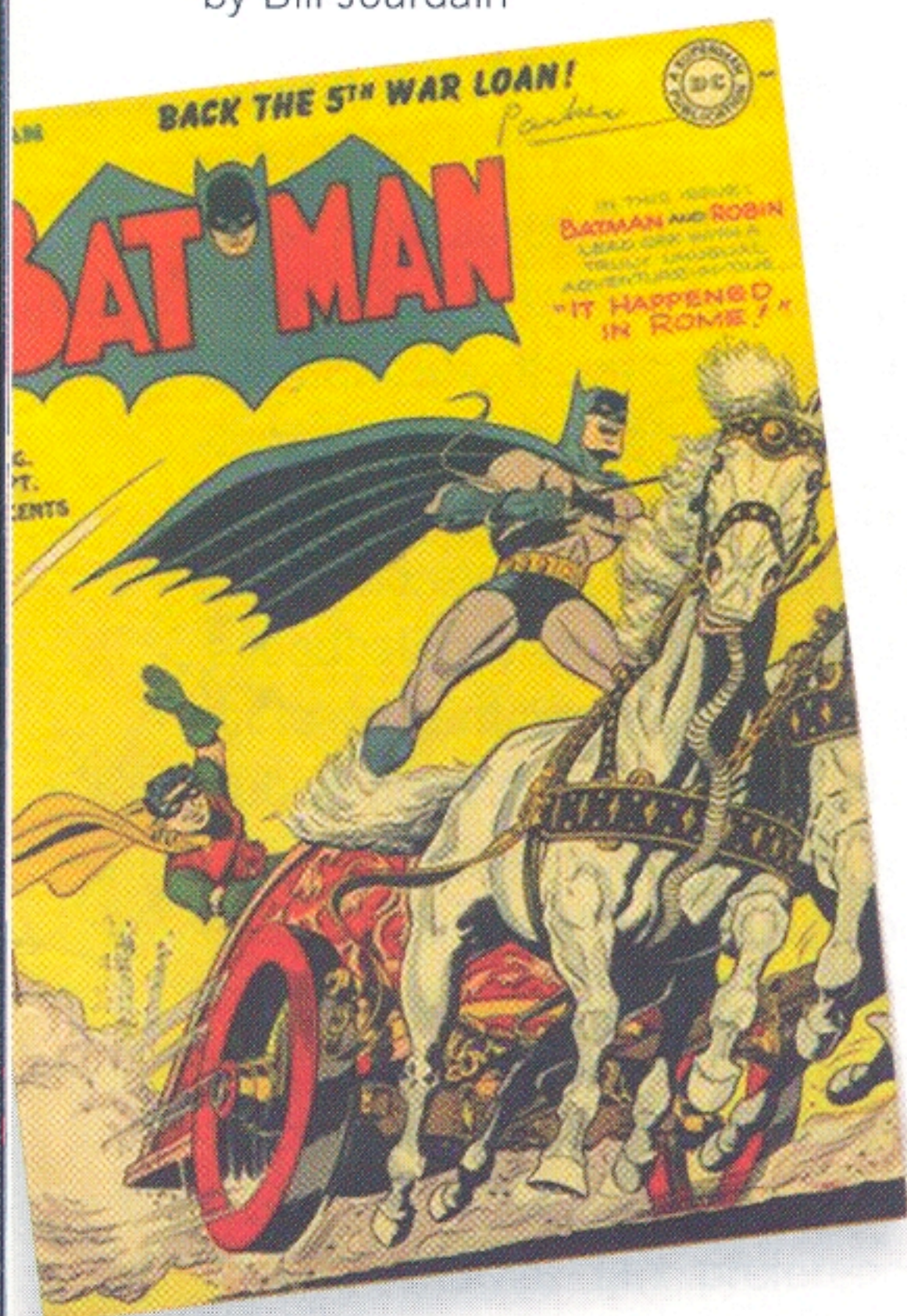


COMICS THEN

Time Travel, Golden Age Style

by Bill Jourdain



All of us, at some time or another, have been intrigued by the important role that time travel plays in the storylines of our favorite television shows, movies, and books, including comics.

Whether it is as a result of H.G. Wells' famous novel *The Time Machine*, Harlan Ellison's award-winning *Star Trek* episode "City on the Edge of Forever", the Professor Carter Nichols adventures in various Batman comics, the misadventures of Marty and Doc Brown in the *Back to the Future* franchise, or more recent phenomena like NBC's *Heroes*, we all have at some point asked ourselves, "What if I could travel backward or forward in time?"

Don't be surprised if you are not familiar with the adventures of Professor Carter Nichols and what he has to do with time travel. Many other comics fans have not heard of him either.



Carter Nichols is responsible for many DC Golden and Silver Age time travel adventures over a period of twenty years. His story begins in the fall of 1944, in *Batman* #24 ("It Happened in Rome"). In many stories thereafter, Professor Nichols serves as a supporting character in issues of *Batman*, *Detective Comics*, and *World's Finest Comics*, assisting Batman, Robin, and sometimes Superman in some terrific time travel adventures. Between his first appearance in 1944 and the introduction of the "new look" Batman in *Detective Comics* #327 (May 1964), Pro-

fessor Nichols appeared in 35 stories. In these adventures, Batman and Robin meet the likes of King Arthur, Robin Hood, Frankenstein, Marco Polo, Cleopatra, the

Three Musketeers, and many other interesting and colorful historical or fictional characters.

The first Carter Nichols story was scripted by Joe Samachson with pencils and inks by Dick Sprang. Subsequent stories were written by Don Cameron, Bill Finger, Edmond Hamilton, Arnold Drake and others. Many of the DC Golden Age greats provided art

on these stories, including Jack Burnley, Jim Mooney, Charles Paris, Lew Schwartz, and Sheldon Moldoff. The Carter Nichols stories generally have the same plots: Batman and Robin, usu-

ally in their civilian identities of Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson, become involved in a mystery that has its origins in the distant past.

...Professor Nichols invented time travel devices that allowed the caped adventurers to travel in time.

Bruce and Dick go to see Professor Nichols, who sends them back (and on a few occasions, forward) in time to solve the mystery. Upon arriving in the past, Bruce and Dick change into their crime fighting identities to stop some evildoer, and end up embroiling themselves with (and often assisting) a well-known historical or fictional figure. In the end, Batman and Robin save the day, and ensure that history is preserved. After the successful conclusion of their adventure, they change back into their civilian clothes just in time for the "Nichols effect" to wear off, thereby returning them to the present. Of course, Professor Nichols never discovers that Bruce and Dick are really Batman and Robin, and they cryptically tell the Professor that the mystery was solved.



Like Batman and Robin, Professor Nichols evolved as a character and his methods of initiating time travel changed over the years. At first, upon arriving at Professor Nichols' laboratory, Bruce and

Dick were placed under hypnosis to begin their travel in time. It was never quite clear whether they actually traveled in time or if they had merely remained in Professor Nichols' lab to "dream" about their time travel adventure. In later stories, Professor Nichols invented a number of time travel devices that allowed the caped adventurers to travel in time. On occasion, Professor Nichols' own time travels resulted in Batman and Robin traveling back to rescue him.

As far-fetched as these stories sound, they provide great entertainment by placing Batman and Robin in well-known factual or fictional historical situations, and away from the mundane setting that Gotham City presented on many occasions. We can thank Professor Nichols for taking us there!

Following is a list of the pre-"new look Batman" Professor Carter Nichols stories:

- "It Happened in Rome" Batman 24 (Aug.-Sep., 1944)
- "All for One, One for All" Batman 32 (Dec. 1945-Jan., 1946)
- "Sir Batman at King Arthur's Court" (Batman 36 Aug.-Sep., 1946)
- "The Rescue of Robin Hood" Detective Comics 116 (Oct., 1946)
- "Peril in Greece" Batman 38 Dec. 1946 – (Jan., 1947)
- "The Black Magician" (Robin Solo Story) Star Spangled 73 (Oct., 1947)
- "The Four Horsemen of Crime" Batman 43 (Oct. – Nov., 1947)
- "The First American Detective" Batman 44 (Dec., 1947 – Jan., 1948)
- "The Batman that History Forgot" Batman 46 (Apr. – May, 1948)

"The True Story of Frankenstein" Detective Comics 135 (May, 1948)

"The Dead Man's Chest" Detective Comics 136 (June, 1948)

"Batman's Arabian Nights" Batman 49 (Oct. – Nov., 1948)

"Batman and the Vikings" Batman 52 (Apr. – May, 1949)

"The Amazing Adventure of Batman and Marco Polo" World's Finest Comics 42 (Sept. – Oct., 1949)



"The Brand of a Hero" Batman 58 (Apr. – May, 1950)

"The Batman of the Future" Batman 59 (Jun. – Jul., 1950)

"Bodyguards to Cleopatra" Detective Comics 167 (Jan., 1951)

"The Batman of Yesterday" Batman 79 (Oct. – Nov., 1953)

"The Origin of the Batcave" Detective Comics 205 (Mar., 1954)

"The River Rogues" Batman 89 (Feb., 1955)

"The Caveman Batman" Batman 93 (Aug., 1955)

"The Three Magicians of Baghdad" (Superman appearance) World's Finest Comics 79 (Nov. – Dec., 1955)

"The Return of Mr. Future" Batman 98 (Mar., 1956)



"Batman – Frontier Marshall" Batman 99 (Apr., 1956)

"The Three Super-Musketeers" (Superman appearance) World's Finest Comics 82 (May – Jun., 1956)

"The Batman from Babylon" Batman 102 (Sept., 1956)

"Batman's Roman Holiday" Batman 112 (Dec., 1957)

"Batman in the Bottle" Batman 115 (Apr., 1958)

"The Last Days of Batman" Batman 125 (Aug., 1959)

"The Second Life of Batman" Batman 127 (Oct., 1959)

"The Secret of the Time Creature" (Superman appearance) World's Finest Comics 107 (Feb., 1960)

"The Secret of the Beast Paintings" Detective Comics 295 (Sept., 1961)

"Batman & Robin, Medieval Bandits" (Superman appearance) World's Finest Comics 132 (Mar., 1963)

"The Menace of the Future Man" (Superman appearance) World's Finest Comics 135 (Aug., 1963)

"The Secret of the Captive Caveman" (Superman appearance) World's Finest Comics 138 (Dec., 1963) **CN**

Bill Jourdain has been a comics fan and collector for over 30 years and loves the Golden Age of Comics. He produces the Golden Age of Comic Books Podcast that can be found on iTunes and at his web site, <http://www.goldenagecomics.org>.