

Confessions of a Buck Rogers 25th Century Solar Scout

By ED KNAPP

"ZAP-ZAP" rang out from behind the hedge lining in our house. I had taken a bead with my nifty new 39 cent Buck Rogers Rocket Pistol. Mrs. Rowe's snowball bush was reduced to naked stems. The summer sun gleamed off the steel blue barrel of the rocket gun; taking aim at Mrs. Ruggles' wash line. "ZAP-ZAP," again the weapon recoiled and the wash disappeared in a vapor cloud. I never had so much fun in my young life, ridding the world of unnecessary alien objects around the neighborhood.

I became a devoted fan of futuristic Buck Rogers in the Twenty-Fifth Century; greatly stimulating my five tender years since his first appearance in the Sunday funnies, 1929. Buck Rogers stood alone in early science fiction comics, preceding Brick Bradford, Flash Gordon, and numerous other later day space adventurers. Buck was the first to bring my attention and fascination to the heretofore unnoticed universe surrounding the earth. Thereafter, my heart beat faster when I gazed up in wonder at the broad night skies filled with twinkling points of light. Adding Buck Rogers to this bewitching backdrop that hung majestic and mysterious above my house, made it a thrill of a lifetime. I became enthralled with artist Dick Calkins'

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marvelous concept of Buck's world. What child of the early thirties could resist the excitement the comic figure evoked.

During those earlier years many mysteries and questions of the celestial bodies that have since been answered, were still shrouded in doubts. This was in a time before the invention or intercession in or world of rocket ships, space stations, satellites, close-up pictures of distant planets, high grade electronics, and long before earthlings set foot on the moon's surface.

My fascination with the 25th Century stories with Buck helmeted in tight fitting space cap and free flying above the buildings of the earth's capitol city of Niagra in a back pack "jumping belt," was mesmerizing.

I became further smitten with the Buck Rogers period when he came "alive" in a lineup of late afternoon adventure story programs carried on the radio. The spirit of that highly advanced era was graphically captured in the program's thrilling title opener. The announcer's voice reverberated dramatically from an echo chamber, proclaiming: **BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25TH CENTURY!** booming forth, accompanied by the thunderous roar of a rocket ship blasting off in flight. The course to high adventure had been set with the tone of that opening.

As a typical young radio listener I was literally transported to mysterious interplanetary worlds with Buck and his companions every weekday; often rocketing to



Mars, Venus, Saturn, Jupiter among other distant planets in our galaxy. Buck's constant companions in his full blown imaginary flights into space (in comics and radio) were the brilliant scientist and master inventor, elderly Dr. Huer and lovely blonde Wilma Deering, Buck's close female helper in his celestial adventures. In fondly recalling the radio series, it seemed Wilma was forever getting herself into the most disastrous predicaments (like most girls) and it took all of Buck's resources to safely bail her out.

Like all true adventurers, Buck had his hands full, fighting evil adversaries that existed in the stellar system. None were more evil, cunning, and treacherous than his arch enemy, Killer Kane and his equally untrustworthy partner, Ardala. Ardala was dark haired, beautiful, shapely and vampish; possessing the deadly venom of a rattle snake.

This sinister pair were forever laying plans to eliminate Buck and his friends in a diabolical scheme to become dictatorial rulers of the entire universe. Buck Rogers' most valuable asset for good was eccen-

tric and wise Dr. Huer. The thin, bald headed scientist was perpetually running from test tube to test tube in some new experiment conducted in his amazing laboratory of gadgets.

Dr. Huer created many worthwhile devices and weapons to combat the evils perpetrated in outer space by Killer Kane and others of his kind. They were necessary defense mechanisms engineered by the smart doctor, aided by our hero in fighting the forces of many wicked planet inhabitants: the Tikekeman, Asterites, Mekkanos, fierce Tiger Men, or the evil "yellow" menace. Prolific inventions by Dr. Heuer included the Psychic Restriction Ray, Ultrasonic death rays, Teleradioscope, Molecular Expansor, Radio Television, and the Mechanical Mole (designed to burrow into the earth's core).

The tremendous bond that developed between Buck and myself during my childhood grew even stronger when the sponsor of his radio program began to offer captivating giveaway premiums to faithful listeners.

Among the show's first premium offers

BUCK ROGERS

my outer space hero, Buck Rogers. The thrill created over Buck's adventures and co-supporting merchandise can be fully realized when you read some of the titles in his series of ten Big Little Books: *Buck Rogers and the Doomed Comet*; *The Moons of Saturn*; *The City Below the Sea*; *The Depth Men of Jupiter*; *The Fiend from Space*. The excitement was unending.

Such was Buck's appeal that in 1939 Universal Studios produced a weekly 12-chapter serial of "Buck Rogers." It was a great success with the young Saturday afternoon movie matinee crowd. Larry "Buster" Crabbe, already my hero as Tarzan and Flash Gordon in earlier 1930s movie serials, played the invincible Buck Rogers in the 25th Century. By this time, we children of the pre-TV days were fed on a full diet of our hero that nourished our appetite for adventure through the comics, radio, hard cover books, ten cent com-

ics, the Big Little Books, the movies, and assorted merchandise.

Today you seldom, if ever, hear the name of Buck Rogers cross anybody's lips, or see his name in print. However, Buck Rogers was "it" in his day, the decade of the thirties.

I was most proud to have been a member of Buck's Solar Scouts team and obviously our group was successful in our combined efforts to save the universe. Should you ask for proof, you only have to step outside your house on a clear night, look up to the vast black dome filled with twinkling starlight. The majestic canopy there reaching above you endlessly, attests to our success in preserving the celestial heavens for you to savor and enjoy for all time.

This, then, is my true confession as a Buck Rogers 25th Century Solar Scout; a testimony of faith and goodwill. ■

NOTE—Tune in to Those Were The Days Saturday, May 24 for an origin episode of "Buck Rogers."

