

This year, Ray Bradbury and the late Isaac Asimov have lent their illustrious names to two new series of high-profile comics adaptations. *Ray Bradbury Comics* and *Isaac Asimov's Robot City* are the brainchildren of Byron Preiss Visual Publications, the highly successful book-packaging company.

Back in the '50s, the heyday of William Gaines's EC Comics, *Weird Science* and *Weird Fantasy* owed much of their popularity to their exquisite adaptations of classic Bradbury stories. But more recently, serious science fiction hasn't fared particularly well in the comics marketplace.

Howard Zimmerman, executive editor for the new Bradbury and Asimov projects, is convinced that the time is ripe for graphic novels with wide appeal to both comics and science-fiction fans.

Of *Ray Bradbury Comics*, Zim-

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approves or asks for changes and corrections. He has total input up and down the line." Zimmerman says that preparing the script is the simplest part of the project. Because it's impossible to imitate Ray Bradbury's style of writing, "The original texts are being edited down to the right proportion. No one is writing new text." For each story, Ray has written a new introduction, telling something about its origin. He has also written general introductions for each volume.

The series was originally announced as being distributed by Bantam Books, but when that deal didn't work out, Topps Comics and its editor-in-chief Jim Salicrup stepped in to fill the void.

In addition to adaptations of such classic Bradbury stories as "The Veldt," "Golden Apples of the Sun," "Besides a Dinosaur, What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?," and "The

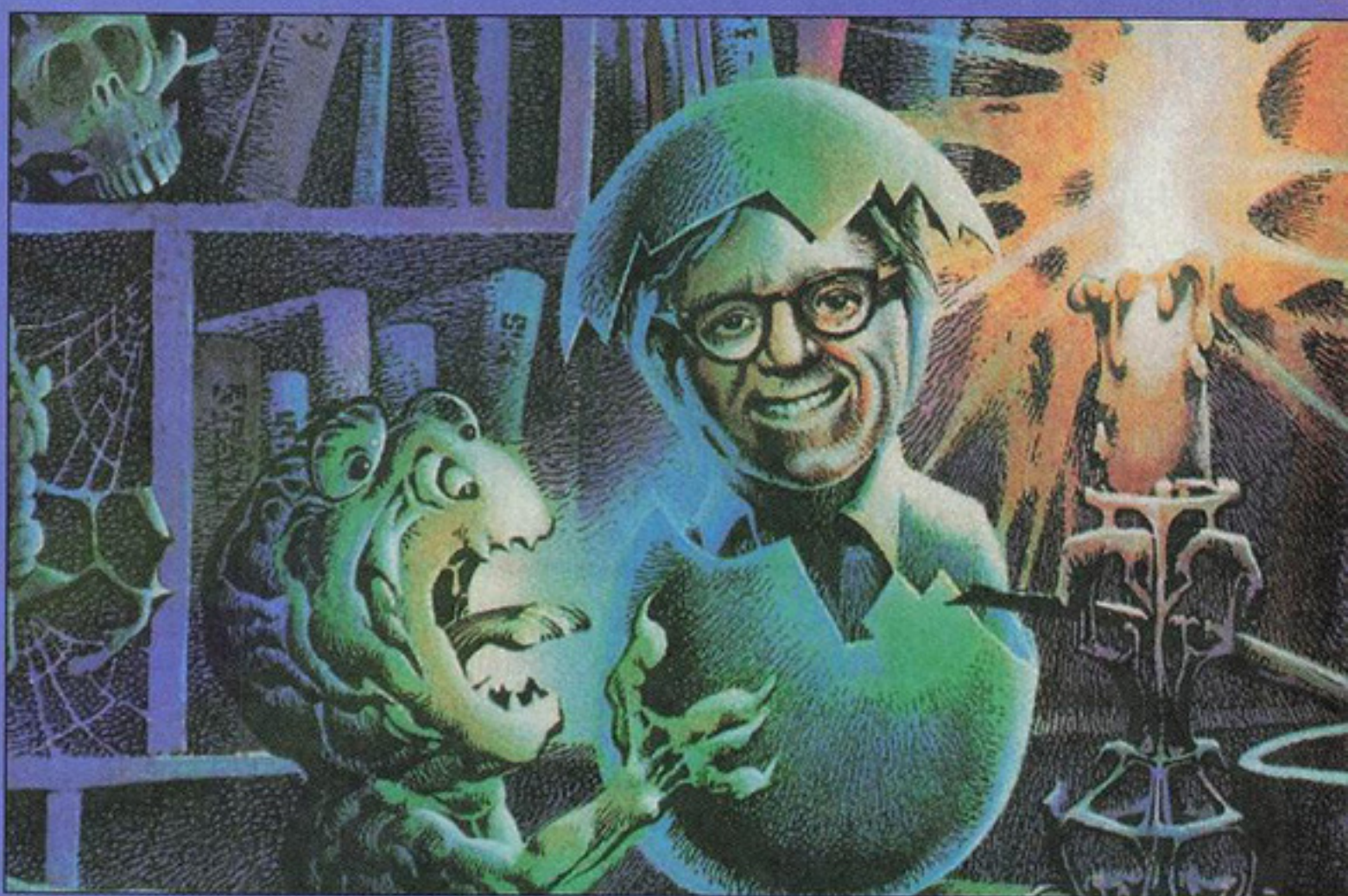
sell and Chuck Roblin. Future issues feature adaptations by Dave Gibbons, James Sherman, Daniel Torres, Ralph Reese and Mark Chiarello, as well as Tim Truman, Steve Leialoha, and Lebbius Woods, an architect also noted for his Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov illustrations.



Chronicling Ray Bradbury's Mind

By Michael Berry

Howard Zimmerman, Byron Preiss Visuals and Topps Comics challenge the SF comics jinx with adaptations of one of the field's top authors.



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According to Zimmerman, Bradbury retains complete quality control over the entire series. "Every time an assignment is given out, the first step is to get page roughs and script from the artist and send them to Ray. He

Foghorn," the new series will include episodes from *The Martian Chronicles* that have never before been adapted to the comics medium. These include "Rocket Summer," "The Locusts," "Night Meeting," "Usher Two," and "The Off-Season."

The list of contributing artists is as impressive as the stories they have chosen to illustrate. The contributors include Kent Williams, P. Craig Rus-

There will be a dinosaur-themed issue, highlighted by Richard Corben's version of "A Sound of Thunder." The book also includes work by Mike Kucharski, Garces, a leading Spanish illustrator, and Wayne Barlowe, author of *Barlowe's Book of Extraterrestrials*. Other contributors include Sean Phillips, Ron Wilbur, John Van Fleet and Bruce Jensen, artist for the *Neuromancer* graphic novel. Harvey

Kurtzman is also contributing a story, with finishes by Matt Wagner. Still in the works are adaptations by Mike Mignola, Ken Steacy, Howard Simpson, Del Barras, and Anthony Williams, artist for Marvel's *The Sleaze Brothers*.

Cover artists for the series include Tim Truman, Bruce Jensen, Daniel Brereton, Bill Stout and Dave Gibbons. The series is being designed and art-directed by Dean Motter of *Mr. X* fame.

Asked to pick his own all-time favorite Bradbury story, Zimmerman chooses "Picasso Summer," not so coincidentally included among the adaptations in *Ray Bradbury Comics*. "It's about a middle-class couple who take their yearly, week-long vacation at a hotel on the French Riviera," he says, "They don't get out much. The guy is a closet art freak and is totally enamored of Picasso's work.

on the condition that he didn't have to create an original Picasso mural. The adaptation, however, will be fully painted.

Given Bradbury's vast output, it's inevitable that some favorite stories will be missing. Zimmerman says, "Some stuff that I would have loved to have done didn't make it into the early issues. On the other hand, I can say that for every person who's worked on this project, it's been a passionate enterprise."

Veteran artist Richard Corben's reaction to the project seems fairly typical. He says, "I normally won't accept any work outside my own publishing ventures. But because of the stature of the author and the quality of the material, I had to make an exception. It was an honor to do this one."

According to Zimmerman, Corben's enthusiasm is evident in the finished

"The Homecoming" is about this kid's family reunion, and as you read it, you realize that all his relatives are werewolves, witches and other strange creatures.

"It seemed to me that to do it traditionally, to show all the characters clearly, wouldn't work. I always find it boring when an artist shows you everything. So my version of 'The Homecoming' is rather dark and bleak, with figures lurking in the shadows."

Leialoha says he's quite pleased with the finished product. "It's not in a particularly realistic style. In fact, I've never worked in this style before. But then, I've never had to do a story where everything happens at midnight, by candlelight."

Newcomer Mark Chiarello, whose previous credits include work on *Hellraiser* and Eclipse's "Stars of the Negro Leagues" trading cards, faced similar challenges while adapting "A Piece of Wood." "The fact that it's basically two guys in a room talking for 13 pages was a real challenge from an artistic point of view," Chiarello notes. "And because it's a Ray Bradbury story, you want to keep all his dialogue, narration and description. You can't do that when you translate it to comics."

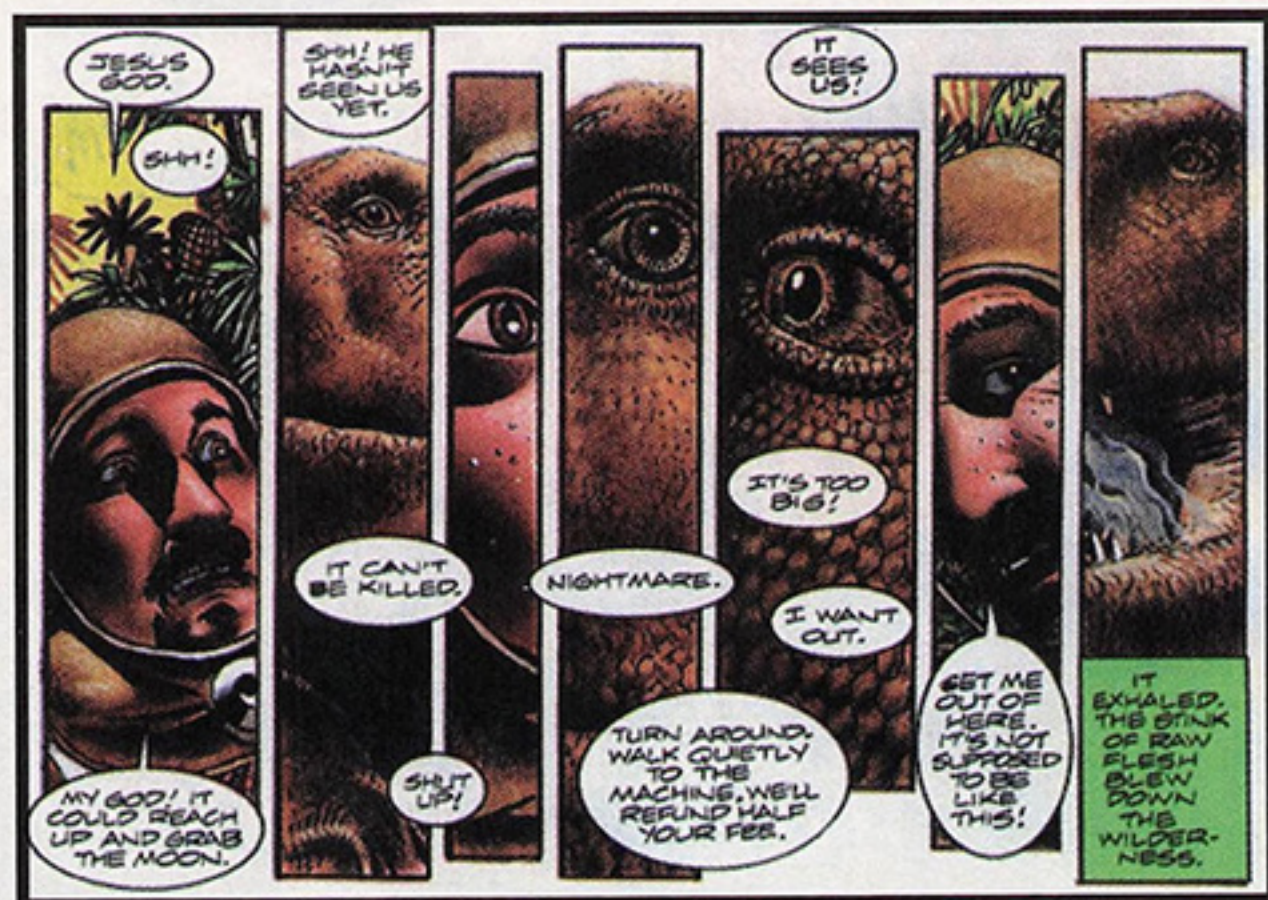
Chiarello is looking forward to feedback from the original creator of "A Piece of Wood." "I don't know if Ray's seen the finished art. But I'm a big, big, Bradbury fan, and I'm dying to find out what he thought of it."

Production values for the entire *Bradbury* series will be high, but Zimmerman says that readers and collectors with a little extra cash to spare may also be able to acquire deluxe editions. "We're working on a couple of special packages, including limited hardcover editions autographed by Ray, perhaps by the artists as well. In Europe and probably the United States, we'll be offering limited edition portfolios of the original art. I can't tell you which artists will be represented just yet."

Isaac Asimov is one of the world's most prolific writers, but few of his stories or novels have been adapted for comics. Soon, *Robot City* will remedy that situation.

Based on the best-selling paperback series in which other writers have explored Asimov's Robot Universe, the overall plot for the comics series is very complicated. Even Zimmerman has a hard time synopsisizing it.

"There's a planet called Robot City, inhabited only by robots. They seem



"As luck would have it, the second night they're at this resort, the man is out walking at dusk and sees this little old man drawing figures in the sand with a stick. There's no one else around. As he gets closer, he realizes that it's Picasso. He inches closer, and when he looks over the artist's shoulder, he's dumbstruck by this magnificent mural in the sand.

"Picasso looks up at him, smiles, chats with him briefly, throws down his stick and walks away. And the guy is left there with this piece of ephemera. It's brilliant, unique, and essentially just for him. He doesn't know what to do. Should he get his camera, make a cast from plaster of paris? Meanwhile, the tide is coming in."

John Van Fleet took the assignment

piece. Zimmerman calls Corben's version of "A Sound of Thunder," his "best stuff in at least a decade. It's just gorgeous!"

Bradbury seems to agree. Corben says, "I did get a very nice card from Ray just last week. We're going to frame that sucker."

For Steve Leialoha, *Ray Bradbury Comics* offered an opportunity to stretch his talent in a different direction. "I had a great time. When Byron and Howard were asking people if they were interested in doing stuff, everyone basically picked the story they most wanted to do. Somebody else had already chosen the one I wanted, but, actually, I think 'Homecoming' was a better choice for me. It's a more difficult story to do."