

Tom Corbett, Space Cadet

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Tom Corbett is the main character in a series of *Tom Corbett — Space Cadet* stories that were depicted in television, radio, books, comic books, comic strips, coloring books, punch-out books and View-Master reels in the 1950s.

The



stories followed the adventures of Tom Corbett, Astro, and Roger Manning, cadets at the *Space Academy* as they train to become members of the elite *Solar Guard*. The action takes place at the Academy in classrooms and bunkroom, aboard their training ship the rocket cruiser *Polaris*, and on alien worlds, both within our solar system and in orbit around nearby stars.

The Tom Corbett universe partook of pseudo-science, not equal to the standards of accuracy set by John W. Campbell in the pages of *Astounding*. And yet, by the standards of the day, it was much more accurate than most media science fiction. Mars was a desert, Venus a jungle, and the asteroids a haunt of space pirates, but at least planets circled suns and there was no air in space. Contrast this with *Twilight Zone*, years later, where people could live on asteroids wearing ordinary clothes, or *Lost in Space*, years after that, where a spaceship could be passing "Jupiter and Andromeda" at the same time. Before *Star Trek*, *Tom Corbett — Space Cadet* was the most scientifically accurate series on television, in part due to official science advisor Willy Ley, and later due to Frankie Thomas. Thomas read up on science and everyone on the set turned to him for advice on matters scientific.

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Sources

Joseph Lawrence Greene of Grosset & Dunlap developed *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*, inspired by the Robert A. Heinlein novel *Space Cadet* (1948) but based also on his own prior work: Greene had originally submitted a radio script for "Tom Ranger" and the "Space Cadets" on January 16, 1946, but it remained unperformed when Heinlein's novel was published. Greene then reworked his radio script into a script for a daily newspaper adventure strip, which was never

produced.

Television

October 2, 1950 - June 25, 1955 Live action serial. The stories initially closely followed the scripts written for an unpublished newspaper comic strip, *Tom Ranger, Space Cadet*, by Joseph Greene from 1949. TV is the medium where *Tom Corbett* first appeared. The series was aired, in different years, on all 4 major television networks (on CBS from October to December, 1950; on ABC from January, 1951 to September, 1952; on NBC from July to September, 1951; on DuMont from August, 1953 to May, 1954; and on NBC again from December, 1954 to June, 1955).

Cast

- **Tom Corbett** Frankie Thomas, Jr.
- **Astro** Al Markim
- **Roger Manning** Jan Merlin
- **Captain Steve Strong** Edward Bryce
- **Dr. Joan Dale** Margaret Garland
- **Commander Arkwright** Carter Blake
- **Cadet Alfie Higgins** John Fiedler
- **Cadet Eric Rattison** Frank Sutton
- **Cadet T. J. Thistle** Jack Grimes

- Michael Harvey played **Captain Strong** for the first six episodes of the CBS series; Pat Ferris played **Dr. Dale** for two episodes of the DuMont series
- **Technical Advisor** Willy Ley
- **Writers:** Albert Aley, Stu Byrnes, Frankie Thomas, Jr., Ray Morse, Jack Weinstock, Willy Gilbert, Alfred Bester & others.

Books

1952 - 1956 published by Grosset & Dunlap.
Written under the pseudonym Carey Rockwell,
with Willy Ley as technical advisor.

- *Stand By For Mars* (1952)
- *Danger in Deep Space* (1953)
- *On the Trail of the Space Pirates* (1953)
- *The Space Pioneers* (1953)
- *The Revolt on Venus* (1954)
- *Treachery in Outer Space* (1954)
- *Sabotage in Space* (1955)
- *The Robot Rocket* (1956)

The Tom Corbett series of eight books was very closely based on the 1948 book "Space Cadet" by Robert Heinlein, which is a rare and expensive book in its first edition, though fairly easily and

cheaply obtainable in many later hardback and paperback editions. The eight books in the Tom Corbett series were first published in blank front blue or blue-grey cover editions, with picture cover dust jackets, and later re-issued in picture cover versions without dust jackets. Both of these series are now popular collector items that are actively traded on the Ebay auction site. The prices paid on Ebay range from \$1-\$2 for rougher condition dust jacket versions of books without their dust jackets, up to \$40 or more for fine condition versions of "The Robot Rocket," the scarcest title, in the much scarcer picture cover version. It is an entertaining and not overly difficult or expensive undertaking to collect a complete set of the dust jacket version editions in nice condition, complete with their dust jackets, although it is quite difficult to obtain the dust jackets in anything close to their original untorn condition. It is somewhat more difficult though not impossible to assemble a complete set of the picture cover editions in nice condition. Another popular and relatively inexpensive Tom Corbett book that is quite popular with collectors is the 1953 short childrens' book "A Trip to the Moon" published by Wonder Books, which can be commonly obtained through Ebay for \$5 or less in decent condition. There are other Tom Corbett

books available that are in some cases quite rare, especially those containing undetached punch-out action figures, and selling for \$250 or more on Ebay, and numerous rings, lunch boxes, game sets, early radio show tapes and other Tom Corbett memorabilia traded among collectors. There is a fairly informative Tom Corbett web site available, but it presents little information of interest to serious book or memorabilia collectors. There does not appear to be any detailed and definitive analysis available of book editions, numbers of copies printed, existing book or dust jacket variations, etc. such as exists, for example, for the several series of Oz books (the "Bibliographia Oziana"). Hopefully some advanced Tom Corbett book and memorabilia collector will publish such a work.

Comic strip

The *Tom Corbett — Space Cadet* comic strip, drawn in Milton Caniff style by Ray Bailey, ran Sunday and daily in American newspapers, from 9 September 1951 to 6 September 1953. Paul S. Newman scripted through 8 February 1953.

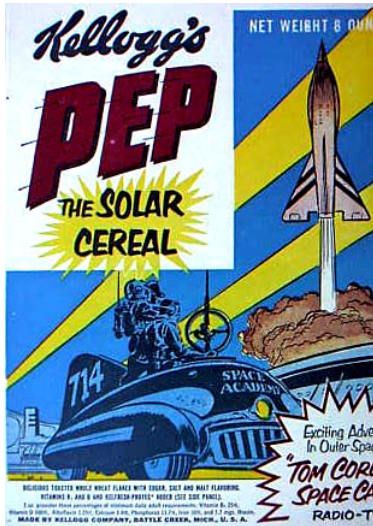
Comic books

The original Tom Corbett series was published by Dell Comics beginning in their *4-Color* series. The *4-Color* series was used to try out new story lines on the public to obtain feedback. If successful the series would be spun off to form its own title. Tom Corbett won his own title after three tryout issues. As the popularity of the television series waned, Dell stopped producing the comic book and the series was then taken up and produced by Prize Comics. There were a small number of Tom Corbett comic books in Manga style published in the 1990s, but these are universally rejected as non-canonical by Tom Corbett fans.

Dell comics

February 1952 - November 1954

- *Titan Sabotage* Dell 4-Color #378
- *Space Pirates* Dell 4-Color #400
- *Colonist of Space Colony Io* Dell 4-Color #421
- *Lost Race of Asorians* Tom Corbett #4
- *The Smugglers of the Moon* Tom Corbett #5
- *Blue Men of Tara* Tom Corbett #6
- *The Space Traitor* Tom Corbett #7
- *Spaceship Graveyard* Tom Corbett #8



The World of Deep Waters Tom Corbett #9

- *Asteroid Treasure Hunt Tom Corbett #10*
- *Slavers of Space March of Comics #102*

Prize comics

May,1955 - October,1955

- Prize TC Vol.2 #1
 - *The Spaceship of Doom*
 - *Octopus Tree*
 - *The Spaceways of Peril*
- Prize TC Vol.2 #2
 - *The Outlaws of Uranus*
 - *The Invaders*
 - *Wolf Planet*
- Prize TC Vol.2,#3
 - *Dangerous Cargo*
 - *The Drifter*
 - *The Craters of Mercury*

Radio

January 1, 1952 - June 26, 1952

The cast for the radio program was the same as for

the television series. Initially the show ran in 15 minute segments three times a week and then was changed to a half hour show twice a week.

Other media

There was a **Tom Corbett — Space Cadet** View-Master packet containing three reels. Its three-dimensional photographs were brilliantly colored but were taken of sculptures of the characters and models of the spacecraft and props. The story was of finding on the moon a miniature pyramid made by unknown aliens, which led to a clue on Mars, and finally to fighting interplanetary crooks in the asteroid belt.

There were also several coloring books, a punch-out book, a costume for kids, a lunch box, a Space Academy playset with plastic figures, furniture and vehicles, made by Marx toys, a Little Golden Book, and a Little Golden Record of the Space Academy song ("From the rocket fields of the academy/ to the far flung stars of outer space,/ we are space cadets training to be/ ready for dangers we may face.") There were two other records presenting *Space Cadet* adventures starring the original TV/radio cast: "Tom Corbett Space Cadet

at Space Academy," and "Rescue in Space: Tom Corbett, Space Cadet."

On the back of boxes of Kellogg's Pep cereal were cardboard cutouts of a space cadet cap, gauntlets and a ray gun, and the company made a direct tie-in with the product Kellogg's Pep: The Solar Cereal.

See also

- *Space Cadet*, 1948 novel by Robert A. Heinlein

External links and references

- The Solar Guard Website
- Roaring Rockets: Tom Corbett, Space Cadet
- Space Hero Files: Tom Corbett, Space Cadet
- Tom Corbett, Space Cadet ABC Radio Series
- Listen to episodes of the Tom Corbett, Space Cadet radio program
- Frankie Thomas Tribute at The Thunder Child web magazine
- "The Original Space Cadet," by Frank Kuznik, *Air and Space*, April-May 1995
- Details and Cover Gallery of the Dell Tom

Corbet series

- Illustrations from the 1950s book series
- The Solar Guard (information about the books)
- Works by Carey Rockwell at Project Gutenberg
- *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* at the Internet Movie Database

Space [hide]
Opera Serials 1930-1960

TV Series

Atom Squad | *Buck Rogers* | *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* | *Captain Z-Ro* | *Flash Gordon*

Rocky Jones, Space Ranger | *Rod Brown of the Rocket Rangers* | *Space Patrol* | ***Tom Corbett, Space Cadet***

Movie Serials

Buck Rogers: *Buck Rogers*

Flash Gordon: *Flash Gordon* | *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* | *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe*

Commando Cody: Radar Men from the Moon | *Zombies of the Stratosphere* | *Commando Cody: Sky Marshal of the Universe*

The Purple Monster Strikes | *Brick Bradford* | *King of the Rocket Men* | *Flying Disc Man from Mars*

Captain Video: Master of the Stratosphere | *The Lost Planet*

Radio Serials

Buck Rogers in the 25th Century | *The Amazing Interplanetary Adventures of Flash Gordon*

The Further Interplanetary Adventures of Flash Gordon | *Space Patrol* | **Tom Corbett, Space Cadet**

Related Topics

Space Opera | Planetary Romance

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books | Solar System in fiction | Fictional captains |
1950 television program debuts | CBS network
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shows

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