



Once upon a time—in 1950, to be exact—a new comic-book publisher was launched in France in the city of Lyon. It was called Editions Lug and its story was told in greater details in *Alter Ego* #30.

Suffice it to say here that, for 30+ years, Lug published a great variety of newsstand monthly comics mags featuring a mix of original series, Italian series such as *Alan Mistero* and *Blek*, and Marvel licenses such as *Spider-Man* and *Fantastic Four*.

It became, in fact, the fifth-largest French publisher of newsstand comics, with the largest and most diverse library in French comics, with over 200 characters/series, including virtually all genres.

At its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, Editions Lug sold 1.5 million comics sold per year. Average sales per title were 80,000 copies, compared to Marvel's 120,000. Their books were translated into three languages.

In the 1980s, the original founders—who had served in the French Resistance—decided to retire. The company passed into other hands, which continued to publish the Marvel books, but switched to reprints-only and stopped the more expensive creation of new series.

The death of newsstands sales eventually proved fatal. Unlike in the US, there was no network of dedicated comic-book stores to pick up the slack. Ultimately, the company went out of business at the end of 2003.

The *Alter Ego* article, written just before that sunset, documented a brief revival of the old characters and series of the '60s and '70s during the 2000–2003 period, undertaken under the aegis of its editor-in-chief Thierry Mornet and the undersigned.

The flagship of this brief, but ultimately doomed, revival was *Strangers*, a six-part miniseries that brought together several alien heroes stranded on Earth, and that was translated and published in the US by Image Comics.

The purpose of this article is to look at what has happened during the past ten years, and bear witness to the third rebirth of what is now widely known as—the HEXAGON UNIVERSE.

MOSAIC MULTIMEDIA

The keystone of the new operation was the strong desire by the creators to not let their works become buried and forgotten, as had been nearly the case during the 1990–2000 period.

In America, old characters belonging to defunct publishers such as Charlton and Gold Key had to wait for a corporate rescuer to live again. In France, fortunately, the ownership is separate from the publishing rights, and the authors could unite to carry on the exploitation of their own creations.

Dubbed "Mosaic Multimedia" to reflect the diversity and goals of the operation, a "syndicate" was launched, regrouping all the major creators—or, in some cases, their legal heirs—of the series once published by Editions Lug.

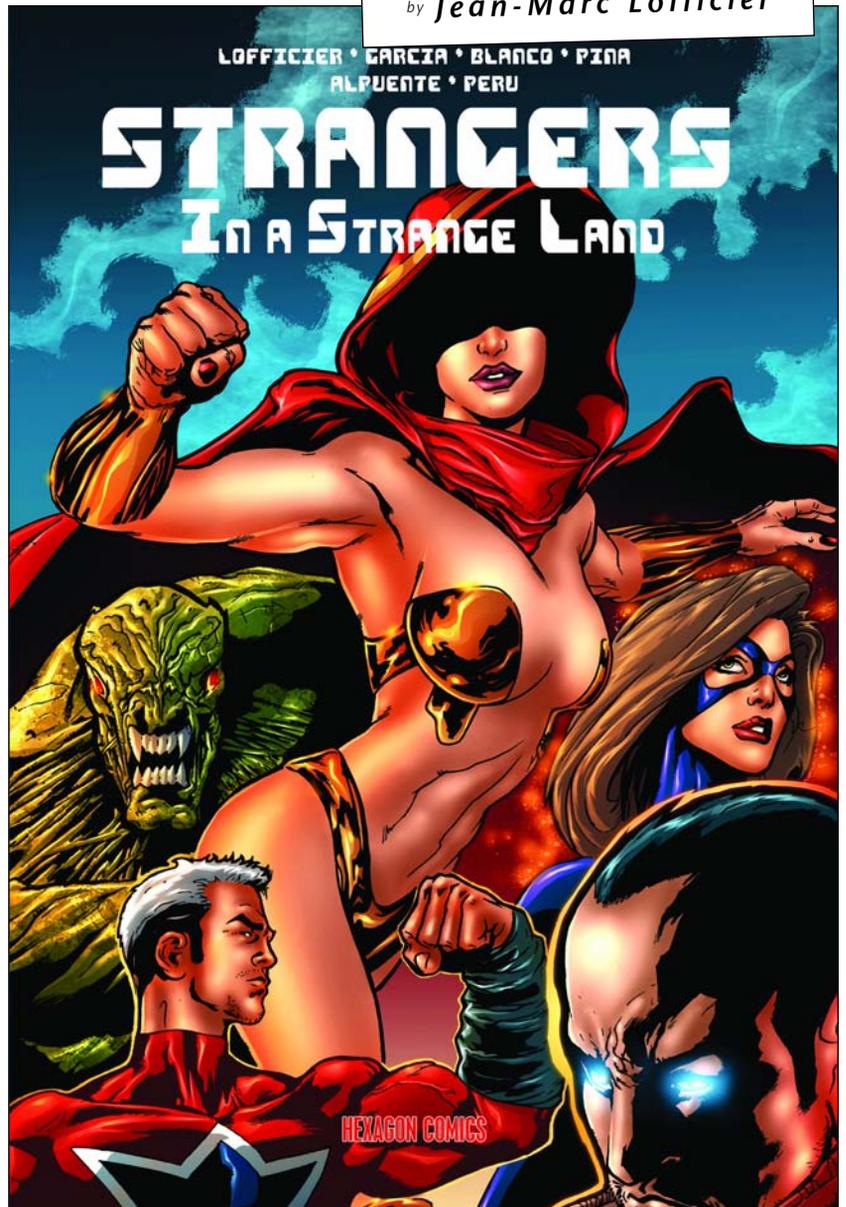
HEXAGON

Forever!

by Jean-Marc Lofficier

LOFFICIER • GARCIA • BLANCO • PINA
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STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND



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The first task—still ongoing as this is written—was to preserve the classic works. The decision was made to collect and republish these in a format not unlike that of the *Marvel Essentials* or the *DC Showcase Presents* books, i.e.: as big trade paperbacks of 500 to 600 pages, but in this case, printed on quality velum paper, retailing at the attractive price of 35 euros.

The “Hexagon Comics Library” (HCL) was finally launched in 2010 with its first two volumes dedicated to the cult favorite *Wampus*, a bizarre alien monster sent to Earth to sow chaos and destruction by an unfathomable cosmic entity.

The name “Hexagon” was chosen because it was reminiscent of France itself, sometimes nicknamed “the Hexagon” because of its six-sided profile on a map.

As of this writing (in March 2015), 48 volumes comprise the HCL, with a new one coming out every month for the foreseeable future. That’s almost 30,000 pages of comics—and growing! A true testimony to the astonishing production of Editions Lug during its existence.

Sporting attractive new covers, and occasionally including a new story or two, the HCL initially concentrated on characters loosely belonging to the superhero, science fiction, and fantasy genres, but is now starting to reprint historical, Western, war, and detective stories, evidencing the wide variety of genres tackled by Lug’s creators.

Who are these creators? Most, if not all, will be unknown to the American readers; yet, they form a squadron of dedicated artist such as Luciano Bernasconi, Giorgio Trevisan, Franco and Fausto Oneta, Lina Buffolente, Ivo Pavone, Raffaele Paparella, Edmond Ripoll, Annibale Casabianca, Emilio Uberti, Guido Zamperoni, and others, all of whom Will Eisner praised in his introduction to the first volume calling them “unsung loyalists of European comic books.”

On the writing side, there was Claude J. Legrand, a distinguished French science-fiction writer and translator, and others such as Franco Frescura and Pier Carpi, to name but two.

New stories were created for the volumes collecting stories involving the members of Hexagon, a group not unlike the Avengers, Kit Kappa, a kung-fu fighter, and Kidz, a group of super-powered teenagers.

Thanks to the HCL, those French readers old enough to remember the characters they’d read when they were kids are able to enjoy collected editions of these classic stories, while new readers, often unaware of the rich treasure trove that is the old Lug catalog, are amazed to discover that there was a time when popular French comics—as opposed to glossy color hardcovers like *Tintin* and *Spirou*—had nothing to envy from their American counterparts.

EXPANDING THE UNIVERSE

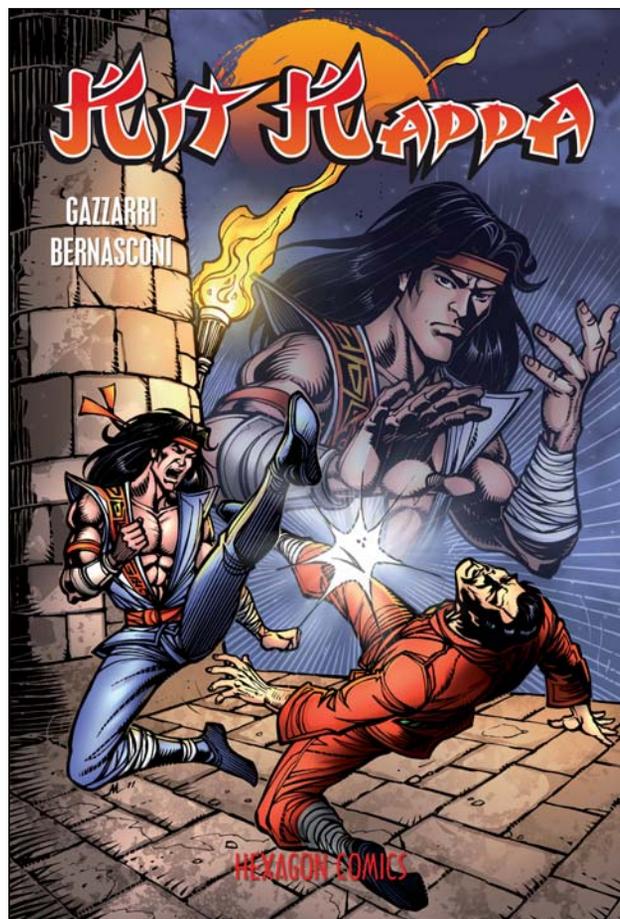
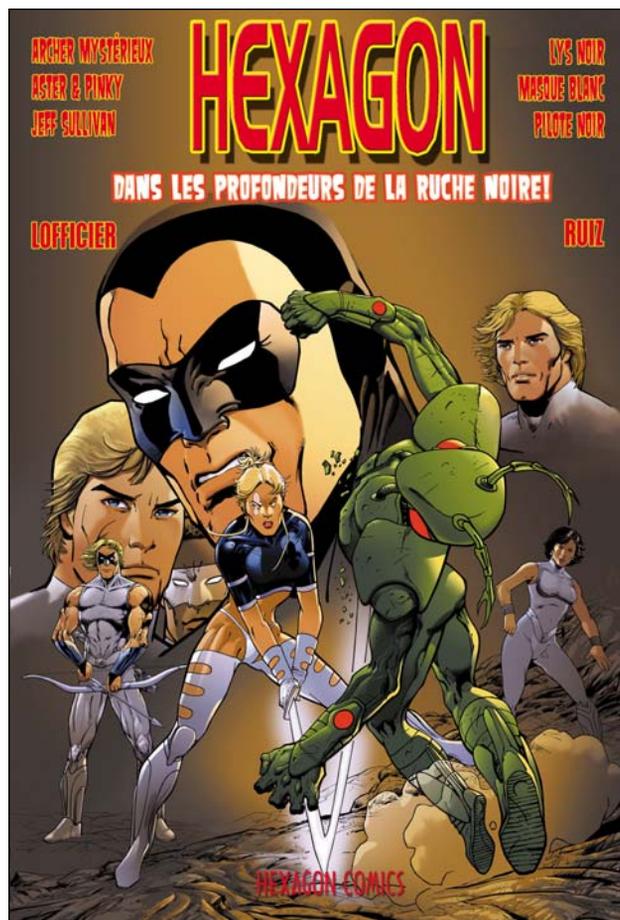
Still, what keeps a fictional universe alive and well is the ever-renewed spring of new stories, and not merely the archival collections of its past glories.

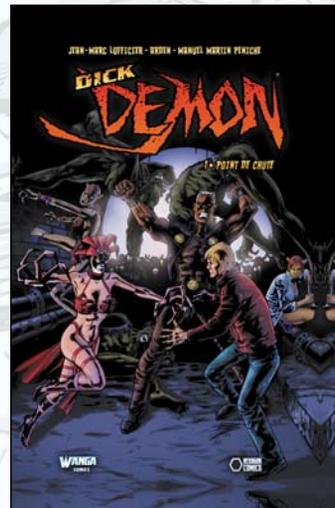
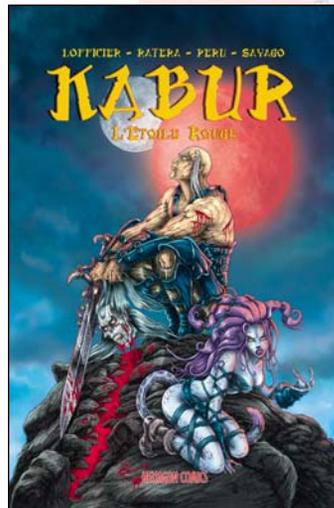
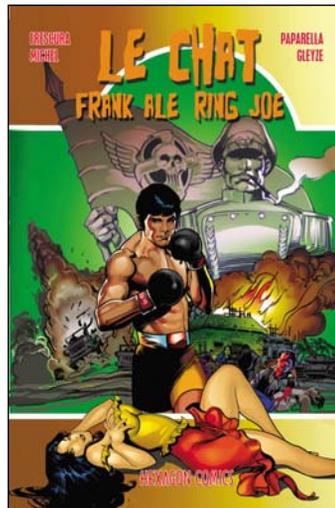
If the Hexagon Universe is back on the French comics scene today, it is largely due to its new products.

When the relaunch started in 2010, the decision was made to also reprint the new stories produced during the brief 2000–2003 period, when many of the characters were revamped and brought back to life—starting with the flagship title, *Strangers*, written by the undersigned and drawn by three brilliant Spanish artists: Manuel Garcia, Fernando Blanco, and Javier Pina.

For the uninitiated, who may not have read the Image Comics miniseries, *Strangers* consists of six characters: Homicron, a female NASA scientist whose body is inhabited by a powerful energy being from far-off planet Alpha; Starlock, a fugitive on the run who escaped from his Martian prison where he’d been consigned by his former masters, a set of awesome cosmic entities called the Towers; Jaleb, the secretive agent on Earth of a Galactic Federation of telepaths; JayDee, a teenage alien metamorph abandoned on Earth who may well be a deadly killing machine; and, finally, Futura, a mysterious woman who comes from another dimension.

These characters—all old Lug characters, except for Futura—were brought together by Tanka, the star of a once-popular jungle adventure series, now turned into “Invariant,” the agent of powerful entities from Earth’s farthest future. Their mission is to protect our planet from as variety of extraterrestrial threats.





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In the first miniseries released by Image, dubbed *Strangers in a Strange Land*, which is now available as a collected trade paperback from Black Coat Press, the Strangers successively fought a megalomaniacal scientist (Astaroth), a madman planning to destroy the Earth (the Necromancer), and finally an A.I. from the same future as Tanka's "masters" (Duke Oxian), who had secretly been manipulating the other two villains.

In 2010, Hexagon reprinted the original six-issue miniseries, also adding both a seventh episode, drawn by Fernando Pasarin, that had only been published in black and white in 2003, the very last month before the previous company's demise, and an all-new, eighth episode, drawn by talented young French artist Pierre Minne.

With the publication of this first French *Strangers* TPB, subtitled *Strangers in a Strange Land*, as well as a series of short stories that served as prologues to *Strangers*, now collected in a single TPB entitled "*Strangers 0: Omens & Origins*," all the scheduled reprint work had been completed.

Now, it was time to begin creating new works!

(Both *Strangers 0* and *Strangers 1* are available in English-language editions on paper through amazon or in e-comic form on *comixology*.)

NEW ADVENTURES

It began in January 2012, with the launch of a new, bimonthly, color comic entitled *Strangers – Season 2*.

That season was eventually to be comprised of seven issues, with an eighth story, not released in comic-book format, but included in a second TPB entitled *Strangers 2: Of Gods and Men*, which appeared in September 2013. (Sadly, there are no plans yet for an English-language edition.)

The first season had ended with the cosmic threat of the Towers, which had learned of Starlock's escape and discovered the existence of Earth. Several issues, featuring mostly Homicron and Starlock, were devoted to that thread, ending with a cataclysmic confrontation on the fringes of the Solar Systems, during which Homicron was converted into anti-matter and disappeared from our universe, perhaps forever.

Another plot thread that had been introduced in the previous season, was the presence on Earth of worshippers of the same evil cosmic entity who had dispatched Wampus years before. Futura and Jaleb led the search for the mysterious Wathan, their cult leader. In the process, they brought back to life the Zorr-Ko, a powerful android who, not unlike the Kree Sentry from *Fantastic Four*, had been abandoned on Earth by an ancient civilization.

A couple of issues dealt with smaller threats and introduced (or reintroduced) guest-stars:

In #1, Tanka teamed up with Phenix, a black-clad female superheroine, to deal with a mad scientist (Baron Von Bolch) and a race of intelligent gorillas;

In #4, Tanka and JayDee helped the Dark Flyer, an armored hero from the super-powered group called Hexagon (which had already guest-starred in #4 of the first series), combat an alien threat in Haiti;

Finally, in #7, Futura joined forces with the Lakota mage Ozark to travel to the sphere inhabited by the Amerindian god Coyote.

Strangers – Season 2 boasted the talents of Mexican artists Alfredo Macall (#1, 4, 7) and Alfonso Ruis (#6), French artist Pierre Minne (#3), and Spanish artists Mariano De La Torre (#2, 8) and Sergio Fernandez Davila (#5).

STRANGERS UNIVERSE

Parallel to the main comics series, several 48-page one-shots were released under the banner title of *Strangers Universe* (à la *Marvel Premiere*).

The first two issues were a newly-colored reprint of a story originally published in 2001, featuring a cataclysmic battle between the ever-popular jungle lord Zembla and the pre-cataclysmic Prince Kabur, both manipulated by the demon queen Mauve, drawn with Lovecraftian gusto by Spanish artist Mike Ratera. Comics fans should note that Mauve had previously appeared in a *Witchblade/Phenix/Sibilla* crossover book, *Blood Oath*, published by Top Cow in 2003.

Then, followed an all-new tale of Starlock's past, when he was teamed up with the original Homicron and the Bronze Gladiator, drawn by De La Torre, along with a colored reprint of the origins of Starlock.

The fourth issue was another new story, a heroic fantasy saga starring Galaor, Warrior of Mû (the legendary, now destroyed, fifth planet) and Futura, drawn by Macall.

The fifth issue introduced France's own multi-generational superhero, the Guardian of the Republic, written by Thierry Mornet and drawn by Juan Roncagliolo Berger.

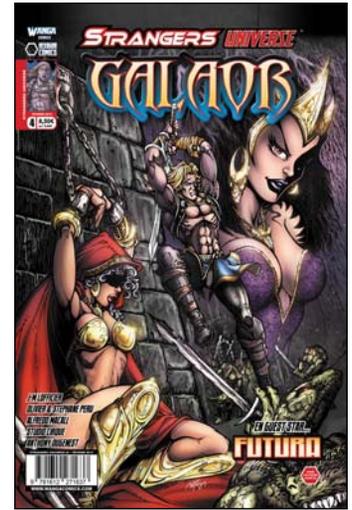
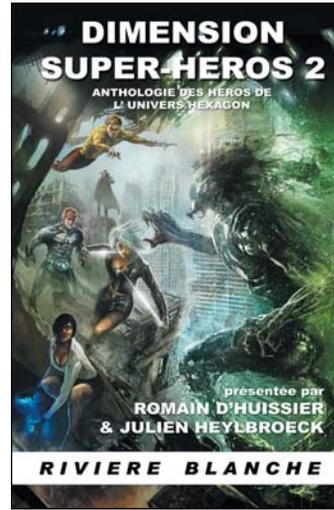
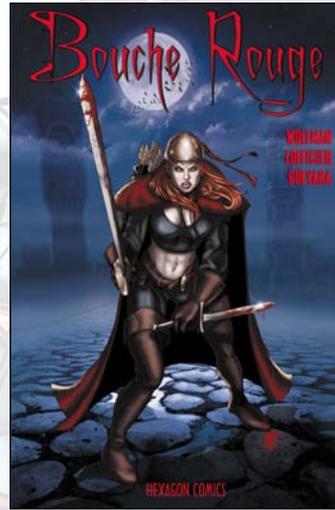
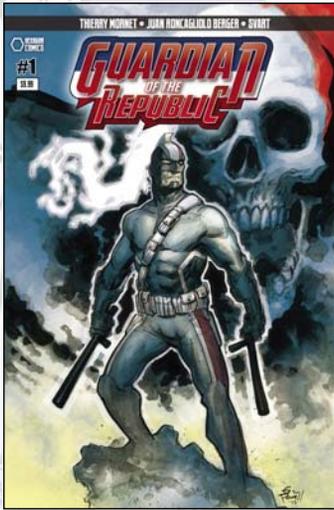
Another one-shot, this time in hardcover, completed a story begun in 2003 that had remained unfinished. It starred Dick Demon, the last scion of a race of alien monsters—the so-called "Twilight People"—that migrated to Earth in prehistoric times. It was released as a 120-page color hardcover, drawn by J. M. Arden and Manuel Martin Peniche.

It was followed by another color hardcover, *Kabur: The Red Star*, reprinting a saga of King Kabur, brought back to life several thousands of years after his death, to fight a race of alien vampires which has conquered Earth.

As 2014 began, the first issue of the latest comic series, *Strangers – Season III* was released, now in the



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form of 48-page, squarebound, black-and-white books.

Season III finally brought the war with the Towers to an end. But at the end of the story, the group was in disarray: Homicon was still believed to be dead, Starlock had surrendered to the Towers, and Jaleb had mysteriously vanished after the destruction of his spaceship. Tanka's first task was to build a new group.

This is what he did by enlisting the help of the Zorr-Ko, the Bronze Gladiator, and Starcyb, a former ally of Starlock, in order to launch a search for their missing members.

This three-pronged quest took the characters into space, to other dimensions, and hidden realms of Earth. In total, it spanned 18 issues—almost three times as long as the previous seasons!—and is scheduled to be completed in the Fall of 2015.

Guest-stars have included Dick Demon and the Twilight People, kung-fu hero Kit Kappa, the Starknight and Malinborne of New Camelot, two space-based heroes, Marino, an underwater hero, the sorceress Morgane, jungle lord Zembla, the Cave Patrol, and several others.

Two new teams were introduced: in *Strangers* 3.15, the Frontiersmen: a group of heroes fight giant monsters and horror creatures at the Texas/Mexican border in the 1860s; and in *Strangers* 3.16 & 3.17, The Enchanters, Hexagon Comics' version of the Defenders, consisting of four magically powered heroes (Ozark, Sibilla, Man, and Metal Man) fighting supernatural threats.

Artists having worked on Season 3 include fan favorite Macall, French artist Christophe Ouvrard, plus a host of other brilliant Mexican artists such as Manuel Martin, Eduardo Garcia, Nestor Vargas, Roberto Castro, Gabriel Mayorga, and Juan Roncagliolo, as well as Argentinean artists Mauro Lirussi and Jorge Mongiovi.

In parallel to *Strangers*, the *Guardian of the Republic* series has also continued, edited and written by Thierry Mornet, illustrated by various French artists, with six issues published to date, including a one-shot taking place towards the end of World War II and introducing a group of freedom fighters called the Partisans. That issue was plotted by none other than Roy Thomas and drawn by Mario Guevara.

In it, a group of *Urbemensch* gathered by Hitler is about to stop the Allied landing in Normandy; but fortunately, a rival group organized by Churchill and De Gaulle is there to foil the Nazis. The Partisans feature a mix of old and new characters, such as WWII hero Baroud, revamped versions of the Metal Man and Ricky Rox (a speedster), and historical versions of Black Lys and the Guardian of the Republic—two, in fact, one fighting on the Resistance's side, the other, for the Vichy regime.

Future books in the works include a one-shot devoted to Scarlet Lips (a vampiress), plotted by Marv Wolfman and drawn by Guevara, and more adventures of the ever-popular Guardian of the Republic.

STILL TO COME

"But wait, there's more!" as the commercials say. What happened to the "multimedia" angle? you may well ask.

During the last decade, there was indeed an attempt by a Hollywood production company—now defunct—to spin off the Hexagon Universe into film or TV products. Presently, three of its characters—

Bob Lance, Sibilla, and Count Saint-Germain—are in development at Branded pictures Entertainment.

More importantly—and tangibly—a new generation of writers have been eager to continue playing with these exciting characters—often new to them—in other formats.

This took the form of a series of prose books, not unlike those published with Marvel characters by the late, lamented Byron Preiss in the late 1990s in the US.

Led by the writing team of Romain d'Huissier and Julien Heylbroeck, the years 2013 and 2014 each saw the release of two books:

The first, an anthology of short stories featuring characters from, and taking place in, the Hexagon Universe: *Dimension Super-Héros Volume 1* and *Volume 2*.

The second was two full-blown novels by d'Huissier starring the Hexagon group: *Matière Noire* (translated into English by Matthew Baugh and released as *Dark Matter* in the US) and *La Guerre des Immortels* (War of the Immortals). The membership of the Hexagon group, like that of the Avengers, has varied over the years; the founding members being Aster (who is currently seemingly deceased), Jeff Sullivan a.k.a. the Man of Brass, the Mysterious Archer, Black Lys, and the Dark Flyer (who has been replaced by his son).

The two novels by d'Huissier start in modern times after the end of the classic series, and feature the new Dark Flyer, Black Lys, Plasma (Jeff Sullivan's daughter), a new Mysterious Archer, and Rakar, a Native American. Looking for new members, the group ends up recruiting Jeff's brother, Fred, once a supervillain, and Ben Leonard, the reincarnation of the Egyptian god Ra.

In 2015, another collection of stories, this time featuring the ghost detective Barry Barrison, was released. A third volume of *Dimension Super-Héros* is at this writing in the planning stages, as well as a collection devoted to Sibilla, a sorceress who is the heiress to Cagliostro's secrets.

Finally, also spearheaded by d'Huissier, this time teaming up with Laurent Duvernay, was a critically acclaimed, award-winning role-playing game simply titled *Hexagon Universe*, which was developed by French publisher les XII Singes, released in late 2013.

Its encyclopedia-like publications have greatly expanded the scope and popularity of the universe, motivating a generation of the new readers to explore it further. So far, this role-playing game is already on its fifth volume, with three more in the planning stages.

The history of the Hexagon Universe, which celebrates its 62nd anniversary this year—many like to date it to *Zembla* #1, which was published in July 1963!—is a wonderful illustration that old heroes need neither die nor fade away. In the same fashion that American icons have been kept fresh through generations of talented artists and writers, despite its periods of involuntary "hibernation," the Hexagon characters have returned again and again—and will likely continue to do in the future!

Discover more about writer/editor JEAN-MARC LOFFICIER at www.lofficier.com.

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