

The history and origin of the Trigan Empire

One of the most popular British comic strips of all time, with its blend of fantasy and science-fiction within an Ancient Rome-like setting. A fully painted series appreciated by many fans all over the world.

The origin

'The Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire', as this popular British science-fiction series was originally known, debuted in the first issue of Fleetway's short-lived weekly *Ranger* (September 1965) and then went over to *Look and Learn* from issue No. 232 (June 1965) until it ceased publication with their issue No. 1049 (April 1982), for a total of 854 issues. As with the series *Dan Dare* running in the competition's *Eagle*, *Trigan Empire* was created in colour. The series would have a total of seven different artists, although its original and first artist had been Don Lawrence. The main writer, and co-creator, was Mike Butterworth, who also edited various other titles published by Fleetway. As to the origin of the series, Butterworth explained:

"The original impetus came from that veritable genius, Leonard Matthews, then the senior magazine editor at Fleetway. He threw the first introductory script at me and told me to take it from there. He had no idea where to further it, but he knew where to look for a guy who did."

The artist chosen to illustrate this series was Don Lawrence. As Lawrence explained later:

"This was a big one. I was asked to appear at the top floor of Fleetway Publishing house which was a God's domain. The carpets were so thick, you just sank in them. And all the secretaries were beautiful women, everybody was beautiful. I suppose I was the up-and-coming star at that time and I wasn't aware of this, but I sort of got the treatment. When I went in, the secretary asked: 'What's your name?' And I said Don Lawrence. 'You're the Don Lawrence?' Oh my god, I thought, where am I? It was weird. But it was obviously a great honour and I dropped everything I was working on. I sent in

BELOW: First issue of the boy's comic magazine *Ranger*, cover dated September 18, 1965. First appearance of the new comic series 'The Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire'.

FACING PAGE: Inside page from *Ranger* No. 27 (19 March 1966) from the story 'Invaders from Gallar', the fourth story in the series. The *Trigan Empire* was presented in two-page weekly instalments inside *Ranger* (and later *Look and Learn*).

OVERLEAF: 2nd page to the same story from the same *Ranger* issue.

the roughs and they all got accepted and so I started on the *Trigan Empire*."

As mentioned earlier, this series was created to be done in colour, at a rate of two pages per week and, as with *Dan Dare*, the colour was applied directly with inks on the original artboard, much to Lawrence's dismay:



The RISE and FALL of the TRIGAN EMPIRE

The Moon Gallar is due to collide with the planet Etekton, and the Lokans have fled from their country to escape the disaster. Entering the city of Trigan they overpower the Trigans. But Trigo, the ruler, is rescued by his brother Brag.



The air was filled with the beating of mighty wings – and another fearsome creature came to save the killer-squad from the menace of the first!



A slash of a knife – and James felt himself relieved of the burden of the companion who had been roped to him.

You can't do that!

I've done it!

Lee-ee-ahh!

James learned what it was to be a member of a green faction killer-squad!



That was an act of cold-blooded murder!

Get climbing – or I'll save you the same!

Later – much later – they came to a snow bridge.



James's merciless companion faced badly at the bridge!



Assassino-ooahh!

King Trigan battled his time to the summit, where he saw ...



The stronghold of the blue faction! Lair of Nagga the fateless one!



You cross first and test its strength! Keep moving! You're not in this game for you're health!

Don Lawrence

All images are scanned from the original artwork.

The artist who brought to life an almost impossible series to draw, with its fearsome monsters, aliens and futuristic machinery into a civilisation resembling Ancient Rome.

BEST KNOWN FOR HAVING WORKED ON the painted colour series *The Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire* and *Storm*, Donald Southern Lawrence was born in London on 17 November 1928. After his National Service he went to study art at Borough Polytechnic Institute for four years, but failed his final exams. A former student visiting the school showed him the work he did as a letterer for comics, and Lawrence picked up enough courage to show his work to an editor at Amalgamated Press. Although his work wasn't accepted, he was told instead to go show his work to Mick Anglo, a comic artist who also ran his own studio, Gower Street Studios.

Lawrence ended working for Anglo on the superhero series *Marvelman* for a period of four years. After an argument with Anglo over pay rates, Lawrence approached Odhams Press where he worked on the Western series *Wilds Fargo* for Zip. Later, he also ended working for Amalgamated Press (later Fleetway), contributing episodes for another Western series, *Billy the Kid* (who unlike its namesake wasn't the outlaw but rather a similar named cowboy who donned a mask à la Lone Ranger to fight outlaws and restore justice), in the *Sun* comic. When *Sun* merged with *Lion*, Lawrence worked on the historical series *Olaf the Gladiator*, *Karl the Viking* and *Moroc the Mighty* (the latter written by science-fiction writer Michael Moorcock).

Lawrence did a colour story of *Karl the Viking* for *Lion Annual* 1965, which led to him being offered the gig for the full-colour science fantasy series *The Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire* on the newly created boys' comics magazine, *Ranger*, in 1965.

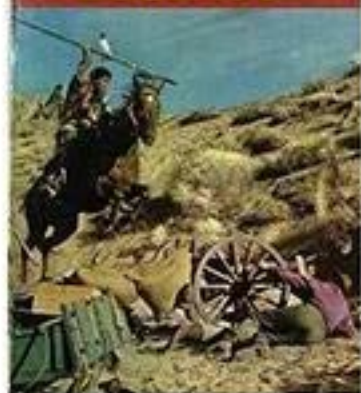
"I could do about two pages of the *Trigan Empire* in one week. I would spend time on the first page, [but] on the second page I was getting near the deadline. And what I did was: if I had to work

FACING PAGE: Complete page from 'The Outlaw Plan' story, appearing in *Look and Learn* issue No. 609 (15 Sept. 1973). Brush, inks and watercolour on board.

BELOW: James, detail from a panel to the 2nd page of the episode appearing on the facing page. Lawrence began painting the strip with colour inks, but later switched to watercolours and gouache.



RANGER BOOK 1967



ABOVE LEFT: Ranger Book 1967 annual (1966).

ABOVE LEFT: The Wise Man of Vorg, detail from page 4.

BELOW: Lindy strip, ca. 1960s.

FACING PAGE: The Wise Man of Vorg, page 2 of the story appearing in Ranger Book 1967 annual (1966).



Ernest Ratcliff

The comic strip artist who only did one story of the *Trigan Empire* for a *Ranger* annual.

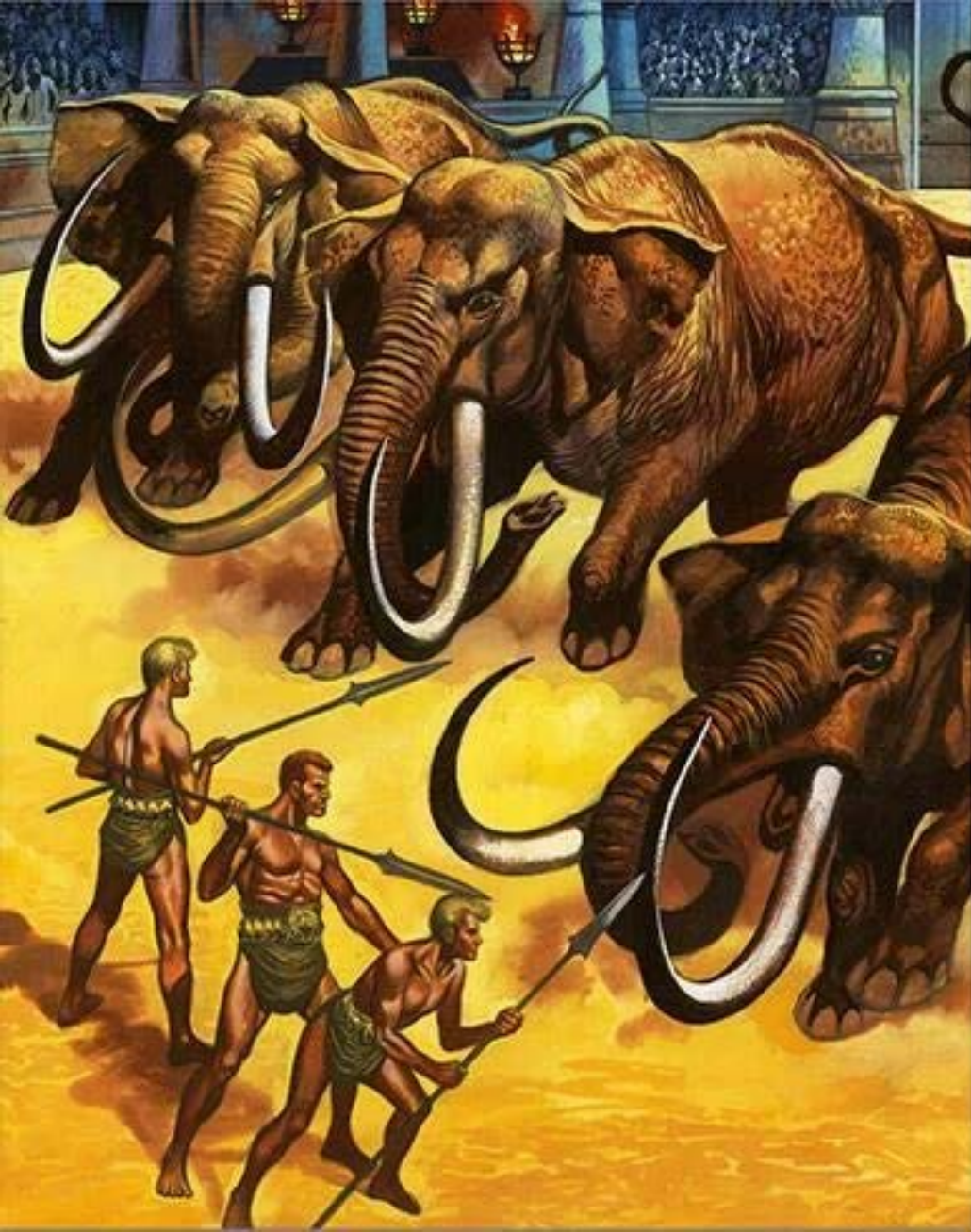
ALTHOUGH IT MIGHT HAVE SEEMED AN ODD choice to be asked to work on the fully painted *Trigan Empire* series, Ernest Ratcliff was already known for the newspaper comic strip *Lindy* appearing in the *London Evening News* during the 1960s. His only

contribution to the *Trigan Empire* was for an eight-page story, 'The Wise Man of Vorg', appearing in *Ranger Book 1967* annual (1966). This story was later reprinted in the new 'Trigan Empire' collection by Rebellion and appeared in their Volume IV. ●



Image courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com)





Ron Embleton

All images are scanned from the original artwork.

One of the top British illustrators who would only serve as a fill-in artist for the *Trigan Empire* on two occasions, but his imprint was felt by the many fans of the series.

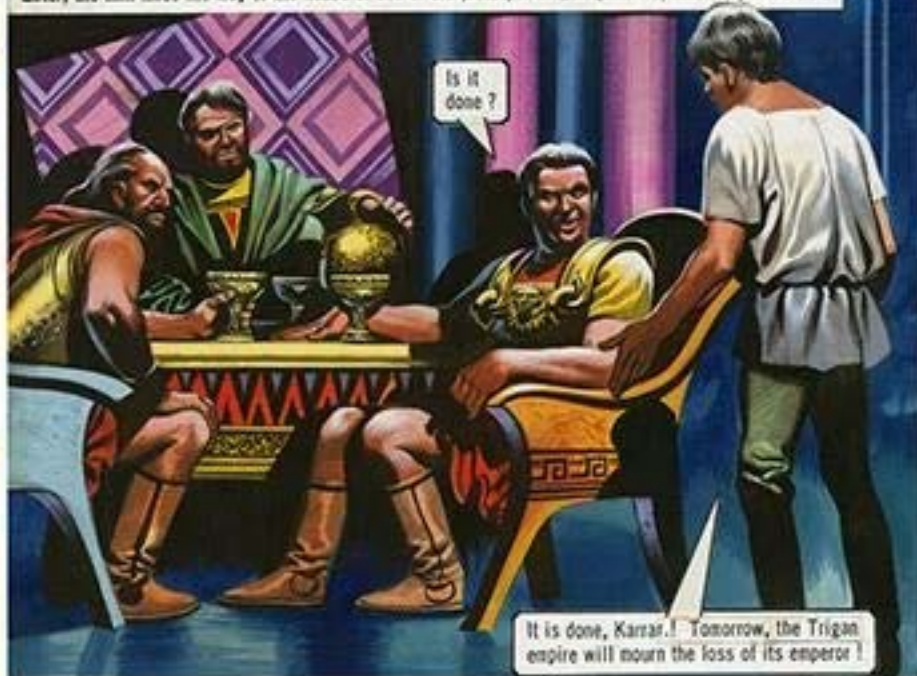
FACING PAGE: Detail to a splash panel from the story 'The Brief Reign of Sennos the First'. This story first appeared in *Ranger Book for Boys* 1968, and was later reprinted in *Look and Learn* issues Nos. 678 to 681 (1975).

BELOW: Panel from the same eight-page story.

ALTHOUGH RON EMBLETON ONLY WORKED ON TWO occasions on the *Trigan Empire*, he was one of the pillars among the British comic strip artists and illustrators. Born in Limehouse, London, on 6 October 1930, Ronald Sydney Embleton was

always interested in drawing and submitted his first cartoon at the age of 9, and by the age of 12 won a national poster competition. He trained at the South East Essex Technical College and School of Art, and after his training worked in a commercial

Later, the man made his way to the house of one of the principal Trigan generals, Karzar, by name . . .



Miguel Quesada

Now it's time for a Spanish artist to fill-in on the series while Lawrence takes a break. The artist they brought had already done illustrations for *Look and Learn* and had a long career in comics back in Spain.

FACING PAGE: First page of the story 'The Zootha Vorgs' also known as 'The Rogue Planet' appearing in *Look and Learn* on issue No. 630 (9 Feb. 1974).

BELOW AND FOLLOWING PAGES: All images from the same story which lasted until issue No. 634 (9 March 1974).

ANOTHER FILL-IN ARTIST FOR THE *TRIGAN EMPIRE*, while Lawrence took a break, was the Spaniard Miguel Quesada. However, Quesada, although an able artist, worked only on two stories of the *Trigan Empire* series, the first, 'The Hypnotist' (also known as 'Doran the Hypnotist') appearing in *Look and Learn* issues number 536 to 540 (1972), and the second, 'The Zootha Vorgs' (also known as 'The Rogue Planet') appearing between issues numbers 630 and 634 (1974). Although in some European reprints these stories were attributed to another Spanish artist, Ramon

Sola, nevertheless, Quesada's work was already well-known in the British comics field as he had been working for them since the early 1960s.

Born in Albacete, Spain on 4 January 1933, Miguel Quesada Cerdán began working in comics at the early age of 13, having to leave school to bring money home for the family after his father was imprisoned during the Spanish Civil War. Through his brother-in-law, Manuel Gago (creator of many comic series in Spain) he took over his series 'La Pandilla de los 7', about a teenage street-gang. Quesada soon began working for Editorial



All images are scanned from the original artwork.

It happened suddenly and without warning. All Eskator was smitten by a surface tremor. Buildings fell in the broad streets of Trigan City.



The Emperor Trigo barely managed to leap from his bed for the safety of the balcony, before the ceiling of his bedchamber fell in!



Dawn brought the solution to the mystery. Countless millions looked up to see that the sky above their planet was dominated by a strange new shape!



The Emperor reached the palace gardens, where he was joined by members of his household, including the great scientist Paris.



That same day, Paris addressed the Imperial Council in their wined chamber.



The Emperor asked the question that was in every mind....



Gerry Wood

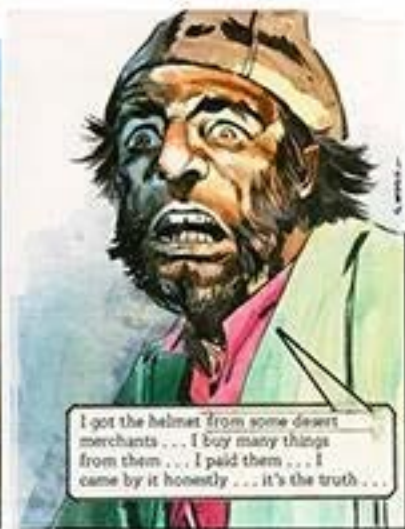
The last artist to take over the *Trigan Empire* after Oliver Frey left. The series would also have a new writer, Ken Roscoe, and would last for five more years when the magazine folded.

BETTER KNOWN AS AN ILLUSTRATOR for *World of Wonder*, *Look and Learn* and *Speed and Power*, Gerry Wood took over the *Trigan Empire* from Oliver Frey in 1977. Wood brought back a more traditional way of showing the panels (gone were Frey's more dynamic panel layouts) and his work didn't seem as accomplished as that of his predecessors, which might explain why it has never been reprinted, but he was a very good illustrator (as the many educational books he illustrated later in life may attest). However, these weren't the only changes in the strip, as it now went under the title *More Adventures of the Trigan*

Empire, had a new writer aboard, Ken Roscoe, and the stories went into outer space and featured many alien species.

Gerry Wood was born in 1938 and by the 1960s was working for Fleetway on their *Battle Picture Library* comics and other war comics. He was better known as a book illustrator before working for the titles mentioned above. He specialised mostly in historical, military and transport subjects.

After the demise of *Look and Learn*, he illustrated many educational books with a historical context well into the new millennium. ●



THESE PAGES: Panels from the story 'Search Mission' or 'The Quest of Fidelius' appearing in *Look and Learn* No. 1034 (15 Aug. 1981). After Oliver Frey's tenure on the series, it would be Gerry Wood, along with another writer, Ken Roscoe.