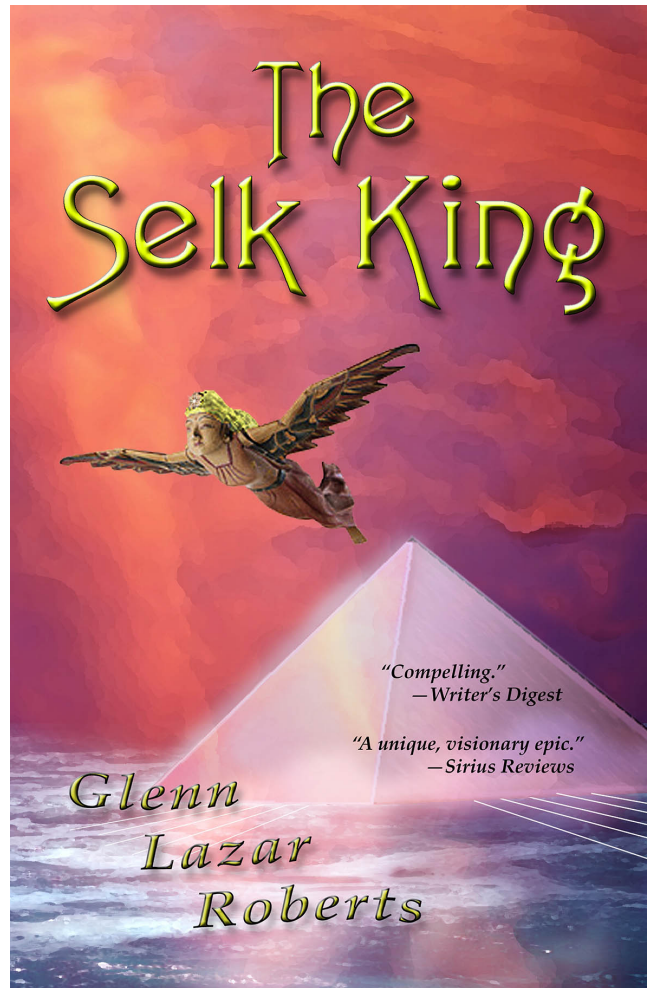




Sequel to Maalstrom. Flores of the Turlicum pursues the beautiful priestess Amina to the Island of the Sun-God, fighting his way across an alien world, further unfolding the mysterious biological relationships that link humanoids, hornets, and the ever silent winged selks who retrieve the bodies of the dead on the planet Maalstrom. At world's end Flores traverses the many levels of See-Face-of-God and confronts the Author of Chaos at the pinnacle of Ra'Allah, the city in the clouds. Robert E Howard's Conan meets Plato in this unique thinking man's vision of heroic and bloody fantasy. An epic bloody fantasy in the tradition of Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter of Mars & Robert E. Howard's Conan.

REVIEWS of The Selk King

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A great sci-fi fantasy story. If you like a sci-fi fantasy story then this is the one for you. The story line was fantastic and intriguing and the characters were developed and interesting. A good read!" —Marilyn Vine, *Vine Voice*

"A complex feat of world-building postulating a bizarre yet philosophically intriguing and enterprising alternative to Evolution..." —Mallory A. Haws, *The Haunted Reading Room Reviews*

BLOODY CONFLICT

The shadows deepened and Flores' eyes adjusted and he suddenly wondered why he had thought the man was old. The person who stood before him was not old at all, but young. An *irsrem* dagger glinted with starlight—Flores was glad he had not plunged blindly forward under his first impulse. Behind the first man appeared four more shadows, moving quickly, glass blades flashing. The first stepped toward Flores.

"So that is it." The Ven noble nodded. No mystery remained. "Good, then. What better time to die than the present?"

UNDER TWIN SUNS ON THE PLANET MAALSTROM

FLORES OF THE TURLICUM FIGHTS MAALSTROM'S ENIGMATIC FORCES

IN THE TRADITION OF EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS AND ROBERT E. HOWARD

THE SELK KING
BOOK 2
of
THE MAALSTROM SERIES

by
Glenn Lazar Roberts



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DEDICATION

To the writer Mervyn Peake, whose writing ‘floated on a sea of script’, and the mythologist Joseph Campbell, who taught us that there are no—and can never be—humans without myth.

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*I flee to the Lord of Dawn,
from the Evil He created,
from the Night when it falls,
from gilas who twist what should be straight,
from the One that Envies all.*

*I flee to the Lord of Man,
the King of Man, his God,
from the One who sneaks through portals,
who whispers evil in the hearts of men,
and the ways of selks and mortals.*

— *The Holy Quran*
Surahs 'Falaq' and 'al-Nas'

CHAPTER 6

BLUE SEAS

The Grest sped through the black boundless night propelled by oars and canvas, the crew putting all their muscle into the effort, fear of the King's overseer and his cohort of ruffians impelling them. Peering into the darkness for signs of patrol craft, and listening for strange oars and splashing reven-na, the crew sought to place as much distance as possible between themselves and Vaw before dawn. Flores directed the vessel toward the west so that when the suns did appear, the vessels of their pursuers would be outlined and not their own, enabling them to remain in darkness for a few more precious moments. However, when the suns did finally come and their spreading light ignited a wide clean sky, no other vessels appeared. Flores shook his head. Although relieved, he still frowned. Was their success due to his stratagem, or to other less certain circumstances? Signaling the rowers to rest, he glanced at his navigator, and pondered deeply.

Plying a wide arc, the Grest, over the course of the next few days, turned gradually south and then east and finally, on their fourth day out from Vaw, re-entered the main sea route following the trade winds toward the southeast. No other stops would be necessary for the remainder of the voyage, save the unpopulated nameless rocky isle that lay in sight of their final destination, where they would finally touch shore. While traveling the main route, other vessels often hove in sight, sails straining or oars dipping, heading south by southeast toward the mysterious cities of the most distant Vensor-sa, or returning from those exotic ports. A few vessels accompanied them on this leg of the journey, keeping pace at a distance, but showing no interest nor giving hint of any association with Vaw. The days rolled by, then one evening the constellation of Atasan appeared on the southern horizon, and their pilot turned into the wind and directed the ship toward the southwest, taking care to keep the prime star of the vortexed cluster directly above the prow and its carved image of the god of fortune. Their companion vessels peeled off, continuing south by east. The Grest's crew could see the surprised expressions on the other crewmen's faces as the Grest plunged into the twilight depths of the swelling western ocean, as if pursuing the setting suns themselves in their mad quest. They could see the pious gesticulations of the other crews as they gazed heavenward and prayed for the unlucky strangers, who must be at the mercy of a deranged pilot or fanatical captain.

Flores spent the time fore of the vessel, one hand resting on the scaly totem of Gethos and the other upon the wale. The windspray sharred his skin and with each seaswell of the boat twisted his dark hair. He found the rogue Macius—or was it now Surge?—ever more absorbing, and ever more inscrutable. Sitting by the rudder, he appeared relaxed and confident. Each night with the advent of twilight he would study the sky, searching out the first stars, and trace constellations, beginning with Nantifus—a difficult task due to the great number of stars visible on Maalstrom. Since he had studied the heavens as part of his Simet education, Flores could trace a few, but putting forth to sea was a different feat altogether. Macius knew more than Flores, including the stars of the southern sky, and had no need of charts. He was indeed a pilot, a murshid, Flores noted. Again he found himself pondering the man. What other hidden traits, or secret inclinations, did the dark man possess?

The Turlicum let his gaze slide over the rag-tag crew of Vaw-sa and regretted having

permitted Macius his dagger. The thief's popularity among his compatriots, who also bore arms, made it now too risky to retrieve the weapon. It was no less risky to disarm the other Vaws. Still, there seemed no need, as the newcomers worked hard. This too puzzled Flores. For men who had only recently become fugitives from their city, they seemed unduly cheerful and optimistic. Not even the revelation by Flores that their ship's goal was the fabled and inviolable Island of the Sun-god dampened their enthusiasm. If anything they were encouraged, glancing often at their pilot and taking inspiration from his presence. The most famous son of Vaw, renowned for his exploits, had returned in safety from the Isle once before, had he not? All of the Vaw-sa were thieves and seamen, and if the most enterprising thief and seaman of the far-spread ocean assured them of their welfare, they should be well satisfied, so they murmured. At the very least they stood the best chance they might of surviving the journey, after which they could return to their homes, and hope that Fish will have forgotten or forgiven their offense. Still, Flores wondered why they should be so enthusiastic. From their occasional singing one might think they expected some more tangible reward than mere survival for another month.

The captain let his gaze rest on Stalkin. Here was another matter. The man's broad flat face, habitually creased with a conceited curl of one lip, moved restlessly about, and refused to converse. At times, after learning of their destination, Stalkin would perch at the stern for long periods beside Macius, though Isav asserted that few words were ever exchanged. Flores found his dislike for the smithy growing by degrees. Although relieved that the shopkeeper represented no threat to his command, he was still disappointed. Stalkin might have been better company on the long voyage.

Flores glanced at Isav. The captain, once an official of the irsrem guild, took his turn at an oar. Flores nodded. Isav would prefer the activity to inspecting the watery waste that surrounded them. His nature not allowing him to relax, the captain, together with Flores' second militia chief, Revd, warily observed their navigator and the Vaw-sa. Perhaps, Flores noted, Isav's nose for betrayal would preserve him in the southern seas as it had the year before in Ven.

Most disconcerting, however, was the fact that his own kinsmen were becoming listless. They pulled the oars with less vigor than did the Vaws, nervously scanned the skies like Stalkin, and often murmured together while glancing resentfully at Flores. The passage of two weeks on the open sea, in the cramped condition of the small vessel, with only a single tent erected in the center to break the increasing glare of the suns, worsened their mood even more. They knew nothing of Macius, or the southern sea, were not experienced sailors and had no interest in Flores' obsession, and their resolve was little bolstered by the tales of the previous exploits of 'Surge' as related to them by the Vaws, although, as the days passed, perhaps they too found the experience and fame of Macius to carry more weight than the tenuous and bizarre purpose of their own leader, who fastened himself to the forward totem, as if, envying Macius his luck, he had decided to forsake his own talismans for those of his more famous pilot. Would clan ties, so strong in Ven, prove more fragile elsewhere? The pain lines around Flores' eyes deepened. Each mile with no land in sight, each day adrift in the vast viridescent waste, with their frail ship exposed like a wound to the cerulean expanse, brought a visible strengthening of his men's fears—and of his own.

The Vens were especially disturbed by the appearance of the constellation Atasan.

Invisible from their home, the Vens had never before glimpsed the strange cluster with so portentous an appellation, and the import of their voyage began to weigh ever more heavily and—their anxiety concerning what manner of reception might await them at the end of their journey, their goal being so much less legitimate than it had been in their last port—to work subtly upon them. With the change in direction, the need for their sinews to work the oars became greater, while their interest lessened, and their energy could not be made up by the increased effort of the Vaw-sa, who finally also began to slacken as the ship penetrated ever deeper into the unknown and forbidden waters. They may well have ceased rowing altogether, if not for their fear of stagnating in doldrums, and their awareness of the vulnerability of the ship to sudden squalls, and the continuing consumption of their dwindling supplies. Flores began to believe that the presence of Macius alone persuaded the others, both Vens and Vaws, to continue on their course, and although still distrustful of Macius' motives, the Turlicum finally was as glad as the rest of the crew that the famous murshid and no other steered the craft.

As it was, the crew came to regard the azure and vermilion sky as somehow menacing, as if their lives depended on secrecy, darkness, and evasion. As the ship penetrated more deeply into the unknown, even the officers became seized by this obsession and began constantly to watch the skies. The white clouds above folded and merged and blew, at times roiling till they seemed to brush the mast, at other times dissipating till the sky shone clear as crystal, and, although Vensor still ignored their vessel, the crew came to feel that this was only because He had not yet detected them or that He merely awaited an opportune moment to demonstrate His power and His will, as if waiting patiently for them to complete their transgression and place themselves utterly beyond redemption before He showed His displeasure, and inflicted His vengeance and judgment upon them, in His good time and way.

The days grew steadily warmer and longer and became gradually intolerable in their heat. The crew began to view the suns with revulsion, their fear and guilt interweaving with exhaustion under the merciless glare of the blinding rays. Like the Eyes of God the suns waxed greater, the angry yellow orbs scouring the waters, searing all within their sight, as Vensor waited patiently, drawing His plans, gathering His strength for the inevitable retribution against those who would dare to set foot in Heaven, dare to violate the word and law of God.

Then it was, when they lay exhausted and depressed under the unrelenting glare, having long since abandoned progress to their sail, rowing only in short relays, and feebly at best, and, despite the emptiness of the vast shimmering blueness that spread on all sides, refraining from needless banter, as if ears as well as eyes might detect them, then it was that one of the Ven crewmen pointed skyward. The others followed his line of sight and grew silent. Far above, flapping lazily on broad outstretched wings, soared a malkop, one of the denizens, the guardians, of Vensor's holy isle. At such a distance hardly more was discernible than wings and torso, but, as its course crossed theirs, or rather paralleled and overtook them, its features soon grew more distinct, and the crewmen finally ceased rowing altogether.

None dared speak.

As the creature drifted overhead, undeterred from its single-minded task, indeed apparently unaware of their presence, the crewmen viewed the creature in detail. It possessed those features they knew well from the skies above their native cities, but

here—in the midst of the southern ocean, a month from land but in close vicinity to the malkop's divine habitation—its features seemed alien and menacing. The face of the selk, as the Vaws termed the creature, was pretty and pale and for all appearances quite human, having a slender quality that was somehow deeply provocative and attracted even as it repelled. Voiceless, like all malkops, the creature yet radiated unmistakable moods in the turn of its mouth and lips, smiling or frowning as might a man, and to all appearances from similar cause. Its hair was fair and blond, straight and flowing down about its slim and delicate neck, the swift currents of air sometimes blowing the sun-bleached strands above and back, and sometimes allowing them to droop down about its neck and across its bosom. The shoulders were similarly delicate, although deformed by the massive outgrowth of wing muscles bulging just below. The wings themselves were smooth and glabrous, no trace of feathers or down being visible, sustaining themselves rather with taut skin stretched across bone and cartilage.

Its midriff was as flat as that of an athletic man, but smoother and hairless and with a delicately pinched waist, not exaggeratedly narrow, but well-formed, as if sculpted from rare and precious stone, again presenting a strangely pleasing quality. Most disturbing of all to the crewmen, however, were the pair of symmetrical fleshy globes or ovoids suspended from its chest, each crowned by an organ of great emotional and philosophical import to all Vensor-sa, the universal symbol of Atasan, the sign of animal reproduction and femininity, the sign of the forbidden sex—the teat.

Vensor-sa could not explain why the creatures of Vensor, those assigned by Heaven to defend it, indeed themselves being the inhabitants of Heaven, should bear the mark of the enemy of Mankind, the opposer of the will of Vensor, but some mysteries are not to be fathomed. Whether the creature possessed the other unmistakable sign of Atasan, the organ of feminine reproduction itself, ubiquitous in the animal kingdom of the divine Talen, but totally lacking among Vensor-sa, as the citizens of the cities of glass proudly and repeatedly avowed, the crew could not discern, since the hips of the malkop were draped with the usual plain sewn dirty brown garment worn by all selks. No Ven in fact had ever glimpsed what lay beneath that common garment of the malkops. And to speculate on such a matter was too close to heresy in the eyes of most for any to voice such perverse desire.

The creature's legs were strong, slim, and lithe. Bare of clothing, they hung below the suspended animal like the limbs of hornets, while the arms, far stronger than their slim appearance might suggest, clasped the usual burden of a malkop engaged upon its dour and eternal task. The corpse of a recently deceased child of Vensor—a man—hung limply in its grasp, the funeral garments still clinging to its torso, although now tattered from exposure to the elements during the long trip to Vensor's abode. The crew made the sign of God upon their chests and gazed silently until the selk had passed from sight, merging with the vermilion streaked sunset that hung like a tapestry above the erect prow of the vessel.

Night brought no comfort to the crew, but only more of the endless stifling heat, and fear of what the rest of the journey might bring. The next days passed without incident. Once more the skies were the playground of clouds, misting, billowing, whipping across the heavens in pursuit of each other, then expanding to fill the horizons, or, without warning, evaporating to leave the bright sky clear and vulnerable. One morning daylight arrived to reveal a blanket of grey obscuring the heavens and drifting so low that the mast

of the vessel seemed to ply the clouds even as the hull clove the waters, their existence as it were bounded by the most narrowly conceived of Aristotelian spheres compressing the space occupied by the frail vessel and its crew to a wide narrow plane, pressing upon them simultaneously from above and below. The crew felt immediate relief not only for the temporary shelter from the hammering rays of the suns, but also for the increased sense of safety from detection. They hoped the cover would continue till they arrived at their destination. But Macius shook his head. As long as the cover lasted he could not locate the small island that was their goal. They should prefer a clean sky, he explained, adding that there was no need to fear the malkops. So long as the Grest remained on the eastern side of the rocky isle, the guardians would ignore the vessel and leave the crew in peace.

For several days the mist endured, as if a great storm vented its fury in some distant part of the ocean, providing the crew a welcome relief and boosting their spirits. Then it broke and dissipated to reveal a clear sky that had cooled considerably. The men, however, far from enjoying the change in temperature, felt the return of all their fears—for far above them, compassing the welkin from horizon to horizon, moved a belt of black dots, or clots, like strings of beads connected by invisible thread, gaps and patches supervening in places, but no part of the sky entirely clear of their mysterious and menacing forms. Moving in several directions along interconnecting arcs, one branch stretched back the way the Grest had come, toward the northeast and bending slightly toward the east, while a second branch extended northwards, in the direction, Flores assumed, of the valleys of the three rivers, the Hedronmas, Suma, and Tlaam, where Ven and all of the cities he knew stood, the entire region of Ven's dominance reduced in his mind's eye to a small facet of a vast organization that encompassed the world, indeed more than the world, of a plan that included both Heaven and Hell in its stupendous and grand design. From their vantage point the crew could see clearly the two great arms merge to form a third that continued south-westward, unrelenting toward their goal.

The crew turned their eyes to the murshid.

Surge glanced above them at the selks suspended in the distance, then brushed some lint from his faded brown tunic. "It is time to turn south. We shall be ashore by evening."

The crew broke into grins. The yardarm was turned and the mainsail refastened, and twenty oars splashed into the water, the Grest launching itself in the new direction, cool wind and visions of solid ground at their journey's end reinvigorating them.

They soon lost view of the selks and encountered a sky that was at once clear, cool, and empty of Vensor's guardians. For a day their prow rode the waves, then abruptly, miraculously it seemed after the long weeks of watery desolation, land hove into view. The heart of every crewman never knew such joy as when their vessel neared the small rocky cliff that jutted from the midst of the elemental deep, poised so perilously that Flores feared that should he shut his eyes but for a moment, he might re-open them to find that the waves had swept the island under and reasserted their jealous supremacy. Nearing the rocky refuge, he found that the crags were more firmly fixed in their bed than he had supposed, a hard and imposing jag rising straight from the angry waves, the waters never ceasing their assault on this challenge, each heave of the sea sending a dense column of watery brine crashing against the rock, with a river of foam running perpetually back whence it came, the boom and tumult of the wash reverberating without surcease. A hundred feet above the Grest the stony walls loomed, giving no harbor to the

vessel, and the steep sides of the cliffs admitted no holds to climbers should the vessel drop anchor for the purpose. To halt would have been suicide in any event, for the gigantic heaves of the sea against the rocky outgrowth, and the fierce currents that played around its base, would have smashed in moments any ship whose pilot might be so foolish as to attempt it.

Macius steered the ship eastward, and, finding that the island was shaped in a crescent, followed the extrados of the curve along its eastern shore until he had arrived at a position southeast of the isle, and near the end of its southern arc. Here, they rounded a blockish promontory, and a sandy beach opened before them, providing sufficient space for a dozen Grests, and leading the crew's gaze up into a lush interior such as they had not guessed existed from the austerity of the outer cliffs. Palms, and trees laden with bright fruit, waved in the humid air. Having glimpsed such after their long ordeal, the men could well believe the isle lay but a short distance from Heaven. The ship approached the beach, and slid to a halt on the soft sea bottom. Shouting, the crew spilled ashore. Ropes were produced, and the crew scrambled quickly onto the beach, pulling the vessel after. Within minutes they had dragged the ship securely onto the hot sand.

The interior was of a higher altitude than the beach, and, together with the circumscribing cliffs, hid from their view the horizon in all directions save east so long as they stood upon the shore. Climbing steeply from the shore they found themselves on a plateau that sloped upwards until it met the cliff walls that compassed the isle on its remaining three sides. On the southern half of the isle, the plateau being comparatively low in these parts, it had to rise sharply to meet the flanking heights, so that any who stood amidst the palms found themselves well sheltered from the elements and as comfortable as one might hope on a deserted rocky crag in unknown waters. On the northern half of the isle, however, the plateau was higher. Here the vegetation was sparse and the crew found themselves more exposed since the plateau had to rise but a short distance to meet the precipitous shoreline. As one moved north the skies became increasingly visible until, near the northern tip of the isle, one attained the summit and found the horizons outspread below, all things being visible to one ensconced in this lofty aerie excepting only the beach at the southern end, which was now obscured by the verdant groves.

Flores and Isav, with Macius behind, mounted the summit, and halted. Far to the south a belt of black specks, such as they had glimpsed in the morning, was suspended in the sky in a vast arc. Although at a lower altitude than the selks they had previously seen, these were also more distant, visible in no greater detail. On the other hand, the belt was now more dense, appearing more like a distant storm than living creatures.

Of more interest to Flores than this highway of selks, however, was its terminus upon the west. Here a smear of white presented itself, almost featureless, stretching away to the south until it receded into the blue of the endless sky and sea. Shining through the white, on those occasions when the clouds parted, or when the suns set behind them, glittered all the colors of the rainbow, like a beacon, sharp though still distant. The white was cloud and mist, the other, some less certain material. It was apparent that the Holy Isle of Vensor was incomparably larger than the fragment beneath their feet.

Also visible was a shorter stretch of beach on the western side of their crag, not far below where they stood. By means of a precipitous approach a path led from this sandy strip to the summit. This western beach could well accommodate several ships, noted

Flores, should one desire a more direct approach, though he recalled the warnings of Macius concerning activity on this side of the island.

The men returned to the oasis and laid out a rudimentary camp. For the remainder of the day no one discussed the land that, after their long and perilous voyage, had finally come within sight. The crew slept and ate and rested and wandered about, savoring their long-delayed freedom, none of their chiefs wishing to spoil the mood by the exercise of their authority. However, their joy, it seemed to Flores, was not at all like that of the condemned granted a temporary reprieve. Far from relieved that they would not have to scale the Isle, they now seemed disappointed. The mystery had deepened. Flores could not imagine why the crew, especially the Vaw-sa, should be upset to encounter obstacles in completing a quest that was not only impractical but impious—should not they rather be relieved that the expedition's difficulties had become insurmountable, and they could now return home without having violated the law of Vensor? Their dejection and murmuring were so patent that the quest seemed more theirs than the Turlicum's.

Leaving the men, Flores explored the island on all sides, and returned alone to the summit. For the remainder of the day he sat and viewed the distant land and the locust-like swarm clouding the horizon to the south. The crash of sea on rock carried to his ears ceaselessly. But he did not see or hear. Superimposed on the obscure distant smudge wedged between sky and sea, was a delicate hand removing a veil from a face of hypnotic beauty with olive skin and jet-black hair. Something in Flores' soul ached at the thought that Amina, having been so recently freed from her long imprisonment in the Temple of Ven, had suffered abduction yet again, and now lay in a prison of even greater remove and isolation.

Dusk approached, and he returned to the camp, a sputtering fire of driftwood guiding his approach. Nearing the flame he heard voices raised in argument. He halted in the darkness.

Faces appeared in the fire's light. All the crew were visible, save Macius.

"Gold, I tell you! Gold! All the mir you could hope to lay your weary eyes upon! And other treasures! It lies but that short distance to the Isle!" Stalkin held up his palms, imaginary coins slipping through his fingers.

Isav faced Stalkin, a ring of Vens and Vaw-sa crouched around the two. "This is insurrection!" yelled Isav. "We are here not to rob the holy Isle. Our Lord is a pious man and has forbidden us to remove the property of Vensor."

The flat broad-chinned face of Stalkin stared newt-like in the corona of the flames, eyes widening till the white shone from entirely round his pupils. A sarcastic smile turned the corners of his mouth. He seemed to have entirely recovered his poise.

"I remind you again, dear Isav. He is not 'our' Lord, but yours. And what does that matter, here, in the vastness of this watery desert? On the sea all men are equal. If the ship goes down, your employer will die as surely as we commoners, his privileges would not have the weight of a single grain of sand."

"You ingrate—speaking of the Turlicum's death? And to his own clansmen! And after he saved your neck from those cutthroats in Vaw!"

Olive and pink alternated on the face of Stalkin as the sarcastic smile extended across the width of his features. "You may believe that if you like." The Vaw gazed slyly about him at the others. "As for me, I am for putting it to a vote."

"A subversive idea!" interjected Isav.

Revd backed him. “The authority of the Turlicum does not depend on anyone's goodwill, and certainly not that of Vaw-sa.”

“And what care we for your customs? We have our own ways.” The Vaw leader turned to his followers. “Who wants to decide this matter by vote?” he shouted.

All of the Vaw-sa quickly raised their arms.

Revd rose and stood beside Isav.

“And how many Ven-sa?” added Stalkin with confidence, as if he already knew the answer to his question.

Hesitantly, four arms rose. Then, having seen their own number, two more, with more assurance. Only four remained to support the Ven captains.

“Now that we have settled how we will run things, let us put our question to the vote as well,” said Stalkin. He addressed the others again. “Who wishes to waste our time with the dead—and a gila as I hear—when our provisions are short, and measureless reward lies now within our reach?”

Cries of encouragement rose from the crewmen, drowning the protests of Isav and Revd.

Stalkin shouted. “Our leader Surge has spoken well of what he saw upon the Isle! Gold! Jewels! Mir! Enough to carpet this rock we sit upon! Surge brought us here in safety. We may accept what he says as truth. Let us take the ship tomorrow—before dawn, to avoid the malkops—and load it with the treasures of the Isle. Then, after the eyes of Vensor have sunk beneath the waves, we shall return here to distribute it under the cover of darkness.”

The others, both Vens and Vaws, exploded with enthusiasm.

“This is folly,” interrupted Revd. “If you try to pillage the Isle, you will anger the guardians! Has it not occurred to you that if it were possible to remove anything, someone would have done so before now? I guarantee you will perish before you touch land. Or, even if you do make it to shore, you will only provoke Vensor's vengeance before you again depart.”

“And what of abducting Vensor's subjects?” replied Stalkin, a look of amazement on his face. “This will not provoke his anger? The Turlicum wishes to bring down upon our heads the wrath of the entire Island—and for what? A gila! And what is our payment for that? Poverty and death! We would risk our lives just as surely if we follow your employer than if we look to our own interests! Can you not see? He is mad! No sane man would undertake such a quest. When will his journey end? How far must he search? He must scour all of Heaven to find what he seeks, but we—we have only to reach the shore to accomplish our purpose.” He passed a gleaming eye over the quiet crew, and whispered. “Surge has said that the jewels lie scattered almost upon the beach itself!”

“It is not for you to judge our Lord, sir, and I warn you not to speak of him again in such a manner—or you will find yourself challenged.” Isav laid his hand upon his sword's pommel and pulled the blade partly from its scabbard.

Unlike the Ven-sa, those of Vaw had no swords, and Stalkin grew quiet.

“Think of what you are saying,” said Revd, addressing the Vens who had sided with Stalkin. “Look from the summit; you will see the guardians poised at this moment to prevent us from approaching. They remain aloft night and day. You would indeed be destroyed—Macius said that as well. Have you forgotten his warning so soon? He reached shore only by waiting until a storm occurred which sent the selks scurrying to

Heaven for safety. You cannot reach the island by boat at other times, even by night, and were we to sit here until a storm arrived, we would not have time to load the ship and return before the wind died and the malkops resumed their flight. Even if successful you would drown beneath the waves. At any rate, we would starve long before such a storm arrives.”

“Then,” Stalkin gently asked, “pray tell us: how do you plan to get ashore? You must have some plan in mind, or you would not have come so far—nor Surge.”

Isav and Revd exchanged quiet glances.

Flores stepped into the circle of light. The others lapsed into silence. Picking up some driftwood, the Turlicum tossed it into the flames. For a time no sound was heard but the snapping of dry limbs.

“You are right, Stalkin. I do have a plan. And tomorrow, you shall not only see it, but you shall participate. And if you desire, you yourself shall be the first to step onto the Island of Vensor.” He threw another stick onto the fire. “We cannot take the ship, so we cannot remove many valuables. And no more than seven of us may go. But, if what you say concerning the island is true, and something of value does indeed lie there, and if it be important to you that you avail yourself of such, I shall allow you to return with a few souvenirs of our visit. . . mementos. In fact, you have my permission to return with all that you can carry.”

The crew leaped to their feet.

“Flores! Flores! Long live Turlicum! Long live Ven!” The Vens laughed and patted each other on their backs, their faith in their leader restored. Stalkin, however, continued to frown.

Flores continued. “You may accompany Surge and I and choose for yourself what to take, or to testify to the others when we return that we found nothing of value. And my two captains will go. And Toom and Meld also.” Flores indicated two of the Vens who had sided with him during the argument.

Stalkin's brows furrowed. “That leaves two Vaw-sa. Are Surge and I to carry the treasure alone, then? Those of us who wish their reward number sixteen—can two carry enough to satisfy sixteen?”

The crew murmured.

Flores prodded the fire, while the tension again rose. “Then Toom and Meld may stay.”

“And one captain.”

For a long moment the camp was silent. Stalkin stood opposite Flores, fists on hips, waiting for another capitulation. The opposing sides moved subtly to opposite sides of the fire, the swords of Flores' faction outweighed by those of the Ven turncoats and the daggers of the ten Vaws.

Finally, he spoke. “And one captain—Isav.”

The tension vanished. The Vaws nodded to each other, grumbling assent, and the Vens again shouted their joy. Stalkin was not entirely pleased, but he grunted and turned away. Within minutes the crew dispersed, some lying down to sleep, others wandering off to savor the night or tend to private matters before bedding down.

Flores stirred the fire a few minutes more, then stood.

Isav approached and the pair moved next to a trunk.

“Flores,” Isav said softly, “why have you allowed the Vaw-sa to go and none of our

own but Revd? Will you not be in danger with only Revd's sword for support?"

The Simet noble gazed into the night, the surf booming ceaselessly beyond the palms. He breathed deep the moist wind and exhaled.

"Better to have them with me, Isav, where I can see their eyes and faces, than here where they can plot behind my back. On Vensor's Isle they will be too busy to plot. And should our activities arouse the selks despite our precautions, who would you rather bear the first onrush of Vensor's guardians—your kin, or those we distrust? I do not believe it is so simple a matter to rob Vensor in his lair, else Macius would today be rich. As for Macius, I saw not his face among the Vaws. I would know the true motives of our pilot, and do not wish to leave him alone in the vicinity of our ship. . . Only he knows what lies ahead."

"Macius!" Isav spat. "Do not trust him, I tell you! He is their ringleader. It was he put Stalkin to this. He who ordered you murdered in the streets of Vaw! Lost his way, indeed! He is an accomplice of Fish, and on the dock left us to confront Fish alone. And only he escaped the Overseer's ambush. Accidents do not happen in threes!" Isav sighed. "It is perhaps best that you have concealed your suspicions. Still I would not turn my back in his presence. You, however—you would swim to Heaven itself in the company of his gang!" Isav shook his head.

Flores opened his mouth to answer. "Patience. Here is what you are to do while I am gone. . ." The two stepped beyond the camp and their conversation was swallowed in the gloom. As the Turlicum chiefs vanished, another face took form in the renewed light of the fire. Surge appeared from where he had been standing in the darkness behind a palm-trunk and watched the spot where they had vanished in the shadows. A bright gleam was in his eye.



NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

The Selk King was written over a four-year period in the early 1990s, the product of a classical education, Nietzsche, the origins of mythology, and a degree in Islamic history which included translating much of the Quran. I have spared the reader Arabic and Greek phraseology wherever possible, but let the characters phrase the issues mostly in English.

To sum up: the problems of humanity are an eternal part of the human condition, and whatever planet humanity may happen to inhabit, these problems can be reduced to The Greek versus the Islamic.

Behind the Veil, Secrets lurk. The Veil of course is Nature, personified by God, or Allah, and Its dictates, which subject Man to the eternal struggle that philosophers have wrestled with since the beginning of time—Can he master himself and be ‘captain of his soul’ or is he destined to be an atom in a greater Cause, whether that Cause be religion, the passions, or a Darwinian ‘balance’ that permits survival of a species only to those that can reproduce without limit.

The Tower is the mystical Mountain that touches the Divine, and also the Tree of Life, which symbolizes the eternal mystery of Death from Life, and Life from Death. The bracelets are the mystical insight that enable penetration of the levels of Heaven by the eponymous hero, in this case Flores, and which can be misused. Yezd is the shaman who transmits the technique. The malkops, or selks, are the semi-divine Messengers who guard access to Heaven, and if properly ritually addressed, will transmit the Hero’s questions to the Divine.

The word ‘Ra’ is Arabic for the imperative ‘Look!’ The phrase ‘Ra’Allah’, therefore is ‘Look upon God’, or ‘See-Face-of-God’. In his struggle to assert himself against millennia of hidebound tradition, and the imperative of infinite reproduction that all Vensor-sa (and humans) are forever subject to, Flores comes to his own conclusions regarding the Greek versus the Islamic. Though Vensor-sa, including Flores, are not human, the species having fragmented into several mutually supporting sub-species, his conclusions I think are equally valid for us.

Long after I completed The Selk King, it occurred to me that I had unconsciously followed the example of The Iliad and The Odyssey. Not to compare my feeble scribblings with the giant Homer, or any other master story-teller, but Maalstrom does seem to follow the pattern of The Iliad, while The Selk King parallels The Odyssey, with the Hero going on a mystical quest across the waters of Chaos to slay demons and match wits with various semi-divine opponents, succeeding or failing at the whim of the gods and his own divine-like Will to Power. Flores even encounters the equivalent of a race of Cyclops, here called Dragabonds.

The Selk King also owes much to Robert E. Howard’s novel *Almuric*, which involves a hero mounting a tower at the ends of the Earth populated by winged demons or angels. This also did not occur to me until after The Selk King was finished.

Leaving aside philosophy and myth, however, The Selk King is an entertaining tale in the tradition of Robert E. Howard's Conan and Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter on Mars. Unique and Just Plain Weird, a story that can be read merely for fun.

—Glenn Lazar Roberts, October 1, 2016

For maps, pictures, and original illustrations, be sure to purchase the print versions of MAALSTROM and THE SELK KING. These paperbacks, and other works by Yours Truly can be had at www.equuspublishing.com. There are only two books in the Maalstrom Series. I had originally conceived the story as a trilogy, thus the occasional references to what seems to be a third book, but I never wrote the third book. I may still write a short story “prequel” at some point, but the ravages of time seem destined to prevent this. Thank you for your time and kind attention.

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If you enjoyed reading

THE SELK KING

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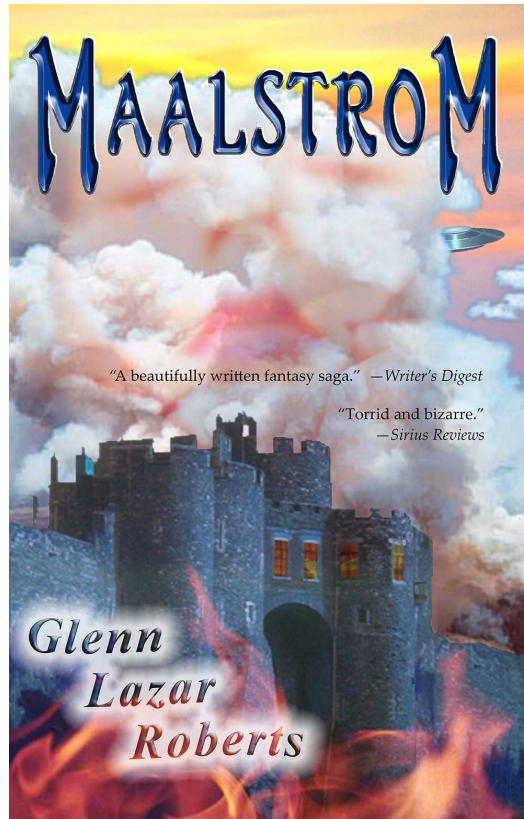
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Don't miss BOOK 1 in
THE MAALSTROM SERIES
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“MAALSTROM”



Glenn's first novel, written at the age of 20. Under twin suns on the planet Maalstrom, Flores of the Turlicum struggles to recover his Assembly seat in the ancient city of Ven and is trapped in the dark Temple of Vensa where he falls under the spell of the priestess Amina—the most beautiful gila of the Three Valleys. As the siege of the Vok-tail clans tightens, Flores learns the secret of the mysterious winged malkops that disappear with every corpse, and must decide which to save: Ven or Amina? Bloody heroic fantasy that untangles an interdependence of alien species.

REVIEWS of Maalstrom

“Maalstrom is packed with intrigue, backdoor deals, betrayal, and one heck-of-a fantasy adventure finale. Flores [is] a thinking-man's-barbarian [in] a classic hero adventure

story...a meticulously crafted tale with...an interesting exploration of religion's impact on culture. If you enjoy..."Game of Thrones", "John Carter Warlord of Mars", "Joseph Campbell", or "Prince of Persia" you'll enjoy visiting Maalstrom... You may notice that women are strangely out of the picture, but just wait..."—J. Picha

"The suspense and the action never let up. There is always a new twist and a mystery that entices the reader to keep going. Even without all of the intrigue and action, the exotic civilization of Maalstrom is in itself enough to warrant reading just to explore it. This is the kind of book that will keep you up all night reading it." —Mike Kilgore

"In the tradition of Burroughs and Howard, Roberts give us an exciting story that takes place in the city of Ven as Flores, warlord of the Turlicum clan struggles to assume his rightful place. Inventive, absorbs the reader and takes him or her to places never dreamed of." —Roger Paulding, author of *Solomon's Journey*

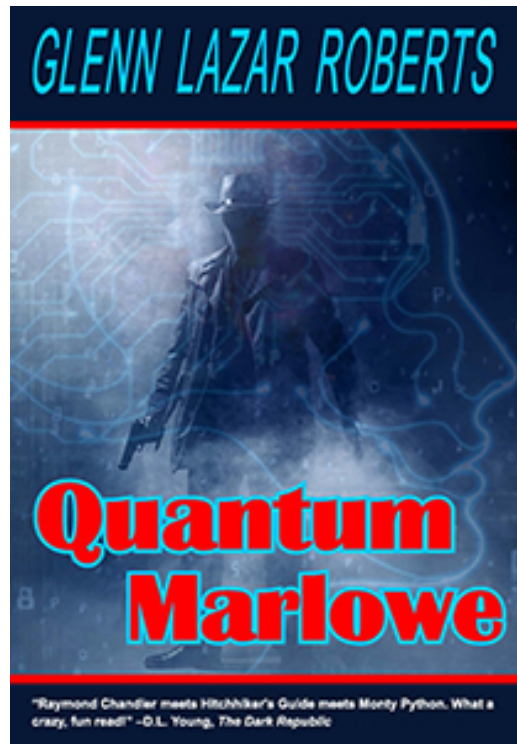
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AND MORE SCI-FI / FANTASY NOVELS

By

Glenn Lazar Roberts

"QUANTUM MARLOWE"



Pete Marlowe, a tiny but tough private detective, is having a bad day. Two mad scientists abducted him, lopped off his pinky finger, and installed a red button that enables him to walk through walls. Now they are blackmailing him to do their bidding. Can “Pinky’s” street smarts survive the scientists’ border-jumping between dimensions? Or is Pete destined to be marooned in a parallel universe? Quantum mechanics meets hard-boiled detective in this classic film noir take-off of the famous novels by Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett.

“I stepped through the wall and the molecules that formed the gypsum and paint on the building that was the pride of Ciudad Juarez again became impenetrable. Outside, I re-attached my finger. Pinky. I smiled at the nickname. Pinky this, moronista! I told you no jail could hold me. Who the hell fucks over his worst enemy, gives him the keys to the Universe, then fucks him over again? Well, that’s their hard luck. *When Pinky gives them the finger, they stay fingered. I’m just that kinda guy.*”

REVIEWS of Quantum Marlowe

“Raymond Chandler meets Hitchhiker’s Guide meets Monty Python. What a crazy, fun read!” —D.L. Young, author *The Dark Republic* series.

“Just wow. Quantum Marlowe is a fun romp that mixes the detective genre with science fiction. It brought to mind authors like Terry Pratchett and Douglas Adams. Funny, vivid, and often strange, this book is its own adventure and worth the journey.” —jddehart

“Marlowe is fearless, funny, savvy, and brave. Cracking good action mystery...funny, sardonic and fast-paced. Loved every minute!!” —Kelly Watley (5 of 5 stars)

“Quantum Marlowe is a quirky tech noir which features a gritty, fast talking detective, traveling through parallel universes and dimensions to track down a powerful relic. Once he obtains it, Marlowe must outmaneuver a drug-pushing mafia queen, mad-hatter scientists, and a gang of hardened killers, in order to keep it and return it to its rightful place. The clever narrative takes us through a high stakes, high energy quest while introducing intriguing ideas of quantum dynamics... An entertaining joyride that challenged the reader with its complexity and layered nuances.” —Felicia Mack Little, author of *Scions of Darkness*

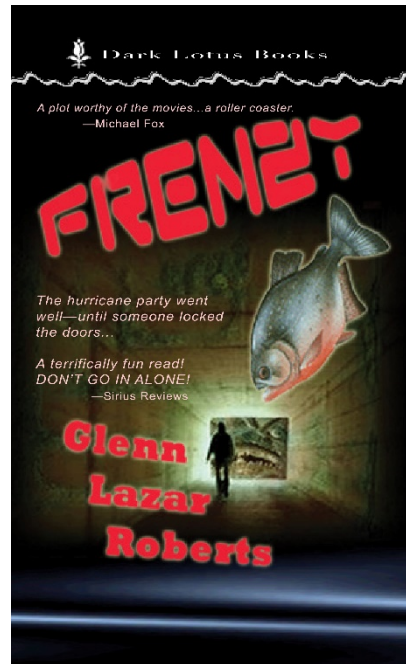
“Glenn Lazar Roberts is one of the finest writers of unconventional prose in contemporary fiction. His wonderfully inventive plots and mastery of the language place him in the company of Calvino, Burges, Gass...” —C. Thorman, author *Holy Orders*

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And Horror from the latest Laboratories of Science...

“FRENZY”



The hurricane party went well—until shattered windows forced the party-goers into the Cancer Research Center's basement. Their only escape is through pedestrian tunnels, a labyrinth of neglected spark-lit corridors that are rapidly flooding. Leading others to safety through the maze, pretty biologist Carmen Niles falls into a deadly scheme involving a biker drug gang, psychics, stock fraud, and one-minute piranhas made by experimental computer 'genechips'. A roller-coaster plot that leaves the reader guessing the next twist through the very last page.

REVIEWS of Frenzy

“A terrifically fun read! Glenn Lazar Roberts squeezes a lot of horror, mystery and plain old fun into his new novel, *Frenzy*. Its pages are filled with a host of quirky characters with monikers such as “Wild Bill,” “Carm,” and “Cracker,” and the brisk dialogue and tight plot will keep the reader guessing until the final page. My suggestion? Grab a copy as fast as you can, turn down the lights and read this fast-paced novel. —Jerry Mohrlang, author of *Sarawak* and *Mujahidin*.”

“This is a superb novella to pop in on and be thrilled with. Lots of twists and turns, lots of pop back-and-forth banter, and plenty of surprises. It’s written as a thriller with a subtle supernatural element mixed in. The author’s style makes it an easy read, with a quick paced flow. Several fully developed characters, each with their own unique story thread, lead to a well orchestrated avalanche of pandemonium. For those looking for entertainment, especially some thriller / horror, this is a good choice. Will help the day at

the pool or trip on the plane fly right by. Definitely recommended.” —Troy F. Tinsman

“A plot worthy of the movies! FRENZY by Glenn Lazar Roberts is a perfect example of building tension... Just when you think you have it all figured out, the plot twists again and sends you giddily in a different direction.” —Michael Fox, author of *Theater Boy*

“Glenn Lazar Roberts’ fabulist thriller [has] skillfully woven topical issues—cancer research, technology, fraud—through a hair-raising plot. Frenzy is a super story. The reader turns pages eagerly right up to the astounding resolution. A must-read.” —Carolyn Thorman, author of *Holy Orders*.

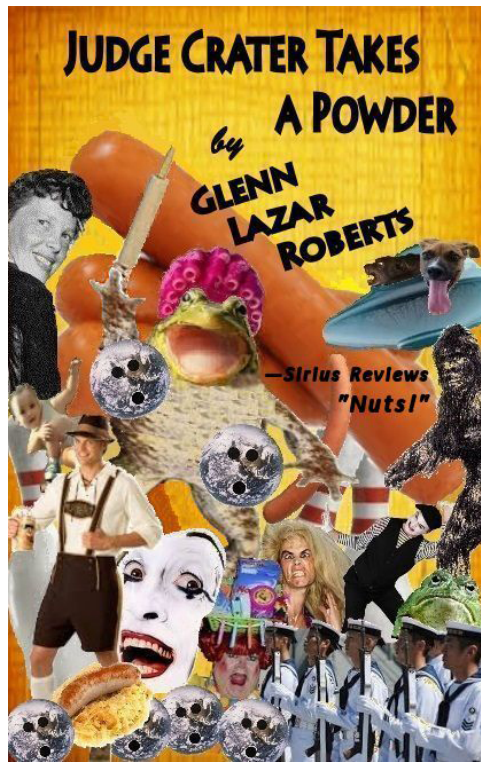
In FRENZY, Glenn Lazar Roberts takes the ideas of the physicist Stephen Wolfram on cellular automata and pushes them to the limit, weaving a tightly plotted thriller that is perfect for hard-core science fiction buffs.” —*Sirius Reviews*

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BOOK 1

Adventures of Maggie, the Radiated Lesbian Nun

“JUDGE CRATER TAKES A POWDER”



In this hilarious satire, J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, recruits Judge Crater and Amelia Earhart to help uncover a conspiracy of aliens planning to flood the Earth to

prepare it for colonization, with cowardly Mafia, recipe-obsessed nuns, space-folding transvestites, incompetent Nazi spies, cow-mutilating aliens, evil mimes, and dueling bible-quoters. Orson Welles tries to warn the public with his Martian broadcast, and future Social Justice Warrior Maggie is born on the planet Bogland. Will snowflakes, marshmallows, and the easily offended find Safe Spaces inside? *Heyll NO!* Will the reader find lots of laughs? *Heyll YES!* Political Correctness may never recover from this inspired work of eccentric mania.

REVIEWS of Judge Crater Takes A Powder

“Roberts interweaves historical fact with castles in the air, dubiousness and irony to create a fast-paced narrative filled with the almost plausible as well as out-and-out incredible in this sardonic romp... For those who like a bit of sarcasm swathed in quirkiness and screwball circumstance, Judge Crater should prove to be a worthwhile read. Happy to recommend for those not easily dismayed, repulsed, or daced.” —M.M.

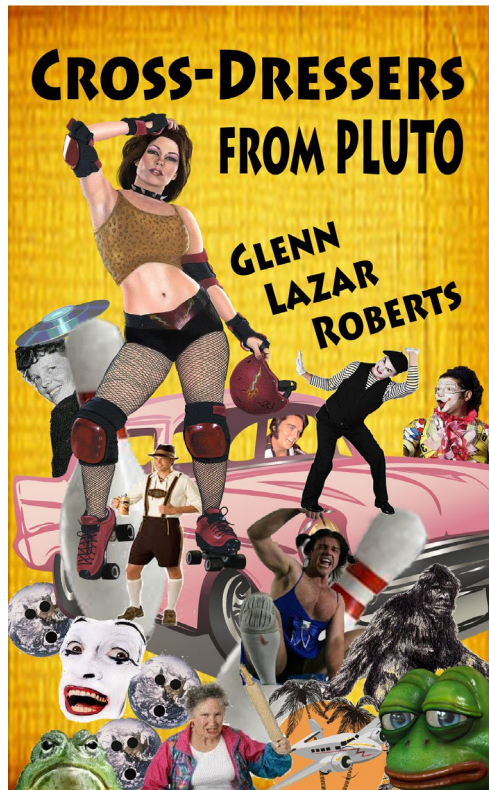
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BOOK 2

Adventures of Maggie, the Radiated Lesbian Nun

“CROSS-DRESSERS FROM PLUTO”



Pop the Thunderbird wine and break open the nopalitos, because Maggie the Radiated Lesbian Nun is igniting fires and breaking hearts across the galaxy. Raised in a secret convent in Area 51, young Maggie is caught up in alien plans for global warming in this hilarious satire of political correctness featuring Amelia Earhart, J. Edgar Hoover, Elvis Presley, Jimmy Hoffa, D.B. Cooper, Howard Hughes, and more Evil Mimes than you can shake a stick at—which is highly recommended.

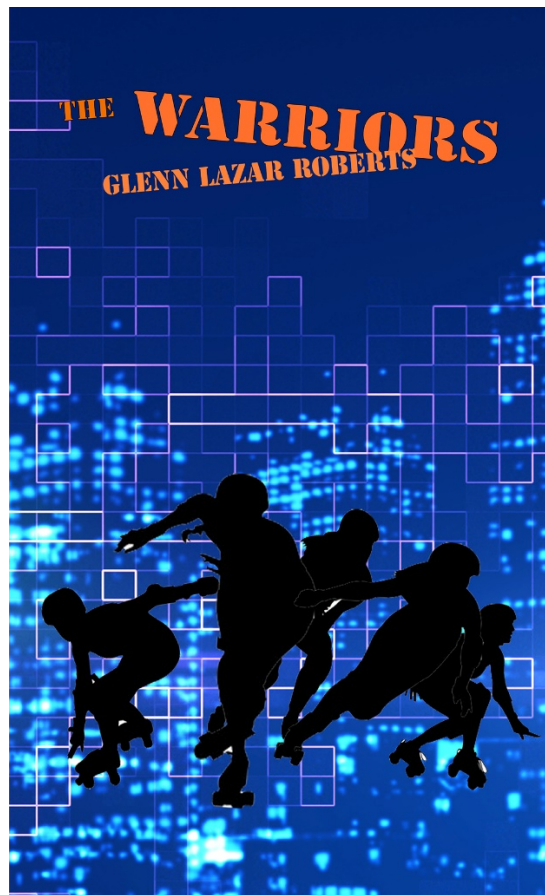
REVIEWS of Cross-Dressers From Pluto

“Nuts!” —*Sirius Reviews*

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!! Don't miss BOOK 3 of Adventures of Maggie, the Radiated Lesbian Nun !!

“THE WARRIORS”



Maggie and her all-girl roller derby gang are framed for murder and pursued by every roller derby gang in Las Angeles in this sci-fi parody of the 1979 cult movie The Warriors. Will the Evil Mimes succeed in their plans for global warming? Can Maggie

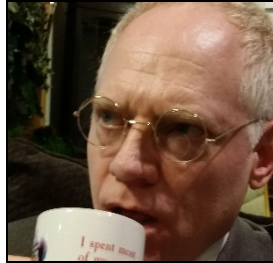
and her little band of Social Justice Warriors stop them?

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Glenn Lazar Roberts is an attorney and writer of sci-fi, horror, satire, and adventure fantasy novels. Glenn has taught college, professionally translated Arabic and Russian, hosts a writing critique circle, and has edited the work of many aspiring writers. He credits an eclectic group of famous authors for inspiring him to write, including Jack Vance, Robert E. Howard, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Mervyn Peake, H.P. Lovecraft, Arthur C. Clarke, and H.G. Wells, among many other Masters of the Art. "I love language. I am perpetually afloat on a sea of script."

*

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