Volume 1,
Number 173
February 2027

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Roger Ash

PUBLISHER
John Morrow

DESIGNER
Rich Fowlks

EDITOR EMERITUS
Michael Eury

COVER ARTIST
Ron Wilson and Frank Giacoia (Originally published as the cover to *Defenders* #28. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions.)

COVER DESIGNER
Michael Kronenberg

PROOFREADER
Kevin Sharp

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BACK ISSUE™ issue 173, February 2027 (ISSN 1932-6904) is published monthly (except Jan., March, May, and Nov.) by TwoMorrows Publishing, 10407 Bedfordtown Drive, Raleigh, NC 27614, USA. Phone: (919) 449-0344. Periodicals postage paid at Raleigh, NC. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Back Issue*, c/o TwoMorrows, 10407 Bedfordtown Drive, Raleigh, NC 27614.**

Michael Eury, Editor Emeritus. Roger Ash, Editor-In-Chief. John Morrow, Publisher. Editorial Office: *BACK ISSUE*, c/o Roger Ash, Editor, 2715 Birchwood Pass, Apt. 7, Cross Plains, WI 53528. Email: rogerash@hotmail.com. Eight-issue subscriptions: $97 Economy US, $147 International, $39 Digital. ***Please send subscription orders and funds to TwoMorrows, NOT to the editorial office.*** Cover artwork by Ron Wilson and Frank Giacoia. TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. All Rights Reserved. All editorial matter © TwoMorrows and Roger Ash, except Prince Street News © Karl Heitmueller Jr. Printed in China. FIRST PRINTING



BACK seat driver

by Roger Ash

I was 12 years old when *Star Wars* was released in the spring of 1977. And it was *Star Wars*. Not *Episode IV: A New Hope*, but *Star Wars*. That's what it's always been to me. And it blew my mind. I had never seen anything quite like it before, but I loved it. I wasn't the only one as *Star Wars* mania gripped the country. I've never seen another movie that created the kind of impact on our society that *Star Wars* did. Marvel published a six issue adaptation of the film which I completely missed. However, I wasn't without it for long as I read it in two treasury sized reprints. With 2027 being the 50th Anniversary of the release of *Star Wars*, it only makes sense that we revisit the original Marvel series, which ran for 107 issues.

Star Wars was also my first major dalliance with science fiction which, naturally, carried over into comics. Being a fan of space opera more than hard science fiction, I was drawn to comics like Stan Lee and John Buscema's *Silver Surer* and Jim Starlin's take on Adam Warlock. I was introduced to both of those stories through the *Fantasy Masterpieces* reprint comic.

Stories of science fiction and space travel have long been a part of comics. EC's *Weird Science* is a classic example and heroes like Superman, Green Lantern, and Adam Strange have science fiction in their DNA. In an issue featuring *Star Wars*, it makes perfect sense to look at some of the other science fiction stories and characters that populate comics.

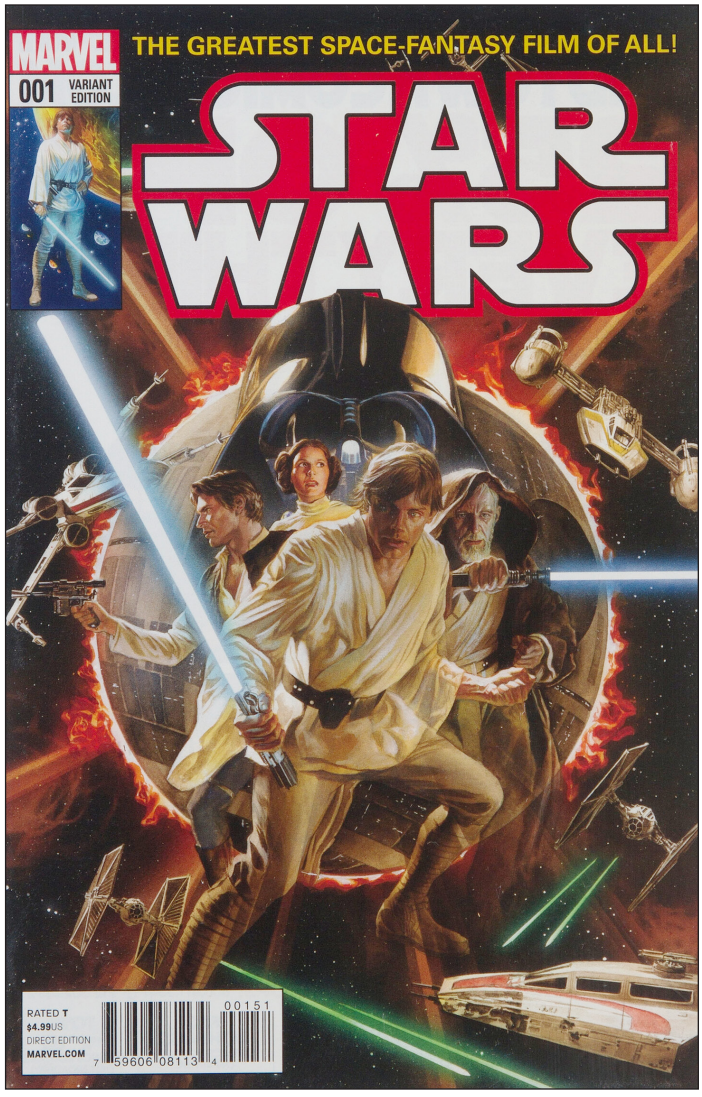
Going back prior to *Star Wars*, we look at Gold Key's *Space Family Robinson*. If the story of a family that becomes lost in space sounds familiar, you're not wrong. This engaging article not only takes a look at the comic, but its history, including its connection to a classic TV series.

Another classic science fiction film was also released in 1977 and received a comic adaptation as well. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was adapted by the powerhouse creative team of Archie Goodwin and Walter Simonson. While not as famous as their *Alien* adaptation, it's a solid story. The creation of the book itself has as many twists and turns as the movie.

Some of the classic DC space heroes are resurrected and given a twist in *Twilight*, a miniseries written by Howard Chaykin with gorgeous art from Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez. You may not have heard of "The Ballad of Halo Jones" or *Dalgoda*, but they are wonderful stories that deserve your attention. "Halo Jones" is by the creative team of Alan Moore and Ian Gibson and features a young, impoverished woman who makes her way into space and has quite an adventure. Dalgoda is an alien who looks like a humanoid dog who arrives on earth to warn us of the approach of a hostile alien species. Things don't go quite as he had planned. This entertaining story comes from the talented creators Jan Strnad and Dennis Fujitake. Karl Heitmueller Jr. takes us to Mars in "Prince Street News."

Does this mean we've skipped over your favorite heroes and villains? Perish the thought! One of the vilest villains in the galaxy is profiled in our look at Jack Kirby's Desaad. The enigmatic member of Guardians of the Galaxy, Starhawk, is thrust into the spotlight. And does a villain who flies in a dirigible count as science fiction? Either way, that won't stop us from taking Colonel Blimp "BACK to the Drawing Board."

What are you still reading this for? Adventure awaits!



Alex Ross' variant cover to Marvel's 2015 *Star Wars* #1 was a tribute to Howard Chaykin and Tom Palmer's 1977 cover, seen on the oppsoite page.

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Backstage PASS!

STAR WARS AT MARVEL: ROUND ONE

FIFTY YEARS AGO, LUKE SKYWALKER SAVED A GALAXY, AND A COMIC COMPANY

by Glenn Greenberg



Marvel's *Star Wars* begins. Cover by Howard Chaykin and Tom Palmer.

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ROY THOMAS

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.

"The green rabbit."

Ask *Star Wars* fans of a certain age what they remember most about the original series of comics published by Marvel from 1977 to 1986—a total of 107 issues, plus three Annuals—and chances are, that's the answer you'll get.

After all, Jaxxon, the green, human-sized, wisecracking rabbit (or *lepus carnivorus*, as he described himself) introduced in *Star Wars* #8 (Feb. 1978) by writer/editor Roy Thomas, penciler/co-plotter Howard Chaykin, and embellisher Tom Palmer, gained almost instant notoriety—some would say infamy. Many fans at the time ridiculed him as silly and out of place in the still-nascent *Star Wars* universe. And reportedly, *Star Wars* creator George Lucas himself disliked the character so much that he requested Jaxxon be removed from the comics as quickly and as permanently as possible.

So, it's understandable that the big green bunny would be a touchstone of a comic book series that has been embraced, rejected, embraced again, rejected again, and then quasi-embraced over the 50 years since *Star Wars*—both the movie *and* the comic—first appeared.

But there's much more to remember—and appreciate, and even love—about Marvel's first effort to continue the *Star Wars* saga in comic book form.

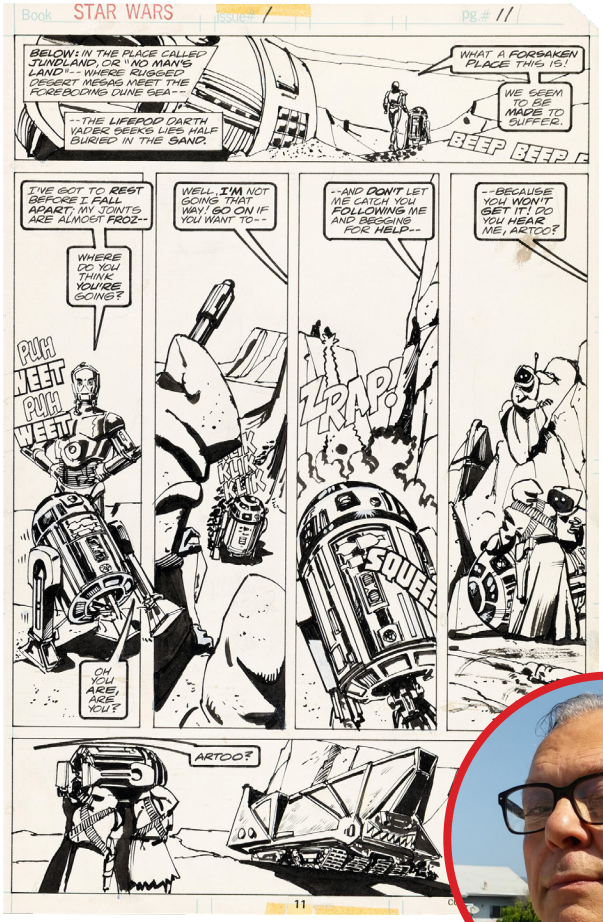
FEELING THE FORCE

It should be noted that comic book readers were exposed to Lucas's space fantasy before moviegoers were. Marvel's six-issue adaptation of *Star Wars*—retroactively titled *Episode IV: A New Hope*—began two months ahead of the May 25, 1977 premiere of the film. This, according to Roy Thomas, was all part of a plan by Lucas to give the movie as much promotion as possible.

"Lucas and Twentieth Century Fox just wanted (the comic) out there to reach another few hundred thousand readers two to three months before the movie came out," Thomas told *Back Issue* in 2005. "They were just trying to drum up a little enthusiasm for the movie because, contrary to popular belief, there was not much advance advertising for *Star Wars*."

Of particular interest in the comic adaptation are the "lost scenes" that were filmed but ended up on the cutting room floor. These include early moments with Luke Skywalker on Tatooine, witnessing the space battle seen at the beginning of the movie and then rushing to tell his friends about it. There were also scenes featuring Luke and his best friend from home, Biggs Darklighter, one of which was restored to the film beginning with the 1997 Special Edition.

Most famously, there was the encounter between Han Solo and Jabba the Hutt—originally spelled "Hut"—that was also inserted into the 1997 Special Edition (and has been revised several times since). While making the film in 1976, Lucas had not yet come up with the final design for Jabba, so Chaykin and embellisher Steve Leialoha drew him as a human-sized, two-legged alien with yellowish skin, beady eyes, and hanging jowls framed by long whiskers. This design was based on a background character in the movie that can be seen in the Mos Eisley cantina and at the spaceport, and no one at Lucasfilm objected. (This version of Jabba would show up two more times in the Marvel series before finally being rendered apocryphal by *Return of the Jedi*.)







HOWARD CHAYKIN

HowardChaykinArt.com.

Chaykin had been specifically requested for the adaptation by Lucas and Charles Lippincott, the Lucasfilm Ltd. executive who had put together the publishing deal with Marvel. Both had been impressed with Chaykin's artwork on projects like *Cody Starbuck* and *Dominic Fortune* and wanted that style for the *Star Wars* comic. While Chaykin inked the first issue himself, his other freelance commitments led to the subsequent issues being inked by Leialoha, Rick Hoberg, and Bill Wray. As a result, the adaptation lacked a consistent look from beginning to end, with an especially jarring shift from all-Chaykin in issue #1 (Jul. 1977) to the Chaykin/Leialoha combination in #2 (Aug. 1977).

"The best-looking issue to me was the one that Chaykin did [on his own], because that was the way the whole thing was supposed to look," Thomas said.

Lucas and Lippincott were peeved that Chaykin, despite his earlier assurances to them that he was fully committed to the project, did not produce all the artwork himself. "I was really pissed at Howie for flaking out . . . still am," Lippincott wrote on Facebook in 2015. "I'm looking at it as the guy who made the deal. … I'm looking at it as the guy who expected a *Dominic Fortune* and got something far less than that."

Chaykin has since acknowledged that his work on *Star Wars* does not rank among his best. "Had I known how much of a phenomenon [*Star Wars*] was going to become, how much it was actually going to look like the Ralph McQuarrie [production] paintings I had seen, I might have done a better job," he told *Back Issue* in 2005. "I'm not a science-fiction person—I mostly read crime fiction for entertainment. I was ten years too old [to be caught up in the *Star Wars* phenomenon]. I was 25 or 26 at the time. I liked it, saw it once, never saw it again."

Nevertheless, Chaykin would find himself—perhaps to his chagrin—forever linked with *Star Wars*, because the Marvel adaptation, like the movie, was a smash hit.

STELLAR SALES

Marvel's adaptation of *Star Wars* sold well over a million copies and was reprinted numerous times, in various formats—regular-sized comics, treasury editions, and even a black-and-white mass market paperback. This was a vindication of sorts for Thomas, who was the one to convince Marvel's then-publisher, a somewhat skeptical Stan Lee, to produce the comic in the first place. But the adaptation was more than just a bestseller—today it is accepted that acquiring the license saved Marvel from oblivion. The 1970s had not been a good time for the comic book industry as a whole, and the success of *Star Wars*—both the movie and the comic—helped Marvel immensely.

"We reprinted the adaptation in every possible format. They all sold and sold and sold," former Marvel Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter wrote in a 2011 article entitled "Roy Thomas Saved Marvel," on his blog at *jimshooter.com*. Shooter, who was serving as Marvel's associate editor at the time and watched it happen first-hand, continued, "In the most conservative terms, it is inarguable that the success of the *Star Wars* comics was a significant factor in Marvel's survival through a couple of very difficult years, 1977 and 1978."

Shooter's assertion was supported by Charles Lippincott, who stated on Facebook in 2015 that "[Marvel] didn't help build the market for *Star Wars*. It was the other way around. *Star Wars* saved Marvel."

In a 2011 interview with the website *io9.com*, Roy Thomas said, "I didn't know Marvel was in such financial problems at the time because I wasn't paying attention to sales after stepping down as Editor-in-Chief two or three years prior. I really wasn't aware of how things had eroded, but there were the little things, like the creeping up in cover price. The book evidently came out and helped Marvel out at a very important time when things were very iffy for them."

(top) Howard Chaykin solo art from *Star Wars* #1.

(bottom) Chaykin inked by Steve Leialoha in issue #2.

Original art scans courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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(top left) Han meets Jabba in issue #2. Quite a difference from what we're used to. Art by Chaykin and Leialoha. (top right) Jaxxon makes his presence known. Cover by Gil Kane and Tony DeZuniga.

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GOING SOLO

With Marvel allowed to continue the comic series beyond the movie adaptation, and Thomas and Chaykin still interested enough to stay on, it fell to them to create a new storyline—the very first *Star Wars* sequel. Lucas was in the early stages of story development on the second movie, so he placed some limits on where the comic could go.

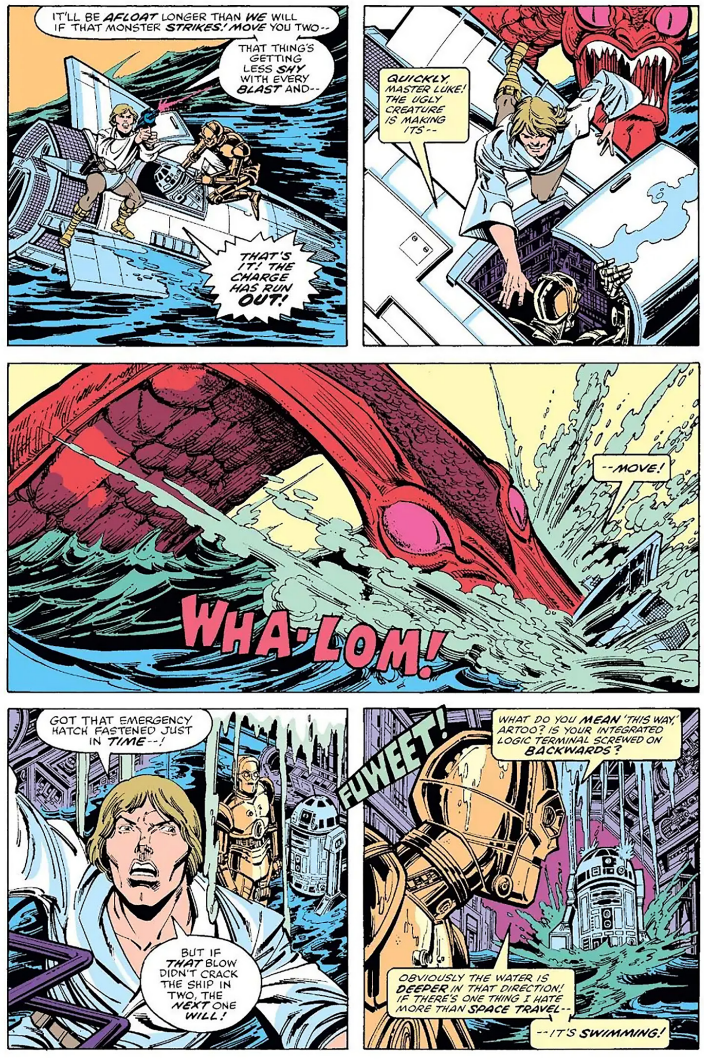
"I was not allowed to advance the romance between Luke and Leia—of course, at the time I had no idea that they were brother and sister," Thomas told *Back Issue* in 2005. "I couldn't do anything with the Clone Wars, I couldn't use Darth Vader, and I wasn't that interested in Luke Skywalker as a character—no offense to Mark Hamill, he played him very well. But it just didn't sound like (Lucasfilm) wanted me to do too much with him."

Thomas's solution was to focus on Han Solo and Chewbacca, in a four-part storyline that began in issue #7 (Jan. 1978) and was patterned after the classic movie, *The Magnificent Seven*. He separated Solo and the Wookiee from the rest of the cast and sent them to a backwater planet where they and several other mercenaries get hired to protect a small farming community from thugs led by one Serji-X Arrogantus, "The Arrogant One" (a playful poke at *MAD Magazine* artist—and future *Groo the Wanderer* creator—Sergio Aragones).

"Han Solo was more of a stand-alone character, the kind of 'Northwest Smith' space opera hero I liked," Thomas said. "He and Chewbacca could easily go off and have adventures by themselves, and Lucasfilm wasn't too worried about it. At that time, they weren't sure that Han Solo was going to be a big part of the second movie—but of course, as it turned out, he was a *very* big part of the second movie! I decided to do a story that was like *The Magnificent Seven* and I would make up some new characters and have some fun."

Which brings us back to Jaxxon, one of the guns for hire who joins Solo and Chewbacca on their mission. It was this green bunny that ultimately sealed Thomas's fate as writer on the series.

"George sort of liked the idea of my *Magnificent Seven* plot," Thomas said. "But then I heard he wasn't that wild about it when it actually came out. He particularly disliked the green rabbit. And I could just see which way this was going. I was now the tail on the dog, and I wasn't too interested in finding out every few issues what I could and couldn't do. … Once I heard that he didn't like the green rabbit, I realized that this was going to be too much of a hassle. I enjoyed doing the first six issues, but after the other four, I just begged off." (Lucas's



Archie Goodwin and Carmine Infantino begin their run in *Star Wars* #11. Art by Infantino and Terry Austin.

TM & © Lucasfilm Ltd.



(top) The bounty hunter Valance is introduced in issue #16. Cover by Walter Simonson. (bottom) Much of the original cast appears on this cover by Infantino and Bob Wiacek. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

TM & © Lucasfilm Ltd.



dislike of Jaxxon is curious, given his own introduction of Jar Jar Binks in the prequel films.)

Thomas's storyline—and his involvement with the series—ended with #10 (Apr. 1978). That issue marked Chaykin's departure, as well. "I ran out of interest," the artist explained in 2005.

The new creative team of writer/editor Archie Goodwin and penciler Carmine Infantino came on with #11 (May 1978) and brought a new direction, a new look, and a new vitality. "I think Archie Goodwin had a much better feel for it than I did," Thomas said. "He was more enthusiastic about it."

AN EMPIRE IN ASCENT

Goodwin started out by wrapping up some dangling plot threads from Thomas's run, including the fate of Luke Skywalker, who had disappeared during a mission to find a new location for the Rebel Alliance's base of operations. It turned out that Luke, C-3PO, and R2-D2 were trapped on a water world, menaced by giant sea serpents and stuck in the middle of a war amongst the planet's ruthless inhabitants. Meanwhile, Han, Chewbacca, and Princess Leia had to contend with the notorious space pirate, Crimson Jack, who in issue #7 had seized the reward money Solo was intending to use to pay back Jabba and get the price off his head.

With #18 (Dec. 1978), which featured a story called "The Empire Strikes!"—well before the title of the second movie was announced—the galactic war was brought to the forefront. The issue kicked off a six-part saga that introduced new concepts like the Wheel (a giant space-station casino), Luke's meditation techniques to become more attuned to the Force (which tied in nicely with the next movie), and Senator Simon Greyshade, who'd served with Leia in the Galactic Senate and harbored an obsessive passion for her. This story arc also included the first appearance of Darth Vader since the movie adaptation. Vader made his dramatic return in #21 (Mar. 1979), determined to learn the name of the young Force-wielding rebel who had destroyed the Death Star.



CARMINE INFANTINO

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.

But the Marvel series did not—could not—rely solely on Vader to serve as a major antagonist. So, in issue #16 (Oct. 1978), Goodwin, guest penciler Walter Simonson, and inker Bob Wiacek introduced a bounty hunter named Valance, a former soldier for the Empire who harbored an intense hatred of droids. Having learned about Luke's role in the destruction of the Death Star, and the fact that the boy treated his droid companions as equals, Valance was compelled to hunt Skywalker down. The bounty hunter is ultimately revealed to be a self-loathing cyborg who hates the mechanical body parts keeping him alive. Valance proved to be a popular character and made several more appearances. In issue #27 (Sep. 1979), he finally came face to face with Luke and C-3PO and found himself so emotionally affected by their friendship and loyalty to one another that he could not bring himself to destroy them. Valance's character arc reached its apex in #29 (Nov. 1979), in which he faced off against Vader to prevent the Sith lord from learning of Skywalker's existence.

In addition, Goodwin introduced the Tagge family, which included cyber-visioned, lightsaber-wielding corporate overlord, Baron Orman Tagge, his brothers, scientist Silas and Imperial general Ulric, and their sister, religious priestess Domina. Orman, who had a personal grudge against Darth Vader, sought to supplant the Sith lord as the Emperor's right-hand man and used his vast resources to help the Empire combat the rebellion.

(top) A beautiful page from *Star Wars* #25. Art by Infantino and Gene Day. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).(bottom left) Valance and Luke meet in issue #27. Art by Infantino and Wiacek. (bottom right) Artist Michael Golden came aboard for the popular issue #38.

TM & © Lucasfilm Ltd.

The series was also allowed to explore the pasts of several main characters and show events that took place before the movie. In issue #17 (Nov. 1978), Goodwin, co-plotter Chris Claremont, and guest artist Herb Trimpe gave readers a larger glimpse into Luke's life on Tatooine with Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru and his friendship with Biggs. In issue #24 (Jun. 1979), fill-in writer Jo Duffy and Infantino told a flashback tale of Obi-Wan Kenobi in the days of the Old Republic. And in stories produced for Marvel UK and not published in the U.S. until years later—initially in the 1982 paperback collection, *Star Wars: Four New Adventures in Full Color*—Goodwin and Infantino depicted the incident that caused Jabba to put the price on Han's head and revealed how Leia became so good with a blaster.

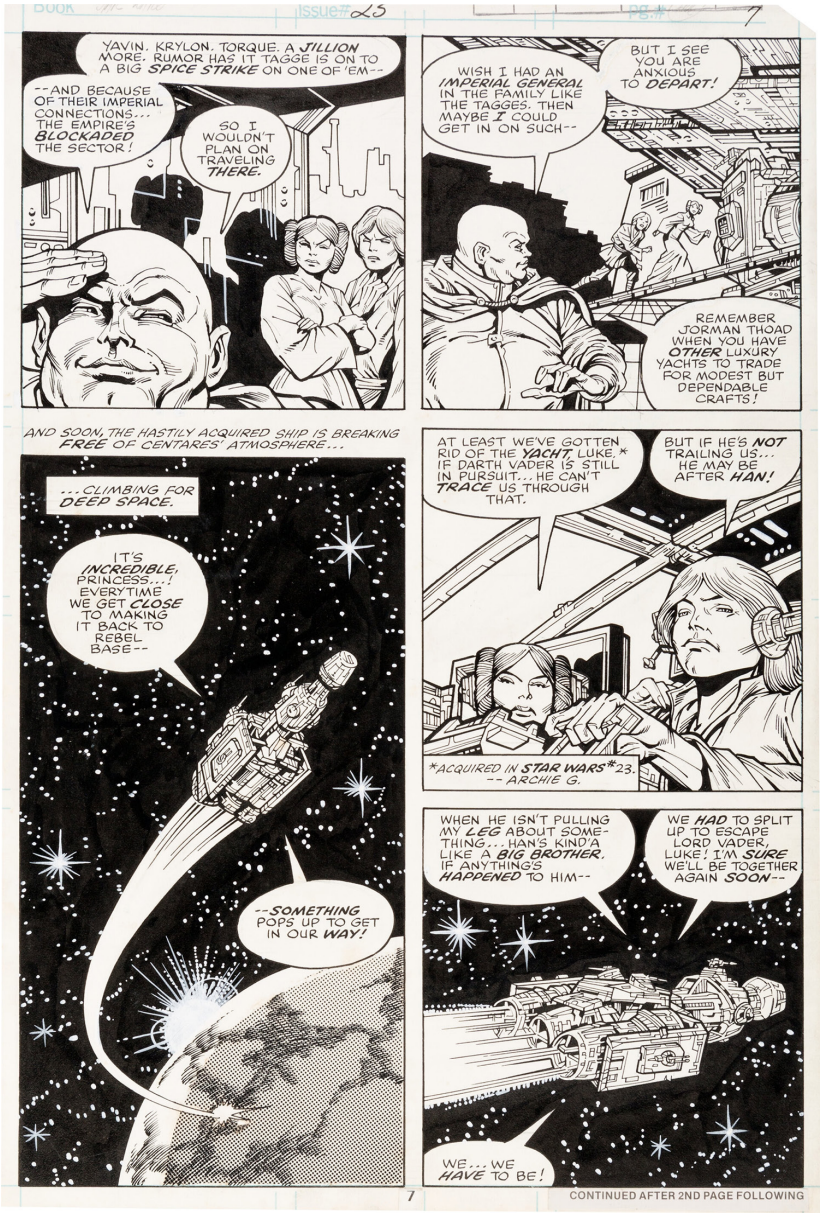
On the art front, Infantino never strived to make the characters, ships, technology, or weapons look exactly the way they did on screen. But he packed every issue with masterful storytelling, compelling drama, and high-energy action. Talking to *BI* in 2005, Infantino, who passed away on April 4, 2013, said he had nothing but good memories of his time on *Star Wars*. "Working with Archie was great," he said. "The whole experience was wonderful. I especially liked creating the covers—I was able to do some very unusual covers for that book."

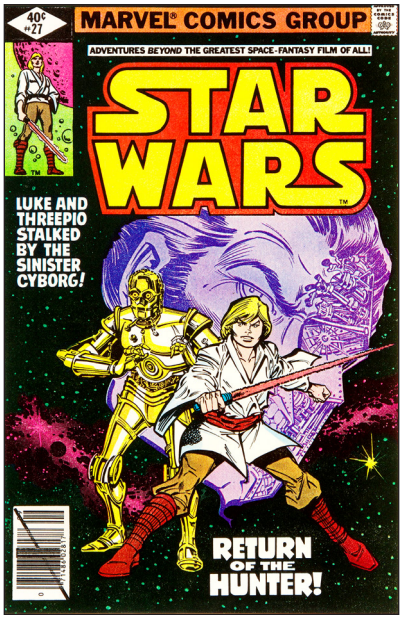
SETTING UP THE SEQUEL

With issue #31 (Jan. 1980), Goodwin and Infantino began setting the stage for the second movie, *The Empire Strikes Back*. Luke was becoming more attuned to the Force and his skills as a swordsman grew, as shown in #33 (Mar. 1980), where he was forced to duel Baron Tagge and held his own impressively. Then issue #35 (May 1980) kicked off the three-parter that changed everything.

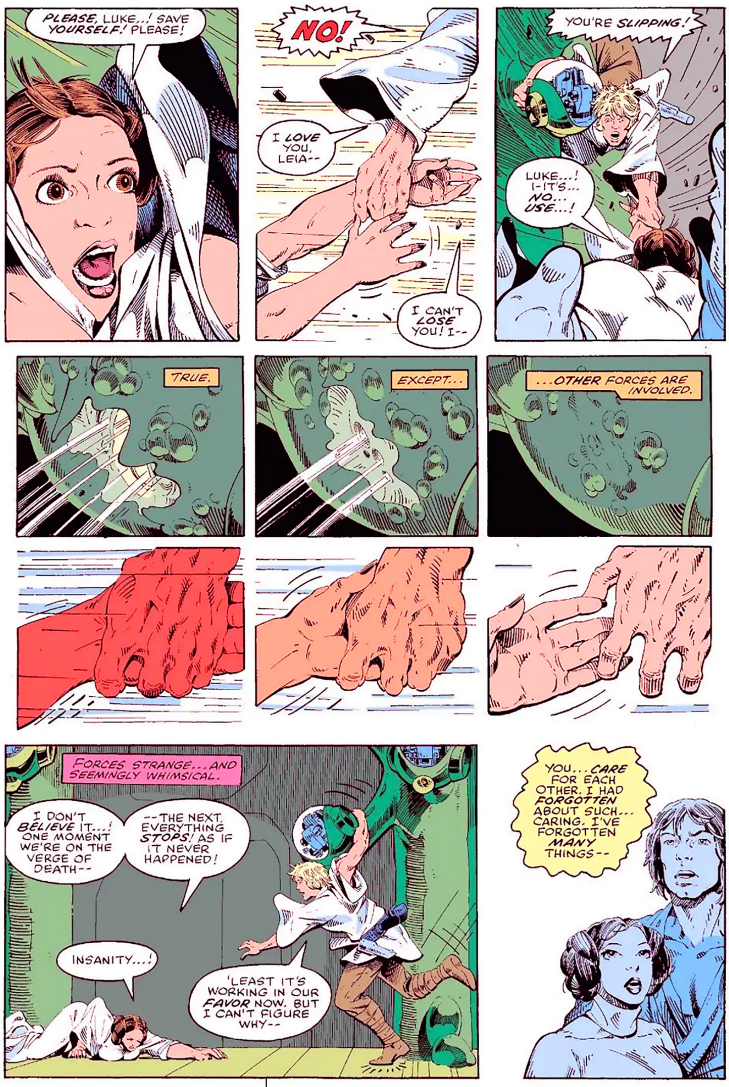
The story began with Vader finally learning of Luke's existence. Vader then launched an elaborate scheme to bring himself and Luke face to face, so he could test the boy and gauge his abilities. The scheme pulled in Han, Leia, Chewie, the droids, and the Tagge siblings, and culminated with Luke and Vader indeed meeting in person for the first time. In issue #37 (July 1980), Luke and Vader stalked each other in a forest of exploding crystal and came just within reach of a lightsaber duel. That long anticipated battle, of course, was reserved for *The Empire Strikes Back*.

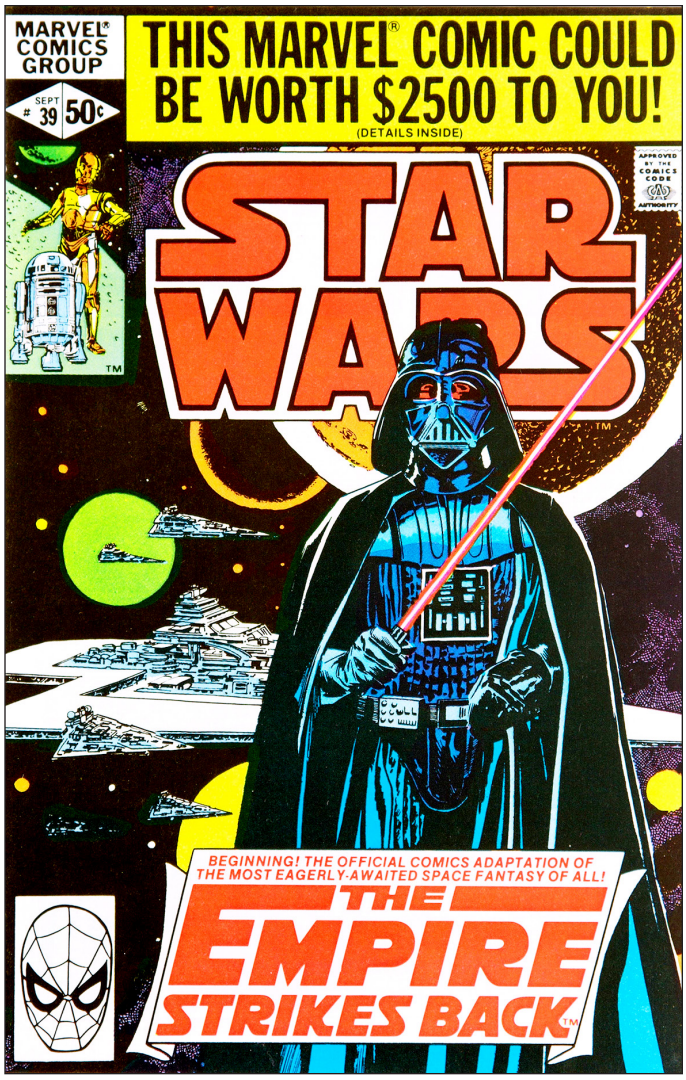
Speaking of which, the "next issue" blurb at the end of #37 promised the first chapter of Marvel's adaptation of the second movie. But when #38 (Aug. 1980) hit the stands, readers were surprised to find a fill-in issue. Disappointment was understandable—but no doubt softened by the fact that it was actually one of the standout issues of the entire series.











(left) A dramatic page from issue #38. Art by Golden and Austin. (right) The adaptation of *The Empire Strikes Back* begins. Cover by Al Williamson and Carlos Garzon.

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A NEW ERA

Star Wars #38 was a major step forward in terms of demonstrating the true potential of the comic series. The off-beat, moody story, entitled "Riders in the Void!" and scripted by Goodwin, featured Luke and Leia becoming trapped aboard a living spaceship all alone beyond the farthest star of the known galaxy. It was made all the more memorable by the extraordinary artwork from plotter/penciler/colorist Michael Golden and inker Terry Austin, who provided spot-on depictions of the Empire's Star Destroyers and TIE fighters and captured the essence of Luke and Leia without resorting to photorealistic likenesses of Mark Hamill and Carrie Fisher.

And yet there is a moment in "Riders in the Void!" that will undoubtedly surprise, and perhaps even confuse, audiences of today: Luke, under extreme duress as he tries desperately to save Leia's life, declares his love for her and his determination not to lose her. Whether this is any worse than Leia planting a big kiss on Luke's lips in *The Empire Strikes Back* is a matter for debate. (Along the same lines, in 1979's *Star Wars Annual* #1, written by Claremont and illustrated by Mike Vosburg and Leialoha, Luke visits an alien world and discovers from one of its elders that the planet was once saved from disaster during the Clone Wars by Obi-Wan Kenobi and his two pupils. One of those pupils was Darth Vader. The other? Luke's father!)

With issue #39 (Sep. 1980), the briefly delayed adaptation of *The Empire Strikes Back* finally began, ushering in a new phase for the series. Once again spanning six issues, it was fairly complete and faithful, leaving out very little and offering some moments and plot points cut from the final version of the movie, including an attack on the Rebel base on Hoth by Wampa ice creatures and more of Luke's Jedi training on Dagobah. As with the original movie, Marvel published the adaptation in several formats, including the magazine-sized *Marvel Super Special* #16 (Spring 1980), a treasury edition, and a mass market paperback (this time in full color).

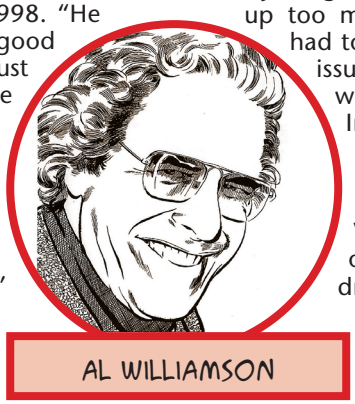
Joining Goodwin for the special occasion was artist Al Williamson, aided by Carlos Garzon.

With his ability to capture the actors' likenesses and accurately translate the look of the films onto the comic book page, Williamson was ideal for the project—in fact, Lucas himself was a longtime admirer of his work and had personally suggested him for both the Marvel series and the *Star Wars* newspaper strip.

"When you have all the stills, that's a big help," Williamson told *BI* in 2005, referring to the many

photos from the movie provided to him by Lucasfilm as art reference. "And after a while, you learn to draw it from memory."

Like Infantino, Williamson had nothing but praise for his frequent collaborator, Archie Goodwin, who passed away on March 1, 1998. "He was a dear friend and a helluva good writer," Williamson said. "He was just amazing. He wrote beautifully. He was my favorite, favorite writer to work with." Williamson would pass away on June 12, 2010.



Dave Sim, from a photo by Mike Catron.

With *The Empire Strikes Back* ending on an uncertain note—Vader claiming that he was Luke's father, Yoda's mention of "another" hope for the galaxy besides Luke, and Han frozen in carbonite and taken away by the bounty hunter Boba Fett—it was going to be quite a challenge to keep the momentum going in the comic for the next three years without being able to resolve any of the burning questions raised by the film. Goodwin was obviously the ideal person to guide the series during such an uncertain and creatively challenging time.

Except that was the point where Goodwin decided to leave.

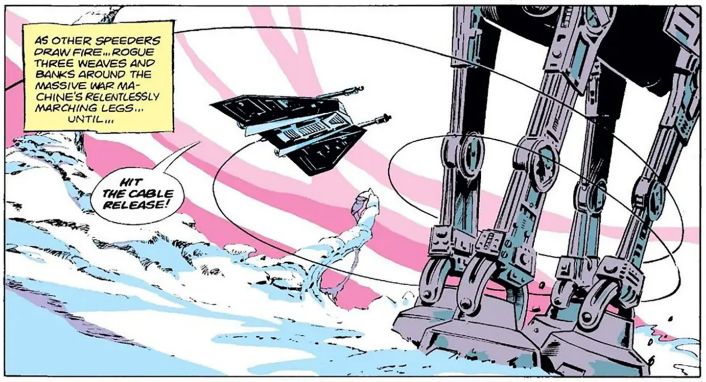
A TIME OF TRANSITION

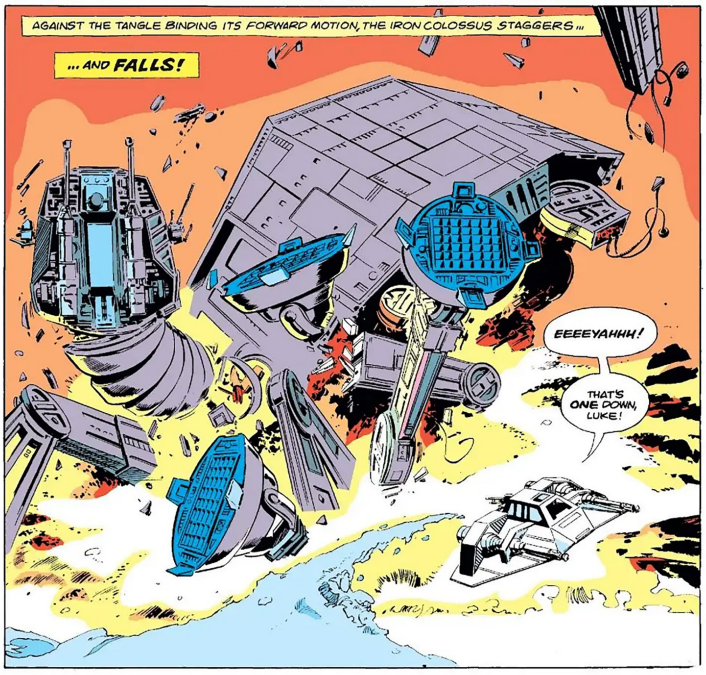
In his editorial on the letters page of *Star Wars* #44 (Feb. 1981), Goodwin wrote that his duties as editor of Marvel's brand-new science-fiction/fantasy magazine, *Epic Illustrated*, were taking up too much of his time and something had to give. He did write several of the issues after the *Empire* adaptation, with Infantino returning as penciler. In issue #45 (Mar. 1981), they picked up with Luke, recovering from his duel with Darth Vader, coping with the possibility that Vader was his father, and facing off against a deadly Imperial probe droid aboard a commandeered rebel cruiser. In issue #47 (May 1981), Goodwin and Infantino sent C-3PO and R2-D2 to a world populated entirely by droids and ruled by a sinister master.

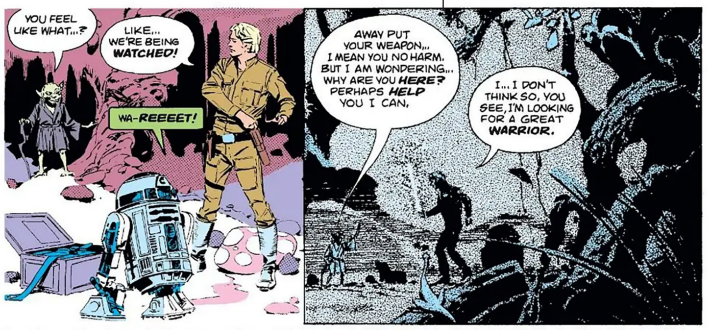
For the issues not written by Goodwin, new editor Louise Simonson (Jones at the time) recruited several other top Marvel writers. J.M. DeMatteis, using the pseudonym "Wally Lombego," wrote #46 (Apr. 1981). His story, "The Dreams of Cody Sunn-Childe," featured Lando Calrissian and Chewbacca continuing their search for the carbon-frozen Han Solo. They encounter

(bottom left) Al Williamson and Carlos Garzon make for an impressive art team. From issue #40. (bottom right) Yoda makes the scene in issue #42. Art by Williamson and Garzon.

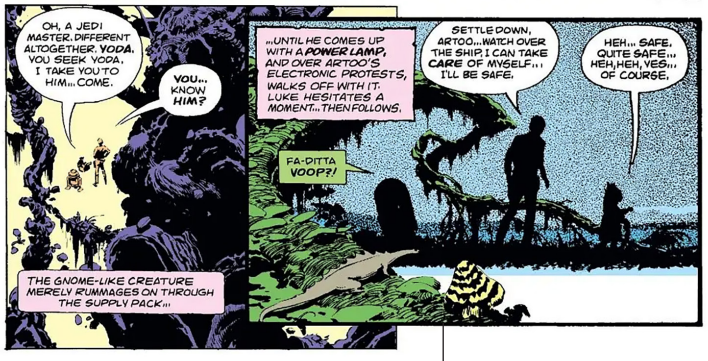
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Sunn-Childe, a former warrior who has become the leader of a colony of pacifists. When Imperial forces show up and threaten his world, Sunn-Childe, although he has the power to destroy them, chooses to die rather than return to his violent ways.

Why the Lombego pseudonym? "The message of the story was that there is as much nobility in laying down your arms—in dying for a dream of peace—as there is in raising your hands in violence," DeMatteis told *BI* in 2005. But Lucasfilm felt that message was not appropriate for *Star Wars*. "They said, 'It makes our characters look bad to have other characters that won't fight, and to say that it's a noble thing not to fight,'" DeMatteis said. The published version of the story ends with Lando concluding, "[Sunn-Childe] created a dream city where he could live in peace. *But he was wrong*! Lofty ideals alone aren't enough when dealing with the Empire ... as he found out."



J. M. DeMatteis

Federico Vinci.

DeMatteis was appalled. "I said, 'Forget it, I'm not putting my name on this,'" he said. "I couldn't have my name on a story that I dedicated to my son—named Cody, not coincidentally—and was supposed to be about these very deep, passionate beliefs that I have." Oddly enough, when Marvel UK ran the story in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back Monthly* #141, around the same time as its publication in the U.S., it was DeMatteis's original, unrevised version that saw print, with him properly credited as writer.

Larry Hama wrote issue #48 (June 1981), a relatively light-hearted caper in which Princess Leia and Darth Vader try to outsmart each other amidst murder, intrigue, and double-crossing on a banking planet. That issue also marked the departure of Infantino, who had received a lucrative job offer from DC Comics, where he had previously done groundbreaking work on the Flash, Batman, and Adam Strange, and even served for several years as publisher. With Williamson's much-lauded work on the *Empire* adaptation still a recent memory and having set a new standard for the series, editor Louise Simonson was determined to find a new art team that would meet it.

"I knew what Lucasfilm liked, and what they really liked more than anything else in the world was Al Williamson's artwork," she said in a 2016 interview. "But it was impossible for us to get Al [as regular artist] because he was very slow—there was just no way. So, I did the best I could to make the book look that good. Kids were so familiar with the look of the films and I wanted to make the readership happy." As it turned out, the solution was right in front of her.

The truly pivotal story during this period was Mike W. Barr's prophetically titled "The Last Jedi," in issue #49 (Jul. 1981). This issue helped set the future course for the series by bringing together the new regular art team: fan-favorite penciler Walter Simonson—Louise's husband—and acclaimed inker Tom Palmer. The story centered on Luke's encounter with an aged, disheveled alien named Jedidiah, who once had the opportunity to become a Jedi Knight but turned it down. His mind later damaged in an accident, Jedidiah became immersed in a fantasy life in which he indeed became a great Jedi. Luke dismisses him initially but ultimately learns a valuable lesson—that anyone can be a hero, despite their physical or mental disabilities. Barr told *BI* in 2005 that it was "probably one of my ten favorite comic stories that I've done."

Just before the book's new regular creative team took over fully, Goodwin and Williamson reunited (with some help from Walter Simonson and Palmer) for the double-sized issue #50 (Aug. 1981). It featured a sweeping tale called "The Crimson Forever!" that squeezed in almost every key element of the entire *Star Wars* saga up to that point. The story began with Lando and Chewbacca's ongoing search for Han. Leia's recently declared love for Solo was acknowledged. An angry and disillusioned Luke confronted Obi-Wan, Yoda, and Darth Vader in a dream fueled by a mysterious, potentially fatal alien disease. Several bounty hunters introduced in *The Empire Strikes Back*—Bossk, Dengar, and IG-88—showed up. And even Han took part, albeit in an extended flashback sequence that tied in with the present-day storyline. Goodwin also incorporated some of his own past continuity, bringing back Domina Tagge for what proved to be her final appearance in the series.



A page by the team of Infantino and Tom Palmer from *Star Wars* #46. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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A DEATH STAR BY ANY OTHER NAME

With a two-part storyline in issues #51 and #52 (Sep.-Oct. 1981), Simonson and Palmer settled in as the regular art team and were joined by new writer David Michelinie. All three were fans of the *Star Wars* movies and enthusiastic about working on the comic.

"To be able to create new stories in this fabulous universe with these terrific characters—it was great! A real kick!" Michelinie told *BI* in 2005. With their very first storyline, however, and much to their surprise, amusement, and curiosity, they received a rare rejection notice from Lucasfilm, necessitating revisions.

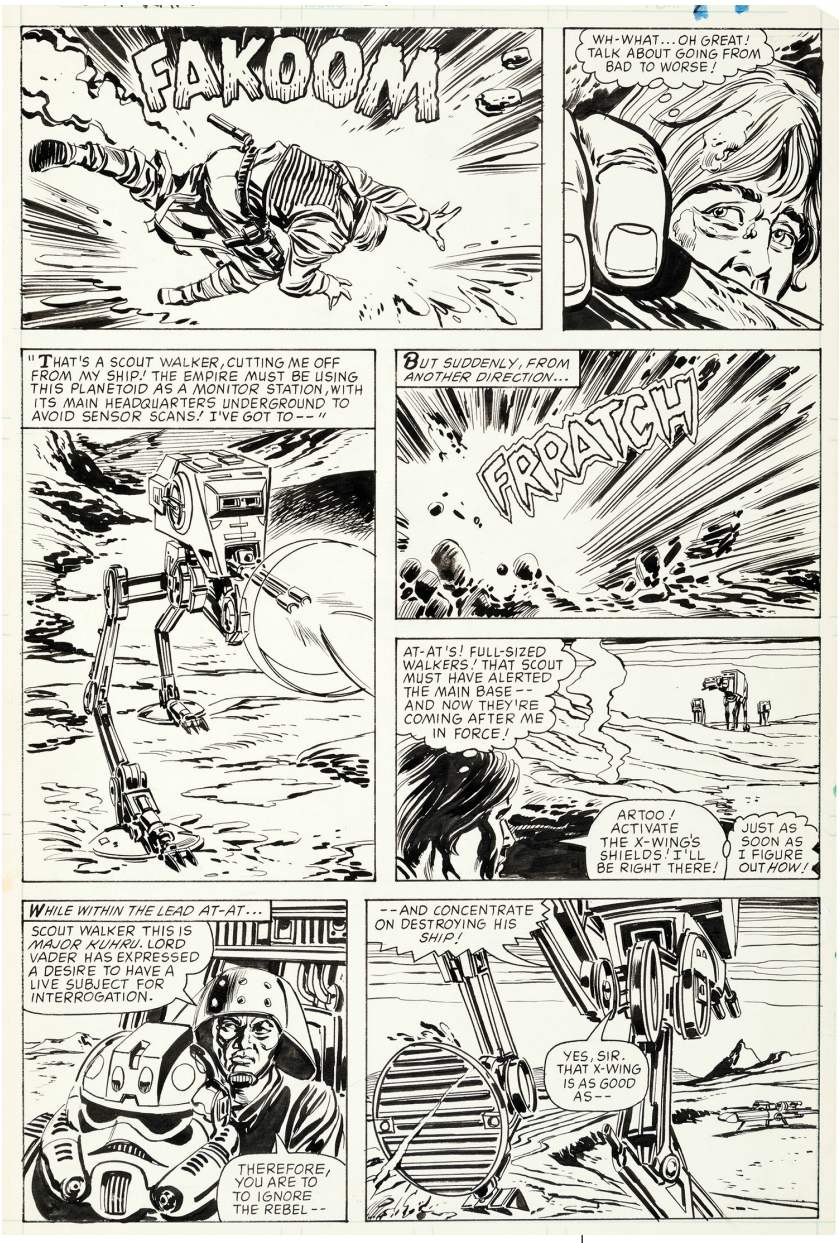
"David's first idea was a pretty obvious one," Walter Simonson explained in 2005. "[It] was to have the Empire decide to build a new Death Star and put chicken wire over the exhaust port so that the Rebels wouldn't be able to get them that way again. And then the Empire could go out and kick ass. And Lucasfilm got back to us and said, 'You can't do that. We can't tell you why, but you can't do it.'"

Michelinie said, "When the idea of creating a second Death Star was bumped, I was kind of like, 'Cool! Guess what's going to happen in the next movie?' I kind of enjoyed that."

Louise Simonson noted, "Whenever they told us we couldn't do something, we knew it was going to be in the next movie."

The team overhauled the story so that the Empire would build what was essentially a giant cannon in space that could blow up planets, but it wouldn't be drawn as a sphere. Lucasfilm approved.

"We did exactly the same story we would have done, except we called it the *Tarkin*—it was really a Death Star, without a circular cover," Walter Simonson recalled.

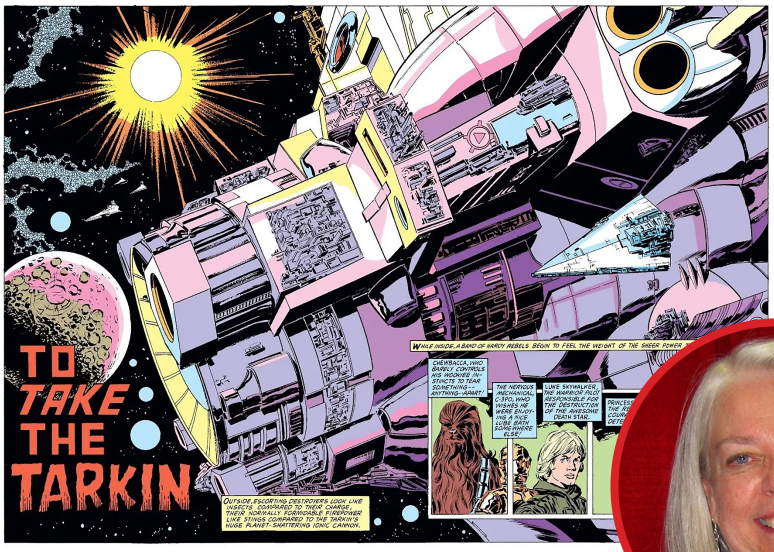


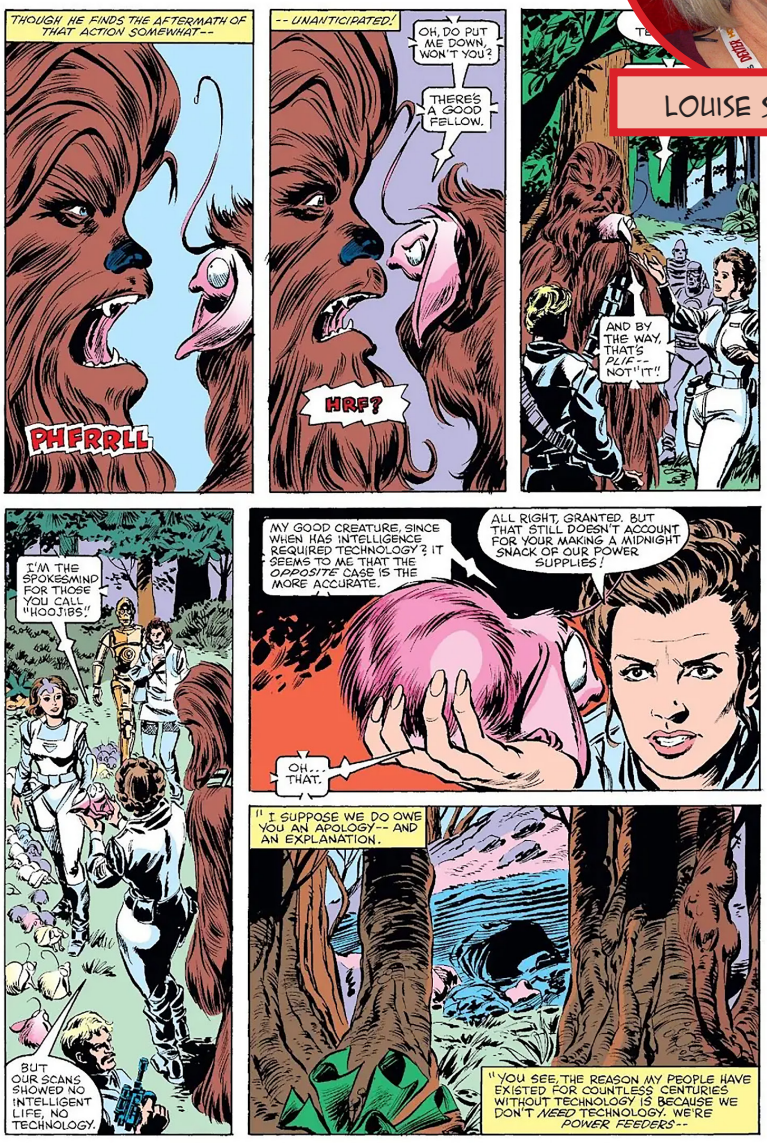
While detailing the rebels' mission to sabotage the *Tarkin*, the two-parter brimmed with character moments, including Lando's efforts to gain the trust of Leia, Luke, and the other main characters. There was also the revelation that Darth Vader's own officers were plotting to assassinate him after he executed several of their comrades in *The Empire Strikes Back*. But the highlight, undoubtedly, was a sequence in which Luke and Vader nearly crossed paths for the first time since their duel at Cloud City. They were interrupted when an airlock opened behind Vader and he was nearly sucked out into space, resulting in Vader displaying the extent of his Force powers—anticipating a notorious scene involving Leia in the 2017 movie, *The Last Jedi*.

Keeping Vader and Skywalker apart was not the original intention, but it was one of several restrictions placed on Marvel by Lucasfilm. "We could never have Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker actually come face to face," Walter Simonson explained.

(left) A new creative team spins tales. Cover by Simonson. (right) Lots of action and cool vehicles on this page from issue #51. Art by Simonson and Palmer. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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(top) It's not the Death Star, it's the *Tarkin*. (bottom) We meet the Hoojibs in issue #55. Art by Simonson and Palmer.

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THE MARS CONNECTION

Following the Tarkin story, the regular team took a short break and issues #53 and #54 (Nov.-Dec. 1981) featured a two-parter written by Claremont and illustrated by Infantino, Simonson, Palmer, Al Milgrom, Alan Kupperberg, and Frank Giacoia. It focused on Leia finally coming to terms with the loss of her home planet, Alderaan, after getting stranded on an alien world and bonding with its inhabitants. For many readers, those inhabitants seemed more than just a little familiar—and for good reason. The storyline—and the artwork—had actually been created for Marvel's *John Carter, Warlord of Mars* series, but when that title was canceled before the story could see print, it was heavily reworked into a *Star Wars* adventure.



LOUISE SIMONSON

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"At that time, all the Marvel books were behind schedule and starting to miss shipping," Louise Simonson explained. "So (then-Editor in Chief) Jim Shooter's solution—which was, I thought, creative and amusing in a nightmarish sort of way—was that there was inventory left over from other series that had been canceled. That work was taken and parceled out to different books. I got *John Carter* and was told to turn this artwork, with a minimum of changes, into something that would fit into the continuity of *Star Wars*." The thinking was that this would buy the regular creative team enough time to catch up, and perhaps even get ahead of schedule. So, did that happen? "Not really," she said with a laugh.

NEW ALLIES, NEW ENEMIES

Michelinie, Simonson, and Palmer returned with issue #55 (Jan. 1982), and began a sequence of stories that brought new, ongoing momentum, the likes of which hadn't been seen since Goodwin's run.

Michelinie noted it was a fun challenge to keep the series exciting and moving forward even though nothing significant could happen to the characters or the status quo. "In most areas, we were pretty much given a free hand," he said. "It was kind of like going on side streets. I figured, as long as all the streets came back into the main drive when the next movie came out, I could move a little bit to the side as we were going along the road."

Walter Simonson recalled that in addition to not being able to put Vader and Luke together, "Luke and Leia couldn't have any kind of romantic involvement—there was no explanation for that, no one said why. So, what you had was, one of your heroes couldn't be used, because Han was off frozen somewhere, your remaining hero and heroine couldn't be involved romantically, and you couldn't have your hero meet the primary villain—which were interesting parameters within which to construct stories. On the balance, though, I think we did a pretty good job."

Michelinie even found a way to use Han. Just as Goodwin had done in issue #50, Michelinie constructed a story for 1982's *Star Wars Annual* #2, illustrated by Infantino and Rudy Nebres, that included an extended flashback sequence detailing Solo's quest for a rare spice, during which he gets caught up in a political uprising and a romantic interlude. "The flashback story in *Annual* #2 came about because I wanted to write Han Solo, dammit!" Michelinie said in a 2018 interview.

Under Michelinie and Simonson, the Rebels established a new base on the planet Arbra, where they joined forces with small, telepathic, rabbit-like creatures called hoojibs

(issue #55). Lando returned to Cloud City and foiled the Imperial forces that had taken it over (issues #56-57, Feb.-March 1982). Most significantly, Luke began a relationship with a female Rebel pilot named Shira Brie—a relationship that aroused misgivings in Leia and ultimately led to disaster when Shira's ship was blasted to pieces. And it was Luke, guided by the Force, who pulled the trigger.

This storyline, titled "Luke Skywalker: Pariah," ran through issues #60-63 (June-Sep. 1982) and is often cited by many fans—and by Michelinie and Walter Simonson—as a favorite. Believed by a growing number of rebels to have killed Shira out of carelessness or even malice, Luke found himself essentially shunned by the Alliance and losing faith in the Force. Even the strong bond between him and Leia was tested. Determined to learn the truth, Luke embarked on a personal quest, accompanied only by Chewbacca. Ultimately he discovered that Shira, not the Force, had misled him, and readers learned that she was not as dead as she initially seemed to be.

"That storyline really played with the characters," Michelinie noted. "I was able to stretch the subplots over several issues and I think it paid off well."

Simonson said he was so enthused, "I wanted to push the 'Pariah' story at least an issue or two longer!"

(left) The "Pariah" story remains a favorite of fans and the creators. Issue #62 art by Simonson and Palmer. (right) The team of Jo Duffy and Ron Frenz debuts in issue #71. Art by Frenz and Palmer.

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NOW LEAVING THE GALAXY

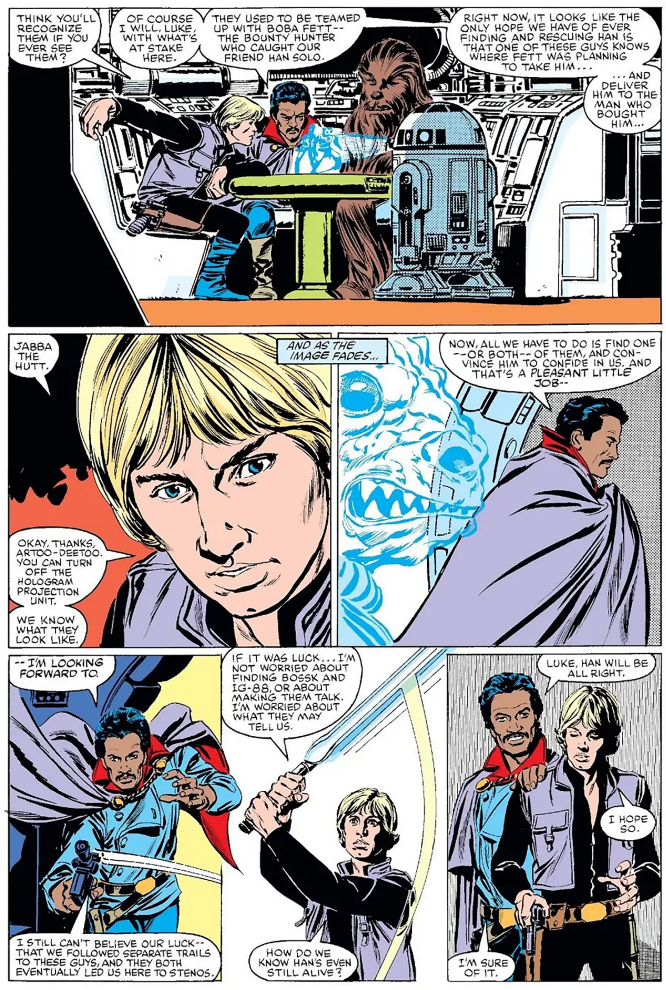
With issue #66 (Dec. 1982), a done-in-one tale about Luke getting stuck on a desert planet much like Tatooine and confronting cruel brigands preying upon the inhabitants, Walter Simonson left the series.

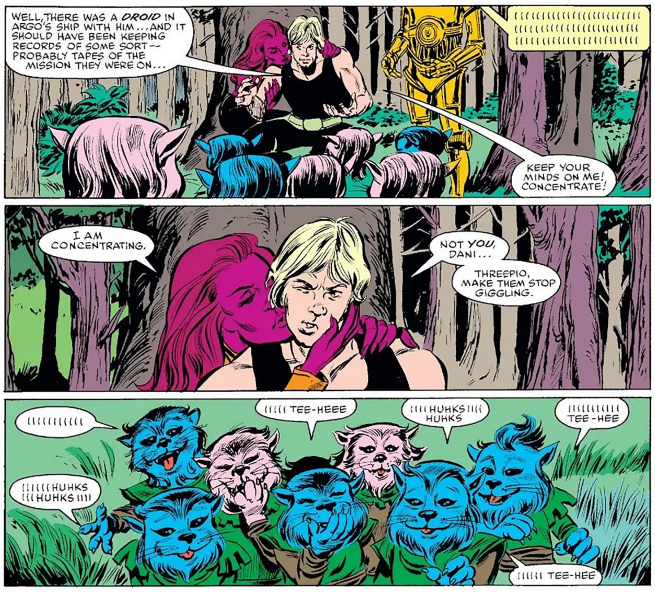
"I was there for about a year and half, which at that time was about as long as I'd stayed on anything," he said. "I explored everything that I felt I could do with the *Star Wars* universe, so I wanted to try some different things." Simonson turned his attention to his creator-owned graphic novel, *Star Slammers*, as well as the Marvel/DC crossover *The Uncanny X-Men and The New Teen Titans*.

Michelinie remained for several more issues, during which he introduced Fenn Shysa, a Mandalorian Protector and old comrade of Boba Fett's who wore similar armor. But he left with issue #69 (Mar. 1983), after learning he would not get to write Marvel's adaptation of *Return of the Jedi*. Lucasfilm had requested Archie Goodwin for the project, and Marvel complied.

"I will bow to no one in my respect and admiration for Archie Goodwin, and it's hard to complain when someone who's better than you gets the job," Michelinie said in 2005. "But I'd been battling in the trenches for a couple of years, kind of treading water, keeping things going, and I was looking forward to getting the dessert at the end of the meal—which for a *Star Wars* fan was adapting the third movie, getting to read the screenplay before anyone else, seeing the stills, stuff like that. So, it was kind of a slap in the face, and I felt the only thing I could do to keep my self-respect was to leave the book." (Michelinie would, however, go on to write the comic book adaptations of two other Lucasfilm productions: 1984's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and 1989's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.)









(top) The Lahsbees were supposed to be a bit different than this. #73 art by Frenz and Palmer. (bottom) An action-packed page from *Star Wars* #76. Art by Frenz and Palmer. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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A COSMIC COLLABORATION

To replace Michelinie, Louise Simonson recruited Jo Duffy, who had previously written issues #24 and #70 (Apr. 1983), and paired her with artist Ron Frenz, a relative newcomer at the time, who had already penciled issue #67 (Jan. 1983). Palmer remained as inker, keeping the overall look of the series consistent. The new team debuted with issue #71 (May 1983), beginning a long storyline that planted the seeds for *Return of the Jedi*. The mission to rescue Han Solo kicked into high gear, coinciding with the search for a pair of missing Bothan spies who disappeared while trying to deliver stolen information to the Rebel Alliance about the Empire's latest super-weapon—the one Michelinie and Simonson had originally intended for issue #51.

But Duffy and Frenz also took the series in new, different directions, with a shared enthusiasm for *Star Wars* that fueled a partnership they both enjoyed and valued.

"Ron could not have been more fun to collaborate with," Duffy told *BI* in 2005. "He loved those characters every bit as much as I did."

"[Jo] was a real solid scripter," Frenz recalled in 2005. "She really let the pictures tell the story and was a joy to work with."

Amusingly enough, they had the same experience on one of their first stories that Michelinie and Simonson had with their "second Death Star" tale. For issue #73 (July 1983), the main cast was supposed to visit a world populated by small, furry creatures, called Lahsbees, who used primitive hang-gliders for transportation. Marvel received major pushback from Lucasfilm.

"I couldn't figure out why Lucasfilm gave me such a hard time about the Lahsbees—until I saw the script for *Return of the Jedi*," Duffy said.

Frenz remembered the art changes that had to be made to the creatures. "They ended up being very feline-like," he said. "It was funny—Lucasfilm had to tell us how to fix them without giving too much away, because they didn't want information to get out about the Ewoks. And they freaked about the hang-gliders, because the Ewoks were going to use them in *Jedi*."

Other new characters introduced by Duffy included the scoundrel and con artist Rik Duel and his sidekicks Dani (an alluring, oversexed, red-skinned Zeltron with a crush on Luke) and Chihdo, a sleazy Rodian (the same species as Greedo from the first film). First appearing in issue #70, they returned numerous times, often serving as comic relief.

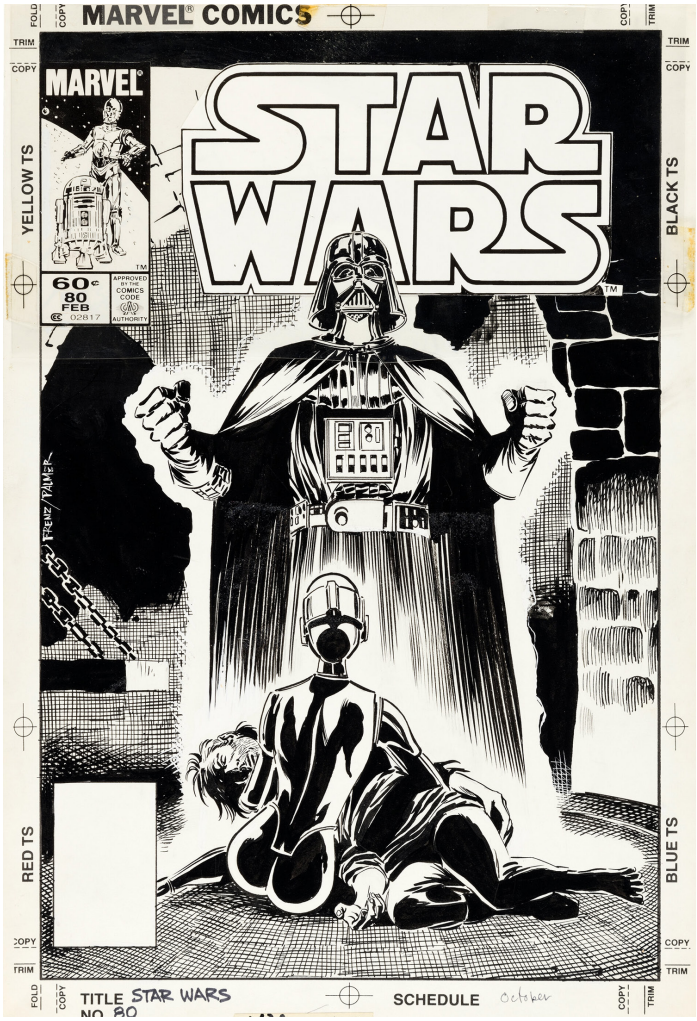
Humor, along with action and characterization, was a key element throughout Duffy and Frenz's collaboration. This was perhaps best exemplified in "Chanteuse of the Stars," published in issue #77 (Nov. 1983), wherein Leia posed as a scantily dressed nightclub singer and was forced to serenade a hulking beast in order to soothe his savage heart. There was also "The Big Con," in issue #79 (Jan. 1984), wherein Lando adopted the persona of "Captain Drebble"—who bore a striking resemblance to the classic Japanese animated hero Captain Harlock—to infiltrate a gang of pirates who possibly knew where Boba Fett had taken Han. But Lando ended up getting drunk and blowing his cover, leading to a madcap aerial skycar chase that anticipated the one seen on movie screens nearly 20 years later in *Attack of the Clones*.

But Duffy also produced darker, more serious material, as seen in "Ellie," which ran in issue #80 (Feb. 1984) and led directly into *Return of the Jedi*, and in 1983's *Star Wars Annual* #3.

"Ellie" featured Luke, Leia, and C-3PO continuing their search for one of the missing Bothan spies inside an Imperial stronghold. There, they encounter the spy's droid, LE-914, with whom C-3PO begins to establish something of an emotional bond before the story reaches its powerful, tragic conclusion. For Frenz, the story remains a personal favorite.

"Stories like 'Ellie' almost made you wish there was a weekly *Star Wars* series, because those stories had so much emotional impact and worked so well in that universe," he said.

In "The Apprentice," published in *Annual* #3 and illustrated by Klaus Janson, Luke met a boy named Flint who possessed nascent Force abilities and aspired to be a Jedi. Flint desperately wanted to become Luke's apprentice. But Luke, not yet a full Jedi himself, declined to become Flint's teacher, well aware of the terrible



Frenz and Palmer combine for the impactful cover to the "Ellie" story. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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consequences if Flint was not properly trained and fell under the influence of the dark side. Rejected by Luke, Flint became an attractive prospect for Darth Vader, who was portrayed in the story as an almost Satanic figure.

"You can't say all of Jo's stories were fluff and fun!" Frenz noted.

INTO THE GREAT UNKNOWN

During the summer of 1983, Marvel adapted *Return of the Jedi*, with Archie Goodwin, Al Williamson, and Carlos Garzon at the helm again—though Frenz, Palmer, Bill Sienkiewicz, Dave Stevens, William Stout, Tom Yeates, Dan Green, and Rick Bryant pitched in on the art to help meet the deadlines. As before, it was published in magazine format, in *Marvel Super Special* #27, and in a full-color mass market paperback. But this time, the story was told in four issues instead of the usual six, and instead of running in the regular comic series, it received its own separate limited series, enabling Marvel to release two *Star Wars* comics a month for four months during a time of heightened interest in the property.

With issue #81 (Mar. 1984), Duffy and Frenz went beyond *Return of the Jedi*, focusing on the newly returned Han Solo. Accompanied by Leia and R2-D2, Han returned to Tatooine to retrieve money he had left behind there but ended up encountering a revived-but-amnesiac Boba Fett. The story revealed that Fett had been burped up by the Sarlaac creature that consumed him in the movie and was then captured by a passing Jawa salvaging crew. (It also suggested that Fett was a cyborg and therefore susceptible to the Jawas' restraining-bolt device.)

Initially, it seemed like the series would have a new ongoing antagonist first established in the movies—which it certainly could use, since Darth Vader, the Emperor, and even Jabba were now gone. And who better to fill that role than the ever-popular Boba Fett? But it was not to be. By the end of the issue, Fett was back in the Sarlaac, never to be seen again for the rest of the series.

"We were getting away with murder even attempting that story," Duffy revealed. "There was a very strict hands-off edict issued on Boba Fett. I really wanted to use him, so I argued passionately to Louise that if we took him out, played with him a bit, and put him back where we got him, we'd have satisfied our own and the audience's ongoing jones for some Fett action, without having breached any of Lucasfilm's rules. Louise agreed to let us try, and no one at Lucasfilm fired any shots when we ran the plot up the flagpole."

However, according to Duffy, the restrictions from Lucasfilm only got tighter. Presumably, George Lucas wasn't sure what he would do next with the film series—sequels, prequels, or a long hiatus (which is ultimately what he chose). Therefore, he couldn't let Marvel move the characters or the status quo forward.

"Lucasfilm basically told us to pretend that *Jedi* had never happened," Duffy said. "We were told Han and Leia were interested in each other but hadn't hooked up. We were not to acknowledge Luke and Leia as siblings. We were not to acknowledge Luke as a fully developed Jedi. We were not to do anything with the Jedi, or with the Empire."

Duffy's solution was to create a *new* war. The triumphant Rebel Alliance now faced a mysterious race of pale-white-skinned alien invaders, called the Nagai, who were bent on conquering the galaxy. This ongoing saga, however, was constantly interrupted by unrelated fill-in stories, including one in issue #98 (Aug. 1985) that reunited Goodwin and Williamson for the last time. Duffy explained that the book's new editor, Ann Nocenti, wanted to clear out the inventory drawer in the hopes of getting the perpetually late book on schedule.

Adding to the woes was the departure of Frenz, who had accepted the irresistible offer to become the new regular penciler of *The Amazing Spider-Man*. His last issue was *Star Wars* #82 (Apr. 1984)—though he came back one more time for issue #99 (Sept. 1985). Inker Tom Palmer remained, amidst a revolving door of guest pencilers that included Bob McLeod, Tony Salmons, David Mazzuchelli, and Sal Buscema. Through it all, Palmer maintained the realistic, cinematic, screen-accurate look that had been a hallmark of the series for years.

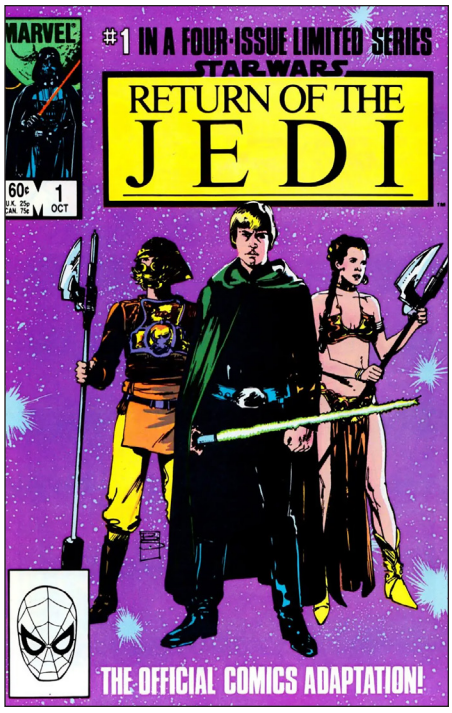
"Tom was the look and feel of the book," Frenz said. "Tom was so good, I think he could ink the *Millennium Falcon* in his sleep!"

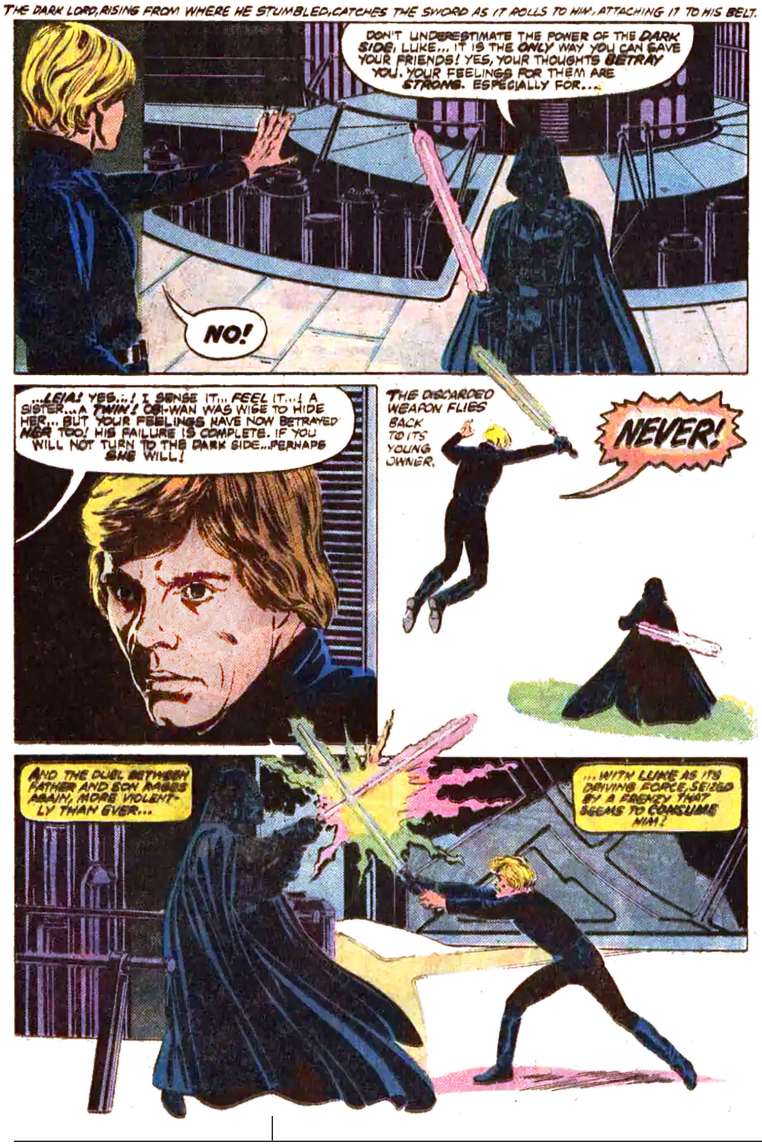
Palmer, who passed away on August 18, 2022, had described working on the series as a labor of love. "The people who were really caught up in [*Star Wars*] who also worked on the comics—like Walt, Ron Frenz, and me—I think we just brought a lot to the table," he told *BI* in 2005. "Lucasfilm didn't say that everything had to look exactly correct—it was something we did because *we* wanted it to look correct, it was important to *us*. It bothered me a lot when things *didn't* look correct, so I did my best to make sure they did. Al Williamson set the standard for all of us."

But eventually, even Palmer moved on. "I went back on *The Avengers* with John Buscema," he explained. "And I could not do two or three comics a month." He would remain on *The Avengers* for the next 11 years, inking over Buscema and a succession of other pencilers that included Paul Ryan, Steve Epting, and Mike Deodato Jr. As it turned out, Palmer's last issue of *Star Wars*, issue #94 (Apr. 1985), was the first one by the new regular penciler, Cynthia Martin.

(top) With *Return of the Jedi*, the film adaptation is done outside of the regular series for the first time. Cover by Bill Sienkiewicz. (bottom) Luke finally faces Darth Vader in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* #4. Art by Williamson, Garzon, Frenz, and Palmer.

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FINAL PHASE

Martin's arrival was undoubtedly a shock to the system for longtime readers. Her style resembled Japanese animation—quite a departure from the realism delivered by Simonson, Frenz, and Palmer.

Meanwhile, Duffy strived to keep the series going despite the restrictions placed upon her. In issue #88 (Oct. 1984) she introduced a mysterious new female Sith lord named Lumiya as a nemesis for Luke, eventually revealing her to be none other than Shira Brie, revived as a cyborg much like Vader. In issue #92 (Feb. 1985), she brought Flint back in a sequel to the third Annual. She later installed Dani the Zeltron as a regular cast member. The war against the Nagai escalated, with other new alien races—the insect-like Hiromi and the tall, green-skinned humanoid Tofs—entering the fray and taking sides. As a result, the cast grew, with the movie characters often left on the sidelines and the new ones—with whom Duffy presumably would have more freedom—taking center stage.

One of those new characters was Bey, a tall, white-haired Corellian who was a childhood friend of Han's. He appeared suddenly in issues #99 and #100 (Sep.-Oct. 1985)—due to an odd scheduling decision, he wasn't properly introduced until issue #101 (Nov. 1985). Regardless, Bey turned out to be only *half*-Corellian—the other half was Nagai. "Bey was going to be Han's illegitimate older half-brother," Duffy revealed in a 2018 interview. "They had the same father. The father was with Bey's mother before he married Han's mother. I saw the father as this strict, unyielding, illegitimate-son-rejecting, not-much-better-to-his-younger-son jerk. We weren't sure Han was ever going to know that he and Bey were brothers, but Bey was going to know. And we were going to be flashing back to their adolescence together."

As 1986 arrived, sales on the series had dropped to the point where it was moved to a bi-monthly schedule. But according to Duffy, sales figures were not the main reason for Marvel's decision to cancel the series with issue #107 (Sept. 1986).

"*Star Wars* was still selling over 100,000 copies a month, better than most of the mid-range super-hero books, up until the end," Duffy said. "The restrictions from Lucasfilm are what effectively canceled the book. It got to the point where they said that I couldn't do this and that with the characters *I* created. I was at my wit's end. We got the feeling that whoever was in charge of approving all this at Lucasfilm didn't want there to be a comic book at all anymore. Lucasfilm's focus was elsewhere at that point; *Star Wars* was not a primary concern. Marvel pulled the plug because we got the impression that they didn't want us to do the comic anymore."

CANON FODDER

Dark Horse Comics picked up the *Star Wars* license in 1991 and immediately made it clear that the Marvel series had been rendered null and void, now to be considered little more than an out-of-continuity curiosity.

"When you work in the collaborative storytelling medium, that's what people are going to do. You have to be able to let it go," Walter Simonson tells *BI* today. "I like the stories that I did, I thought David and I did good stories … (That run) seems pretty well regarded by people who pay attention to the comics. Whether someone has decided it's not 'canon,' or whatever, I have no idea, I don't really care. I just know that in my own world, it *is* canon."

It should be noted that Dark Horse's first *Star Wars* project, the limited series, *Dark Empire*, written by Tom Veitch, illustrated by Cam Kennedy, and set six years after *Return of the Jedi*, was originally going to be published by Marvel. And *Dark Empire* followed Marvel's lead by revealing that Boba Fett had survived the Sarlaac, which, as Fett explained, had found him "indigestible."

Going forward, Dark Horse, Bantam Books, and other license holders would coordinate with each other and Lucasfilm to ensure that the so-called *Star Wars* Expanded Universe—which included comics, novels, video games, role-playing games, and more—remained consistent. Essentially, all these projects shared the same continuity—one that initially rejected, ignored, or directly contradicted the Marvel run, but would eventually embrace and incorporate key elements from it.

"I never took the decanonization seriously," Duffy says today. "I'm a fangirl, and if there's anything I know about my fellow fangirls and boys, it's that if we like something, we will not let someone throw it out. Someone may throw it out this week, but next week, someone else will be in charge, someone who loves it, and it'll be back so fast it'll make your head spin."

Of all the elements from the original Marvel series adopted by the Expanded Universe, arguably the most pivotal was Shira Brie/Lumiya. She was reintroduced, with much of her backstory and her history with Luke kept intact, in the nine-book *Star Wars: Legacy of the Force* novel series, starting with Book One, *Betrayal*, written by Aaron Allston and published in 2006 by Ballantine Books/Del Rey. In the storyline, set about 36 years after *Return of the Jedi*, Lumiya aimed to corrupt Luke's nephew—Han and Leia's son—the Jedi Knight, Jacen Solo.

"It's the mark of the effectiveness of the creation of a character," Walter Simonson says. "It's also the mark of a good bit of luck, because you create characters and you don't have any idea, honest to God, what's going to happen to them."

"I had no idea Lumiya was brought back," Duffy says. "I'm completely unsurprised. I thought David and Walter did terrific stuff when they created Shira Brie and I thought [we] did great work [after them]. … So, I'm not surprised, but I'm delighted for all of us. It's a heck of a validation."

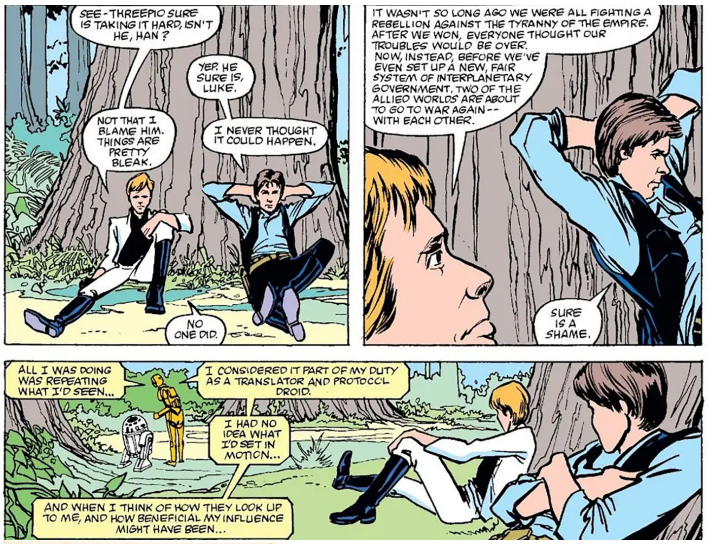
A WHOLE NEW START

After Disney's purchase of Lucasfilm in 2012, the Expanded Universe met the same fate as the original Marvel run—relegation to "Legends" status, its long string of continuity rendered moot. This move enabled the new regime at Lucasfilm to start over with a fresh slate of content to supplement the company's new live-action and animated *Star Wars* productions. These would be closely coordinated and ostensibly intended to be fully canonical. On the comic book end, Marvel regained the license and launched its new *Star Wars* offerings in 2015, starting with a series that continued the adventures of Luke, Han, Leia, Chewbacca, C-3PO, and R2-D2 from where the first movie left off—just as Roy Thomas and Howard Chaykin had done in 1977.

While the new Marvel run would forge its own path, the original proved to be a vital source of inspiration—to the extent that Marvel actually returned to the original series' continuity for a one-shot special, *Star Wars* #108 (May 2019). It was written by Matthew Rosenberg, illustrated by Giuseppe Camuncoli, Andrea Broccardo, Kerry Gammill, Jan Duursema, Stefano Landini, Luke Ross, Leonard Kirk, Cam Smith, and Ze Carlos, and sported a main cover by Walter Simonson. The story, a sequel to "The Crimson Forever!" from issue #50 of the original series, also marked the return of Valance, Domina Tagge, Zeltrons, Hiromi, hoojibs, and—in a key role—Jaxxon.

"At the time, we were celebrating 80 years of Marvel Comics and developing nostalgic projects that tied into our heritage and history," Mark Paniccia, Marvel's current *Star Wars* editor, tells *BI*. "There's a deep love for those storylines [from the original Marvel *Star Wars* run] and we wanted to revisit that bygone era, those characters and themes. It really was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We couldn't have done it without the anniversary. That gave us a good hook and Lucasfilm agreed."

The return of Valance in particular had special meaning for Paniccia. "Valance had a big impact on me when I was reading those early Marvel *Star Wars* books," he says. "The Walter





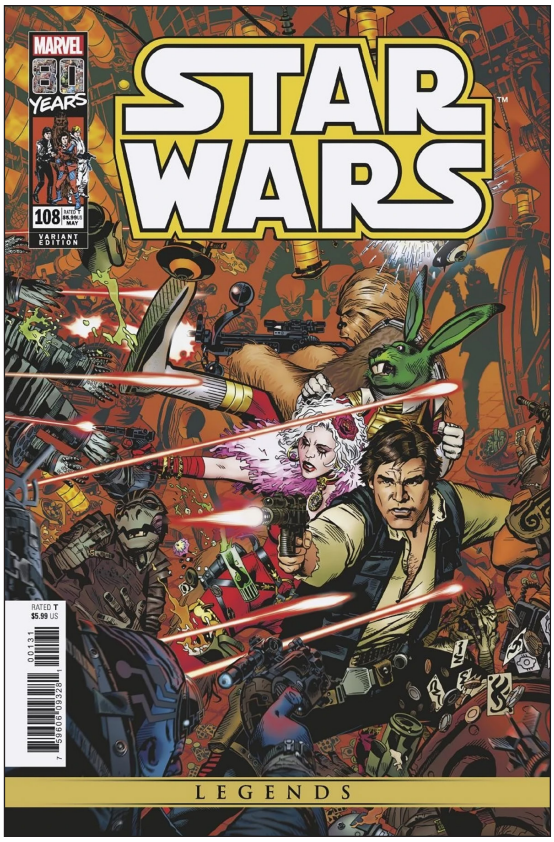
(top) Cynthia Martin joins the team in issue #94. Art by Martin and Palmer. (bottom) Luke and Dani plan their escape in issue #97. Art by Martin and Nichols. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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(left) The series comes to an end. For now. Cover by Cynthia Martin and Joe Rubinstein. (right) Issue #108 is published as a special and Jaxxon is on the cover. Variant cover by Golden.

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Simonson cover to #16 is a core memory of mine. I just thought Valance was so cool and I really loved the character's arc. Cut to decades later and now I'm editing the *Star Wars* line. One of the first things I did when getting the gig was do a deep dive into the old Marvel characters and plots. I thought it might be neat to bring some of that stuff back. I discussed reintroducing the original Marvel characters with Mike Siglain at Lucasfilm. After much discussion it made sense to revisit as many of the OG Marvel *Star Wars* characters as we could for the #108 special. And talking with Matt Rosenberg, we found a way to connect Valance to the 'Crimson Forever' storyline."

Around the same time, in the main "canon" titles, Marvel introduced a *new* version of Valance in the first issue of its movie adaptation of *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (2018), and then developed him further, with a reimagined backstory, in the *Han Solo—Imperial Cadet* limited series (2018-2019). This happened because, as it turned out, Paniccia wasn't the only well-placed individual with a fondness for the cyborg bounty hunter. "[Valance] had some fans over at Lucasfilm's Story Group," he explains.

Walter Simonson says he was pleased to see Valance return, and to draw him again for the cover of the issue #108 special. "My only regret," he adds, "is that Archie isn't around to see it. Because Valance was really his idea. I did design him, so we were co-creators, but Archie was really the driving force."

Domina Tagge and her brothers were also reconceived for the new continuity, showing up first in the *Doctor Aphra* series launched in 2020 and then in the *War of the Bounty Hunters* crossover event published in 2021. The 2023 one-shot, *Star Wars: Revelations*, officially canonized Rik Duel, Dani, and Chihdo. And the Nagai were reintroduced too, appearing in the most recent monthly *Star Wars* series, launched in 2025.

"It was a great honor to bring these characters that Walter, Archie, Jo, Carmine, and many others created into canon," Paniccia says. "They contributed so much to that first run, and it's a joy to see them interacting once again with the movie characters."

Elements from Marvel's original run have now even been referenced in live action. Crimson Jack, last seen in issue #15, was mentioned in the *Skeleton Crew* TV series. More significantly, the core idea of Duffy's story in issue #81—Boba Fett's escape from the Sarlaac—became canonical during Season 2 of *The Mandalorian*.

"As soon as the Sarlaac burped him up the first time, the door was opened," Duffy says.

As for Jaxxon, he has since been embraced, as well. The green rabbit appeared on variant covers for Marvel's *Star Wars* #1 (Jan. 2015), *Vader Down* #1 (Nov. 2015), and *Poe Dameron* #1 (April 2016), and was later featured in "canon" stories published by IDW in their comic book titles, *Star Wars Adventures Annual* (2018-2020), *Star Wars Adventures: Ghosts of Vader's Castle* (2021), and *Star Wars: Hyperspace Stories—Jaxxon Annual* (2023).

"I'm delighted," Roy Thomas says today. He adds with a laugh, "And I'm glad George is still alive to see it—I hope he's noticed it. Whatever he thinks—whether he likes it or he doesn't like it or doesn't care, I hope sometime somebody points it out to him, just to say, 'He's still around, George! Fifty years after you [banished him]!'"

Jaxxon has even gotten his own Hasbro action figure, which, at the time of this writing, is still available.

"Now I think he should have his own series," Thomas says. "Hell, I want to see him have his own *movie*! They can do that now—Jaxxon and Chewbacca are destined for a team-up!"



***GLENN GREENBERG** is an award-winning writer and editor whose work includes comics, prose fiction, journalism, and marketing content. His comic book writing credits include* **The Spectacular Spider-Man**, **The Silver Surfer**, **Dracula: Lord of the Undead**, **The Rampaging Hulk**, *and* **Star Trek: Untold Voyages**. *On the Star Wars front, Glenn contributed several feature articles to Marvel's current line of comics, and he wrote a special edition of* **TIME** *Magazine, titled The Story of* **Star Wars**, *which recounted the entire history of the franchise on the occasion of its 45th anniversary.*

end

EVIL, THY NAME IS DESAAD



by James Heath Lantz

Bring on the BAD GUYS!

Desaad may be Darkseid's right hand man, but he's also a treacherous being who revels in pain and suffering. Some might go even as far as to say Desaad is more evil than Darkseid. What motivates his methods and his sadism? How did he come to be? What inspired the character's creation? *BACK ISSUE* will travel to Apokolips and other parts of the DC Universe to answer these and so many other questions for you Bronze Age fans and Jack Kirby enthusiasts. Just try to finish this one before the Parademons hunt you down.

BEGINNING THE PAIN

When Jack Kirby left Marvel to work for DC, his vast imagination brought about new characters and worlds as it had for the House of Ideas. Kirby had written, drawn, and edited various comics with inking by Vince Colletta, Mike Royer, Frank Giacoia, and D. Bruce Berry. Among Kirby's best known DC Comics' work is his magnum opus, his *Thriller*, *Purple Rain* or *Ziggy Stardust* if you will, *The Fourth World Saga*. It consisted of four series–*Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen*, *The New Gods*, *The Forever People*, and *Mister Miracle*. Each title could be read separately or as an overarching serial. *The Fourth World Saga* introduced readers to a multitude of layered heroes and villains created by the King of Comics, Jack Kirby. Among the latter is the devious Desaad.

The Forever People #2 (Apr.-May 1971) is considered the debut of Desaad. However, he also appeared in *The New Gods* #2 (Apr.-May 1971) which was released in the same month. The chronological first appearance of Desaad is *The New Gods* #2 if one looks at things in that particular order. Desaad was envisioned as part of Kirby's overall *Fourth World* arc of good versus evil. His name was inspired by the real-life Marquis De Sade. Desaad even has an assistant Justeen, whose name is a variation of the title character in De Sade's novel *Justine*. However, Justine and Justeen share very few, if any, similarities to one another.

A Jewish veteran of World War II, Kirby created Desaad to symbolize state sponsored oppression and physical and psychological torture commonly used by the Nazis. This was nothing new as Kirby often used his military experience and some of the historical figures involved as basis for his comics work. Darkseid was *The Fourth World Saga*'s equivalent of Adolf Hitler, and Desaad was basically his Doctor Josef Mengele. Like Mengele, Desaad would perform cruel, torturous, and inhumane experiments on others.

Kirby's design for Desaad, like those of most of his characters in his storied comics career, has the many nuances that only the King of Comics could create. In the case of Darkseid's chief torturer, Kirby made him look sinister in a way that shows readers that his very presence and being exude evil. A smile from him, or even just a look, could strike fear into most mortals whom he encounters. One gets the idea that he observed the serpent from the Biblical story of Adam and Eve for his mannerisms and behavior. These aspects combined with Kirby's flare for the dramatic make Desaad one of the most memorable villains in the DC Universe.

Desaad's debuts in the second issues of *The Forever People* and *The New Gods* have Kirby planting the seeds of the character's arc throughout *The Fourth World Saga*. Readers and soldiers of Apokolips alike see that he is extremely impatient to test his fear machine in *The New Gods*. A guard even points out that Desaad hungers for this like a parasite while those placed in the device beg for mercy where none exists.

Thanks to Kirby's distinct art style, there is a look of sheer glee on Desaad's face when he removes his purple mask after the fear machine's experiment is a success. Kirby conveys more emotion in a single panel than some could show in an entire page. However, the story demonstrates that Desaad's joy is not just for the torture he has inflicted. It comes from the need to use the apparatus on a larger scale

Desaad as he appeared in *Who's Who in the DC Universe* #6. Art by Jack Kirby and Greg Theakston.

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in Darkseid's quest the Anti-Life Equation. He's even placed a field model of the fear machine in a key point in a city on Earth where Darkseid's son Orion is working to stop the forces of Apokolips.

Speaking of Orion, in *The New Gods* #2, Desaad insists on testing some of his new mechanisms of torture on him. He is angry about Orion's thwarting of Darkseid's plans. The Lord of Apokolips calmly reigns Desaad in while observing that his right-hand man is blinded by his mania. Darkseid's perception of Desaad accurately assesses the character's mental state. His passion for inflicting pain borders on obsession, and in the case of Orion, it blinds him. Yet, there could be other factors involved. At this point in *The Fourth World Saga*, Desaad is very devoted to Darkseid, and he maybe sees the fact that Orion fighting Apokolips as the ultimate treachery, for Orion is Darkseid's son. One could surmise that Desaad is trying to be a better scion to Darkseid than Orion, even if Desaad was not fathered by the tyrant in the traditional sense.

While Desaad was experimenting with his fear machine in *The New Gods* #2, he was observing and relishing the fear created by Darkseid's minion Mantis. Desaad isn't seen much in his pair of appearances in *The New Gods* and *The Forever People's* second issues. Yet, the impact of his presence can be felt in both chapters. Desaad's tests and monitoring of what apprehension does to those on Apokolips and Earth gives the impression that he may only be in a few panels, but Desaad is still someone to watch out for as *The Fourth World Saga* progresses.

Desaad plays a more prominent role in *The Forever People* #4 (Aug.-Sep. 1971). Kirby has Darkseid's chief torturer turn the Happyland amusement park into a "Kingdom of The Damned" because someone there holds the key to the Anti-Life Equation. This midway's name could be a tribute to the July 08, 1940-July 19, 1940 "Happyland Amusement Park" serial from *The Adventures of Superman* radio program. Patrons of this Happyland discover it's more horror than happy when Desaad makes them his guinea pigs all while he tortures the Forever People and the sentient computer Mother Box.

Readers get an even better look at Desaad's penchant for inflicting physical and psychological torture on others. However, we also get a look at his arrogance when he believes to have killed Mother Box. Darkseid scolds him for his hubris because the Dark Lord of Apokolips knows there is more to the Mother Boxes than Desaad or even Darkseid realizes.

Desaad continues his psychological toying with the Happyland visitors in the next issue of *The Forever People*. His main tool for this, as with his previous appearances in *The Fourth World Saga*, is fear. Desaad derives pleasure from it. He also doesn't see why Darkseid would rather observe Happyland in

(top left) Desaad debuts in *Forever People* #2. (top right) Desaad gets the glory on the cover of *Forever People* #4. (bottom) Desaad menaces Beautiful Dreamer on this splash page from *Forever People* #4. Art by Kirby and Vince Colletta. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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Desaad attempts to reason with Darkseid on this page from *Forever People* #6. Kirby pencil art scan courtesy of John Morrow.

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other ways. He doesn't get time to ponder much about that because wrestler Sonny Sumo, who has a portion of the Anti-Life Equation within him and is aided by the Mother Box Desaad believed gone, has freed the Forever People and crumbled Happyland, where Desaad's evil devices are housed in the next two *Forever People* comic books.

Desaad's emotions and mindset run the spectrum of extremes throughout the "Happyland" section of *The Fourth World Saga*. He feels great joy and pleasure during his experiments with fear and the imprisonment of the Forever People when these chapters start out, and he becomes rather sure of himself as he progresses. Yet, there is intense rage and fear within him when Sonny Sumo and Mother Box stop his torturous work. His anger is directed at the unforeseen arrival of Sumo and Mother Box, but his anxiety is due to the consequences of failure. His master Darkseid does not take kindly to those who don't succeed in doing his bidding. Desaad, more than anyone, knows this all too well. He tends to take the brunt of Darkseid's anger.



Darkseid strikes down Desaad on the page from *New Gods* #11. Art by Kirby and Mike Royer. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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Desaad's next, albeit small, appearance in Kirby's serial delved more into the past before the early issues of *The Fourth World Saga*. *The New Gods* #7 (Mar. 1972) shows him among others during a banquet. It is just one scene, but Desaad's visage looks like it is plotting and scheming various means to inflict pain on the subjects and royalty of Apokolips.

One could wonder why Kirby didn't look into this period in the first issues of his quartet of comic series. Yet, reading *The Fourth World Saga* like a novel or overarching serial instead of single stories can help to explain this to some degree. Kirby introduces the characters in *Jimmy Olsen*, *The New Gods*, *The Forever People*, and *Mister Miracle* in more familiar Earthly settings so readers can get to know them better in more identifiable places. Plus, it's common in comics to put the past events in later stories. Batman, for example, doesn't get an origin story until *Detective Comics* #33, some months after his debut in #27. In other media, George Lucas started the *Star Wars* films with 1977's *Episode IV: A New Hope*, with prequels showing how Anakin Skywalker became Darth Vader in 1999, 2002, and 2005.

Getting back to Desaad, *The New Gods* #11 (Nov. 1972) gives readers a look at his past actions. Darkseid is pondering the war between his two sons Orion and Kalibak. The dark lord of Apokolips discusses this with Desaad, who knows that Orion and Kalibak are half-brothers. Tigra was Orion's mother, and Darkseid's one true love when he was the mortal Uxes, Suli as the same parent for Kalibak. Desaad knew that Darkseid wanted to secretly wed Suli against his mother, Queen Heggra's wishes. At the same time, Darkseid is aware that Desaad poisoned Suli and killed her. Desaad's response after being struck by Darkseid's Omega Beams is practically the Nuremberg defense. He was only following orders. Queen Heggra wanted Desaad to murder Suli because she felt Suli was unsuitable to sire the children of Darkseid.

It's implied that Darkseid always knew that Desaad murdered Suli, and Desaad seems to have understood that Darkseid was aware of this. Desaad reveals to both the Dark Lord of Apokolips and readers that he committed the heinous act because he feared Queen Heggra's wrath. Desaad, at heart, is a coward who is devoted to whomever rules Apokolips so long as it suits his purposes. Because of this, he repeatedly takes abuse and Omega Beam blasts from Darkseid. A perfect example of this would be when a displeased Darkseid uses the deadly eye lasers on Desaad when he learns the chief torturer is siphoning the emotions coming from Orion's battle with Kalibak in *The New Gods* #11. The end result is Desaad supposedly being wiped from existence.

1984's *The New Gods* six-issue miniseries reprinted Kirby's original eleven *New Gods* stories from *The Fourth World Saga*. This second volume was printed on higher quality Baxter paper with new Kirby covers. The sixth comic also features the unpublished last panel of *The New Gods* #11 and the previously unreleased #12 written and drawn by Kirby.

While Kirby left DC Comics after the cancellation of three of the four *Fourth World Saga* titles, (*Jimmy Olsen* remained and changed direction after Kirby's departure, as was discussed in *BACK ISSUE* #154.) Kirby would return to them in the mid-1980s with two *Super Powers* miniseries and *The Hunger Dogs*

graphic novel. (There was a third *Super Powers* series, but Kirby was not involved with it.-Ed.) *Super Powers* was based on a toy line of the same name in which DC's Jeanette Kahn and Paul Levitz had hired Kirby to design characters–including some from his *Fourth World Saga. The Hunger Dogs* was a conclusion to Kirby's overall serial from the 1970s.

Desaad was among the characters used in Kirby's *Super Powers* comics. As with *The Fourth World Saga*, he is Darkseid's right hand man. However, the series is not considered part of DC's main canon. This gave Kirby more creative freedom on the books. Desaad's action figure counterpart was pretty faithful to what the King of Comics had drawn in the pages of *The Forever People* and *The New Gods.* The only real difference was the mechanical accessories attached to Desaad's body.



The Hunger Dogs featured Desaad. However, his role is limited to that of a background character due to the continuity established by creators who took over the titles Kirby had created. Kirby himself has been said to have been unhappy with *The Hunger Dogs* because he felt *The Fourth World Saga* needed more than one book to wrap up. Still, in spite of this and Desaad's small role in the graphic novel, Darkseid's chief torturer would still make the DC Universe a darker place.

DESAAD AFTER KIRBY

After Jack Kirby returned to Marvel, DC had revived *The New Gods*. This time writer Gerry Conway took on the writing with Don Newton and Dan Adkins handling the art. Conway, Newton, and Adkins began their saga in *1st Issue Special* #13 (Apr. 1976). They continued in issue #12 of *The New Gods*, which was re-titled *Return of the New Gods*. The series ended with issue #19, but Conway, Newton, and Adkins would conclude their story in *Adventure Comics* #459 and 460 (Sep.-Oct-Nov.-Dec. 1978). Conway also had the New Gods guest star in his *Justice League of America* run.

Desaad is initially absent from Conway's *Return of the New Gods* because Darkseid killed him in Kirby's comics. He was replaced by Gargon until his unexplained return in issue #17 (Apr. 1978). In fact, there was very little distinction between Gargon and Desaad in *Return of the New Gods*. Gargon's face is never shown in his appearances, and his robe is exactly like that of Desaad. This is perhaps what led to the creative confusion when Desaad is shown in *Return of the New Gods* #17. Conway would later acknowledge the error in *New Gods* canon while saying his *New Gods* had paled in comparison to what Kirby had done. All that is said is that Darkseid brought back some from his inner circle, including Desaad, in his quest for the Anti-Life Equation.

In addition to Kirby's work on *The New Gods* Volume 2, *Super Powers*, and *The Hunger Dogs*, the 1980s was a resurgence of the characters from Kirby's *Fourth World Saga*. They weren't very involved in Marv Wolfman and George Perez's *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, and much of their continuity remained intact. They would, however, play a prominent role in John Ostrander, Len Wein, and John Byrne's *Legends* company-wide crossover in 1986.

Darkseid is waging a new, more insidious war on superheroes which he dubs Operation: Humiliation. His henchman Glorious Godfrey, in the guise of human G. Gordon Godfrey, has turned the public against





(top) Kirby's design for the Desaad Super Powers action figure. (inset) The finished Super Powers action figure. (bottom) Darkseid and Desaad from *Super Powers* #2. Art by Kirby and Greg Theakston. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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Superman, Batman, and the rest of the DC champions of justice, resulting in President Ronald Reagan signing an executive order banning superhuman activity. Desaad served as chief torturer and strategist for Operation: Humiliation. Among Desaad's contributions to *Legends* were overseeing the Techno-Seeds that created the villains Brimstone and Macro-Man and directing Darkseid's psychological war.

John Byrne's opinions of *Legends* have been well documented. He stated that it was a missed opportunity that was never fully thought through. Despite this, Byrne's art is perhaps among his strongest, particularly when it comes to Kirby's *Fourth World* villains. Byrne adds his own style while respecting what Kirby created. Desaad is clearly in his element, in part, thanks to how Byrne renders him in *Legends*. Byrne gets how evil and sadistic Desaad is in the panels in which the character appears. Desaad looks malevolently content with the work he has to do for Darkseid throughout this crossover. Byrne shows a great understanding for Desaad and the rest from Kirby's *Fourth World* in *Legends*. Granted, Conway's assessment of Post-Kirby *Fourth World* stories can be true to some degree. But Byrne is neither replacing, nor imitating Jack Kirby. He is paying tribute to the King of Comics through his own artwork.

When it comes to respecting and honoring Jack Kirby's *Fourth World* legacy at DC, few have done the job as well as Mark Evanier. Evanier served as Kirby's assistant during his time at DC with *The Fourth World Saga*. He also gave some ideas to Kirby. It seemed only natural for him to take on a series created by his mentor.

Evanier and Paris Cullins took on the third series of *The New Gods* that had been initially started by Jim Starlin after the *Cosmic Odyssey* mini-series Starlin and Mike Mignola had released. *Cosmic* only featured Desaad in a small part as a springboard for Darkseid to ponder where he'd gone wrong in the past. It was Evanier who truly gave Desaad some character definition. He went from someone who merely enjoys being the chief torturer to becoming a conniving sycophant. Desaad also lacks the raw power of the other New Gods in Evanier's twenty-eight issue saga which was co-plotted by Cullins. He must rely on his intellect, technological expertise and political maneuvering to survive on Apokolips.

Mark Evanier had a bit of a hand in the creation of *The Hunger Dogs*. Desaad's near zombie-like behavior in that graphic novel can be summed up by how Evanier portrayed him in *The New Gods Volume Three*. Without the qualities mentioned above, Desaad is mindless in *The Hunger Dogs*, a mere shell of himself that lacks anything psychological. His brain is his most powerful asset in a world of Omega Beams and superhuman abilities. He's a corrupt politician among gods.

(left) Desaad is back in *Return of the New Gods* #17. Art by Don Newton and Dan Adkins. (right) Kalibak makes Desaad pay for killing his mother. *New Gods* #12 art by Paris Cullins and Will Blyberg. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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In Kirby's comics, Desaad has an absolute loyalty to Darkseid because he fears him after the truth of Suli's death is known. That loyalty is put to the test in the latter half of Evanier's *The New Gods*. Darkseid's father Yuga Khan returns in #17 (June 1990), having escaped imprisonment in the Promethean Galaxy. Upon reclaiming the throne of Apokolips, Yuga Khan proves to be more dangerous than Darkseid. He obliterates Desaad for revenge against Heggra's death. He knows Darkseid will manipulate Desaad for his plans of patricide.

In truth when one looks much deeper, particularly in Cullins and Evanier's *The New Gods*, Desaad has no fidelity to anyone save for himself. Yuga Khan points this out in *The New Gods* #20 (Sep. 1990) when he reveals that he knows Desaad poisoned Heggra under Darkseid's orders. It's later revealed in the next chapter by Evanier and Rick Hoberg that natural laws prevent a god from killing their parents. This is why Darkseid used Desaad to murder Heggra. He could not commit the crime himself. Plus, Darkseid possibly felt a dark joy of using the one who executed Suli to do his bidding.

Yuga Khan destroys Desaad not long after he betrays Darkseid. This, like much of Evanier's take on the character, shows Desaad to be opportunistic. He does show that in Kirby's original serial. There were layers in protagonists and antagonists, but they were either pure good or pure evil. Evanier, Cullins, and Hoberg add some more gray area and motivation to the seeds planted by Kirby to allow characters like Desaad to grow.

THE NEXT SAGA

When looking at comic book titles in and centering around Kirby's *Fourth World Saga* during and after Kirby's runs, there seems to be an overarching serial in them. This wasn't very common in comic books until the 1980s when company-wide crossovers and titles featuring the same character would interconnect. Conway's runs on *Batman* and *Detective Comics*, and the monthly post-*Crisis Superman* books are a good example of this.

As with Kirby's original saga, the next serial by Byrne, Tom Peyer, Rachel Pollack, Luke Ross, and Brian Garvey begins in another character's book. *Wonder Woman* #101-104 (Sep.-Dec. 1995) has Desaad subject Wonder Woman to various tortures so Darkseid can learn the Olympian Gods' connections to the New Gods. Darkseid's forces attack Paradise Island as Diana Prince learns of the divine links between the Amazons and the New Gods.

Peyer, Pollack, Ross, and Garvey continue where Byrne left off in the fourth series *The New Gods* #1 (Oct. 1996). After Darkseid's defeat in *Wonder Woman*, many, including Desaad and Granny Goodness, ponder about his fate and whereabouts. Desaad even impersonates the Dark Lord of Apokolips, adding subterfuge and identity issues to his character. He seems to go back to his roots of enjoying torturing others in Byrne's *Wonder Woman*, but the creative team on the 1996 *New God* series adds more to Desaad by making him a hollow being seeking to discover who he truly is all while he desires to maintain control on Apokolips. By usurping Darkseid's identity there is no way for much of Apokolips' population to know the real fate of the omnipotent tyrant in early chapters of this serial. One can also see that Desaad is trying to hide from himself in the guise of Darkseid, leaving readers to ask how long Desaad can feign being someone else before he must eventually confront himself.

There is desperation in Desaad and his actions in this *New Gods* series. Yes, he looks like Darkseid, but he lacks the oppressive certainty and conviction of the god he seeks to imitate. Darkseid is a more corrupt power, but Desaad is an evil whose actions create more chaos than order.

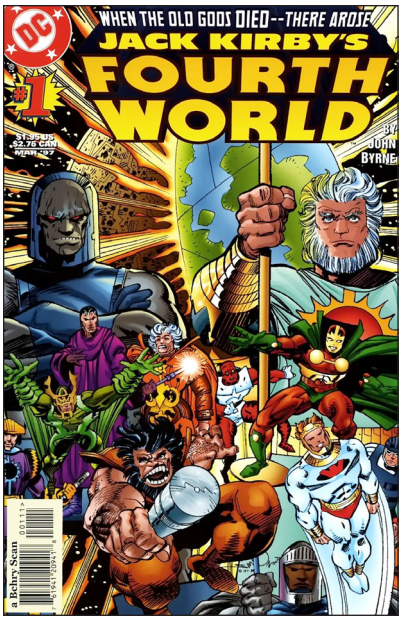
As Pollack goes on her own with Ross, Orion sees through Desaad's impersonation of Darkseid because Orion himself had killed his father Darkseid, at least physically. Darkseid's mind is hidden in his son Orion's





(top) Yuga Khan destroys Desaad in *New Gods* #20. Art by Rick Hoberg and Willie Blyberg. (bottom) Orion sees through Desaad's disguise in *New Gods* #6. Art by Luke Ross, Brian Garvey, and John Nyberg.

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body. They separate at the end of *The New Gods* #6 (Mar. 1996). Pollack goes beyond the exteriors and archetypes of good and evil deities in *The New Gods*. Pollack, Ross, and other artists give the audience a look behind the mask of omnipotence to show that even those thought to be all-powerful have flaws, and their decisions have consequences even for them. Desaad's pretense of being Darkseid causes those on Apokolips to want to tear him to bits. However, Darkseid and the creative team had other plans for Desaad and the rest of the New Gods. The Source has been corrupted, causing many gods to go mad. Highfather of New Genesis and Darkseid must work together to fight S'ivaa, Destroyer of Worlds.

With Darkseid and Highfather sacrificed to the Source and S'ivaa merged with the Source Wall, the planets New Genesis and Apokolips are without leaders and consumed by the Source Fires when Byrne took over *The New Gods* with issue #12 (Nov. 1996). However, as with Jack Kirby's beginning of *The Fourth World Saga*, Byrne's run on *The New Gods* begins on Earth. Byrne had experience with Kirby's characters with the *Legends* crossover and his runs on *Superman* and *Action Comics*. *Action Comics* #593 (Oct. 1987) had Desaad impersonate Darkseid as he later had done in *The New Gods Volume Four.* Byrne also made Desaad look more horrifying compared to what Kirby had done. In Byrne's hands, Desaad seems less human and more evil.

The New Gods #12-15 by Byrne are the final issues of this fourth series. Some New Gods are on Earth wondering about the fate of New Genesis and Apokolips. Desaad believes the answers lie within old allies of Orion last seen in Jack Kirby's original saga. The character returns to torturous tactics to familiarize new readers to his past in a way that doesn't feel like a step backward in Desaad's evolution.

By the end of Byrne's *The New Gods*, Apokolips and New Genesis have become one planet, leading into Byrne's next title, the aptly named *Jack Kirby's Fourth World.* This twenty-issue series also featured covers by Walter Simonson and back-up stories by Byrne and Simonson. Byrne, like those before him and after Kirby, expanded on plot treads within the original *Fourth World Saga*. Desaad, while physically weaker than most of his peers, relies on various methods of torture, deception, and powers of mental control and disguise to become one of the most loyal of Darkseid's minions.

Byrne, in addition to making Desaad one of Darkseid's more elite followers, showed that the character was important in the Dark Lord of Apokolips' past, as seen in the secondary *Tales of the New Gods* features from *JKFW* #2-5 (Apr.-July 1997). He had taken up the name of Desaad

(top left) The New Gods, including Desaad, are featured on Walter Simonson's cover for *Jack Kirby's Fourth World* #1. (top right) Orion and Desaad battle for control of Orion's body in *JKFW* #6. Cover by Simonson. (bottom) Desaad and Metron have a disagreement in *JKFW* #10. Art by John Byrne.

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sometime before Queen Heggra's son Uxes killed his brother Drax to steal the Omega Force power that would turn Uxes into Darkseid. Darkseid, as previously established, would use Desaad to murder his mother after she ordered Desaad to poison Suli.

Desaad would become trapped in Orion's body leaving both New Gods internally fighting for dominance in *JKFW* #6 (Aug. 1997) much in the way the Hulk does with Bruce Banner. This occurred in one of Darkseid's attempts to gain access to the Source. While there are no visual cues to this war in the psyches of Orion and Desaad, dialogue gives readers clues to the internal conflict. Orion's method of dealing with Darkseid's shock troops, for example, is one more of sadistic glee than a warrior battling a foe. There is a manipulative cruelty in Orion's behavior that is more like Desaad. Highfather and Takion separate the two beings, preventing Darkseid from killing both.

Byrne, while adding elements to the character's past, took Desaad back his roots of being among the most evil of Darkseid's inner circle. Yes, we see more about him, but at his core, Desaad is *The Fourth World Saga's* Mengele who delights in the physical and psychological pain of others. We see this even when he shares bodies with Orion. In addition to the sadism in battle, there is an innate happiness in seeing Orion commit his atrocities in battle.

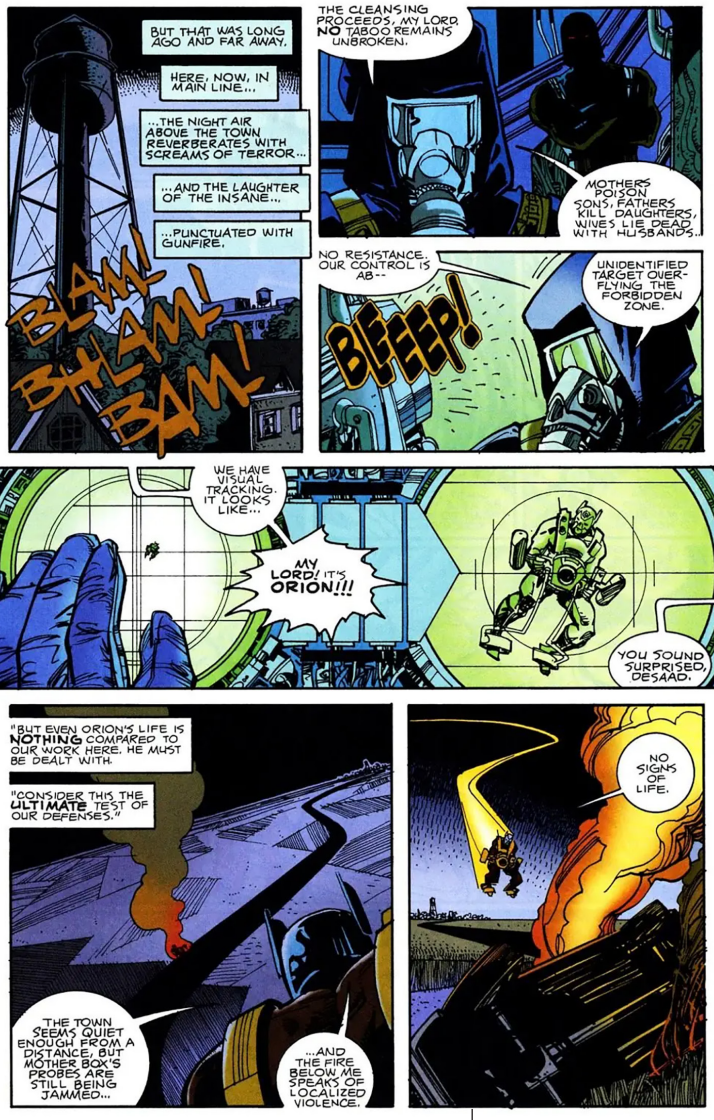
Visually, we see Desaad evolve from a more human aspect under Kirby to something a little more demonic when Byrne draws him. This transformation would continue with Simonson in his 2000-2002 *Orion* series. Desaad is shown performing Anti-Life experiments on the population of Main Line, Nebraska in *Orion*, proving once again his torture is used to appease his scientific curiosity.

Another trait we see in Desaad under Simonson's masterful storytelling is the character's manipulative nature. He uses Justeen and Mortalla for his own plots and schemes. Mortalla is a pawn in Desaad's attempts to interfere with Orion's destruction of Kalibak's power belt. Orion would gain the upper hand and later stop Desaad. Yet, Darkseid's chief torturer would continue to prove he is an evil force to be reckoned with in numerous DC comic books for many years after *Orion* concluded. You can check out just how evil Desaad is in all of his appearances. Just don't let him torture you before you get to your local comic book shop to buy them.

Dedicated to the lady whose love is every world I've lived in, my beautiful and amazing wife Laura. More love and thanks go to Jadis, Pupino, Odino, and our four-legged New Gods and to my nephew Kento, who turned the Anti-Life Equation into the Super Life Equation. Without your affection, assistance, support, and patience, none of this would be possible. This article is also dedicated to Jack Kirby, Gerry Conway, Mark Evanier, Paris Cullins, Rachel Pollack, Luke Ross, Tom Peyer, John Byrne, Walter Simonson, and the various comic book writers and artists past, present and future who made Desaad truly evil. May Highfather guide you forever.

***James Heath Lantz** is a freelance writer who was heavily influenced by television, film, old time radio shows and books-especially comic books-growing up in Ohio. He's co-authored* **Roy Thomas Presents Captain Video** *with Roy Thomas. He also wrote the introductions for* **Pre-Code Classics: Weird Mysteries Volumes One and Two** *and* **Roy Thomas Presents Sheena-Queen of the Jungle Volume Three** *(All published by PS Artbooks), self-published his* **Trilogy of Tales** *e-book, (Available at Smashwords.com and other outlets), and reviews various media for Superman Homepage. James currently lives in Italy with his wife Laura and their family of cats, dogs, and humans from Italy, Japan, and the United States.*







(top) Darkseid and Desaad plot in *Orion* #2. Art by Walter Simonson. (bottom) Desaad's hash is settled in *Orion* #11. Or is it? Cover by Simonson.

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TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

LOST IN... A DIFFERENT AREA OF... SPACE!

ANOTHER SPACE FAMILY ROBINSON

by Steven Thompson



I was 7 years old in 1966 and I was just discovering that comic books were not all about talking ghosts and devils and giants or little girls with dot fetishes! This being the year of Batmania, I was, naturally, inclined toward DC superheroes. Later in the year, I discovered Marvel and Tower. Then I saw a comic book based on one of my favorite television series—*Lost in Space*! At least it seemed to be. I mean, it was right there on the cover, "Lost in Space" and it even referenced the Robinsons. I flipped through it at the drugstore, however, and it became obvious that something was wrong. Well, everything was wrong! No robot, no Dr. Smith, no Jupiter 2 spacecraft. Even the Robinsons weren't the same! I mean, "Tim" and "Tam?" Seriously? The term "rip-off" hadn't even been coined at that point but I could see that book was ripping off the TV show and I didn't like it! I put it back and never bought or read a single issue of *Space Family Robinson—Lost in Space*...until now.

Somebody was certainly buying it, though, as it initially lasted seven years and, according to writer, blogger, and comics historian Mark Evanier on the "Ask Mark Evanier!" page, "*Space Family Robinson* for a time outsold everything at DC and Marvel." At its peak, the title was also published in Mexico, Brazil, Australia, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Lebanon, and the Philippines. Like many of the more serious Gold Key titles, every issue featured gorgeous, fully painted covers, mostly by artist George Wilson, which no doubt contributed to the title's sales.

Before we can really discuss Gold Key's *Space Family Robinson*, however, we need to understand where it came from. Curiously, it all started with Daniel Defoe, described on his Wikipedia page as a "writer, journalist, merchant, and spy." A fascinating gentleman, no doubt, but today we're only concerned with one particular aspect of the man, that being the novel that he wrote in 1719, when he was nearly 60 years old. You've probably heard of it: *Robinson Crusoe*.

When I was growing up in the 1960s, everyone seemed familiar with the story of Robinson Crusoe, and how he was stranded on an island for years, eventually saving from cannibals a native he called Friday, who becomes his friend and servant. The pair of them have numerous adventures after that. Even if you hadn't read the book, or seen any kind of adaptation of it, you just seemed to "know" that Robinson Crusoe was about a guy living on an island somewhere. It's like that story had just crept into the public consciousness, which is basically what happened.

The adventures of *Space Family Robinson* begins. Original art for *Space Family Robinson* #1 by George Wilson. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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(top) Character and spacecraft designs by Dan Spiegle for *Space Family Robinson*. (bottom) A page by Spiegle from issue #1. Original art scans courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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It turns out that Defoe's novel—often credited as being the very first English language novel—created an early version of the type of rabid excitement we would later label Beatlemania, or yes, even Batmania! It was called Robinsonade!

Robinsonade was mainly categorized by more and more authors writing variations on Defoe's story, milking the axiom that one can't go wrong giving the public what it wants. Throughout the mid-1700s there was new fiction from around the globe that featured men isolated from society on desert islands, on mountain tops, in caves, and even on the moon, in early examples of science fiction!

Considered the most successful and by far the longest-lasting example of Robinsonade, in 1812 Zurich, nearly 100 years after Defoe's book, Johann David Wyss published his novel, *Der Schweizerische Robinson,* translated as *The Swiss Robinson*. The family in the book is actually not named Robinson, or any other name. They're just a Swiss family. The title was simply meant to connect it to its inspiration in the eyes of potential book buyers.

When it came to America in 1814, though, it was awarded the unwieldy title of *The Family Robinson Crusoe, or, Journal of a Father Shipwrecked, with his Wife and Children, on an Uninhabited Island*. It wasn't too long before that monster was simplified to *The Swiss Family Robinson*.

The book was a massive world-wide success, leading to a number of both official and unofficial sequels, one of which was actually written by the legendary French writer, Jules Verne (author of *Around the World In 80 Days* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*).

If you're keeping up with today's history lesson, class, here's where it starts to get really interesting. On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik and suddenly the world was very different. The race for space was on!

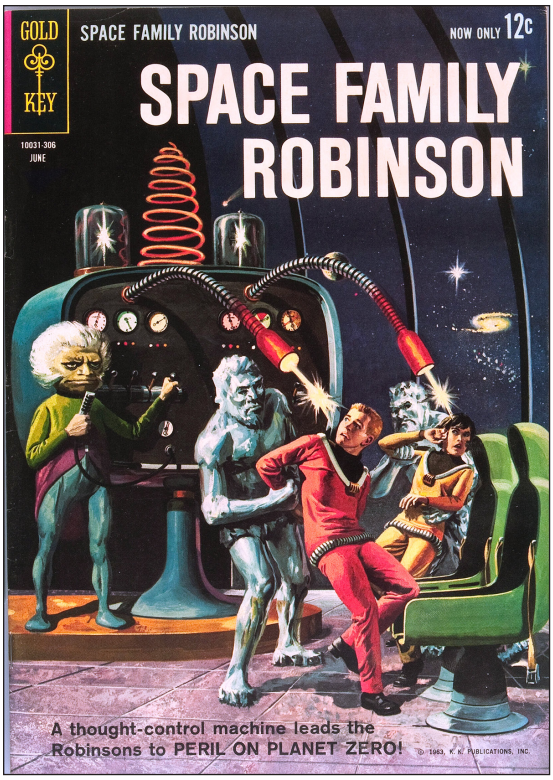
Three years later, in 1960, Walt Disney Productions released its now-classic film version of *Swiss Family Robinson*. With Dr. Wernher Von Braun, the German scientist at the forefront of the Space Race, also working for Disney, it was probably inevitable that someone would coin the punnish title *Space Family Robinson*. Several people did.

Somewhere between 1960 and 1962, Danish-American author and filmmaker Ib J. Melchior, at that time building a reputation for his successful B-movie science fiction hits, like *Journey to the 7th Planet* (1962) and *The Angry Red Planet* (1959), crafted a scenario based on that title—*Space Family Robinson*. Some reports indicate that Melchior's project would have been for Disney, only to be canceled when that studio's sci-fi film *Moon Pilot* (1962) failed to "take off" at the box office. By 1964, though, Melchior was still hawking his project as upcoming, with a *Variety* ad citing that filming would commence soon. Instead, that same year saw the release of *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*, co-written by Melchior.

Meanwhile, Del Connell, 2011's winner of the Bill Finger Award, had worked as a writer for Walt Disney Productions from 1939 to 1950, after which he transitioned to writing Disney comics and others for Western Publishing (then distributed by Dell Comics).

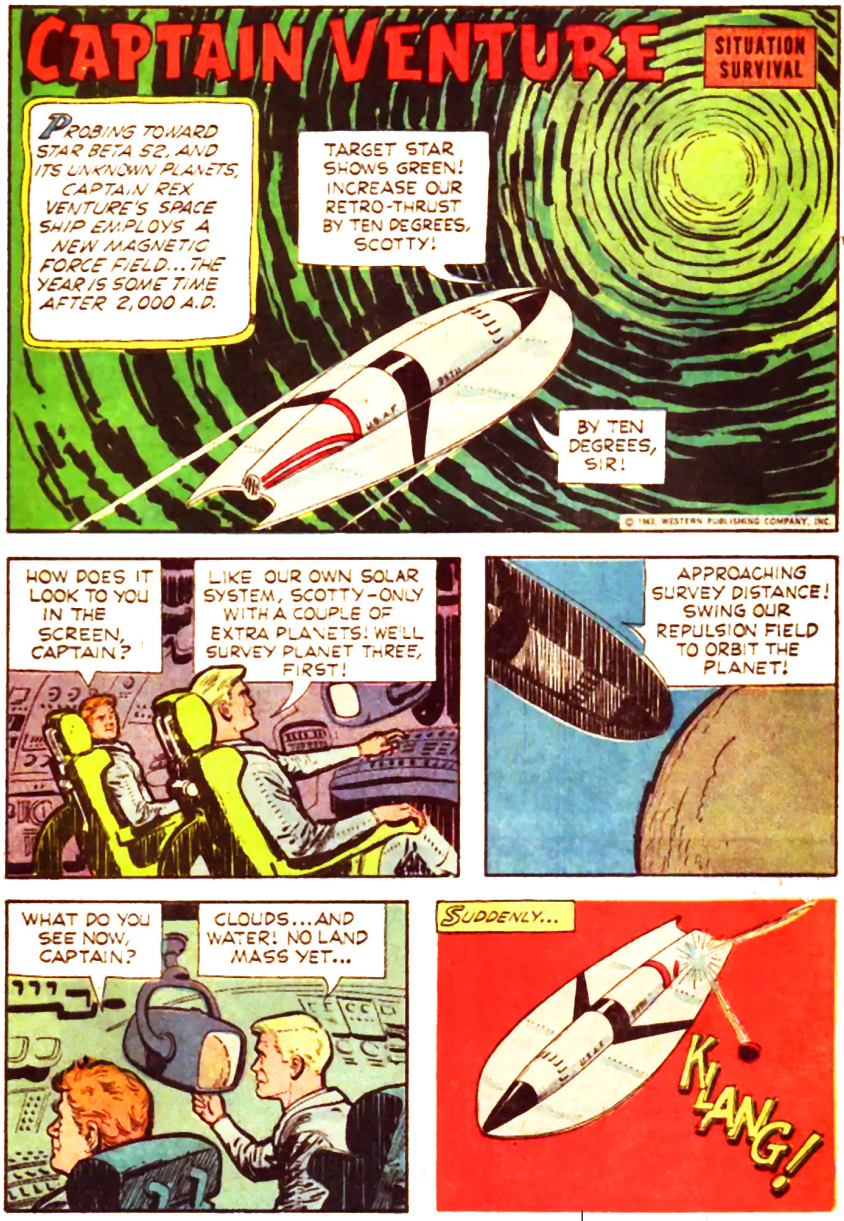
Six years later, he became editorial director for Western, a job he would remain with until the company went out of business in the late 1980s. During his tenure was when Western split away from Dell and formed its own company, Gold Key, which retained most of the profitable licensed characters in the divorce.

It was for Gold Key that Del created *SFR* in 1962. In his 1996 book, *Space Family Robinson: The True Story* (later reissued as *Lost in Space: The True Story)*, author Ed Shifres mentions a long-standing rumor that the *SFR* comic book had been created by legendary Disney duck artist Carl Barks.



While Barks was still alive, Shifres went to the source. Barks responded, in part, "First off, my connection to the Gold Key *Space Family Robinson* comic book stories was zero. I neither wrote the stories nor drew any of the artwork." The Old Duck Man added, "My name has gotten hooked into the folklore of the series creation by the fact that I wrote a one-line suggestion to Editor Chase Craig around 1960-61 to the effect that Gold Key should do a comic book version of *Swiss Family Robinson* and title it *Space Family Robinson*. It was just an idea that popped into my head. I had never heard of any use of the title in TV or anywhere else." Craig never responded at all and Barks was disappointed. Later, he found out, "Chase had just been too busy to read my letter through and had not noticed my great idea. Months later, I saw the first issue of Gold Key's *Space Family Robinson* comics on the newsstands and was quite flabbergasted to see that they had chosen to make the series a scientific-gimmickry imitation of a thousand other space comics and movies. Well, Chase and Del were a little red-faced months later when they found in my file that I had once suggested the title and series."

Chase Craig weighed in to Shifres, also, pointing out that they couldn't have used the concept if they had wanted to as long as Dell distributed their comics. "Every comic we produced was based on a famous name. At this time our comics were published by Dell, and this was their policy." A couple of years later came the split between Dell Comics and Western Publishing, which led to the creation of Gold Key Comics and at that point, "… the word came out that they now wanted original titles. As a result, Del Connell, an editor in our L.A. office, came in with a story treatment for a comic based on a family which was lost in space. I want to point out that Del had never seen Carl Barks's letter to me suggesting the title *Space Family Robinson*. Carl's title seemed to fit Del's story so we called it *Space Family Robinson*. I believe Del wrote the first script and from that point on he edited the series, although he bought future stories from others."



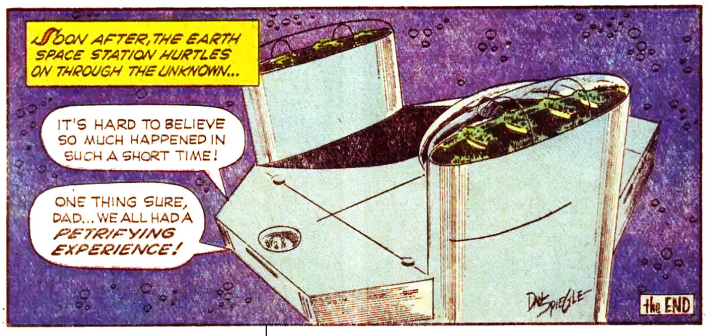
By "others," today's Grand Comics Database lists only the ultra-prolific Gaylord DuBois. He's credited with writing all the remaining Gold Key issues.

Gaylord DuBois, former ranch hand, short order cook, theological student, social worker, WPA bureaucrat, tie salesman, electric meter reader, farmer, teacher, and deputy sheriff of Rock Springs, Wyoming, was asked by a friend in the publishing business if he wanted to make a quick hundred bucks turning a *Lone Ranger* radio script into a 60,000-word novel. From there, he never looked back. He is said to have written nearly 1,500 comic book scripts, mostly uncredited, and perhaps second only to Paul S. Newman, who also wrote uncredited for Western Publishing. For much of that time, beginning in 1946, DuBois and his wife were traveling North America in a hitched-up travel trailer.

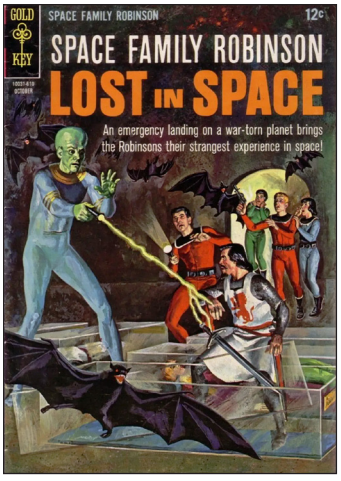
Although unknown to most comic book fans, DuBois was profiled in newspapers from time

(left) The Robinson's don't actually become lost in space until issue #3. Cover by Wilson. (right) "Captain Venture" begins in issue #6. Art by Spiegle.

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(top Left) In issue #7, Spiegle began signing the last panel of the story. (right) Wilson's original cover art for issue #8. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (below left) With issue #15, the title becomes *Space Family Robinson Lost in Space*. Cover by Wilson. (below right) Unlike most Gold Key comics, *Space Family Robinson* had an occasional serialized story. Cover by Wilson.

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to time. In 1977, columnist Dick Burdette who worked for *The Orlando Sentinel* and the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, wrote that "Gaylord DuBois produces a briefcase full of *Lost in Space* scripts written nine months in advance. Like all the scripts he's written, this one involves not only the storyline, but a vivid description of the background, the characters' expressions and apparel, what they are saying and thinking—every exact detail so that all the artist has to do is read the script and draw it in minute detail." DuBois was 78 years old at that time.

Despite the fact that he technically retired in the mid-'70s, his *SFR* scripts continued to appear as long as that title ran. It was his last official comic book work, although he came out of retirement at age 90 to write *New Christian Comics*. He lived until 1993.

Although Gold Key almost never listed any credits on its comic book stories (wrongly figuring, perhaps, that their target school age audience only cared about the characters, not the creators), readers discovered with issue #7 (Apr. 1964) that the artist on the series was Dan Spiegle. He literally signed his name to the final panel of the story and continued to do so for later ones. Spiegle would draw every single one of the Robinsons' adventures—in America, anyway.

Like DuBois, Spiegle's big break had come with a cowboy, in his case Hopalong Cassidy. Hoppy was a western hero portrayed in more than 65 movies and later on television by actor William Boyd. When a newspaper comic strip was planned in 1949 to cash in on the character's growing popularity, it was Boyd himself who reportedly chose Dan Spiegle to draw it. Spiegle later reported that he had great difficulty adjusting to the demands of drawing a daily and Sunday strip. It was after the Hoppy craze and the strip ended that the artist turned up at Western.

In 1972, fan writer Dan Gheno—who had actually been thanked for a letter five years earlier in *SFR* #18 (Oct. 1966)—interviewed Spiegle in the fanzine *Graphic Story World*. "Western," Spiegle said, "was lassoing any artist into their corral who had prior experience, so they happily set me to work doing—westerns. This was about the time of the great cowboy mania saturation peak in comic books, around '55 or '56."

When asked how he came to be involved with *SFR* Spiegle responded, "At that time, Del Connell, a Western editor, was writing the origin issue for the new magazine, and they asked me to draw up a cast of characters. Western liked them so much that they assigned me the strip. It was a success right from the beginning, running about four years, for a while one of their most popular. In fact, it was so popular that CBS stole our idea and refused to pay us any royalties! We were going to sue, but our lawyers cautioned against it, since we were doing so many comic books on their characters, and in the long run we would lose from the loss of business from them. So, we adopted their title and added it to ours in hope of deriving some publicity off the TV show."

Speaking of the TV series, Gary Carter, former editor of the magazine *Comic Book Marketplace*, which devoted much of its issue #58 (Apr. 1998) to the *SFR* comic, said "Irwin Allen always went for the cheapest, lowest common denominator. I view him as doing great damage to sci-fi, stoking the fires for adults in the '60s to tell their kids, 'See, it's all junk.'"

The inevitable comparison to *Lost in Space* on television wasn't helped by the coincidence that June, the matriarch of the Robinson family in the comic, shared her first name with June Lockhart, the actress

playing the similar role of Maureen Robinson on TV. But there's really little that the two franchises have in common, especially after the decision was made to go more for colorful, campy comedy with the show while the comic book remained a serious, if not overly intellectual science fiction adventure all the way through.

Beginning with issue #15 (Jan. 1966), the phrase "Lost in Space" was added to the title of the comic, writ large under a now much smaller "Space Family Robinson." With no actual acknowledgement of the TV show, however, nor any reciprocal acknowledgement on the show itself, the new title simply served to confuse the mostly pre-teen audience it was apparently meant to entice. In 1973, long after the Jupiter II had flown off into TV history, Gold Key changed the title yet again, this time to the unwieldy *Space Family Robinson, Lost in Space on Space Station One*.

Bottom line? Despite all of the intriguing behind-the-scenes points, Gold Key's *SFR* is its own entity. Most likely, TV producer Irwin Allen, film producer Melchior, Disney studios, comics legend Barks, and Western's Chase Craig and/or Del Connell were all simply looking to exploit the public's obsession with outer space with each similarly inspired to the name from the same source—*The Swiss Family Robinson*. The comic book certainly has virtually nothing in common with the Irwin Allen TV series, *Lost in Space*, except for the use of those three words on most of the covers. It just is what it is.

And what is it? *SFR* is just some good, old-fashioned space opera, purposely geared toward a juvenile audience but mostly serious in its adventures. Along the lines of Hanna-Barbera's 1960s cartoons, *Space Ghost* or *Jonny Quest*, it can be enjoyed by fans of all ages.

Craig and June Robinson head up the first family in space, with their early teen children Tim and Tam along with them on Space Station One, as well as a bird named Yakker and a dog named Clancy. Eventually, we learn that the family has been chosen by computer as the ideal family for the space mission. They're all standard types and there's no real character development over the run. Craig is handsome, heroic, strong, honest, and smart. June is intelligent but is mainly shown to be a dutiful wife and mother. The kids are brainy, curious, reckless, and fearless. You know it's fiction because brother and sister rarely if ever argue or fight.

In issue #1 (Dec.1962), the Robinsons aren't yet "lost in space." They're just enjoying an exploratory mission. Even after they do get knocked into deep space in issue #2 (Mar. 1963), they're able to contact Earth, which quickly mounts a rescue mission. In issue #3 (June 1963), however, the station's gyro is broken but they're still optimistic regarding rescue rockets from home.

Unfortunately, a series of cosmic anomalies keeps bouncing them around the galaxy and they completely lose contact with home. Along the way, adopting a kind of galactic "if space life gives you galactic lemons" attitude, they spend some time exploring as they meet and document a lot of alien races. Luckily, they have a universal translator. Unfortunately, it doesn't work on the more monstrous creatures they meet.

Many of the aliens they run across throughout the series' run have the cartoonish look of Hanna-Barbera aliens, either crazy-tall or ridiculously small, with crayon-colored skin and multiple eyes or appendages. One can almost hear Don Messick's voice rising out of the comic as you read.

In the great comics hero tradition of Orphan Annie's "Leapin' Lizards" or the TV Robin's later "Holy Fill-In-The-Blank," Tim and Tam (and sometimes their parents) were often heard spouting out, "Poppin' Planets," "Great Galaxy," or "Leaping Lunar!" Don't let those exclamations fool you, though. For the most part, as we said, these were good, solid, serious juvenile sci-fi stories.

Well, except for issue #23 (Aug. 1967). You can't tell me that DuBois didn't catch the double entendre of a story entitled "Menace From Uranus" which featured paralyzing gas bombs. Even if he didn't do that on purpose, the kids who were the book's target audience undoubtedly caught it and snickered.



SPACE STATION #1

Why don't you have the Robinsons meet some other earthmen out in space?
CHRIS RUCKER — Anchor Pt., Alaska

The Robinsons met U.S. Air Force rocket explorers in issues #1 and #11. But since progressing deeper into space, the only earth people contacted have been the 12th-Century English folk, in issue #18.

I want to know why Captain Venture doesn't have his own comic book.
JIM DINEHART — Whittier, Calif.

Many readers have suggested that we do a book on Captain Venture. At the moment, we don't know if this will ever happen — but most anything is possible these days, so don't give up hope.

I would like to know the ages of Tim and Tam.
LISA MAYS — Secretary, Md.

Tim is 16 and Tam is 15.

I feel I must tell you that you goofed in your December issue. You said Pluto was 2½ million miles from the sun. Pluto averages 3,700,000,000 miles from the sun and never comes closer than 2,700,000,000 miles.
BRANDON KING — Markham, Ontario, Can.

Good catch, Brandon. You are correct. On Cover 2 we stated that Pluto was over 2½ million miles from the sun. The million should have been billion. This mistake was also caught by Flora Core of Bakersfield, California.

Is there a possibility that the food supply on Space Station #1 will run out?
NORMAN ELDRIDGE — Ronan, Mont.

It is not likely. Besides the fruit and vegetable gardens aboard the Space Station, the Robinsons, when they come to a planet that has wild game, restock their meat supply. A reserve supply of food pills that swell up to dinner-size meals when water is added are also aboard for emergency use.

How did the Robinson family get lost in space?
GARY WALTERS — Uniontown, Penn.

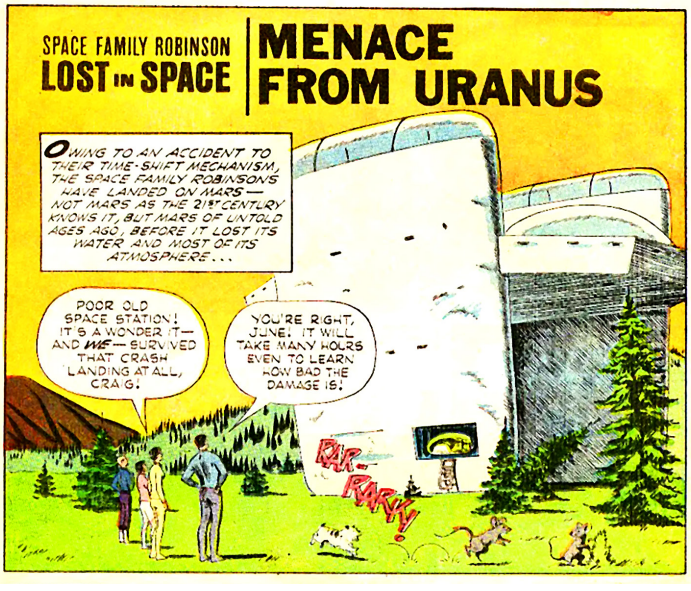
The Robinsons were exploring the outer regions of our solar system when a series of violent cosmic explosions damaged the Space Station's control system and sent it plunging at fantastic speeds deep into space. They lost contact with Earth and have been traveling through the distant reaches of space ever since.

Many readers have asked about the artist who draws Space Family Robinson and Captain Venture. His name is Dan Spiegle — one of the top illustrators in the comic book business. Dan has been illustrating comic books for over 15 years. Besides Space Family he does many of Gold Key's movie and adventure comics.

We are sorry that we cannot answer all letters, but we wish to thank the following readers for having written to Space Station #1:

MIKE OWENS — Burlington, N.J.
KIM KANITZ — Manitowoc, Wis.
LINDA STRAUSS — Willard, Ohio
ANTHONY HANSEN — Colonia, N.J.
ROGER BUSS — Prattville, Ala.
STEVE OWEN — Victorville, Calif.
WAYNE BLEVINS — Science Hill, Ky.
RICHARD BAILY — Sulphur Springs, Ark.
WES SNOOK — Mason City, Iowa
ALAN LINK — Florissant, Mo.
RALPH McNEIL — Hoopa, Calif.
JOHN MESSER — Detroit, Mich.
PETER SHERIFF — Windsor, N.S.W. Australia
MERLIN BROCKHOEFT, Jr. — New Orleans, La.
GARY McGREW — Charleston, W. Va.
JOHN PICKETT — Ripton, Vt.
LAROY SLEDGE — Baltimore, Md.
GEORGE NELSON — Baltimore, Md.
DAVID RINEHART — Baltimore, Md.
RICK WALL — Crescent City, Ill.

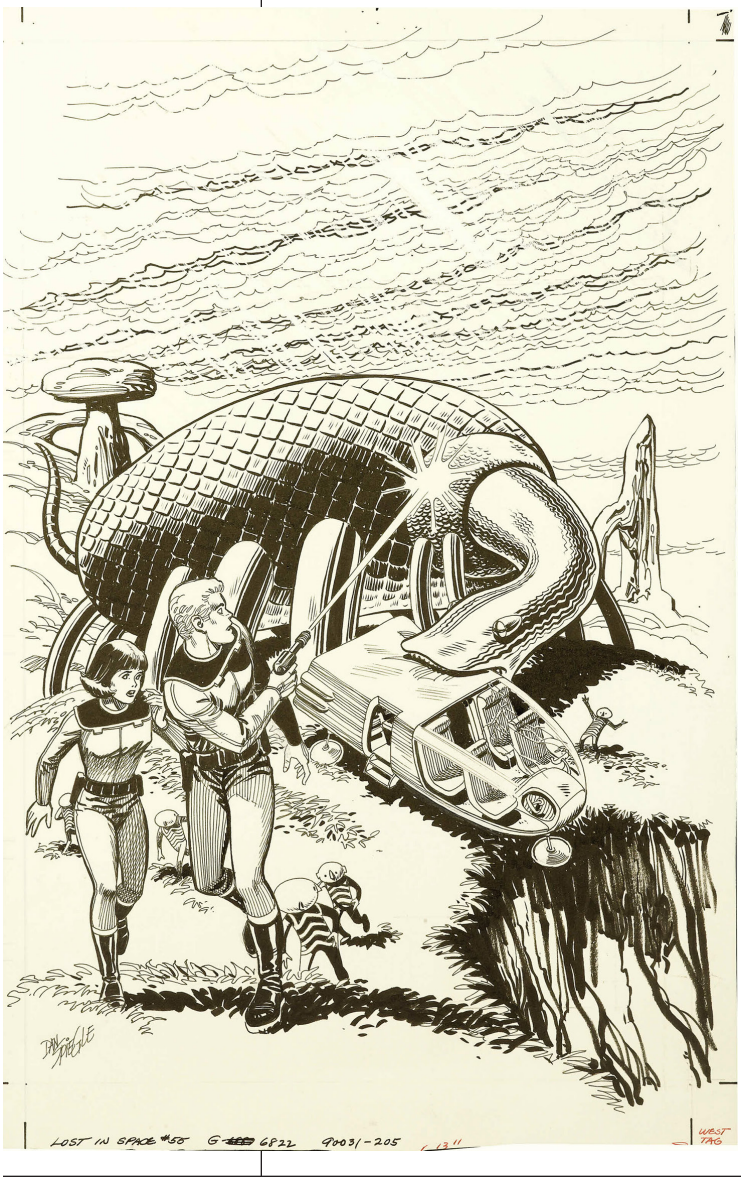
Address your letters to: SPACE STATION #1, K.K. Publications, Poughkeepsie, New York 12601



(top) *Space Family Robinson* included a letters column. This one from issue #22 is interesting as Dan Spiegle is given credit as the artist of the series. (bottom) Many youngsters likely giggled at the title of this story. Issue #23 art by Spiegle.

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(top) With issue #38, the title becomes the unwieldly *Space Family Robinson, Lost in Space on Space Station One*. Cover by Wilson. (bottom) An unpublished cover by Spiegle for issue #55 based on the Wilson painting used for the issue. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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In his fanzine interview, Spiegle said, "Space Station One just progressively evolved out of my imagination. One thing led to another, and I had a fully equipped space ship, with solar gardens, space pods, and the whole works. I fashioned the space pods, by the way, out of my electric razor. The only law that was set out before me concerning the design was that I was not to make the space station look like one of those round uninteresting satellites, the type that satellites are 'supposed' to look like."

Beginning with issue #13 (July 1965), the series even has a letters page, an uncommon sight for a Gold Key comic. This is where a lot of backstory is provided for readers about Space Station One. For example, we learn that it is 224 feet wide, with its towers each 158 feet high. We're also told that "the thickness of the main section between the towers" is a mere 40 feet.

Space Station One was assembled on Earth but since it was powered by magnetism, it was able to lift easily into space and attain great speeds. Similarly, a type of reverse magnetism powers its shields, keeping everything from cosmic dust to giant meteors from crashing into it.

We also learn in answers to letters that Tim is 16 years old, and Tam 15, although they look younger at first and they do seem to age a bit over time. Clancy the dog is said to be 6 and Yakker the bird is 10.

In response to a question about the onboard gardening, we hear the very logical sounding, "The vegetables and fruit trees in the two glassed-in sun decks are planted in synthetic earth and 'watered' with chemicals. The ripening time and size of the fruits and vegetables are all controlled by the turn of a valve to regulate the flow and mixtures of the chemicals."

Another explanation informs readers as to how the oxygen on the vehicle is stored, recycled, and filtered back. Again, scientifically it makes sense. Whomever was compiling these letters pages was doing their homework. One presumes the prolific Gaylor DuBois wasn't the one responding to these fan letters. Perhaps Del Connell?

As noted, the *Space Family Robinson* series was so popular that it was also published around the world in a dozen different languages, all reprinting the work of Spiegle and DuBois (probably without additional compensation). In the United Kingdom, however, things played out a bit differently.

Way back in the 1950s, already inspired by *Swiss Family Robinson*, there had been a comics series entitled *The Space Family Rollinson*! It's unlikely that anyone associated with the later Gold Key series had ever seen or heard of this unrelated strip.

Although not widely known even today, though, in 1966, Craig, June, Tim, and Tam, and their animal friends also had a series of all-new adventures published exclusively in England! While it's true that every single US tale of the Robinsons was drawn by the great Dan Spiegle, all of the British stories were drawn by John M. Burns. Burns, who would go on to fame as one of the greatest of all UK comics artists, drew the Robinsons more stereotypically handsome and pretty, akin to the smooth, time-honored British tradition for science fiction comics as established by the likes of Frank Hampson and Frank Bellamy, both of whom had drawn *Dan Dare*. Where did Burns draw our heroes? Are you sitting comfortably?

Okay, let's begin. Gerry and Sylvia Anderson were behind a surprisingly popular adventure series for children done in England entirely with marionettes. It was called *Thunderbirds*. *Thunderbirds* had some success in the US and led to several feature films as well but in the UK it was a phenomenon. While the heroes were the Tracy family and their super-charged high-tech jets, one of the most popular characters was Lady Penelope, originally voiced by Sylvia Anderson herself.

Lady Penelope was popular enough to get her own eponymous weekly comic magazine, aimed mainly at young girls. While the adventures of the title character appear, the book is rounded out with serialized comic strips based on American TV shows then-popular in the country. Initially, these included *Bewitched, The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Somehow into this mix was thrown not the TV *Lost in Space* Robinsons but a single weekly black-and-white page serializing brand-new adventures of the American Space Family Robinson!

Although eventually replaced by *The Monkees*, the strip survived through six exciting full stories in the weekly magazine and even popped up again that year in a *Lady Penelope Summer Special* and then, with a five-page color story, in the 1967 *Lady Penelope Annual*!

There was apparently also a 64-page *SFR* story in an issue of *Debbie, the Picture Story Library for Girls*, one of a series of black and white digest sized English comics akin to the continental European comics digest albums. The cover shows a Spock-like alien snapping a photo of the posed four family members—who look absolutely nothing like either the Spiegle or Burns versions of the Robinsons.

In practice, *SFR* stories are more on a level with *Star Trek* than TV's *Lost in Space*. In their quest to return home (like the much later *Star Trek Voyager*) our heroic family still continues to explore planets, interact with multi-hued aliens, and encounter monsters. They also constantly need to repair their space station.



There are some exciting and seemingly original concepts such as phase astronomy introduced in issue #18 (Oct. 1966), a tiny prison planet and its machine-made artificial atmosphere and gravity in issue #36 (Oct. 1969). More often, though, one finds the family contending with giant plants, birds, cats, rats, meteors, and abandoned civilizations.

DuBois apparently decided to try to experiment with continued stories, a la Marvel. The first attempt came with the aforementioned issue #18, part one of what amounts to a four-issue serial published from early Fall 1966 to early Spring of 1967. In it, the supporting cast even grows as the Robinsons stumble on a planet where they find a number of 12th century Englishmen (and a woman) in suspended animation, one of whom coincidentally happens to be June's ancestor! Although never mentioned, I have to assume they had Zaphod Beeblebrox's Infinite Improbability Drive. By the end of the arc, they have been gifted a Space-Time Phase Drive machine, which gets them even more lost in later stories.

Space Family Robinson ran for 14 issues, then another 22 issues as *Space Family Robinson Lost in Space*, that second part of the title added just after the TV series began. This was followed by 17 more issues with the run-on title, *Space Family Robinson, Lost in Space on Space Station One* before a break of a bit more than three years beginning at the end of 1977.

During that time, there was, however, still one new SFR story, as always by the series' longtime creators, that appeared in the first issue of a 50 cent 1978 title entitled *Gold Key Champion*. It ended with our heroes still…lost in space, ten years after the completely unrelated TV series ended its run with its stars similarly still lost in space.

Add to that five issues of the shoe store giveaway title *Boys' and Girls' March of Comics*. Running for 36 years, by the 1970s these issues, grabbed up eagerly by children all over the country on otherwise boring shopping trips with their mothers, were small size, with a format of fewer panels per page. Each issue generally featured a cartoon character—like Donald Duck, Woody Woodpecker, or Yogi Bear—but from time to time one might get less cartoony fare such as the Lone Ranger, Turok, or Space Family Robinson. Initially the issues with the Robinsons were all new, from DuBois and Spiegle, of course, a brief adventure rounded out

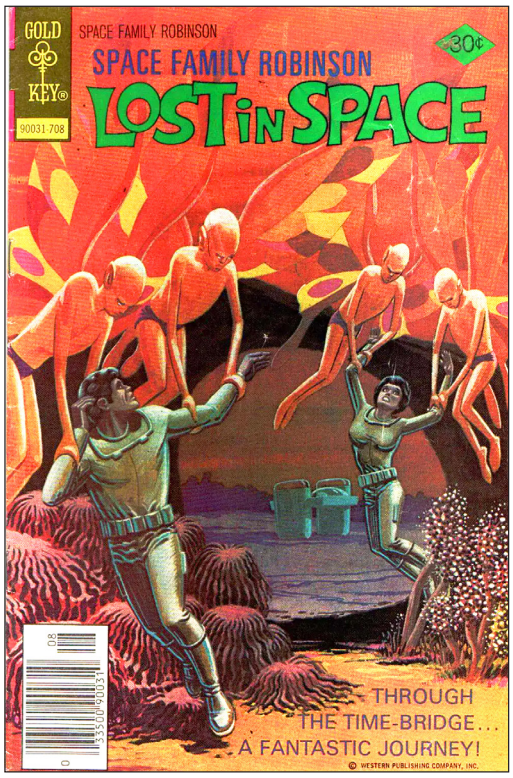


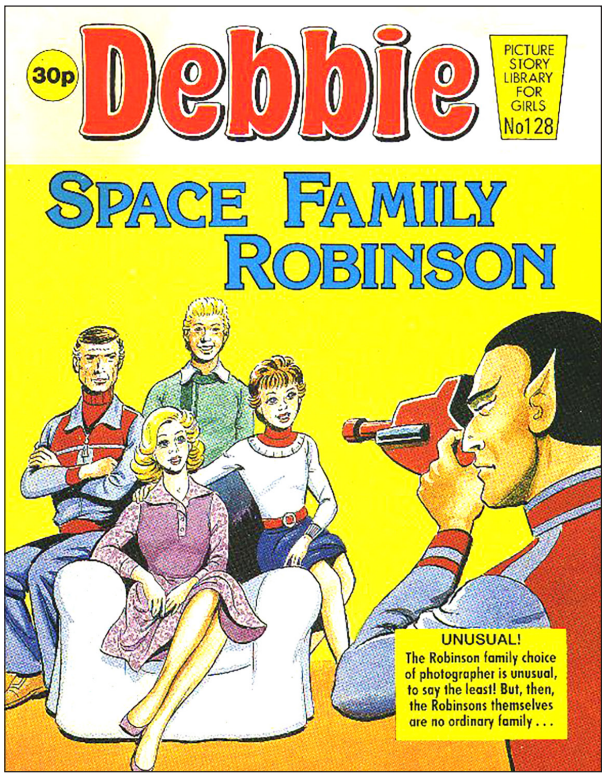
A John M. Burns Space Family Robinson page from *Lady Penelope*. (inset) *Boys' and Girls' March of Comics* #320 featured a Space Family Robinson tale. Cover by Wilson.

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(left) Issue #52 features a painted cover by Spiegle. (right) The cover to the UK's *Debbie* #123 featuring an interesting take on the Robinsons.

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with related games and puzzles. The last couple, though, were reprints of the first ones.

The 1981-1982 version of the full-size comic, now published by Whitman (which was still Western) and distributed largely to non-traditional comics sales sources like toy stores, had also been running reprints, almost exclusively. Even the covers were reprints. The penultimate issue featured a Paul Norris/Mike Royer back-up of *Magnus, Robot Fighter*, reprinted from that character's own book, issue #26 (May 1969). This was the only other back-up strip in the parent title not to feature the Robinsons or Captain Venture.

Captain who? We can't finish up without mentioning the original backing strip, "Captain Venture"—also by DuBois and Spiegle—which ran in issues #6 (Feb. 1964) through issue #36 (Aug. 1969). Unrelated to a Golden-Age space hero also called Captain Venture, this was the story of America's first two deep space astronauts—the rugged Captain Rex Venture and his trusty sidekick and engineer, Scotty Mackay on a world consisting almost completely of water. Essentially, they, too are lost in space.

The captain became popular enough to merit his own spin-off title, *Captain Venture and the Land Beneath the Sea* #1 (Oct.1968). His book consisted of edited reprints of the already extant stories and sold well enough that a rare second printing was done. A year later, a second issue followed, this time with an all-new story by the same creators, probably intended to have appeared as several stories in *Space Family Robinson*, which had been canceled after issue 36 (Apr. 1969). *Captain Venture* #2 (Oct. 1969), also received a second printing.

The fact that there exists original art for 11 pages of an unpublished 12-page story drawn by another veteran Gold Key artist, Bill Ziegler, entitled "The Ghost Lure," with each page indicating it was ear-marked for a never-published issue 62, indicates that at some point new stories of the Robinsons were meant to return yet again. But it was not to be.

New episodes of the *Lost in Space* TV series ended in early 1968 and Melchior, Disney, and any others attempting to cash in on the "Space Family Robinson" concept moved on. *SFR*, the comic book, even ended its original run with issue #36 (Aug. 1969), right around the time that the US won the Space Race, and Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the Moon.

But *Lost in Space* almost immediately went into syndicated reruns, as did the also freshly canceled *Star Trek*. The latter, of course, then became a pop culture phenomenon in the early 1970s. Speculation is that this is what led to the revival of the Robinsons' comic book four years later with issue #37 (Oct.1973). This second run lasted until issue #54 (Dec.1977). As already mentioned, the third run, from the early 1980s, was all reprint.

Del Connell passed in 2011. Gaylord DuBois died in 1993, and Dan Spiegle in 2017. All three men lived into their 90s. Despite their anonymity back in the day, all three men were recognized as important contributors to the world of comics before they left us. Here in the 21st century, their legacies have continued as Dark Horse has reprinted most of the *Space Family Robinson* issues over multiple volumes for old fans to cherish and new fans to discover.

Beginning in the 1980s, there have also been a number of different comic book series from various publishers that actually were based on Irwin Allen's *Lost in Space*. Bill Mumy, the show's Will Robinson, even wrote some of the better ones himself. Would've been fun if the two Robinson families had finally met!

Surprisingly, though, as of this writing, no one has revived the original title. I'm seeing a 200-page graphic novel in which the Robinson family, with the kids now grown, finally returns to Earth but because of all their bouncing around through space and time, centuries have passed, and they're viewed as living legends. Might work. Until and unless that ever happens, though, I guess they remain the Space Family Robinson, lost in space on Space Station One.



***STEVEN THOMPSON** has been writing about comics, movies, TV, and radio since 1988. He has worked in various capacities on more than 150 books and magazines to date. He currently writes a regular column in* **Comic Book Creator** *from TwoMorrows and maintains multiple online blogs.*

end

STARHAWK KNOWING "THE ONE WHO KNOWS"

by Matt Merante



FlashBack!

"There is no present or future–only the past happening over and over again–now"–Eugene O'Neill

What if you knew exactly how your life would unfold, and had the power to influence critical events for the greater good? What if you had to carry out this mission while permanently bonded to your ex-wife/stepsibling, who could intermittently take control of your shared physical form? These questions are at the core of what makes Starhawk "The One Who Knows," one of Marvel's most remarkable characters. Stakar Ogord contains incredible cosmic power and knowledge of alternate timelines yet can only experience corporeal existence in a rotating fashion with his former partner, Aleta. How many other couples could manage such a daunting existence? One of the tenets of the hit franchise *Back To the Future* (1985) was that Marty McFly had to alter the past in order to secure a positive outcome for his family's lineage. But he did not have to periodically swap places with his girlfriend (or sister) while doing so. In *Groundhog Day* (1993), Bill Murray's character Phil Connors was forced to relive one single day *ad nauseam*. As a cosmic force, Starhawk has to relive an entire lifespan from infancy to adulthood until forever ends. Starhawk knows what will happen, what should happen, and what must be avoided. Knowing all is a gigantic burden, and suffering the fragile egos of those who don't is a delicate task. If you or I went around saying we were "The One Who Knows" we'd likely notice a decrease in our social invitations. But if living organisms can be guided by an omniscient higher power that guides them towards the light, then they should at least consider the input. Let us reexamine Starhawk's tremendous impact with a dialectic lens, accepting that seemingly contradictory ideas can exist at the same time and still hold true. Male and female, light and darkness, parent and child, death and rebirth, all have roles to play. The time-space continuum of the Marvel Universe would be in terrible shape otherwise. After all, Starhawk has saved it before and will do so again…and again.

MAY I INTRODUCE MYSELF?

By combining the unrestrained creativity of Steve Gerber and the deft storytelling skill of Sal Buscema, you have the recipe for the first Starhawk story in *Defenders* #27-29 (Sep.-Nov. 1975). Featuring the original four members of the Guardians of the Galaxy, redesigned by Dave Cockrum, this story has them teaming up with the Defenders to defeat the invading Badoon army. The original Guardians, first introduced in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #18 (Jan. 1969) by Arnold Drake and Gene Colan, are covered in greater detail in *BACK ISSUE* #65 (July 2013) and #119 (Apr. 2020). Starhawk's role in this specific tale is one that he would return to often, an esoteric being of great power and energy, with very little in the way of expositive explanation. He basically showed up and healed Valkyrie with his light powers, told the Defenders he knew everything about the Badoon Brotherhood, including their "sisterhood," flew up

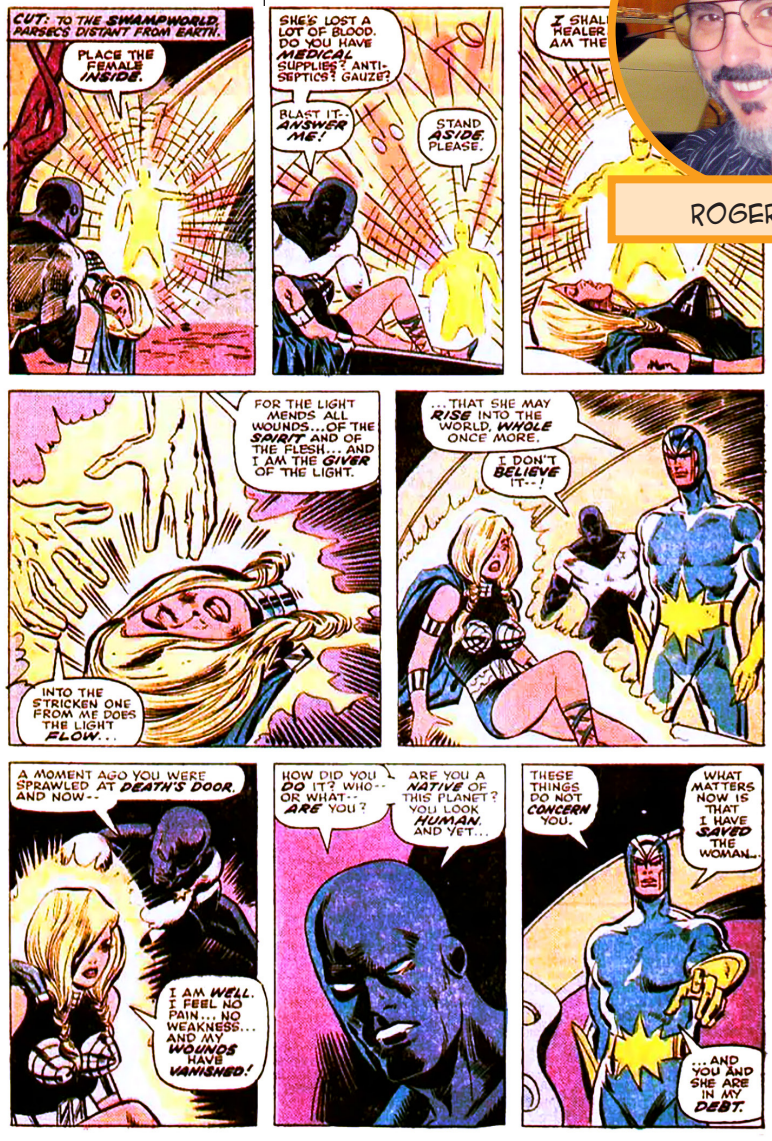
Starhawk makes his cover debut on *Defenders* #28. Art by Ron Wilson and Frank Giacoia.

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(top) The Guardians of the Galaxy first appear in *Marvel Super Heroes* #18. Cover by Gene Colan. (bottom) Starhawk, though his name is not yet known, makes his enigmatic debut in *Defenders* #27. Art by Sal Buscema and Vince Colletta.

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ROGER STERN

Alexander Fuld Frazier.

to space briefly check-in on his latchkey space children, consulted with Aleta, and then joined the Guardians squad uninvited. This befuddling introduction actually worked for the character's benefit, creating an air of mystery that piqued reader interest for many years. Readers knew very little about this extremely knowledgeable new figure and wanted more.

A PROTEAN ORIGIN

A necessary question for any new character is "Where did they come from?" Steve Gerber (with Mary Skrenes; uncredited) and Al Milgrom began Starhawk's origin in *Marvel Presents: GotG* #9 (Feb. 1977). The initial presence of an infant being dumped out of a jar onto a lab table and prodded by a green snake-like creature looking for spare food rations is stark and unsettling. This baby, considered a mutant because it was humanoid unlike other inhabitants, barely avoided becoming someone's dinner. It was quite the humble beginning for a future timestream influencer. An empathetic alien took him under her tentacled care. Soon the infant was kidnapped by a Reaver of Arcturus who believed the child to be of his race. Raised by this pillager, the youth was named Stakar and grew up with his stepsister Aleta. One fateful day he ran off to explore the forbidden temple of the Hawk-God of Arcturus. The result of this decision was delayed by a few months and written by a completely different author!

Steve Gerber exited the title right in the midst of Starhawk's origin due to a combination of deadline tardiness and philosophical strain with some of Marvel's editorial directives. Left to pick up the pieces in *Marvel Presents #10* (Apr. 1977), was none other than future super-scribe Roger Stern. He expressed his thoughts at the time in an interview in *F.O.O.M. #21* (Spring 1978). "The *Guardians of the Galaxy* was basically my first title at Marvel…When Steve brought in the preceding issue, I said, 'Gee, this is really bizarre Steve! How does it end?' And Steve revealed that he hadn't really figured that out yet. I was thunderstruck."

Stern solved the story problem with some assistance. "I was over at Chris Claremont's for dinner one evening, and we tossed ideas back and forth. Chris was a big help… Of course, Al Milgrom was a big help too!...And Starlin helped him (Milgrom) lay out the *Guardians* story…"

In Stern's conclusion of the two-part origin story, Stakar accidentally turns Aleta into pure energy that powers the Hawk-God statue by way of a brainwave helmet mishap. Without any guidance, the frenzied Aleta/Hawk-God(ess?) caused mass planetary chaos. Using his mind as an anchor point, Stakar communed with his sister's energy and the Hawk-God, creating a "multinuclear explosion and implosion." A new being emerged from the wreckage and exclaimed, "I am…Starhawk. I am Stakar and Aleta, and I am more!" The combined efforts of Gerber and Stern, two amazing writers with differing perspectives, created a distinct origin for one very idiosyncratic character. Socrates, the father of dialectics, would be proud!

MARRIED…WITH CHILDREN?!

Gerber may have been off *Marvel Presents*, but Stern was not done with Starhawk. In *Marvel Presents: GotG* #11 (June 1977) he placed his full stamp on the character's legacy during one of the most traumatic family ordeals in Marvel history. Stakar's adoptive kidnapper/stepdad stole his

children from their asteroid lair and converted them into mind-controlled psychic vampires! Starhawk flew to save them after receiving an internal distress call from Aleta–from deep within his soul. Slicing through Arcturian defenses like a hot space knife through cosmic butter, Starhawk made his way to his evil stepfather. Unable to fend off their life leeching ability, Starhawk was made defenseless by his children: Tara, Sita, and John. Not even the momentary appearance of their mother Aleta would disrupt the trance. Vance Astro utilized a telekinetic blast to remove their mind-control bands, and shocked them into the realization of their near parricide. The feedback turned their powers inward, transformed them into dust and left Starhawk completely forlorn. Even with all of his cosmic power, Starhawk could not save his children. The loss would haunt him for eternity.

This creative decision was also addressed by Stern in *F.O.O.M. #21* (Spring 1978). "I suppose you could take me to task for killing off Starhawk's kids, but I'm proud of it. I've always had a thing about super-hero offspring–unless they've got a good purpose for being there, they're in the way." Stern continues, "You've got this ultra-cosmic character, Starhawk, both male and female, roaming the galaxy for a thousand years–and suddenly,...he decides to have kids....The whole contradiction annoys me. You've got this character, 'One Who Knows,' who every so often goes off and plays *Ozzie and Harriet*."

In a recent correspondence with *BI*, Stern conveyed how he sees that *F.O.O.M.* quote fifty some years later. "I didn't seriously feel that way at the time that *F.O.O.M.* article was published. I was speaking facetiously, but the joke didn't come across in print. I do think that the lifestyles of super-heroes are not the best for raising children—as evidenced by Starhawk's and Aleta's offspring. Also, thanks to their grandfather's machinations, those three offspring were no longer children by the end of that story. As a matter of fact, they technically died of old age. Or did they? If you ever followed Steve Gerber's *Morbius the Living Vampire* stories—specifically, the ones that dealt with the Caretakers of Arcturus—you'd know that there was a way the children might have survived. (No thanks to Grandpa Ogord, though; what a rotten guy!) If the Guardians' series itself had survived, I would have eventually gotten around to dealing with what actually happened to the 'kids.'" Being an effective cosmic champion, a responsible parent, and a fully committed partner was seemingly too much for even Starhawk to sustain.







(top left) Starhawk's origin begins in *Marvel Presents: Guardians of the Galaxy* #9. (top right) Starhawk's origin concludes in issue #10 by a different writer. Covers by Al Milgrom. (bottom) Starhawk's children turn to dust and he is powerless to save them in *Marvel Presents: Guardians of the Galaxy* #11. Art by Milgrom and Bob Wiacek.

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(left) Spider-Man meets Starhawk in *Marvel Team-Up* #86. Art by Bob McLeod. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (right) Starhawk teamed up with the Thing for an epic storyline in *Marvel Two-In-One*. Issue #61 cover by George Perez and Terry Austin.

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BE OUR GUEST

Starhawk made multiple guest appearances following the seminal *Marvel Presents: GotG* run. In *Thor Annual* #6 (Dec. 1977) by Stern, Wein, and S. Buscema, he combined forces with a time-traveling god of thunder to disrupt the plans of Korvac and his "Minions of Menace". Starhawk returned to support the anti-Korvac movement in *Avengers* #167-168 (Jan.-Feb.1978), #170-177 (Apr.-Nov. 1978), and #181 (Mar. 1979) as part of Jim Shooter's memorable saga.

A key moment from *Avengers* #168 (Feb. 1978) "First Blood," drawn by the superb George Perez, featured a stellar sequence in which Aleta/Starhawk infiltrated the home of Michael Korvac, revealing him to be the enemy. A physical, mental, and cosmic battle commenced. Starhawk was reduced to dust (not unlike his children) and rebuilt by Korvac, but without any recollection of the confrontation, or the ability to sense Korvac in any form. Quite the consequence for the most omniscient one of all! This mental block eventually backfired when the Avengers encountered Korvac, and Starhawk could not see him when he was standing in plain view. This alerted the team that something suspicious had occurred and led to Korvac's eventual defeat.

Starhawk, with *GotG* members Nikki and Martinex in tow, partnered with Spider-Man in *Marvel Team-Up* #86 (Oct. 1979). This lively romp had them sort out an early mix-up and face off against the Hulk's opponents: Hammer and Anvil. Shocking no one, the combined forces of Starhawk and Spider-Man (with Martinex and Nikki) took out Hammer and Anvil's energy chain rather quickly. Guess who was the first to figure out that weakness? Yes, "The One Who Knows."

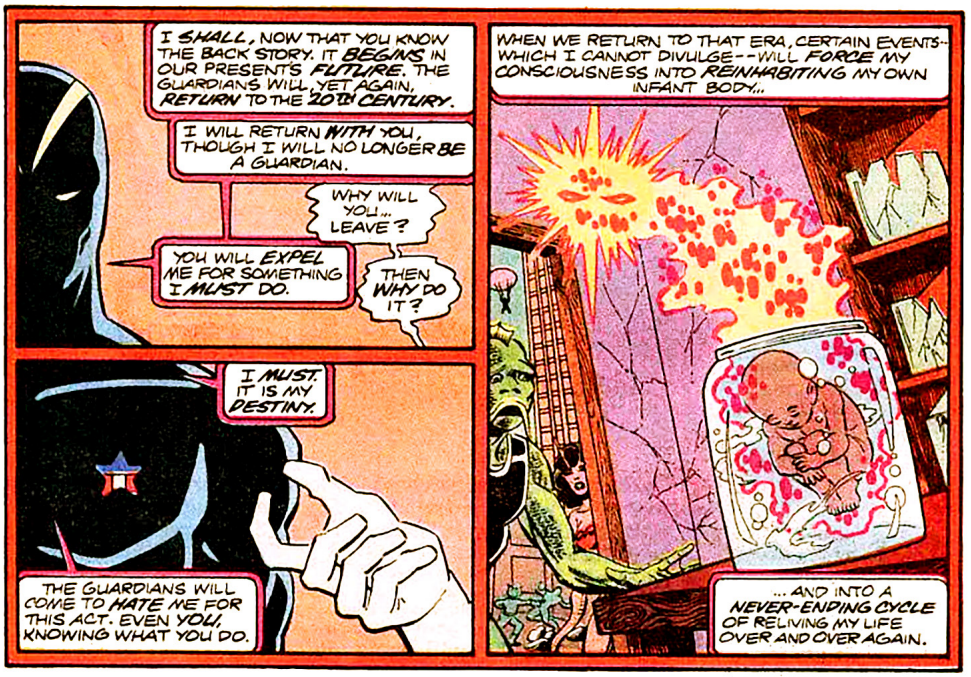
Mark Gruenwald demonstrated his interest in Starhawk while penning *Marvel Two-in-One* #61-63 (Mar.-May 1980). Each issue featured the Thing and Starhawk in a cosmic quest along with "Her" (aka Kismet/Paragon/Ayesha), Moondragon, Adam Warlock, and the High Evolutionary. The plot focused on "Her" as she sought out her perfect love, Adam Warlock. A cautionary tale about the fallacy of being "made for someone," certain aspects of the storyline clearly influenced the film *Guardians of The Galaxy Vol. 3* (Disney 2023), specifically the involvement of the High Evolutionary and his passion for Counter-Earth.

In *Marvel Two-in-One* #69 (Nov.1980) we are gifted with one more Thing and Guardians team-up, with Starhawk bearing witness to the paradoxical re-origin of Vance Astro/Marvel Boy in "Homecoming!"







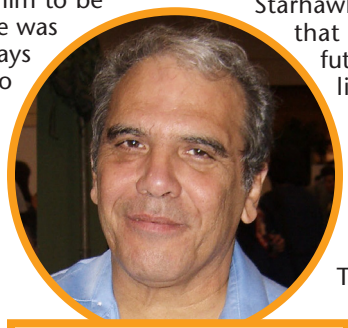


(left) Starhawk and the Guardians return in a new series. Cover by Jim Valentino. (right) In *GotG* #7, Starhawk explains how he knows. Art by Valentino and Montano.

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THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

Jim Valentino reintroduced *The Guardians of the Galaxy* to a new generation of comic fans in June of 1991. Starhawk and Aleta both appear on the cover of the first issue, and each engaged in various developments throughout the series. Starhawk was consistently a fan-favorite, though not necessarily the "golden child" of Valentino. Valentino was kind enough to share with *BI* his thoughts on both Starhawk and Steve Gerber. "If you go back to Gerber's run and look at the character and what he does—he's pretty condescending to the rest of the team...then, when things start to get hairy, he takes off and leaves them—and he's their most powerful member! I found him to be a pompous jerk and couldn't understand why he was so popular with the fans...I would try to find ways to exploit these traits...in the case of Starhawk, to point out what I saw as his flaws."



JIM VALENTINO

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.

Valentino made sure to honor Gerber's original take in his series. "I tried to stay as true as I could to Gerber's characterizations…I was a huge fan of his. I contend that he was Alan Moore before there was an Alan Moore. In my opinion his work still holds up today."

Valentino would go on to successfully helm the book for 29 consecutive issues.

In *GotG* #2 (July 1990) Valentino set up a scene which contrasted the abilities of Starhawk and Aleta, while redirecting their fate. During battle, Charlie-27 noticed the Stark (the villains of the story) do not seem to fight as aggressively towards females. He directed Starhawk to change into Aleta. Upon materializing she admitted, "Starhawk and I may share the same body, but we don't share the same mind–or powers!" She cannot fly and has to create hard light "discs" to make herself mobile in the air. Starhawk can release light energy but cannot create objects as she can. The gamble worked as Aleta neutralized the Stark's female lieutenant, by accidentally killing her! At the end of issue Aleta decided to turn back as she is completely surrounded by foes. The Stark fire on Starhawk and Aleta mid-metamorphosis!

In the following issue, *GotG* #3 (Aug. 1990) "Split Decision," we discover that the timing of the strike separated the power couple for the first time since the original Hawk-God incident! This update to Starhawk and Aleta's nature permitted each character to explore their individual agency more fluidly.

Starhawk did happen to be the most powerful Guardian, often redirecting the group based on his foresight, or as later developed by Valentino, his memories. "I had established in *GotG* #7 (Dec. 1990) that it wasn't prescience that made Starhawk know what was about to happen, but rather that he became non-corporeal at some point in the future and reinhabited his own infant body. He was living a Moebius strip existence. He knew, because he'd lived through all of the events of his life before in a perpetual loop." Starhawk's memories allowed him to accurately know what was about to happen, and how to steer reality in a different direction.

Roger Stern responded to this concept. "Wow. That's the first I've heard of Valentino's explanation. I wish I'd thought of that. Pretty ingenious... I always anchored 'The One Who Knows' catch-phrase to the millennia of data Stakar and Aleta had absorbed from that enormous cybernetic hawk during their empowerment as Starhawk."

An example of a decision Starhawk made based on his memories occurred in *GotG* #11 (Apr. 1991). Acting unilaterally, Starhawk freed the unstoppable Phoenix force in order to save his teammates and defeat a fascist mutant government on the planet Haven. He contemplated his actions carefully. "I have stood here many times before…seen the divergent realities… I know that it will eventually save the universe…Yet...I have trembled with fear." While the vast majority of the populace of the planet Haven was saved by Starhawk, and the Phoenix did successfully defeat the overlords, the planet itself was destroyed and several allies died. Additionally, the Guardians no longer felt like they could fully trust Stakar. Charlie-27 noted, "The fact is we were cut out of the information loop–and what we didn't know almost got us killed!" The division between Starhawk and the rest of the team would continue to increase.

In homage to *Marvel Super-Heroes* #18 (Jan. 1969), the first appearance of the Guardians, Valentino provided the "secret" origin in *GotG* #26 (July 1992). This retelling provided some additional details, most notably that each of the events that led to the Guardians being formed were secretly orchestrated by Starhawk. This could be the ultimate example of Starhawk's impact on Marvel's cosmic history.

GOING DARK

In the 1990s having a comic book character become "darker" was par for the course, but in Starhawk's case it corresponded directly to a specific character arc. After leaving the team (or disintegrating) in *GotG* #16 (Sep. 1991), he returned in dramatic fashion on the final page of *GotG* #21 (Feb. 1992). Stakar deliberately absorbed Aleta in order to return to his physical form and then portrayed a more sinister and aggressive personae. This change was visually represented in updates to his costume's color palette. The golden yellow vacated his solar sails and was replaced by royal blue. His suit was now made of dark cosmos and spattered stars. And his once fair skin turned a vampiric, pale turquoise. If one did not view Starhawk as an antihero previously, they did now. Valentino explained. "To my way of thinking he already was an antihero, I was just trying to make it obvious to the readers. Bear in mind, he was the most popular member and, as noted, I really couldn't understand why. So, I had him do something completely awful—he took Aleta, who had started an affair with Vance, completely out of the picture to save himself, essentially enslaving her..." Aleta eventually freed herself and took control in *GotG #29* (Oct. 1992), Valentino's final issue on the book.

In an interesting turn of fate, the name change Valentino intended to use for Starhawk's personality update was punted. "Yes, originally I wanted to rename him 'Shadowhawk' after he went dark, but I got a phone call from Tom DeFalco who was the Editor-in-Chief of Marvel at the time. He told me that I couldn't change the character's name (one of only two times I was told I couldn't do something in the series) but that he really liked the name 'Shadowhawk' and I should create a new character with that name... and so I did (for *Image Comics*). Pro-tip—always listen to Tom DeFalco."

A COSMIC LINEAGE

As *Guardians of the Galaxy* headed to its conclusion in the spring and summer of 1995, editor Mark Gruenwald had a clear objective for the final four issues: reveal Starhawk's unique parentage! Gruenwald's involvement came full circle, as he wrote the *Marvel Two-in-One* issues featuring Starhawk and Kismet in 1980, and suggested that Jim Valentino develop the *GotG* series "bible" when it was being pitched. The update to Starhawk's "secret" origin features many of Marvel's key cosmic players including Silver Surfer, Kismet, and his biological father–Quasar! Essentially Wendell Vaughan, Quasar, had a relationship with Kismet that produced the infant Stakar. Quasar died before meeting his child, but not before making sure Kismet could safely give birth on the planet Vespar. However, the baby was kidnapped by Eon and taken to Arcturus. In the final issue, *GotG #62* (July 1995) a mother-son reunion transpired in which they defeated Eon's evil son Era (who had killed Eon) and emancipated themselves from the overbearing Hawk-God. This ended their cycle of separation. Starhawk's roots trace back to both Captain Marvel and Adam Warlock via his parents Quasar and Kismet!



Starhawk returns on the cover of issue #22. Art by Valentino and Al Milgrom. Scan courtesy of Bill Colosimo.

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Writer Michael Gallagher remembers Gruenwald's directive. "One thing I recall very clearly is being summoned to Mark's office alone and being told exactly how Starhawk's saga was going to play out, including the addition of Quasar, Kismet and others...I said, 'Yes sir' and went to work. So, while I scripted and enhanced his intricate plot where needed, this was totally Mark's project although he didn't take any credit for it.

"Ultimately, Mark's ending made sense...I thought his conclusion left the door open for a new round of 'Starhawk and Kismet' adventures." Gallagher offered additional insights from his time on the book. "Starhawk, in all his/her/their incarnations, was an extremely unique, compelling character to write. While their ongoing male/female battle can seem to simply be about controlling the Starhawk power, to me it also addressed marital violence, severe sibling rivalry, fluctuating philosophies, multiple personality disorder, parenting, gender, and adoption issues."

Artist Kevin West also enjoyed the ride. "I loved working on Starhawk. He had a cool, sleek design, flashy abilities, and was just an overall fun character to draw. Actually, the very first time I drew Starhawk was when I was 11 or 12 years old. There was a fantastic action shot of him flying on the cover of *Defenders #28* (Oct. 1975). I was so inspired, I drew a copy of it. Who knew that would turn out to be a premonition?...I did have to practice a

bit on drawing those solar sails he generates when he flies, but once I got an understanding of them, they weren't a big deal…As far as the appearance and costumes…I followed what was established in all of the prior issues of *GotG* that Jim Valentino had done. I did (re)design Aleta's costume, but it was a minor variation of her original costume combined with what Starhawk was already decked out in at the time…"

STARHAWK'S RETURN

Following the end of the 1990s *Guardians of the Galaxy*, Starhawk went dormant for more than a decade. When Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning rebooted the Guardians in 2008 (first appearance in *Annihilation: Conquest* #6) Starhawk was not part of the team.

However, he appeared in *GotG Vol. 3* #3 (Sep. 2008), beating the tar out of the Guardians and then vanishing. Stakar returned briefly in *GotG #4* (Oct. 2008), and then in *GotG #5* (Nov. 2008) again, but this time in female form. Starhawk contends, "The future tense is in flux. Every day I wake and find I am something new. Male, female, neither, both, alive, dead…" This destabilized iteration of Starhawk served as an indicator of the errors within the cosmic time-stream, and sought to overcorrect the problem by destroying the Guardians. Although soon imprisoned, this Starhawk would remain an ongoing threat to the team.

In 2014, the *Guardians of the Galaxy* film not only shattered expectations at the box office, but it brought an unprecedented amount of attention to characters only previously known by the most devoted comic book readers. Based on the 2008 series, Starhawk was not a primary player, but did make a few cameo appearances in *GotG Vol. 2* (2017) and *GotG Vol. 3* (2023). He was portrayed by none other than Sylvester Stallone. A comic character and movie star who both had their beginnings in the mid-1970s intersected nearly forty years later!

MADE OF STAR STUFF

The 1970s Marvel cosmic comics were and continue to be adored for many reasons: trippy original concepts, psychedelic artwork, meta-messaging, and compelling characters. Starhawk checks each of those boxes and more. Steve Gerber, Roger Stern, Sal Buscema, and Al Milgrom delivered to readers a mysterious, aloof, complex, powerful, and, at times, contradictory character. Jim Valentino's reintroduction of Starhawk in the 1990s expanded the character's role in the Marvel tapestry for the next generation of comic book readers. He "darkened" an already complex character within a fan-favorite team book. Michael Gallagher and Kevin West concluded Starhawk's origin under the guidance of Mark Gruenwald. Today, ardent fans continue to enjoy the character's more recent appearances and interpretations in both comics and film. To truly grasp what was born of Starhawk's creation, one may need to tap into a dialectic perspective: male and female, past and present, selfishness and altruism, parent and child, time and space, acceptance and uncertainty. Each of these opposing forces can exist within the other. Ultimately, we have to surrender to the fact that we are simply mere mortals, and Starhawk is and will always be, "*The One Who Knows*."



Matt Merante is a writer and literacy specialist whose interests include comics, film, and pop culture. He admires the work of Steve Gerber, Sal Buscema, Norm Breyfogle, Roger Stern, Al Milgrom, Jim Valentino, and others. Matt lives in Virginia with his family and has rarely been considered "The One Who Knows."





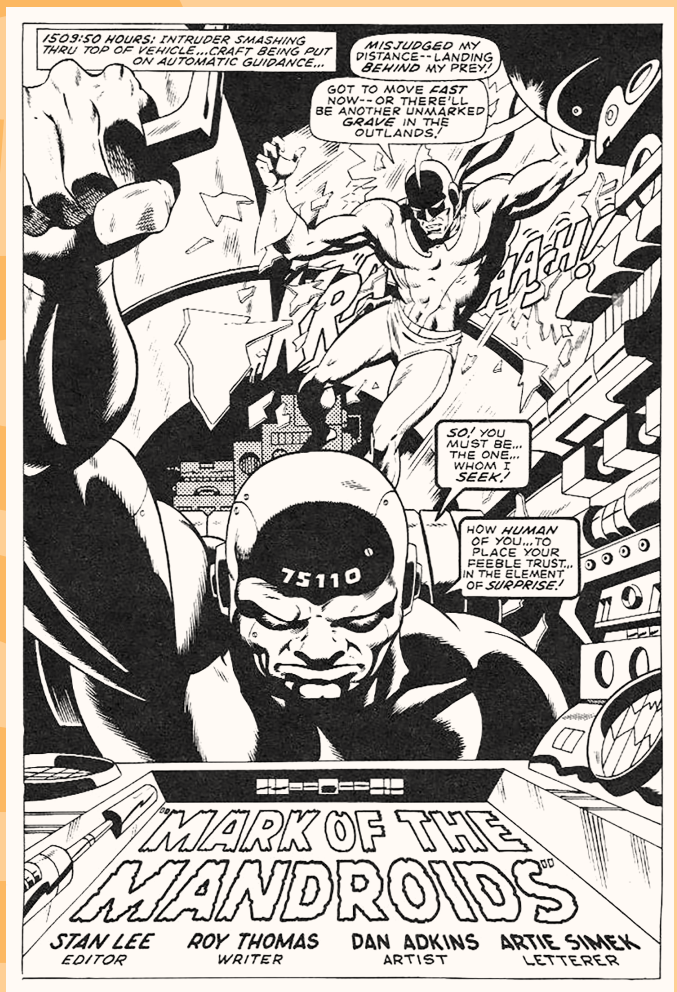
(top) It's a mother and child reunion in *GotG* #62. Art by West and Montano. (bottom) This Starhawk seems a bit different. Art by Clint Langley.

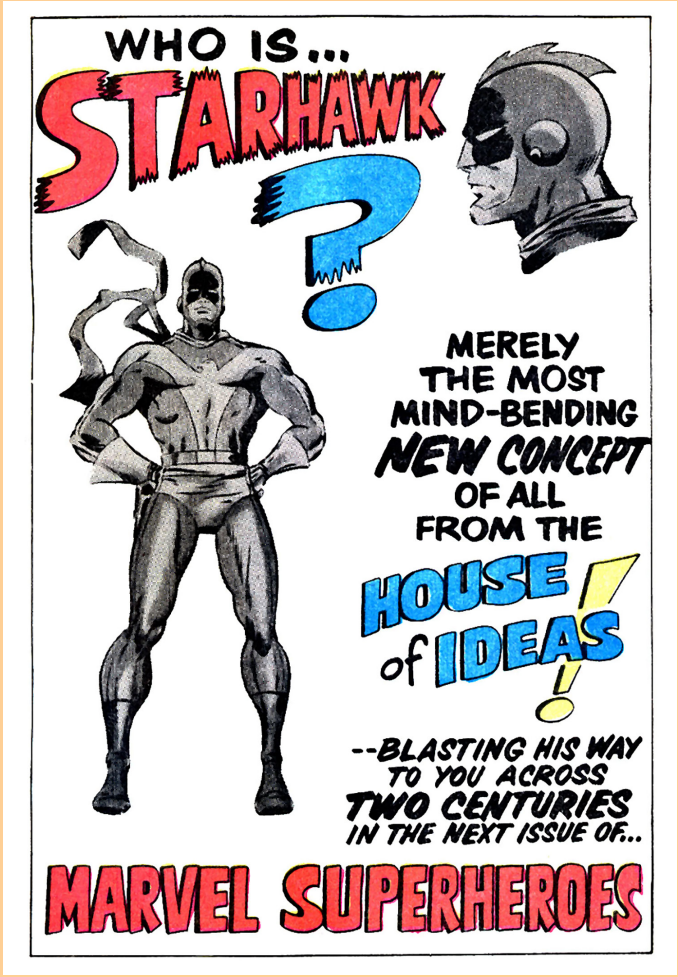
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THE FIRST STARHAWK

Prior to Stakar Ogord ever existing in the Marvel Universe, there was another character with that same name. Written by Roy Thomas with art by Dan Adkins, this Starhawk never saw the light of publication. Editor Martin Goodman did not feel the story would be profitable and pulled the plug before it made it to press. Roy Thomas confirmed this via email with *BI*. "Martin Goodman spotted the ads, noted that it contained 'rockets, rayguns, and robots', three things that had never made any money for him (or so he said), and he canceled the book before it could be published. That was that. Our Starhawk was not particularly related to anybody else, far as I recall. Dan designed the costume, so I don't know his influences…his artwork was nice."

Al Milgrom also had some recollection of the character and Marvel's publishing patterns at the time. "I do remember that character. I remember seeing the costume that Dan Adkins did. Goodman had strong opinions and Marvel was known as the 'house of no ideas' then….They would jump on the latest trend, and flood the market. Stan Lee would often assign more stories than what was necessary to keep his artists busy. When Goodman found out, he put a stop to it. They had too much inventory."





Roger Stern added, "Yes, I was aware of the first almost-Starhawk. That one was originally scheduled to appear in *Marvel Super-Heroes #21* (July 1969). It was fully penciled, scripted, and lettered—and mostly inked—but was pulled while in production. The story I heard was that then-publisher Martin Goodman thought it to be too 'science-fictiony.' Without a new lead feature, *Marvel Super-Heroes* was turned into an all-reprint title with issue #21. During my brief tenure as Reprint Editor, I was always on the lookout for stories that hadn't been reprinted multiple times. Since Martin Goodman was no longer around to say no, I tried to track down the Thomas/Adkins Starhawk story, in hopes of running it in *Weird Wonder Tales*. I figured that at most; I'd have to rename the feature. But we were never able to locate stats of the whole thing. Too bad. Just another one that got away."

Too much sci-fi? The victim of overstocked stories in the can? Either way, the death of this particular Starhawk allowed the Stakar we know and love to flourish.

(top right) A house ad for the Starhawk that never was. (bottom left) Dan Adkins' art for the Starhawk story that was never published.

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end

GODS OF THE TWILIGHT

by Brian Martin



The 1950s and 1960s were the heyday for science fiction heroes from DC Comics. There were a number of features that presented the sort of light-hearted puzzle stories that editor Julius Schwartz perfected over this period of time.

Star Rovers consisted of three main characters who appeared in nine stories in *Mystery in Space* and *Strange Adventures.* Homer Glint, Rick Purvis, and Karel Sorensen (the female of the group, just in case the spelling throws anyone off) were from different walks of life, thrown together in various situations, which they managed to resolve. The twist was, each character had a different view of how the situation was resolved, and their role in it.

Manhunter 2070 was the cover feature of *Showcase* issues #91-93(June-Sep. 1970). John Starker was a bounty hunter in his brief comic career. The series was created by veteran Mike Sekowsky.

The Space Museum was the overall title for an anthology series that ran in *Strange Adventures*. A father would take his son to the museum, and while there they would look at a certain object, then the father would tell the story around that object and explain why it was housed in the museum.

In terms of number of appearances, Tommy Tomorrow is the granddaddy of them all, starring from 1947 until 1963. A colonel in the Planeteers, Tommy was featured in stories, usually six pages in length, where he encountered hot rodders in space, the Showboat of space, the cosmic jigsaw puzzle, and was once the Singing Spaceman. I think you get the drift. His adventures were usually lighthearted.

The Knights of the galaxy were an interplanetary police force whose stories appeared in the first few issues of *Mystery in Space*. They tended to have some connection to the knight theme in their stories.

Space Cabby was exactly what he sounds like. The twist was that he could never pick up a normal fare. The trip always turned into an adventure of some sort.

Star Hawkins (Axel Starker) was a private eye of the future who was not the most successful, so the only assistant he could afford was a robot by the name of Ilda. As it was, a constant subplot had Star having to pawn Ilda quite often, then eventually get her back. He plied his trade in early '60s issues of *Strange Adventures.*

As part of what were anthology titles, these stories were always one and done. A few plot devices might carry over from one instalment to the next, but nothing ended with "to be continued." Continuity was not a thing, other than keeping the characters and their situations consistent.

Now, forget everything I just told you, because the versions of these characters in the series *Twilight* have almost nothing to do with what I just described.

Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez's stylish cover for *Twilight* #1. All art accompanying this article is by Garcia-Lopez.

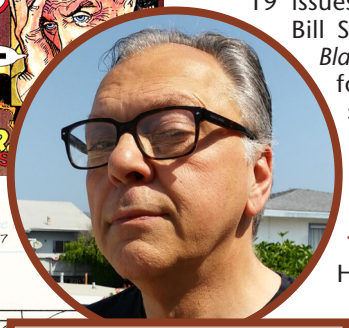
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(top) The introduction of Homer Glint and his cat. (bottom) Homer and Karel on an early mission. The page features a distinctive Chaykin layout. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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HOWARD CHAYKIN

HowardChaykinArt.com.

EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW

To say that *Twilight* offered a revisionist take on the DC science fiction characters profiled above would be an understatement. The three issue prestige format series from 1990 was written by Howard Chaykin and drawn by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez. The precedent for this drastic rethink had been set previously by Chaykin when he wrote and drew miniseries featuring *The Shadow* (1986) and then *Blackhawk* (1988).

Howard Chaykin informs *BI* that "Dick Giordano pitched me *The Shadow* at the 1985 SDCC. I took it on to get through my first autumn and winter as a Californian. I pitched *Blackhawk*. Both franchises were dead and had been for years, despite attempts, ranging from inspired to inept, to revive them. I felt both needed a new perspective, and I was young enough to mistakenly assume that the comic book audience shared my enthusiasms."

Those revisions were considered jarring by some purists, though both Chaykin rethinks were followed by significant runs that carried on his new perspective. *The Shadow* ran 19 issues written by Andy Helfer and illustrated by Bill Sienkiewicz, Marshall Rogers, and Kyle Baker. *Blackhawk* was featured in *Action Comics Weekly* for most of that title's brief incarnation (that stretch of *Action* was dissected by me in *BI* #98) and then had a respectable 16 issue run plus a Special. They were tame in comparison to what was presented in *Twilight*.

THREE SIDES TO EVERY STORY

Homer Glint of the Star Rovers narrates the tale from a safe distance in the future. His sounding board for the recitation is his cat F'Tatatita. Just so it is not a one-way monologue, F'Tatatita can talk. Following in the footsteps of Raul from Chaykin's iconic *American Flagg*, the author told *BI* the use of prattling pusses was "a cheap audience attention grabbing device. Nothing more nor less."

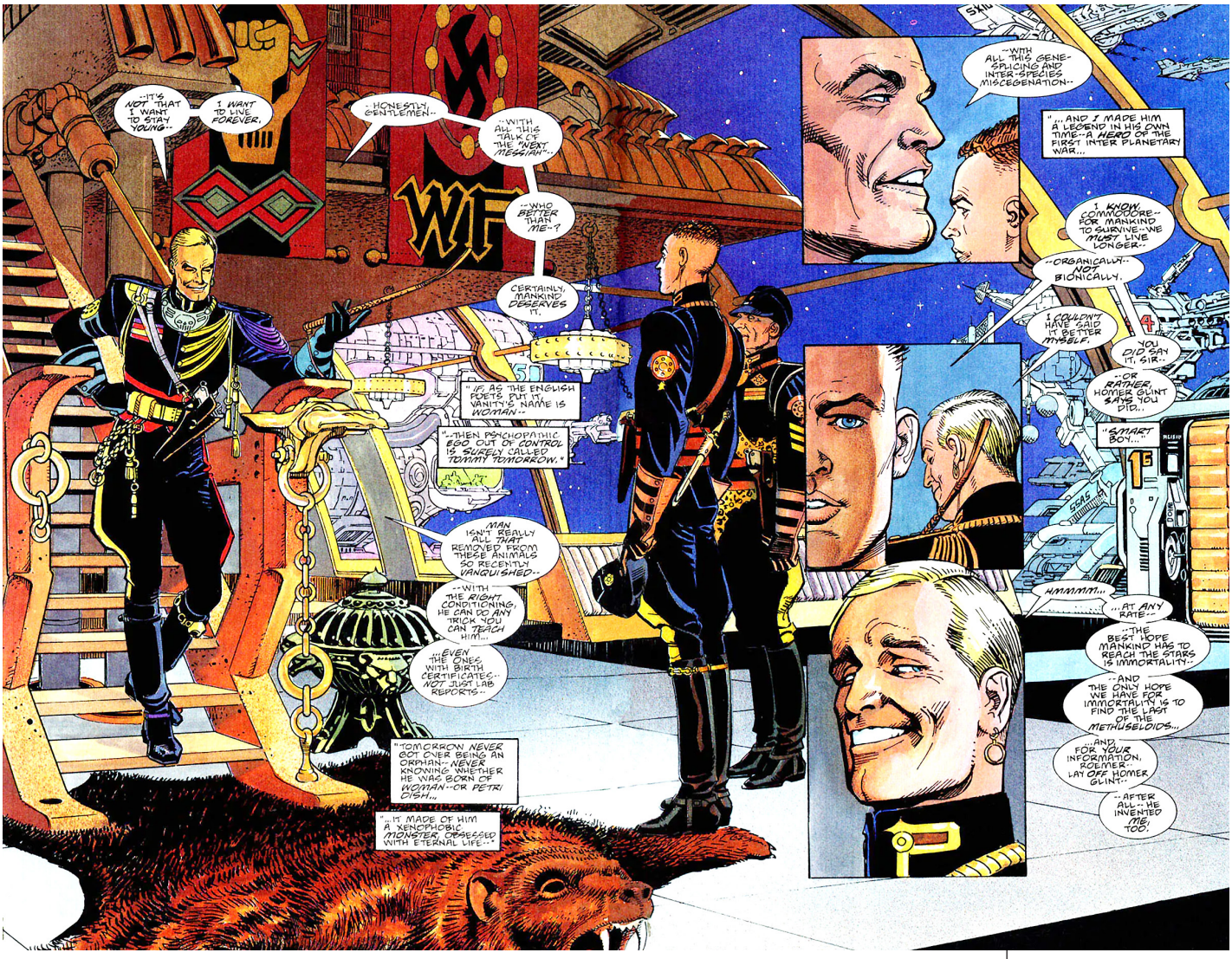
Any illusions that these were your father's characters was dispelled quite early, as Homer's narrative begins with the Star Rovers involved in negotiations with a band of genetically altered gorillas and he states, "I'd known idiots in my time, but none could compare with Richard Purvis." He also reveals that he and Karel were married for a time. The gist of his opinion of Purvis is driven home as the man proceeds to decapitate the leader of the gorilla tribe rather than continue negotiations. That's definitely something that would not have even been contemplated in the '60s. Manhunter 2070 is also on hand as part of the militia monitoring the situation the Rovers find themselves in.

Next up we are introduced to Tommy Tommorow, and a couple of captions from the story give you the best summation of his rethink available. "A psychopathic ego out of control." Also, "A xenophobic monster, obsessed with eternal life." Certainly not someone you'd confuse with the Singing Spaceman. The Planeteers that Tomorrow oversees are a much more Fascistic organization in this incarnation.

When it comes to his immortality obsessions, we find out there exists a race known as the Methuseloids that Tomorrow believes can grant him just that. He does come by a bit of his messiah complex honestly as Homer's articles on an early confrontation with those same Methuseloids helped to elevate Tommy to a lofty position in the arena of public opinion.

STAR STAR

Star Hawkins is introduced next, and we are shown the whereabouts of Manhunter 2070 as it is revealed they are brothers. Hawkins is just a little more, um, vicious than before, as in the opening sequence he kills two men involved in a business, simply because they stand in his way. That



business is a robot brothel, and his brother has a thing for robots. And he is in love with his brother's robot servant Ilda.

Star has conscripted his brother to pick up a kidnapped Ilda, a mission they discuss as they wander through the Space Museum. The new take on this edifice is also nowhere near as reverent as the old series had portrayed. Star calls it ironic "that an institution so devoted to looking within—to staying within the confines of Earth… should call itself the Museum of Space."

As Manhunter 2070 arrives to make the exchange for Ilda (here depicted as much more human than her original incarnation), we are introduced to her current owner and one of the integral characters in the series. Created from whole cloth is Brenda Tomorrow, former wife of Tommy and a bit of a rebel to say the least. From the very start, our narrator Homer has mostly glowing things to say about this brunette bombshell, so it's really no surprise that later on we find out he married her after the events depicted in *Twilight* and they were together until she died.

The most significant revelation is that Brenda knows where the last of the Methuseloids are, and that to gain immortality from them you have to eat them.

SAY HELLO TO HEAVEN

The synchronicity of the series is brought into focus as the Star Rovers latest assignment is to investigate the remnants of a race of strange creatures. It seems Brenda is the only one who knows they are the Methuseloids. The Space Museum, who contract the Rovers, think they are just a curiosity, though not long after meeting them, Karel becomes convinced of their actual identity.

The crucial point in the narrative that happens here is predicated on the use of another, not quite as old DC science fiction character. *Ironwolf* was created by Howard Chaykin and starred in issues #8-10 of *Weird Worlds* (Nov/Dec 1973-Oct/Nov 1974 [There was a bit of a gap between issues 9 and 10]). One of the quirky things about that series was that the spaceships in that universe were composed of wood! In a contest just before they received the current assignment, Rick Purvis had just defeated Lord Ironwolf in a sporting event. To accomplish their mission though, Purvis had purchased a ship from him.

Tommy Tomorrow cements his characterization as he looks upon the scene of the Rovers meeting the aliens, deciding immortality is for him only, and anyone else is collateral damage. He fires on the Rovers and subsequently causes their ship to explode.

Tommy Tomorrow in all his glory.

TM & © DC Comics.



(left) Axel Starker looks for his brother. This page includes a reference to another classic series. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (right) Karel becomes something more than human.

TM & © DC Comics.

The explosion blinds Homer Glint (Don't worry too much about a blind narrator covering the rest of the series. He receives electronic eyes for a bit and then sees remotely through F'Tatatita's eyes) and kills Rick Purvis. But what it does to Karel is a theme that would be repeated in the series. The explosion transfers the immortality of the Methesuloids, along with a significant amount of power to her, essentially raising her to godhood. Tomorrow manages to feast on a dead alien, achieving his desire for immortality. Homer stops him from escaping.

There are two significant developments that happen next. The secret of the Methuseloids is discovered and made available to humanity, and Karel was wearing an artificial camera so that meant her ascension was broadcast through know space, instantly creating a religion around her. Here ends book one.



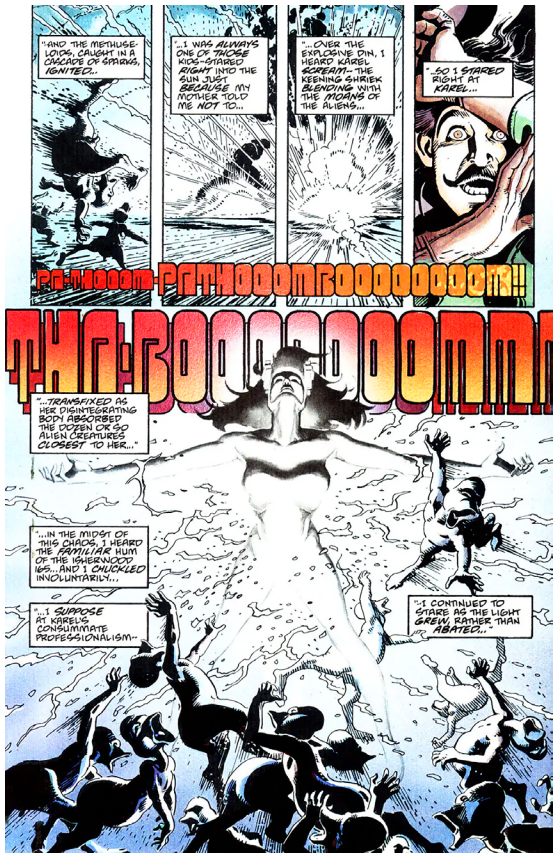
ART FOR ARTS SAKE

We have so far not mentioned the artwork on the series. Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez is a legendary artist (and one of this writer's all-time favorites), and he does his usual exemplary job here. But from the very start, there is something just a little different about the art in this series. Howard Chaykin had developed a style of laying out pages, particularly on his break-out series *American Flagg*, which was distinct. Early pages of *Twilight* show the same style, and when *BI* asked Chaykin about it he revealed that "I provided 4" x 6" layouts at (editor Andy) Helfer's insistence." Designs for the characters, ships, and architecture for the series were solely the creations of Mr. Garcia-Lopez. There are also a number of mind-blowing double page spreads throughout the series, so if you are a JLGL fan, you will not be disappointed in this series in the slightest.

I CAN PLACE THE FACE BUT…

Before we delve back into that actual narrative, let's just run a few things by Mr. Chaykin where the reimagining of these characters is concerned. Chaykin tells *BI* that placing all of these series in the same timeline was his idea. As for any childhood connection to them he states that "I was very familiar with all of those characters, having been a Silver Age enthusiast, in all its iterations, since its arrival."

There were certain elements of the original series that, on first glance, could have been used as springboards for these new characterizations. The Star Rovers were often in competition as much as cooperating, and Tommy Tommorow's Planeteers could easily have been pushed to Fascism, but when asked straight up by *BI* if these cues had any



effect on his thinking, Chaykin affirms "Little or none, to be frank. My jumping off point was the work of Ned Buntline, his contemporaries, and his competition, who together created from whole cloth our national mythos of the American (wild) West, making heroes of grifters, criminals, and nonentities." This aligns perfectly with Homer Glint creating the cult of personality that surrounded Tommy and Rick Purvis in *Twilight*. (Just so you don't have to scour the Internet, Ned Buntline wrote in the mid-1800s).

One final note. Chaykin said he never discussed his treatment of these characters with their "father" Julie Schwartz.

LIVING IN THE PAST

The fact that the series recasts its subjects by no means indicates, as stated above, that Chaykin had no knowledge of the foundations he was building on. Further evidence is given for those who know where to look, of his knowledge of both science fiction and comics history. Kapek is the name he gives the manager of the robot brothel where the Hawkins brothers first appear. Karl Capek is the originator of the term robot in his 1920 play *R.U.R.*

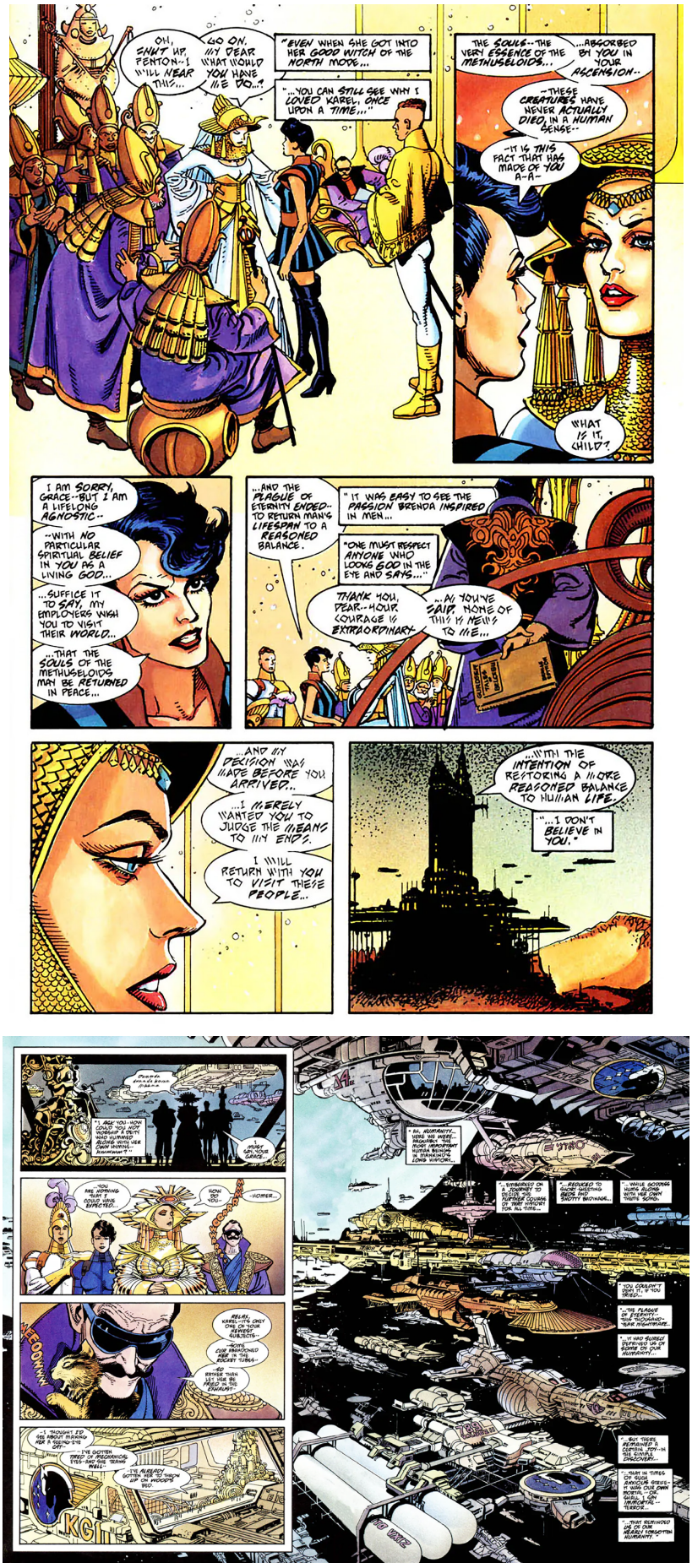
The names Fox and Broome are used as names for colleagues of Brenda in her early days after being separated from Tommy. (Give yourself a few lashes with a wet noodle if you are reading this and do not recognize those names.)

THE WHITE QUEEN

The narrative picks up one thousand years later, with Karel installed as a goddess, with factions fighting over how she should be worshipped and some resenting immortality. The Knights of the Galaxy are recast as her honor guard, with former Tommy Tomorrow minion Brent Wood as the most prominent, and the one who worships Karel most devoutly. This worship will cause him a lot of grief as the series progresses. Homer meanwhile has been recast as High Father of the new church. But trust me, he is not orthodox in the slightest. His role, possibly inflated by his being the narrator, is manyfold, as he is the official chronicler of the Church of Karel, so the reverence some of the characters are held in is really due to his reportage.

Tommy is a pirate, while Brenda has been in contact with the race that created the Methuseloids, and they want to help humanity end the "curse" of immortality. Brenda meets with Karel and convinces her of the need for this, and a delegation, led by Karel, sets off to meet them.

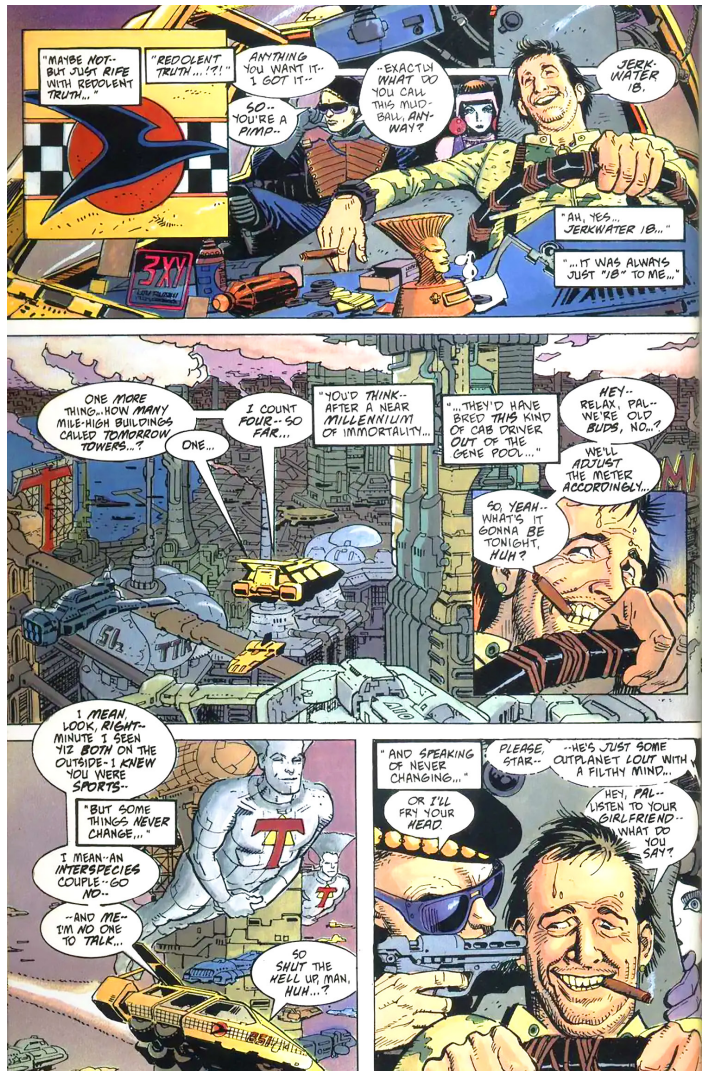
The pirates meet up with the reverent emissaries in explosive fashion as Tomorrow ambushes the delegation sent to meet the, well, the race's name is given as unpronounceable. The important thing is, Tomorrow succeeds in blowing up the ship with Karel in it. But the release of godly energy destroys every ship in both fleets. Homer, Brenda, and F'Tatatita (just introduced as Homer had saved her from a rocket tube), appear to be the only ones from Karel's expedition that survive,



(top) Brenda Tomorrow approaches Karel with a proposition. (bottom) A glorious double page spread.

TM & © DC Comics.





(left) The aftermath of Tommy's attack on Karel's ship. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (right) Space Cabby makes an appearance.

TM & © DC Comics.

though we find out soon after that Wood did as well. In another instance of godly power being transferred via explosion, the three characters watch in horror as all of the debris reforms into a monstrous mechanical version of Tommy Tomorrow. The goddess is dead, long live the god.

Star Hawkins has continued to try to make a living, all the while denigrating Ilda for everything she does. Did we mention that Ilda loves Star about as much as Manhunter 2070 loves her? He despises her but is contracted to her.

At the same time, that brother of his has reached the depths of despair where he is contemplating the old axiom, if you can't beat them, join them and visits a specialist in bionic prosthetics. He can't go through with it quite yet, but things can change.

HOLY TRINITY

As book three begins, Tommy Tomorrow has assumed the godhood that Karel Sorensen had. Crucial to the plot though is the fact that Tommy has a bit of Karel within him. Not much has changed in his personality though, just his ability to achieve it. Those still loyal to the goddess are Karel's Knights of the Galaxy, and Tommy would love to eliminate them and is quite annoyed that they do not worship him.

Like many megalomaniacs, he wants his followers to prove they are pure and worthy of his, well love is not the right word but… In this case his proof involved them showing they are descended from those born on the "real" Earth. Holding a rally to promote this turns out to be his downfall, since more than a few people want to see him dead.

Space Cabby makes his appearance here as more of a sleaze merchant who helps Star Hawkins track down his brother. He still drives a cab, and you could say he still becomes involved in an adventure, so maybe this is not that radical a rethink.

The plots then begin to coalesce as Star has made a promise to rid the universe of Tommy, and the best way to get close to him is with someone who is part man, part machine. Just what his brother had been wishing for. There is a twist though. Manhunter 2070 is willing to merge with a machine, but only if it is Ilda. Talk about the perils of unrequited love.

We said that Brenda Tomorrow was integral to the story, and ever since her ex had attained godhood, she had been searching for that race that created the Methuseloids, hoping they might have a way to free humanity from the curse of immortality. Turns out, she does find them, and they do. She has a weapon that can

(top) Axel and Ilda search for Jon. (bottom) Tommy has gone mad.

TM & © DC Comics.

separate the part of Karel housed within Tommy. Now, to just get it close to Tommy.

The climax of the series involves that rally we mentioned as the transformed John Starker attacks Tomorrow, with unknown back up from Brent Wood who has been given possession of a gun Brenda had fortified. Wood's devotion to Karel and a presumed betrayal of her that happened at the end of Book Two, coupled with what was quite a fanatical devotion anyway, have turned him into the perfect religious weapon. That, plus that sliver of Karel's essence that resides within Tommy will turn out to be the villain's Achilles Heel. Trust me, there is a lot more to it than this, but I don't want to turn this into a boring plot synopsis, nor spoil things for those who have not read the series before or in a long time. Suffice to say that quite a few characters have their hash settled in various ways and leave it at that.

IS THAT MY THEME MUSIC I HEAR?

Twilight examines a lot of different ideas over the course of only three forty-eight-page issues. Humanity's pursuit of immortality, and whether they would want it if they achieved it, is given a thorough examination. Our dependence on and relationship to technology, even more of an issue now that at the time of this series, is taken to some extreme conclusions. Religion and the deification of celebrities is examined, as well as the mechanisms that are used to raise them to those lofty peaks. The effect that godlike power might have on a human is given a run through, though Karel does mostly exemplify the fact that absolute power does not always lead to absolute corruption.

The abuses of power that are perpetrated are presented, as well as the underlying motivations that often lead to them. The fact that a lot of those motivations were extant before the power is achieved gets the spotlight as well.

The bonds of family and friends, and how they can be strained, or even faked, are explored. Not to mention the limits some people will go to for the ones they care about the most.

WHAT A CHARACTER

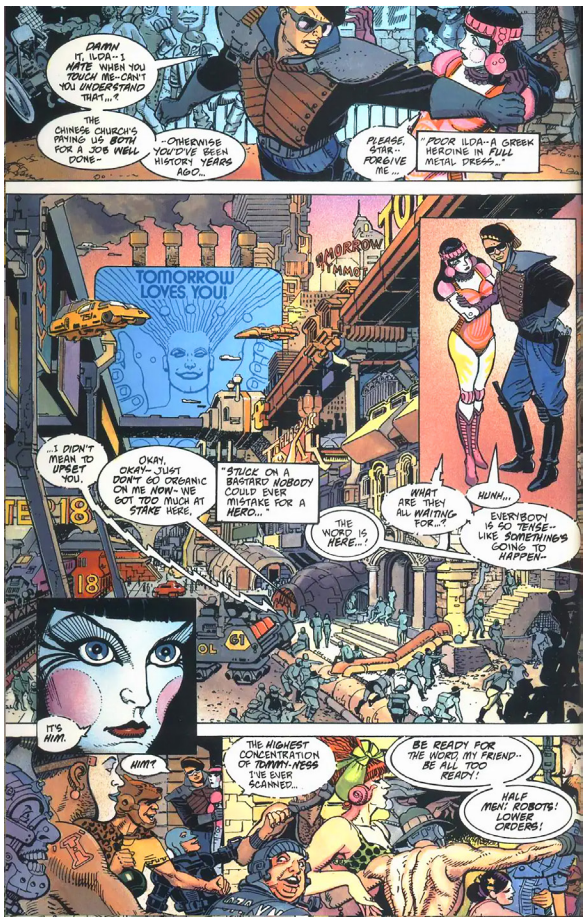
As with the *Shadow* series, and the *Blackhawk* miniseries, as well as pretty much everything Howard Chaykin has ever written, in *Twilight* we are presented with a cast of characters who are by no means perfect. They are subject to the same motivations, jealousies, and desires as any of us. That they are applied to characters that were originally portrayed as paragons of virtue is what made the series jarring for so many at the time. There were a lot of those types of examinations going on at DC and in comics in general, and your degree of aversion for a specific rethink really depended on if you grew up with specific characters and series. From personal experience, I know there were characters that I hated what was done to them in this period, and others where I was able to just enjoy a good story, all based on what my conception of them coming in was.

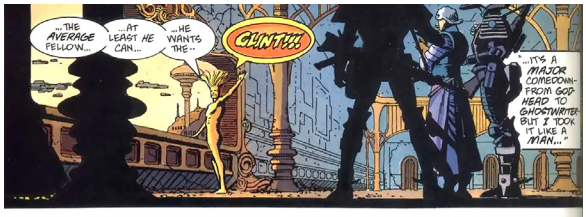
By this point in their careers, Chaykin had shown he was one of the best writers of comics for adults (In the best sense of the term), while Garcia-Lopez was a master at drawing anything. This series reinforced both of those sentiments. If you are able to take *Twilight* as just a story featuring a bunch of flawed human beings, you can enjoy an adult tale examining many facets of being human, fantastically illustrated, and complete in and of itself. If you could not, hopefully you can go back and read it now and appreciate it for what it is.

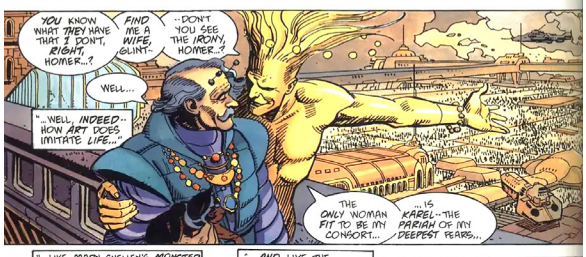


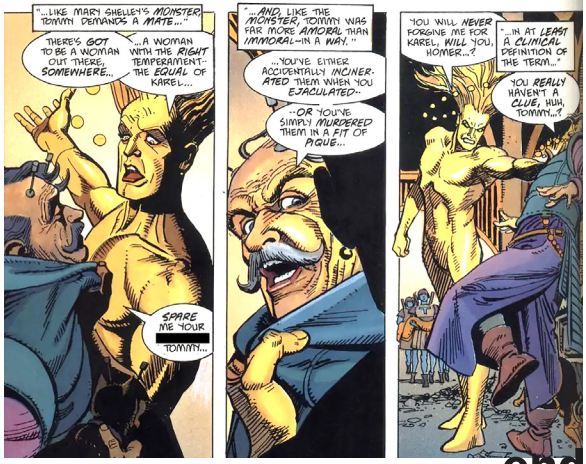
The author would like to thank Howard Chaykin for his participation in preparing this article.

Brian Martin lives in Oakville, Ontario, Canada, and though he would love to give immortality a shot, he would appreciate a safety valve just in case it was not all it was cracked up to be. He has, and reads, way too many comics, but reading them at twilight is a bit of a strain on the eyes, so he always tries to have sufficient lighting.









end



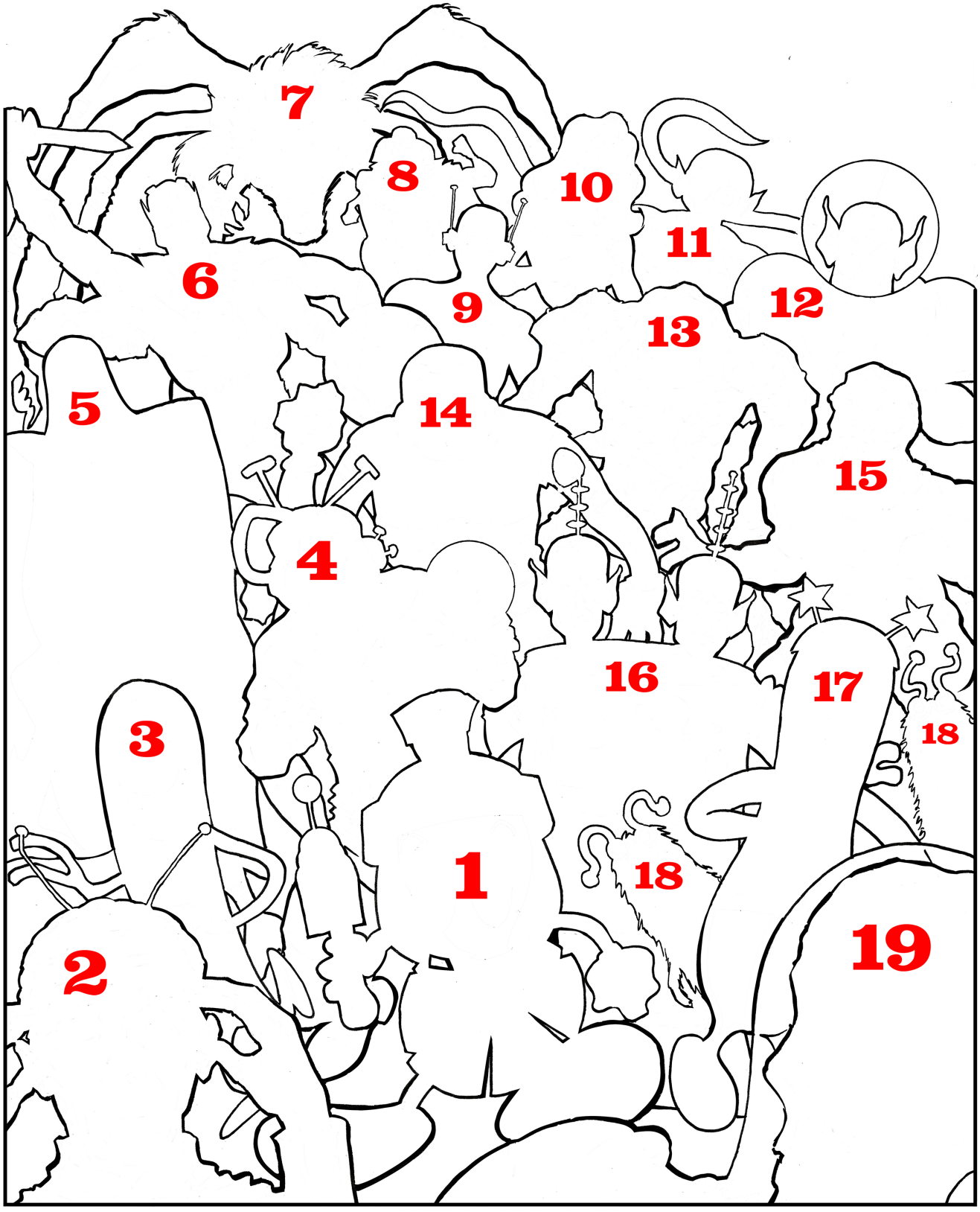
TWOMORROWS AD PAGE



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by Karl Heitmueller Jr.

1. Marvin the Martian (**LOONEY TUNES**) • 2. Uncle Martin (**MY FAVORITE MARTIAN**)
3. from Disney's **MARS & BEYOND** • 4. Voldar (**SANTA CLAUS CONQUERS THE MARTIANS**)
5. Nyah (**DEVIL GIRL FROM MARS**) • 6. Tars Tarkas (**JOHN CARTER OF MARS**)
7. RatBatSpiderCrab (**THE ANGRY RED PLANET**) • 8. Karmang the Evil (**SUPERMAN VS. SHAZAM**) • 9. Dop (**MARS NEEDS WOMEN,** 1968) • 10. Ylla (**MAN O' MARS**)
11. from **BATMAN** #42 • 12. from **CAPTAIN AMERICA** #70 • 13. from **WAR OF THE WORLDS** (1953 film version) • 14. Gorvak (**SPACEHAWK**) • 15. from **INVADERS FROM MARS** (1953)
16. from **THE TWILIGHT ZONE** • 17. Cosmo the Merry Martian (Harvey Comics)
18. from **SESAME STREET** • 19. from **MARS ATTACKS** trading cards



end

IN SEARCH OF LOST SPACE:

The Ballad Of HALO JONES

by Ian Millsted



"FRESH AIR? YEAH, I THINK I REMEMBER BREATHING THAT ONCE. IT TASTED OF FISH."

In the summer of 1984, a quiet revolution was going on for comics readers in Britain. It was becoming increasingly common to see people over the age of fourteen carrying and reading comics. It might be imported US titles like *X-Men* or *The New Teen Titans*, it might be adult humor magazine *Viz*, it might be *Swamp Thing* (with that new writer and the atmospheric art) if you could find copies, but the most visible was *2000AD*. The weekly anthology had been around for seven years and over 370 issues and had been on a particularly strong streak since the early 300s. "Judge Dredd" was in every issue with great scripts by John Wagner and a rotating crop of artists such as Steve Dillon, Ron Smith, and others. There were frequent appearances of the popular "Rogue Trooper," written by Gerry Finley-Day, and "Strontium Dog," by Alan Grant and artist Carlos Ezquerra. Also popular had been "Skizz," a very British take on E.T., and "D.R. and Quinch" (see *BACK ISSUE* #164). Both of the latter were written by Alan Moore who had simultaneously been writing "Marvelman" *(Miracleman* in the US) and "V for Vendetta" for *Warrior* magazine. Moore had become an established writer, and the question was what would he do next? The answer was "The Ballad of Halo Jones."



ALAN MOORE

Fimb/Wikimedia Commons.

The first most readers saw of "Halo Jones" was a promo back page illustration by Ian Gibson in *2000AD* #374 (June 23, 1984). The first episode appeared in #376 (July 7, 1984) for which Halo Jones was given the cover spot and the coveted color center pages usually owned by "Judge Dredd" (At this point, *2000AD* was a black and white magazine with just the front and back covers and center pages in color). This showed a vote of confidence in the series by the editors. With an excellent double page spread of a huge satellite dormitory habitation, we are introduced to three women sitting around listening to media announcements (some of which would become part of the story as it later unfolded). When Brinna, the older woman, says she is going out to watch a famous spaceship travel past, the two younger women decide to go along as well. Rodice affects a cool and cynical persona. Halo Jones is quieter–she gets less dialogue in the first episode than either Brinna or Rodice but what she says is indicative of where the series will go. She knows

From *The Ballad of Halo Jones: Full Colour Omnibus* comes this gorgeous image originally printed in the *2000AD Sci-Fi Special* (1985). All art in this article is by Ian Gibson.

TM & © Rebellion 2000AD Ltd.

about the spaceship: "The Clara Pandy's been everywhere … right out past the Magellanic Cloud, even." Oh, and they also have a protective robotic dog, Toby. The episode ends with Halo declaring that she is "sick of this place" and will get away one day. Rodice responds with the observation that anything that gets away just gets dragged back later, as is the case with the spaceship they have been to see, which is returning to be scrapped.

Where "D.R. and Quinch" was the extreme depiction of teenage boys behaving badly, "Halo Jones" was designed to be the opposite of the typical *2000AD* series. Instead of another violent anti-hero (male, of course), Moore wanted to feature a girl with a mundane existence, who wanted to get out into the universe. This looked potentially risky. Would the mainly teenage male audience take to a series with a female lead? In fact, there were a number of factors in its favor. *2000AD* seemed to be managing the rare trick of keeping its readership as they got older, and more interested in girls. In addition, girls were making up an increasing part of the readership. While "Halo Jones" was the first ongoing serial in the anthology to have a named female lead, it was not completely novel. There had been quite a few female protagonists in *2000AD*. The early serial, "Death Planet" (1978), had a female principle. *2000AD* had published adaptations of Harry Harrison's Stainless Steel Rat stories in which the Rat's wife was virtually an equal protagonist. In "Skizz," the Elliot equivalent character is Roxy, a teenage girl. "Judge Anderson" had featured in a solo strip in the *2000AD* annual released in 1983 and would go on to appear in many issues right up to the present day. Boys will read comics about girls if the story and art are strong, and that was certainly true with "Halo Jones."



Halo Jones is teased in this ad.

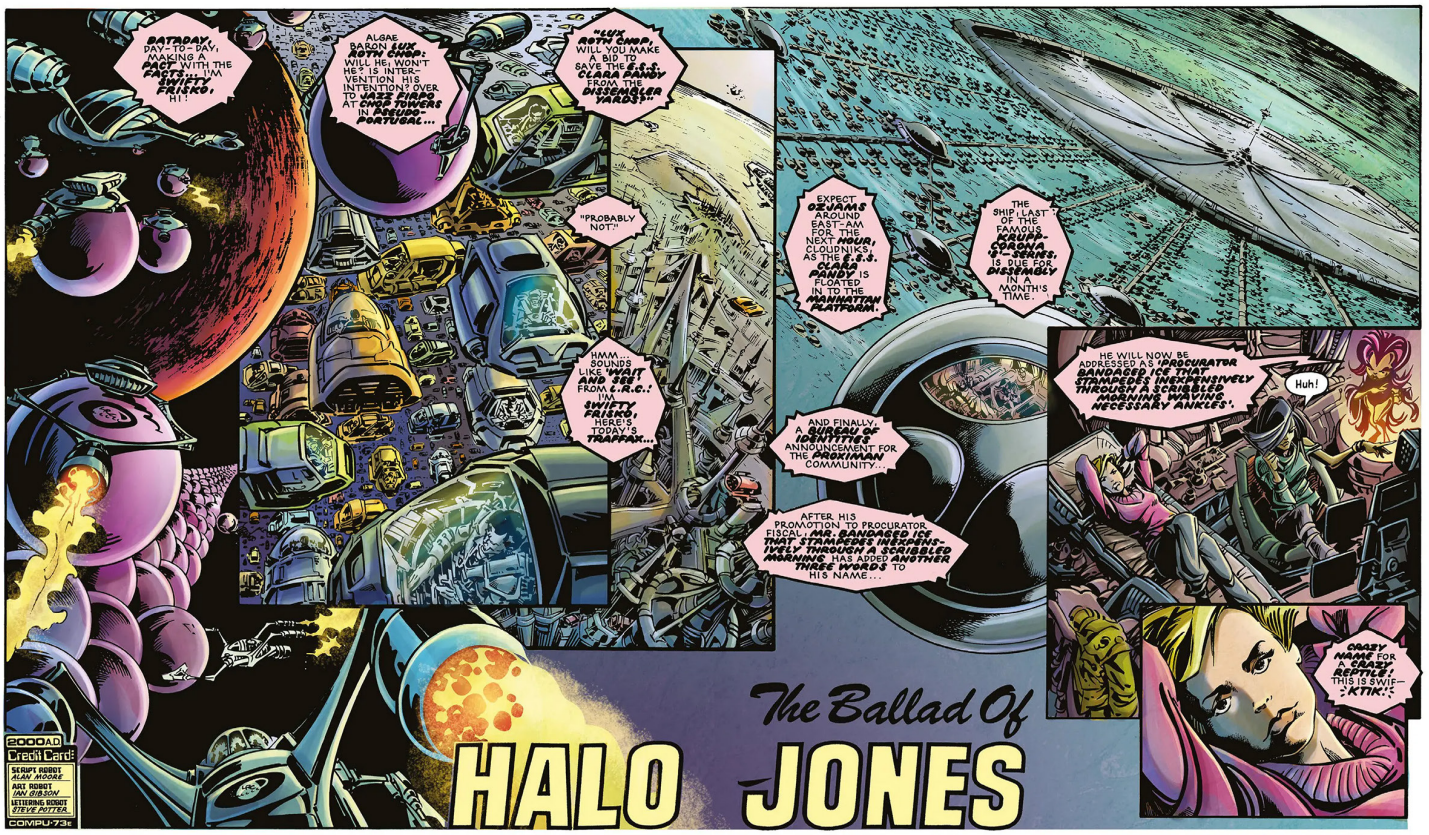
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In his introduction to the collection of the first story arc, Moore explained his reasoning: "I didn't want to write about a pretty scatterbrain who fainted a lot and had trouble keeping her clothes on. I similarly had no inclination to unleash yet another Tough Bitch With A Disintegrator And An Extra 'Y' Chromosome upon the world. What I wanted was simply an ordinary woman such as you might find standing in front of you while queueing for the check-out at Tesco's, but transposed to the sort of future environment that seemed a prerequisite of what was, after all, a boy's science fiction comic."

"The Ballad of Halo Jones" was very much a joint project between Alan Moore and artist Ian Gibson. They worked together to design the "world" of Halo Jones. Gibson had worked on *2000AD* from very early issues, being a frequent artist on "Judge Dredd" and the signature artist on the very funny "Sam Slade Robo Hunter." He had a well-deserved reputation for drawing realistically attractive women, including work on British *Bionic Woman* annuals.

One early challenge for *Halo Jones* came from an unexpected source. After that first episode there was a break of four weeks before the next due to industrial action. Steve MacManus, the editor of *2000AD* for much of the 1980s recalls, in his memoir *The Mighty One*, that "the next episode did not appear for four weeks due to another NUJ strike. Fourteen of the sixty-eight magazines published by IPC were suspended during this latest dispute."

In *2000AD* #377 (Aug. 4, 1984), the center pages were restored to "Judge Dredd." Halo Jones' second episode was a five-page black and white format that would be the norm for most of the run. Much of this episode is given to Halo and Rodice watching a music performance with dialogue that contains an imagined youth slang which Moore and Gibson had worked on together. One of the musicians, Ludy, is another friend. The big cliffhanger is the announcement that they have run out of food in their "shabbitat" and will have to embark on, gasp, a shopping expedition. This leads into the next episode in which we find out a bit more detail about the characters. Halo is eighteen years old. Rodice seems to be a few years older. The hoopworld satellite in which they live is an overcrowded environment in which a mass population has developed without any meaningful work or roles, for the most part. At the end of the third episode in *2000AD* #378 (Aug. 11, 1984) the girls are about to be caught up in a riot of the desperate population. The pattern is set for the rest of the story arc, continuing the exploration of



(bottom) The cover to Halo's first appearance in *2000AD* #376, and (top) the color centerspread remastered from *The Ballad of Halo Jones: Full Colour Omnibus*.

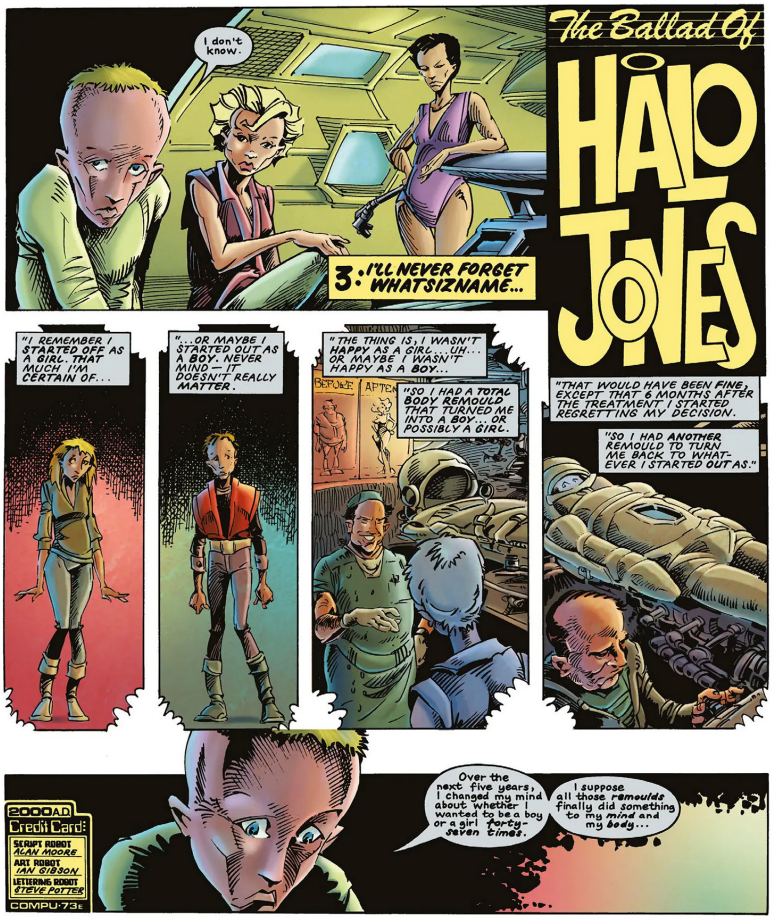
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the lives of Halo and her friends. There is a view sometimes expressed that the first "Halo Jones" serial is short on action, whereas in fact there is a lot going on all the time. There is a mass of creative invention from Moore and Gibson with each page containing a new idea that could have been developed into a story in itself. It bears multiple readings to pick up on all the little touches which are slotted in.

The extended shopping trip reaches a crescendo when Halo and Rodice return to their living space (*2000AD* #382 [Sep. 8, 1984]) to find it has been trashed and Brinna has been murdered. The following week, in #383 (Sep. 15, 1984) there is a tragic end to Ludy's story as well (and I'm trying to minimize the spoilers in the hopes you good folks seek out the actual stories). In the final episode of the first arc, in *2000AD* #385 (Sep. 29, 1984), the girls go to Manhattan in search of work. Only one job presents itself, working as a stewardess on the Clara Pandy, now back in service. Only one of the girls can be employed. Guess who? The parting is deftly handled. Was it pure coincidence that this particular issue came out just at that time of year when many British eighteen-year-olds are saying goodbye to their high school friends and heading off to university while others were being left behind in towns and cities all over the country?









(top left) Halo as a hostess. (bottom left) The story of Halo's roommate. Pages from *The Ballad of Halo Jones: Full Colour Omnibus.* (right) The second story begins in *2000AD* #406.

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"THAT ISN'T A STAR. THAT'S OUR SOLID WASTES DISPOSAL TRAILER."

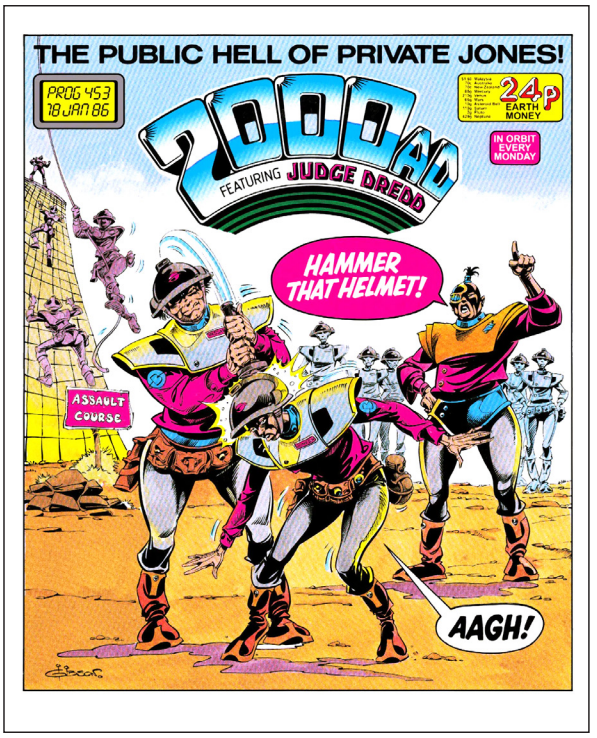
The second story arc, of ten episodes again, for "Halo Jones" followed a few months later, starting in *2000AD* #406 (Feb. 23, 1985). As before, she is honored with the front cover of that issue but not, this time, the color center pages. The series had gained a niche rather than universal popularity among readers of the magazine. Alan Moore revealed, in his introduction to the collected edition of the second arc (Book 2 as it was called) that continuing the series "just about made it under the wire by the skin of its teeth." Why was this? Moore further commented "reader reaction to the first book had been nothing to write home about. The younger readers were, by turns, bored by the lack of overt violent action and confused by the fact that all of the characters seemed to be talking unintelligible gibberish without so much as an explanatory glossary in sight." In fact, the invented slang helps a text like this to avoid becoming of its time, as also shown in Anthony Burgess invented youth speech in *A Clockwork Orange* (1961). Few things age a book or film more than use of the hip speech of the day. In the fanzine *Zarjaz* #3 (May 2003), Alan Moore explained his approach to dialogue. "Why it reads well is because I've read it before I write it. I have read it to make sure that there are no clunky syllables, so that there's a nice sort of bumdabum-dabumdabum there's a nice sort of rhythm there's no sudden three-syllable words where there should have been a two-syllable word, on which the mental voice of the reader will trip."

Moore and Gibson were commissioned for the second arc on the proviso that there would be a bit more action. However, Moore "didn't want to turn Halo into an action character" which would deprive the strip of what he thought its main character possessed… "namely, the sheer ordinariness of its main character." Moore observed: "Luckily, with the judicious use of a handful of terrorists and a psychotic robot dog, I was able to get the prescribed amount of violence into the narrative without doing literary violence to the characters themselves." In addition, the hoop slang was no longer in use as it was specific to that environment while the Clara Pandy space cruiser was a place of more conventional English. However, there is still plenty of wordplay for those looking for such. The name of the ship, Clara Pandy, is a play on Para Handy, the main character in a series of folksy short stories set aboard a small ship plying its trade on the west coast of Scotland in the first quarter of the twentieth century by author Neil Munro. There continue to be background conversations which hint at a wider story going on in the background.

There is also a shift in the physical appearance of Halo herself. In the first arc she dresses in baggy street clothes and, for about half the serial wears a hat which covers much of her face. In the second arc, her job as a hostess (more stewardess than what the word hostess suggests) requires that she dresses in figure hugging outfits. As Halo says in the story: "showing my feet and everything! I mean, on the Hoop, if a woman did that, I mean … well, we just didn't do it".

In this story arc, Halo is sharing a cabin with fellow hostess Toy Molto and an initially anonymous third roomie. That story is developed further in the third episode in #408 (Mar. 9, 1985) which must be one of the first mainstream UK comic stories to address gender identity. It is also a funny and tragic five-page story that stands in its own right. Beyond that, much of the main story in this arc revolves around the mysteries behind some of the other crew and well-healed passengers and Halo's interactions with them. There is also further resolution of sub-plots from arc one.

One fun "Easter egg" to look out for is the appearance of a woman-chasing passenger in the seventh episode. Ian Gibson chose to base the look of the character on himself. This acts as a humorous aside just as the serial is shifting into a darker place. There is a great deal of pathos in this sequence, handled with care by Moore. The strip is awarded the cover again for *2000AD* #413 (Apr. 13, 1985), but this time it is Toby the robot dog that is featured rather than Halo. The arc concludes with Halo having made a clear break, both physically and emotionally, with her Hoop background. What will she do next? Her final line here, with irony surely intended, is "play it again, Yortlebluzzgubbly." However, Jones, Moore, and Gibson were all keen to move in other directions.





(top) Halo joins the military, *2000AD* #453. (bottom) Bad dog!

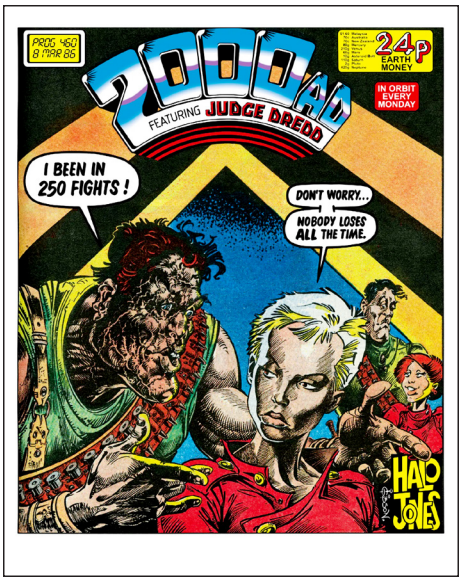
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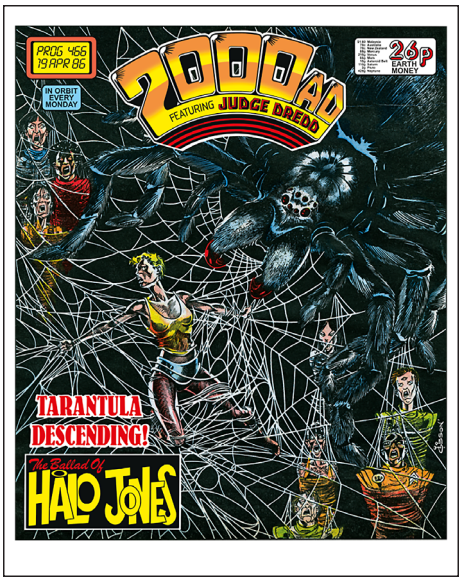
Halo in the military from *2000AD* #463. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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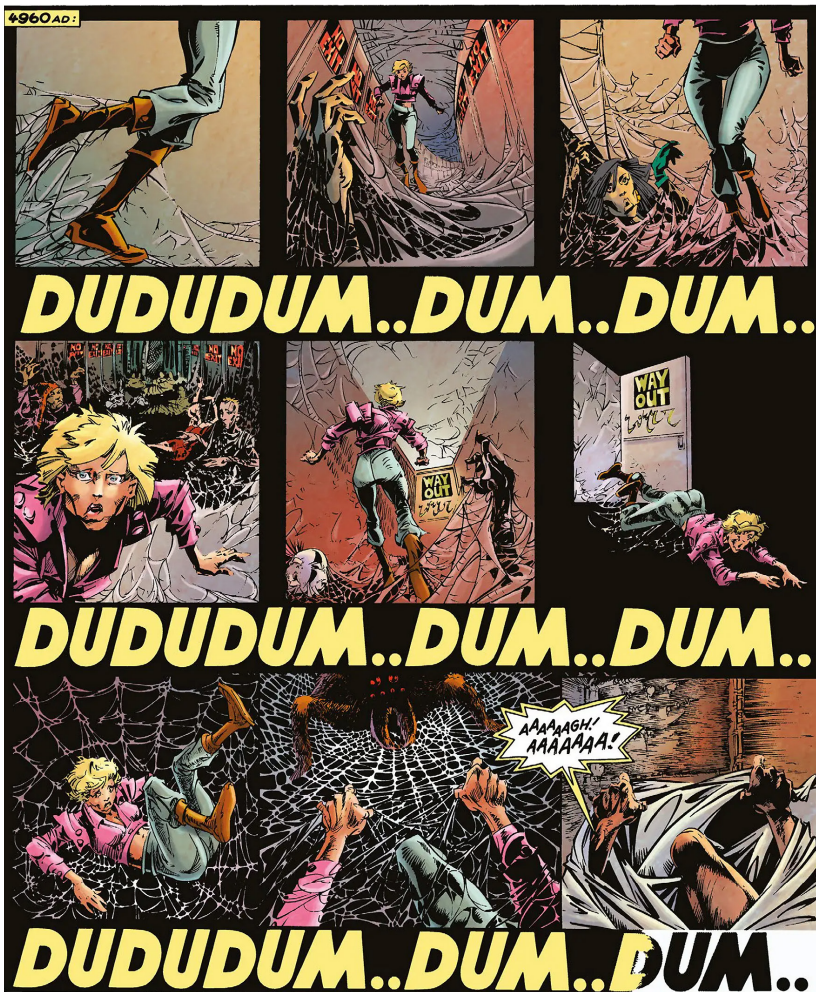


"IT FEELS LIKE A WEB, STRAINING AGAINST ME, GROWING TAUT, FINALLY SNAPPING STRAND BY STRAND … AND THEN I'M OUT. JUST OUT."

Halo Jones returned for what would be the third and final arc in *2000AD* #451 (Jan. 4, 1986). The second series had been more popular and this time the arc was extended to sixteen episodes. Alan Moore, in his introduction to the third collected edition, recalled "The additional length of the piece enables us to take the individual scenes at their proper pace and to tell the story with enough space to include both a goodly proportion of action and as much characterization as needed to give it emotional depth and impact." Halo appears on the front cover of #451, a more mature and cynical looking Jones than before.

For those who questioned the lack of violent action, the third arc takes us into a war zone. However, "The Ballad of Halo Jones" was never going to become a standard future war story. *2000AD* already had "Rogue Trooper" doing that, and doing it very well, thank you. Moore elaborated: "it seemed to me that the time was ripe for a story that looked at the concept of war in the future from a slightly different angle to the more traditional one. For one thing, it struck me that war in the future would be every bit as physically and psychologically damaging as warfare in the present, but with a greater and extended capacity for horrors. It seemed suspicious to me that, among the majority of future war strips that I had come across, none came even close to matching the depiction of inhumanity and misery conjured up by Pat Mills and Joe Colquhoun's masterful 'Charley's War.'"

Nine years have passed between the second and third arcs. There is a prologue to Book Three which accounts for Halo's activities, largely drifting from job to job and planet to planet while events unravel in the universe around her. By episode two, Halo has signed up for military service. One reward is another cover feature for #453 (Jan. 18, 1986). This is a military in which most of the combatants featured are women. Moore wrote this as much for shock value as to make a feminist statement, but the two things are not mutually exclusive. The first fighting is a jungle setting, a staple of many a war story over the years as it takes

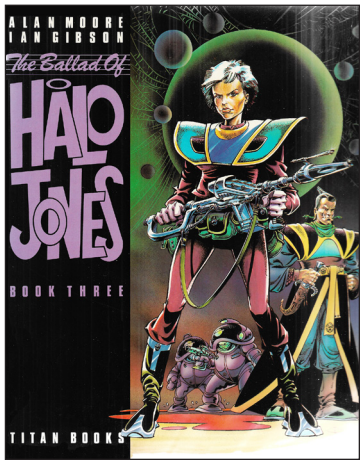


More cover appearances by Halo in (top left) *2000AD* #451, (top middle) 460, and (top right) 466. (bottom) Halo has spider troubles in this beautifully rendered page from *2000AD #466*. Remastered image from *The Ballad of Halo Jones: Full Colour Omnibus*.

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The covers to *The Ballad of Halo Jones* from Titan Collections.

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humans out of their comfort zone. After that, Halo is involved in a futuristic equivalent of a tank battle, another favorite of war stories in comics. The creators are working through the standard, cliché even, settings and trying to put a new spin on each, much as Moore and company were doing with horror tropes in *Swamp Thing* at the same time. There follows a journey through war-devastated environments, the death of friends, sniper warfare and a *Starship Troopers*-style landing on an alien planet. None of this is glorified. It shows the conflicts as sad, tragic, and even pathetic and all within the constraints of a comic sold to eight-year-olds. The war itself is not a just war. Moore hints at various points that Halo is fighting on the side of the aggressor. There is also a growing ambivalence in her emotions towards others. She has been damaged, but she is still Halo Jones at her core. At story's end she is still determined to move on and explore further.

"BUT IF YOU'RE ASKING, THEN THE ANSWER'S NO. GOT THINGS TO DO AND PLACES TO GO. WE'RE HEADING OUT FOR INDEPENDENCE." – TRANSVISION VAMP

"The Ballad of Halo Jones" managed to have a cultural reach beyond that of most comics. One such example was the song "Hanging Out with Halo Jones" from the debut album by Transvision Vamp (Pop Art 1988). Lead singer Wendy James kindly responded to an enquiry about what "Halo Jones" meant to the group. "I/we knew about Ian Gibson, and we were immersed in the advent of (the) *Blade Runner* movie, and the icon of Halo Jones going it alone, vulnerable, and necessarily tough was a touchstone, in as much as I am adopted and possessed similar traits to this fictional but relatable and very human female cartoon." Ian Gibson had worked in the music industry prior to his comic art career.

No more of "The Ballad" has been seen. In 1986 it was not set in stone that it had finished for good and both Alan Moore and Ian Gibson seemed open to at least the possibility of further stories. There had been talk of taking Halo Jones life to old age in a series of "Books" running to ten volumes. In August 1986 Alan Moore wrote in the collected Book 3, "While there are currently no plans to continue the series, due to external circumstances and considerations, I think it's fair to say that, were those circumstances to alter, both Ian and myself would be only too pleased to resume 'The Ballad' and continue to relate the history of a character to whom we've both grown very attached over the couple of years that we've worked with her." However, it was not to be. Alan Moore no longer writes comics and Ian Gibson died in 2023. Gibson had drawn occasional pictures of Halo Jones, including the controversial "Halo in chains" piece in which a character looking a bit like Halo, but with bigger breasts, is shown topless, but no further stories. The series was done as work for hire and *2000AD* could, conceivably, have continued with other creators and there have been occasional illustrations but, thankfully, enough respect has been shown to it leave alone. For my money the series ends well and needs no further continuation. Enjoy what there is. It stands up very well and there have been multiple collected versions, including now in color, and is recommended as a gift to any nieces and nephews you might have.



With thanks to Wendy James.

Ian Millsted is a writer and teacher based in Portishead, UK.



Gibson cover art from the 2001 *Halo Jones* trade paperback.

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TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

Backstage PASS!

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND

by Robert Jeschonek

Suspense is high as people with knowledge of closely guarded secrets race against time to protect the truth they've found from authorities seeking to conceal it. Is this the plot of the classic science fiction film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*…or the origin story of the Marvel Comics adaptation of the movie?

Both, as it turns out.

FROM MANHUNTER TO ALIEN HUNTERS

Written and directed by Steven Spielberg, *Close Encounters* was scheduled for theatrical wide release in late 1977. The film revolves around the experiences of several characters who encounter mysterious alien beings, culminating in the dazzling nighttime visitation of an extraterrestrial mother-ship at Devil's Tower, Wyoming.

Excited by the huge splash made by *Star Wars* in early '77, Marvel contracted with Columbia Pictures to publish a *Close Encounters* comics adaptation that would ride the wave of the new film's likely success.

To enhance the comic's potential, Marvel handed the assignment to a superstar creative team—writer Archie Goodwin and artist Walter Simonson. Four years earlier, the two had found great acclaim on the *Manhunter* backup series in *Detective Comics* at DC; what better team to bring the suspenseful, action-packed story of *Close Encounters* to life on the comics page? Adding up-and-coming inker Klaus Janson to the mix pumped up the creative power even more.

Having such high-level pros in the trenches paid off, as developing the project wasn't easy. For one thing, Marvel wasn't paying to use likenesses of the actors from the film. It was up to Simonson to come up with interpretations that would be similar enough to the original actors that they would be recognizable as the characters they portrayed…but not *too* recognizable.

"I tried to keep characters' body types similar to what they were in the movie," recalls Simonson. "I just tried to get characters that would work in the comic."

Much bigger challenges resulted from security measures that would have put the secrecy-obsessed government entities in the movie to shame.

ADAPTING A MOVIE BLINDFOLDED

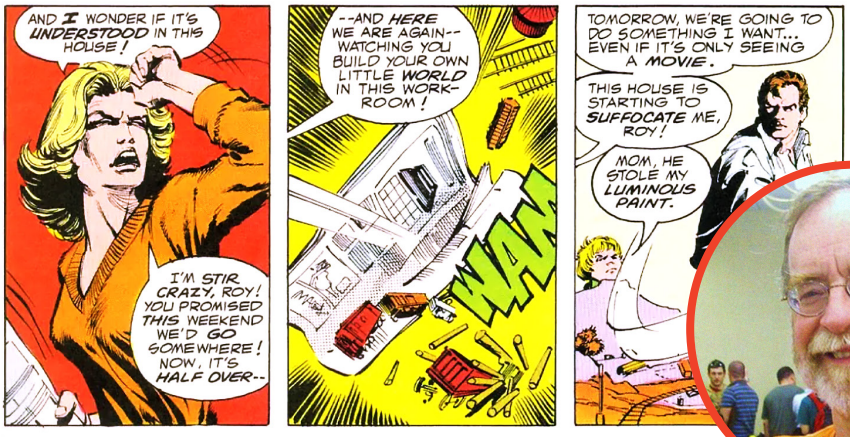
Hoping to maximize the movie's box office haul, Columbia Pictures demanded tight security during the comic's creation. The studio was determined to prevent spoilers, even after the film premiered in theaters.

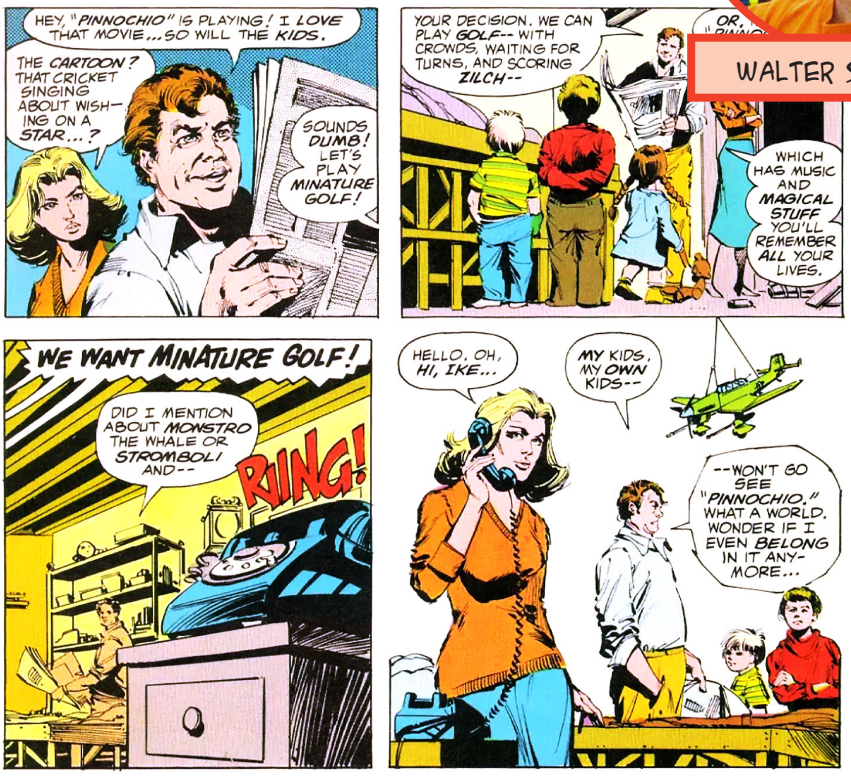


Bob Larkin's magnificent painted cover for *Marvel Super Special* #3: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

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They may not look like (top) Richard Dreyfuss and Teri Garr, but you get the idea. Art unless noted by Walter Simonson and Klaus Janson.

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According to Simonson, the Marvel team received a copy of the film's shooting script, though they were limited in what parts of it they could use. Columbia restricted them from including certain elements in the comic, like the smiling alien in the mothership contact sequence at the end of the film.

Marvel's creators also faced a shortage of usable imagery from the film. "Columbia didn't give us any visual reference to use at the drawing table," recalls Simonson. "They showed us a minute or two of the footage of when the aliens came down a country road, and everyone watched as they passed. We also saw some photos of the cast in costume and some extremely fuzzy photos of sections of the alien mothership."

As if the short supply of visuals wasn't bad enough, none of the limited materials could leave the Columbia offices where the Marvel team viewed them. It was as if Goodwin, Simonson, and Janson were dealing with top-secret defense intelligence…or actual proof of extraterrestrial activities on Earth, zealously protected by men in black.



WALTER SIMONSON

Eager for some kind of takeaway to enhance the finished product, resourceful Simonson came up with a plan to work around this restriction. Little did he know it would lead to a high-stakes struggle with forces committed to secrecy much like those faced by the heroes of the *Close Encounters* movie.

THE NAPKIN CAPER

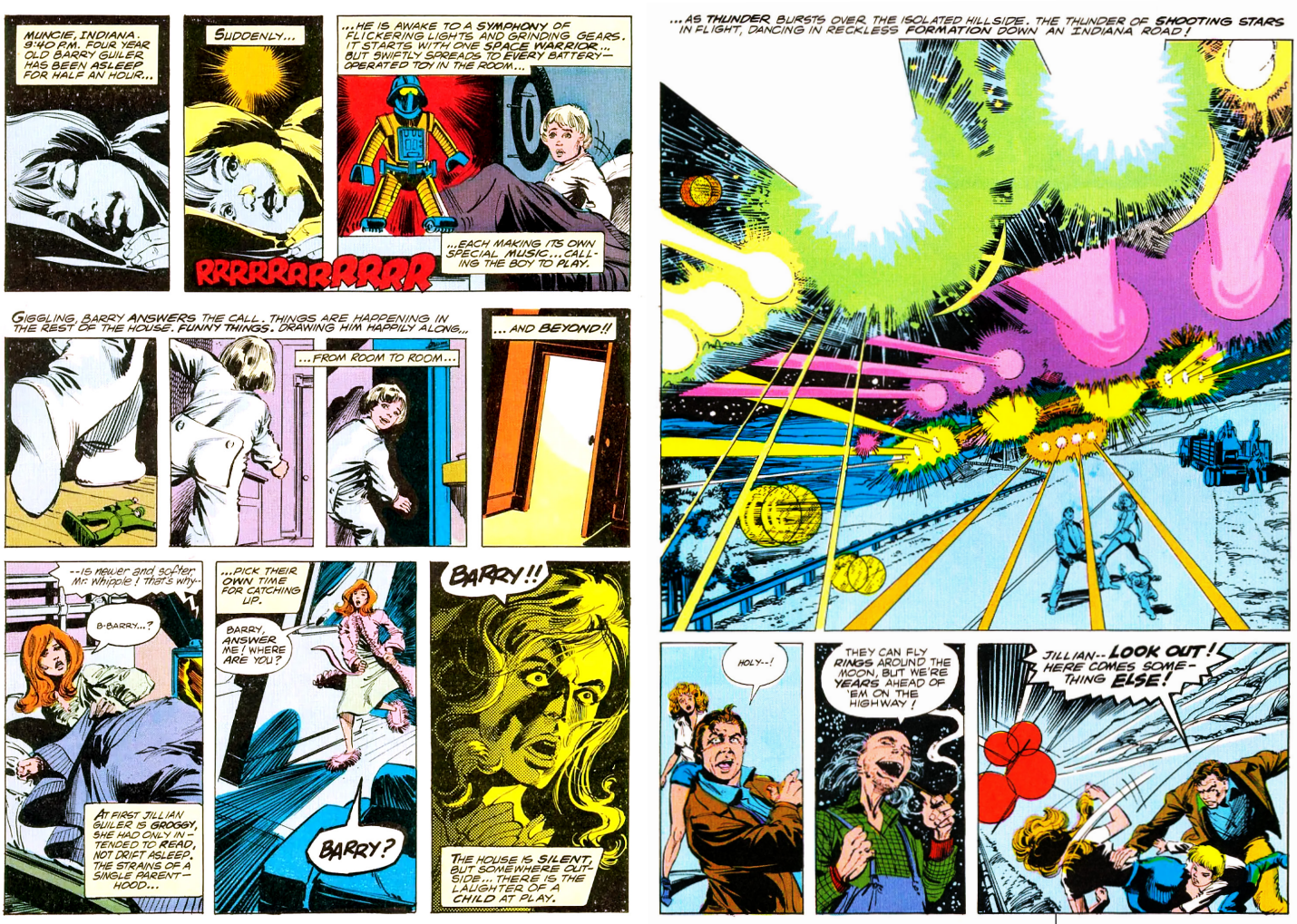
It all started with napkins.

Though Columbia wouldn't let Simonson remove any photo reference from their office, a public relations representative agreed to his request to let him make some quick sketches to take with him. Simonson used the materials he had in his pockets—a green Pentel pen and some napkins from a fast-food place. He left with some rough sketches of the mothership in his possession.

That might have been the end of it if not for Jim Warren. His company, Warren Publishing, had bought the rights to publish a *Close Encounters* photo magazine, but he was having trouble getting Columbia to provide actual photos for it. When he found out Marvel was publishing a comics adaptation of the film, he became convinced that Columbia was supplying Marvel with reference even as they were holding out on him.

Obsessed with what he thought was Marvel's access to *Close Encounters* content, Warren pressured his senior editor to get the facts. That editor had an inside track with the Marvel adaptation's penciler, who just happened to be her husband, Walter Simonson.

Louise "Weezie" Simonson refused to share what Walter had told her about the project. Frustrated, Warren tried another tactic, one that pitted Columbia Studios against the comic's creative team and the parent company of Marvel Comics itself.



THE BAD KIND OF SIGNING

When it came to the napkins, Columbia wanted Marvel to fold.

One day, Goodwin and Walter Simonson were called to the office of Jim Galton, president of Cadence Corporation, Marvel's owner at the time. When the creatives stepped into the room, they saw Galton was accompanied by a familiar face: the Columbia PR rep who'd allowed Simonson to walk off with napkin sketches of the mothership.

"Columbia wanted us to sign a four-page document giving them the right to sue us if any information leaked about key elements of the movie," recalls Simonson. Apparently, Warren had told Columbia that Simonson was an untrustworthy freelancer, and the film's secrets "would be out there in *Time* magazine in no time."

Columbia's threats had the creators sweating, but Galton wasn't cowed. After a consultation with Cadence's corporate counsel, he laid out Marvel's position for Columbia. According to Simonson, "Jim sat down at his desk with a smile and said, 'I'm afraid I can't sign this onerous document.'"

Problem solved, right? Not quite. Columbia was still obsessed with secrecy, and the napkins were a wrinkle they weren't about to let fall off the table.

THE PAPER NAPKIN CHASE

Goodwin and Simonson were feeling paranoid… with good reason. Though Galton refused to sign the additional non-disclosure agreement, Columbia still wanted to round up whatever reference materials they'd allowed Marvel to have. There hadn't been much—just the shooting script and napkin sketches—but they wanted to ensure those items wouldn't be misused or fall into the wrong hands.

That was why, after the meeting in Galton's office, Goodwin and Simonson hurried out of the building like characters in a cinematic thriller. They knew they had to get home and secure the materials before someone from Columbia tracked them down.

"We set out uptown on foot," says Simonson. "We started on Madison Avenue between 56th and 57th and headed for our apartments, which were near each other. I lived on 74th Street and Archie had a place on 76th. We couldn't get a cab for some reason, so walking home was our best option."

As they headed for their apartments, Simonson stopped several times to call Weezie from pay phones (necessary as this was before the era of ubiquitous mobile phones). "We had no idea if the Columbia Gestapo were going to come and knock on our doors. I finally got hold of Weezie, and she said Columbia had not yet come to the apartment. I told her to put the script and napkins out of sight, and I'd get home as soon as I could."

(left) Toddler Barry Guiler is entranced by the aliens. (right) Aliens on the road. One of the few scenes Goodwin and Simonson actually saw before crafting the adaptation.

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Well aware the clock was ticking; Simonson and Goodwin gave up on hiking and caught a bus. The last stop was one block from where Simonson lived.

Hearts pounding, the two creators made it to their first destination. They burst into Simonson's apartment, only to find…the coast was clear. If Columbia was coming, they hadn't been there yet.

"We decided to split up the reference material," explains Simonson. "I kept the script, and Archie took the napkins. It was risky, because we had no copies, but dividing the materials between us seemed like the safest bet."

At least Simonson and Goodwin had dodged a bullet for the time being. Maybe their paranoia was groundless after all.

Goodwin left with the napkins in his pocket. Walter and Weezie relaxed, settling in for the evening.

Then the phone rang, and everything went off the rails.

"It was Archie, calling to say he'd arrived home…and Columbia's PR guy was there waiting for him," recalls Simonson. "Archie's wife was serving him tea."

The Columbia rep repossessed the napkin drawings on the spot. "Archie insisted on being given a receipt, which, unfortunately, he later lost," says Simonson. "Then, the guy left with the drawings. I'm sure they were torn up and tossed into the nearest waste basket outside."

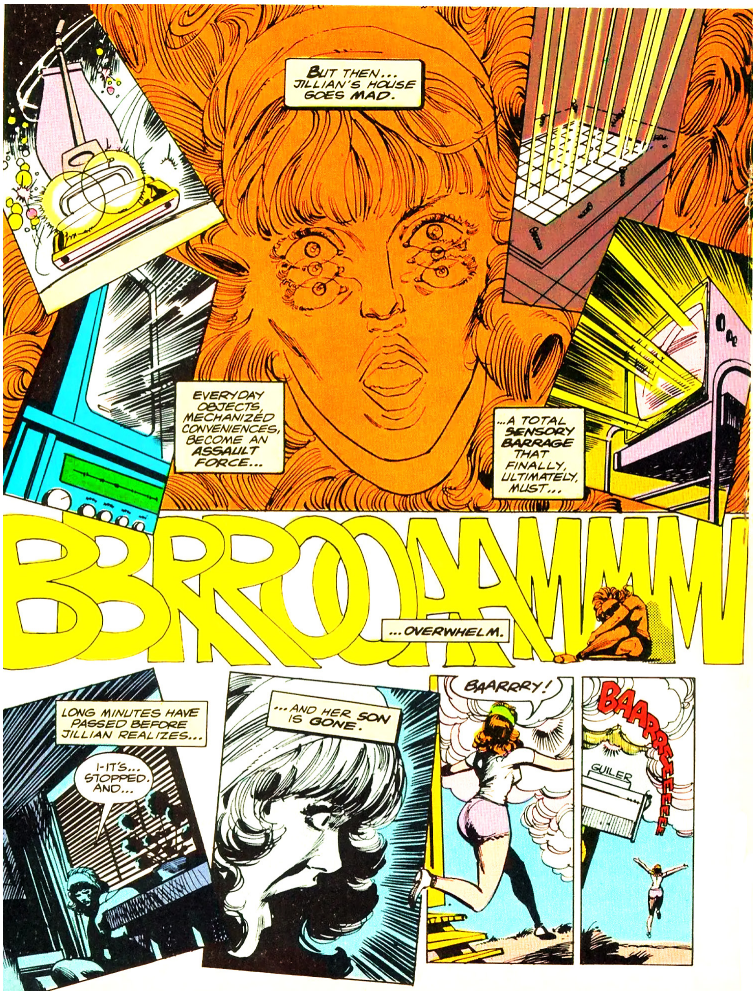
In the end, the Columbia cover-up succeeded…though it didn't really affect the *Close Encounters* comic adaptation. Simonson had already worked his magic on the page, so losing the napkins didn't throw a monkey wrench into the project.

Weezie had a happy ending, too. Though she resigned from Warren Publishing in protest over Jim Warren's role in the kerfuffle with Columbia, she wasn't out of a job for long. Warren begged her to come back, and she did, staying until late 1979, when she left for Marvel.

As well as everything turned out, Walter Simonson says, "That was perhaps my weirdest experience in comics. It was also my most upsetting in many ways."

MAKING A SPLASH

Despite all the drama over Columbia's extreme secrecy, Goodwin and Simonson turned out a high-quality adaptation. According to Simonson, their partnership was as effective on *Close Encounters* as it had been on *Manhunter*…and just as much fun.



Adapting a film to comics calls for some creative decisions such as this page.

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"Archie was always a treat," says Simonson. "He was such a good guy.

"And he was such a good writer, too. He was able to write densely without making it seem dense. He was extremely good at layering exposition in word balloons in a way that didn't sound boring."

The team's skills at compressing content came in handy given the length of the book. "We had only 46 pages," recalls Simonson. "Fortunately, Archie was good at boiling stuff down, and I wasn't bad at pacing out the artwork properly, so we got the job done."

In most cases, the lower page count required the creators to compress scenes from the movie…though they also lengthened at least one. According to Goodwin's afterword in the comic, the scene that introduced Richard Dreyfuss' character, Roy Neary, was extended for the comic. "We went back to the original script, which had a longer version of the same scene, and used that," wrote Goodwin. "The extra panels and what happens in them help us establish familiarity with the character and build interest in him."

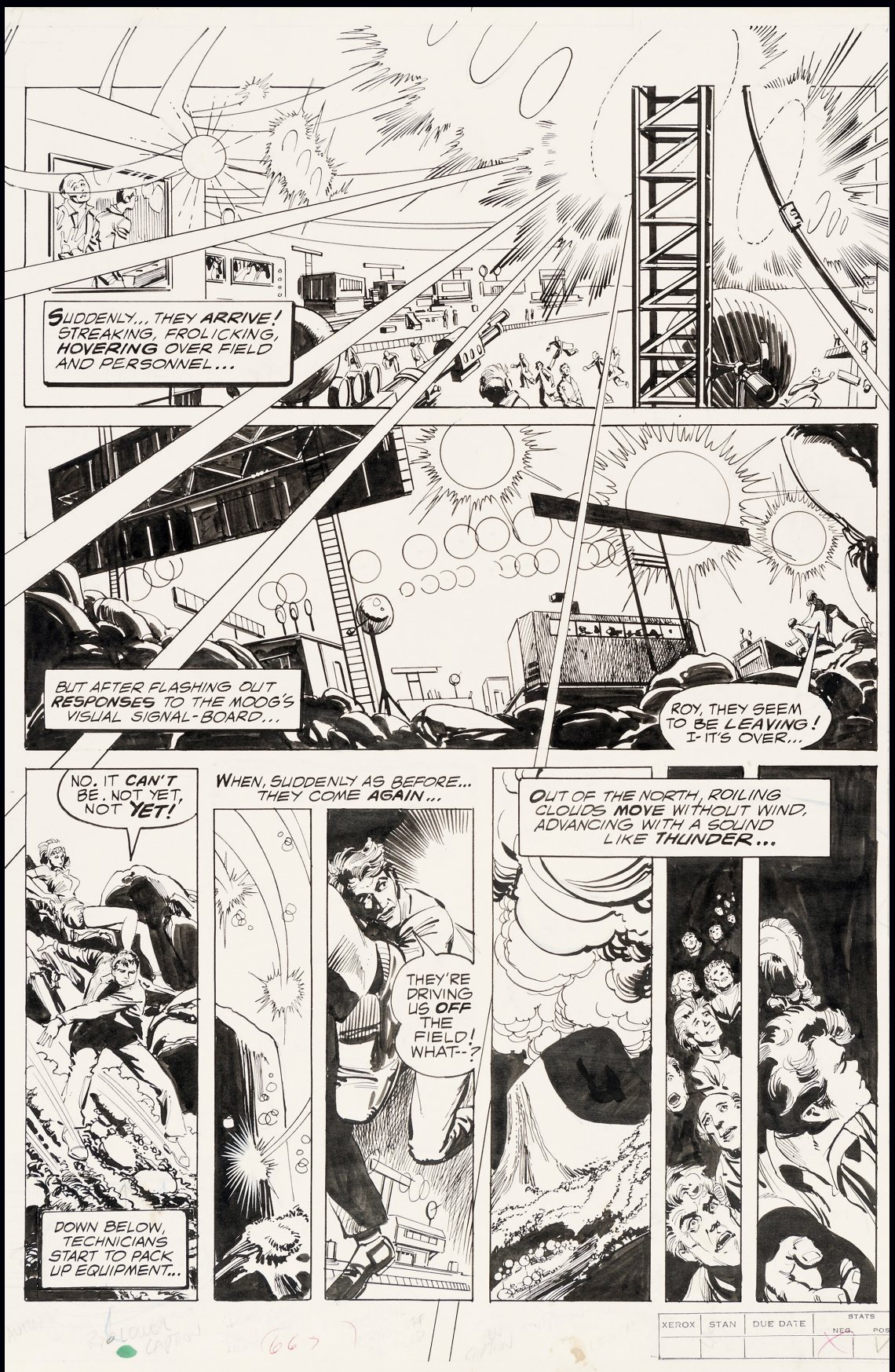
Thanks to the team's skills in juggling content within a limited page count, working with the allotted length didn't hamstring their efforts. It didn't hurt that the book would be published at magazine size—about 8 ¼" by 10 ¾"—as part of the *Marvel Super Special* series. The larger size gave Simonson more real estate to work with on a page-by-page basis than would have been the case at standard comic book size.

One example that stands out is the spectacular two-page splash of the alien mothership near the end of the story. Simonson drew it from memory, plus the napkin sketches before they were confiscated, and enhanced the impression of the vessel's vast size by using full bleed printing that ran off the edges of the pages.

Elsewhere in the book, Simonson used bleeds in a more limited way for spot effects. "I like to use bleeds for impact," he explains. "I often use a bleed on one panel of a page, emphasizing that that panel and the image spilling out of it are bigger and more significant than the rest."

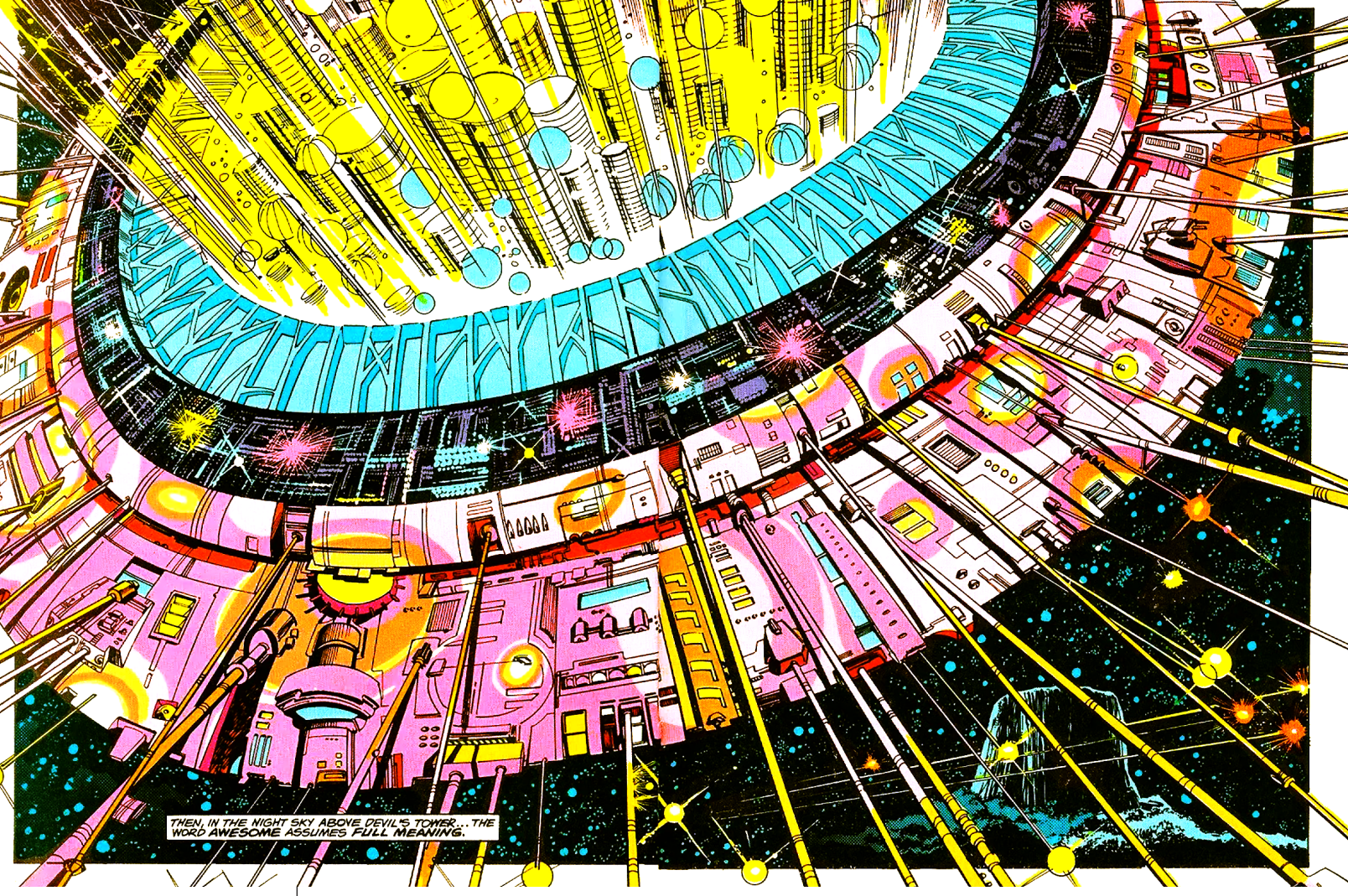
Ultimately, everything was in service to Goodwin and Simonson's overarching goal: to make the best comic they could, rather than trying to do a mirror image of the movie. In the process, they also accomplished something else: perfecting their system of collaboration, a system that would lead to the creation of another science fiction adaptation.

And this one would be even more well-received than *Close Encounters* had been.



The players are about to experience something amazing. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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The mothership appears in a glorious two-page spread.

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CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE TERRIFYING KIND

When Goodwin and Simonson were recruited to adapt another sci-fi film in 1978, it was a very different project from *Close Encounters*. Instead of benevolent alien beings welcoming humanity to the universe, this new movie depicted a horrifyingly hostile extraterrestrial bent on slaughtering every human aboard a claustrophobic space hauler.

Despite the very different tone, Goodwin and Simonson brought their singular genius to the adaptation of *Alien* with spectacular results. They so effectively captured the film on the page that it went on to become the first comic book to hit the *New York Times* Best Sellers List.

The experience of creating the *Alien* adaptation was very different from that of developing the *Close Encounters* comic. For one thing, Goodwin and Simonson were given plenty of reference material. "The publisher, *Heavy Metal*, got a ton of slides from the film studio, 20th Century Fox," recalls Simonson. "I was able to have them make stats of the slides, which were crappy reproductions, but fine for using as basic reference for the comic. I think it made a big difference."

The studio also provided multiple drafts of the script, enabling Goodwin and Simonson to choose from scenes that were omitted as well as those that made it into the final cut.

According to Simonson, the book's increased page count also made it a stronger effort. Instead of the 46 pages of *Close Encounters, Alien* ran 64 pages, giving the creative team more room in which to operate.

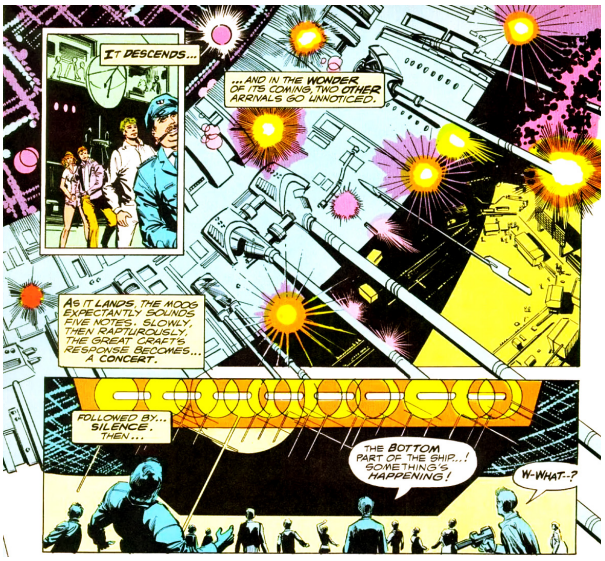
The result, published the same year as the film's release in 1979, sold extremely well, nearly cracking the top five on the *New York Times* Best Sellers List. It continues to be well-regarded by fans and critics alike.

And its predecessor, *Close Encounters*, continues to gain steam as interest in that film grows due to the revelation of government files related to unexplained phenomena and the release of another Spielberg project devoted to alien lifeforms.

THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

Close Encounters was a pioneering film in many ways, from the dazzling special effects to the friendly aliens…and the portrayal of a government conspiracy hiding the truth about extraterrestrials from the public. This idea, and its execution as a key element in a suspenseful story, resonated for decades to come.

In Spielberg's own follow-up, *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, government forces hunt an adorable alien marooned on Earth and battle to keep E.T.'s existence a secret. Similar themes flow through the movie *Men in Black* and, most prominently, the TV series *The X-Files*. Though *The X-Files* deals with a wide variety of scientific and supernatural threats, its core narrative focuses on a vast government cover-up concealing the presence and activities of alien lifeforms.

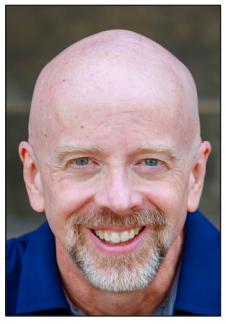


Films and TV series like those helped kick public interest in alien life and UFOs into hyperdrive. More and more people became convinced that a government conspiracy is hiding the truth and demanded to know the facts. In response, US government entities have released tranches of related information, images, and video, stoking interest in UFOs—rechristened as "Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena" or UAPs—to new heights. The recent documentary film *The Age of Disclosure* brought even more attention to the subject.

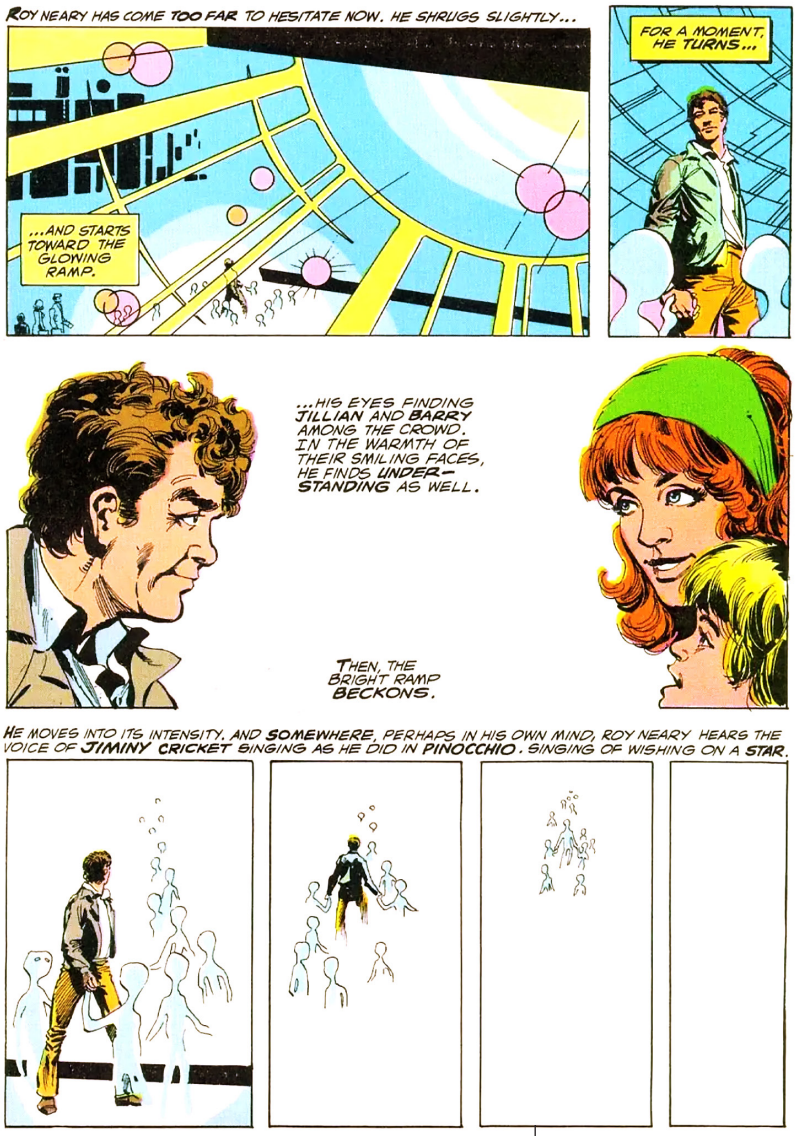
Spielberg himself has come full circle with his film *Disclosure Day*, tapping into the same font of ideas he first explored 49 years ago in *Close Encounters*. With the tagline "We Deserve to Know," the new film features events related to the disclosure of undeniable proof of the existence of alien beings. Before the movie's release, the trailer fueled speculation that *Disclosure Day* might in some way be a sequel to *Close Encounters*.

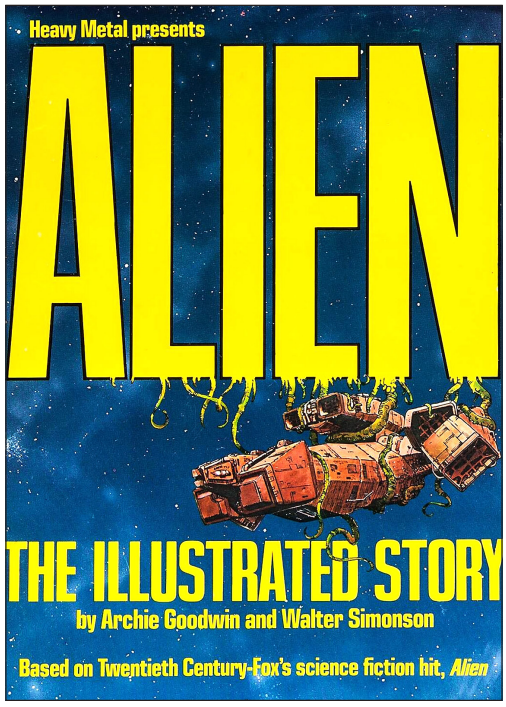
With so much renewed interest in that film and the recent string of revelations by the government, readers will find the Marvel Comics adaptation a fascinating and entertaining companion piece. Together with the film, it might even prove to be prophetic about the existence of alien life…which wouldn't surprise Simonson at all.

"I can't imagine there isn't life in outer space," he says. "There are just too many stars, too many galaxies. I can't imagine this is the only planet where life has arisen. Whether we'll ever come in contact with it because of the vastness of the universe and the limits of light speed travel, I don't know. But I'm sure there's life out there somewhere."



ROBERT JESCHONEK** is a* **USA Today-bestselling author based in Steve Ditko's hometown of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He has scripted comics for DC and AHOY and edits the* **Legends of Indie Comics: Words Only** *series of prose fiction anthologies featuring classic indie comics characters (including Concrete, Nexus, Cerebus, Grimjack, and Flaming Carrot) as written by their creators. He has also written official* **Star Trek** *and* **Doctor Who** *fiction. Visit him online at* **www.bobscribe.com**.





(left) The mothership lands. (top right) Roy enters the mothership and Goodwin nicely ties his departure to his introduction. (bottom) The adaptation to follow. *Alien: The Illustrated Story* cover by Simonson.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind TM & © Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. Alien TM & © Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

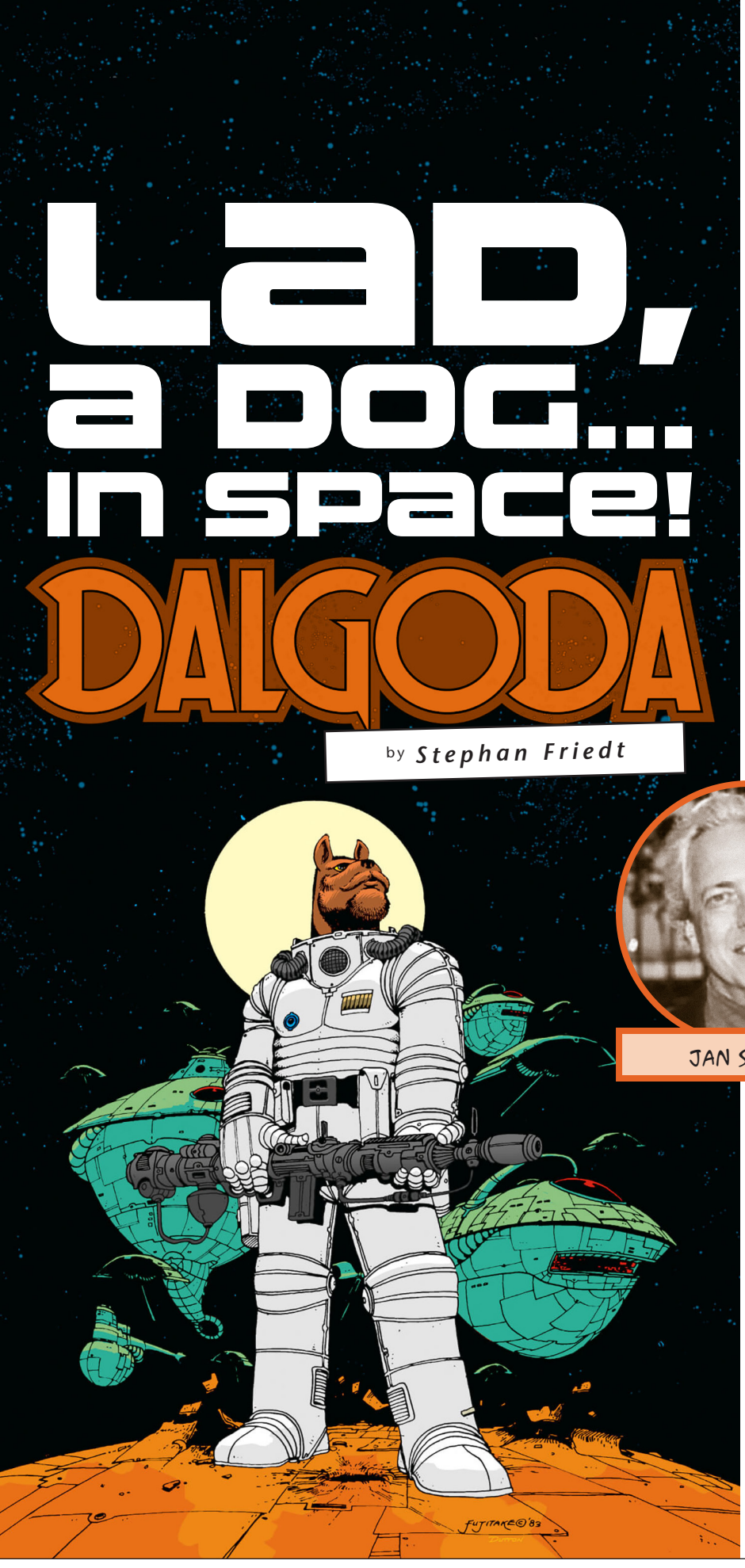
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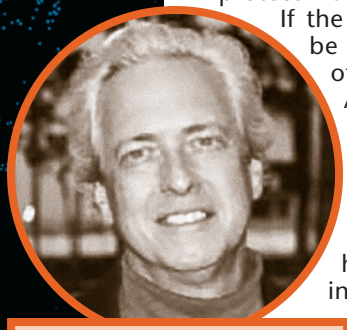
TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

Lad, a Dog... in space!

DALGODA™

by Stephan Friedt





JAN STRNAD

"The name 'Dalgoda' is an anagram of the title of the famous dog story,* Lad, a Dog *by Albert Payson Terhune, a book I've never read."

-Jan Strnad, Afterword to the *Dalgoda Omnibus* (About Comics 2024)

To give some background on why that title might have stuck in Strnad's head...

Lad, a Dog was written in 1919 by Albert Payson Terhune. The book was comprised of stories inspired by his collie and became a bestseller in both adult and children's fiction. It spawned two sequels and a "Son of..." book. In 1962, it was the basis of the Warner Brothers film of the same name. The movie resulted in two Dell comics, *Four Color* #1303 (Feb.-Apr. 1962) with a movie photo of Angela Cartwright and Lad, and a reprint issue later that summer as *Lad, a Dog* #2 (July-Sep. 1962) with a painted cover. Both contained the same Sam Glanzman drawn story adapted by writer Ken Fitch. Even if you didn't read it, you couldn't miss it. I admit I read the book and have the Dell comics.

But this is about *Dalgoda*, so let's get to it.

Dalgoda, a canine-looking hominid from the planet Canida, is sent on a mission to Earth to recruit the resources of Earth's defenses to protect his world from the invading "Nimp". If the Nimp conquer Canida, Earth will be next. Dal encounters deceit, bigotry, and attempted assassination. Along with disgraced midshipman Posey Ravencraft, Posey's mechanic girlfriend Gunner, janitor Victor Kneedam, and Dalgoda's lawyer Randy Kneedam, Dalgoda does his best to stay alive and return to help his people. He even gets a love interest or two along the way.

Dalgoda ran for eight issues from Fantagraphics (Aug. 1984-Apr. 1986). In 1986, Dalgoda returned in the four-issue series *Flesh & Bone* under the Upshot imprint from Fantagraphics. In August 1986, Dalgoda returned as a back-up story in the Fantagraphics reprint of Charlton's *Doomsday Squad* #1.

In 1990, the UK anthology title *A1* from Atomeka Press ran the final 12-page story, "The Hero of the Tale" by Jan Strnad and Kevin Nowlan.

Dalgoda was finally gathered together in an omnibus volume by About Comics in 2024.

On Dennis Fujitake's input to the series, Strnad writes in the afterword to the Omnibus, "Much of the appeal of *Dalgoda*, in my opinion, lies in the sense the reader gets (I hope) of being in a real environment with real people. Look at the background extras in any scene and you'll find people

Dalgoda looks regal on the cover of the first issue. All art in this article is by Dennis Fujitake.

© Jan Strnad and Dennis Fujitake.





(left) Dalgoda and Posey get to know each other in *Dalgoda* #1. (right) A Kill-Drone is on Dalgoda's tail on this exciting page from *Dalgoda* #1. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

© Jan Strnad and Dennis Fujitake.

doing peoply things, sometimes to comic effect. This is Dennis going the extra mile."

In *Dalgoda* #1 (Aug. 1984), Strnad told us in the introduction, "I can't claim that *Dalgoda* is a radical innovation within the graphic story medium. This is primarily the fault of the writer (me), a person steeped in the traditional modes of storytelling, who values clarity of expression over novelty for novelty's sake"

He would go on to add, "I've saved this paragraph to sing the praises of *Dalgoda*'s co-creator, Dennis Fujitake. Beyond the clean lines and layouts that make his work easy to follow and technically impressive, Dennis imbues his characters…*all* of them, right down to the guy schlepping boxes in the background…with a warmth and humanity rarely see in mainstream material."



Cindy Ellen Russell.

I dug out my copies of *Anomaly* (Strnad's fanzine), *A Selection of Fictional Narratives* (Fujitake's fanzine, and an excellent example of his early "Frazetta/Jones" influence), all my *Dalgoda* issues, and even *My Day at the Beach in Hawaii* (a children's book by Fujitake). I had the chance to correspond with Strnad and Fujitake about their beginnings in comics and their collaboration.

STEPHAN FRIEDT: ***You both started in fanzines. What is your earliest memory of finding comics, science fiction, or fandom?***

JAN STRNAD: It's hard for me to remember a time when I didn't read comics. The local grocery store had a section of comics for kids to read while their mothers shopped. Shelves of them, and two rows of metal chairs to sit in. My mother accidentally left me there one time, just went home without me. At least I think it was an accident. The first time was, for sure, but when she did it a second time, I began to have my doubts. I spent my allowance on comic books. I bought everything except romance and war comics. When *Fantastic Four* #1 came out with that incredible Kirby cover, I became a Marvel Maniac. The DC comics that I bought seemed very sedate in comparison. At one point I had so many comic books set around the house that Mom paid me 2¢ for every one I got rid of. I carted over 400 comics to the next-door neighbors' house, figuring that I could go over there to read them whenever I wanted. The neighbor kids' mother threw them out. The comic books at my neighborhood store were shelved next to the paperback books, so that's

how I discovered science fiction. My first s-f book was *Alien Planet* by Fletcher Pratt. I was probably 13 years old when I bought it. I bought all the *Conan* books with Frank Frazette covers, dipped my toe into Edgar Rice Burroughs, loved the Year's Best S-F anthologies and read all the big names in s-f at the time: Asimov, Bradbury, et al. plus Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch, H.P. Lovecraft, and others. Around middle school my future *Anomaly* partner, Don Bain, and I drew our own comics that we exchanged. Not long after that I discovered comic book fandom with G.B. Love's *Rocket's Blast Comic Collector* and *The Buyer's Guide*. Later I contributed a column to *TBG* and won a "Favorite Fan Writer" award one year, which got me a nice certificate illustrated by Tim Kirk. Don and I put out our own fanzine, *Anomaly,* in high school/college, the same time the underground comix appeared and flourished. That's when I discovered all those marvelous EC Comics that had come out pre-code and pre-me. With the ECs and the undergrounds commanding my brain cells, my interest in super-heroes waned.

DENNIS FUJITAKE: As a kid I had casually read comics usually gotten free from a neighbor lady who ran a barbershop. I really got hooked on comics when I discovered Marvel, especially *Spider-Man*. I had no idea comic book fandom existed until I saw a small mention in the letters section of a Marvel comic book. It talked about a fanzine called *The Comic Crusader* published by Martin L. Greim. I immediately subscribed and eventually became a contributor.

FRIEDT: ***Whom or what were your earliest influences?***

STRNAD: So, my earliest influences were all the above, but by the time I was writing *Dalgoda* I'd graduated college with a major in English literature, so you must add Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, etc., and my creative writing instructors, Jack Matthews and Richard Yates.

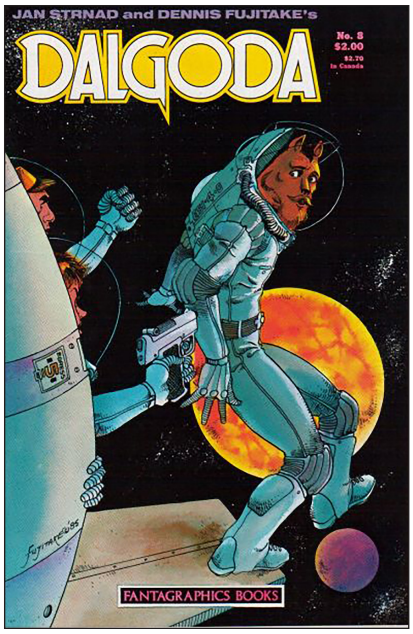
FRIEDT: ***Many comments have been made about Dennis's early art having Jeff Jones and Frazetta feels to them, something that changed tremendously by the time Dalgoda came along.***

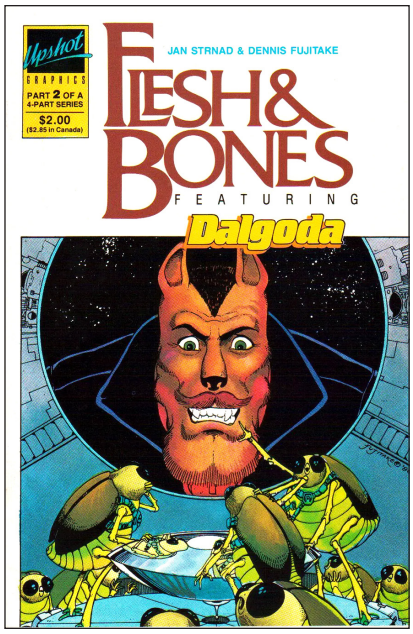
FUJITAKE: Before Jeff Jones and Frazetta there was Steve Ditko. His work on *Dr. Strange* and *Spider-Man* really got me excited about drawing comics. Later, there was Moebius and the talented European illustrators. Many American illustrators in comics and advertising also had a very strong influence on me.

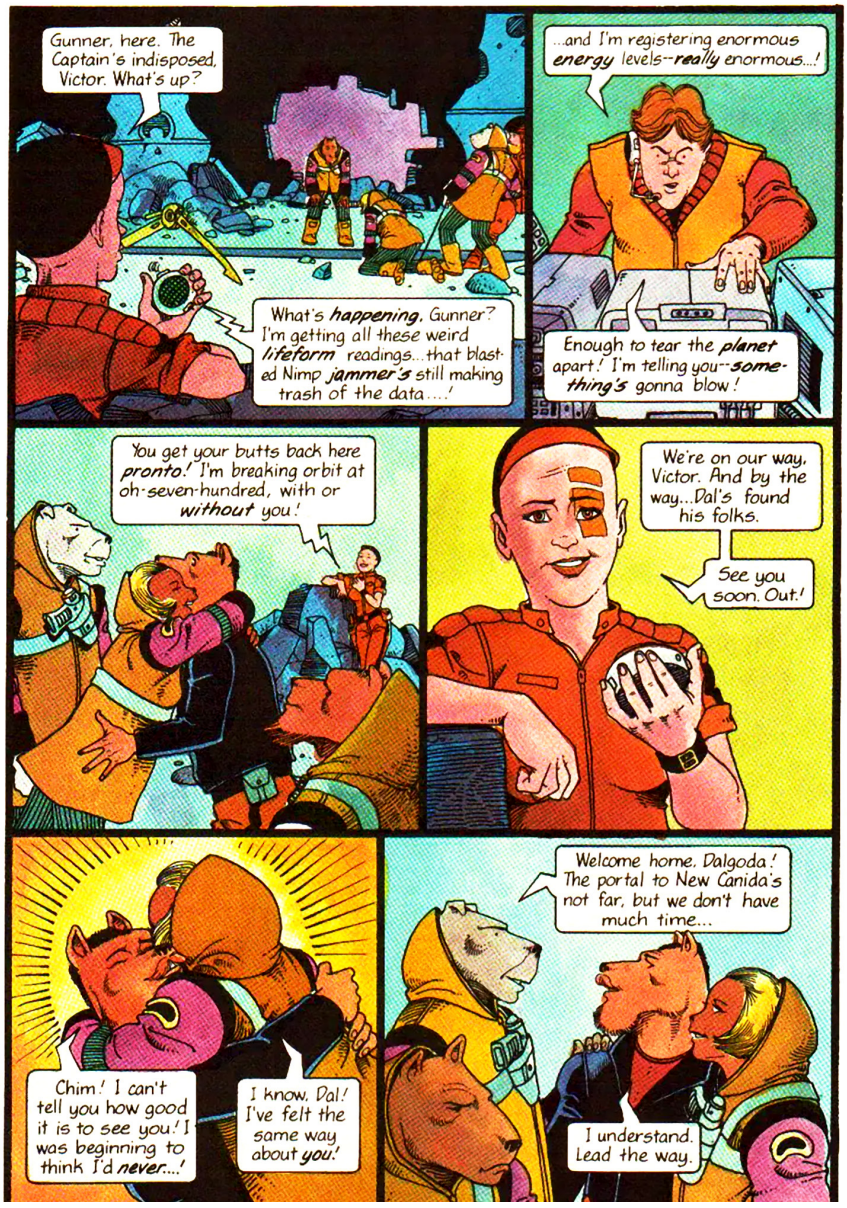
FRIEDT: ***How/Where did you two first become acquainted with each other?***

FUJITAKE: I think it was when we were both doing stuff with Gary Groth who paired us up for *Dalgoda*. I had an idea of making a sub-space submarine SF story. Jan greatly expanded on it with a dog alien who comes to Earth. The rest is history.

STRNAD: Gary Groth of Fantagraphics brought Dennis and me together. As Dennis said, Dennis had a science fiction idea about "Sub-Spacers" that I used as the basis for *Dalgoda.* Dennis drew







(top left) Dalgoda faces a mutiny, *Dalgoda* #8. (top right) Dalgoda is the Nimp's worst nightmare in *Flesh & Bones* #2. (bottom) Dalgoda reunites with his people in *Flesh & Bones* #4.

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Dalgoda Index

Only Dalgoda stories are listed. Many of the issues contained back-up stories.

Dalgoda #1 (Aug. 1984)
"Factions"
Story: Jan Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Dennis Fujitake
Colors: Ken Smith
Letters: Kim Thompson
Editor: Gary Groth and Kim Thompson

Dalgoda #2 (Dec. 1984)
"A Tendril Embrace"
Story: Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Fujitake
Colors: Smith
Letters: Uncredited
Editor: Groth & Thompson

Dalgoda #3 (Feb. 1985)
"I Walked with a Zombdroid"
Story: Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Fujitake
Colors: Smith
Letters: Thompson
Editor: Groth & Thompson

Dalgoda #4 (Apr. 1985)
"Christmas Present"
Story: Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Fujitake
Colors: Smith
Letters: Thompson
Editor: Groth & Thompson

Dalgoda #5 (June 1985)
"Dalgoda, Come Home, Part One"
Story: Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Fujitake
Colors: Smith
Letters: Thompson
Editor: Groth & Thompson

Dalgoda #6 (Oct. 1985)
"Dalgoda, Come Home, Part Two"
Story: Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Fujitake
Colors: Smith
Letters: Thompson
Editor: Groth & Thompson

Dalgoda #7 (Jan. 1986)
"The Canine Mutiny, Part One"
Story: Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Fujitake
Colors: Smith
Letters: Thompson
Editor: Groth & Thompson

Dalgoda #8 (Apr. 1986)
"The Canine Mutiny, Part Two"
Story: Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Fujitake
Colors: Mark Wheatley & Kathryn Mayer
Letters: Typeset
Editor: Groth & Thompson

Flesh & Bones #1 (1986)
Story: Jan Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Dennis Fujitake
Colors: Mark Wheatley & Kathryn Mayer
Letters: Carrie Spiegle

Flesh & Bones #2 (1986)
Story: Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Fujitake
Colors: Wheatley & Mayer
Letters: Spiegle

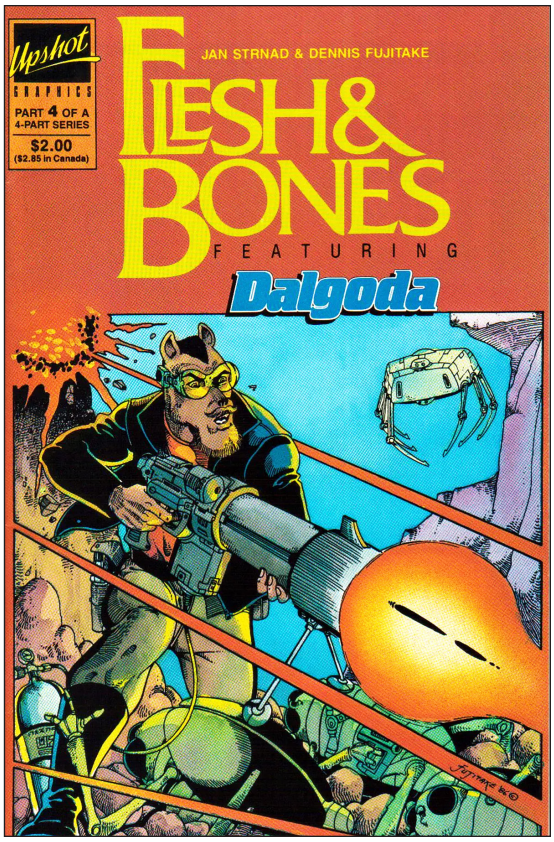
Flesh & Bones #3 (1986)
Story: Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Fujitake
Colors: Wheatley & Mayer
Letters: Spiegle

Flesh & Bones #4 (1986)
Story: Strnad
Cover and Interior Art: Fujitake
Colors: Wheatley & Mayer

The Doomsday Squad #1 (Aug. 1986)
Back-up feature: "Dalgoda"
Story: Jan Strnad
Pencils/Inks: Dennis Fujitake
Colors: Mark Wheatley
Letters: Carrie Spiegle
Editor: Gary Groth (As J. Collier)

A1 #4 (1990)
Anthology book-Several stories, including:
"Hero of the Tale" (Dalgoda)
Story: Jan Strnad
Art/Letters: Kevin Nowlan

The Dalgoda Omnibus (**About Comics** February 2025)
Collects all of the Dalgoda stories with essays and art reprints.



Dalgoda battles the Nimp on the cover of *Flesh & Bones* #4.

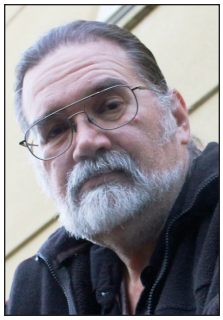
© Jan Strnad and Dennis Fujitake.

a *Sub-Spacers* logo that we printed on a shirt. You can see that design on the back cover of About Comics' reprint of the *Retief* stories by Keith Laumer that Dennis and I adapted.

I really loved Dennis's artwork immediately. I could see the Ditko influence in the body positions and Moebius in his linework, and he combined them with his own style and sense of humor to make something quite extraordinary. I tried my best to give him interesting things to draw.

In his afterword for the omnibus, Strnad notes, "It's been forty years since I've read *Dalgoda* straight through from start to finish. It's dangerous, revisiting old work. Sometimes it embarrasses you, and sometimes you wonder if you could write anything that good anymore. Certainly, you'd write it differently…

"One thing that struck me, looking back, is how we're plagued with the same issues now that society wrestled with four decades ago."



***STEPHAN FRIEDT** helps with entries at the Grand Comic Book Database at* **comics.org**, *deals with database entries at* **comicspriceguide.com**, *and provides editorial consultation and an occasional writing assist for the new Defective Comix Studio at* **defectivecomix.com**.

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BACK to the Drawing Board

COLONEL BLIMP

by Joseph Norton

The recipe for success in building a memorable Batman villain contains many ingredients. First and foremost, a strong creative team, and then in no particular order, a cool name, great design to match up against the Dark Knight's style, and a little bit of story momentum, among other things. Show up in a good run and the chances improve. Admittedly there are more opponents on the tier of KGBeast than there are on the Joker level, but every so often you get a breakout addition to Batman's Rogue Gallery.

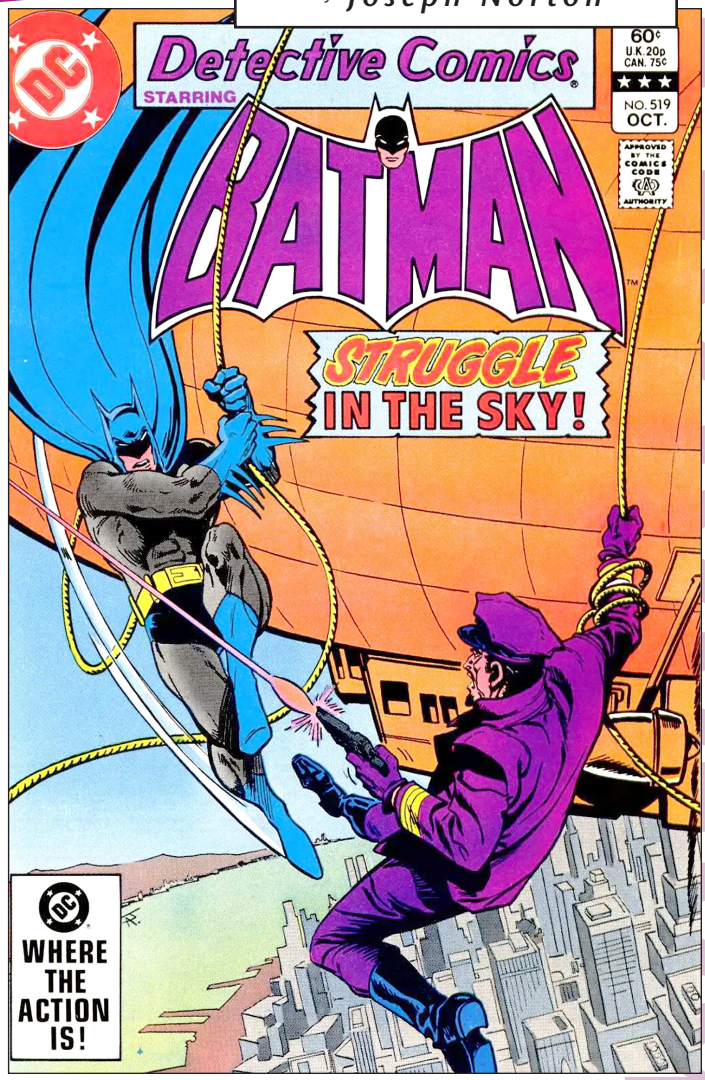
Colonel Blimp unfortunately was not that guy. His brief and unmemorable turn in a two-part story during the summer of 1982 showed that he was clearly just hot air. Or was he? Was there more to Colonel Blimp than met the eye or was he always destined to crash and burn like the name implied. Was the Colonel a victim of designed obsolescence or a clever homage to another era of Gotham's Caped Crusader? Sit with *BACK ISSUE* at the Drawing Board while we go back and look at Colonel Blimp and wonder if he ever had what it took to soar in the night skies of Gotham.

Created by Bronze Age founding father, writer Gerry Conway, with help from Paul Kupperberg and artist Don Newton, Colonel Blimp first appeared in *Batman* #352 (Oct. 1982). Conway's Batman run was memorable, he re-envisioned very early Golden Age Batman villains like the Mad Monk (turning Batman into a vampire while doing it), and introduced Killer Croc and Jason Todd, two characters with lasting impact on the Batman mythos. Colonel Blimp's antics bear similarities to *Detective Comics* #33 (Dec. 1939) "The Batman Wars Against The Dirigible of Doom" which showed the evil Professor Carl Kruger terrorizing the Manhattan skies (apparently Gotham was not a thing yet) with his blimp.

In one of the final interviews before his death last year, Conway told *BACK ISSUE* that he did not have many memories of the creation of Blimp other than the origin of his name. Conway recalls, "He was a takeoff on an English film called either *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* or *The Adventures of Colonel Blimp*, depending on whether you're referring to the English version or the American version. Which was itself an adaptation of a British comic strip, I believe." In the movie, Blimp is an overly officious British Army Officer pining for the way things ought to be and incapable of understanding how wars were fought at the time.

Kupperberg shared just a little more and gave insight on maybe why Blimp was unmemorable even to his creator. He revealed to *BACK ISSUE*, "I went back to take a look at those issues and I don't have any specific memories of the issues or the character. Whatever I knew about Colonel Blimp I must have gotten from Gerry's plot and I would have put that on the page, but he was a silly, forgettable concept. For me, it was just another gig, and probably a rushed, overnight one at that: 'Gerry's running late, we need this yesterday!!'"

So why even talk about Colonel Blimp who has three appearances in comics to date? Could it be because this two-part story is a perfect example of Conway's mastery of the character of Batman as well as the medium itself? "The Killer Sky" and *Detective Comics* #519 (Oct. 1982) second part "Like a Dreadnought in the Sky" doubles down on why Conway was the perfect creator to bring the characters and stories of the Gold and Silver Age into the Bronze Age and beyond. There is no way to retell the origin of Colonel Blimp and his war against "modern weapons" without laughing. Avenging his father's forced

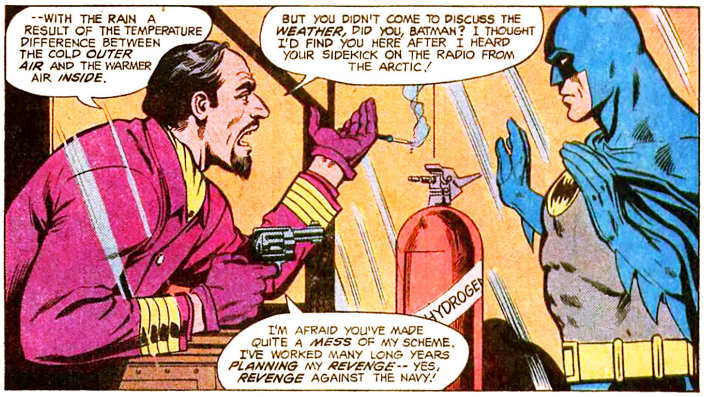


Batman battles Colonel Blimp on the cover of *Detective Comics* #519. Art by Jim Aparo.

TM & © DC Comics.

retirement because, as Blimp tells Batman, "My father… staked his reputation on the Navy's zeppelin project during the 1950s." That brief statement by Blimp clarified for the reader the cleverness of Conway's choice of name as related to the film. Even to readers in 1982, Blimp's crusade was quixotic at best and silly in execution. Using a blimp to grab submarines out of the sea and transporting them to the Arctic? Was he out of space lasers? Even his costume is something out of a Rodgers and Hammerstein operetta. It featured full purple military regalia with a cigarette holder and plenty of super villain monologuing. The only reason Blimp's appearance on the cover of *Detective* #519 is not laughable is because it is depicted with a lean athletic Batman swinging from his rope facing off against his high-flying villain gloriously rendered by the brilliant Batman artist Jim Aparo, no stranger to a ridiculous character or two.

The two exciting Aparo covers, both textbook examples of the artist's absolute mastery of the character's design, are supported by even stronger interior art by Newton and inker John Calnan. Blimp's cartoonish antics are depicted with a very cinematic flourish, the skies of Washington DC, New Jersey, and the Arctic are filled with high-flying adventure. An explosive panel by Newton recalled the Hindenburg disaster and had no business being that good in a comic headlined by Colonel Blimp. Watch Robin swinging from tow lines, implicitly reminding us of the Flying Graysons. Look at the second issue of the story's splash page with Batman on the Washington monument looking over the skyline of DC. This was a scene done hundreds of times before and since but exciting nonetheless because the reader knows a fight against a zeppelin is ahead. This two-part story absolutely nailed the excitement of why we read comics even if it required a large suspension of disbelief to imagine Colonel Blimp's fleet of zeppelins ripping nuclear submarines out of the water.





(top) Batman and Colonel Blimp don't come face-to-face until the story is almost over. Batman dispatches Blimp with ease on the following page. *Detective Comics* #519 art by Newton and Calnan. (bottom) Colonel Blimp makes a brief reappearance in 2016's *Batman* #6. Art by Ivan Reis, Joe Prado, Oclair Albert, and Scott Hanna.

TM & © DC Comics.

But after a closer examination of Colonel Blimp, the reader can almost see where Conway may have been leading us all along. Blimp's henchmen were all clad in their monochromatic work clothes with a snazzy blimp insignia on their chest, hunkered down in an abandoned air hanger. Readers are treated to a scene in the Batcave with the Bat-computer spewing out questionable conclusions. Panels have the Batmobile speeding out of the Batcave. Is it hard to believe that Gerry Conway, who brought *The Amazing Spider-Man* into the Bronze Age at the age of 19 and then spent a second career as a television writer and producer, was not crafting a stealth homage to the '60s Batman television series? All that was missing in this story were a few "Biff!" and "Zoink!" panels. Line up Colonel Blimp against Killer Croc, Mr. Zsasz, and Bane and compare him to King Tut, Egg Head, and Louie the Lilac. It is not difficult to say which table Blimp should be sitting at.

Colonel Blimp's debut in this exciting two parter, filled with all the reasons comic readers love Batman, may not have done much for the villain's career, because it took him 35 years to show up again. Comics powerhouse Tom King re-inflated Colonel Blimp for a brief scene in the DC Rebirth *Batman* #6 Vol. 3 (Oct. 2016). King told Comics Alliance back in September 2016, "There's so much to know about Batman! There's 75 years, and the continuity is complicated, so I started diving in, reading as much Batman as I could and exploring all the characters, trying to look up old things." In explaining why he picked Colonel Blimp for his story, King embraced the lighter than air nature of the character "I feel like once you steal one submarine, you just want to do it again. Once you're on the submarine-stealing route of your life, it's hard to get off that path. You can go to Submarine Stealers Anonymous, but they have a poor track record if you look at it." King absolutely understood the underlying silliness of Colonel Blimp.

Knightfall, The Killing Joke, *Dark Knight Returns,* and other grimmer depictions make up much of the Batman mythos today. Readers back in the early '80s were just starting to see glimpses of that Batman era ahead but the Caped Crusader wasn't fully there yet. Gerry Conway understood that perhaps there was room for a lighthearted but still exciting story. Conway spent a career walking the line between relevance and reminiscence. A villain like Colonel Blimp recalled Batman stories from the '30s, mixed with the iconography of the '60s television show. Colonel Blimp may have been undeniably campy and ultimately ineffective but of course a villain is as good as the hero he faces. Much like the airship he based his name on, Colonel Blimp was not designed to last a lifetime but he certainly was villainous enough to show us why ninety years later, Batman is still one of the greatest heroes of all.



Writer Joseph Norton witnessed an exploding dirigible over the skies of his southern New Jersey home while a teenager. Watching that high tech aircraft go up in flames inspired him to adopt the moniker of Doctor VCR and is currently in a campaign to bring back the Eight Track Tape player. He will not rest until justice is served.

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BACK TALK

Send your comments to:
Email: rogerash@hotmail.com
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A LETTER ABOUT LETTERS

Thanks for the piece in issue #169 about letter-hacks. It brought back a lot of memories for me. For about a year in the late '60s, I was one of those frequent contributors to letter columns, with letters printed in various DC, Marvel, and Charlton books. I was most frequently found in the letter columns Dick Giordano did at Charlton in his Action Heroes comics. I loved what he was trying to do at Charlton and he always gave thoughtful answers.

As a couple of the famous letter writers you interviewed said, it was a thrill to see your name (and address) in print. And because addresses were included in most letter columns of that time, my letters led me into regular correspondence for a time with some more active in organized fandom, including the late Rich Buckler (who lived a few miles away from me in Detroit prior to his start at Marvel), a couple of other active Detroit area fans, and Glen Johnson, a very thoughtful frequent letter writer from New Mexico.

I made the choice not to grow from that introduction into deeper organized fandom involvement, but I became a regular buyer of quality fanzines, starting with Roy Thomas's issues of the original *Alter Ego* and continuing through the TwoMorrows publications of the past three decades. And the first thing I read in *Back Issue* and *Alter Ego* is the rich letters columns you include. Thanks for keeping up a great tradition for feedback and dialogue.

—Larry Good

We're glad you enjoyed the article Larry, and that you enjoy our letter column as well. I was not a big letter writer myself, I may have written as many as six, I always enjoyed the letter columns in part because of the news you could glean from the responses to the letters. Plus, it was a treat to find new missives from writers I liked, such as T.M. Maple.

SUPPORTIVE THOUGHTS

I suppose, so soon after your gorilla issue, you couldn't call this issue "Second Bananas."

Regardless, "Support Staff" still made for a surprisingly eclectic issue.

I've mixed feelings about the Warriors Three. I wasn't crazy about them when I started reading Thor during the last year of "Tales of Asgard." They seemed very one-dimensional and more a distraction from Thor than a needed addition. I especially disliked them once they inexplicably shifted to the main feature. The book worked best, I thought, with Thor as a solo act. The three of them, along with Balder and Sif, were five bananas too many.

Krypto? Had to reevaluate *him* as well. The only place I liked him was on the '66 Aurora model kit, where he and Superboy are facing down a dragon. Otherwise, no. Jor-El sending a super-zoo of critters from Krypton–including, of all things, a horse–seemed ridiculous. Yet, noting the recent usage of Krypto as a fun character for small kids or cartoon animal lovers in the movies poses no problem. The companies can and *should* target material for audiences other than me.

Oberon, I thought was a great character. He made Mr. Miracle seem like he had not only a devoted employee but a caring, sensitive friend. Opinionated and emotional, he was a valued part of the act. Even when Barda joined up, their initial contention was tremendous fun. He almost seemed, at least to me, like a supportive son who, for any lip, immensely loved both parents.

I thought Foggy Nelson was a fun partner. Helpful to Matt, in the origin, and patient at all the nonsense he brought to the office–when he even showed up.

Karen and he formed a character base echoing Pepper and Happy in *Iron Man*. That is, a love interest with a male competitor thrown in.

Plus, Foggy added humor with his inability to compete with Matt in so many areas. He also made the stories more believable in that the office otherwise couldn't be run with Matt off fighting Leapfrog and Stilt Man. *Someone* had to show up in court.

The look at Mary Jane was quite revealing. It demonstrated how ideas evolve and how stunts, meant to denote growth, can, inadvertently, demonstrate rash decisions and changed minds. For instance, the wedding. A moving ahead with the relationship? Fine, until it was decided, through magical means, it never happened. Two things there. First, it demonstrates events can and will be undercut when convenient. Secondly, it makes fans feel foolish for believing. Who cares, afterwards, if they should reunite? That, too, can be negated with another convoluted explanation. Better to think through things initially.

As always, enjoyed "Terry's Toons." It's almost like when I read reprints of Bill Elder's *MAD* comics. I find new characters and situations previously missed in subsequent re-readings.

I had two belly laughs. First, of all people, Quisp. Next, Mr. Mind. I cracked up as they're both *so* obscure.

Hope you'll publish more. It's a welcome challenge to see which I can push myself to identify and which I need to search out online when the teacher isn't looking.

—Joe Frank

A thoughtful letter as always, Joe. My initial idea for the theme name for the issue was "Thank You For Your Support." I was a big fan of the Bartles & Jaymes ads in the '80s.



Next issue: Monsters. Machines. Questionable people who deal with the occult. These "Unlikely Heroes" are keeping you safe, as we'll demonstrate in* BACK ISSUE *#174! Includes spotlights on John Constantine (in a creepy crossover with Cryptology #14), New Mutants' Warlock, The Nocturnals, Creature Commandos, Gargoyle, Fashion in Action, and Coyote. Featuring the work of ALAN MOORE, STEVE BISSETTE, RICK VEITCH, J.M. DEMATTEIS, CHRIS CLAREMONT, BILL SIENKIEWICZ, DANIEL BRERETON, DON PERLIN, JOHN K. SNYDER III, STEVE ENGLEHART, MARSHALL ROGERS, and others. John Constantine cover by GLENN FABRY.

Don't ask—just* BI *it!
Roger Ash, editor

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