, if not more so. During their expedition the *Ironcastle* safari comes across a type of mimosa that has the ability to dominate humans and animals. The strange mimosas put people to sleep, cause them to become sluggish, and even stop them from moving all together. In the final chapter the source of the strange plant kingdom is revealed and it is of an extraterrestrial nature.

Farmer introduces us to the remains of the Mineral-Vegetable King (MVK) that is buried beneath a hill in Gondoroko, which I believe to be the very same hill Mibessem once stood. The remains of the tallest and original mimosa plant are atop the hill the MVK is buried beneath. Darnley indicates that the natives treat the hill as taboo. Farmer reveals that the strange vegetable kingdom in Gondoroko is really this one singular vegetable king whose roots have grown outward and changed the surrounding area to resemble something more akin to his own planet. However Darnley indicated that Earth, Mother Earth more precisely conquered, paralleling the Mother Goddess Kho defeating the king of devils in the Khokarsan legends.

It is believed the original being was vegetable in nature, but he consumed his spaceship and by digesting the metal became the MVK. However, by the time *Ironcastle* and his party reach the being only his corpse remains, Farmer describes it as a crystal star, or the skeleton of a star. Halfway down beneath the hill, the trunk of the mimosa breaks off into six roots that enclose the remains of the MVK and then the roots plunge into the earth. It is revealed the oldest mimosa directly above the MVK on the surface is the source for all the strange plant-life in the area. But, this phenomenon will cease to be as the MVK is dead and he is dying outwards.

The safari discovers that the red-granite-like spear tips the Stunted Men (encountered earlier in the novel) use originate from the roots of the MVK. They are not made of true granite, but to the naked eye they appear to be. In reality they are stronger than steel and a byproduct of the MVK changing the environment. According to Darnley the roots stopped producing these four years ago. Keep in mind, the novel began in 1920 and *Ironcastle* speculated it would take him two years to reach Darnley in Gondoroko. That would place the conclusion of the book in 1922. 1922 minus four years is 1918 where Farmer's *TDHT* takes place and there is a certain Crystal Tree involved in that book. Keep in mind *Ironcastle* was published by DAW in March 1976 and *TDHT* was published by Del Rey in June 1999, that's a twenty-three year gap... but when it comes to PJF I don't believe in

coincidences. However, there is a lot about *TDHT* including the connection (if one exists) between the MVK and the Crystal Tree that has not been uncovered and is begging for further exploration and is, quite frankly, beyond the scope of this humble article.

My theory is that the MVK somehow caused the palm trees to move via its invasive underground root system. That's the only explanation I can think of in the context of Farmer's body of work, as I don't think it could have been merely the wind moving them. I originally thought the Ghost Frog from *TDHT* could be a suspect, but that creature isn't invisible and it appears to be connected to a different set of alien visitors to Africa, "the Twins", not the MVK.

If you take into account that *Flight to Opar* and *Ironcastle* were both published in 1976, PJF had to have been working on these novels fairly close together. I believe that during his translation/adaptation of *Ironcastle* he saw and opportunity to make a connection between the two novels and seeded the mystery in *Flight*. It is important to note that when Hadon is telling the story in *Flight* his tale is full of chronological inconsistencies that do not match up with the chronology found in *Hadon of Ancient Opar*. For one, the events involving Keth and Bessem don't seem to correlate with the period where Lupoeth journeys into the valley that would one day contain Opar. Also, some of the cities Hadon mentions hadn't existed during the time in question either. Given that Hadon is essentially telling a historical ghost tale we can assume he isn't the most reliable narrator. Pair this with the superstitious nature of the Khokarsan civilization and we clearly do not have all the facts in regards to what exactly happened in Mibessem all those years ago. I think it is safe to conclude that the story Hadon tells has been passed down through many generations and has become enhanced and modified over time, but still contains some of the essential clues. When pairing these clues with a reading of *Ironcastle*, the reader is able to solve or at least see the outlines of the solution.

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Review: The Standalone Science Fiction of Philip José Farmer

By William H. Emmons



Cover artwork by Eric Ladd and Val & John Lakey

Farmer is best known for his two series Riverworld and the World of Tiers as well as his many literary pastiches but he got his start as a writer of standalone science fiction short stories and novels. Farmer wrote highly philosophical standalone science fiction adventures that dealt with serious themes like politics, religion, sexuality and free will. In this short review, we'll discuss two of his novels, *Tongues of the Moon* (1964) and *The Unreasoning Mask* (1981).

Tongues of the Moon

This novel is an apocalyptic philosophical thriller frenetically told, in the 1978 Jove/HBJ edition, over 143 pages without any chapter breaks. The world of the far future is

dominated by Communist governments who have conquered North America and remade the face of world demographics through forced migration policies. The story begins as the hold out fascist power of Argentina uses cobalt bombs to cause a nuclear winter, achieving a pyrrhic victory over godless Marxism at the price of all life on Earth. However, humankind survives on various colonies throughout the solar system. The initial perspective characters are two American dissidents on the Soviet-dominated moon, a man named Broward, the founder of a small underground dedicated to Athenian direct democracy, and the bloodthirsty Scone, a Nationalist Marxist who wants to see American greatness restored but the Soviet system of government retained.

A major theme of the novel is the evil that people are willing to do in the name of ideology. Following Earth's destruction, Scone takes quick actions that kill many lunar survivors, Russian and American alike, in the name of his Nationalism. Broward, who is also opposed to Soviet rule of Americans, initially goes along with Scone but soon finds himself questioning this decision.

Like Scone, Broward recognizes that the surviving Argentine colony on Mars is an existential threat to the lunar survivors. When Broward is sent on a mission to detonate a bomb that would kill the whole Martian colony, he is presented with challenging opportunities to rectify Scone's tyranny and cease the bloodletting.

The book asks the question whether human nature dooms us to self destruction. In a reflective moment Broward shares his ambivalent attitude with a comrade,

"I wonder if Man's worth saving," he said. "He almost succeeds in annihilating himself. But, despite himself, he's given another chance. You'd think every man and woman left alive would think of only one thing, of perpetuating the species. You'd think that everybody would forget his national and ideological differences, would say to every other man, 'Let's lay down our arms, work together, make sure that we live and that our sons and daughters live and their children live, and ensure that they have a worthwhile world to live in, make sure that this doesn't happen again.' But they don't. They're all fighting each other as if nothing had happened. Is man logical but irrational? Logical in effectively carrying out his irrationalities? Is he worth saving?" (p. 61)

Broward's actions throughout the book show that humanity does indeed have a chance if warlike tyrants are pushed out. While ideology is shown to be the cause of great evil in the novel, the book leaves open the room for positive ideology. On Mars and on the Moon, Broward takes big chances because he believes in something better than Scone's

autocratic warmongering and Nationalism. On Mars, he finds comrades whose Christianity is stronger than their loyalty to the fascist regime and who desire peace with the Moon. When talking about his Athenian ideology, Broward explains to one of his Christian comrades, "I'll do my best to introduce what I think are good ideas. If they're rejected, I won't kill or jail people for it." (p. 136) But he's only able to create the precondition for this by taking up violence against tyrants.

This book is a good one to read if you're interested in exploring Farmer's views on government or if you're simply looking for a sci-fi thriller to pass the time.

The Unreasoning Mask

This is a work of speculative theology about God, the nature of existence and free will. Captain Hûd Ramstan, a thief and philanderer, rides the living ship *Al-Buraq*--in Arabic, "the lightning," named for the woman-face donkey Muhammad rode to Heaven--across universes seeking ancient truths and fleeing the consequences of his actions. As the story begins, Ramstan has stolen the *glyfa*, the living idol worshipped by the alien Tolt, and attempted to conceal the theft from his crew. The *glyfa* has offered Ramstan immortality but he is uninterested, although he spends many hours communicating with and pondering the egg-shaped idol.

Ramstan is beset from many directions. The Tolt are after him and his crew and want their god back. His own crew seems to consist mostly of his jilted former lovers who resent him. Others on the crew correctly suspect he has endangered them by stealing the *glyfa*. Worse, as the nature of reality is revealed, Ramstan and his crew find themselves on the run from the Bolg, a giant pluriversal antibody jumping from universe to universe destroying worlds with sentient life.

Farmer's well known love of religion comes together with his love of linguistics. The book speculates what it would be like if the universe, or more properly the collection of universes called a pluriverse, were actually a growing godling that *could* learn to speak if someone were able to teach it. Ramstan meets unsettling ancient mystics who have the mission of teaching the pluriversal god baby to talk. Ramstan must navigate his relationship with his crew, competing claims on him by the *glyfa* and the mystics, the danger posed by the Bolg and his own drive for free will to determine what he will do.

Farmer creates a richly built series of worlds and scenarios and then ruthlessly destroys them. The reader will relish both the interesting locales and the means of their

destruction. The last quarter of the book is heavy on cosmological exposition which is suspensefully doled out to great effect. In some ways the book is Farmer's answer to Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker*.

Farmer considered this one of his best novels. For aficionados, it's worth reading if only for that reason. But it's a fresh sort of read for the general science fiction reader as well. There is not a lot of other science fiction quite like it.

About the Fans/Writers

Sean Lee Levin discovered Philip José Farmer's work as a teenager in 2002 and has been obsessed ever since. A lifelong resident of Chicago, Illinois (the same state Farmer resided in), Sean spends much of his spare time reading, watching movies, and writing. He is the author of *Crossovers Expanded: A Secret Chronology of the World* Volumes 1 and 2, published by Meteor House in 2016. He is currently looking to get a Western story published. You can find Sean's blog, which contains his movie reviews and other cool things, at <http://seanlevin.blogspot.com/?m=1>.

Atom Mudman Bezecny is the editor-in-chief of the independent pulp press Odd Tales Productions, a position she has occupied for four years. Her previous publications include the novels *Tail of the Lizard King*, *Deus Mega Therion*, *Kinyonga Tales*, *The New Adventures of the Flash Avenger*, *Flint Golden and the Thunderstrike Crisis*, and *The Return of the Amazing Bulk*, a canonical sequel to Lewis Schoenbrun's superhero film *The Amazing Bulk*. She is also the author of many short stories, including a series starring her original heroine Bloody Mary. Her stories can be found at www.oddtalesofwonder.com.

Jason Scott Aiken came to know of Philip José Farmer's work just a few weeks before Farmer's passing in February 2009. Aiken's journey to Farmer was concurrent to his discovery of pulp magazines and culminated with him attending FarmerCon VI at PulpFest 2011 in Columbus, Ohio. Aiken has been attending FarmerCon and PulpFest ever since and also hosted and produced *Pulp Crazy*, a podcast dedicated to pulp authors, literature, and themes. In addition to Farmer and Pulp fandom, Aiken has had short fiction published by Black Coat Press, Cirsova, and Paizo Publishing. He can be found online at jasonscottaiken.com and pulpcrazy.com.

William H. Emmons is the host of the forthcoming Planet Stories Podcast and a regular contributor to the SFFAudio Podcast. He is a communist agitator and general ne'er do well. He lives in Eastern Kentucky with his fiancé, elderly dog and eight feral cats.

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