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Alan Dean Foster and STAR WARS (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

There is an article on Techdirt.com at <https://preview.tinyurl.com/alandeanfoster>, which says in part:

"... it appears that Disney is not paying artists. While the details are a bit fuzzy, yesterday the Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) and famed author Alan Dean Foster announced that Disney was no longer paying him royalties for the various Star Wars books he wrote (including the novelization of the very first film back in 1976), along with his novelizations of the Aliens movies. He claims he'd always received royalties before, but they suddenly disappeared."

The article quotes a letter from Foster to Disney, which says in part:

"When you purchased Lucasfilm you acquired the rights to some books I wrote. STAR WARS, the novelization of the very first film. SPLINTER OF THE MIND'S EYE, the first sequel novel. You owe me royalties on these books. You stopped paying them."

This is not the first time it was admitted that Foster wrote the novelization of STAR WARS (I cannot find exactly when Lucas admitted it, but it was quite a few years ago); this is just the latest chapter in that saga.

The following piece by Mark originally appeared in "Lan's Lantern" #6, Autumn 1977. The editor's note is from that "Lan's Lantern" issue.

Who Wrote STAR WARS? by Mark R. Leeper

[Editor's note: This piece was written before the appearance of the STAR WARS article in the July 1977 issue of DELAPS, in which the contention of Foster as the author of the book is made in a footnote.]

The film STAR WARS is certainly a remarkable film and a remarkable achievement for George Lucas. The popularity of the book STAR WARS has proved as much a success for Ballantine Books as the film has proven for 20th Century Fox. I read the book and enjoyed it a great deal, due in major part in its evocation of the film, but the more I heard of Lucas' insistence that he wrote the book the more I began to feel that the man "doth protest too much."

I would like to present an hypothesis on the writing of the book STAR WARS, for what it's worth, and my evidence for the hypothesis. In all probability I am wrong, and if so, I apologize to Mr. Lucas, not that he's likely to care one way or the other. I would guess that at some point in the production of the film, when the script was firmed up, Lucas gave a copy to Alan Dean Foster and told him to

transform it into a novel that Lucas would sign his name to. Foster went ahead and ghost-wrote the book for Lucas. Let me go into some of the reasons that this arrangement may have been made and why I feel that this possibility is likely.

Lucas put four years into the making of STAR WARS and by all accounts he was extremely busy on the film alone. Virtually every piece of work on the film was very closely supervised by Lucas. This would have had to be an extremely time-consuming project that made Lucas' time more valuable than money. Lucas seems unlikely to have been able to spare the time to write a novel, particularly a first novel which surely would have been an extremely time-consuming project in itself. Just to get the words on paper for a first professional piece, most authors must put in a great deal of time merely experimenting with writing style. This is somewhat less true of Lucas than it would be of most other people since he was already adept at script-writing, but still the transition to novel-writing should not be minimized. It would have been a major effort on a secondary project by a man whose every spare minute was required on his primary project.

The novel STAR WARS is not a classic piece of science fiction by any means, but it is not amateurish either. Even with Lucas' experience in screenwriting and assuming an availability of time Lucas was not likely to have, the resulting novel was surprisingly polished for an author's first attempt. Any author who did as well with his first novel as Lucas appears to have done with STAR WARS is someone who could stand on his own as a science fiction writer. The probability that Lucas has this talent on top of his talents as a film-maker is not great.

So it seems unlikely that Lucas wrote the book STAR WARS. Why should I suspect that the actual author is Foster? There is one primary reason. It has already been announced that the second STAR WARS book will be authored by Foster. Obviously Lucas sees Foster as a man capable of writing in the style Lucas visualizes for STAR WARS.

I cannot claim to have read a great deal of Foster. To date, I have only read TAR-AYIM KRANG, but in reading that book, I was struck by how much this book could have influenced STAR WARS. The main character is a boy about Luke Skywalker's age who is also just learning to develop psychic talents not highly different from the Force. We have barroom scenes; we have virtually the same interstellar technology and trader economy. We have extremely non-anthropomorphic aliens living in close co-existence with humans. And if other authors have used the same elements, note that this book was published in 1972 when Lucas was likely to have been just starting the serious consideration of a giant space opera. It is also written in a style that Lucas might well have appreciated. And speaking of publishing, STAR WARS was published by Ballantine Books, who is Foster's exclusive publisher. They might well have accepted the book STAR WARS, when it had been rejected by a number of other publishers, specifically because they knew it had been written by an author who had proved profitable for them in the past.

We know already that there has been an agreement between Lucas and Foster that Foster would write one STAR WARS book. It would be no great stretch of the imagination to believe that the agreement was for two books, one for Foster to write under his own name and one that would appear under the name George Lucas. One might wonder why Foster would not insist on his name appearing on both books. There are a number of reasons. Foster may well have been impressed with the whole STAR WARS project. The project was, incidentally, at 20th Century Fox's insistence, a two-film project. It is not likely that Lucas, knowing that two books would have to be written, would decide to do one himself, and have someone else write the other. Foster was a man who had experience adapting scripts into novels, having done both DARK STAR and LUANA based on scripts. I have been told, incidentally, that of all of Foster's books DARK STAR is the closest in style to the book STAR WARS, as well it might be if it too was written from a script.

And one final reason why Foster may have allowed Lucas to sign his name to the book. As anyone who has seen the movie and read the book knows, the book could have almost been used as a script for the film. Take away the writing style that is reminiscent of Foster and the book is the script of the film. The main differences are that the book contains a few unspectacular scenes that may well have been cut out from the film in an effort to get the film down to two hours. Taking the totality of ideas that came from the Lucas script, Lucas' contribution to the novel would have been at least as great as any ghost-writer. By rights, if Foster had transformed a script into a book, the book should have been by Lucas and Foster. But if both names had appeared, every science fiction reader would nod knowingly and say to himself, "I'll just *bet* Lucas had a hand in the writing." So instead of two books by Lucas and Foster, the logical thing to do would be to agree that Lucas takes the credit for the first book, Foster for the second.

I'm probably doing both men an injustice but my hypothesis is the only explanation that seems to me to fit the facts. [-mrl]

[Regarding who got the original credit, according to Wikipedia, when Foster was asked if it was difficult for him to see Lucas get all the credit for STAR WARS, Foster said, "Not at all. It was George's story idea. I was merely expanding upon it. Not having my name on the cover didn't bother me in the least. It would be akin to a contractor demanding to have his name on a Frank Lloyd Wright house."

It is also worth pointing out that the second book that Foster wrote turned out not to be the novelization of the second film--that was done by Donald F. Glut--but a stand-alone novel, SPLINTER OF THE MIND'S EYE. -ecl]

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [Mark's comments on THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL](#) in the 12/04/20 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

I think the idea that the galaxy was run by robocops was supposed to be disturbing, even if it was understated. It strengthens the Christ analogy. Klaatu is himself peaceful, but he represents a power that doesn't mind wiping out whole planets to keep the rest in line. Similarly, the Bible tells us Yahweh ordered the massacre of entire cities and once drowned nearly the whole world. Klaatu / Jesus is there to tell us if we do the right thing, we can avoid the wrath of the power he represents. [-gmg]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Our book discussion group read the science fiction stories of Rudyard Kipling for November.

Wikipedia claims "With the Night Mail" (1905) and "As Easy as A.B.C." (1912) are the only two science fiction stories that Rudyard Kipling wrote. (They are wrong.) Both are about the Aerial Board of Control and how air traffic will lead to a world government. This idea seems to inspire H. G. Wells with his "Wings Over the World" in THINGS TO COME. Someone pointed out that the terminology for air travel seemed to be borrowed much more from sailing than actually happened in reality. I compared it to how space flight and space battles, especially in films, is patterned after atmospheric flight, complete with banking and noises in space.

One thing about all the technical detail in these--they would have been perfect for ASTOUNDING if ASTOUNDING had existed then.

But several other Kipling stories are often classified as science fiction as well. "The Ship That Found Herself" and ".007" are really marginal science fiction, with basically the same premise: machines are sentient beings. In "The Ship That Found Herself" it is an ocean vessel and in ".007" it is a locomotive, but other than that they two are very similar. Whether these are science fiction or merely a literary device is open to question.

"In the Same Boat" involves nightmares but the application of medication in their treatment makes what might seem more a dark fantasy story at least somewhat science fiction.

"A Matter of Fact" is more a journalism story, where a group of reporters see a sea monster, but cannot figure out how to report it.

(There were two other stories, "Wireless" and "Unprofessional", which I did not get to.) [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Politics are not my concern... they impressed me as
a dog's life without a dog's decencies.
--Rudyard Kipling

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