

FUTURISTIC ROMANCES

INTRODUCTION

In 1999 I found myself frustrated; I was walking out of most second-hand bookstores empty-handed. Most of what I collected were seriously older paperbacks and most bookstores no longer carried anything more than a few years old. In looking around for something more recent to collect I noticed a dump-bin of BMI reprints at a CVS containing mostly romances, including many labeled Futuristic. I remembered that Leisure Books had introduced this series several years earlier but I had paid no attention to them; they had apparently been busy during the intervening years. It seemed to be a reasonably finite collectible and recent enough that I could expect to find them easily. After I acquired the first few I decided to read some and see what they were like. I was surprised to find that they were quite good and I happily continued to collect, and read, them. Now that Leisure Books and its ancillary imprints are defunct I can rest assured that I have the entire run.

Interestingly, although *Locus* magazine, which is regarded as the “newspaper of record” for SF and Fantasy, mentioned the first half-dozen in their New Books lists, they were seldom mentioned thereafter. Further research indicated that this series is not very well documented in the SF field’s primary reference works. Robert Reginald’s SF Bibliography stopped at 1991; whatever information he compiled on later books remains unpublished. The online *SF Encyclopedia*, as of this writing, only lists one of these books. The ISFDB has about two-thirds of the authors, and the ones they do cover aren’t always complete for this series. I felt that these books deserved better treatment than this; the present bibliography is an attempt to fill that bibliographic void.

In August 1990, Dorchester Publishing Co., Inc. launched a program of Futuristic Romances in their Leisure Books line. They had previously issued one science fiction romance, *Venus Rising* by Flora Speer, in 1989. It was labeled only as a romance; there was nothing specific in the blurbs to indicate its true nature; only the cover painting suggested its SF setting. It must have drawn enough reader response, however, to inspire this new series.

There had been a handful of Science Fiction romances from other publishers in the previous few years but it had never risen to being a full-blown program. The few that I am aware of are detailed in the Addendum.

After 15 titles over 2½ years the Futuristic program paused. In August 1993 Dorchester introduced a new Romance imprint called Love Spell. Their announced publishing program was four books a month: one Contemporary, one Historical, one Time-travel and one Futuristic. Thus half of their publications were some form of fantasy. This schedule was adhered to for 4 years. But eventually the Futuristics started to give way to other fantasy tropes, such as angels. Eventually the rise in popularity of Paranormal Romances elbowed the Futuristics aside and they became “occasional,” issued as seldom as twice a year. They remained part of the Love Spell imprint up to its end in 2010, when Dorchester withdrew from print publication altogether.

It took 2 or 3 books, but eventually the Futuristics fell into a uniform packaging, including a distinctive cursive logo and the catchphrase “Love in Another Time, Another Place.” In May 1995 they shrank the logo, backing it with a heart with a Saturn-like ring around it. In 1996 they dropped any form of the logo and only the label “Futuristic” on the spine continued to identify the series.

Nineteen books were re-issued, most with the exact same packaging. There were exceptions however and they are a bit puzzling. Fifteen Leisure Books were reprinted. The first three re-issues were done again as Leisure Books in 1994, even though the Love Spell line had begun in mid-1993. Another five were reissued as Love Spell but the cover paintings were cropped and the books completely repackaged. One assumes from all this that, while the cover set-ups allowed for the replacement of the printed line that included the book number and price, they were not prepared to replace the logo. They must have figured it out eventually, however, since the other seven Leisure Books reprints were successfully issued with the old packaging and the new logo. A further four original Love Spell titles came around again with minimal variation. Other Love Spell titles saw later printings that retained their book numbers and changed only the price. The couple I am aware of are documented; there are probably a few more.

The bibliography is divided into three sections:

Numerical Index

This section lists all the books covered, first by their imprint, then in numerical order, giving the title, author and publication date. Titles that were reissues are indented to more easily show the pattern of issuance.

Author Index

This section lists books in alphabetical order by author, then by title. Many bylines are pseudonyms; the authors’ real names do not have separate entries.

I tend to follow the usual conventions in parsing an author's name, though I have added a couple of features of my own devising. An author's name is given in the fullest version known to me, with the parts that actually appear in the bylines in boldface. Parts of the name that may vary from book to book are given in parentheses. Parts of the name that are known but never appear in the bylines are given in square brackets. All the authors are female. I have indicated, where known to me, their birth names if they wrote under their married names. The years of birth (I don’t believe any of them are deceased) are given along with an indication of the author's nationality. Most of them are American and are labeled as US.

The information given for each book is:

- imprint
- book number
- publication date
- cover price
- cover artist, if known, and any distinctive feature of the cover

The cover comments usually denote wrap-around and spine-wrapped covers, and use of photos. Some were entirely photographic, obviously shot in a studio; later ones were evidently “photo-shopped,” combined with other images.

For reissues only the data that was changed is noted.

Following the book data, each entry includes a brief synopsis of the plot, generally identifying the romantic duos and describing notable SF elements. For better or worse these synopses are my own and are not cribbed from the books’ blurbs or other websites. Over the past two years I re-read all 93 books and wrote the synopses as I went. Some books’ plots were easily captured, others have such complex back-stories and set-ups that I was hard pressed to rein them in. Hopefully they convey some sense of the ambiance of a given book. The annotations also included notes about each book’s relation to other titles. Series abound in the Futuristics. By my count 55 of the 93 books have characters or settings in common with at least one other book. The synopses try to highlight such series, as well as reference additional titles issued by other publishers.

The two major motifs among these books are Space Opera and Planetary Romance. The Space Operas were interplanetary/interstellar adventures, involving smuggling, rebellions, treasure hunts, alien encounters, political intrigues, etc. The Planetary Romances were set on a single world, not recognizably Earth, some with extraterrestrial contact, all being exercises in world-building: exploring unusual cultures, class warfare, arduous treks, oppressive governments, etc. Recurring themes in both types include slavery, oppression of women, rigid caste systems, and ethnic cleansing, most, sadly, still relevant today.

I have not attempted any form of literary criticism; I have avoided any indication of how well I liked or disliked any given book. Tastes differ and mine is no better than anyone else’s. The average level of readability is much higher than one would expect from a group of writers who might be considered “outsiders” in the field. There are some novels I consider extremely good and several I thought were subpar. I consider the bulk of the books to be interesting and entertaining. Compared to the current state of the field these books might be considered “retro.” If that suits your taste, you might find it worthwhile to dip into some of these.

Each entry includes a scan of the cover. Wrap-around covers also include a scan of the backcover. Some covers are wrapped around to the spine but no further. I have noted them but there was no practical way to display such a wrapped picture. There are also several books that had double covers, a second one under the first. I would have liked to display both covers but I could find no way to scan any of the second covers without seriously damaging the books. In all known cases where an edition was re-packaged, the altered cover is also displayed.

The covers, sadly, did not scream Science Fiction. They feature the standard motif of a man and a woman, one or the other in partial undress, posed in a passionate embrace. The earliest covers were photographs but they soon moved to painted covers. Most of the time there is nothing unearthly about the backgrounds, even in full wrap-around. There are no spaceships, robots, aliens, planets, unusual cityscapes, or odd clothing to indicate the nature of the books. Near the end of the run the covers did move more in that direction, many again incorporating posed photographs. It also didn’t help that these books were usually shelved in the Romance section of most bookstores, making it more difficult for a casual SF reader to notice them.

As far as I can tell only 28 covers had either a visible signature of a printed credit, too few to be worth a formal Artist Index. For the record, the following artists have identified covers in this index:

John Ennis (1953-) US
Franco [Accornero]
[Charles] [C.] Gehm (1929-2015) US
[Doreen] Minuto
Pellegrino
Pino [Daeni], (né Giuseppe Dangelico) (1939-2010) Italian/US
Renato [Aime] (1946-2014) US
Sandro

There is one cover that seems to be signed “H.B.” and another that I couldn’t quite read.

Title Index

This section lists all the titles that appear in the Index and cross-references them to their bylines, without any other detail. Titles are listed in alphabetical order, with leading “A”, “An,” and “The” ignored.

Addendum

This bonus section gives information on similar SF romances from Leisure or Love Spell Books, that were not labeled as Futuristic, that readers/collectors may also find interesting. It also recaps similar science fiction romances from other publishers, including those that preceded the introduction of Dorchester’s Futuristic line.

Acknowledgements

This bibliography differs from my previous ones in that the material is all fairly recent and the authors too young to research through standard works like ancestry.com. Some of these authors have websites but most are coy about giving their ages and most don’t contain much personal data. Most of the birthdates were taken from the copyright records.

Kathy Godfrey and Jerry Boyajian both read the synopses to make sure they were reasonably coherent. Neither seems to have been moved to read any of the books. So it goes.

Virtually all of the cover scans are from my own copies. I only cribbed two scans off the Internet. The “stock images” floating around the internet tend to be altered in some way and I wanted to show the actual covers.

This bibliography was compiled from scratch, so whatever errors undoubtedly lurk herein are entirely mine. Any corrections or additional information would be appreciated. They can be sent to kennethr_johnson@yahoo.com or P.O. Box 451, Medford, MA 02155.