



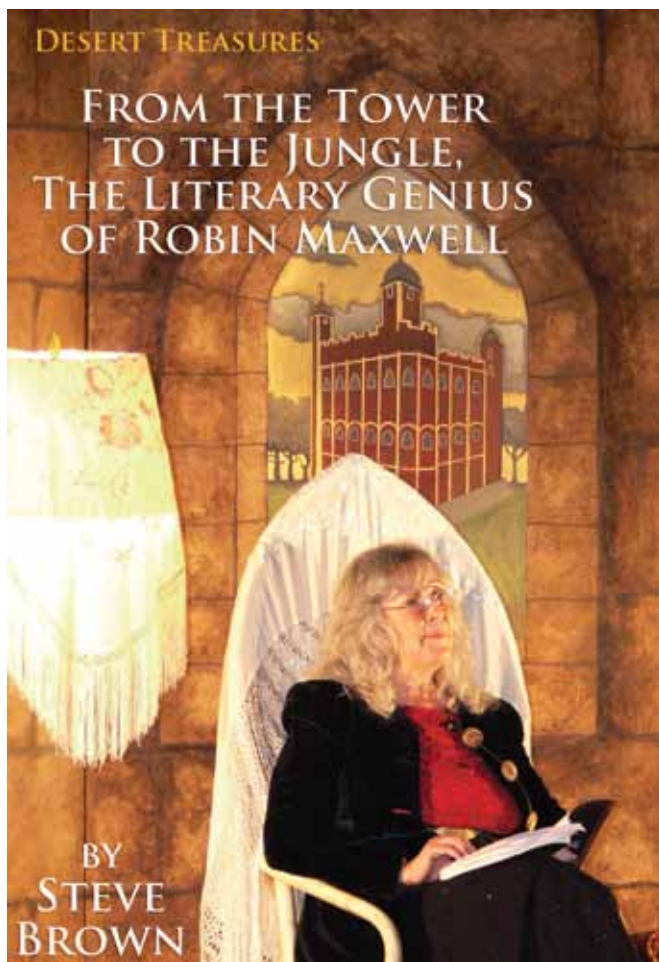
# The Sun Runner

THE MAGAZINE OF THE REAL CALIFORNIA DESERT, FEBRUARY 2012

## THE DESERT TREASURES ISSUE



Scott Jagger



In history, the formal written version put down for posterity, that is, women are often ignored, stuffed somewhere in a footnote, marginalized and reduced to the occasional two-dimensional characterization. Men, preferably white (at least in European and American history), strut about, doing the “important” stuff, and women while away their days having babies and holding down the home front while the men take off for this conquest or that war—doing all the big things that go into the history books, usually written by men.

How odd, how arrogant, to think the sex which comprises more than half the world’s population, should be reduced to such triviality, such meaninglessness. How interesting, and sexually biased, to believe it to be so.

Shut out of the history books and frequently relegated to anonymity, women have been silenced from the story of world events for far too long.

Enter one non-assuming woman from up around Pipes Canyon and Pioneertown.

If women rarely make it into the history books as prominently as their male counterparts do, then believe me, they’ll find another way to ensure you don’t forget that they were there, and they did indeed have a role in shaping the events of the day. And that’s where author Robin Maxwell comes in.

Robin grew up in New Jersey, going to school in Plainfield, and graduating from Tufts University School of Occupational Therapy. But it was only a few years before she came west to Hollywood, where she worked as a parrot tamer, casting director, and screenwriter. She wrote comedy, drama, and feature animation for Disney and others—accomplishments which helped create a foundation for her next move—into the lives

of women in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Some may meet Robin and find her to be an intelligent, pleasant, disciplined writer. I see someone who has done the work of a true historian and author—someone who has traveled through her research and her passion, back through the centuries, to connect with women from another time and place and bring them back to life, not as two dimensional caricatures, but vibrantly real people, with all the ambitions, dreams, strengths, and even faults, of those alive today.

Some may meet Robin and find her to be rather unassuming, someone you could possibly overlook. But if there’s one lesson, for men especially, to be found in Robin’s work, it is this: Never, ever, underestimate the power of a woman.

Her female characters found in her historical novels, well known or not, are strong women. Their stories are often of determination and discovery—of themselves, their sexuality, and their place in history. Robin’s male characters are no less driven and true to form, but her passion is telling the story of women, some well known, like Elizabeth I, and others lost to history and only found in a stray sentence, such as Caterina, mother of Leonardo da Vinci, in her book, *Signora da Vinci*.

Robin does extensive historical research for her works of fiction, providing a solid base for her characters to become real. Her groundwork is real historical facts, events, and relationships, but where the history books leave off and no contemporary records exist, that’s where she really gets going. As with all great historical fiction that personalizes the very real people who find themselves part of history, she has to get inside their heads, their motivations, their personal ambitions, fears, and interests that drive their actions. Sometimes, all history sees are the actions. But what leads to them can be far more complex and interesting than anyone could ever guess.

Just like her determined female characters, Robin is disciplined, and driven to make her mark. And just like the great women of history, known or unknown, she doesn’t let much of anything stop her or slow her down. She lives with her husband Max Thomas, a yogi, Renaissance man, and a desert treasure himself, in the beautiful natural setting of the hi-desert.

Robin and Max have endured fire (and almost lost everything—including their lives—in the 2006 Sawtooth fire), deep personal loss and grief, and Robin’s latest challenge to her literal ability to work: blepharospasm. This medical condition is an uncontrolled muscle contraction of the eyelid. It leads to periods when her eyes forcibly close, and can end in functional blindness.

“When I think of all the information in my head, no wonder my brain is fritzing out,” Robin says of her condition.

For someone who spends 12 hours or more at her computer working seven days a week, this presents a significant challenge to Robin as an author. Max, however, has worked with Robin to help find ways to work around the condition (these two are a dynamic creative team). This collaboration has been especially important with Robin’s latest project, a book that ventures out of history and into a full century of, well, jungle love.

Robin’s ventured into the literal literary world before, and to prove she’s no pushover, when she did, she walked right into the head and heart of Juliet Capelletti, territory formerly thought to belong to one man, and one man only: William Shakespeare. In *O, Juliet*, Robin enters the world of Romeo and Juliet, a dangerous place to wander about as a writer. And she pulls it off, fleshing out Shakespeare’s young lovers and the forces they come up against.

Now, Robin is embarking on a new adventure, and is bringing a woman who has, up until now, been a supporting character into her own. The year is 1912, and Jane Porter is lecturing at

the Chicago Library. She's there to present her findings on a "missing link" species she's discovered, and she's booted out of the hall. One man, a certain Edgar Rice Burroughs, is in the audience, and he's not so dismissive of Jane's work.

Every now and then, you encounter a situation where you just know that something a writer, artist, musician, or other creative soul has pulled off something brilliant. In the structuring of Robin's new book, *JANE, The Woman Who Loved Tarzan*, I encountered an example of that brilliance.

The first time Tarzan made his appearance in print was a century ago, in 1912. Burroughs had given up on trying to peddle pencil sharpeners and had taken to writing after decades of unfulfilling, and unsuccessful, work in the real world. Tarzan, however, became a success. Now, in *JANE*, Robin has gone back a century to introduce the historical author of Tarzan to the fictional mate of his popular character, which, of course, helps get Burroughs working on the story that eventually leads Jane to the Chicago Library where he meets her, in a literary-historical loop through time, as well as fact and fiction.

Brilliant. It's always encouraging to see a fictional character just go confidently marching into reality. I haven't seen any character make reality their own literary device since Kurt Vonnegut's character, Kilgore Trout, wrote his own book.

And, as you may have guessed by now, Jane, is no two dimensional supporting role in Robin's tale.

"Tarzan is under the impression that he's a less-than-perfect Mangani (the missing link species who have raised Tarzan)," Robin explains. "Jane helps him remember who he is."

And Robin helps Jane know what she's talking about. Robin has put her historical fiction skills to work for Tarzan's world and she's done extensive research on everything from missing links in human evolution to feral children. So when Burroughs meets Jane, he's in for one wild story.

"Edgar Rice Burroughs is in the audience and he's so fascinated he goes up to her afterward," Robin describes the meeting between author and character. "She goes home with him and she's got her two cases with bones to show him. And she says, 'I've got a story for you.' It starts with her waking up after an attack by a leopard in Tarzan's nest."

So, how did Jane, who met Burroughs and introduced him to Tarzan, meet Robin so it all could happen?

"We came up with the idea driving down Route 62," Robin explains. "Max asked what the next book was going to be. I said I'd really like to do another love story, and that I like using a character from literature."

You can just see Robin and Max asking out loud, "Well, what's another couple from literature? Tarzan and Jane!

"I had to research the book," she notes. "I found it incredibly good storytelling, but dated, and some of it hard to believe. I've made my career writing about strong women. I wanted there to be a good reason for Jane to be in Africa, and I wanted her to be strong and intelligent."

And so Jane attends Cambridge (but can't graduate, being a woman of her times). But Robin had one present day hurdle to clear before the story *JANE* could become a reality: Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. Burroughs had formed his own corporation to oversee his work back in 1923, and the company continues to look after Burroughs works 100 years after Tarzan was introduced to the world.

"I knew someone who had a friend who had done business with ERB, Inc. for 10 years," Robin explains. "I knew you did not mess with the ERB people. That had to be the first step. I called and pitched it to the ERB president."

The pitch worked. *JANE* was on its way to making history. "The coolest thing is that ERB granted me literary conceit,"

Robin says. "The way ERB heard about Tarzan first is from Jane, in my book."

James Sullos, Jr., president of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc., is just as enthusiastic about Robin's *JANE* as she is about getting to tell the tale. Though some members of Burroughs' family didn't want new Tarzan books to be written, ERB, Inc. has expanded their perspective, and when Robin approached Sullos about *JANE*, he was "very interested" in the project.

"She has a history of writing about strong women and how they survive," Sullos, a part-time resident of Indian Wells, explains. "I think she's come up with a masterpiece. I call it a masterpiece and a classic. It's both."

Oh, and Sullos is quite pleased the ending to *JANE* seems to leave it open for a possible sequel.

"She's done a lot of research and touches on a lot of things," Sullos continues. "She's bringing in the missing link and does a very good job of piecing that together."

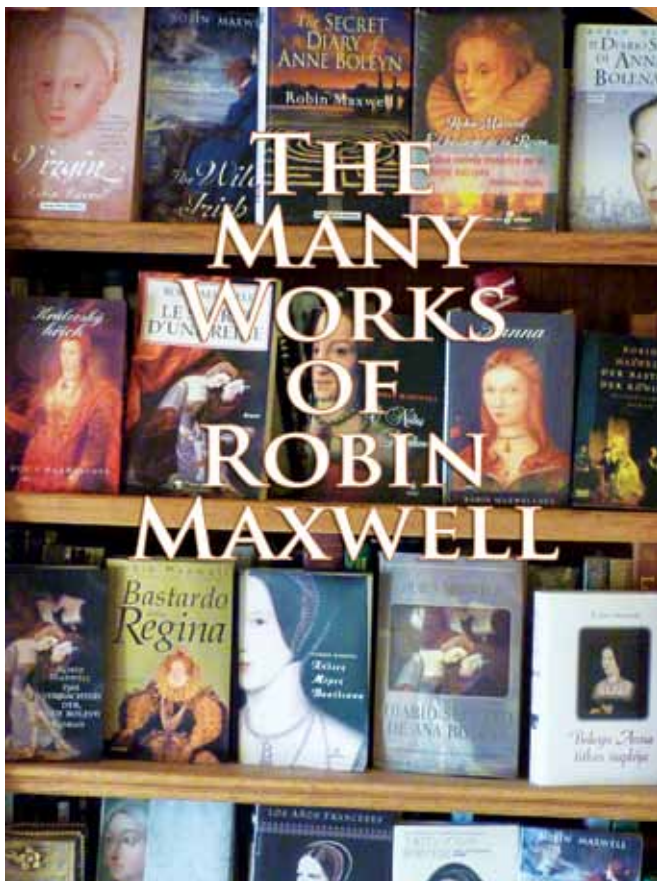
And so Tarzan—and Jane—continue their love for each other into a new century. But there's another love story here, and it's every bit as remarkable and timeless.

"I started talking about the problem with my eyes that I developed in the middle of trying to write *JANE, The Woman Who Loved Tarzan* (when I couldn't even read my research books)," Robin explains. Max became my eyes. This is how we worked every day: He would read aloud to me the parts I had underlined in my research books and computer print-outs. I would sit with my laptop and with eyes closed or staring out the window at the Sawtooths and would copy the notes in 24 point font, then print them up... during the process, something changed in Max's and my relationship. He'd always been the first (and most trusted) reader of everything I'd written... he became my story partner on *JANE*.

"I've given Max the last and biggest acknowledgements in every one of my novels, but there aren't words to describe what my level of gratitude is for him on *JANE*. I literally could not have done it without him. And there's no doubt that after 30 years together, the experience made us closer than we ever were. If the book is a success, we will share it in a way we've never done before."

You know, this has all the elements of an epic story about a strong woman determined to make her mark on the world. There's passion, drama, romance, tragedy, discipline, challenges, and perhaps most importantly, love.





colony of Ireland erupts in rebellion. Grace O'Malley, a gunrunner, pirate, and "Mother of the Irish Rebellion," is at the heart of the troubles. Maxwell takes you along as O'Malley sails up the Thames River to London for a risky meeting with Elizabeth in this tale of the her Irish war.

*"Through the eyes of these intelligent and courageous women, the dramatic and violent events of the Irish conflict come stunningly alive."* – *The Irish World*, ( London )

#### 2005: To the Tower Born

The disappearance of the young York princes, Edward and Richard, from the Tower of London in 1483 has stirred debate among historians and worked its way into Shakespeare. Maxwell offers a controversial perspective on the disappearance in a dangerous world of political intrigue.

*"Robin Maxwell's writing entertains and opens new and tantalizing avenues of thought on the princes' disappearance."* – *Ricardian Register*

#### 2007: Mademoiselle Boleyn

When Anne Boleyn is sent to the French court she is introduced to a world of political maneuvering and her own sexual awakening. Strong willed, clever, and with the guidance of powerful allies and friends, including Leonardo da Vinci, she learns to navigate the world of the court, on the path that takes her to Henry VIII.

*"Historically plausible account of Anne Boleyn's adolescence in France as a courtier of King Francois. Maxwell's prequel to her first novel (The Secret Diary of Anne Boleyn, 1997) explores Anne's upbringing far from England. Lavishly imagined detail-regarding entertainment, dress and habits of the time-adds depth to this work. accomplished rehabilitation of much-maligned Anne as an empowered woman."* – *Kirkus Reviews*

#### 2009: Signora Da Vinci

In 1452 a very young boy is separated from his unmarried mother whom the world never will get to know. Maxwell tells the tale of the his mother, Caterina, and the world of the ultimate Renaissance man, Leonardo da Vinci, through the eyes, and heart, of this courageous woman.

*"Here is a superbly imagined portrait of a woman living in turbulent times who boldly behaved as few dared. Caterina da Vinci moved in a world that included the glittering Medici and the villainous Savonarola, all of whom are well-limned in this sparkling epic. Set in the sunshine of 15th century Tuscany, the novel continually delights with intriguing details, from the bottega workshops of the great Italian masters to the minutiae of an alchemist's laboratory."*

– Vicki Leon, *Uppity Women of the Renaissance, Working IX to V*

#### 2010: O Juliet

Treading on dangerous literary grounds where few dare to go, Maxwell spins the tale of Juliet Capelletti and her love, Romeo Monticocco. Move over Shakespeare - Maxwell's telling the rest of the story.

*"Not many writers would dare to compete with William Shakespeare. But Robin Maxwell pulls it off. Her star-crossed young lovers are just as unforgettable as the Bard's, and now readers get to see what happens off-stage."*

– Sharon Kay Penman, *New York Times* bestselling author

#### September, 2012: JANE, The Woman Who Loved Tarzan

You can also read Robin's posts about contemporary women in her *Huffington Post* blog, and visit [www.RobinMaxwell.com](http://www.RobinMaxwell.com) for more information on her books.

#### 1997: The Secret Diary of Anne Boleyn

Now in its 22nd printing internationally, Maxwell connects Anne Boleyn, queen for a thousand days, with her daughter she never got to know, Elizabeth I, through a secret diary. At the start of Elizabeth's reign as queen—a reign that would last for more than 40 years—this diary is given to her. By reading it, the new queen discovers the mother, queen, and wife of Henry VIII she never knew—a strong, courageous woman—and her discovery changes the course of history.

*"A wonderfully juicy historical novel so convincing that it's difficult to believe it is the author's first...Maxwell brings all of bloody Tudor England vividly to life."* – *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

#### 1999: The Queen's Bastard

Did "the Virgin Queen," Elizabeth have a son with Robin Dudley, Earl of Leicester? Amongst the intrigues and tumult of court life, and England's battle against the Spanish Armada, Maxwell brings this royal bastard son to life.

*"Breathes extraordinary life into the scandals, political intrigue and gut-wrenching battles that typified Queen Elizabeth's reign...Electrifying prose...enthralling historical fiction."*

– *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

#### 2001: Virgin, Prelude to the Throne

A Los Angeles Times bestseller, *Virgin* takes the reader into the world of Elizabeth I in the years before she becomes queen. Banished from Henry VIII's court at age two, Elizabeth finds an unlikely ally in Henry's sixth wife, Catherine Parr. But when Henry dies, and Edward is crowned King of England at age 10, her future is, once again, unpredictable.

"Tense, absorbing, highly entertaining." – *Library Journal*

#### 2003: The Wild Irish

A tale of two strong, determined women who meet in history. After Elizabeth I has beaten the Spanish Armada, the English