

Super-Heroes, Spaceships, Spies, and Talking Cars

BY ALAN J. PORTER, Senior Member

“Pop Culture Historian,” it says it right there on my personal email signature. So what is that exactly? When I introduce myself to people I tend to introduce myself as a writer first and foremost. The Pop Culture Historian label came from one of my publishers, and it seemed such a good fit for what I do in my “off hours” that I borrowed it.

Actually, writers don’t have off hours. If they aren’t actively writing, most writers are thinking about writing. Let’s just say the Pop Culture Historian label covers my “non-technical” writing.

I tend to split my time between my technical and business communications consulting company, 4Js Group (<http://4jsgroup.blogspot.com>), and my pop-culture writing career. So far I’ve had books published about Batman, The Beatles, James Bond, and Star Trek, plus contributed to others on Batman, James Bond, novelist Terry Pratchett, “The Time Tunnel” TV show, and champion racing driver Nigel Mansell.

I also write comic books, and currently write the regular monthly comic book series based on the Disney*Pixar movie “CARS.” A couple of paperback collections from the series will also be in stores this year.

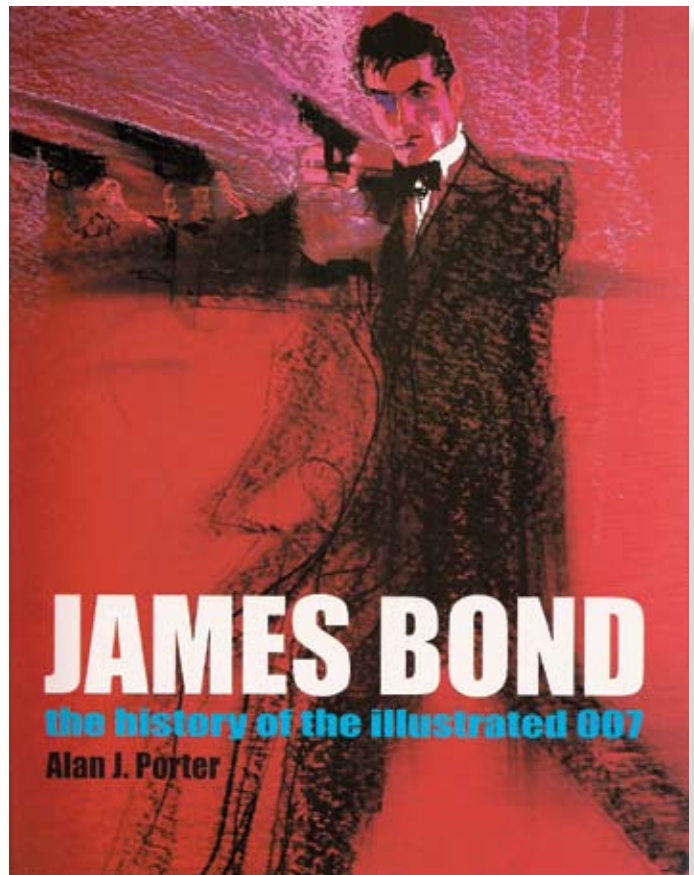
It all really started with a degree of frustration. My first real post-college hobby was collecting comics books in

general and Batman-related merchandise in particular. At its height, my collection had more than 12,000 items in it. But there wasn’t any single guide book to help let collectors know what was out there, so I pitched the idea and found a publisher for *The Unauthorized BATMAN Collectors Guide*, which saw print in 1997 (and, amazingly, still sells on a fairly regular basis even though it is now more than a decade out of date).

After spending some of my college years in Liverpool, my other passion was learning more about The Beatles and how they came together. Amazingly, no one had written a book focused on the Fab Four’s teenage years in Liverpool, so I wrote one. With *Before They Were Beatles*, I tried the self-publishing route and learned a lot about the whole publishing process.

The toy collecting gave way to a writing career that has given me the opportunity to peruse and research many of the pop-culture icons that I have enjoyed over the years.

After Batman and The Beatles, the most logical next step was the third big pop-culture icon of my youth—James Bond. I had written about Bond for a few magazines and done some introductory essays for some Bond newspaper comic strip reprint collections, and that lead to the deal that saw me spending a year immersed in the world of 007 to write



JAMES BOND: The History of the Illustrated 007. Then, last year, I reread 40 years’ worth of *Star Trek* comic books and newspaper strips to produce *STAR TREK: A Comics History*.

So how do I approach a new pop-culture project? Over the past year or so I’ve brainstormed various ideas with a couple of publishers, once again based around the idea of books I would like to read but haven’t been published yet. Ideas we’ve talked about include a critical history of Batman on TV, a history of the illustrated western from the pulps to modern graphic novels, and a couple more Beatles-related topics.

It looked as if the Westerns book would be next up, so we did some initial research on the potential market and I started to gather material. Then, at a convention last year, I attended a panel celebrating the 80th anniversary

of *Buck Rogers*. The turnout for the panel was amazing, standing-room only, and every *Rogers* item I saw on the show booths was selling out. At dinner with my publisher the evening after the panel, we decided to put the Westerns book on hold and do a book on the complete history of America’s first science fiction hero instead.

Currently, my off hours are filled with rocket ships, jet packs, and ray guns as I have started to watch all the old movie serials and am rereading all the printed *Buck Rogers* stories, starting with his first appearance in the August 1928 issue of *Amazing Stories* magazine.

It’s looking like my 2010 will be spent jumping between the 20th and 25th centuries, and I’m looking forward to the ride. So excuse me while I go and figure out how this anti-gravity belt works.... **i**



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