

S O U T H E R N  
F A N D O M  
C O N F E D E R A T I O N  
U P D A T E

Volume 1, Issue 2

February 2009

**More Musings From the Wanderer**

(That'd be Warren Buff, the Editor of this rag, and President of the SFC – he can be reached by email at [warrenmbuff@gmail.com](mailto:warrenmbuff@gmail.com), by phone at (919) 633-4993, or by good old-fashioned postal mail at 2144 B Ravenglass Pl, Raleigh, NC 27613, USA.)

Well, it's February already, so I guess that means it's time for me to fire off another issue of the *SFC Update*. It's still mostly me here, although I've managed to squeeze in a little art. I've got the remainder of an article that got jarbled in its transmission to Chris Garcia (it is, as he put it, a drunken lounge report from Chattacon). I will of course be going over the big list of cons coming up in the next month (the first of them almost upon us – I've got to work on this punctuality thing). And I think I can squeeze in an article from one of our frequent contributors to the *SFC Bulletin*, Jeff Thompson. He does good, sercon work, and while it's often a little long for the *Bulletin*, the online-only nature of the *Update* makes it a perfect fit. Over here to the right, we've got a cartoon from Steve Stiles, whose cartoons have consistently been a lot of fun for me. Oh, and we've



**Not only did someone leave the airlock open,  
but now I can't find my lemmings!**

actually got a pretty active letter column this month. I welcome all comers, especially if you've got something to say about Fandom, or the South, or ideally, Southern Fandom. I'm still taking questions for the interview I want to run with the bids, ideally to be published in the late March issue of the *Bulletin* (and please don't make me add in a bunch of softball filler to break up the standard pitch – I want to hear what matters to you).

As for what I've been up to, well, we started a reading group out of RTSFS (the Research Triangle SF Society) to work our way through the Best Novel Hugo winners, meeting in a pub to discuss them. We didn't get much discussion of *The Demolished Man* accomplished, but we had a good time, and arranged to meet again for the next one on February 17<sup>th</sup>. On that note, I'm interested in seeing if Southern clubs would be interested in advertising their events month-to-month in the *Update*, like a big regional calendar. Got a club? I'd be willing to list your schedule. There might be fen near you who just don't realize you're out there.

### **What's Up In February?**

Well, let's start with a run-down of conventions. February 6-8, in Greensboro, NC, on the campus of Guilford College, come check out What-The-Hell?! Con. Did I mention it's free? You can come and hang out with all the young local fans (it is, after all, a college con), see Tom Smith (if you're hungry for an encore after Chattacon), meet loads of local authors, artists, and webcomics folks, and get a taste of a few of the area's clubs. Saturday night features the Geek Auction, in which dudes and groups of dudes are auctioned off for charity – their buyers get a dance with them at the subsequent dance.

The following weekend features Farpoint, in Timonium, MD, where you can get your media fix, mostly centered on Star Trek. Harve Bennett (the producer of *Star Trek II-V*) will be there, as well as Alan Tudyk (Wash from *Firefly*) and Phil Weyland (from the *Trek* films). The program looks to include panels, a masquerade, and a game room – in short, a fairly standard smorgasbord, with SF media as its focus. If Anime is more your speed, check out Kawa Kon in St. Louis. They'll be featuring Cam Clarke (the voice of Leonardo in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*) and the musical stylings of the Spooky Bards. I've unfortunately not met anyone who's spoken of Kawa Kon, but it looks like a good time.

The weekend of February 20-22 will feature ConNooga, back at the Chattanooga Choo-Choo Hotel. They've got a smattering of guests covering a range of media most conventions don't focus on, and I think something of the future of fandom is contained therein. They're also a hotbed of activity for Fans For Christ, which came as a surprise to me (but I'm glad they're able to get along with the assortment of deviants ConNooga gets). Apparently (and forgive me for using a reference I'm not old enough to really know) there *are* still Christian Slans in Slandom (though I don't know if they're reading Slanzines). Back on my own turf, in Durham, NC, if horror films are your thing, you might want to check out the Nevermore Film Festival. This will be their tenth year, and

they continue to feature some of the best new material in horror and genre films, with a selection including films from the US, Canada, the UK, and New Zealand.

The final weekend of February (y'know, the one that spills over into March) is loaded down with cons. First, there's Concave, although you'll have to ask around about that one (hint: it's in Kentucky). If you're down in Florida, you might want to consider MegaCon in Orlando. From the write-ups I've seen, it's quite a large Comic Book convention, and if you're looking for some deep back issues, it'd be a great place to find them. They've assembled an impressive guest list, including George Perez, Chris Claremont, Mark Waid, Frank Cho, Peter Beagle, William Stout, and about a hundred others. They're not kidding about it being "Mega". Up in Charlottesville, Virginia, PrezCon is probably the biggest gaming event of the month. They'll have plenty of special events, company reps, prize support, and all the usual fun you'd expect at a gaming con. The University of Kentucky is hosting UKON, in Louisville, but I don't really know much more about that. Expect a younger crowd, and probably a darn good time. And over in Roanoke, VA, you can find SheVaCon, in their 17<sup>th</sup> year. They've got Larry Niven as GoH, and a good old-fashioned balanced set of programming. A few of my friends make the trip up there every year, but I've yet to attend. Maybe I will someday. And, to round this out, and cover something outside of the Upper South, on February 28<sup>th</sup>, Le Festival d'Esprits will be held in Shreveport, LA. A general paranormal festival, it looks like a fun time – and heck, I know there are fans down in Shreveport, so you just might see a few.

As always, this listing owes a whole lot to Kelly Lockhart's Southern Fandom Resource Guide, which I've used to get links to websites, dates, and locations. Make sure to get the word out about your conventions by sending him the info!

## Letters

*First, here's Jeff Thompson:*

Happy New Year! Are you having a good weekend? Yesterday, I drove to Lebanon, Tennessee, to see my friend Tim and to visit an incredible new bookstore that Tim had been telling me about --Sherlock's Book Emporium and Curiosities ([www.sherlocksbooks.com](http://www.sherlocksbooks.com)) --the largest independent bookstore in the state of Tennessee.

Sherlock's Books is much more than a bookshop. *It's a fan-boy's dream!* Be sure and look at the website. In addition to new and used books, Sherlock's sells new and used VHS and DVD, movie posters, vintage lunchboxes (*Wild Wild West*, *Green Hornet*, *Lost in Space*, *Brady Bunch*, *Land of the Giants*, et al.), and vintage board games (*Bewitched*, *Honey West*, *Dark Shadows*, *Mork and Mindy*, *A-Team*, et al.). Plus, the owner of the store exhibits his own personal popular-culture memorabilia in glass cases. I saw extremely rare Batman, Green Hornet, *Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Outer Limits*, and James Bond collectibles--as well as glass-encased first editions of books such as *When Worlds Collide*, *Jaws*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Interview with the Vampire*, and *Fahrenheit 451*. Finally, Sherlock's Books includes a soup/sandwich/pizza restaurant and a movie-theatre-

style screening room where films and TV episodes are shown. When Tim and I were there, episodes of *Swamp Thing* were showing.

I bought two 1960s Sax Rohmer paperbacks, a Captain & Tennille CD, an unopened package of Buck Rogers trading cards, and *Marvel Chillers* #5 (June 1976 [featuring letters of comment from two of my former *Heroines Showcase* colleagues])--all for less than twenty-two dollars. The next time that you're here in Middle Tennessee, I hope that you'll make a special, short trip to [www.sherlocksbooks.com](http://www.sherlocksbooks.com) on Maddox-Simpson Parkway in Lebanon, Tennessee--because Fandom Is A Way Of Life!

Dr. Jeff Thompson  
8701 Sawyer Brown Road  
Nashville, Tennessee 37221-1415

615-662-3064      615-963-5541

615-495-4751

jthompson at tnstate dot edu

*Thanks for the heads up, Jeff. I don't get over to middle Tennessee much myself, but I'm sure a fair number of my readers do. It sounds like a fund collection of stuff they've got out there.*

*Next, we heard from Mike Willmoth:*

Hi, Warren!

I just received a copy of your inaugural edition of SFCU 'zine and wanted to thank you for putting it out. I learned a lot about Southern Fandom and conventions I don't normally get to. I've been to LibertyCon a number of times, but being a friend of Uncle Timmy helps facilitate that :-)

Sorry to hear you won't make it out to Westercon 62 (FiestaCon) this July, but I hope you have fun at your alternate selection.

I look forward to seeing you in Montreal!

Mike Willmoth  
mwillmoth at earthlink dot net or mwillmoth at gmail dot com

*Glad to be able to spread the word out that way. I swear, some day I'm gonna make it to Westercon. Real Soon Now.*

*Arnie Katz wrote in as well:*

Dear Warren:

This looks like a good idea and a very worthy effort. The more communication and dissemination of information, the better I say. \*For a quarter, I'll say it with a mouth full of chocolate chip cookies.)

While a lot of this is about things that are peripheral to my interests, such as the stuff about the Hugos and all those big conventions, I hope you will keep me on your eMailing list. In the future, I'll try to comment when you touch on things about which I might know something of value.

We've had a big week here in Vegas. Twenty-three fans attended the 18th Annual Vegas Dandom Open House, sponsored by the Vegrabts and hosted by Joyce and me. They ate and drank copiously and chatted ceaselessly. The last guests, not counting JoHn Hardin, who used the guest room, left about 4:20. Then Saturday night, we had 12 fans here for the regular Vegrants meeting, which lasted until about 3:30. (We were shy about five of our most stalwart regulars, all of whom are now down with a virus.)

IDLE MINDS #2 is about to appear. It only needs the letter column and proofreading. Then I'll put together the VFW annish.

Hope all is well with you.

Faanishly,

Arnie

*I did indeed see Idle Minds #2 up on efanazines.com, and I've skimmed through it. A more thorough read is in order, of course. Glad to hear that Vegas is hopping as usual. I'm upping the ante on content this month, with some sercon material and this letter column, and the schizophrenically fannish live conreport from Chattacon. I may have to do that again some time. Oh, and nextish of the Bulletin, I've got a real treat in store: Steve and Sue Francis's DUFF Report. At 11-point Times, in columns, it takes up ten pages, and it'll be totally worth it to print. I'll leave it in a larger font for the web, of course, since I don't have to worry about the extra costs of ink, paper, and postage here. I'm starting to see the appeal in that.*

*Steve Green wrote from across the pond:*

Hi Warren,

Congratulations on your first issue. Like *SFCU*, Martin Tudor's and my newszine *Critical Wave* is a child of the electronic age, freed from the logistical and economic limits upon pagination, distribution and the inclusion of colour imagery, though I'll confess part of

me yearns for the days when I still relied upon an old-fashioned stencil duplicator. (If you're interested, *Critical Wave* is online at <http://efanzines.com/Wave/index.htm>).

I was pleased to hear Tom Feller was impressed with the "In Memoriam" section of last year's Hugo ceremony, as my wife Ann was among those listed. I wasn't aware of this until Chris Garcia mentioned it to me, and was quite touched Geri Sullivan and her team found time to honour Ann's memory.

Speaking of the worldcon, you may be aware that Tom Womack and I are currently in competition for this year's TransAtlantic Fan Fund, with the victor attending the Montreal worldcon in August. For my own part, I'd definitely intend skipping over the border into the US once the Canadian leg of the TAFF trip was completed. The ballot form is now available at <http://taff.org.uk/ballots/taff2009.html>.

Kind regards  
-- Steve

stevegreen at livejournal dot com  
Solihull, England

*I was indeed aware of the TAFF race, though it's always good to remind my readers of it. It's important for us to keep the lines of communication up, and TAFF and DUFF serve us well in that regard. I'd even managed to read Critical Wave. Here's to many more great issues. The "In Memoriam" segment was particularly poignant for us Southerners – we'd lost a great many friends last year, and seeing all of their names up there brought back the memories. I fear that this year will be even harder on a much larger chunk of Fandom when Forry's name scrolls by – then again, I suspect more than just a name scrolling by for Forry.*

*And what zine would be a real zine without a Lloyd Penney letter of comment?*

1706-24 Eva Rd.  
Etobicoke, ON  
CANADA M9C 2B2

January 9, 2009

Dear Warren:

Something new from the SFC...thanks for the first issue of the SFC Update. I know how much publications can cost, money and time, so this seems to be a wise move.

With past SFC presidents/editors, I've joked that seeing that I live in southern Ontario, I should be included...and, I won't (further) mention the Point Pelee DSC bid from years back. Southern seems to be a state of mind. I also like the idea of making as many of the club members as Worldcon savvy as possible. Some don't like Worldcons, but many do,

and they are a ton of fun. I've gone to as many as I could afford. I hope many SFCers will be able to come up to Montreal for more fun this year.

With that said, I just wasn't attracted by the idea of going to Denver for a Worldcon, and we didn't go. The money just wasn't there, anyway. From all the reports I've read, it was a little small, but seemed to be a popular success. I don't recall a financial report, though...

Yvonne would like to go to Reno in 2011, via Vegas if possible, and I have been doing a little work with the Seattle bid for that year. I'm just pleased there are still bids for future years. I'm always afraid that there will be one year with no bidders at all, and that might be the beginning of the end.

One website I think many of us could use...where all the fannish pages are on Facebook. Maybe it exists, I haven't looked. More and more cons have a page there, and I think more will use Facebook, after the layoffs at LiveJournal, and its uncertain future. Then again, after the SFcrowsnest hijack, is there a social network page that's both useful and safe?

Great! You're on your way to Montreal in August. We will see you there...I'm in charge of the fanzine lounge, so bring zines to sell or give away. We've got a number of local fans who will give up on going to Montreal for Dragon\*Con, but hey, that's their loss. At least this year, you can go to both if you've got the wallet for it.

I'm done for the moment...hope the club members like the Update. Looks fine to me, and I look forward to any zine you care to write up. Whenever it arrives, see you then.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

*One thing I've liked about the race this year is that the bids seem to be fairly civil, to the point that folks can politely disagree about which has the stronger merits. I'm on Facebook myself (though you already know that – but some of my readers might not), and finding that setting up groups and getting folks to join is pretty damned useful – most groups allow you to send a message out to all of the members at once. Aussiecon 4 has been doing this, particularly to alert folks to news about their Guests of Honor. It's a shame to see folks ditching a local Worldcon for Dragon\*con – I'm in the BOTH, DAMNIT camp myself – but I guess there's a different appeal to each, and not everyone likes both flavors. I do look forward to seeing you in the fanzine lounge (or, I suppose, that'll probably be my first chance to meet you).*

*And finally, Joy V. Smith gave us an update:*

Joy V. Smith's story, Seedlings, is included in Magistria: The Realm of the Sorcerer (a shared world anthology), which is now available on amazon.com. Her plant mages fight with magic and their sentient plant companions. [This anthology is a reprint; it's out from a new publisher.]

Link:

[http://www.amazon.com/Magistria-Realm-Sorcerer-Robert-Santa/dp/0981932320/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1232426222&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Magistria-Realm-Sorcerer-Robert-Santa/dp/0981932320/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1232426222&sr=1-1)

Amazon.com: Magistria: The Realm of the Sorcerer: Robert J Santa, Lawrence Barker, G W Thomas: Books

Joy

*Thanks for the heads up, Joy! And congrats on the story publication!*

*We also heard from: Steven H Silver, Curt Phillips, Stephen Fleming, Hope Evey, Mike Moon, Tom Feller, Tim Bolgeo,*

**Chattacon 34 Lounge Report** (continued from *The Drink Tank* #200)

*Editor's note: I'm apparently a failure when it comes to emailing stuff to Chris Garcia, and only managed to get him the first two pages of the report. I'm printing the rest here. This was created, on the fly, in the lounge we ran out of our rooms at Chattacon. It was quite drunken. I hope that explains most everything.*

Glug's Journal: Saturday, 10:55 am

Well the rat-fink bastards finally came back last night, and then it was my turn to stand for two hours waiting for the Chattacon DMV to print my badge. WEE! The lounge was a good laid back experience for Friday night, it was good to catch up with old friends before the bad craziness that will ensue tonight. I have just finished a cigar, serenaded by sounds of a concrete waterfall and conspiring for some anarchy. It's these little moments before the insanity starts again that make or break a con experience.

**Carol**

Carol here from "All Games Considered" and "Secret Life of Girl Gamers" – I'm used to just talking into a mike to communicate my news and views, but tonight I've the honor of being asked to contribute to this fine 'zine. Although the registration line was long and stuttering (and they almost didn't have us down as Pre-Registered!! Yikes!) We had a fine couple of drinks in the bar (a great place to put Registration besides) and a great dinner afterwards. We then plunged into the party-atmosphere of the con where we met these fine folks. I seem to have failed on my mission to find and interview Steve Jackson, but there's always next time. Oh, and sadly, the hot tub here at Hotel 3 was definitely tub-like, but alas – NOT HOT!

Bill Snodgrass

Double-Edged Publishing

[www.doubleedgedpublishing.com](http://www.doubleedgedpublishing.com)



Chattacon 2009 has been a lot of fun. Once through the registration process—a growth area—things have been really nice. The people here have been terrific, clearly dedicated to providing a great atmosphere grounded in a broad and readily accessible fan experience. All aspects of the speculative genres are well represented.

The hotel and convention space is first rate—a fine example of southern charm, yet sophisticated and up to date. Themed around the Chattanooga Choo-Choo motif, the facilities are genuine and true to their nostalgia roots.

People looking for a great con experience would be smart to consider Chattacon.

#### Glug's Journal: Sunday 12:42 AM

A comedian died tonight in New York ... oops, wrong journal. So I spent most of the day in the rooms watching Chattavision, the programming that the con is pumping through out the hotel. That is what saved my sanity. The pseudorandom collection of grey market movies which never applied for copyright, fan films and public service announcements about civil defense shelters kept me greatly entertained. When I finally managed to get away from the fan lounge I made the round of parties, one of the real reasons to do a convention. The ~~Heroes~~ Villains party on the first floor is certainly exciting, but has a few too many people for my taste. There is a picture of me there, rocking a trench coat under a comic dialog bubble reading "Constantine you bastard!" somewhere on the intarwebs now, which made it all worth it. The Time Lords party was serving Red Rum. After a scan with the sonic screw driver deemed it non-lethal I took my share, and I must say it was quite an enjoyable time.

#### Nick's Entry, Saturday:

As I am writing this, I am high on second hand cigar smoke, the fumes of alcohol that I'm too young to drink, and pixie sticks. I'm wound up. I even ran across the third floor catwalk screaming that I was "A golden god". Davey assures me however that I am wrong he is the only golden god. Some days I forget that he is Sexy Space Jesus.

I hung out with some of the Browncoats today. That was fun. The Browncoats are one of the few Scifi groups that I have *true* respect for because they do charity work. They are based off of the fandom for Firefly TV series.

I also spent time with this cool (and extremely hot) pirate chick that was overflowing a corset. Some people think that they can stick a corset on and they will instantly be hot. That's not the case, but this girl could really pull it off. She even once let me untie the back of her corset so she adjust it. Lucky me I guess.

People were thanking me when they left our lounge. After the beer and the cherry bounce was gone, people found that eating the cherries that were left in the mason jar was good.

The cherries had been soaked in Bourbon for nearly a month so they were strong and alcoholic.

I'm going to say that this is my first con. It was really fun and I am going to go to more.

### Glug's Journal: Sunday 9:30 am

I am alive. After a warm shower and scraping away the stubble I feel human again. Last night I drank the Worm and recited the litany against beer, and came out the other end alive. I met Kive who usually runs pretty hot parties at Chatta. This was an off year for him but we still ended up in his private party and then it all go a little surreal. None the less dear readers, I have survived and I have done it all for you, so that you can now the greatness, the glory and the blood and the gore that is Chattacon.

So we got up Sunday morning, loaded out the rooms, and went to the only item of programming I attended: Lee Martindale's reading. Lee's a good friend, and I hope y'all get the chance to meet her. There was some running around after this, and I said my goodbyes. Then we moved some stuff between the cars, and I led the way so that Davey and my crews could eat some Waffle House before going back to North Carolina. I took the wrong exit. So I get to a stop sign, and I really could have gone ahead, but I was distracted. I saw something trotting across the street, joining up with others of its kind. I knew I was on the wrong side of the tracks. I asked my crew, "Do y'all see that pack of wild dogs? I don't think I've ever actually seen that before." After a bit of gawking and laughing, we pulled up to the next street, and as I turned around, I rolled down the window, and hollered to Davey, "Hey man, sorry I took the wrong exit." He called back, "I'm loving the pack of wild dogs!" Everybody had a good laugh, because everybody had been talking about the same thing. Waffle House was, as expected, greasy. Warren out.

## **RED-HOT SONJA**

by Jeff Thompson

Between 1974 and 1978, I wrote non-fiction articles about comic-book heroines for the fanzine *The Heroine Addict*, later renamed *The Heroines Showcase*. In *The Heroines Showcase* #13 and 14 (spring and summer 1978), I enthusiastically wrote about the then-current four-color sensation Red Sonja. I noted that this exciting character already had been the subject of her own specialized fan clubs and conventions, had had lookalike contests and beauty pageants held in her honor, and had been written up in the 20 March 1978 issue of *Newsweek*. Red Sonja had first appeared in the pages of a Marvel comic book in late 1972, but she was a literary character that had already been existence for 38 years.

In the early twentieth century, the prodigious author Robert E. Howard (1906-1936) lived for a mere 30 years, yet in that time, Howard filled the pages of many pulp magazines with tales of his swashbuckling, barbaric heroes such as King Kull the

Conqueror of the year 18,000 BC; Conan the Barbarian of the year 10,000 BC; Solomon Kane and Gottfried von Kalmbach of the AD 1500s and 1600s—and an obscure Russian character named Red Sonya of Rogatino. In “The Shadow of the Vulture,” Robert E. Howard’s story published in the January 1934 edition of *The Magic Carpet* (a.k.a. *Oriental Stories*), the German knight Gottfried von Kalmbach encounters the beautiful Sonya of Rogatino. The year is AD 1683, during the siege of Vienna by the Turks, and Red Sonya comes to the aid of the grateful Teutonic soldier. In a letter to H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard admitted, “Gottfried and his mistress Red Sonya seem more real to me than any other character I’ve ever drawn.”

Three dozen years later, Marvel Comics published *Conan the Barbarian* #1 (October 1970) and proceeded to adapt Conan and other Robert E. Howard fantasy characters to comic-book form. Marvel’s Roy Thomas, *Conan*’s scripter, soon decided to modify the character of Red Sonya of Rogatino and place her in Conan’s prehistoric world. Thus, Thomas and artist Barry Windsor-Smith collaborated on a story called “Swords in the Night” (based on “The Shadow of the Vulture”) for *Conan the Barbarian* #23 (February 1973), in which the Cimmerian warrior Conan replaced the von Kalmbach character—and Red Sonja of Hyrkania was born. In her initial comic-book appearances, Red Sonja was described as a twentyish adventuress who was born in the Month of the Tiger in Hyrkania (a country which lies hundreds of miles from Conan’s Cimmeria beyond a vast desert and the Vilayet Sea) and who now is a mercenary soldier employed by King Ghannif of Pah-Dishah.

In the story, Conan is being ambushed by a band of Turanians at the gates of the city of Makkalet when Red Sonja, clad in a chain-mail shirt and leather shorts, thunders onto the scene with her small army to aid the Cimmerian. “Ho, dog-brothers!” the seemingly fearless She-Devil with a Sword cries. “Let’s show the gutless pigs how the warriors of Pah-Dishah can fight! By Tarim, we’ll give the devils scarlet wine to drink this dawn—or my name’s not Red Sonja!”

At first, Conan takes a sexist view of this stunning, forceful woman. “No one fights my battles for me,” he declares, “least of all a wench who should be tending a hearth somewhere!” However, after the Turanians are defeated, Conan strikes up a tenuous friendship with Red Sonja, who reappears toward the end of the 21-page story to help Conan out of another bind.

Since its inception in 1970, *Conan the Barbarian* had been instrumental in pushing the boundaries of the Comics Code Authority by introducing more violence, blood, cursing, and sex into early-1970s comic books as they strove to become more “adult” and “relevant.” The *Conan* stories’ fantastic setting of a world of completely unfettered and guilt-free violence and sexuality fulfilled the wish-dreams of countless readers of all ages. The Red Sonja stories kept pace with, if not exceeded, the Conan adventures in terms of sex, violence, and gender issues. In terms of the then-contemporary role of women, Red Sonja represented a double-edged sword. Stan Lee wrote, “Red Sonja best typifies the new equality between male and female.” However, at the same time that Red Sonja struck effective blows for women’s liberation and female independence, she became a comic-book sex object rivaling Sheena, Phantom Lady, Black Cat, and other milestones in “good-girl art” from decades gone by. In many of Red Sonja’s comic-book appearances in the 1970s, the sexy savage from Hyrkania disrobed in order to sleep or to bathe—or, in one issue, to get a massage from a male servant—or she

was subjected to bondage in provocative poses. Frequently, she also climbed up and entered a phallic tower or spire (two obvious examples being in *Conan the Barbarian* #24 and *Red Sonja* #6). Perhaps the reason for Red Sonja's success in the 1970s was that the Hyrkanian warrior-woman spoke to her readers on several different levels. She provided exciting adventures for her juvenile readers, her strength and independence appealed to feminist readers, and she titillated her male readers with her sexualized exploits.

Red Sonja's second appearance was a landmark, for it won the 1973 Shazam! Award for the best comic-book story of the year. The magazine was *Conan the Barbarian* #24 (March 1973), and the story was "The Song of Red Sonja," by Roy Thomas and Barry Windsor-Smith (the latter's final issue before John Buscema and Gil Kane began illustrating *Conan*). Near the beginning of the 20-page story, Red Sonja and Conan briefly swim together provocatively. When Conan hopes for *more* than just swimming from the Hyrkanian beauty, Sonja fends him off and dupes him into helping her steal an enchanted serpent tiara from atop one of those aforementioned mushroom-like towers on the grounds of Makkalet's palace royal. After their caper, Conan again wishes to pursue amorous activities, but the elusive Sonja rides off on their one and only horse as she vows, "NO man's lips shall ever touch mine, Cimmerian, save those of him who has defeated me on the field of battle—and that even YOU shall never do!"

After *Conan* #24 in 1973, it was almost a year-and-a-half before the crimson-tressed She-Devil with a Sword appeared again. When she did—in *The Savage Sword of Conan* #1 (August 1974)—she was sporting a new and much more revealing costume, one that her delighted fans at the time called her "chain-mail bikini" or "portable coin collection." In "Curse of the Undead-Man" (freely adapted from Robert E. Howard's short story "Mistress of Death") in *Savage Sword* #1, Sonja again crosses paths with Conan, this time in the City of Thieves, where the barbaric duo proceeds to battle Costranno, a sorcerer. At one point in the story, Conan tells Sonja, "By the way, did I tell you I like your armor—what little there is of it?" The Hyrkanian beauty replies, "An Ophirean pikeman said the same thing to me the other day, just before he made a grab for me. I hope he can learn to wield a pike left-handed. Now, tell me what you've been up to."

This casual attitude of Sonja's toward maiming or killing people was characteristic of almost all of the so-called barbarian characters in Marvel, DC, and Atlas/Seaboard comic books of the 1970s. In Red Sonja's first 30 appearances, she killed approximately 25 men, slew many inhuman creatures, wounded or assaulted countless other people, and even murdered four women (in *Conan* #44, *Marvel Feature* #4, and *Red Sonja* #3 and 6). In addition to describing her hair, the "Red" before Sonja's name could have referred to her penchant for bloodbaths.

*The Savage Sword of Conan* #1 is also noteworthy because it contains Red Sonja's first solo appearance, a 10-page story written by Roy Thomas and illustrated by Neal Adams and Esteban Maroto. In "Red Sonja," Sonja slays King Ghannif of Pah-Dishah when he tries to force himself on her. Therefore, Red Sonja now becomes a fugitive from justice.

Red Sonja again joins Conan for the two-part "Tower of Blood"/"Fiend and the Flame" story in *Conan the Barbarian* #43 and 44 (October and November 1974). In this adventure, she and Conan encounter the immortal siblings Morophla (a gnomish old man) and Uathact (a tall, sleek beauty). The two sorcerers are accustomed to taking

sexual favors from their visitors and then draining their blood to refresh their own immortality. Uathact hurls Red Sonja into a pit where Dromek—a green and lascivious man-monster—waits to mate with her, much to Morophla’s displeasure. Conan recues Sonja, however, and both barbarians are confined to a dungeon.

When Conan offers to give himself to Uathact if she will betray her brother and help him and Sonja escape, the Cimmerian asks Sonja if she is jealous. “No! There is no place for such things in my life!” she insists. “Sometimes, I almost want there to be, but there is not—and there never will be!” Finally, Red Sonja and Conan escape by setting fire to Morophla and Uathact’s castle—and then Sonja knocks out Conan from behind with a stone and flees on their only horse—again.

Many Red Sonja fans refer to her next four appearances—all solo stories—as the Darkwood Forest Tales. In the first story, “Episode,” in *Conan the Barbarian* #48 (March 1975), an old man named Vincentius captures Sonja and binds her to an altar with a man named Nunwolf and prepares to sacrifice both of them to the gods. Vincentius, needless to say, is unsuccessful, and Red Sonja triumphs. In “She-Devil with a Sword” in *Kull and the Barbarians* #2 (July 1975), Red Sonja encounters Ghuntar, the werewolf of Darkwood Forest, after the guilt-ridden wolfman has slain his mother while he had been a wolf. This issue also reveals the active participatory fan culture that had sprung up around Red Sonja as a fan named Dawn Griel (of San Diego, California) appears in two photographs in which she models a replica of Sonja’s first costume. Countless fans modeling their homemade replicas of Red Sonja’s *second* costume would soon follow!

Red Sonja’s Darkwood Forest odyssey continues in *Kull and the Barbarians* #3 (September 1975) in a remarkable 14-page origin story called “The Day of the Sword,” by Roy Thomas, Doug Moench, and Howard Chaykin. Finally, Red Sonja fans learn how Sonja came to be a warrior and why she rarely, if ever, allows herself to be touched in any way by men. Sonja’s origin resembles Batman’s or Spider-Man’s beginnings in some ways, yet its originality and poignancy make it distinctive.

According to “The Day of the Sword,” Sonja lived in Hyrkania with her mother, her father Ivor (a retired, peg-legged mercenary in the Hyrkanian Army), and her two younger brothers—until one day five years earlier when Sonja was 18 or 19 years old. On that day, one of Ivor’s old adversaries rode up to the family’s house with several other men. The nameless soldier who hated Ivor proceeded to slay him before his family’s eyes. He then murdered Sonja’s brother, her mother, and her other brother. Next, the sadistic soldier dragged Sonja into her house and brutally raped her in her own bed. The soldiers set fire to the cottage and departed, but Sonja managed to escape. Nauseous, sobbing, and clutching her dead father’s sword, she stumbled through the countryside until she saw an unearthly vision. Scathach, the shimmering deity hovering in the air above Sonja, acknowledged the sword and declared, “You have suffered deeply, Sonja, but know that there is strength born in suffering. This strength is your own, Sonja, and has ever dwelled within you but has only now been awakened. If you but have the will, Sonja, you may use your strength to make the world your home. You may become a wanderer, the equal of any man or woman you meet. But first, you must make a vow to me, Sonja. You must never allow yourself to be loved by another man unless he has defeated you in fair battle—something NO man is like to do after this day!” The divine being touched its own ethereal sword to Sonja’s right shoulder and then vanished.

Sonja, who had been a mediocre swordswoman before now, somehow knew that she would be an unsurpassed mistress of the blade from now on. She was proven right when one of the straggling ruffians returned to take his turn with her. Sonja engaged in a brilliant swordfight with the man and slew him. “But the sight of blood no longer sickened Sonja, nor did the feel of her first kill. Instead, she had felt exhilaration and fierce rage, which she shouted to the world in a loud voice of defiance. It was a voice which well suited her vow of that dark day. And though she has ridden far and lived much since that day, she has never forgotten that vow: ‘I will find you, Nameless One, and I will repay you for what you have done—to my family and to ME!’”

On this day in Darkwood Forest (in *Kull and the Barbarians* #3), Red Sonja comes face to face with the Nameless One who killed her family and raped her five years ago—but the once vicious man now is no more than a raving lunatic. Sonja is angry that the Nameless One is too demented to realize why she would slay him, so she leaves him in the forest. She is satisfied that he has been punished even if it was not by her own sword. Red Sonja now can put her dreadful memories in their proper perspective and go on with her life.

On Saturday 23 August 1975, during Stan Lee’s question-and-answer session at the Atlanta Comics and Fantasy Fair, a female fan spoke up and insisted, “You *must* do something about Red Sonja’s new costume! I mean, what if that thing ever rusted shut?!” After the laughter had subsided, Lee retorted, “Well, do you *guys* think we oughta change Sonja’s costume?” Stan Lee’s query was met with a chorus of basso “no’s!”

At the same time (late summer 1975), Red Sonja deservedly acquired her own successful, bi-monthly comic-book series in the pages of the new *Marvel Feature* (not the 1971-1973 *Marvel Feature* that had launched the Defenders). *Marvel Feature* #1 (November 1975) reprinted Sonja’s solo story from *The Savage Sword of Conan* #1 and featured a new eight-pager by Roy Thomas and Dick Giordano. In “The Temple of Abomination,” Red Sonja, still wandering through Darkwood Forest, battles an army of satyrs.

With *Marvel Feature* #2 (January 1976), Frank Thorne began his long run of illustrating Red Sonja. Thorne’s definitive 1970s-era rendition of Sonja depicted her not quite as beautiful as before but “savagely alluring,” as I wrote in *The Heroines Showcase* #13 (spring 1978). Thorne’s practice of drawing thick black lines around Sonja’s eyes effectively captured the savagery and sexuality of the character. In “Blood of the Hunter,” the story in *Marvel Feature* #2, Sonja befriends a temperamental teenage boy named Durkin who has a left peg leg—just as her father did.

*Marvel Feature* #3 (March 1976) sported a bondage cover by Frank Thorne and a story (“Balek Lives!”) about an ancient automaton, and “Eyes of the Gorgon,” Bruce Jones’s story in issue number four (May 1976), in which rats crawl on Sonja’s body, was reprinted in *The Superhero Women*, by Stan Lee (1977). *Marvel Feature* #5 (July 1976) featured a Thorne pin-up of Sonja instead of the letters page and an adventure, “The Bear God Walks,” in which Sonja allows herself to be romanced briefly by a man named Tusan before they confront the Bear God together.

After almost two years of solo stories in *Kull and the Barbarians* and *Marvel Feature*, Red Sonja was reunited with Conan the Cimmerian in a spectacular, five-part cross-over saga in the pages of *Conan the Barbarian* #66 and *Marvel Feature* #6 (both September 1976), *Conan* #67 (October 1976), and *Marvel Feature* #7 and *Conan* #68

(both October 1976). In the epic adventure written by Roy Thomas and drawn by Frank Thorne (in *Marvel Feature*) and John Buscema (in *Conan*), a merchant named Publio hires Conan and his paramour Belit to travel to Messantia, capital of Argos, to steal for him a missing page from the Iron-Bound Book of Skelos, a fabled tome of necromancy—but old Karanthes, priest of Ibis, has commissioned Red Sonja of Hyrkania to do the same thing! Upon the barbarians' inevitable confrontation, Sonja cattily calls Belit Conan's "serving wench," and the two women engage in a dazzling sword-and-dagger fight. In the ensuing confusion, Sonja pilfers the valuable Skelos parchment and flees—leaving Conan to face "The Talons of the Man-Tiger" (in *Conan* #67).

Sonja takes the page to Karanthes, but Conan and Belit catch up with her. The trio has another skirmish; then, a demon sent by the god Set steals the coveted page. Conan stops another catfight between Sonja and Belit, and after enlisting the aid of King Kull of Valusia, the foursome recovers the page. In the end, however, writer Thomas does not allow either Conan or Sonja to win the page; instead, it is consumed in a Stygian blaze. As I observed in *The Heroines Showcase* #14 (summer 1978), "Sort of reminds you of those races between Superman and the Flash, no?"

At the conclusion of their adventure together, Red Sonja and Conan (with Belit) go their separate ways after a dubious truce has been established between Sonja and Belit. "Then, as the Hyrkanian rides off eastward—and the other two toward the west—only Conan of Cimmeria deigns to glance backward for a moment. And, if Belit notices it, riding at his side, she says nothing. He is hers, at least for now, and that will have to do." (Belit would die 32 issues later, in *Conan the Barbarian* #100.)

Two months later, it was not *Marvel Feature* #8 which burst forth from the newsstands (*Feature* had been cancelled) but *Red Sonja* #1, produced by Roy Thomas, Clair Noto, Frank Thorne, and Ed Summer. "By popular demand!" proclaimed the striking Thorne cover, which was reminiscent of the cover of *Conan the Barbarian* #1 six years earlier. "Fabulous first issue! Fire and fury in the age of Conan!" To the delight of every Sonja fan, the savage Hyrkanian beauty had come of four-color age.

The story of *Red Sonja* #1 (January 1977) is the outstanding, unforgettable fantasy, "The Blood of the Unicorn." Sonja is forced to slay her suffering horse, which has broken a leg. After a while of walking through the Argossean forest, she spies an exquisite white unicorn being mistreated by some men who want his alabaster horn. The supposedly enchanted horn of the unicorn breaks off of the beast's forehead and is seized by Andar of Bezfarda. Red Sonja leads the frightened creature away, and in the days to come, she develops for the steed feelings of empathy, togetherness, and love unlike those of any other relationship in her young life. "Two strong hearts, they journey on—no longer as master and beast, but still side by side, as companions now, keeping to seldom-used paths and back roads, away from the company of men who would not understand this unspoken, nigh-mystic tie."

Soon, Red Sonja notices that the unicorn's horn is growing back, and his full strength is returning. Eventually, Andar of Bezfarda and his lackeys ambush Sonja and the unicorn. As Andar prepares to kill Sonja, the valiant unicorn saves his mistress's life by impaling Andar upon his regenerated horn.

Alas, the beautiful Hyrkanian is unlucky at love of any kind, and "The Blood of the Unicorn" concludes on a bittersweet note reminiscent of the tear-jerking, so-called "women's movies" of the 1930s and 1940s. "Then, in the still enfolding darkness, Sonja

leads the great phantom beast on until they reach the border which marks the end of one Argosian province and the beginning of another. There, she suddenly senses that the beast is unwilling to go further, and her heart grows cold as she sees how large and strong the horn has grown. Next moment, he snorts and rears, more wild than she has ever seen him! *His* heart, *too*, is torn, and the choice is not so much for either to make as it is already made by Fate; for each must follow his own destiny. The unicorn must again travel his elusive path, riderless and free, and Red Sonja must fulfill her own warrior's destiny—to roam and seek her fortune in strange lands among strange men—alone.”

“The Blood of the Unicorn” perfectly encapsulates those ever-present themes in Red Sonja's stories of her eternal isolation and constantly thwarted happiness, and it serves as a seventies-era metaphor for the many varieties of love, however extraordinary they may be. Red Sonja, who is “half-magic” herself because of her supernatural origin experience seen in *Kull and the Barbarians* #3, felt an affinity to the white unicorn, who was of an enchanted species extant only in illusory, fabled lands such as Sonja's own. At last, Sonja was truly happy—if only for a fleeting instant. Red Sonja of Hyrkania seems to be a tragic figure not unlike Barnabas Collins of *Dark Shadows* fame—a tortured soul languishing in an existence strangled by sorrow. As Charlotte Vale (Bette Davis) laments in *Now, Voyager* (1942), “I'm immune to happiness.”

In case you are wondering how Red Sonja could have ridden the unicorn or even associated with him because of the popular unicorn legend's stipulation that only virgins may ride unicorns, consider that the unicorn had lost his horn when Sonja had discovered him and therefore was imperfect, just as Sonja had lost her virginity to the nameless rapist in “The Day of the Sword.” Besides mere physical conditions, another bond existed between the ruined unicorn and Red Sonja: Sonja's very soul had been tainted by numerous traumas and an unnatural urge to maim and kill. Ultimately, when the unicorn's horn grew back and he became whole again, he reluctantly severed his tie with Sonja. Because of the story's great emotional power, “The Blood of the Unicorn” is one of the creative high points in the 1970s-era appearances of Red Sonja in Marvel Comics.

In late 1976, Red Sonja's popularity hit a similar peak when the She-Devil with a Sword proved that, just like *Star Trek*, Perry Rhodan, and old radio, she too was famous enough to have a large-scale fan convention devoted chiefly to her. The first SonjaCon was held at a New Jersey Travelodge on 20-21 November 1976. Among the guests were Frank Thorne, Roy Thomas, Howard Chaykin, Dave Cockrum, and Wendy Pini (who won the Sonja lookalike contest). The panel discussions, art shows, costume contest, comics-dealing, and overall enthusiasm at the 1976 SonjaCon cemented Red Sonja's place alongside Wonder Woman, Supergirl, and a few others as one of the major comic-book heroines.

Meanwhile, “The Demon in the Maze” in *Red Sonja* #2 (March 1977) is noteworthy because it was inspired by one of co-writer Clair Noto's dreams. In the exciting story, which contains elements of the Greek myth of Theseus and Ariadne and of Ray Harryhausen's film *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), Sonja must traverse a demon-filled maze in Venzia, Argos. She obtains a peculiar bag of human bones from a dying mage, who instruct her to hurl the bones out of the pouch when she encounters evil in the labyrinth. She later does empty the bag—and a helpful army of sword-wielding, animated skeletons is the bizarre result!



*Red Sonja* #3 (May 1977) finds Sonja in Athor where she frees some slaves and meets a dashing wanderer named Mikal, who will become her traveling companion in four stories. Mikal asks Sonja to accompany him to “The Games of Gita” at Zotoz. The savage beauty participates in the Olympic-style competition and later battles a spider-woman. Red Sonja declines the offer of the Zotozian throne and prepares to depart. Brown-haired Mikal exclaims, “Hold, Sonja! If you must go, there’s no need for you to ride alone. I’ll get a horse and go with you.” Red Sonja’s wary reply is, “For a while perhaps—but *only* for a while!”

Red Sonja and Mikal go on to encounter a macabre, underwater village of monsters in “The Lake of the Unknown” in *Red Sonja* #4 (July 1977) and a two-headed dragon in issue number five (September 1977). During the latter adventure, “Master of the Bells,” by Thomas, Noto, and Thorne, Red Sonja becomes separated from Mikal and sets out to find him at a mystical place called the Singing Tower, which the underwater creatures had mentioned to her.

Red Sonja’s next appearance was in the pages of *Conan the Barbarian*, her initial comic-book home. The September 1977 issue (#78) featured a slightly revised, color reprint of the originally black-and-white “Curse of the Undead-Man” from *The Savage Sword of Conan* #1. This story was the first to depict Sonja in her famous coin bikini (as designed by Esteban Maroto). Around the time of this reprint in *Conan*, the She-Devil with a Sword again co-starred with the Cimmerian in a reprint of the Shazam! Award-winning “Song of Red Sonja” (from *Conan* #24) in the oversized *Marvel Treasury Edition* #15.

Despite having her own bi-monthly color comic book (1977-1979), Red Sonja still appeared occasionally in Marvel’s black-and-white barbarian books as well. In fact, *The Savage Sword of Conan* #23 (October 1977) was almost one-half Red Sonja. Sonja appeared on the cover, on the stunning frontispiece, and in a full-page pin-up picturing her with the white unicorn from *Red Sonja* #1. *Heroines Showcase* writer-artists Wendy Pini and Chris Padovano contributed a poem and an illustrated article, respectively, and Roy Thomas, Clair Noto, and Frank Thorne produced the 12-page Sonja story “Wizards of the Black Sun,” in which the Hyrkanian warrior meets Djali, a three-legged talking goat.

Meanwhile, Wendy Pini co-wrote “The Singing Tower,” the story in *Red Sonja* #6 (November 1977). Sonja is carried inside an incredibly phallic-looking tower and is suspended in bondage, high above the floor, alongside a woman who is a giant. Sonja is reunited with Mikal but says farewell to him after insisting that it is time for them to go their separate ways. Mikal, who is the rightful ruler of Zotoz, remains at the Singing Tower while Sonja departs (after callously casting away a souvenir ring which Mikal had given to her).

Red Sonja’s next love interest was the rugged, black-haired Summaro, who was introduced in “Throne of Blood” in *Red Sonja* #7 (January 1978). In the first of a two-parter, the Hyrkanian beauty stumbles onto Skranos, a walled city whose townspeople have heard minstrels’ reports of how Sonja had slain King Ghannif of Pah-Dishah. Therefore, the villagers capture Sonja and prepare to lynch her! Frank Thorne’s full-page drawing on the last page is stunning. Then, in “Vengeance of the Golden Circle” in *Red Sonja* #8 (March 1978), Summaro rescues Sonja just as the hangman prepares to open the

gallows trapdoor under her. Next, Sonja must do battle with a muscle-bound rogue named Jimodo inside the very carcass of a long-dead mastodon.

*Red Sonja* #9 (May 1978) features another milestone story, “Chariot of the Fire Stallions,” which reveals that Summaro’s father is General Quillos, a mortal, but that his mother, Apah Alah, is a wizardess—and Summaro has inherited a portion of her powers. Summaro makes a pass at Sonja, and she threateningly draws her sword. Apah Alah appears to defend her son and transports Red Sonja to her own netherworld where she makes Sonja race a green man-monster named Amparo in a chariot around a fiery pit. Ultimately, Summaro employs his own powers to rescue Red Sonja, but instead of being grateful to him, she remains her haughty, aloof self.

“Red Lace” in *Red Sonja* #10 and 11 (July and September 1978) found Sonja at a true disadvantage for the first time in her life as a warrior. In issue number ten, Summaro and Sonja venture into Apah Alah’s arcane castle where Summaro was conceived. Now, the crumbling citadel is haunted by bat-creatures, an old man named Marmo, and a bejeweled centaur. The deranged Marmo attacks and blinds the centaur; before its death, the half-man/half-horse flails about for its assailant, seizes Red Sonja, and *blinds her* with its own blood! However, in *Red Sonja* #11, Sonja is not “Sightless in a Strange Land” for long: she regains her sight when a dying bird’s blood splashes across her eyes. It would have been more interesting if Roy Thomas and Clair Noto had waited several issues before restoring Red Sonja’s sight, thereby temporarily turning the comic book into a prehistoric *Daredevil* as Red Sonja copes with her blindness.

Perhaps, the writers realized that they did not have the luxury of time, for only four more issues of *Red Sonja* were published. They featured the stories “Ashes and Emblems” in *Red Sonja* #12 (November 1978), “Shall Skranos Fall?” in issue #13 (January 1979), “An Evening on the Border” between the land of the living and the land of the dead in *Red Sonja* #14 (March 1979), and “The Tomb of the Three Dead Kings” in issue #15 (May 1979). After her own seventies-era magazine ended with that tale of vampirism in #15, the She-Devil with a Sword made guest appearances in other Marvel comic books, starred in her own major motion picture in 1985, and enjoyed comic-book revivals in the mid-1980s and the 1990s (Marvel) and again in the 2000s (Dynamite Entertainment). In the spring of 2006, Red Sonja even met DC Comics’ Claw the Unconquered in the four-issue *Red Sonja/Claw: The Devil’s Hands*. Either in comic books, prose literature, movies, action figures, paintings, or other media, Robert E. Howard’s Red Sonja continues to thrive and to capture the imagination of sword-and-sorcery aficionados of all ages. Her iron bikini shows no signs of “rusting shut” any time soon!