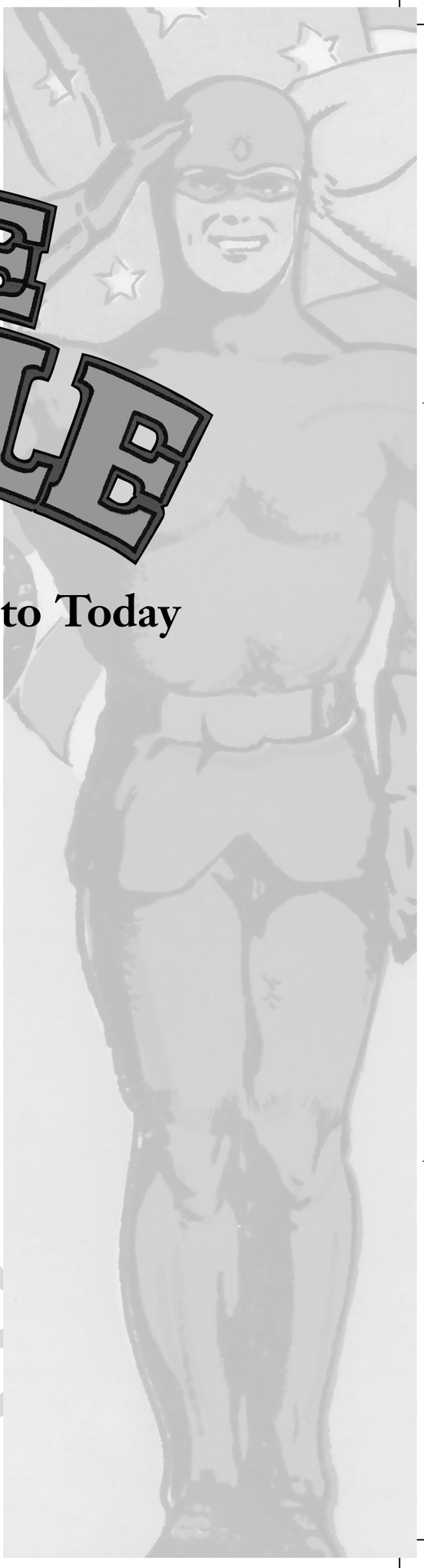

the BLUE BEETLE companion

His Many Lives from 1939 to Today

By Christopher Irving

Book design by Rich J. Fowlks

TwoMorrows Publishing
Raleigh, North Carolina

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Special thanks to Chris .R. Notarile of Blinky Productions.

This book, my first, is dedicated to my father, Elliott Irving, who always went comic-hunting with me on Wednesdays and is the first author I ever had the pleasure of knowing.

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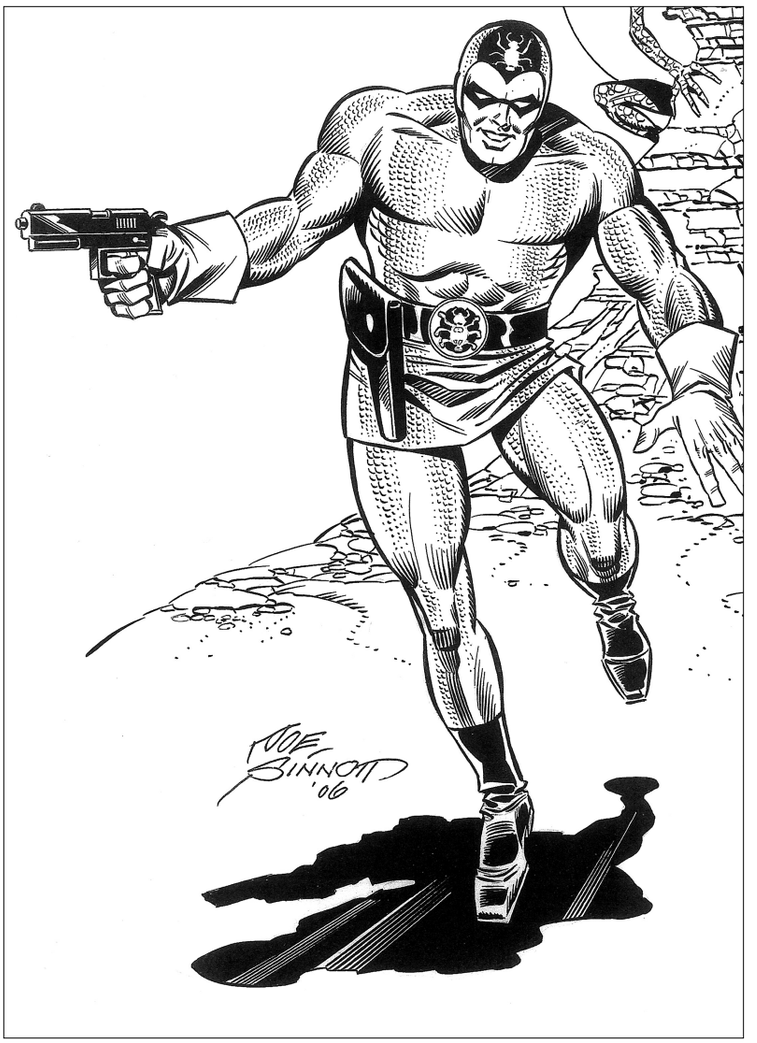
INTRODUCTION



Comics master Joe Sinnott takes a shot at the Golden Age Blue Beetle in this 2006 drawing.

Nobody, except for maybe a baseball nut, is more obsessed with minutiae, statistics, minor players and forgotten glories (as well as mediocrities and out-and-out travesties) than a dyed-in-the-wool comic book fan. For such a monomaniac, nothing in the (more often than not miserable and misbegotten) history of the comics medium is too picayune for critical scrutiny or just plain hagiography.

Thing is, though—when there are so many (quote) important (unquote) things to pay attention to in the world, who cares who drew (or wrote or, for want of a better word, edited) a bunch of fourth-string super-hero comic books published 50 or 60 years ago by a bunch of long-dead stogie-chomping chiseling sleazebags who lived their professional lives in airless office buildings just off Times Square, and lived them always—always!—two-steps-ahead-of-the-law or their creditors? Who cares? In truth, not a hell of a lot of people.

No, but then who's to say that all of this crap (and I use the term with great affection)—who's to say that all of this crap, risibly footnoted material included, especially included, isn't important, too? Subtract comic books from our culture—let's just imagine it for a second—and we'd be living in a very different reality, something unrecognizably "other." So there's that, but also this: there's human and cultural gold, pure gold, in the archivally unearthed, and oral, histories of the second bananas, the also-rans, and the never-made-its of the comic book industry. To trace the fortunes (and mis-) of outfits like Fox Comics and Charlton Comics is to see, in microcosm, exactly how business was done, and undone, during three crucial decades of the American twentieth century; like Mario Puzo's gangster families, the unscrupulous publishers and sorrowfully naïve creators of the first and second generations of comic books and comic book characters serve to play out in perfect allegory the invention of modern fairness-be-damned capitalism. And besides, to become familiar with the likes of Victor Fox and John Santangelo is to rub shoulders with the sorts of larger-than-life characters that made Charles Dickens famous.

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So my heartfelt thanks to all of those do-it-for-love researchers who manage, somehow, to keep filling in and fattening up the secret and always zesty history of comic books. It may not be remunerative work, and it may not, most of the time, even be respected work, but it's definitely valuable work. To separate reality from legend, truth from apocrypha, always is.

Have I ever in my life cared even two figs about the Blue Beetle? Nope.

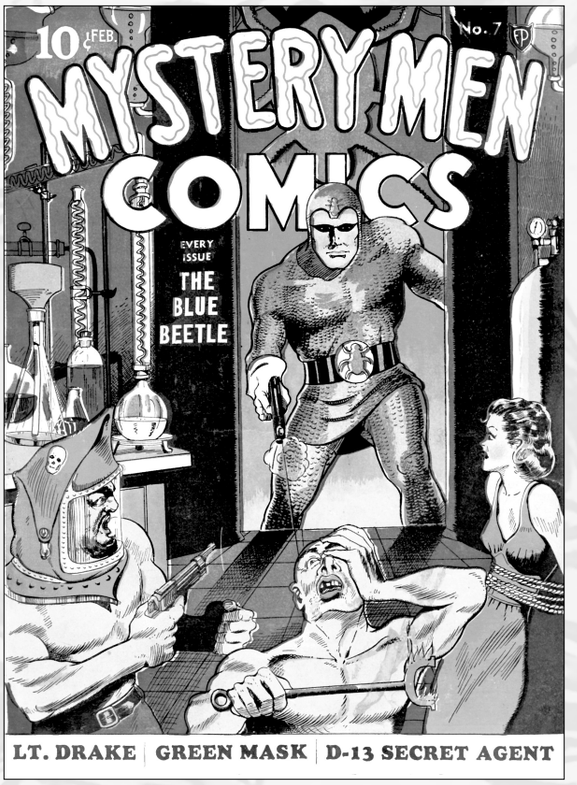
Am I glad that Chris Irving has written this book about him? You bet. Because by reading it I've learned a thing or two (or three or four) about my favorite medium, and because herein I've met, or re-encountered, some of the most colorful rascals ever to put their (smudgy) fingerprints on said favorite medium.

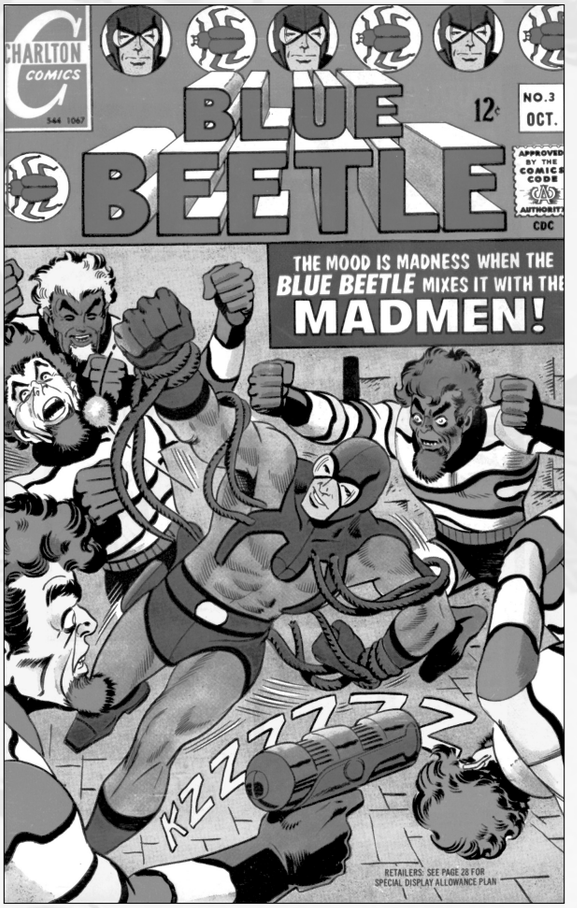
(Much to my surprise, I also re-encountered a real-life character I actually knew once upon a time: W.W. Scott, seen in Chris's book having a memorable encounter with the insufferable Robert Kanigher. My first job out of graduate school [1973] was doing editorial work in New York City for Lopez Publications, and one of my colleagues there was W.W. Scott, at that time in charge of putting together digest-sized cartoon magazines intended primarily for army PX's. Scotty never mentioned to me that he'd worked in comic books—what he'd boast about was having edited the *Harvard Lampoon*, his way of telling me, of course, that he'd gone to Harvard. Maybe he did and maybe he didn't, but he was always great fun. Great guy. Snowy white handlebar mustache. And, brother, did he know the magazine business, inside and out. I learned a lot from him. And while he must've been way up there in age—he sure looked creaky!—he was the biggest flirt I'd ever met; he never, ever missed an opportunity to schmooze with a pretty secretary or assistant editor.)

Well, that's enough from me. Now go enjoy the real reason why you're here, go and enjoy the true cockamamie history of the make-believe Blue Beetle, second banana extraordinaire, and meet the all-too-human human beings who dreamed him up and set him loose.

Tom De Haven
July 2006

Tom De Haven is the author of several novels, including the comic strip trilogy: Funny Papers, Derby Dugan's Depression Funnies, *and* Dugan Under Ground *(for which he won the American Book Award). His most recent novel,* It's Superman! *follows Clark Kent's development as a man (and superman) in the Great Depression. De Haven teaches English at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia.*





(top) *Mystery Men Comics #7.*
(above) *Blue Beetle #3.*

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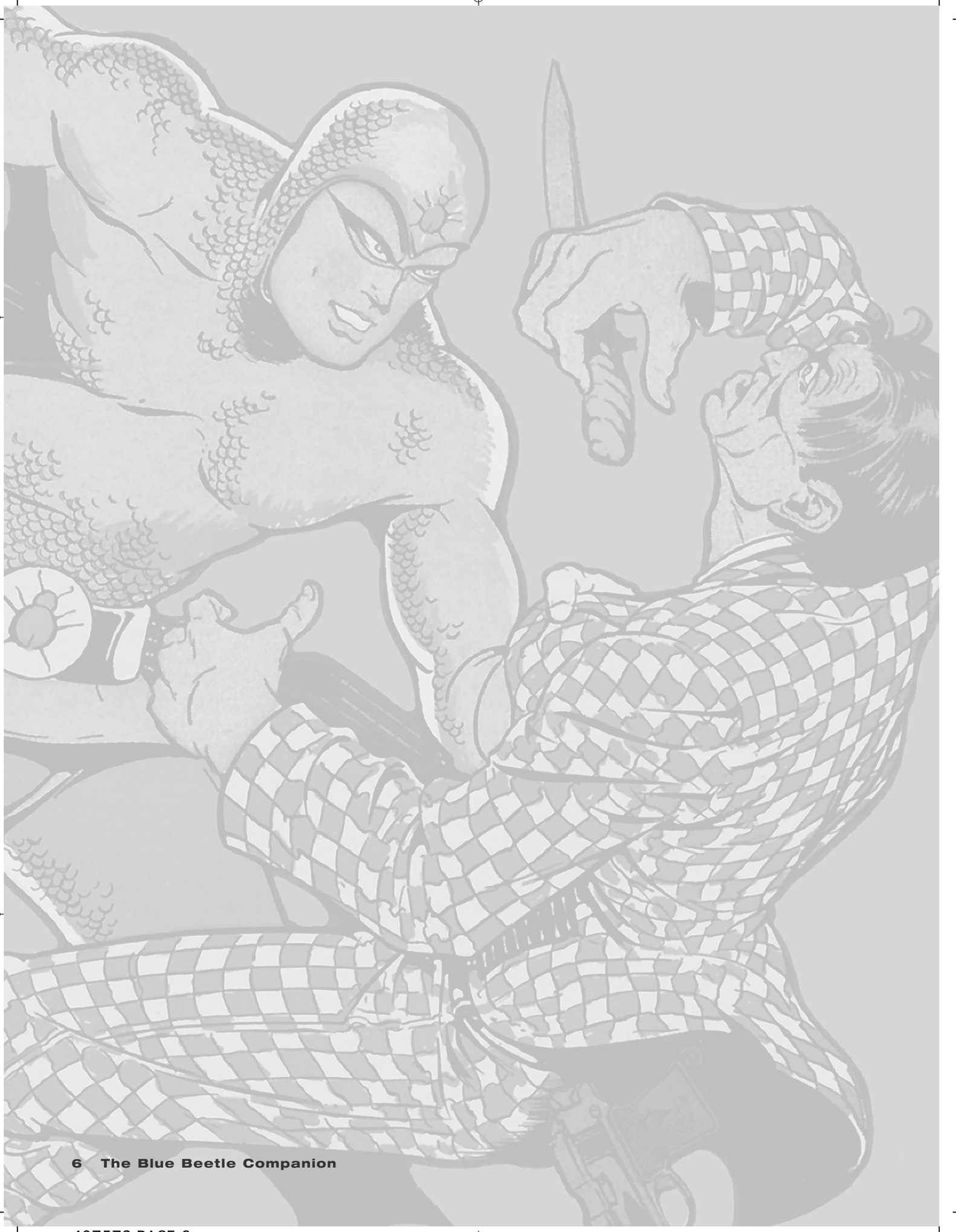

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THE GOLDEN AGE

THE BIRTH OF THE MYSTERYMAN:
The many faces of Officer Dan Garret

1939-1950

Comic books exploded as an industry in the 1930s, taking pop culture by storm in a four-colored blur. While an army of four-color mysterymen and crimefighters were successfully jettisoned upon an unsuspecting world, changing the mighty course of movie serials, merchandising, and radio shows, dozens more would-be heroic successes fell between the cracks, washed away with the gutter trash from the Great Depression.

The Golden Age of comic books began with Superman's premiere in the first issue of *Action Comics* in June of 1938. The first true super-hero, Superman was a combination of Flash Gordon, the mysterymen of the pulp magazines, and Captain Easy from the *Wash Tubbs* comic strip. Even though, Detective Comics only printed 200,000 copies of *Action Comics* #1 and sold 130,000, a fact Detective wasn't made privy to until three months after the comic's release.

The Blue Beetle was neither jettisoned, nor did he necessarily fall between the cracks: he just hung on and remains to do so more than sixty years after his birth. Kind of an anomaly unto himself, the Blue Beetle could have easily disappeared from comic pages everywhere before the end of World War II…or he could have been a raging success that would have given Superman and Captain America a run for their tights-clad money.

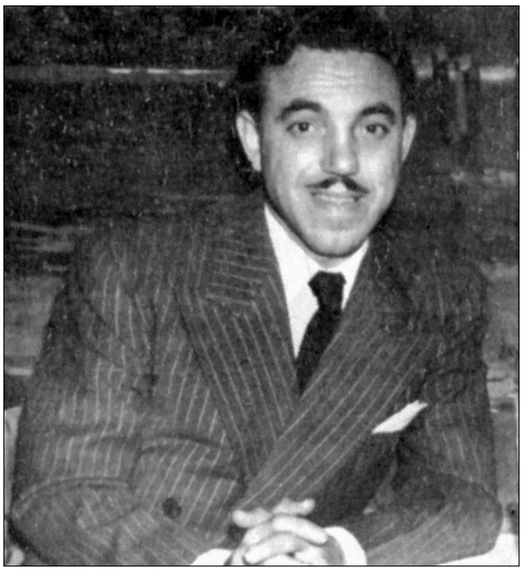
A young Will Eisner, in 1941.

Like many figures in the formative days of the comic book medium, Victor Fox was a colorful character straight out of a Dickens novel.

"Victor was short, round, bald and coarsely gruff, with horn-rimmed glasses and a permanent cigar clamped between his teeth," artist Al Feldstein told historian Jon Berk. "He was the personification of the typical exploiting comic book publisher of his day—grinding out shameless imitations of successful titles and trends, and treating his artists and editors like dirt."

"Victor Fox actually had his own apartment in the same building with the Fox Features offices," Chuck Cuidera revealed. "One day, he asks me to do a favor for him. He has this box of liquor, and asks me to take it up to his apartment, near the top floor of the building. I go up there, and who answers the door but a beautiful woman dressed only in a slip! She invited me in, asked if I wanted a cup of coffee or anything. I was polite, but got out of there fast as I could! That was Fox, though—he always had a girl around, stashed away somewhere!"

"Fox found out I was also a painter," Don Rico said in a 1975 interview with Barry Alfonso for *Mysticogryfil*. "So he commissioned me to do a mural for his home and he kept me prisoner in his house."



Jerry Iger, the other half of Eisner and Iger, in 1942.

Victor Fox would pace back and forth around his bullpenners, chomping on a cigar and announcing "I'm the king of comics!"; comics may have been "a kid's field, but we're not playing school here with chalk on a blackboard," and Fox always had "millions of dollars tied up in this industry."

Al Feldstein could still do a mean impersonation of Victor Fox, even decades after working for him. The enigma that was Victor Samuel Fox is gradually being uncovered in a sorting of myth, falsehoods and outright lies spoken from and about the man. The long-running story has been that Fox was a former accountant at Detective Comics who saw the success of his employer, quit, and started his own comics company that same day. Historian Michael Feldman firmly believes the accountant story a fabrication and there has been no documentation or witnesses who have attested towards Fox's former employment. Writer Robert Kanigher once stated that "Fox had nothing to do with DC."

Victor Fox's beginnings were across the Atlantic...in jolly old England.

Victor's parents, Joseph and Bessie Fox, were born in Russia in May, 1865 and March, 1863, respectively. They had two daughters after their marriage: Annie in July, 1884 and Rosie in September, 1885 before moving to Nottinghamshire, England. Once there, Fanny E. was born in April, 1892, and Samuel Victor Joseph on July 3, 1893. The Fox family emigrated to America by March, 1898—the month Etta G. was born. Another Fox sister, Marrion, was born in May 1900.

The Foxes settled in Fall River City in Bristol, Massachusetts by 1900. Joseph was employed as a storekeeper before moving the family to New York City by 1917. There, Joseph opened his own women's clothing business, where he employed his daughters Etta as a designer and Marion as a Secretary. The Foxes lived on 555 West 151st Street in New York, presumably under the same roof. By this point, Samuel had begun going by Victor Samuel, and had started the exporting line of his father's business.

(above & next page) Eisner's ciphers of himself and Victor Fox, from the 1986 Graphic Novel *The Dreamer*.

© Will Eisner Estate

According to Victor's June 5, 1917 draft card, he had earlier served six months as a First Lieutenant in the Army. The draft card also describes him as being of medium height and stout, with gray eyes and black hair (which corresponds with the general description given by those who knew the man). Apparently not one for military service, Fox attempted to exempt from duty since he exported the military uniforms his father had started manufacturing...a matter of either coincidence or design. His business office was listed as 42 East 20th Street.

Who Was Who in America listed Fox as Chairman of Consolidated Maritime Lines, Inc. from 1919 to 1922, becoming an Industrial Engineer for reorgns. to large corporations until 1935.

April 19, 1927 saw the 27 year-old Fox involved in a lawsuit against the Palmer and Parker Company, whom Fox and Company had subchartered to transport mahogany logs from Gold Coast, Africa to Boston in 1920. Two years later, on November 26, 1929, Fox was arraigned for operating a "boiler room" scheme, where he sold good stocks in exchange for bad ones, and failed to deliver "unissued" stocks. Fox, at the time, was operating under two business names: "Fox Motor and Bank Stocks" and "American Common Stocks, Inc."

At some point in 1936, he reportedly published astrology magazines under the Zarius Zeus pen name (Zeus, ironically enough, is the "King" of the Greek pantheon of gods). By 1939, he decided that a comics empire was written in the stars for him.

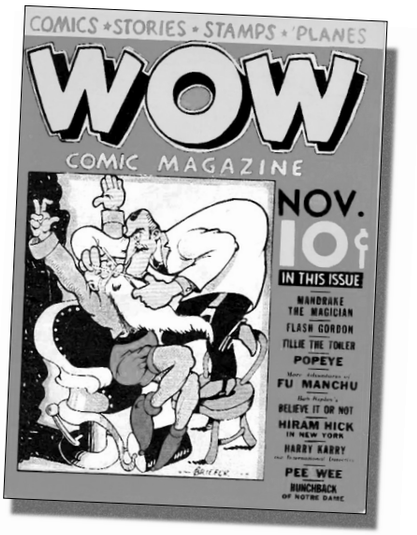
Meanwhile, a failed comics cartoonist/publisher and his young business partner, Jerry Iger and Will Eisner, had formed a comic book production studio to package original material.

"The reason I got together with Jerry was because he was a good salesman and I was shy at the time," Eisner reflected. "Good at making product and running a shop, period. Jerry had no hesitation about calling on any publisher. Now he was the short guy in the team, but he was a very feisty guy. He was 13 years older than me."

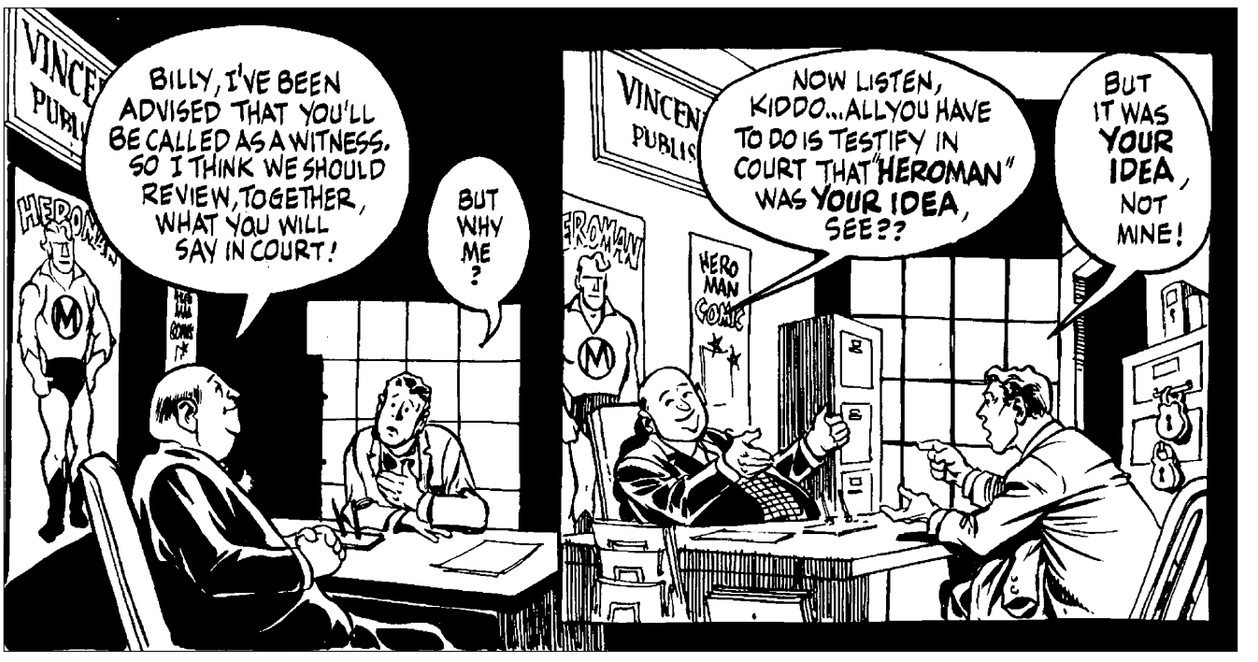
The Eisner and Iger shop of Universal Phoenix was the first to divide the cartoonist's tasks into an assembly line, arranged so that the work could be produced more expediently. Eisner and Iger had met some years before when, in 1936, they produced the short-lived *WOW! What A Magazine*, one of the earliest forays into comic books with original material. After *WOW!* folded in 1937 (the launderer who'd invested the money, John Henle, cancelled the title due to low sales), Eisner and Iger became full partners (for producing the $15 capital to rent an office, Eisner got top billing). The new Eisner and Iger shop packaged original comics for publishers like Centaur and Fiction House.

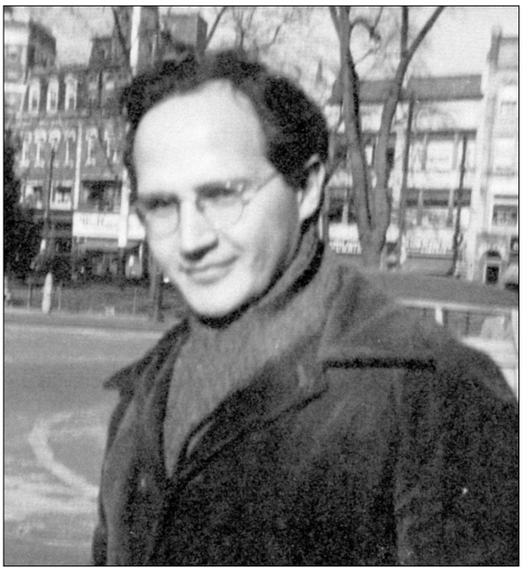
"I was very poor because it was still the Great Depression," Eisner told Gerard Jean. "Jerry Iger was broke; he was out of work, out of a job. But I saw something that was very obvious: You didn't have to be a genius to see that they were looking for new stories, original stories. Up until that time, the magazines that were beginning were using newspaper strips, which they pasted together. Then I said to Jerry Iger, 'Something is happening here. Pretty soon, there won't be enough strips, and they will need original material; and I think we can do it.'"

Pictures show Iger as a well-coiffed man with a pencil-thin moustache and pinstripe suits and Eisner as a handsome kid with a high forehead. Iger was born to Austrian immigrant parents in 1903 New York and was then transplanted to Oklahoma for a good amount of his childhood. Returning to New York in 1916, Iger would later land a job at the famous Fleischer animation studios in Manhattan in 1922. From there, he would work for the Hearst-run *New York American* for a decade as a staff artist. Eventually, Iger would answer a 1936 classified ad for a cartoonist/editor to land the position assembling *WOW! What A Magazine*.



WOW #4, 1936, featured early work by Will Eisner.





Lou Fine, one of the most prolific and noted Golden Age artists, circa 1942.

It was here that a very young Will Eisner came into the picture. Bill Eisner (as he was called then) truly was the product of both his immigrant parents; his father had been a set painter and his mother a very practical and business-like woman. Raised with the dichotomy of his father's artistic passion and his mother's practical nature, Eisner developed a shrewd business sense at a young age.

"Everybody refers to the period as the Golden Era," Eisner reflected. "For me, it was the Leaden Era. Everybody was working hard. Most of the guys were working to just make some money so they could go uptown...to a major advertising agency."

The Universal Phoenix studio was set up in a large room with a row of drawing boards along the wall, with Eisner's being set in the center at one end of the room. Pages would be passed down from penciler to penciler, hashing out dialogue, figures, backgrounds, then another one or two would ink backgrounds and figures. This assembly line process let the studio hash stories out like there was no tomorrow. Eisner jokingly described the set-up like a "Roman galley."

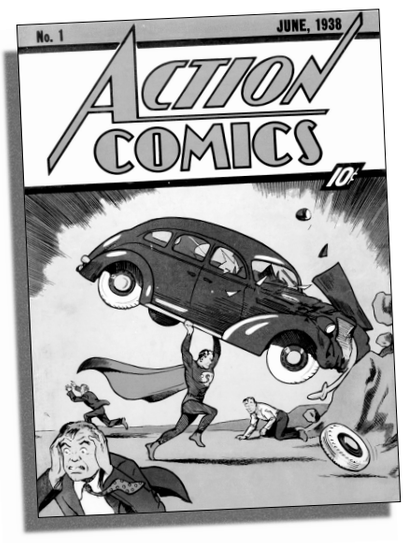
The stable of talent at Eisner and Iger included legends like Lou Fine (who would go down as one of the Golden Age's true masters), Mort Meskin (who would later enjoy a partnership with artist Jerry Robinson), Bob Kane (eventual co-creator of *Batman* for DC/Detective), Nicholas Viscardi (a.k.a. Nick Cardy, known for his run on *Teen Titans* and a slew of DC westerns), Alex Blum, Jim Mooney, and Bob Powell.

"An artist would have three or four stories to do a month," George Tuska recalled. "Small stories—four pages, five pages, something like that. All of us had that...then, somebody gets up and leaves. He has about five stories. Iger would take the stories and give them out to each one of us. It's more for me, it's more for this guy, it's more for that guy, to get done each month. Than another guy quits. Same thing again—Iger doles out this one, this one, this one. He would come by and want me to do it faster. Deadlines were everything to him."

Tuska eventually decided to not come back from lunch one day, later working for Eisner after Eisner had split from Jerry Iger.

"A lot of comic artists were very eager to become illustrators or become artists," Nick Cardy noted. "They weren't seasoned. So they went there. They had every talent and they did comic books and they learned from each other. They didn't care that we were like the equipment of the sweat shops. The guys didn't mind it because they were drawing and getting paid. This was shortly after the Depression...just before World War II. They guys were enthusiastic."

Action Comics #1 (June 1938), the debut of Superman.
© DC Comics



Victor Fox had plans for the Eisner/Iger studio, ones he hoped would let him cash in on the inevitable success of Detective Comics. *Wonder Comics* #1, cover-dated May of 1939 (and out on stands that March), was to be the secret weapon that would backfire on him.

"[Fox] decided to start his own publishing company, and called and got in touch with Jerry Iger, my partner, and we began doing work for him on a contract basis," Eisner recalled in 2000. "Fox was the kind of fellow who told you and had a firm idea of what he wanted. He had some notes that I kept, fortunately, in which he told me he wanted a character that specifically wore a cape and had tights. When I got the description, I remember thinking it was awfully close to Superman."

Clad in a red bodysuit, Wonder Man did one-up on Superman's lifting a car on the cover of *Action Comics* #1: mid-leap, Wonder Man crunches the nose of an enemy plane in with one hand, machine gun bullets grazing off of his indestructible shoulder.

The origin of his powers, a ring granted by a Tibetan yogi, is told in the top half of the first page.

"He is known to the world as Fred Carson, a timid radio engineer and inventor," the opening caption tells us, before it cuts to the International Broadcasting Company. Despite the protest of his cigar-chomping boss, Hastings, to not hear any more "goofy ideas," Carson presents his "new type television apparatus...so small you can carry it on your belt" before Hasting's spoiled daughter Brenda pops in. Having joined up with the Red Cross, Brenda is off to the civil war-ridden country of Tatonia; after viewing the terrors of Tatonia on his "long-range televisor," Fred decides to accept the offer to chaperone Brenda. Flying in a "low-winged monoplane," the pair arrive at the red cross base and meet up with Brenda's fiance, Reggie "Playboy" Berold (Basil Berold, incidentally, was one of Universal Phoenix shop artist Lou Fine's pseudonyms).

As enemy planes start to encroach on the camp, Fred sends the cowardly Reggie and Brenda off in the plane and "alone on the deserted field...Fred Carson removes his outer garments and becomes the Wonder Man, mightiest human on Earth...". Catching a falling bomb, Wonder Man hurls it back at the enemy plane, and then helps a truckload of refugees get across the border. Eventually, he takes the fight to the crooked General Attila of the enemy army, freeing Brenda and Reggie, destroying huge cannons, dispensing food to starving innocents, kisses Brenda...and even knocks General Attila out while impressing the seal of his ring into the tyrant's face. Fred Carson reports the story with his miniature phone and returns to IBC. Reggie, it turns out, takes credit for saving Brenda, who is infatuated with Wonder Man (who, of course, is mutually attracted to her).

The May 1939 issue of Superman's *Action Comics* #10 coincidentally featured Superman slugging a plane on the cover, and featured another story by writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster. *Wonder Man*, despite Fox's plagiaristic intentions, was a better produced strip. Shuster's crude art could not compete with the fluidity and power of Eisner's, and one can only speculate as to whether *Wonder Man* (had he continued under Eisner's hand) would have presented as much competition for *Superman* as *Captain Marvel* would in the next decade.

Fox was possibly the first Golden Age publisher to recognize the marketability of super-heroes (after Detective, of course). Unfortunately for him, the character's uncanny likeness to the Man of Tomorrow made him the target of Detective Comics.

"We produced it for him, and then he was sued by the Superman people," Eisner said. "I recall, at that time, that he owed us quite a bit of money. We were in a terrible bind because he refused to pay the money unless I testified in court that it was my idea, and that he had nothing to do with it and just didn't know."

The money Fox owed Eisner and Iger was reportedly around $3,000—nothing to shake a stick at in the late 1930s. Eisner, despite partner Jerry Iger's insistence on going ahead with Fox, decided to not testify against himself in court.

Following a March 16, 1939 preliminary injunction (designed to keep Fox from publishing *Wonder Man* before the final court date, therefore saving Detective "irreparable damage"), the South District New York Court held a hearing on April 7, 1939.

Fox Comics, officially referred to as Bruns Publications, and Fox's distributors Kable News Company and Interborough News Company, were defendants against Detective Comics. Presided over by Judge Woolsey, Detective claimed that Superman's year-long publication history allowed Fox ample time to create a clone of Superman and profit from their success.

(top) Both Superman and Wonder Man, ironically, picked the same month to battle planes, as displayed on both this cover and the cover of *Action Comics* #10 (above). *Action* cover © DC Comics

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Judge Woolsey found Fox guilty of infringement, "both textually and pictorially", after reviewing publications from both parties (specifically citing the issue of *Wonder Comics*).

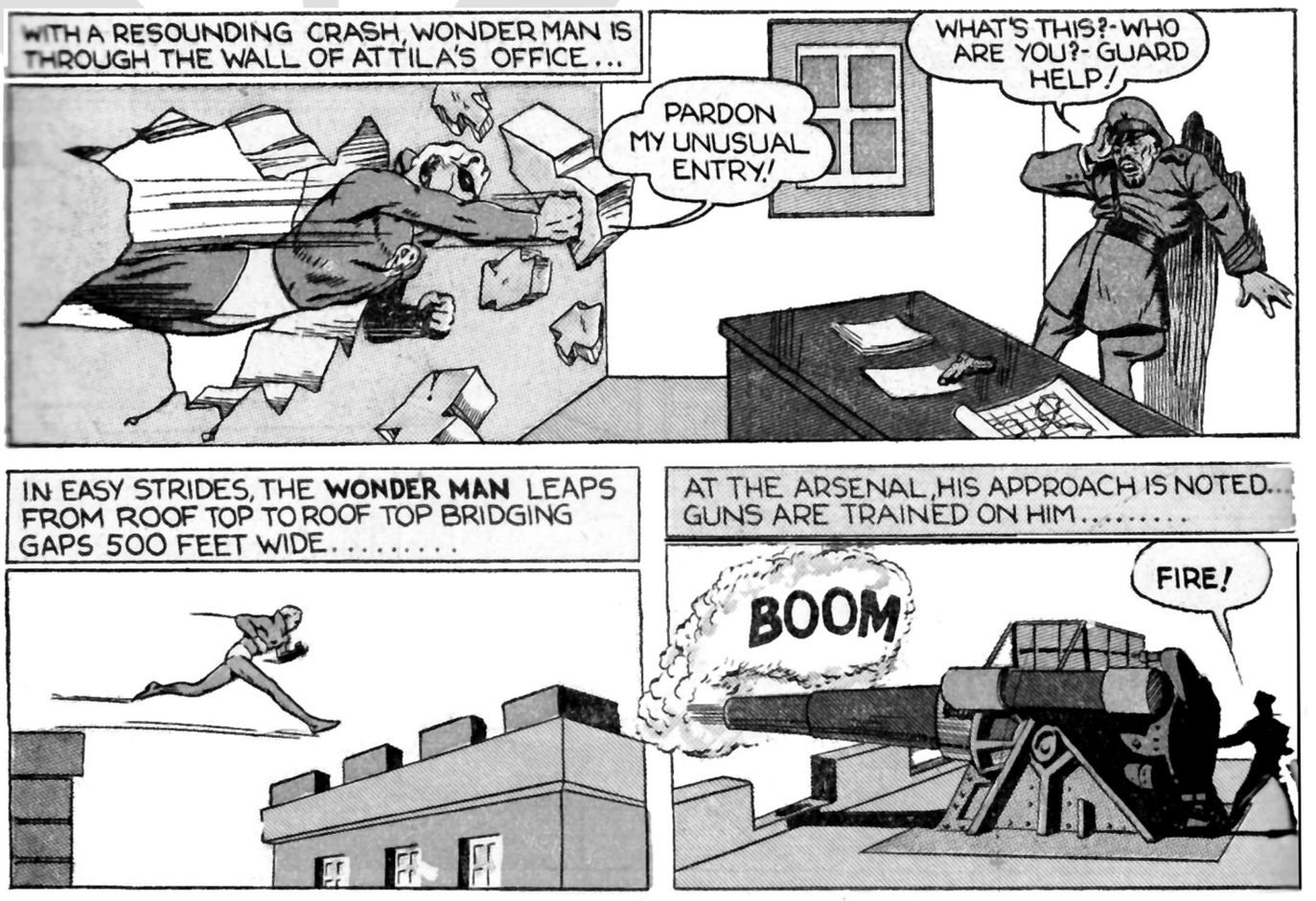
"Short of 'Chinese copies' of the plaintiff's 'Superman' strip," Woolsey decided, "the defendant could hardly have gone further than it has done."

Woolsey decreed a "permanent injunction forbidding the further publication by [Fox Comics] of its cartoon character 'Wonder Man', in such form as will make that cartoon character trespass in any respect on the plaintiff's cartoon character, 'Superman'." Damages and profits owed by Fox began at $1,500, before the addition of court and legal costs.

Not content with the decision, Fox appealed Woolsey. On April 29, 1940, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals upheld Woolsey's verdict. Circuit Judge Augustus N. Hand stated that:

"Each publication portrays a man of miraculous strength and speed called 'Superman' in *Action Comics*" and 'Wonder Man' in the magazine of [Fox]. The attribute and antics of 'Superman' and 'Wonder Man' are closely similar. Each at times conceals his strength beneath ordinary clothing but after removing his cloak stand revealed in full panoply in skintight acrobatic costume. The only real difference between them is that 'Superman' wears a blue uniform and 'Wonder Man' a red one. Each is termed the champion of the oppressed. Each is shown running toward a full moon off into the night and each is shown crushing a gun in his powerful hands. 'Superman' is pictured as stopping a bullet with his person and 'Wonder Man' as arresting and throwing back shells. Each is depicted as shot at by three men, yet as wholly impervious to the missiles that strike him.

(below) These panels highlight just a few of the Superman-esque moments witnessed in Wonder Man's first (and final) adventure. The entire story can be read in *Alter Ego* #48. All scans are courtesy of collector Jon Berk (who also contributed more Golden Age covers for this book).



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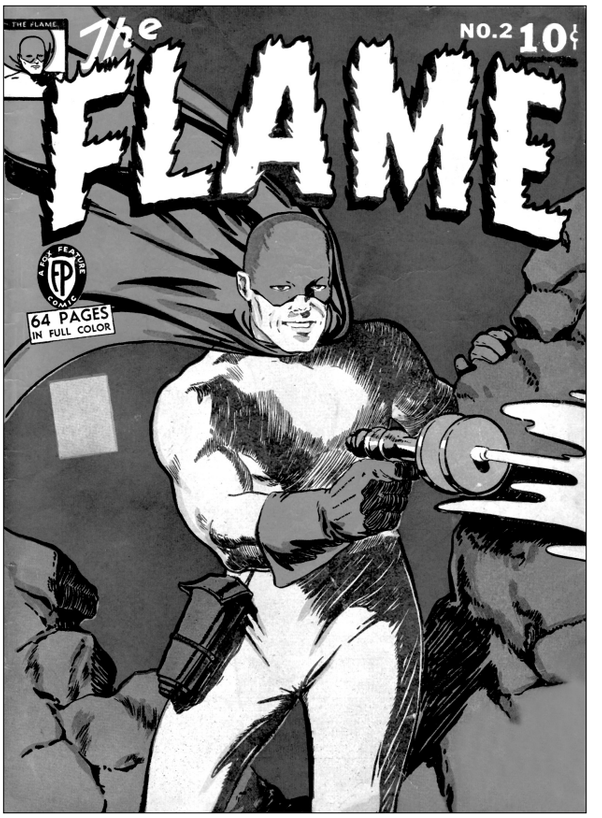
"'Superman' is shown as leaping over a twenty story building, and 'Wonder Man' as leaping from building to building. 'Superman' and 'Wonder Man' are each endowed with sufficient strength to rip open a steel door. Each is described as being the strongest man in the world and each as battling against 'evil and injustice'."

Fox's claim was that Wonder Man, like Superman, was a mere analogue of literary and mythological figures (like Hercules). Hand disagreed, stating that "Perhaps the periodicals of [Detective] are foolish rather than comic, but they embody an original arrangement of incidents and a pictorial and literary form...".

Eisner and Iger continued to produce material for Fox, but ceased delivering work after months of non-payment by Victor Fox. Fox most likely stalled on payment until the Wonder Man suit was settled. Needless to say, they did not receive the $3,000 for producing *Wonder Comics* #1.

Apparently, more Wonder Man stories had been produced, but were substituted with the mystic Yarko the Great for *Wonder Comics* #2. Ironically, Fox was forced to change the name of *Wonder Comics* with the next issue to *Wonderworld*, due to a title dispute from a pulp magazine publisher.

Lou Fine's The Flame, a character who would become one of Fox's stars, debuted in the third issue. Clad in yellow and red, The Flame started as a non-powered super-hero, but would later gain the ability to transport via smoke and fire (an ability shared by the Timely character the Vision by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby). It is probably not a coincidence that Timely's fire-powered character the Human Torch had debuted around that same time, in the summer of 1939.



Lou Fine's cover to *The Flame #2* (Fall 1940).

Eventually, Jerry Iger would bring Fox into yet another lawsuit, this one to recoup lost payment on stories. Unsurprisingly, considering his track record, Victor Fox lost the lawsuit and had to recompense both the money lost and the court fees.

Eisner parted ways with Iger in 1940, selling his portion of the company to Iger and taking artists Lou Fine, Bob Powell, and Chuck Mazoujian with him to create *The Spirit*. *The Spirit* raised the mark for quality in the comics medium, presenting a cinematic approach and more literary style of writing than before...all presented in eight-page stories distributed within Sunday comic sections in newspapers. *The Spirit* stories had the cinematic tone of a Warner Brothers film and the irony and punch of a short story by O'Henry. Eisner would later revolutionize the medium yet again, in creating one of the first graphic novels with 1978's *A Contract with God*.

Between six months to a year after beginning work for Victor Fox, the Eisner and Iger shop were no longer producing work for Fox Features Syndicate, possibly because "Busy" Arnold outbid Fox for their services. Eisner and Iger, despite leaving the employ of Fox, had produced a nest egg of characters and material for Fox's would-be publishing empire, enough to fuel Fox's publishing machine until the August 1941 issues of his comics magazines. Eisner-Iger material comprised the first issue of Fox's *Mystery Men Comics*, cover-dated August 1939. The cover featured the Green Mask, a pulpish, gun-toting vigilante wearing a bandanna-mask. The interiors, however, lacked the same panache. As Jules Feiffer said in his seminal *The Great Comic Book Heroes*: "Fox had the best covers and the worst insides."

Leading the pack of stories, the Green Mask pursued an insurance racket with the help of his sidekick "News" Blake. A "Modern Robin Hood," the powerless Green Mask starts and ends his story without a distinctive identity—secret or otherwise. Drawn by Walter Frehm, *The Green Mask* would enjoy cover-boy status for only seven more issues.

Quality Comics' first *Spirit* reprint book (1944)

Spirit TM and © Will Eisner Estate

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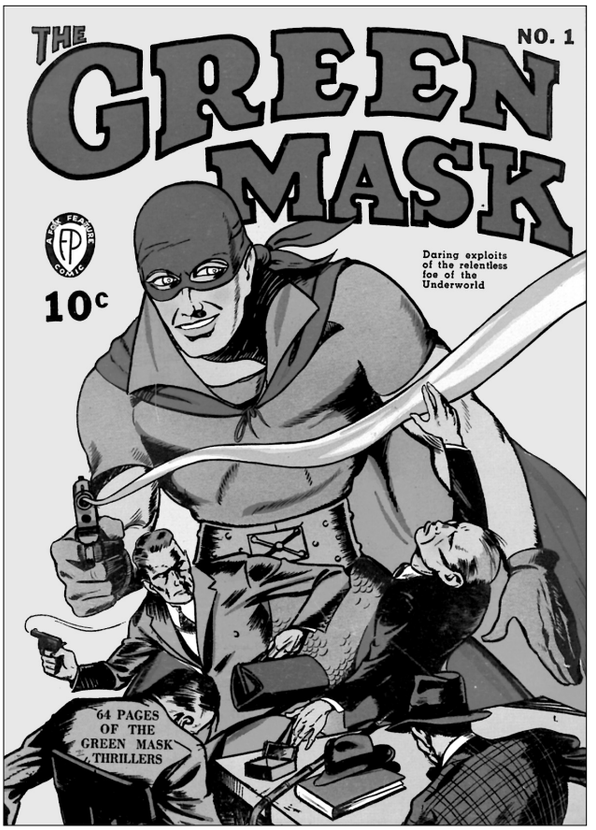


Fox's would-be star, *The Green Mask* (Summer 1940).

Mystery Men Comics #1 (August 1939).

Dick Briefer's *Rex Dexter of Mars* follows, a cross between *Buck Rogers* and *John Carter of Mars* that stemmed out of the 1939 World's Fair. Briefer would later enjoy success with his classic *Frankenstein* comic book for Crestwood Publications.

After reading through *Billy Bounce*, *Boy Detective*; *Chen Chang*; *Wing Turner*, *Air Detective*; George Tuska's *Zanzibar the Magician*...on and on the comic strip swipes go until, tucked away in the back, is radio show swipe *The Blue Beetle*.

Stumbling across a dying banker, patrolman Dan Garret decides to investigate the "White Mask" gang responsible for the man's murder. Garret goes into his friend Abe's apothecary shop, and a high-powered car soon flies out the back. Shortly after, the White Mask Gang finds a blue beetle scurrying across a table top, announcing the presence of a figure in a blue double-breasted suit with beetle emblem at the neck, fedora and goggles—The Blue Beetle! Pretending to join up with the gang, the Blue Beetle sneaks away and uses his Blue Beetle Wireless Phone (decades ahead of cell phones, the Wireless Phone was a funnel-like mouthpiece with a dial on the back that bore a more than passing resemblance to Wonder Man's portable phone) to contact the police and tip them off to the White Mask Gang's plans. When the Gang becomes savvy to the double-cross, the Blue Beetle saves the day with a left hook and a gas capsule.

The Beetle is an obvious swipe of George W. Trendle's radio hero *The Green Hornet*, not just in look and name, but also in *modus operandi:* both were vigilantes posing as criminal masterminds. It's surprising there wasn't a Filipino assistant in the strip.

The question remained, despite the Charles Nicholas credit on *The Blue Beetle*, as to who really created the character. In order to find out, a closer look must be given to the Blue Beetle's birthplace: the Eisner and Iger shop.

Eisner and Iger employed the use of pseudonyms, initially to hide the fact that Eisner, in starting Eisner and Iger with himself as sole artist, created the pseudonyms to give the impression they had the full staff they would soon attain. Later, it became a way to prevent publishers from raiding their shop for talent.

"We had two people on staff who were writing," Eisner said. "One was Toni Blum and the other was Bill Bossert, who was both a cartoonist and writer. Generally, the way the Eisner-Iger shop worked was that I would design the character and then the artist would follow up on it."

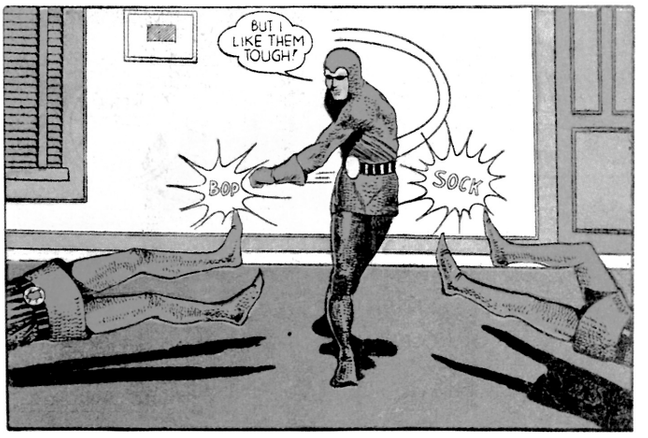
The Blue Beetle may have easily been created that way, with Charles Nicholas taking the artistic reins on the strip. Eisner has stated that the Charles Nicholas handle was a house-wide moniker that was used on *The Blue Beetle* strip by any number of artists. Over the years, two artists had come to lay claim to creating the Blue Beetle for Fox.

Charles Wotjkowski was a Polish-born artist who worked for Eisner-Iger at the time of their employment by Fox Comics. Wotjkowski was to legally change his last name to Nicholas, and would eventually work for the Simon and Kirby shop, Charlton Comics, and Marvel.

A quiet man, Nicholas always had his trademark cigarette dangling, the ash growing longer and longer yet still staying whole. A cloud of smoke constantly surrounded the artist.

"I met Charles Nicholas along with a few other artists when we all accepted staff jobs at Charlton Press in early 1955," Dick Giordano recalled. "We all accepted working in Derby, Connecticut for very low page rates (with a promise of all the work we wanted) because freelance work was hard to come by as the industry went into one of its frequent tailspins...

"Whatever he was given, he would pencil four pages (I think...or it could have been three) a day, every day, no more, no less. At the rate we were getting he had determined that he needed to do that much work to support his family. Of course, this was not the best work that Charlie could do; stock shots were employed to save time and one story penciled by Charlie looked pretty much the same as any other story penciled by Charlie. But top management did not care what the art looked like, just that it was done. And Charlie, realizing that this was pretty much the last stop in his career, just did what he had to do! I never heard him complain except with humor, and he rarely spoke of his family or outside interests, but he smiled a lot, had an offbeat sense of humor and seemed well adjusted to his situation. He was exceptionally easy to get along with and I never heard a cross word about or from Charlie."



(above) The mysteryman drawn by mystery artist Charles Nicholas, from *Mystery Men Comics* #7 (February 1940).

The other artist to lay claim is more established: the late Chuck Cuidera, the co-creator of *Blackhawk* for Quality Comics, was born Charles Nicholas Cuidera. Chuck Cuidera was hired by Joe Simon and Al Harvey to work at Fox for $25 a week. The son of an Italian immigrant and a Jewish mother, Cuidera was the only one of three sons to pursue the arts: both of his brothers had started to study medicine, but became cops instead. He started his career at Fox Studios, working behind a young Jack Kirby. His stint there was short-lived, as he defected to the Eisner shop in 1940.

Cuidera was an abrasive tough guy, according to fellow studio artists, one who never clicked with Will Eisner. In his later years, an embittered Cuidera would angrily stake his claim to Blackhawk's parentage.

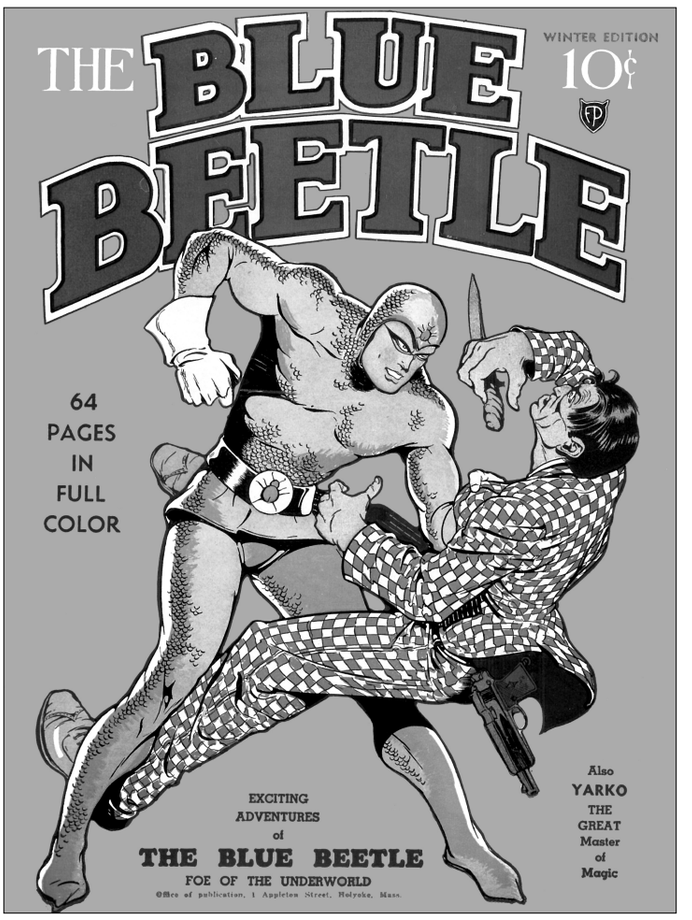
"During the summer, and after school, I was working for Will [Eisner]," Joe Kubert said of his early career in comics. "I got paid twelve-and-a-half bucks a week. It was a wonderful thing for me, it was terrific. The guys treated me really well.

"It was there that I met Chuck Cuidera for the first time. He was doing *Blackhawk*; one of the experiences of working...was cleaning up Chuck Cuidera's covers for *Blackhawk*. I was so into working, and loved so much what I was doing, and grateful for the opportunity, that when I had Chuck's cover to clean up, I'd erase the hell out of it, and clean up as best as I knew how. Part of the cleaning up process is using white paint wherever there's a smudge, or wherever you feel the line's not as sharp as it should be.

"I remember that the cover was one where Blackhawk was climbing up a rope and he was in a spotlight. The rope had little hairs, it was one of those Hauser-type ropes. I was so into it that I whited out all of the hairs, and drew one here and one there, that Chuck Cuidera said to me 'You're only cleaning up, you're not drawing!' He was only kidding, of course."

In later years, calling Cuidera up on the phone, Cuidera would start a conversation with "I created Blackhawk!", a point of pride he'd always felt Eisner had taken away from him.

Cuidera's memory was fuzzy in later years, with several inconsistencies in his claim to the Blue Beetle's creation: At one point, he claimed to



(below) Blue Beetle punches his way to the newsstands with *The Blue Beetle* #1 (Winter 1939/1940).

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have designed the chain-mail costume, at others he claimed that costume was in the character's first appearance, on others, he blamed everything on the bane of historians everywhere—memories disintegrated with the passage of time.

"I *do* remember [Charles Wotjkowski] saying once that he had created Blue Beetle," Giordano elaborated. "It didn't occur to anyone to ask him to elaborate. It wasn't important enough in the day to support a conversation. I've read that Chuck Cuidera has made the same claim and I'd only give Charlie's claim a bit more credence because he had nothing to gain by having made it."

However, lining up both men's careers in a timeline negates one claim:

The Blue Beetle was created around 1939 for Fox, through Eisner and Iger's Tudor City studio. Cuidera worked for Fox first, no earlier than 1940 (the year in which Simon was hired as editor for Fox's new bullpen), and then went to Will Eisner's studio to produce work for Quality Comics. Simon stated the condition of Fox Comics when he was hired:

"[Fox] started his own company called Fox Comics, Fox Publications, Fox Features Syndicate, Fox Radio, Fox this, Fox that—" Simon told Mark Evanier in a 1998 panel. "And he didn't have a staff there, but Eisner and Iger were supplying art and editorial material. I happened to get a job; I went over to Fox and became editor there, which was just an impossible job, because as I said there were no artists, no writers, no editors, no letterers—nothing there. Everything came out of the Eisner and Iger shop...

If Cuidera's first contact with Fox or Eisner wasn't until after 1939, and if there weren't any artists there when Joe Simon was hired in 1940, it would have started his career in comics much too late for him to have been a participant in any of the initial Fox Comics outings.

"Chuck Cuidera said that he worked with me," Joe Simon elaborated. "I know that *Blue Beetle* was already created *before* I came to Fox. I had nothing to do with that, except that I did some covers."

Comic book historian Jerry Bails, however, felt strongly towards one Charles Nicholas over the other:

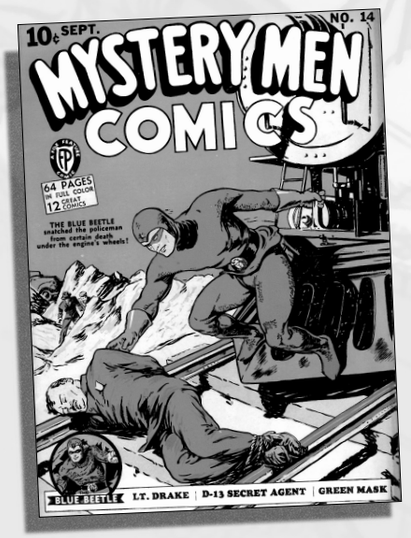
"As I recall," Bails said, "the first issue of *Blue Beetle* by Fox had a variety of artists (for want of a more accurate term) interpreting Blue Beetle. The only one I'm sure of is Charles Wojtowski. His art is indistinguishable from his art over at Timely...I checked the first 5 issues of *Mystery Men* and it appears to me that Wojkowski did all these stories, or someone equally inexperienced. I caught a panel in one of these stories that was so similar (if not identical) to one in the first *Blue Beetle* issue...I do not see any clear sign of Chuck Cuidera, although I'm going by his *Blackhawk*, which probably represented his best accumulated experience. He could've improved in the intervening time interval. He was around more experienced artists. Few of these younger guys seem to have had any art classes at this point [in 1939]. They look like teenagers and probably were in some instances."

Regardless of the Blue Beetle's creator, the name was still in use after the "real" Charles Nicholas stopped producing work for Fox. Artist Pierce Rice once wrote:

"My understanding at the time was that there was no such party as Charles Nicholas, and that the Blue Beetle [art] was handled exclusively by Al Carreno, with this being the case as long as I had anything to do with [Fox]. I'm not sure whether or not I ever met Al, but Louis Cazeneuve (with whom I worked) was, I think, sort of a pal of his. Al was more or less the star by virtue of his turning out the company's lead feature."

Artist Paul Norris got his start in 1940 under Carreno, while drawing *The Blue Beetle* for Fox.

"Al was a very interesting person," Norris told historian Will Murray. "He came out of Mexico. His father was a lieutenant for Pancho Villa. As a matter of fact, he was more like his right-hand man, a money man. He



Mystery Men Comics #14 (September 1940).

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sent Al to Chicago to go to law school, but Al instead became a struggling artist. He took it from there. I don't know how he ever resolved it with his father."

Carreno's work on *The Blue Beetle* starts appearing in *The Blue Beetle* #2. As Carreno's assistant, Norris worked for eight dollars a page on *The Blue Beetle*, doing background penciling and inking. In February 1941, Norris took his portfolio to Detective Comics, where he co-created Aquaman with editor Mort Weisinger.

By the second issue of *Mystery Men*, the Blue Beetle's look changed, perhaps because Fox wanted to avoid any other lawsuits of Wonder Man-esque proportions. The Blue Beetle's new costume consisted of blue tights with a short-sleeved blue chain mail tunic, a beetle stylistically emblazoned diagonally down from his right shoulder, and yellow arrow gloves. His second costume is prototypical of the Phantom-esque look the character would eventually take on. Rounded out by a maskless cowl with antennae, and a pair of elf-like pointed shoes, these accessories were abandoned two issues later. In *Mystery Men* #4, The Blue Beetle took on his more established look, with a long-sleeved tunic and black domino mask, as he encountered an extortion racket aimed at newsboys (yes, newsboys).

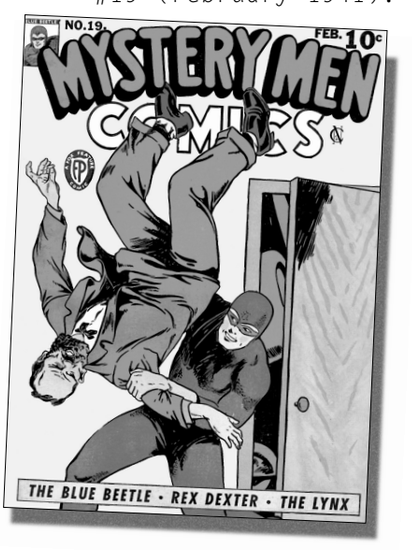
Blue Beetle in his more pulpish days, from *The Blue Beetle* #1. Art by Chuck Cuidera. Courtesy of Marc Svensson.

The Wonder Man lawsuit and falling out with Eisner and Iger apparently hadn't changed Fox's disposition, as he continued to be a shuckster. Headquartered in the same building as Detective Comics, at 430 Lexington Avenue, rumor has it that Fox would spit out of the elevator whenever it stopped on his competitor's floor. Fueled by his defeat at the hands of Detective's lawyers, Fox was likely determined to not only cash in on the comics craze...but to also put Detective out of business.

Cover dated Winter 1939/1940, *The Blue Beetle* premiered in his own title, making him the second super-hero with a first issue, and the third with his own series; *Superman* #1 had come out only a few months before, in the Summer of 1939; *Amazing Man Comics* (featuring Bill Everett's Aman the Amazing Man) came out in September, but launched with a #5. Of the three main characters to choose from his stable—the Flame, the Blue Beetle, and the Green Mask—one can wonder why Fox chose the most oddball to produce a rushed first issue of. The Wonder Man debacle had not only spurned the short man with the high voice into vengeance against Detective, but had probably made him a tad more wary in the similarity department. The Flame was fire-themed, like The Human Torch at Timely, while Green Mask had a slight resemblance to Batman and a slew of pulp crimefighters, but the Blue Beetle may have been so unlike any other characters that Fox decided he would be a safer (rather than *better*) choice to become his star. The hodge-podge nature of that first issue, with an original lead story followed by Blue Beetle *Mystery Men* reprints, smacks of being thrown together to chase *Superman* onto the newsstands. *The Blue Beetle* #1 did not even have any house ads in other Fox titles coming out around that time.

The lead story opens with Dan Garret's birth in 1916 to an Irish cop father, and quickly follows him through young adulthood and to college (where he, naturally, is a star student and athlete). It is during

(below) *Mystery Men Comics* #19 (February 1941).



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Dan's senior year that he receives a telegram notifying him of his police officer father's fatal wounding in the line of duty. Rushing to his father's deathbed, Dan vows revenge against the murderers. Shortly after graduation, Dan Garret becomes a cop, partnered with his father's best friend Mike Mannigan (the typical bumbling Irish cop, with shades of *Green Hornet*'s Mike Axford or *Dick Tracy*'s Pat Patton). Using a minimal amount of detective work, the Blue Beetle, "A dark figure in a strange costume" finds out his father's murderer and avenges his death in the few remaining pages.

The premiere story appears drawn by the same artist as the earlier *Blue Beetle* stories (from *Mystery Men*), but a hint more dynamic. There are definite Eisner earmarks present, from creepy angles to overblown fight scenes. Perhaps aware that it would be more than a mere back-up, Will Eisner or someone else in the Tudor City studio had provided rough breakdowns for the original "Charles Nicholas" to do finishes over. Also, the artwork is considerably better than most of what would follow in that period of the character's career. Rather than the bland and constipated layouts of the earlier *Mystery Men* stories, there is diversity in panel size and layout in the origin, and is moodier with a wider variety of shots. The standard Fox lead story for *The Green Mask* was nine pages; the fact that *The Blue Beetle* exceeds that by four hints that it may have been intended for a solo book from the outset, rather than as a lead in *Mystery Men*.

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Victor Fox's attempt to gain staff artists: Joe Simon answered the bottom one.

With the estrangement of the Eisner-Iger shop in late 1939, Fox needed to create his own bullpen of artists. Fox initially tried to raid the Eisner-Iger studio with a classified ad from December 2, 1939, specifically asking for the original artists of many of the Fox features. Victor Fox would also rent more office space to accommodate his impending stable of artists by December 29.

Responding to such an ad was Joe Simon, who would go on to become one of the most influential figures of the Golden Age. At the pay rate of $85 a week, Simon worked as an editor for Fox, the self-proclaimed "King of Comics".

Standing at 6'3" and weighing in at a buck-fifty, the gangly Simon got his job through a sterling letter of reference by the *Syracuse Herald*'s James Miller. The con man was conned—Fox didn't know that "James Miller" was in actuality Jimmy Miller, copy boy.

"[Fox] started, and he got bigger offices there in the same building—more impressive offices than DC," Simon said. "He was a very strange character. He had kind of a British accent; he was like 5'2"—told us he was a former ballroom dancer. He was very loud, menacing, and really a scary little guy. He used to say, 'I'm the King of the Comics. I'm the King of the Comics. I'm the King of the Comics.' We couldn't stop him. So that's the task I had when I went in to start that job."

The newspaper ads continued in *The New York Times*, offering "High prices and cash on delivery" for "TOP-NOTCH artists." All interviews would be Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, between 4 and 5 P.M. only, with "Mr. Roberts" at Fox's offices at 480 Lexington Avenue, Room 912. As "Mr. Roberts," Simon interviewed and hired new talent and, as Joe Simon, he produced several covers and stories for Fox.

"[The] easy way for him to get Will Eisner's staff over there [to work for him] was to just advertise in the papers: 'Artist who did *Wonder Man* call Mr. Roberts at this number' at Fox's office; and he didn't want us to use our real names because we could do the same thing Will Eisner did. We could take the characters and leave. So anyway,

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everybody who answered the ad had to be referred to a 'Mr. Roberts' to be interviewed for the job."

A young artist named Jacob Kurtzberg had been doing some freelance work for Eisner and Iger around 1938, and soon became a regular artist at Fox Comics for $15 a week.

Kurtzberg was a short scrapper from the Bronx with bushy eyebrows and a black crewcut. Having grown up in a tough immigrant neighborhood, he carried the violence of his childhood to the comics page: punches were thrown with feet no less than four feet apart, figures flew through the air after being hit. A fight scene, even in the early days, were violently balletic.

This short kid who once stared a mobster down for his former boss Will Eisner, signed through a series of pseudonyms, but liked one so much that he legally took it on as his name in 1942. It was a name that would become legendary in the comics field, used to refer to him as the once and future "King of Comics": Jack Kirby. The title had been earlier established by Fox himself, much to Kirby's future chagrin.

"He was Edward G. Robinson," Kirby said. "I remember him walking back and forth watching the artists all the time like a hawk and saying 'I'm the King of Comics!' And we would look back at him and actually he was a joy to us because he made working fun. He was a character in the full sense of being a character."

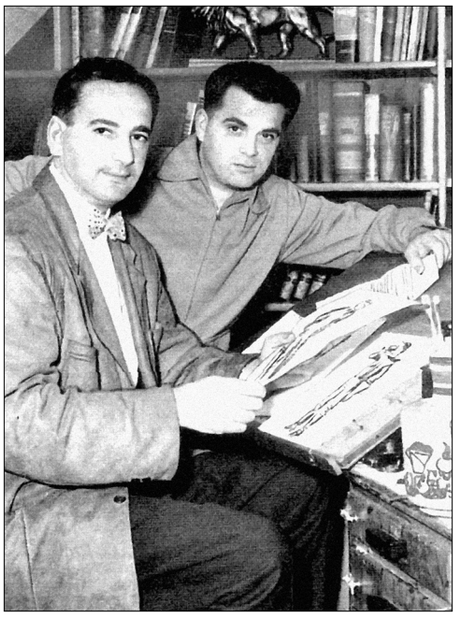
His salary at Fox not enough, Simon finished his grueling work day of cranking out covers and working with artists to moonlight as a freelancer for the comic shop Funnies, Incorporated, run by Lloyd Jacquet.

"We rented an office a few blocks from the Fox office—Fox was in an elegant office, by the way," Simon stated. "It was like, his private office was [big]. It was right in the heart of town, near Grand Central and the name of the building was Grand Central Palace. DC was upstairs, Fox was downstairs. So, Jack and I rented an office on West 45th Street for $25 a week. After work, we'd go there and work on our other characters, *Blue Bolt*, and Jack came in with me on the second issue of *Blue Bolt*."

Among those projects worked on by Simon was an early draft of *Captain America* for Martin Goodman's Timely Comics.

"I was doing this freelance work after hours," Simon continued. "I was very young, 24, I think. Kirby was even younger, and was working at the bullpen at Fox. He found out that I was doing this extra work, and asked if he could come over and work with me. I said 'Sure,' since I had more than I could handle. I had to get letterers and inkers to help me meet my schedule. When Kirby came in, I'd already done the work for *Captain America* #1, all the roughs and story outlines, and even the covers on the first page were laid out and lettered."

Fox Comics gave birth to more than knock-off super-heroes: it inadvertently birthed the Simon and Kirby team, one which by the 1950s, would establish or work in every genre from Western to Horror to Romance.



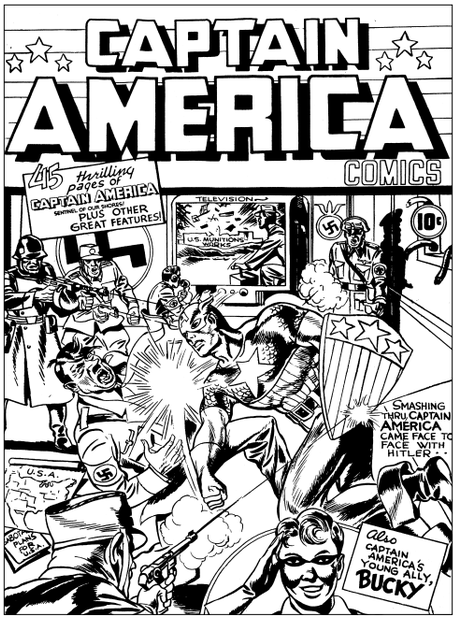
Legendary comics team Simon and Kirby, after the trenches of Fox Comics.

Freelancers at Fox made $1 a page for pencils, $1.50 for pencils and inks, and an extra 50 cents for lettering. Fox, however, still remained notorious for non-payment to freelancers.

"[On] Friday night, I would plant myself in the outer office and would not leave until I got my check," Rico said. "Fox would come out and say, 'Are you still here?' I'd say, 'Yep, I'm still here'—and he'd go back inside again."

"Fox as a publisher and his treatment of the help was the worst of the lot," Rice attested. "My own notion is that all those birds were cut from the same cloth. But not only did I not know Fox himself, I'm not certain I ever so much as laid eyes on the man, though I have a dim recollection of his having been pointed out to me at a distance."

"Fox was a wheeler and dealer, you know. At the time I worked there, he put out something to compete with Coca-Cola, and it was called Kooba," Cuidera said.



Captain America #1 (March 1941).
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Kooba Cola was one of Fox's 1940 brainchildren, an over-sized bottle of cola that would only be sold at newsstands. Heavily advertised in the pages of Fox Comics as "Enough for two," and "a cola drink with Vitamin B1," bottles of Kooba were even subliminally drawn into panels of the comics. Coupons for free bottles of Kooba started popping up in issues of Fox Comics, and a bottle cap redemption program was supposedly enacted. A kid could get a fifty cent *Buck Rogers* pop pistol for only 250 Kooba Cola caps, or a baseball for 99. Not even "The Kooba Kid," a boy who gained great muscles from drinking a bottle of Kooba (ala Popeye and his can of spinach) could salvage this carbonated, vitamin-packed disaster that never was.

Despite all the energy put into advertising it, not one Fox staffer interviewed can ever recall seeing an actual bottle of Kooba Cola. Rumor has it that Fox was trying to solicit enough advance orders before producing the drink.

Kooba Cola, the mystery soft drink.

The office of publication for Fox Features Syndicate changed within the first few months of publication. It was listed as 1 Appleton Street in Holyoke, Massachusetts in the April-May 1940 issue of *The Blue Beetle*, but would change to 29 Worthington Street in Springfield, Massachusetts a couple of short months later.

It was not uncommon for a variety of small publishers to use the address of the Holyoke, Massachusetts printer and stapler as their "Office of Publication," so they could apply for bulk mailing permits from the county post office, and also so the printer could fulfill subscriptions for expediency's sake. The *Holyoke / South Hadley / Chicopee Directory* from both 1939 and 1940 lists 1 Appleton Street as the home of Thorn Press Printers; by 1941, it would become Holyoke Magazine Press, and enter the comic book business.

The *1940 Springfield Directory* reveals the potential publishers of Fox Comics at 29 Worthington Street: The Arnold-Roberts Paper Company in office 628. The Arnold may have been publisher Everett M. "Busy" Arnold and the Roberts may have easily been the pseudonym Victor Fox was infamous for using for himself and his editors: Mr. Roberts. The Arnold-Roberts Paper Company's absence by 1942 (when Fox took a brief vacation from publishing) could be more than a mere coincidence.

In the 1940s, Arnold launched the Quality Comics line (which would publish Jack Cole's *Plastic Man*, Lou Fine's *The Ray*, and Cuidera's *Blackhawk*) and Will Eisner's *The Spirit* section.

Arnold was born in Rhode Island and attended Brown University, which he left in 1921 without graduating. Victor Fox had apparently attended Brown University as well, for only one year, and could have met the younger Arnold in his college days.

Upon leaving Brown, Arnold found work as a sales representative for the Goss Printing Company, leaving Goss in 1930 to partner with Buffalo printer Walter Koessler in the Greater Buffalo Press, a color plant specializing in printing comic sections. Six years later, Arnold would join

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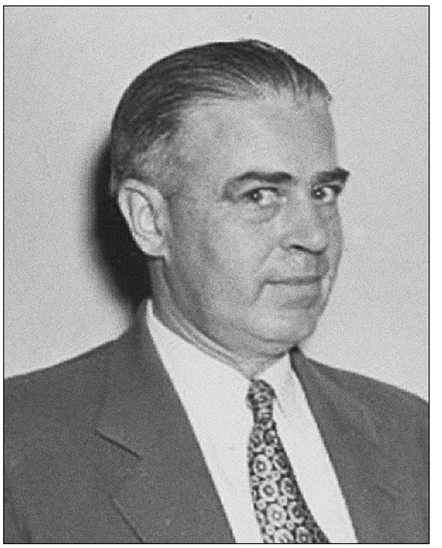
two former National employees in printing *The Comics Magazine*, publishing the first professional work by *Superman*'s Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, as well as the first masked hero in comics: The Clock.

In 1937, "Busy" Arnold joined with three newspaper syndicates (the McNaught Syndicate, the Frank J. Markey Syndicate, and Iowa's Register and Tribune Syndicate) to form Comic Favorites, Inc.. Their first title was *Feature Funnies*, which published some new features shopped out from the Harry Chesler shop and, starting in 1938, Eisner and Iger's Universal Phoenix with *Espionage Starring Black X*, alongside reprints of favorite strips like *Joe Palooka* and *Dixie Dugan*. Two years later, Comic Magazines, Inc. formed when Arnold and the Register and Tribune Syndicate's parent company bought out the other two syndicates, granting Arnold 50% of the company.

In August 1939, *Smash Comics* #1, the first comic published by Arnold's newly-formed Quality Comics was published. It came out shortly after Fox's *Wonder Comics* #1 was released. By December of that year, Arnold would begin talks with Will Eisner to publish *The Spirit* Sunday section with the Register and Tribune Syndicate. The Quality line would continue to flourish until the 1950s, with Arnold selling many of the properties (like *Plastic Man* and *Blackhawk*) to Detective Comics (now DC Comics), where they still reside.

If the two men operated their "Office of Publication" at the same address, and had hypothetically met at Brown University in the early '20s, is it also possible that Fox was introduced to Will Eisner and Jerry Iger by Arnold (who, at the time, was also commissioning work from the studio)? Arnold may well have been the "mutual acquaintance" who set Universal Phoenix up with the burgeoning Fox Features Syndicate in 1939.



Everett "Busy" Arnold from the *Brown Alumni Magazine*, courtesy of Brown University Archives.
© 2007 Brown University.

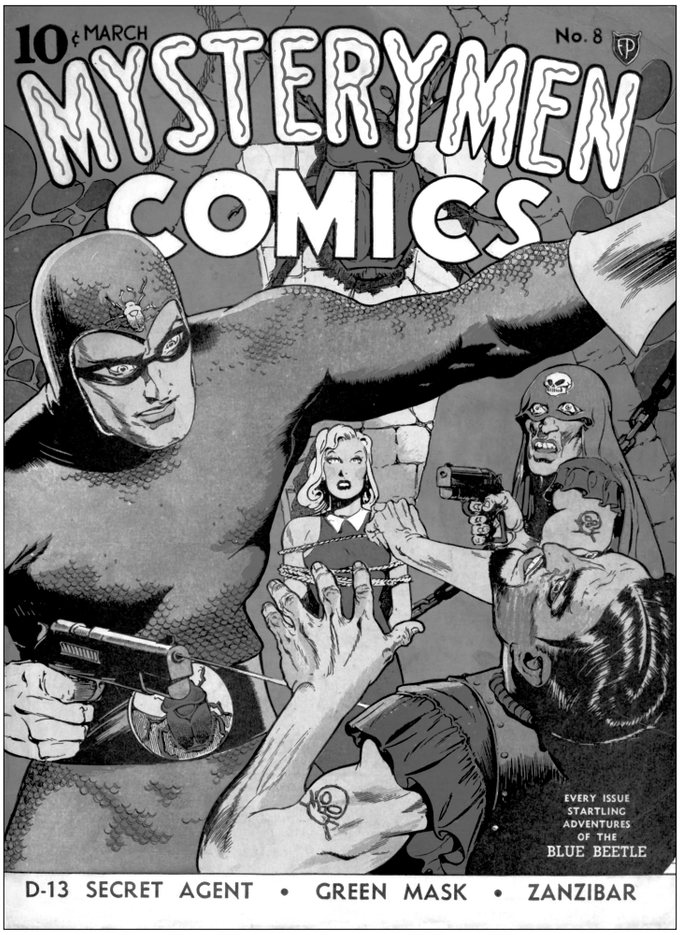
Regardless of whether they were in cahoots or not, the two publishers were like night and day, as Jim Steranko noted about Arnold in his monumental comics history project *The History of Comics*:

> *"Arnold was, without a doubt, one of the most generous comic publishers. He was always very fair with the artists and believed in sharing the wealth. He often delivered an extra bonus to his men in appreciation for their work and loyalty. He was, perhaps, the only publisher who paid his men what they were really worth."*

In 1950, 29 Worthington Street would be listed as the office of publications for Ace Comics for one month, indicating that it remained a printer (in some form) through the 1940s.

By 1940, Fox Comics was the third-largest comic book publisher with 67 comics that year; Detective published 86, followed by Dell's 79. Fox was also one of the earlier publishers to tap into the success of the super-hero, having published an almost entirely super-hero centered line of comics.

Despite the fear of litigation caused by the Wonder Man lawsuit, Fox Comics followed the debut of Batman's sidekick, Robin the Boy Wonder, by giving the Green Mask a partner in Domino, the Miracle Boy. A blatant knock-off, Detective either didn't care or (most likely) didn't notice. They did take notice by August 17, 1942, however, when they sued Fox for the similarities between The Lynx and Blackie the Mystery Boy



Mystery Men Comics #8 (March 1940).

Mystery Men Comics #13 (August 1940) cover by Lou Fine.

in the pages of *Mystery Men Comics*. Artist Jim Mooney eventually got work at Detective Comics drawing *Batman*...off the strength of his earlier *Lynx* work for Fox.

At the top of the Fox pile of characters stood the Blue Beetle, not only Fox's top-seller, but Fox's most impressive character in an array of unimpressive heroes. Wearing his distinctive scaly, creepy, chain-link armor, the Blue Beetle ruthlessly took down gangsters with a pair of twin automatics, wading through firefights unphased (until a thug hit him in every Golden Age hero's tender spot: in the head from behind). Other times he'd down a vial or swallow a capsule of Dr. Franz's steroid-like Formula 2-X to become a powerhouse (it's almost amazing that Victor Fox didn't try to market a "Vitamin 2-X" chewable vitamin or candy). In either a lack of continuity, or testimony to the amount of inventory stories at Fox, *The Blue Beetle* #5 featured "Blue Beetle's New Powers," a story which introduces Vitamin 2-X, which had been mentioned as far as two issues back.

The villains gasped in terror when a small metal blue beetle was thrown into the room, later changing to a projected beetle silhouette from a flashlight, then a huge glowing blue beetle that would mysteriously appear, suspended mid-air. "The Blue Beetle!" they'd exclaim, wide-eyed with their hands up in terror as the Blue Beetle would announce himself next panel, hands on his waist, with a smug "Yes! The Blue Beetle!"

Fall 1940s *Blue Beetle* #4 introduced girl reporter and love interest Joan Mason; an unnamed blond girl reporter had appeared two issues earlier, strictly for the sake of being rescued by the Blue Beetle. Commissioner Harmon's daughter, Helen, had debuted in the third issue, and saved Dan's life with a blood transfusion in the fourth...but didn't manage to stick around past that. Mason's arrival was replacement for Charley Storm as the strip's token newshound. The post-World War II issues would feature Joan about as much as the Blue Beetle.

Fox's Unholy Trinity of Blue Beetle, Samson, and The Flame, from *Big 3* #4 (July 1941).

Even more changes happened through 1940: Dr. Franz morphed from a bald, heavyset man with a comb-over to a tall, wispy man with a goatee. The cover of *The Blue Beetle* #9 first showed the Blue Beetle's next cosmetic change: rather than giving the character yellow arrow gloves, the cover colorist gave him red. The next issue debuted the red gloves in the stories, and had Garret start stripping to his Blue Beetle costume *à la* Clark Kent to Superman, rather than magically appearing from off-panel as his costumed alter-ego.

1940 was a big enough year for Fox to launch two new titles: *The Flame* and *The Green Mask* in June, and *Big 3* (featuring Blue Beetle, the Flame, and Samson) in August. All three titles would be short-lived.

Still, attempts to sell sodas and novelty toys were not quite as ambitious as Fox's attempt at competing with Superman, something he may have attained with the multi-media approach of the Blue Beetle.

Victor Fox decided to pull out all the stops to succeed the Man of Tomorrow with the Azure Avenger. On January 16, 1939 the *Superman* daily comic strip appeared in newspapers across the nation; *The Blue Beetle* premiered almost a year later to the date, on January 8, 1940. *Superman* hit the airwaves of the Mutual Radio Network on February 12, 1940, and *The Blue Beetle* followed close on his boot-red heels on May 15, in a syndicated program of his own.

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What follows is The Blue Beetle's first appearance from *Mystery Men Comics* #1 (August 1939), with special thanks to Michigan State University.

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A TOUGHER BIRD TO CATCH!: The Ill-Fated *Blue Beetle* daily strip

Victor Fox, bent on expanding his comics empire, decided to take over the daily newspapers' comic section in late 1939, even advertising in an article in the October 28 issue of *Editor & Publisher*.

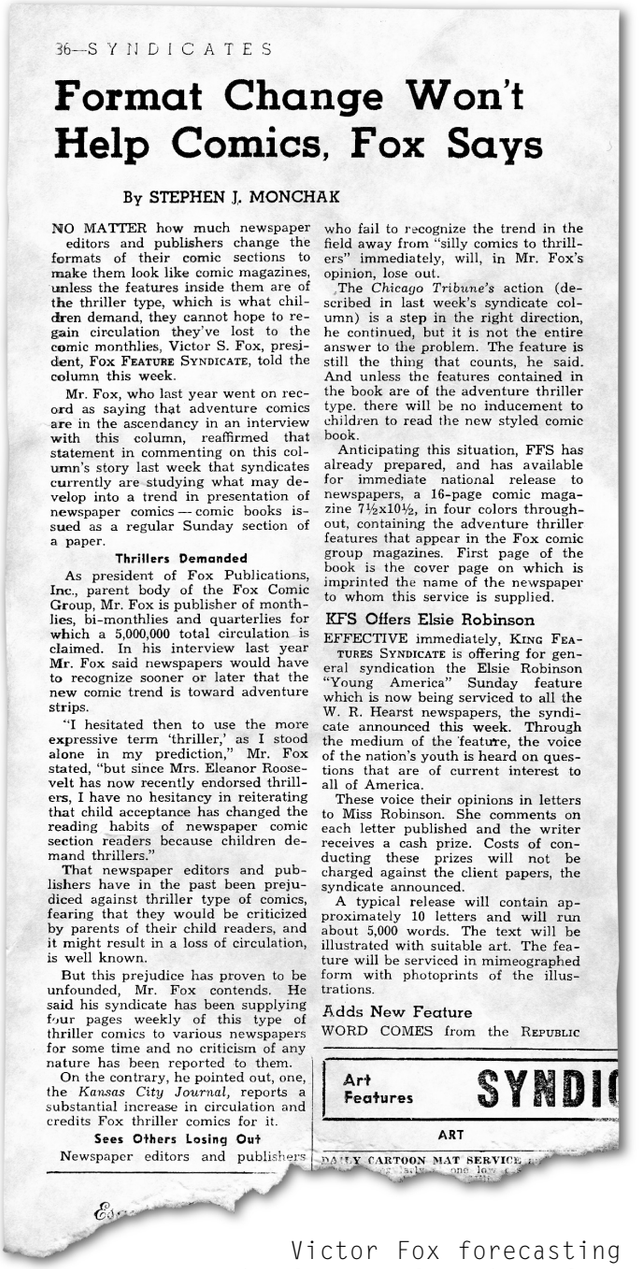
"He told the column [Fox Feature Syndicate]," the article reads, "has prepared for release Dec. 3 a four-page, eight-comic ready-print Sunday supplement in four colors. The comics include: *The Green Mask*, *Patty O'Day*, *Dr. Fung*, *Yarko the Great*, *Rex Dexter of Mars*, *The Golden Knight*, *Tex Maxon*, and *Spark Stevens*, all features being polled by FFS for reader popularity. These can be serviced in black-and-white, he added.

"In addition, Mr. Fox said, FFS will release this month to newspapers four daily comic strips, *The Green Mask*, *Spark Stevens*, *The Blue Beetle*, and *D-13 Secret Agent*. These are black-and-white. Of FFS's 70 comic features, the column was told, more than 50 are available to newspapers."

Fox's four-page comics supplement premiered on January 7, 1940, to undoubtedly high fanfare. *The Springfield Republican* in Springfield, Massachusetts carried the short-lived Sunday strips.

In order to save on ordering new features, Fox would print two comic book pages side by side and resume the page count each Sunday, until the full stories were told. Each story opened with a half-page splash on the first page; when it came time to print up Sunday strips #2-up, Fox would chop off the top half of page three of the comic book and paste up the half-splash from the first page. As a result, there would be huge leaps in continuity from week to week. Blue Beetle could be knocked out one Sunday, but would be in the middle of a fist fight the next. The only attempt made to give any flow was in a hastily lettered caption imposed on the "splash."

To make things more confusing, the stories were printed out of sequence. The first two weeks of *The Blue Beetle* reprinted his introduction in *Mystery Men Comics* #1(where he resembled the Green Hornet), followed by *Mystery Men* #3, then *Mystery Men* #4, followed by the third story...all of which had the Blue Beetle in different costumes. Not worried about character integrity, Sunday funnies readers got four variations on the character within two months.



36—SYNDICATES

Format Change Won't Help Comics, Fox Says

By STEPHEN J. MONCHAK

NO MATTER how much newspaper editors and publishers change the formats of their comic sections to make them look like comic magazines, unless the features inside them are of the thriller type, which is what children demand, they cannot hope to regain circulation they've lost to the comic monthlies, Victor S. Fox, president, Fox Feature Syndicate, told the column this week.

Mr. Fox, who last year went on record as saying that adventure comics are in the ascendancy in an interview with this column, reaffirmed that statement in commenting on this column's story last week that syndicates currently are studying what may develop into a trend in presentation of newspaper comics — comic books issued as a regular Sunday section of a paper.

Thrillers Demanded

As president of Fox Publications, Inc., parent body of the Fox Comic Group, Mr. Fox is publisher of monthlies, bi-monthlies and quarterlies for which a 5,000,000 total circulation is claimed. In his interview last year Mr. Fox said newspapers would have to recognize sooner or later that the new comic trend is toward adventure strips.

"I hesitated then to use the more expressive term 'thriller,' as I stood alone in my prediction," Mr. Fox stated, "but since Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt has now recently endorsed thrillers, I have no hesitancy in reiterating that child acceptance has changed the reading habits of newspaper comic section readers because children demand thrillers."

That newspaper editors and publishers have in the past been prejudiced against thriller type of comics, fearing that they would be criticized by parents of their child readers, and it might result in a loss of circulation, is well known.

But this prejudice has proven to be unfounded, Mr. Fox contends. He said his syndicate has been supplying four pages weekly of this type of thriller comics to various newspapers for some time and no criticism of any nature has been reported to them.

On the contrary, he pointed out, one, the *Kansas City Journal*, reports a substantial increase in circulation and credits Fox thriller comics for it.

Sees Others Losing Out

Newspaper editors and publishers who fail to recognize the trend in the field away from "silly comics to thrillers" immediately, will, in Mr. Fox's opinion, lose out.

The *Chicago Tribune's* action (described in last week's syndicate column) is a step in the right direction, he continued, but it is not the entire answer to the problem. The feature is still the thing that counts, he said. And unless the features contained in the book are of the adventure thriller type. there will be no inducement to children to read the new styled comic book.

Anticipating this situation, FFS has already prepared, and has available for immediate national release to newspapers, a 16-page comic magazine 7½x10½, in four colors throughout, containing the adventure thriller features that appear in the Fox comic group magazines. First page of the book is the cover page on which is imprinted the name of the newspaper to whom this service is supplied.

KFS Offers Elsie Robinson

EFFECTIVE immediately, King Features Syndicate is offering for general syndication the Elsie Robinson "Young America" Sunday feature which is now being serviced to all the W. R. Hearst newspapers, the syndicate announced this week. Through the medium of the feature, the voice of the nation's youth is heard on questions that are of current interest to all of America.

These voice their opinions in letters to Miss Robinson. She comments on each letter published and the writer receives a cash prize. Costs of conducting these prizes will not be charged against the client papers, the syndicate announced.

A typical release will contain approximately 10 letters and will run about 5,000 words. The text will be illustrated with suitable art. The feature will be serviced in mimeographed form with photoprints of the illustrations.

Adds New Feature

WORD COMES from the Republic

Art Features SYNDI

ART

DAILY CARTOON MAT SERVICE

Victor Fox forecasting the future of comics, from *Editor & Publisher*.

Next spring, Fox offered his *Weekly Comic Magazine* to newspapers: a sixteen-page comic book insert featuring headliners The Blue Beetle and Patty O'Day. Interestingly enough, Will Eisner's *The Spirit* Sunday supplement debuted on June 2, 1940; one can only wonder if Fox had caught wind of Eisner's latest venture and had decided to compete with it.

The Blue Beetle Sunday strip for July 7, 1940 had Dan Garret and Mike Mannigan escape from the villainous Taro. "You'll never leave this house alive!" Taro screams at the escaping duo. "I'll blow you up with it!" Readers never found out. On July 11, *The Blue Beetle* and other Fox Sunday strips disappeared from the pages of the *Republican*.

In an interesting sidenote, the *Republican* offices were located roughly two blocks from Fox's printer/Office of Publication on 29 Worthington Street in Springfield. It may have been a matter of the same printer, or sheer coincidence, that made them one of the few papers known to carry the Sunday strips.

Spirit Section from August 17, 1952.
Spirit TM and © Will Eisner Estate.

Perhaps timed to coincide with the release of *The Blue Beetle* #1 and debuting the day after the Sunday strip, *The Blue Beetle* daily comic was literally a one-time victory over National's *Superman*—only one newspaper has yet been known to have ever carried the strip.

At the height of the *Superman* strip's popularity, it was read by 25,000,000 readers in 285 papers. Could *The Blue Beetle* compete? *The Boston Evening Transcript* thought so on January 8, 1940, the first day of the strip's run:

"INTRODUCING — "*The Blue Beetle*"

"The Transcript presents today to its comics strip devotees '*The Blue Beetle*.' It appears for the first time in the place of honor at our right.

"'*The Blue Beetle*,' let it be known, accords with the latest trend in comic strips in presenting the incredible adventures of an individual of extraordinary powers. But it works, we believe, a definite artistic advance in his category of strips in that it makes these superhuman feats more nearly within the realm of common laws of physics, anatomy, etc. In other words, it makes incredibility more credible, with the ingenuity of a Jules Verne, an H. G. Wells or a Johnathan Swift.

"With introducing '*The Blue Beetle*' with our right hand, we wave a measuredly regretful farewell to '*Superman*' with our left. The escapades of Superman during the months of his incumbency here have often strained our sense of logic, and many of our readers have indicated a similar feeling that the cards were too definitely stacked in favor of Superman."

"Listen, Eli," hotshot York City Sun reporter Charley Storm reasons with his editor. "You know I'd be the first to laugh this thing off but I can't because I've a burning hunch it's true!"

Storm turns to face a darkened window, looking out at the York City night.

"I tell you, Eli, that somewhere in York City tonight there is an incredible personality who is waging a private war against crime. Who he is and what his motives are, I don't know.

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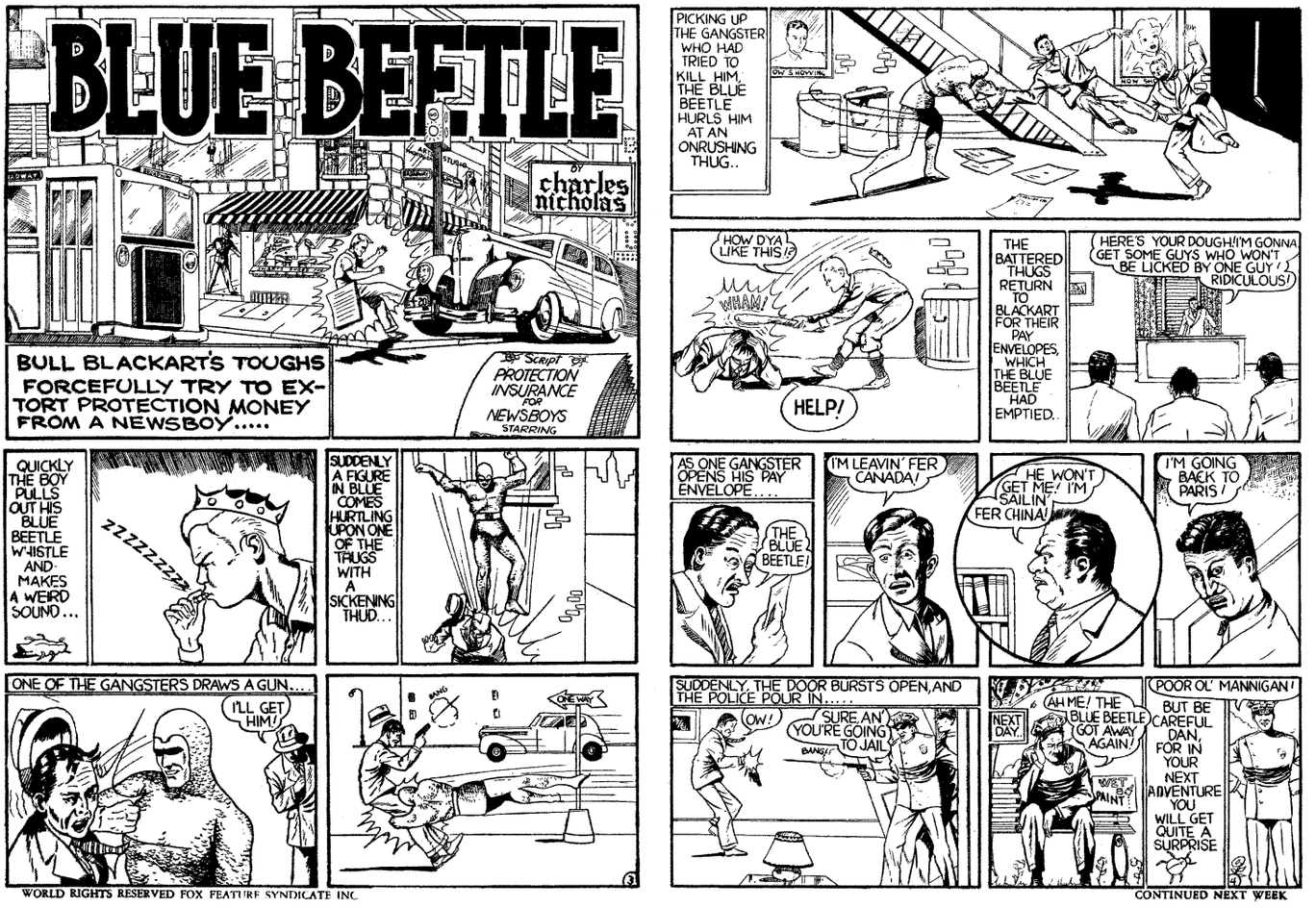

This Sunday strip reprinted *Mystery Men* #4: the first appearance of the Blue Beetle in his traditional costume.

"Despite your skepticism," Storm says as he turns from the window. "I know he exists and I'll find him. There's a story somewhere when killers like 'Croaker' Conway and crime czars like Dude Riley become irritated when I inquire about underworld rumors concerning this man the mobsters call 'The Blue Beetle'!"

"Look, Charley," Crane puts his hands on the spunky reporter's shoulders. "I'm editing the '*York City Sun*' not 'Grimm's Fairy Tales.' Now fix that hangover with a bicarbonate of soda. It'll chase away all those 'Blue Beetles' you've been seeing."

A silhouetted figure swings by the Sun's window as Storm makes a vow to his editor.

"Okay, I'll go quietly, Eli," Storm pronounces. "But I'll find the 'Blue Beetle' and when I do, I'll bring back an exclusive that'll blow all your page one stories into the recipe column."

With a powerful left arm, the Blue Beetle pulls himself onto the ledge of a building, pondering.

"So Charley Storm's gone beetle hunting, eh?" the Blue Beetle thinks. "He's a tough kid to elude—but I'm a tougher bird to catch!"

So started the first two days of the *The Blue Beetle* daily strip, drawn by a young Jack Kirby, before he partnered up with Joe Simon on *Blue Bolt*. Dramatic Kirby eartags dominate *The Blue Beetle*, as characters stand with powerful muscular and elongated bodies, punches are thrown like piledrivers and shadows pour over characters like black syrup. It was Kirby's first super-hero work and it smacked of Milton Caniff, using blacks to establish a noir-ish atmosphere as The Blue Beetle himself creeps through the shadows of York City. The art is heavily rendered with the youthful enthusiasm of a young Kirby, everything from the

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This "Sunday Strip" panel reprinted a story from *Mystery Men Comics* #8 (March 1940).

chain mail of Blue Beetle's armor to the cross-hatching of a gangster's automatic. According to Simon in December 2000, Kirby apparently wrote and inked *The Blue Beetle* strip as well, which also predates *Space Rangers* as Kirby's first published comic strip.

The Blue Beetle follows rookie cop Dan Garrett as he witnesses the murder of the city's D.A., and (as the Blue Beetle) tries to take down Dude Riley, the crime boss responsible for the murder. Along the way, the Blue Beetle saves murder witness Judy Grant from the D.A.'s murderer, Killer Conway, in a tussle that results in a forced confession and the Blue Beetle fleeing from a flock of policemen rushing to save Grant.

"They may be friends of mine but this get up may - er - confuse them," The Blue Beetle says as he rushes down the hall. As he reaches the roof, a new high-powered police rifle cracks out a shot, getting the mysteryman in the shoulder. Dragging himself along the rooftop, the Blue Beetle stops on a ledge as policemen surround him. The Blue Beetle drops off the roof, apparently suicidal, but dangling off a fire escape away from the eyes of the policemen. His magnetized "magneto" gloves give him a great grip...but not enough to support his weakened body as he finally drops with the "whirling vortex" of the streets rushing up towards him in a sequence similar to the montage in Raymond Chandler's 1944 movie *Murder, My Sweet*.

Awaking in the bedroom of Ruth Hale, a woman whose terrace the Blue Beetle's magnetized gloves clung to, Dan Garret is out of commission for the rest of Kirby's strip. The resulting story is a crime strip with a bed-ridden mysteryman, letting news reporter Charley Storm (who has become involved with Grant) and the D.A. become the protagonists for the remainder of Kirby's run.

The surprising thing about *The Blue Beetle* strip is that it differs so drastically from the comic book in a number of ways. Aside from the art in the comic strip being more fluid than that of the rather stiff comic book counterpart, the cast of supporting characters are radically different in the Jack Kirby strip.

Mike Mannigan makes his first appearance in the February 29 installment, but rarely appears in Kirby's storyline; perhaps Kirby felt Mannigan would be too comical for his dark crime strip. Rather than Dr. Franz, The Blue Beetle's partner in his war against crime is named Dr. Abe

Dan Garret swallows super-powers in this March 1940 strip.

Krantz (this precursor to Franz appeared in the first Blue Beetle story in *Mystery Men Comics* #1). As opposed to the generic racketeers that are smattered throughout the comic book stories, the Blue Beetle's opponent in the strip is the aforementioned Dude Riley, a sly gangster who always has his trademark pet by his side: an uninspired wolf named Wolf. Riley's equally colorful henchmen include Lucifer Long, a wiry man whose angular features earn him his nickname, the slobbish Fats Ricardi, and the dashing "Ladies Man." Kirby creations all, these slick gangsters offered a stimulating opposition to the Blue Beetle and Storm.

As Ladies' Man Lewis is captured on March 9, Jack Kirby is set free from *The Blue Beetle*. The next week, drawn by Louis Cazenueve, would wrap Kirby's storyline up with the capture of Dude Riley and the rest of his gang. Cazenueve's art was slicker and less-detailed than Kirby's. The figures operated in stark and heavy blacks, as opposed to Kirby's heavily rendered and intricately shadowed characters. His Blue Beetle wasn't drawn with heavy-looking chain-mail and didn't creepily skulk around rooftops like Kirby's had: he waded through mobs of criminals and sped around in a bullet-proof car.

Up to that point, *The Blue Beetle* had been a dramatic crime strip that actually featured very little of the hero himself, and had little to do with the comic book. That would change with the March 18 installment:

"And this is the Vitamin 2X capsule you discovered?" Dan Garret, his patrolman hat cocked back on his head, investigates the small capsule in Dr. Franz's lab.

"Yes," Franz confirmed. "It's the greatest ever made. It gives a man superhuman powers."

"I'll try it," Dan tilts his head back, holding a glass of water. "Mm. Tastes sweet."

Thanks to 2-X, the Blue Beetle would no longer find himself bruised but unbowed: he would now be near invincible. Dan Garret would lift a heavy metal beam over his head two days later, relishing in the effects of Franz's wonderdrug. Changing into his Blue Beetle costume, he would announce himself to thugs with a confident "Yes! The Blue Beetle!" before displaying his newfound resistance to bullets and pistol-whipping, the captions confirming that the 2-X has also made his skin "extra tough." The character who was felled by a single bullet a mere month ago was now a juggernaut. Blue Beetle's portable phone, straight from the comics and

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radio show, makes an appearance as well. Abe Krantz, like in the comics, mysteriously disappeared to make room for Dr. Franz.

The strip, which had started as a solid well-told continuity, suddenly developed the inconsistencies of its comic book counterpart. After interrogating thugs about a theater owner's murder, Blue Beetle then tries to save a kidnapped girl with no explanation, which then runs into a gang war between mobster Catelli (who kidnapped the token girl) and Little Lulu (not the comic strip character, obviously). A little bit of the grim Blue Beetle emerges on April 4, as the Blue Beetle hurls a grenade at a building full of gangsters: "They paid for the many crimes they committed," he grimly pronounces as he drives off with the (now) rescued girl and the captive Catelli. The Vitamin 2-X story, "The Blue Beetle's New Powers," was printed in the pages of *The Blue Beetle* #5 about four months later. It was undoubtedly cheaper for Fox to reformat the strips as comic book pages and also hints at a conscious effort on Fox's behalf to make a marketing effort with *The Blue Beetle*.

The April 18 strip presented a story which was also reformatted and printed in *The Blue Beetle* #4. With Dan Garret mercilessly gunned down by criminals heading a dope ring, it follows his recovery via Vitamin 2-X, and subsequent payback. The sequence ended on May 11 and was also the basis of the first episode of the radio show on May 15.

May 13 was the beginning of the "Ghosts of Denton Hall" story, one which was also printed in comic book form in *The Blue Beetle* #4. The strip sequence ended on June 3, but rather than ending the storyline completely, five panels were drawn in that bridge "Denton Hall" with yet another story printed in *The Blue Beetle* #4, "The Vanished Corpse," which ran until Jun 29. The strip sequences continued to double as comic book stories until this tip of Fox's comic strip iceberg inevitably melted. On November 26, an unconscious Blue Beetle was stuffed into a car and sent hurtling in the direction of a gasoline tanker. Only readers of the comics would know how it tied up, as *The Blue Beetle* quietly disappeared from the pages of the *Transcript*.

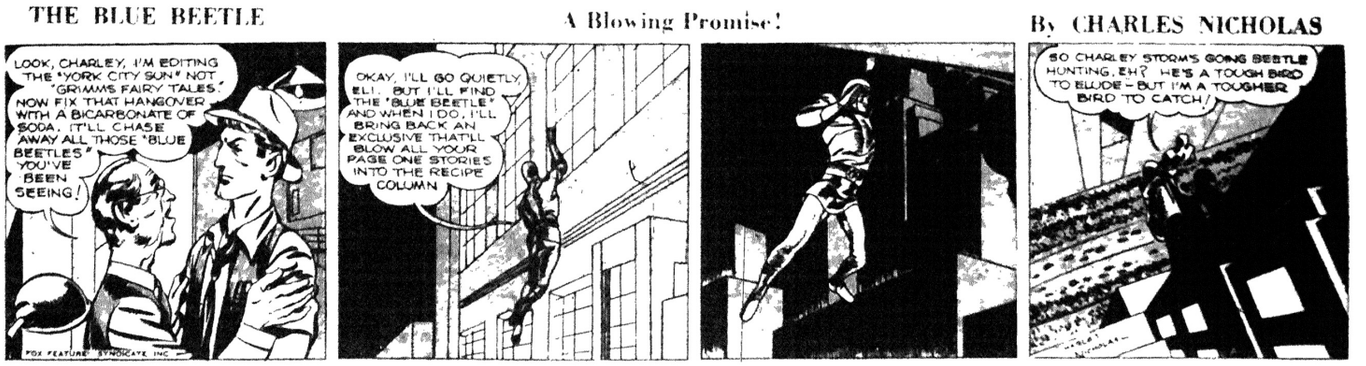
The death of *The Blue Beetle* comic strip was not the final nail in the character's publicity coffin, however: two months after his comic strip debut, the character had raided the airwaves in his own serialized radio show.

A bit of the old, pulpy Blue Beetle emerged on April 4, 1940.

Don't Miss Next Week's Thrilling Installment in the Amazing Story of The Blue Beetle

"THE KING" AND THE BEETLE: The Jack Kirby Blue Beetle daily strip

The following *Blue Beetle* strips (from January 8 to January 30, 1940), written and drawn by Jack Kirby, were reproduced from both microfilm of *The Boston Transcript* and copies of original proofs. Thanks to Will Murray for providing the proofs. Alas, we can only give you the first part of Kirby's Blue Beetle adventure...the entirety can be found on Greg Theakston's *The Complete Jack Kirby Volume One* CD Rom, available from Pure Imagination.

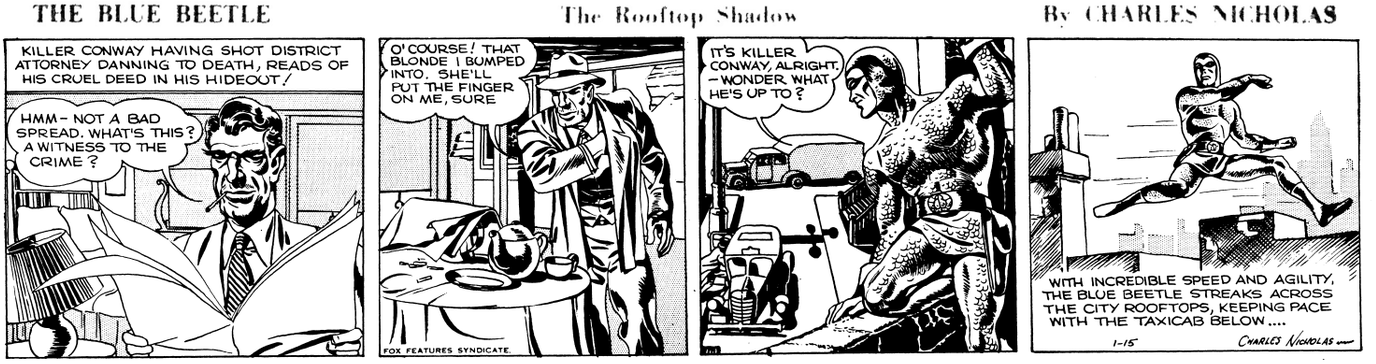


THE BLUE BEETLE — Cop Blows D. A. Goes! — By CHARLES NICHOLAS

THE BLUE BEETLE — This Job Is Done! — By CHARLES NICHOLAS

THE BLUE BEETLE — A Dire Prediction! — By CHARLES NICHOLAS

THE BLUE BEETLE — The Rooftop Shadow — By CHARLES NICHOLAS



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THE BLUE BEETLE — Killer in the Corner — By CHARLES NICHOLAS

THE BLUE BEETLE — Wolf in Photographer's Clothing — By CHARLES NICHOLAS

THE BLUE BEETLE — He's Not Kidding, Lady — By CHARLES NICHOLAS

THE BLUE BEETLE — Slip of the Lip — By CHARLES NICHOLAS

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RELEASE MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 1940

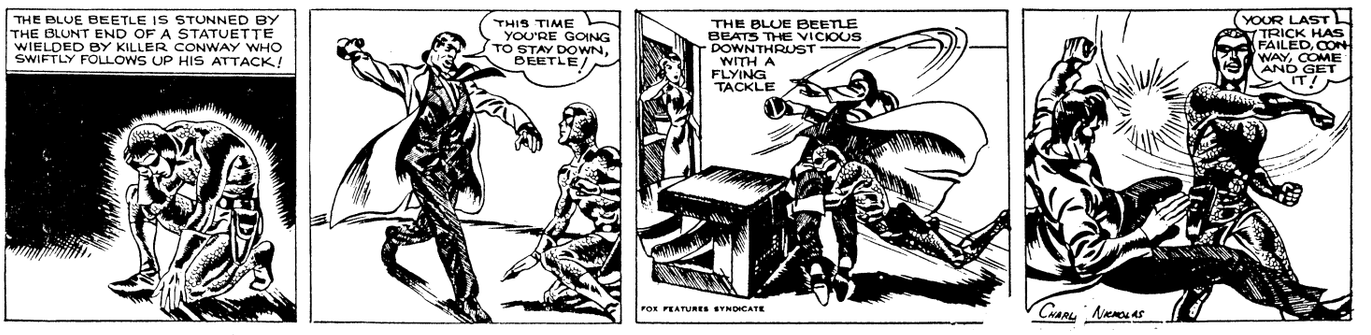
The Blue Beetle — CAUSE FOR KILLER'S CONSTERNATION — by Charles Nicholas

RELEASE TUESDAY, JANUARY 23, 1940

The Blue Beetle — FOULED ABOVE THE BELT — by Charles Nicholas

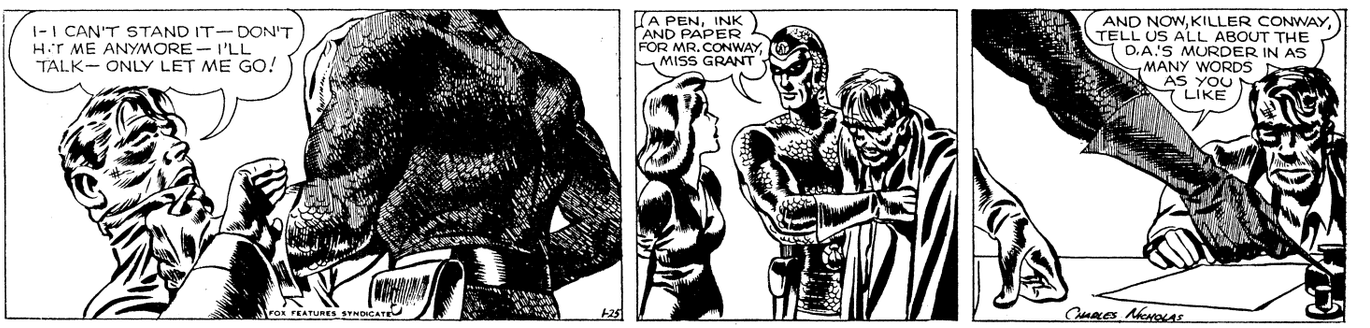
RELEASE WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 1940

The Blue Beetle — BEGINNING OF A BLITZKRIEG — by Charles Nicholas



RELEASE THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 1940

The Blue Beetle — THE MAN WHO KNOWS ALL — WRITES ALL — by Charles Nicholas



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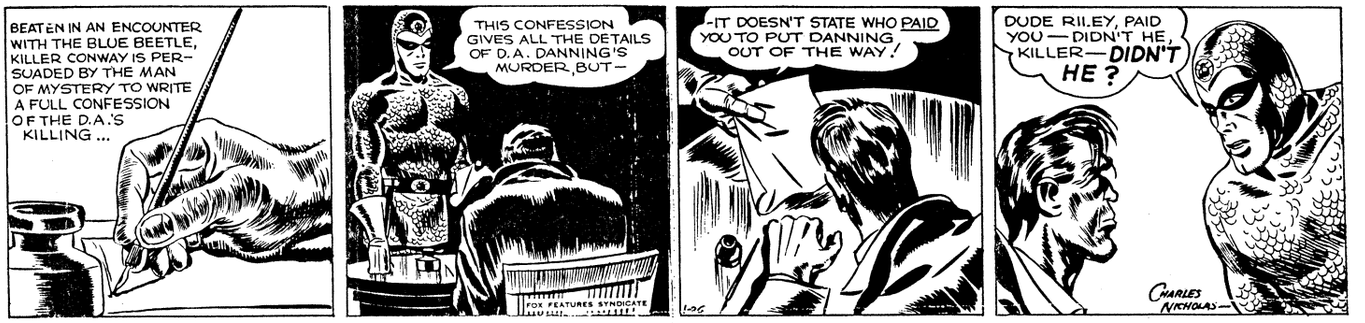
The Blue Beetle

RELEASE FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 1940

HE WON'T SQUEAL ON THE HEEL

by Charles Nicholas

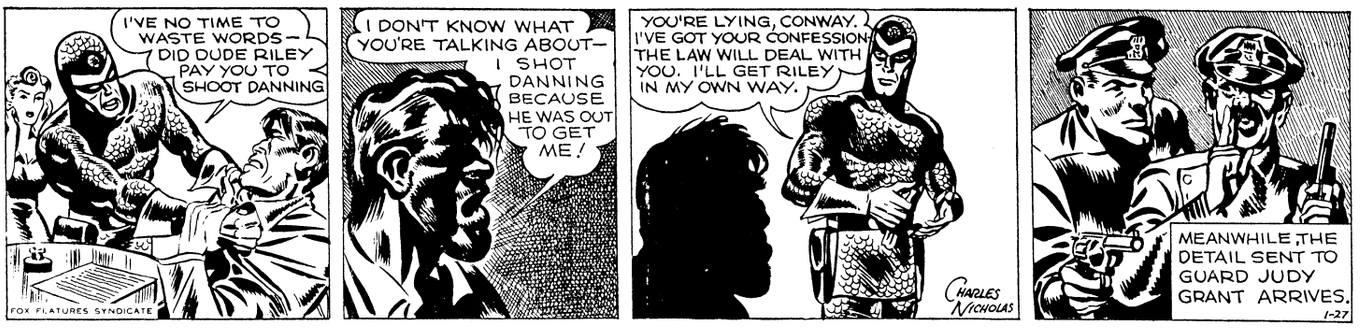


The Blue Beetle

RELEASE SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 1940

ARRIVAL OF THE BOYS IN BLUE

by Charles Nicholas



THE BLUE BEETLE

When Guests Drop In—With Guns

By CHARLES NICHOLAS

THE BLUE BEETLE

Message for Mannigan

By CHARLES NICHOLAS

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This recreation of *The Blue Beetle* #4's cover is by original artist Edd Ashe, and was provided by Heritage Comics.

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Gorilla gangsters with tommy guns? This Blue Beetle story from *Mystery Men Comics* #20 (March 1941) is an example of the Azure Avenger in his Golden Age prime, from creepy chain mail to dropping off of rooftops like his namesake. A tip of the hat to historian Will Murray for providing the scans from his original comic.

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MYSTERY MEN COMICS IS ON SALE THE 15TH OF EVERY MONTH

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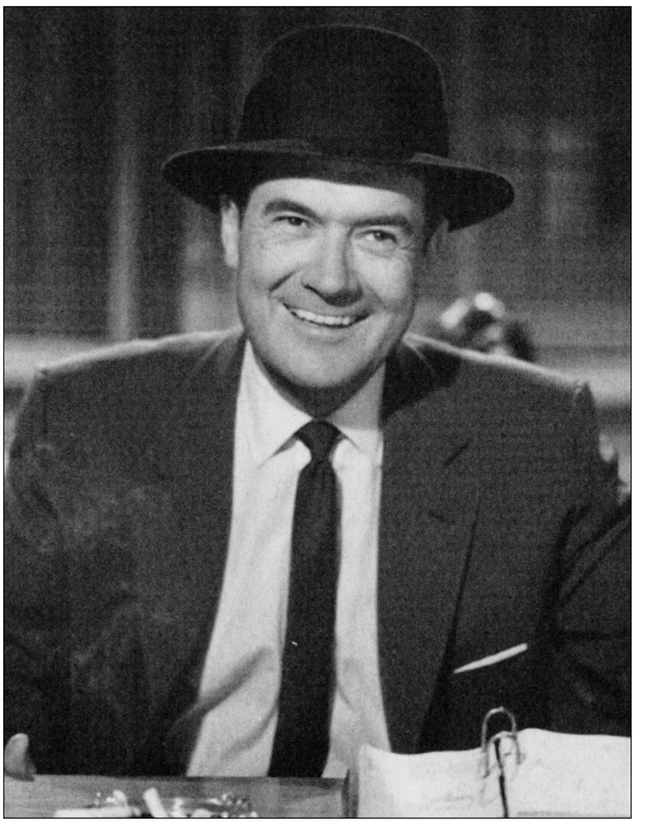
NIPPING IT IN THE BUD:
The Blue Beetle's Foray into Radioland

In its Golden Age, the land of radio harbored more than a handful of masked crimefighters and avengers: the Lone Ranger rode, the Shadow clouded men's minds, and the Green Hornet stung criminals. Before the advent of the television, radio shows based off of popular comic strips were not unusual. Heroes like Dick Tracy and Superman found themselves transformed from agents of the funnies pages to sound effects and disembodied voices.

The Blue Beetle first hit the airwaves on May 15, 1940, in a syndicated attempt that was perhaps doomed from the get-go. Frank Lovejoy, who would eventually become a prolific radio and movie actor (with parts ranging from the villainous Laugher on *The Shadow* to the starring role of reporter Randy Stone on *Nightbeat*), voiced the Blue Beetle and his alter ego Dan Garret for only the first four shows. Lovejoy brought a rather maniacal, almost sadistic, cackle to the character. His Blue Beetle seemed as if he took some sick pride in hurting criminals, not unlike a homicidal version of The Shadow.



Veteran character actor Frank Lovejoy.

Born in New York City in 1917, Lovejoy's father was a salesman for Pathé Films. Frank was a runner on Wall Street when the infamous 1929 stock market crash threw the country into the Great Depression, observing the "naked emotion" displayed by the people around him. After attending New York University and becoming a player in stock companies, he debuted on Broadway in 1934. The play, *Judgement Day*, went from September 12 to some time in December, with 92 performances.

The lights of Broadway didn't work well with Lovejoy, and he went back to stock companies. While waiting two weeks for a stock company to assemble in Cincinnati in 1934, Lovejoy got work at radio station WLW and stayed for a year. It was an unplanned entry into the foray of radio acting, a lightning bolt carried on radio waves, launching Lovejoy's career more than any stock company or Broadway role had before. By 1950, (by his estimation) Lovejoy had acted in 4,000 radio programs.

He was eternally the tough guy, his gruff and cocky voice emanating the type of guy you'd like to have covering your back in a barfight; he became a succession of cops, hard-nosed reporters, private investigators, thugs, and FBI agents. The 1949 movie *Home of the Brave* launched a film career that would befit every great character actor: a part in the cult Vincent Price vehicle *House of Wax* (playing, unsurprisingly, a cop), and a few starring roles like *I Was A Communist* for the FBI. On the television front, Lovejoy starred in the detective show *Meet McGraw*.

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This house ad from Fox Comics urged kids to tune in.

Listening to Lovejoy's 1950-1952 radio program *Nightbeat*, he exudes a combination of toughness and sensitivity as *Chicago Star* reporter Randy Stone. One can only imagine that toughness working as a pulp-inspired crimefighter.

Lovejoy would return to Broadway by the early '60s, eventually starring alongside wife Joan Banks in 520 performances of a New England stock company's production of Gore Vidal's *The Best Man*. On October 2, 1962, Lovejoy died in his sleep while staying at the Warwick Hotel. The doctors said it was a heart attack. It seems, according to fellow actor Paul Picerni, that Lovejoy had been no stranger to heart problems.

"When he did a series called *Meet McGraw*, I was cast in a guest part," Picerni told Tom Weaver for *www.bmonster.com*. "We were on the set one day, and he made a face and he sat down and he said [in an out-of-breath voice], 'Paul—do me a favor, will you? In my dressing room—on top of my dresser—you'll find a little bottle of nitroglycerin pills. Go get 'em for me, will ya?' I looked at his face, and I could see that he was in pain, and so I rushed and got the nitroglycerin. He took a couple of tablets and he said, 'Thanks a lot—thanks—' And at that moment, I suddenly liked Frank, I said to myself, 'He's okay,' because he trusted me enough to have me go get them, and not the assistant director or somebody else."

The episode in question aired on February 25, 1954, meaning that Lovejoy had been suffering for at least eight years, if not longer.

But before McGraw and Randy Stone, or the war movies, or Vincent Price—before Lovejoy's voice gained that fully gruff edge to it—he was Patrolman Dan Garret on *The Blue Beetle*. Listening to those early programs is a real change from his later, more well-written work. His tough guy banter, his voice going grim when dealing with criminals, or buoyant when around the leading lady of the episode, his cackle when he blows thugs away...all paints the picture of a crimefighter scarier than Superman or the Green Hornet.

Lovejoy wouldn't last long, however, moving on for reasons lost to time, after a few mere programs.

"I don't know how much Victor Fox had to do with the radio production, but [Lovejoy] quit after the first few radio episodes, which was probably because Victor Fox didn't pay him, or paid him so little," radio historian Jim Harmon concluded. "[Victor Fox] was notorious for outright stealing things."

Whatever the circumstances regarding Lovejoy's departure (Lovejoy had, ironically, appeared in a few episodes of the early *Superman* show), a later actor took up the reins of the Beetle for the fifth episode "The Invisible Ghost," which aired on May 29, 1940. This new actor who went uncredited, (like the other cast members) read the uninspired scripts with a fraction more enthusiasm than Lovejoy—and a fraction less talent.

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Like the episodes to follow, the premiere opens with patrolman Dan Garret visiting his "friend and advisor" Dr. Franz in his apothecary shop. This time, he conveniently recalls his origin and motivation behind becoming his armored alter ego.

All within the first few minutes of air time, the Blue Beetle's origin (pulled from the pages of *The Blue Beetle* #1) is established. Dan Garret is later gunned down while trying to apprehend a dope peddler in broad daylight, following the story from the fourth issue of the comic (as slap-dash as its comic book counterpart, the radio show seemed as if it was being written as it was transcribed onto record). While Dan seemingly needed his initial dose of 2X to possess his incredible strength and stamina in the inaugural episode, 2X wasn't mentioned again until one of the final episodes, "Underworld Goes Underground," in which Dan must take a dose in order to possess the Blue Beetle's uncanny abilities.

Each episode followed the basic formula of having "rookie patrolman" Dan Garret take a case, usually starting out of Dr. Franz's Apothecary Shop. How a mere patrolman could succeed as a detective and still remain a "rookie" is beyond logic. Maybe Police Commissioner Donnely wasn't the promoting type...

The Blue Beetle radio show was based off of a handful of stories from *Mystery Men Comics*, and even tied into the short-lived and then-dead comic strip by Jack Kirby and Arturo Cazeneuve with mention of York City. One would think that "York City" was synonymous with New York City, yet it is later revealed (in the final episode, nonetheless) that York City is located near Virginia Beach, which would place it either near Washington, D.C., or somewhere in Virginia or North Carolina. There is also the possibility that "York City" could represent Yorktown, Virginia, where the Revolutionary War ended.

"130 Million Americans", or so states this Fox house ad.

From its premiere to the episode of June 21, 1940, *The Blue Beetle* was a half-hour program. Afterwards, it reverted to two fifteen-minute parts spread out over the course of a week. The compact story format was unusual, as most serials ran in storylines of fifteen, not a mere two episodes.

"Rounding Up the Payroll Bandits, Part I" from June 26 was the first time that the show was broken up into two fifteen-minute chapters. An opening was tagged to the beginning of the second part, and the Blue Beetle's "moral," originally spoken by the Beetle himself was unceremoniously blurted out by the announcer. The morals were the show's attempt at seeming wholesome, though they rarely fit the episode. The best example would be in the June 5, 1940 episode, "Death Strikes from the East": the episode is littered with derogatory Asian stereotypes, yet the Blue Beetle praises racial equality!

The most aggravating aspect of *The Blue Beetle* lies, like the comics, in the character's inconsistencies. It seems that the writers couldn't decide which popular radio character to swipe from episode to episode. Dr. Franz was forever inventing some device or another to allow his advisee to infringe on somebody else's powers. In "The Invisible Ghost," Blue Beetle uses Franz's "invisible paint" to paint himself invisible to save an innocent man from the electric chair. Fans of *The Shadow* must have felt betrayed that, while Lamont Cranston required studies in the Orient to learn how to cloud men's minds, all it took Blue Beetle was a nice coat of paint to strike fear into the hearts of criminals!

Even Superman's X-Ray vision had competition with the Blue Beetle's "X-Ray camera with infra-red lens," which he used to take down a fortune-teller racket in "Spirits Don't Talk." The Man of Steel's heat vision had an equal in Dr. Franz's formula X-4, which could also melt through steel.

It seems that *The Blue Beetle* not only borrowed from other radio shows: there is at least one instance in which a story aped a competing comic book.

"The Frame Up," broadcast on June 12, 1940, followed the same plot as a *Superman* story in May 1940's *Action Comics* #24 (which would have come out around March), in which Superman saves a framed gambler. "The

Action Comics #24 (May 1940).
© DC Comics

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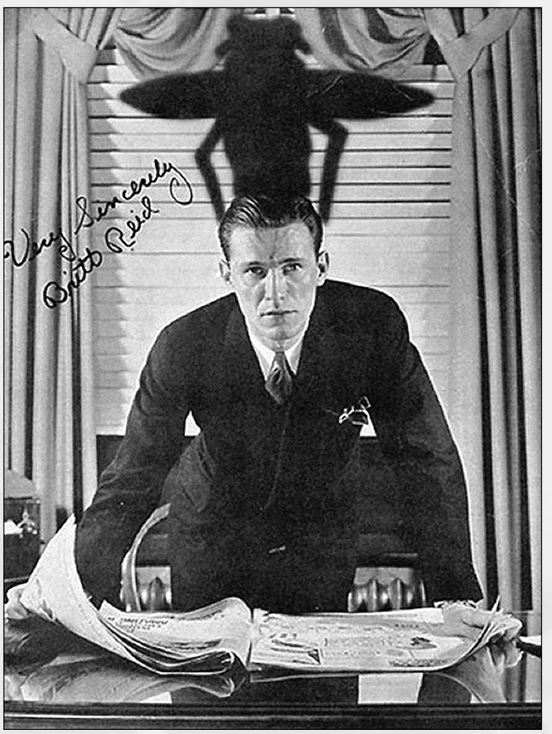
Frame Up" follows the *Superman* story in most every way: both heroes are led to the case via an ad calling for their help in the personal columns, both victims are framed in the same exact way, and both involve the heroes beating the electric chair with a governor's pardon.

Fox even promoted *The Blue Beetle* at the New York's World Fair, with a "Blue Beetle Day" on August 7, 1940. The event, a series of relays for 300 children, was broadcast over WMCA, 570 AM, in New Jersey. WMCA was one of the stations broadcasting *The Blue Beetle*, playing it at 4:00 Wednesday and Friday afternoons. Twenty-three years later, WMCA would become important to rock 'n' roll history, as the first to play The Beatles song "I Want to Hold Your Hand."

The second part of "Crime, Inc." (one of the better episodes, in which a crime ring dresses all of their hoodlums in Blue Beetle costumes) introduces the "Electric Ray," which Blue Beetle uses to "sting, as well as nip"...and actually executes an entire gang of criminals with. This once again dredges up the parallels between the "Gang Smasher" and the Green Hornet who always "stung." Dan Garret's partner, Mike Mannigan, is a bumbling Irish cop who belongs in the same club of popular gullible Irish supporting characters such as *The Green Hornet*'s Mike Axford. *The Blue Beetle*'s similarities to *The Green Hornet* lay in more than the Axford-Mannigan connection: Blue Beetle seems to rip-off George W. Trendle's masked crimefighter more than anyone else.

The opening of *The Blue Beetle* is perhaps the prime example of this. An organ blares tortured notes out amongst the siren that is the character's trademark, hoping that the listeners will piece the apparent banging of keys into something as dramatic as *The Green Hornet*'s "Flight of the Bumblebee" theme.



Actor Al Hodge played Britt Reid/The Green Hornet in 1938.

(*Organ music and sirens*) "The Blue Beetle! (*organ music and sirens*) "Sweeping down on the underworld to smash gangmen comes a friend of the unfortunate! Enemy of criminals! This mysterious, all-powerful character is a problem to the police, but a crusader of the law. In reality, Dan Garret, a rookie patrolman loved by everyone, but suspected by none of being The Blue Beetle!" (*Organ*) "As The Blue Beetle, he hides behind a strange mask and suit of impenetrable chain armor, flexible as silk, but stronger than steel!" (*Organ*)

However, when one listens to the opening of *The Green Hornet*, it's hard not to notice the similarities:

(*Hornet's buzzing*) "The Green Hornet!" (*Buzzing*) "He hunts the biggest of all game! Public enemies who try to destroy our America!" (*"Flight of the Bumblebee" theme music*) "With his faithful valet, Kato, Britt Reid, daring young publisher, matches wits with the underworld, risking his life that criminals and racketeers, within the law, may feel its weight by the sting of The Green Hornet!" (*Engine sound*)

It is doubtful that *The Blue Beetle* presented any real competition to *The Green Hornet*, or any other radio serial for that matter: *The Blue Beetle* survived only a scant four months, and had aired on about eighty stations during the height of its popularity.

On September 13, 1940, the second part of "Jewel Mystery of Channel Island" left the airwaves as the final episode of the Blue Beetle's foray into the world of radio. Perhaps it was a lack of listeners, or more likely Victor Fox's steady habit of not paying people, that led to the series' demise. Amazingly, *The Blue Beetle* had evolved into a rather clever mini-serial towards the end, showing more sense of direction than its comic-book counterpart. As it is, *The Blue Beetle* has become a very obscure footnote in the annals of radio history, much like the Golden Age comics themselves.

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THE BLUE BEETLE RADIO SCRIPT (TRANSCRIBED)
"The Dope Peddlers," Part I
Aired May 15, 1940; Syndicated

(*organ music, whistle blowing*)

ANNOUNCER
The Blue Beetle!

(*Magic Ray sound effect*)

Sweeping down upon the underworld to smash gangmen comes a friend of the unfortunate! Enemy of criminals! (*organ music*)
This mysterious, all-powerful character is a problem to the police, a crusader for law. In reality, Dan Garret, a rookie patrolman loved by everyone, but suspected by none of being The Blue Beetle!
As The Blue Beetle, he hides behind a strange mask and a suit of impenetrable blue chain armor, flexible as silk, but stronger than steel!

Today's episode of *The Blue Beetle* sends The Blue Beetle swooping down on a group of powerful underworld characters whose racket is dope. Will he be able to ferret them out? Can he cope with this mysterious ring of ruthless men single-handed? Can he discover their leader and bring him to justice?

As our story opens, our hero, Dan Garret, is visiting his friend and secret advisor Dr. Franz, who operates a little apothecary shop in one of the great city's side streets. He is restlessly pacing the floor in Dr. Franz's living room.

DAN
Look, Doc, why does there have to be so much red tape in police work?

FRANZ
Well, Danny, every officer has to have rules and regulations. That makes for efficiency.

DAN
Yes, but the criminals and the crooks we're set to catch aren't bound up in rules and regulations. I like police work, but I also crave action.

FRANZ
You seem to get plenty of it as The Blue Beetle. I've worried about you, Danny, the terrible risks you take. These crooks and gangsters are vicious, cold-blooded killers. They'd have no mercy on you if they caught you.

DAN
I can take care of myself. Besides, that suit of blue chain armor and that mask are great protection.

FRANZ
I hope they never catch you without it, or ever discover who The Blue Beetle really is. I'm afraid it would mean the end of Patrolman Dan Garret.

DAN
Well, after all, Doc, you're the only one who knows. Even Mannigan is always saying what he'd do if he caught The Blue Beetle.

FRANZ
He's the officer on the beat next to yours, isn't he?

DAN
Yes, he was my father's pal.

FRANZ
I see.

DAN
He got me on the police force after my father was killed by a gangster's bullet.

FRANZ
And, doesn't he suspect at all?

DAN
No, he doesn't. He's a good cop, but he's not very heavy above the ears.

NEWSBOY (*background*)
Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

DAN
What's that newsboy talking about? Something about a movie star committing suicide? Wait, I'll go get a paper!

NEWSBOY
Extra! Extra! Read all about it!
Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

DAN
Here you are, boy, give me one of those papers.

NEWSBOY
Yes, sir.

DAN
Thank you.

NEWSBOY
Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

DAN
Hey, look at this, Doc. Sandra Beaumont, the movie actress, committed suicide last night. The paper says she left a note on the dressing table which said 'Dope has become my master. No longer can I live without it. This is the end. Let my fate be a warning to all.'
(*beat*)
What do you think of that, Doc?

FRANZ
I think it's tragic, Danny.

DAN
So do I. I'm going to do something about that dope racket right now.

FRANZ
What are you going to do?

DAN
I'm going to ask the Commissioner to put me on special assignment, to try and uncover the leaders of that dope ring in this city.

FRANZ
You better be careful, Dan. They'll stop at nothing.

DAN
Well, if I can't uncover them as Patrolman Dan Garret—
(*beat*)
I'll get them as The Blue Beetle!

(*organ music*)

ANNOUNCER
As our next scene opens, Patrolman Dan Garret, Mike Mannigan, and Charley Storm—ace reporter of The York City Sun—are standing on the corner, watching a hotel suspected of being the dope ring's headquarters.

(*traffic noises*)

CHARLEY
Uh, huh, that's the place all right. Somebody tipped off my paper.

MANNIGAN
So why don't we go in and raid the place?

DAN
Just the two of us?

MANNIGAN
Sure.

DAN
Don't be silly, we've got no evidence. The commissioner wants evidence, that's our job. We watch everybody that goes in and comes out of that place.

MANNIGAN
Me? I like action.

DAN
So do I.
(*car pulling up*)
Hey, look. That shabbily-dressed man there. He just came out of that side entrance and gave a cigarette to that kid standing there.

MANNIGAN
So what?

DAN
Looks like the kid gave him some money for it.

CHARLEY
He's a dope peddler! He's selling dope cigarettes—marijuana!

DAN
Marijuana!? Boy, here's where I make a pinch!
Hey, you! Hold on a minute, I want to talk to you!

DOPE PEDDLER
Come and get me, copper!

DAN
Oh, yeah? You gotta travel fast to get away from me, brother!

MANNIGAN
Go get 'im, Danny! I'll pick up Clancy at the next beat! We'll head 'em off at the intersection!
(*whistle*)
Look, Danny's diving for 'im!

CHARLEY
He's got 'im!

MANNIGAN
Boy, that was a flying tackle if there sure was—

CHARLEY
Hey, look, that car there! There's a machine gun! Look out, Danny!

(*machine gun noise*)
(*car noise, driving off*)

MANNIGAN
I'm gonna take a shot with my revolver as they pass. Duck down behind those ashcans!
(*gunshots*)
Missed 'em, by golly! Did you get the license number of that car as she passed?

CHARLEY
Yup. DB83725—it's probably a stolen car. Hey, what about Dan and the dope peddler? Those murderers get 'em?

MANNIGAN
Looks like it. They're both stretched out in the street. You phone for the ambulance while I head 'em off.

CHARLEY
Okay, I'll phone my paper at the same time. Boy, what a story!
(*crowd noise*)

MANNIGAN
Come on, come on, here. Break it up, let's have a look at 'em.
Boy, they sure got this guy, he looks like a sieve. Sure and he'll never sell no more dope cigarettes to kids—he's dead.

CROWD
Look at the blood, will you?

CROWD
Yeah, look at it.

CROWD
That kid looks like he's dead, too.

MANNIGAN
Danny? Danny? It's Mannigan.
How are ya doing, Danny?

DAN
What happened? Where's the dope peddler?

MANNIGAN
He's dead. You tackled him, and some triggermen in a car machine-gunned you both.

(*sirens*)

DAN
I remember now, I saw the car coming.

MANNIGAN
Are you bad hurt?

DAN
I don't know...
I can't feel much, numb all over.

MANNIGAN
Here's the ambulance.
You'll get a swell ride to the hospital, Danny, and maybe a citation from the Commissioner for bravery in action!

(*organ music music, somber*)

COMMISSIONER
What's the verdict, Doctor? Will Patrolman Dan Garret live?

DOCTOR
Well, it's very doubtful, Commissioner. An operation is necessary to remove the bullet, but—he's so weak from loss of blood.

COMMISSIONER
That's tough. He's one of my best men, due for promotion, soon.

EXTRA
Message for you, Doctor.

DOCTOR
Oh, thank you.
(*beat*)
Pardon me, Commissioner. Ooh...This should be interesting to you, Commissioner. Read it.

COMMISSIONER
If my blood is the right type, I would like to volunteer as a blood donor for the brave Officer Garret.
(*beat*)
Why, this is signed by my daughter!

DOCTOR
Precisely.

COMMISSIONER
She's convalescing here from her accident!

DOCTOR
She's almost recovered, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER
Yes, but Doctor, but is she strong enough?

DOCTOR
I think so.

COMMISSIONER
Then, by all means, let her do it! I'm fond, as well as proud, of Dan Garret. He's a fine boy, like his Dad before him. It will also make my daughter very happy. I have a sneaking suspicion she likes young Garret.

(*organ music*)

NARRATOR
The Commissioner's daughter Mary's blood proved to be the right type, and the transfusion was performed. Later, Danny was operated upon and the machine gun bullet was removed from his abdomen. For days, he hovered between life and death. Then one night, when all was quiet, a strange man slipped by the nurse and stood behind Dan's bed.

FRANZ
Dan? Dan Garret?

DAN
(*weakly*)
Who is it...calling Dan Garret?

FRANZ
It is I, Dr. Franz, your friend. I've got something for you.

DAN
No, Doc...

FRANZ
Now listen, Danny: I want you to take this capsule, it's my secret 2-X formula. It will bring you a speedy recovery.

DAN
You sure?

FRANZ
I am positive. My formula will save your life, restore you to health in 24 hours. It will also give you greater vitality, keener eyesight, almost superhuman mentality, and will give you abnormal strength. You will be a tough hombre when you get out of here.

DAN
Give it to me. I've got to get out of here, there's important work to be done, and I've got to do it.

(*organ music*)

ANNOUNCER
The next morning, to the surprise of everyone, Dan Garret was completely recovered. From Mike Mannigan and Mary Donnelly, the Commissioner's daughter, who came to visit him, he learned that the Commissioner had ordered extensive raids on all opium dens in the city. At one place, they told him, the police had been blown to bits by dynamite planted by the dope ring before they fled. Dan insisted on being released from the hospital and restored to duty. By mid afternoon, he's back on his beat, fully recovered to health and strength by Dr. Franz's magic formula. That night, he visits the little apothecary shop of Dr. Franz.

(*door opening, bell ringing*)

DAN
Hello, Doc!

FRANZ
Hello, hello, Danny. Well, my 2-X formula worked, didn't it?

DAN
It sure did. Hey, have a look at this.

FRANZ
Oh, that bullet, huh?

DAN
Yeah, that came out of me.

FRANZ
Well, then, let's have a look at it under the microscope. Wait until I close up shop. Pull down the shades, would you, while I lock the door. There, now let's give this bullet the once-over under the microscope.
(*beat*)
Hmmm...hmmm...Very interesting. Very interesting, indeed.

DAN
What is it, Doc? Have you got something?

FRANZ
I think so. This bullet was fired from a Chaucat.

DAN
A Chaucat? What's that?

FRANZ
Why, that's what the soldiers in the last World War called a certain type of French machine gun, because they couldn't pronounce the real name.

DAN
Boy, that ought to be easy to trace. There can't be many of those in those town. Got any ideas?

FRANZ
Well, there's a French novelist by the name of Philip Redon, who collects interesting firearms as a hobby. He might know something about this gun.

(*organ music*)

NARRATOR
Out into the night went Dan Garret on the trail of the murder gun, but a changed Dan Garret—no longer is he in the blue uniform of the city's finest. He wears blue, but it's the blue chain armor of The Blue Beetle!

(*organ music*)
(*typewriter noise*)
(*Magic Ray sound effect*)

REDON
(*shocked*)
The Blue Beetle!

BLUE BEETLE
Drop that gun, Redon, I've got you covered!

(*gunshots*)

BLUE BEETLE
It's no use, Redon, your bullets can't pierce this chain armor I'm wearing.

(*gunshot, struggling*)

BLUE BEETLE
(*grim*)
I'm sorry to be so rough with you, but I wanted that gun of yours. Now pick yourself up. That's better. I see you recognize my little calling card—the sound of my Magic Ray Machine and the little beetle always signifies the presence of The Blue Beetle.

REDON
You frightened me, Monsieur. I fired from nervousness. I had no desire to injure The Blue Beetle.

BLUE BEETLE
I see.

REDON
Oui, Monsieur. What is it you desire?

BLUE BEETLE
I understand you have an interesting collection of firearms.

REDON
I make a hobby of collecting unusual firearms.

BLUE BEETLE
You own a Chaucat automatic machine gun?

REDON
Oui, sir.

BLUE BEETLE
You have the only one in the city, I believe.

REDON
That, Monsieur, I do not know.

BLUE BEETLE
I'd like to see it.

REDON
Certainly, Monsieur. Right, this way.

BLUE BEETLE
And no funny business.

REDON
Yes, I'm not in the mood for oh, what you call, this funny business.

BLUE BEETLE
Good.

REDON
Now, here you are, Monsieur. This is the gun cabinet. The Chaucat, she is—
(*shocked*)
Monsieur! She is gone!

BLUE BEETLE
Gone?

REDON
Oui, Monsieur! Always, she is here in display —

BLUE BEETLE
Come on, Redon, your pretended surprise isn't fooling me! Cut it out! Maybe you're on the level, but then again, maybe you're not. I'll just dust this glass for fingerprints and then take a photograph. Now you stand over there, and don't make any false moves.

(*footsteps*)

BLUE BEETLE
Now, let me see. A little here, some more here. There are several fingerprints, some of them yours, of course. Bring that floorlamp over here when I photograph you, now hold it steady. That's right, now that's gotta—

REDON
(*nervously*)
Find something?

BLUE BEETLE
Maybe yes, and maybe no. Now you get this straight, Redon: If you want to finish that novel or whatever you were typing when I came in, just forget you ever saw The Blue Beetle!

REDON
I assure you, Monsieur, I have no wish—

BLUE BEETLE
Good! If you're on the level, you're safe. If you're not — well, the next time you meet The Blue Beetle, it'll be just too bad.

(*organ music*)

This is only the first half of the Blue Beetle's first radio adventure. The entire run of programs can easily be found online in mp3 form. This author highly recommends checking out *www.otrcat.com*.

The Blue Beetle Episode Guide

THE DOPE PEDDLERS (5/15/40)
The premiere show also makes mention of Dan's father's death at the hands of gangsters and introduces Vitamin 2-X when it's administered to Dan after he is nearly gunned to death. He uses his new strength and the Blue Beetle's Magic Ray weapon, to pursue the Dope Ring.
Adapted from *The Blue Beetle* #1 and *The Blue Beetle* #4

SABOTAGE AND LIQUIDATION (5/17/40)
Dan is sent on detail to guard a special experimental fighter plane. He and Mannigan watch it crash and, through both the wreckage and Dr. Franz's expertise with a microscope, Dan finds out that it had been sabotaged. Jane Darryl comes out of nowhere to serve as the damsel in distress, and the Blue Beetle fights the evil spy X-13.
Adapted from *The Blue Beetle* #2

MURDER FOR PROFIT (5/22/40)
When a banker is murdered on the operating table, Dan suspects it is so a gang of crooks can manipulate the stock market. Armed with Formula X-4, which eats through steel, the Blue Beetle is charged up by Franz's "Radio Locator," which zaps him full of enough energy to beat the baddies. An unusual side effect: it makes his "eyes shine like searchlights"...
Adapted from *The Blue Beetle* #2

BLASTING THE DYNAMITE GANG (5/24/40)
A band of burglars dynamite around the city, bringing terror and mass burglary. The head of the gang is the Octopus, who sends a threatening telegram to the Mayor, ordering him to shut off the electricity. The Octopus plans on stealing Blue Beetle's armor and Magic Ray, and the Blue Beetle must fight his way through the villain's lair.
Adapted from *Mystery Men Comics* #8

THE INVISIBLE GHOST (5/29/40)
Like the Green Hornet, the Blue Beetle battles slot machine fraud. The new actor steps into the role of Dan Garret with this episode. This episode also marks the use of Dr. Franz's "invisible paint," which allows Blue Beetle to emulate The Shadow this time around!
Adapted from *Mystery Men Comics* #6

DEATH RIDES ON HORSEBACK (6/3/40)
A masked rider shoots cops and retreats into the 'vast wilderness of the city park.' The Blue Beetle investigates while Joan Mason, a girl reporter no longer content to write about "gardens," goes missing while investigating the masked rider. The Blue Beetle saves Joan after he is also subdued by the masked rider. She helps him out, claiming to be 'a Texas Ranger's daughter.'
Adapted from a text story in *The Blue Beetle* #1

Blue Beetle #2 (May-June 1940).

DEATH STRIKES FROM THE EAST (6/5/40)
The Blue Beetle pursues the Purple Dragon, a white man who is extorting money from the China-towners of York City and plots to murder the Commissioner of Merchants.

SEA SERPENT (6/7/40)
The Blue Beetle uses his 'Poison Detector Ring' to beat a mysterious sea serpent near a resort, all while saving Joan Mason.

THE FRAME UP (6/12/40)
Blue Beetle once more drags out the invisible paint, this time to save a man framed for murder. Mention is made of Dr, Franz's 'midget portable television set' and the Blue Beetle employs the 'midget recording device.'

SPIRITS DON'T TALK (6/14/40)
Dan and Mike investigate a psychic séance racket, with Dan using his X-Ray camera with special infra-red lens. As the Blue Beetle, he crunches down on the mastermind behind the whole racket.

THOROUGHBREDS ALWAYS COME THROUGH (6/19/40)
Dan comes across a racket involving a disguised thoroughbred horse, and goes after the criminals with his midget portable television set!
Adapted from *The Blue Beetle* #2

SMASHING THE ARSON RING (6/21/40)
Dan tries to break an arson ring, perpetuated by a one-armed man with the unfortunate name of...Stumpy! It starts in a burning building, and ends on the waterfront in one of the better episodes.

ROUNDING UP THE PAYROLL BANDITS: PART I (6/26/40)
This is the first time the program is split into two parts. Dan and Mike stumble upon one of the payroll robberies scourging York City, and Dan shoots a bandit. The bandit dies before he can fully reveal the secret of the mastermind! Will Dan find out in time?

ROUNDING UP THE PAYROLL BANDITS: PART II (6/28/40)
In an act of blasphemy, Blue Beetle pursues a crook in the middle of a church service, exposing the mastermind behind the payroll robberies...before the mastermind commits suicide.

CRIME, INC.: PART I (7/3/40)
A group of fake Blue Beetles rob banks, kidnap the commissioner's daughter and blow up the mayor's office. Can the real Blue Beetle convincingly pose as one of the impostors and take the whole gang down?

CRIME, INC.: PART II (7/5/40)
Dan is found out, but the baddies brilliantly deduct that he is *not* the real Blue Beetle. Armed with his new Electric Ray Pistol, so that he can 'sting, as well as nip,' the Blue Beetle goes after the gang to save the commissioner's daughter.

SAVED BY A HAIR: PART I (7/10/40)
The Blue Beetle tries to save a framed parolee, but is distracted by a kidnapping plot.
Adapted from *The Blue Beetle* #2

SAVED BY A HAIR: PART II (7/12/40)
Left a prisoner for Mannigan to arrest, The Blue Beetle escapes to take down the kidnappers of the parole commissioner's daughter.
Adapted from *The Blue Beetle* #2

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FINESSE IN THE DIAMONDS: PART I (7/17/40)
The Blue Beetle is above solving a case of stolen diamonds—until he find out it's the sister of Charlie Storm's girl who is framed for the theft.

FINESSE IN THE DIAMONDS: PART II (7/19/40)
The Blue Beetle uncovers an insurance fraud plot that involves several duplicates of a stolen necklace.

SABOTAGE, INC.: PART I (7/24/40)
Dan and Mike receive a strange phone call and find the caller dead at his apartment, stabbed mercilessly. This story starts outside of the apothecary shop for once. Without explanation, the Blue Beetle ties the murder into a Canadian drug-running ring.

SABOTAGE, INC.: PART II (7/26/40)
The murdered man was killed by a bizarre icicle-gun rigged out of a child's air rifle...or so Dr. Franz says, as the Blue Beetle is stranded on a munitions train.

SMASHING THE RESTAURANT RACKET: PART I (7/31/40)
Dan goes after the Cosmopolitan Restaurant Owner's Association, a protection racket against restaurant owners. Dan crashes a meeting but is found out and, as the Blue Beetle, falls prey to the racket's booby trap.

SMASHING THE RESTAURANT RACKET: PART II (8/2/40)
It turns out Joan Mason happened to be trapped in the burning building with the Blue Beetle and, of course, he has to come to her rescue as well. The Blue Beetle goes after the real head of the racket with the help of the mayor and Mannigan!

TWO RACKETS IN ONE: PART I (8/7/40)
York City is faced with a Trucking War and a Poultry War! A mean-spirited pedestrian causes a truck to crash! A garage is set on fire! A man eats poisoned mushrooms! The Blue Beetle is taken down by a roomful of Mexicans and left for the cops!

TWO RACKETS IN ONE: PART II (8/9/40)
The Blue Beetle steals an army plane to take the head of both rackets down, once and for all! Fortunately, Uncle Sam oversees this little bit of grand theft on the Beetle's behalf because, after all...it wasn't *that* dinged up when he returned it.

UNDERWORLD GOES UNDERGROUND: PART I (8/14/40)
The Blue Beetle goes undercover to find out why an old college buddy's mining operation has been constantly sabotaged by a rival. Caught by the rival's men, The Blue Beetle is locked in a decompression chamber. Will he die from a case of the bends?

Mystery Men Comics #16 (November 1940).

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UNDERWORLD GOES UNDERGROUND: PART II (8/16/40)
The Blue Beetle fails to stop the badguys from causing a mining accident...but he can at least save the miners after.

DANCING GHOST OF ROCKING HILLS: PART I (8/21/40)
Dr. Franz gleans a message from a riddle-like classified ad to the Blue Beetle, and by a sheer long-shot solves the cryptic message, sending Blue Beetle out to the apparently haunted Rocking Hills crag. Blue Beetle falls into a dungeon while trying to save a rich heiress.

DANCING GHOST OF ROCKING HILLS: PART II (8/23/40)
The heiress' lawyer, it turns out, is heading a counterfeiting ring at the mansion...and is ratted out to the police by the Blue Beetle. Oh, yeah, and Blue Beetle calls a clubfooted villain a "cripple."

WHALE OF PIRATES FOLLY: PART I (8/28/40)
Dan and Doc Franz meet a perfume smuggler, and Dan pursues a smuggling ring in York City. The Blue Beetle is knocked out and thrown underwater, tied in a net. Is he all washed up?

WHALE OF PIRATES FOLLY: PART II (8/30/40)
The Blue Beetle fights the smugglers off their submarine in Pirates' Folly, an abandoned cave used by pirates.

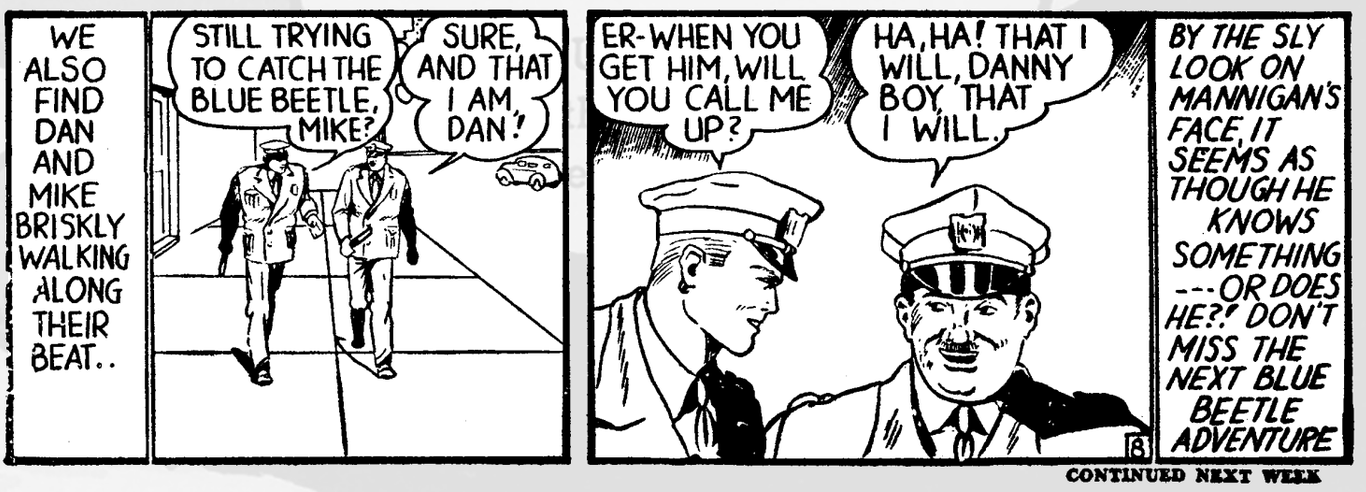
ASYLUM OF DR. DREAR: PART I (9/4/40)
Banker Tilden's foster daughter is suspicious when he goes to Dr. Drear's Asylum, and comes to Dan to look into the matter. Dan realizes the patient at Drear's isn't the banker, and is caught when he attempts to rescue him as The Blue Beetle.

ASYLUM OF DR. DREAR: PART II (9/6/40)
Blue Beetle saves Tilden, just in time to keep the banker's crooked nephew (the rat) from keeping the money that was supposed to go to a children's hospital.

JEWEL MYSTERY OF CHANNEL ISLAND: PART I (9/11/40)
Dan and Mike are sent to a resort on Channel Island to investigate a rash of jewel robberies. The Blue Beetle appears the night a woman's jewels are stolen, proclaims he knows the identity of the robber...and jumps down a sheer cliff wall to his apparent death!

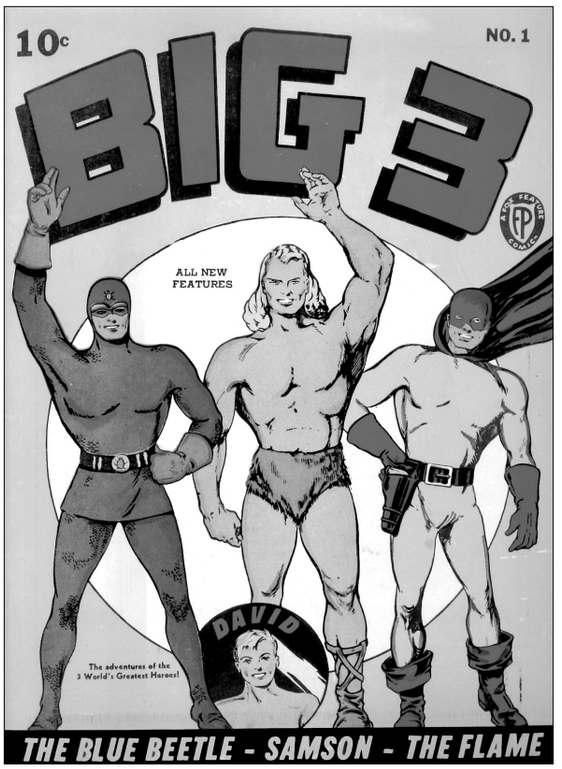
JEWEL MYSTERY OF CHANNEL ISLAND: PART II (9/13/40)
Using radioactive jewels, The Blue Beetle tracks the jewel thieves down and lets Mannigan take the credit.

Final panels from the Blue Beetle's first Sunday newspaper strip.



THE GOLDEN AGE PART II: From Holyoke to Fox and Back

Fox's *Big 3* #1 (Fall 1940) and DC's 1940 *New York World's Fair Comics.*

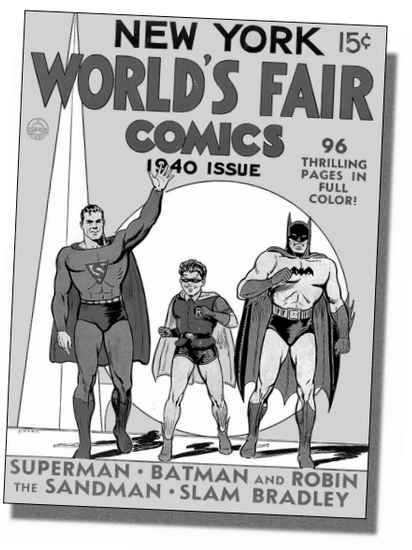


Despite the twin failures of the strip and radio show, the Blue Beetle continued on exclusively in comic books, appearing in all thirty-one issues of *Mystery Men Comics* and in the short-lived *Big 3* anthology.

Big 3 was most likely Fox's answer to Detective Comics' *1940 New York World's Fair* comic book: the cover to *World's Fair* (drawn by Jack Burnley) is not only the first time Superman, Batman, and Robin appeared together, but was an action-packed promotional comic between Detective and...well, the World's Fair. The cover of *Big 3* #1 features the Blue Beetle, Samson, and the Flame, and is almost a dead ringer for Burnley's cover, even down to Blue Beetle's waving like Superman.

Blue Beetle gets the main story, drawn slickly by "Charles Nicholas"...the Blue Beetle called into action by the fifth page. He's no longer sticking to the shadows, but is dropping bug-like off of rooftops in his creepy chain-mail armor, his body twisting powerfully to grab ledges as he continues his descent. The Blue Beetle would hop from the ground, knees bent up towards his chest, leaping over cars and from roof to roof. He almost always made Joan Mason's apartment the first stop, getting information from her on whatever case he was working on, or ironically arriving in the nick of time to save her from kidnappers or villains. It was a new angle to the character, going from pulpy crimefighter to acrobatic adventurer ...but one that worked.

The adventures would remain off-the-wall, with the Blue Beetle solving the mystery of exploding gorillas and villains who used voice projection on corpses to cash out on life insurance policies. They possessed a crude charm and, for a time, always had an explosion around the third panel: an edict from Victor Fox, given to editor Joe Simon as a means to boost sales.



An ad for the *Blue Beetle* radio show is tucked after the *Blue Beetle* story, urging kids to "Ask your favorite local station to have *The Blue Beetle* on the air." Given Fox's Blue Beetle Day on August 7, 1940 and the Fall 1940 cover date of *Big 3*, Fox may have put *Big 3* together to compete with Detective's *World's Fair* comic.

Many of the early 1940s Fox Comics were drawn by the trio of Pierce Rice and Arturo and Louis Cazenueve. Aside from several *Blue Beetle* stories (Cazenueve's work appeared as early as *The Blue Beetle* #2), their artwork also appeared on *The Eagle* and *The Green Mask*. Like the early Fox line-up, this team originated from Eisner and Iger.

The 23 year-old Rice arrived at Eisner and Iger in 1939, where he met the Argentina-born Arturo Cosine. Cosine's brother Louis would join them, and the three would leave for their own studio space on 42nd

—[illegible] by [illegible] Chamber Trio.
10:30 A. M.—Blue Beetle Day, sponsored by Fox Feature Syndicate; 300 children to participate in final running of relay races, preliminaries of which were conducted in the city parks by forty-two Brooklyn theatres. Broadcast over WMCA, noon. Field of Special Events (H-15).
11 A. M.—Crime and fire prevention exhib[illegible] by New York Po-

The New York World's Fair's "Blue Beetle Day", as announced in *The New York Times*.

Street. The Cosines changed their names to Cazenueve, and the trio started packaging comic book stories, with Fox their primary account. Rice would do most of the penciling, while the Cazenueve brothers the inking. With contorted figures in action, inked in a distinctive and loose brush-line, their artwork remains among the most recognizable and distinctive from that period; their work appearing in comics for Harvey, Detective Comics, and MLJ.

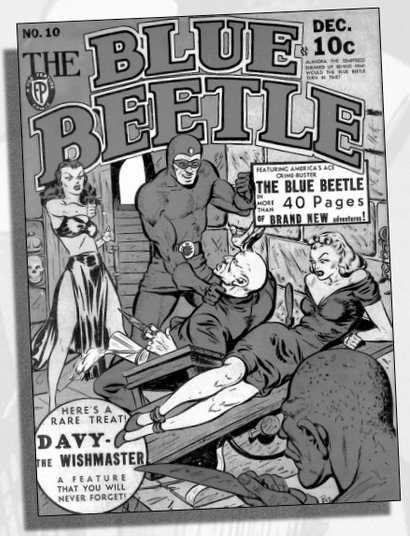
Rice left comics in the 1950s and remained active as both an artist and a teacher. The intellectual Rice would also write an art history book, *Man As Hero: The Human Figure in Western Art*, before his death.

Ramona Patenaude, one of the early female comic artists, provided many of the *Blue Beetle* bondage covers from late 1941, including those for *Blue Beetle* #10-12. Very little is known of this early female comics artist, except that she left the field in the mid-'50s. Having drawn both issues of *V... Comics*, Patenaude also drew the final issue of a Fox Comic before Fox's brief hiatus.

Joe Simon left Fox Comics with newfound partner Jack Kirby after about three months; W.W. Scott was briefly hired as editor, and was then followed by Abner Sundell. As editor, Scott hired soon-to-be prolific comic writer Robert Kanigher (who would later co-create *Sgt. Rock*, the Silver Age *Flash*, and *The Metal Men* for Detective/National Comics). The ever-observant Kanigher described Scott as having "a wispy moustache down which a rivulet of saliva flowed from a corncob pipe clenched in his teeth; his eyes were like bouncing marbles; he wore high-button shoes; and in his steambath office in New York in July, without air conditioning he always wore long johns."

Kanigher, who wrote five years of *The Blue Beetle*, recalled his first meeting with Scott:

> *I answered an ad and walked into an office about a mile long. At the end of it is a desk about the size of a football field. Behind it is a bald head.*
>
> *The bald head tells me, "Tell me a story."*
>
> *Without breaking stride, I said "A skeleton is driving an open convertible from Times Square (not someone in a costume, but a real skeleton) and people are running in sheer panic."*
>
> *He said, "I like a man who thinks on his feet."*



Blue Beetle #10 (December 1941).

The story that Kanigher described was published in *Big 3* #3 from May of 1941. The story opens with the skeleton in an open convertible, about to mow pedestrians down when Mike Mannigan and Dan Garret intervene, causing the car to crash into a streetlight. Approaching the car, Dan recognizes a "Magneto-coordinator" that has powered the skeleton. Dashing off into Franz's Apothecary Shop, Dan changes into his crimefighting guise of the Blue Beetle and takes to the rooftops. Dropping down like his namesake, the Blue Beetle allies with Joan Mason against the evil Dr. Krako, who has been powering the skeletons by remote. After that script, Scott "ordered Blue Beetles by the yard" from Kanigher.

With dark, bushy eyebrows, a hawkish nose, and ever-present pipe, Kanigher was famous for his harsh manner. A brilliant writer whose work was either deep in human drama or absurdity—or even both, in some cases—Kanigher mixed genres in an imaginative and, well, *wonky* way. Love or hate the man and/or his work, he had a flavor all his own.

His *Blue Beetle* stories wouldn't differ, from the Beetle being cloned by a mad scientist, to his keeping his costume in a shrunken size and enlarging it with "enlargo liquid" before going into action.

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Kanigher later reused the costume concept for the Silver Age Flash's costume, which was kept in a shrunken form in a ring.

The Blue Beetle crossed the ocean to France in the early '40s, was recolored red and reprinted as *The Steel Phantom*, which was the publishers' melding of the Blue Beetle and Superman into one character.

"I do know for a fact that in 1941, Hurrah published a recolored (red) version of the Golden Age *Blue Beetle* under the name '*Fantome d'Acier*' (*Steel Phantom*)," French cartoonist Jean-Marc Lofficier said. "Because that way, he looked more similar to the Phantom (whose suit was colored red in France too) which was a more popular character."

Blue Beetle writer (and DC Comics legend) Robert Kanigher.

Fox faced even further legal trouble on March 6, 1942, when many of his creditors (including publishing and engraving houses) forced him into bankruptcy. Owing upwards of $100,000, Fox's situation had been contributed to when his distributor, Colonial News, Inc., went under owing him $173,551.

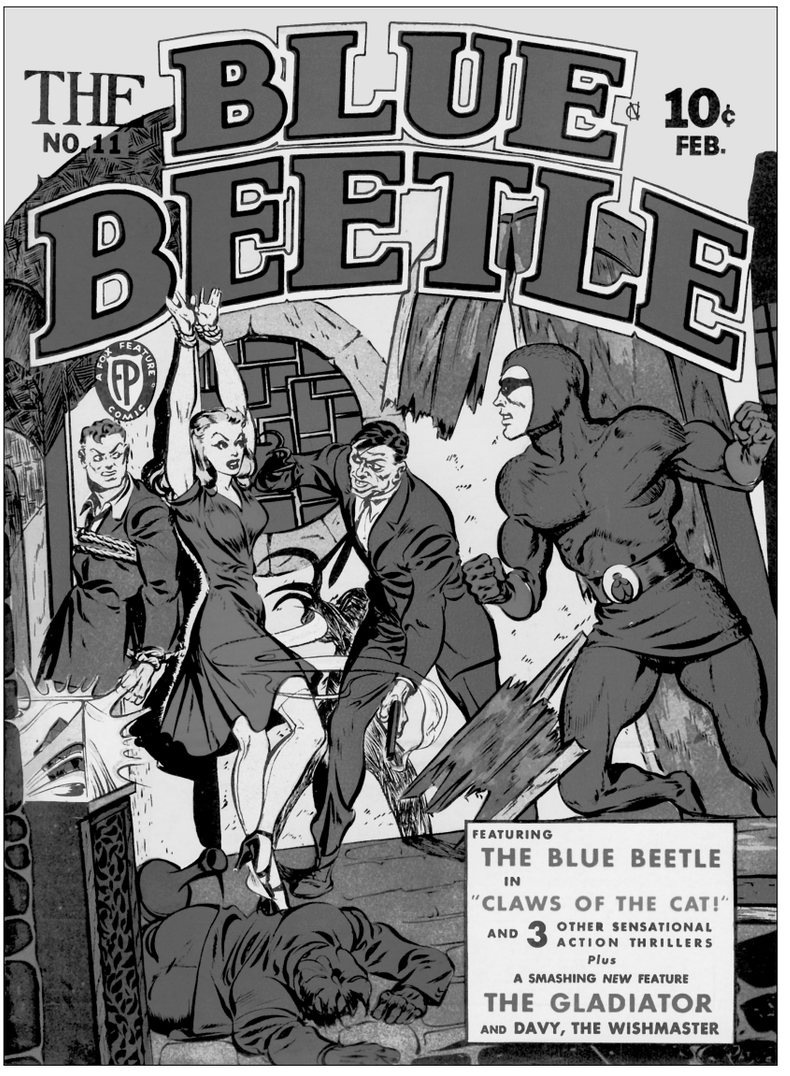
When Victor Fox left the comic book business in 1942, Fox Comics disappeared.

"I remember one day Al Harvey coming in to where we were drawing and telling me 'Chuck, you better start looking for another job," Cuidera told historian Will Murray. "'This guy's going to jail,' referring to old man Fox. He owed everybody and his brother."

Victor Fox disappeared for a few years, with the story often that the draft dodger from the first World War enlisted in the second to avoid debt. Victor Fox may have gone one up to avoid getting drafted this time around: he got married.

On August 8, 1943 the "King of Comics" gained a queen in Carolyn Bellvage. One year later, on August 21, 1944, their daughter Victoria Anne was born. Whatever his plans and actions after his departure, the comics world had still not heard the last of Victor Fox...

(below) *Blue Beetle* #11 (February 1942) cover by Ramona Patenuade.



Four months after the last Fox issue (Feb. 1942's #11), *The Blue Beetle* returned with June 1942's #12. Fox's apparent printer in Holyoke, Massachusetts decided to launch into the comics business by taking over the publishing of *The Blue Beetle* and a few other Fox characters to recoup money owed by Fox. In the process, they decided to add a title or two of their own.

For decades several comic books were printed out of Holyoke, everything from the American Comics Group to Timely (later Marvel) Comics. The average print run for the average Golden Age comic book would be upwards of 300,000 to 500,000 copies; a significant amount more than the roughly 10,000 copies printed of a comic book in the early 21st century.

The Blue Beetle #12 and #13 utilized inventory material from Fox (much like Fox most likely started *The Blue Beetle* using inventory from Eisner & Iger); the cover to #12 even has a blank spot where the Fox Comics logo was removed at the last minute. *The Blue Beetle* #13 has only one fully produced ad: a full

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Ramona Patenuede's cover to *The Blue Beetle* #12 (June 1942), the first issue after Holyoke took over (notice the white area where a Fox logo had been cut out).

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color back cover ad for Holyoke's *Captain Aero Comics*. The inside covers have bland, constipated typeset ads without any graphics, most likely thrown together right before publication.

The next issue was the start of original material from Holyoke; The Blue Beetle was now "Secret Service Agent Dan Garret, alias the fearless Blue Beetle" and gained an obligatory sidekick in the form of Sparkington J. Northrup, a blond kid in a legless version of Blue Beetle's costume. Blue Beetle would also face his first nemesis through Holyoke: the villainous Skull. "Sparky's" name mysteriously changed to "Spunky" by issue #17, and he was gone by #30.

Other changes in the Holyoke issues of *The Blue Beetle* included turning York City into Central City, as well as the Blue Beetle traveling abroad for undercover missions (ala Simon & Kirby's *Captain America*). Joan Mason was usurped by new leading lady Sally Kirby. Racketeers were *passé* with the passing of the Great Depression, and Nazis were now in vogue, such as the deformed and masked General Wiltz, or the Beetle's own identical Nazi counterpart, Fritz.

Like most Golden Age heroes, the thugs and mobsters of the earlier covers were replaced with Nazis and battlefields on *The Blue Beetle*, instantly marking him a patriotic hero. For two issues, The Blue Beetle was even kicked off the cover and the lead story spot, traded off for images of battlefields and dogfights.

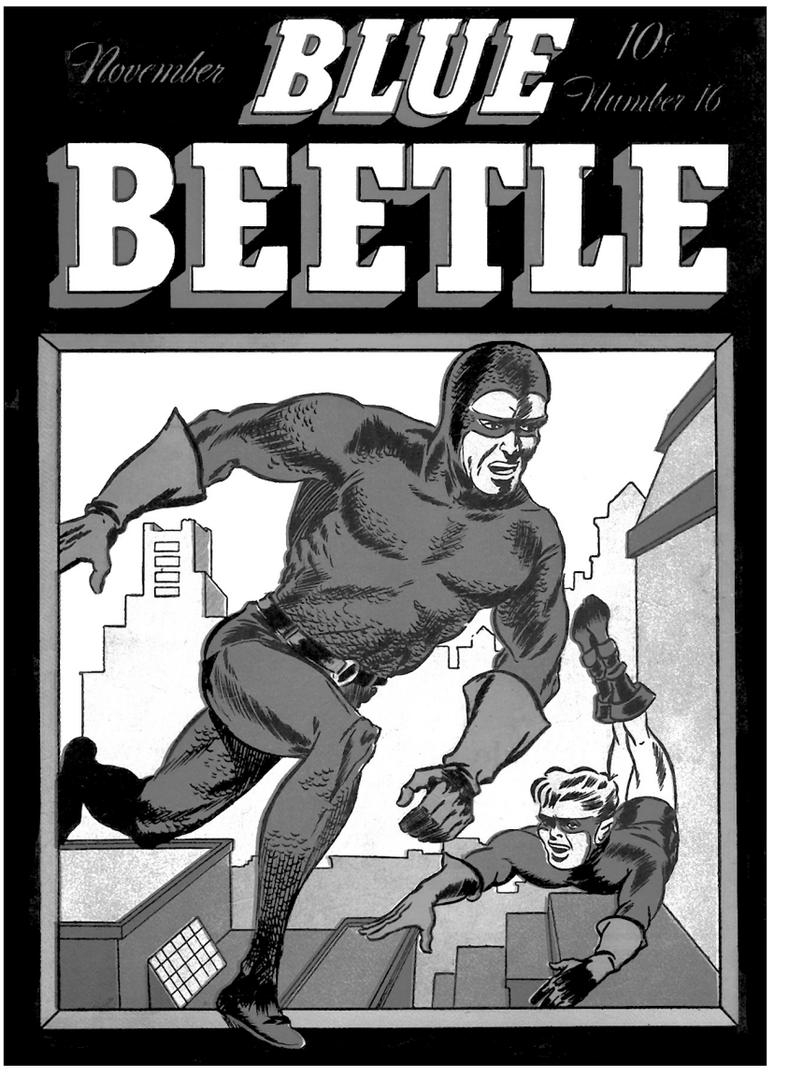
Holyoke's publishing schedule for *The Blue Beetle* was unusual for the time: with 19 issues coming out within a 21-month period, *The Blue Beetle* was a monthly comic book when leaders-in-the-field *Batman* and *Superman* were only bi-monthly.

Where the Fox run had included a handful of *Blue Beetle* back-up features, as well as the main story, Holyoke often featured no more than one or two *Blue Beetle* stories with a number of unrelated back-ups, including Spark Stevens (drawn by a young Joe Kubert), Tamaa, Crime Reporter, and a slew of "Real Life" biographies on historical figures.

The last *Blue Beetle* issue at Holyoke was #30 from February of 1944. After that, the Blue Beetle would return to his dysfunctional home, with Holyoke being no more than the well-intentioned but inadequate foster care. Years later, other publishers would "operate" out of 1 Appleton Street, including Youthful Magazines in 1950.

Captain Aero Comics #1 (December 1941).

(below) Blue Beetle and Sparky from *Blue Beetle* #16 (November 1942).



"THE KING" RETURNS

Victor Fox returned to comics in 1944, taking the Blue Beetle back and jumpstarting Fox Feature Syndicate back to life. On February 15, 1944, Fox proposed to leave his involuntary bankruptcy behind by paying creditors 33⅓% of the sales from *The Blue Beetle* comic book, establishing *The Blue Beetle* as Fox's top-seller. In 1945, according to *Who Was Who in America*, Fox became President of Key Industries, Inc. and Renard Investments, Ltd. With his office at 142 East 49th Street in New York City, Fox may have put this new business together to gain capital for the revival of his comics company.

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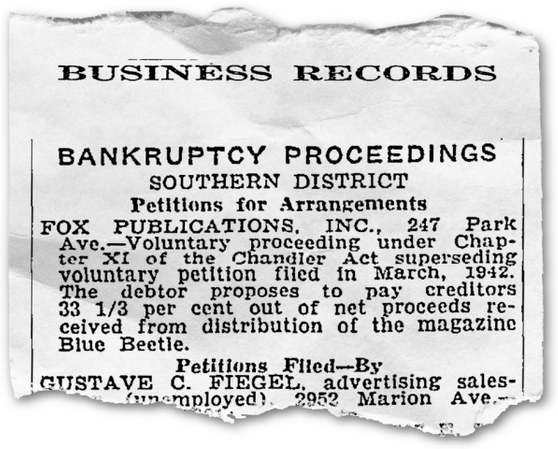
Like most things Fox, these tattoos were only temporary. Scans courtesy of Mark Heike and Bill Black at AC Comics (*www.accomics.com*).


BUSINESS RECORDS

BANKRUPTCY PROCEEDINGS
SOUTHERN DISTRICT
Petitions for Arrangements

FOX PUBLICATIONS, INC., 247 Park Ave.—Voluntary proceeding under Chapter XI of the Chandler Act superseding voluntary petition filed in March, 1942. The debtor proposes to pay creditors 33 1/3 per cent out of net proceeds received from distribution of the magazine Blue Beetle.

Petitions Filed—By
GUSTAVE C. FIEGEL, advertising sales- (unemployed), 2952 Marion Ave.—

According to Will Eisner, Victor Fox had filed for bankruptcy around four times.

Holyoke printed their first comic book, *Catman* #1, the month immediately following Fox's early demise in 1942; a year earlier, Holyoke had changed their name from Thorn Press Printers, perhaps after being bought out or deciding to refocus their printing towards periodicals than general printing. There would be a court case in 1945 between the two in regards to debt owed by Fox Syndication, Inc. and the ownership of Fox characters. What little documentation that has turned up indicates the case may have been dismissed.

June 1944's *The Blue Beetle* #31 was the first Fox issue in two years. With this second wave, the Blue Beetle's powers became whatever the writers wanted them to be at the time: he could do everything from grow in size to change his physical appearance. The Blue Beetle was now Superman, able to suddenly fly and lift school buses and trains. The book had become a directionless fantasy. Due to Blue Beetle's sudden deluge of super powers, there was no longer any need for Dr. Franz or his Vitamin 2-X.

One feature of the Blue Beetle stories was the "Comics Hall of Fame," which ran from issue #36 to #39 and featured two lucky child contestants drawn into the story with the Blue Beetle and Joan Mason. Also at his disposal was the Beetlemobile, the Beetlebird (a plane) and the Beetleboat, as he traveled around with the two lucky "Hall of Fame" winners on trivial and random adventures. Kids could enter to accompany the Blue Beetle "in his unparalleled and patriotic adventures" by sending the entry form (signed by a parent, of course) in with a snapshot, their age, height and weight. The winners would get their names and addresses printed, as well as their likenesses drawn in the Comics Hall of Fame story for that issue. The Blue Beetle, who started as a grim pulp hero armed with twin automatics, was now no more than a glorified babysitter.

Other Fox mainstays remained, especially Mike Mannigan (who was sometimes drawn as a thinner man—apparently Mike worked off all the weight during the war) and Dan Garret's status as a "rookie cop," despite his years on the force or stint as a secret agent. Blue Beetle was put through a countless number of ridiculous adventures, be it mind control, an army of zombies perpetuated by fugitives from the planet Saturn, or a giant-sized Mike Mannigan that threatened to crush the city. Every once in a while, an honest-to-God murder mystery might come along.

Joan Mason got badly-drawn adventures of her own, pursuing stories for "The Daily Planet" (which had been called "The Daily Blade" in early Fox stories), where she did fight common criminals and was often tied up in questionable poses. She would soon gain more than her fair share of solo stories within *The Blue Beetle*.

Most all of *The Blue Beetle* stories were now signed by "Otis," a pen name that replaced the departing "Charles Nicholas" for the remainder of *The Blue Beetle*'s publishing days at Fox. Where the art at Holyoke may have been mediocre at best, the art on the early second Fox run of *Blue Beetle* was barely sub-standard.

The Blue Beetle disappeared for seven months between late 1946 and mid-1947, between issues #44 and #45 (oddly enough, there was no forty-third issue of the title, from an earlier hiatus). *The Blue Beetle* #45 bore a cover blurb that read of the "Return of America's No. 1 Hero," a

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return that lasted another year and featured Blue Beetle as "host" to the gruesome "true crime" story that had taken his cover over.

Things had changed for Jerry Iger by the spring of 1946. A year after the *Wonderman* debacle, Iger had hired Ruth Roche for a staff job, with her going from a business manager and comic book writer to full partner in 1945. Rumor has it that she and Iger were also involved outside of the office.

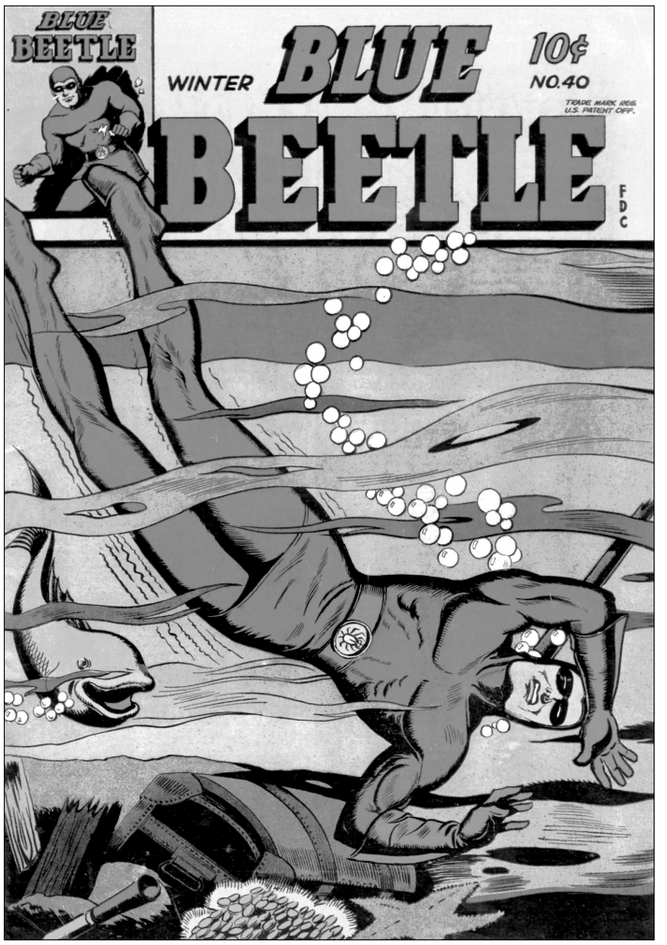
With a third party arranging a meeting, Victor Fox proposed hiring Jerry Iger's services out once more. The end of the meeting resulted in Iger and Roche producing the new line of Fox Comics, with Fox apparently making his payments on time.

"I didn't know that Jerry Iger (and Ruth Roche) again did business with him in 1945," Eisner stated. "Interesting, for when I sold the company to Iger, he was still 'mad' at him for cheating us out of the money that I forfeited during the Superman/Wonderman affair."

The Iger/Roche studio featured the work of Jack Kamen, who would soon go on to become one of Bill Gaines' staple artists on the infamous EC comics of the 1950s, and Matt Baker, who would often be regarded as the master of "Good Girl" art. Yet another Iger/Roche alum was Al Feldstein, who would become not only an artist of the EC Comics' line of books (including *Tales from the Crypt*), but more of a writer. After the horror books were cancelled, Feldstein became a long-running editor of *MAD Magazine*.

"I remember doing artwork for *The Blue Beetle* when I was at the Jerry Iger Studio," Feldstein revealed to historian Jon Berk. "When I first started to 'freelance,' after leaving Jerry Iger's sweatshop, one of the several people who gave me work was Bob Farrell.

"In fact, Bob also gave me a place to work...mainly his terraced apartment overlooking Gramercy Park...because my working at home had become rather difficult for me...what with a new baby in a 3-room apartment...and a doting mother-in-law living down the hall. Bob Farrell used to drive a convertible Cadillac, which, I thought, was the Cat's Meow! He was definitely a wheeler-dealer, and he did have some sort of business association with Fox. It was Bob Farrell who introduced me to Victor Fox—in return for a 'commission' on all moneys paid to me by the Fox outfit. Farrell was aware that I was re-writing his own scripts and doing a good job on his own art needs. Bob somehow knew that Victor Fox was looking for someone to 'package' a teenage book for him, *Archie* being a hot-seller, and so he arranged the introduction and, in return, the agent fee."



Cover to *The Blue Beetle* #40 (Winter 1945/1946).

Jerry Iger and Ruth Roche in 1942.

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"Actually, I had very little contact with Victor Fox personally after the initial introduction by Bob Farrell. As far as Victor was concerned, we ran into each other once or twice when I was delivering finished books...and he grudgingly complimented me on the job I was doing (but not too much, for fear I might ask for more money!)."

The Iger & Roche studio had experienced great success with the high sex content of their work for Fiction House, and decided to give the Fox comics the same treatment. The result was what have come to be known as "Headlight Comics," the most popular of which was *Phantom Lady*, drawn by Matt Baker.

Artwork on *The Blue Beetle* was mostly done by Jack Kamen and Al Feldstein through the Iger & Roche shop. With #52, *The Blue Beetle* became a "True Crime" comic book, with Blue Beetle himself a mere host, becoming second banana to sex and violence.

Psychiatrist Frederick Wertham released *Seduction of the Innocent*, a book that linked comic books with juvenile delinquency, in 1954. Through years of studies done at his Harlem clinic, Wertham had "proof" that comics gave birth to the newest breed of criminal. One of the many comics Wertham cited was *The Blue Beetle*, this time in the case of a seven-and-a-half year-old boy experiencing nightmares:

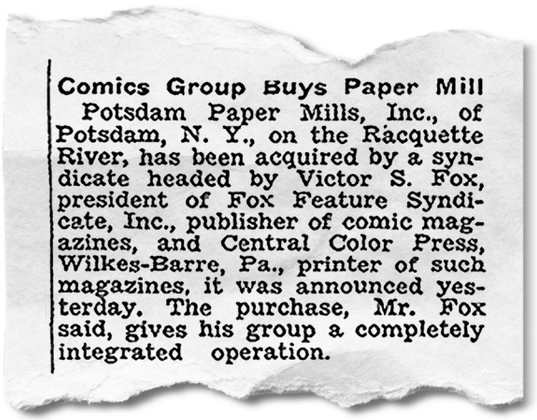
> *"You know," the boy said. "What I really like is the Blue Beetle [a figure in a very violent crime comic book]. I read that many times. That's what I dreamed about..."*
>
> *"Who is the Blue Beetle?"*
>
> *"He is like Superman. He is a beetle, but he changes into Superman and afterwards he changes into a beetle again..."*
>
> *It is not difficult to understand that a child stimulated to fantasies about violent and sadistic adventures and about a man who changes into an insect gets frightened. Kafka for the kiddies!*

Ironically, Wertham's statement may be the only time *The Blue Beetle* was likened to a work of literature.

Fox seemed to be on the upswing, as Fox Syndication and Central Color Press jointly purchased the Potsdam Paper Mills, Inc. on October 23, 1947. Fox had finally broken out of the captive publisher role. Oddly enough, his best-selling title would cease publication shortly after: *The Blue Beetle* #57 (July 1948) was the last issue for another brief period, sending him back into comic book limbo for two more years.

The Blue Beetle was brought back to the newsstands with *The Blue Beetle* #58 in April 1950. Predating the other super-hero revivals of the 1950s (including *Captain America* in 1953 and, most importantly, the revamped *Flash* in 1954), *The Blue Beetle* was the first super-hero revived after World War II. The cover of Blue Beetle bursting through a front page that proclaims "The Blue Beetle Returns!" would later be revamped as his next return at his next company. Even the crooks in the main story acknowledged his return with a "Nobody's seen or heard anything of him for almost two years!"

Any of Fox's success was short-lived, as both Fox and its wholly owned subsidiary Central Color filed for involuntary bankruptcy and protection against creditors on July 15, 1950. On March 27 of the following year,



Comics Group Buys Paper Mill

Potsdam Paper Mills, Inc., of Potsdam, N. Y., on the Racquette River, has been acquired by a syndicate headed by Victor S. Fox, president of Fox Feature Syndicate, Inc., publisher of comic magazines, and Central Color Press, Wilkes-Barre, Pa., printer of such magazines, it was announced yesterday. The purchase, Mr. Fox said, gives his group a completely integrated operation.

Fox's purchase of the Potsdam Paper Mills, as documented in *The New York Times*.

(below) Blue Beetle in this Jack Kamen-drawn "Headlight" cover to #50 (November 1947).

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they attempted to rearrange their debts via petition. With liabilities of $775,000 versus their assets of a mere $30,000, Fox was appointed a bankruptcy receiver on August 2, 1951. Victor Fox himself declared personal bankruptcy on May 29, 1952, and would disappear into the mists of comics history.

Perhaps Fox was caught in the post-war glut that infected comics in the late '40s; whatever the case, *The Blue Beetle*'s revival only lasted three issues, ending with #60 in August of 1950. While the cover featured the title character amidst an explosion of action, it probably ended with a fizzle rather than a bang.

Fox Comics, as well, ended with a fizzle, with the final titles coming out with August and September 1950 cover dates.

Artist Pierce Rice recalls the trials Fox freelancers had to undergo to get paid by the early 1950s:

"When I got the checks from Fox for this stuff, they all bounced," Rice wrote. "When I went over to the office, all the artists were there on the same errand, and were being dealt with individually. When my turn came, very uncharacteristically, I threatened to take the place apart, and to my astonishment they made good. Just for the record, Bernie Sachs went around to the station house, brought in a detective, got his money, and then was braced for a share of it. New York."

"I learned from my letterer, Jim Wroten," Feldstein revealed to Berk, "that Fox was getting himself into financial trouble and that I should make sure that I was fully paid for each book I delivered before I started the next one. Seems Victor was associated (so the rumor had it) with the bent-nose guys in a business venture: the San Juan (Puerto Rico) Race Track...and that there were some monetary problems associated with getting it going."

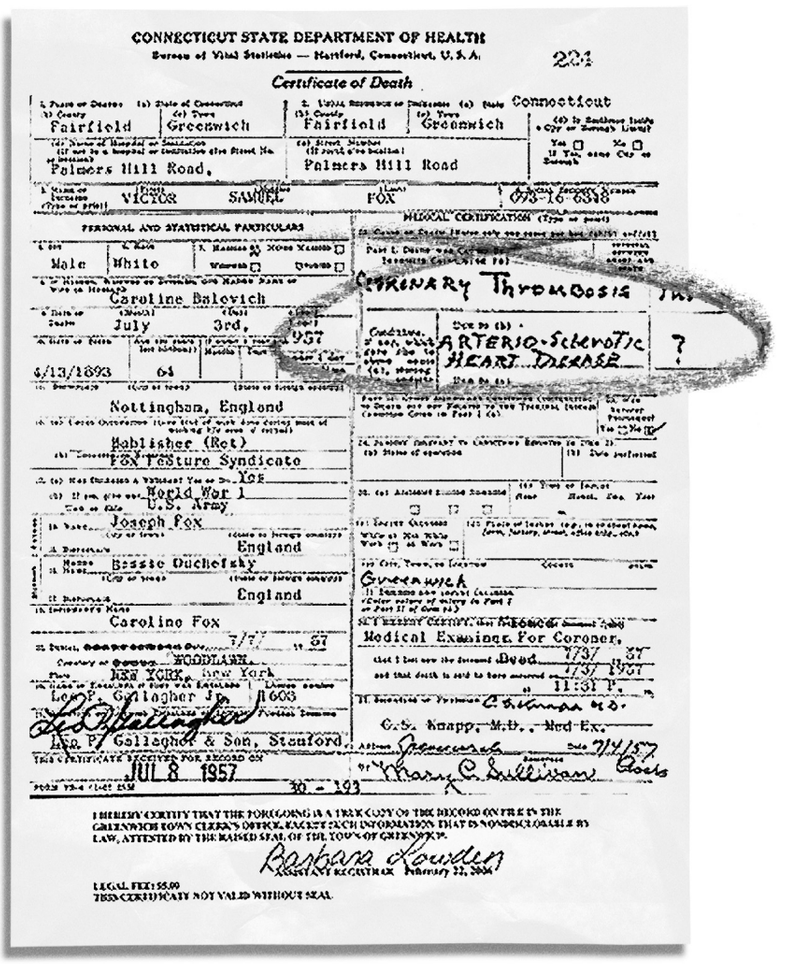
Blue Beetle #58 (April 1950).

Victor Fox retired to a home on Palmer Hill Road in Old Greenwich, Connecticut with his wife and daughter. Seven years after the Fox publishing empire collapsed inward, on July 3, 1957, its self-proclaimed King died in his sleep. The Medical Examiner for the coroner proclaimed that a Coronary Thrombosis due to arterio-sclerotic heart disease caused Fox's death. He was buried four days later in Woodlawn cemetery in New York. The only known relative, his daughter Victoria, may have choked to death on a turkey bone while living in San Diego in 2002. The death certificate of this Victoria Fox doesn't list any relatives, but she was born in 1944, when Victor's daughter was.

Yet another big question mark in the life of Victor Fox.

The irony behind Victor Fox is that, while motivated entirely by greed, he set quite a few precedents for the comic book industry. Not only was this shrill man one of the first to really catch on that super-heroes were the next cash cow, but he was also one of the first to truly market comics with everything from mail-in offers to publicity events.

The Blue Beetle, on the other hand, would not stay dead. He would be resurrected in just a few short years, once again trailing behind Superman's scarlet cape.


CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Bureau of Vital Statistics — Hartford, Connecticut, U. S. A.
Certificate of Death

Fairfield | Greenwich | Fairfield | Greenwich | Connecticut
Palmers Hill Road, | Palmers Hill Road
VICTOR | SAMUEL | FOX | 095-16-6338
Male | White | Married
Caroline Balovich
July | 3rd, | 1957
6/13/1893 | 64
Nottingham, England
Publisher (Ret) | Fox Feature Syndicate | New York
World War I | U.S. Army
Joseph Fox
England
Bessie Duchefsky
England
Caroline Fox
NEW YORK | New York
Gallagher Funeral Home
Gallagher & Son, Stamford
JUL 8 1957

Coronary Thrombosis
Arterio-Sclerotic Heart Disease
Medical Examiner For Coroner,
Dead 7/3/57
11:31 P.M.
C.S. Knapp, M.D., Med. Ex.
7/4/57
Mary C. Sullivan Clerk

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE FOREGOING IS A TRUE COPY OF THE RECORD ON FILE IN THE GREENWICH TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE, EXCEPT SUCH INFORMATION THAT IS NONDISCLOSABLE BY LAW, ATTESTED BY THE RAISED SEAL OF THE TOWN OF GREENWICH.
Barbara Lourden
ASSISTANT REGISTRAR February 22, 2006
LEGAL FEE: $5.00
THIS CERTIFICATE NOT VALID WITHOUT SEAL

A copy of Victor Fox's death certificate, citing heart failure.

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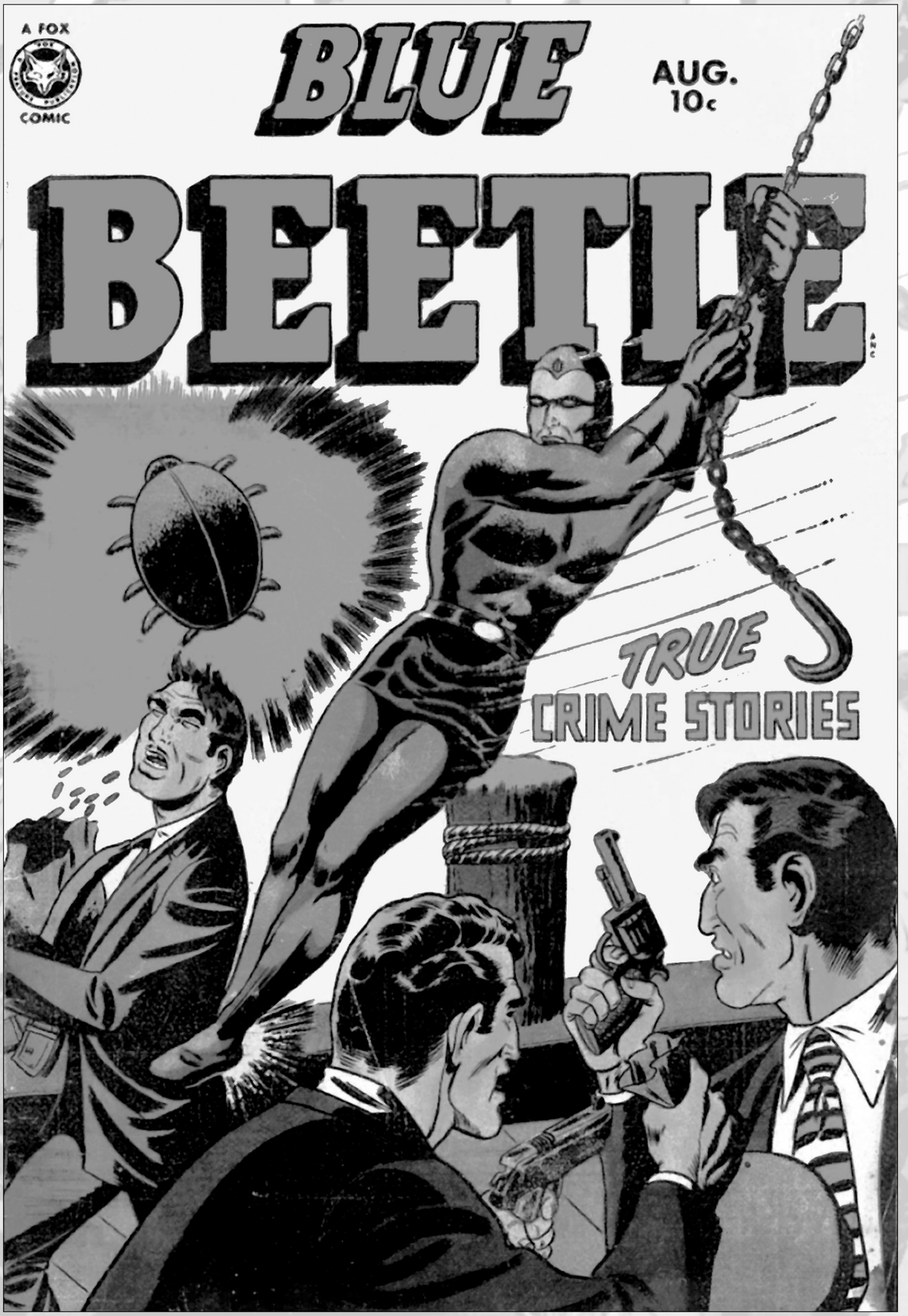

The cover to the final issue of Fox's *The Blue Beetle*, #60 (August 1950).

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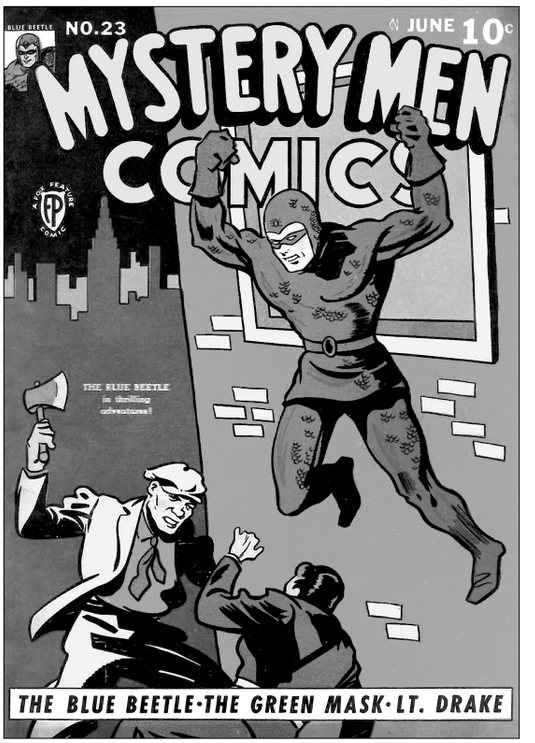
THE GOLDEN AGE BLUE BEETLE APPEARANCES



Mystery Men Comics #23 (June 1941), and *Blue Beetle* #49 (October 1947).

This list excludes any of Officer Dan Garret's Charlton appearances. Information was gathered from Howard Kelton's *Index to Golden Age Comic Books* and The Grand Comics Database (*www.comics.org*).

FOX COMICS, PHASE I 1939-1942

Mystery Men Comics #1 (Aug. 1939) - *Mystery Men Comics* #31 (Feb. 1942)
Cover Feature: #7-8, #10-31

The Blue Beetle #1 (Spring 1940) - *The Blue Beetle* #11 (Feb. 1942)

Big 3 #1 (Fall 1940) - *Big 3* #7 (Jan. 1942)
Cover Feature: #1-#7

HOLYOKE COMICS 1942-1944

The Blue Beetle #12 (June 1942) - *The Blue Beetle* #30 (Feb. 1944)

FOX COMICS, PHASE II

The Blue Beetle #31 (June 1944) - *The Blue Beetle* #60 (Aug. 1950)

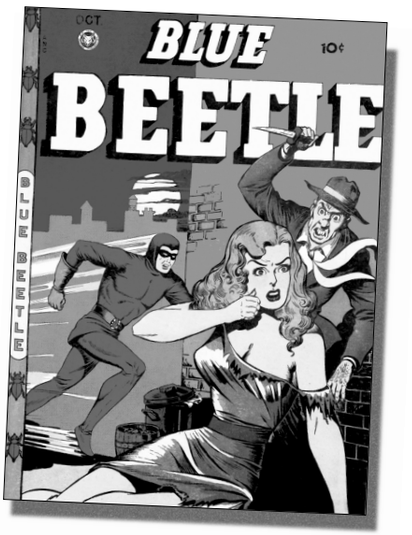
Real Hit Comics #1 (1944)
This was a U.S. Savings Bond premium comic book, reprinting the cover from Holyoke's *The Blue Beetle* #25

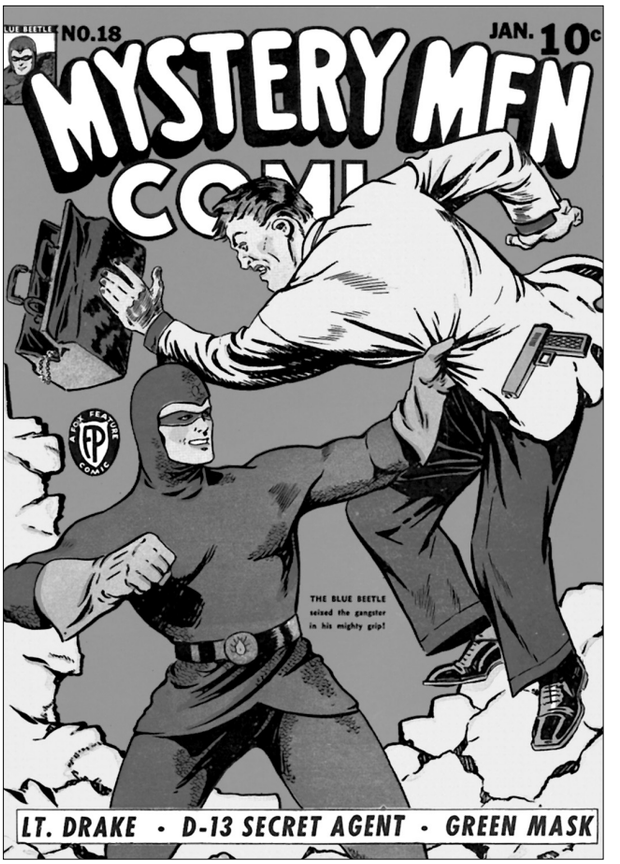
All-Top Comics #4 [text story] (Dec. 1946-Jan. 1947) - *All-Top Comics* #13 (Sept. 1948)

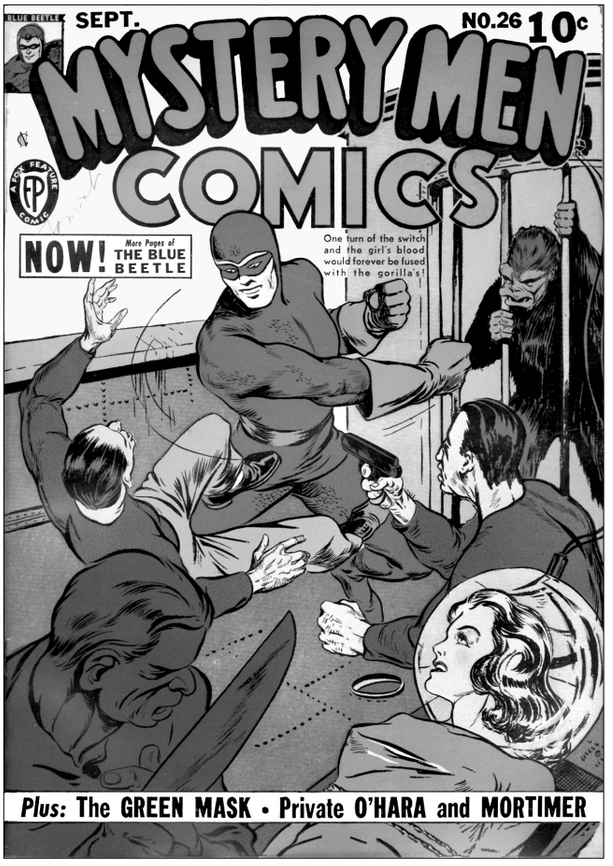
Phantom Lady #13 (Aug. 1947)

Tegra, Jungle Empress #1 (Aug. 1948)

Zago, Jungle Prince #1 (Sept. 1948)







Mystery Men Comics #11 (June 1940), 18 (Jan. 1941), 26 (Sept. 1941), and 30 (Jan. 1942).

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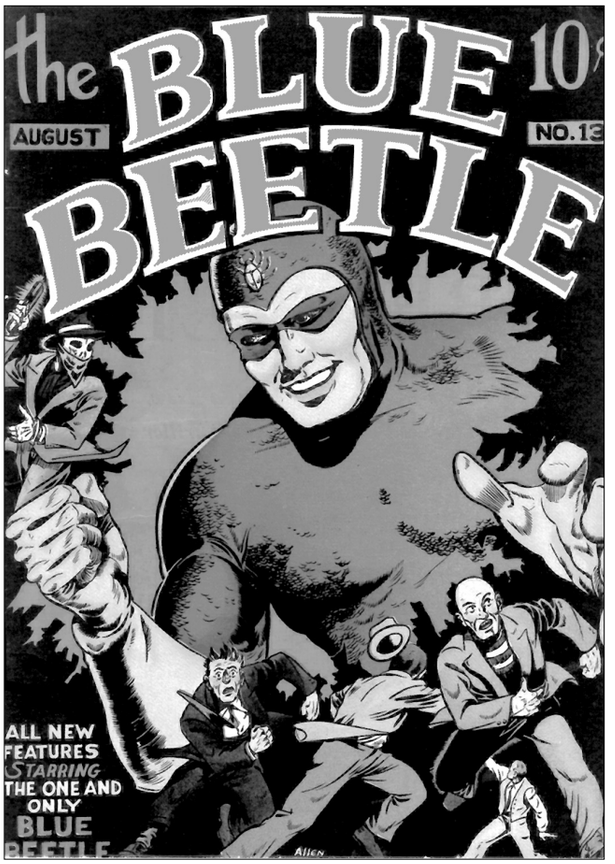

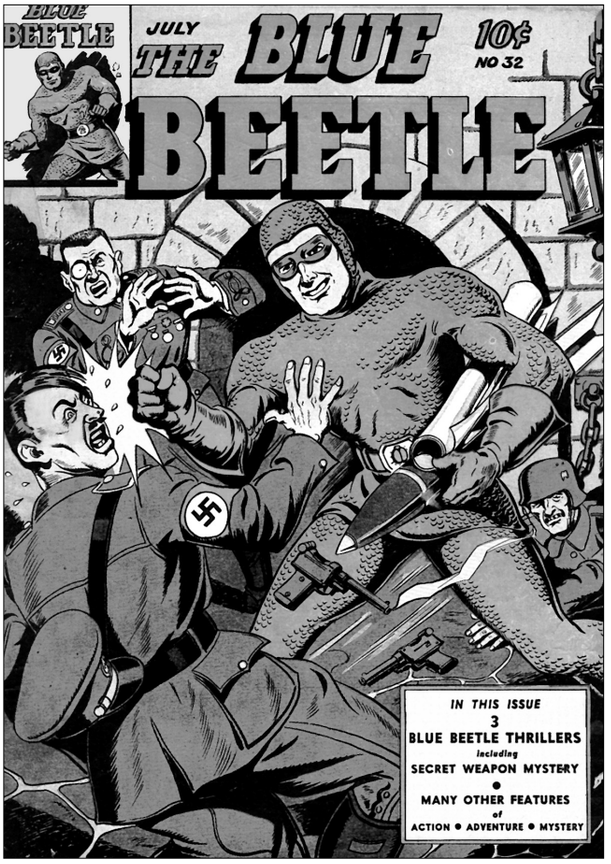

Big 3 #2 (1941), and *Blue Beetle* #13 (Aug. 1942), 32 (July 1944), and 52 (Jan. 1948).

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An extremely patriotic Blue Beetle splash, from Holyoke's *Blue Beetle* #25 (September 1943). Note how Dan Garret has gained black hair. This, and many other Golden Age scans, are courtesy of collector/historian supreme Marc Svensson.

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A SHIP OF ANY NAME:
The Enigma of the U.S.S. Blue Beetle

It started with an invitation from 1942: "The Chief Petty Officers and Crew of the U.S.S. Blue Beetle Summons You." Was it a promotional gag of Victor Fox's? A ship named after a crewman's favorite comic book character?

The truth was less bizarre than suspected.

The U.S.S. Blue Beetle was, in reality, the U.S.S. Euryale, named after one of the Gorgons in Greek mythology. Built in New Jersey for the United Maritime Commission in 1941, the merchant vessel was launched on April 12, 1941. Two years later, the Navy got a hold of the Euryale and converted the 492' 6" ship into a submarine tender, along with sister ships Anthedon, Clytie, Apollo, and Aegir.

The Euryale's new mission was to refit submarines and repair surface ships, as well as to establish rest camps for submariners undoubtedly anxious to get out of living in a tin can. To that end, the Euryale was a floating industrial plant, equipped to ready submarines for their missions. The crew also found themselves setting up a playground and staging a Christmas party for 60,000 Australian kids and engaging in intra-ship sports with other ships.

The picture used by the Navy Department of the Euryale shows an enormous ship, mid-water on a cloudy day. The picture, ironically, was taken with an unauthorized camera smuggled off-ship by the ship's mail clerk, Capt. (Ret.) Powell Black.

In 1944, the Anthedon joined up with the Euryale in Perth. The Anthedon, due to the color of her camouflage paint, was nicknamed "The Green Hornet" by her crew; the Euryale crew retaliated by nicknaming their ship the opposite:

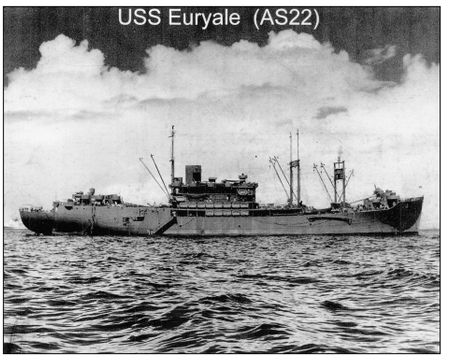
The Blue Beetle.

It is not known whether the Euryale crew member who suggested the name was familiar with the Fox Comics' character.

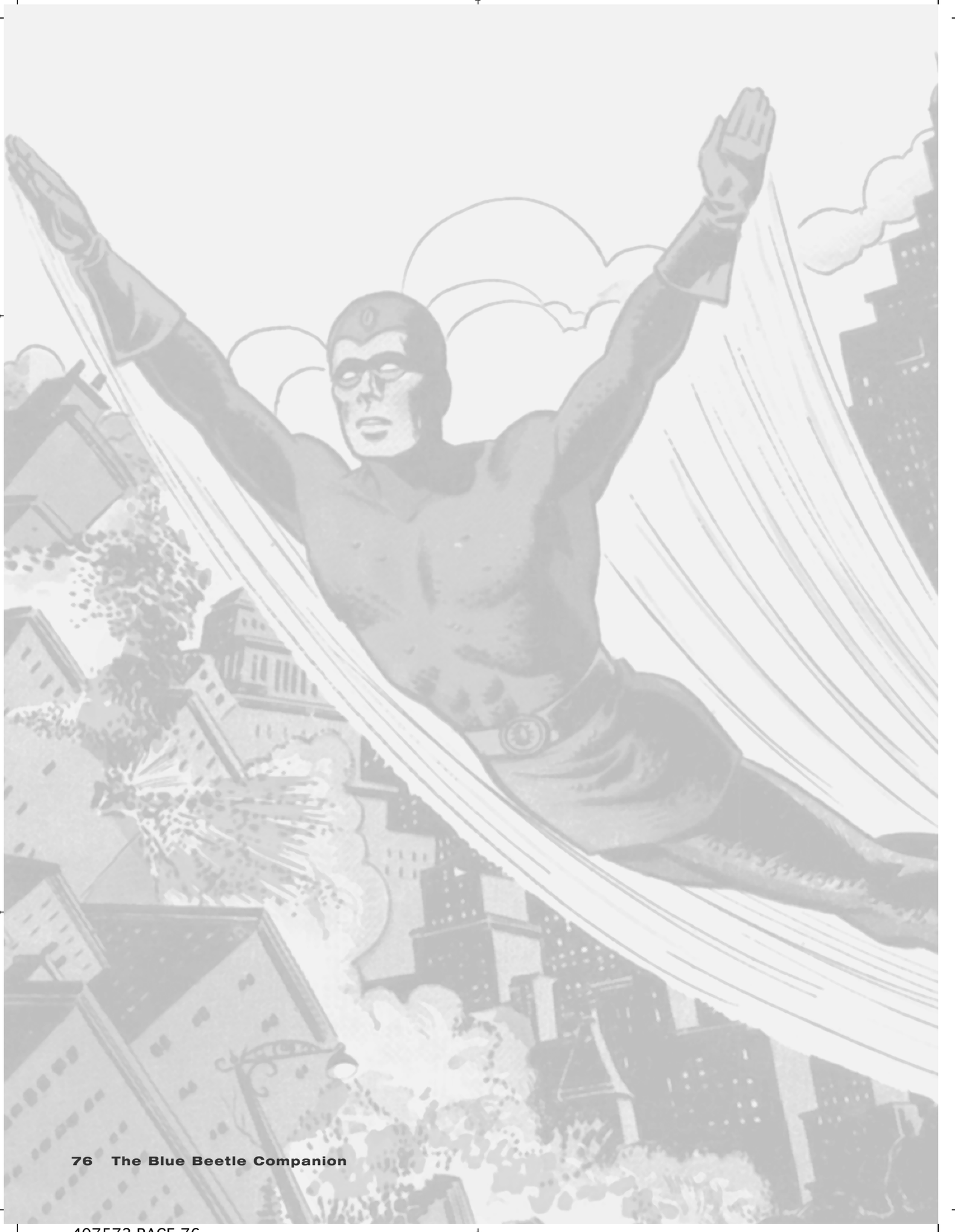
Submarines had to be equipped in the field, as opposed to stateside. By the end of the Euryale's 18-month military career, it had performed 132 refits. After Japan's surrender in 1945, the Euryale headed to Japan to dismantle and prepare Japanese submarines for disposal. In October 1946, The Euryale was decommissioned and put in the Pacific Reserve Fleet, eventually transferred to the United States Maritime Administration in 1971 and then sold.

Another U.S.S. Blue Beetle of note was the U.S.S. Drayton, a destroyer commissioned in 1946. The Drayton participated in the search for missing aviator Amelia Earhart before taking port in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii in October 1939. The Drayton was out at sea when Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, but soon joined in the action by doing everything from escorting shipping to Christmas Island and Fiji, bombarding shore facilities and launching amphibious assaults, and even fighting for the Guadalcanal.

Named "The Blue Beetle" for her dark blue-painted hull, the Drayton was decommissioned in October 1945 and unceremoniously sold for scrapping the next year.



Special thanks goes to Sheri Lytle and her Euryale website at *http://www.katiebuglove.com/euryaleindex.html*, as well as the help of Captain Powell Black, retired U.S. Navy, and Bill Bradield (Radio Second Class). Pictured below the ship is her crew.



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THE SILVER AGE

FROM CHAIN-MAIL TO STROBE GUNS:
Blue Beetle's rebirth at Charlton Comics

1954-1983

The Blue Beetle's new home was built by yet another immigrant with a court record: John Santangelo, who came to America from Italy in the early part of the 20th century as a manual laborer. Living in Yonkers, New York and traveling to Derby, Connecticut to lay bricks in the '30s, Santangelo began pursuing a young high-school girl in the neighborhood. Unable to fulfill her wish of finding printed popular song lyrics in the city, Santangelo came across the idea to print them out on his own.

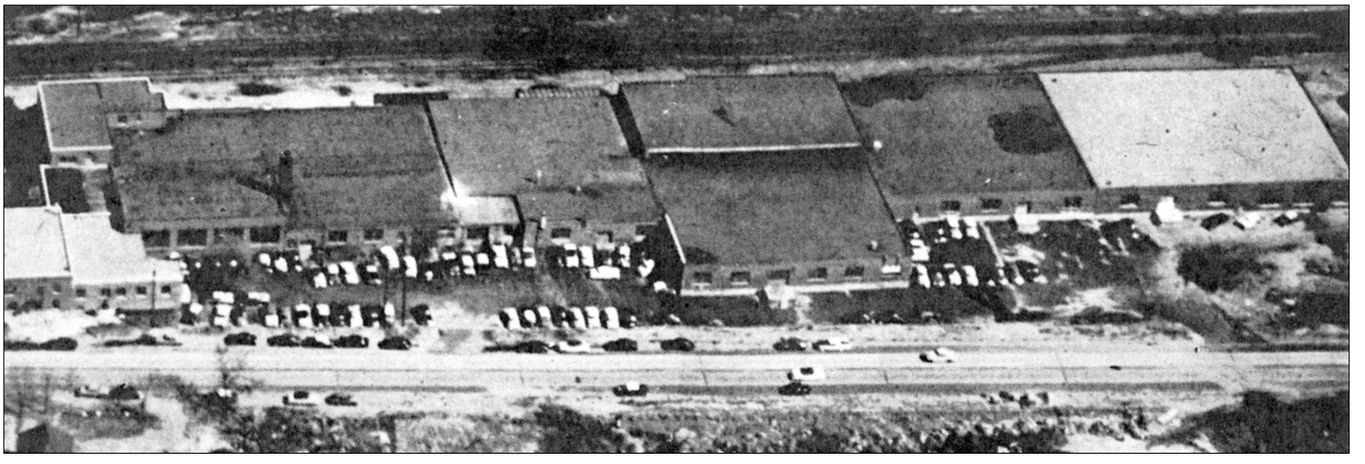
The beginnings of the Charlton Publishing Company stemmed from crude printed single pieces of paper, folded in half and printed at a fellow Italian friend's print shop. Santangelo drove around Connecticut and New York with his wares, dropping them off with cigar store owners. The lyric sheets cost Santangelo 2 cents to print, and he split the 10 cent price tag 50% with the store owners.

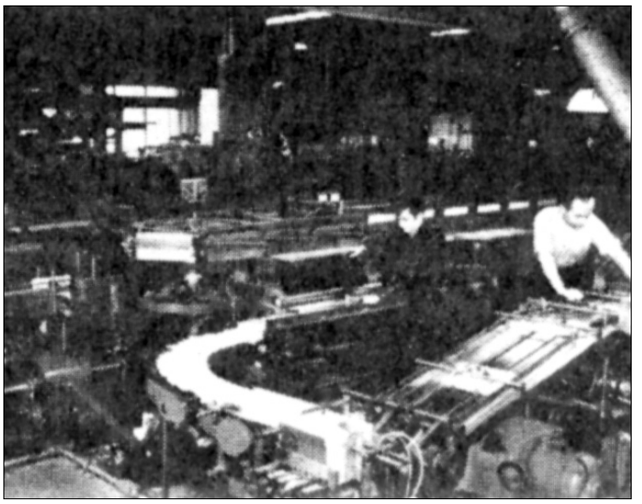
"He had a saying many years later," Santangelo's son Charlie said. "When he'd become wealthy, that 'I never made a dollar; I always made a half-dollar'."

Pretty soon, Santangelo's song sheet took off and Santangelo increased production. Copyright infringement caught up with John, and he found himself sentenced to a year and a day in the New Haven County Jail.

"My old man was an immigrant and he didn't know anything about copyright laws," Charles said. "It certainly wasn't terrible or intentional, but he did violate the law."

(above) Steve Ditko was known to bring candy to Charlton's female employees. (below) The Charlton Publications complex in Derby, Connecticut.





Charlton's roof even covered a complete printing operation. Courtesy of Bob Beerbohm.
(below) *Space Adventures* #13 (October-November 1954).

Former Charlton head staff writer Joe Gill presented a view of Santangelo that differed from a July 1958 *Newsdealer* magazine article that likened the founder to a "latter-day Horatio Alger":

"He was wealthy, a very cunning man, and a friend of mine. But a lot of people didn't like him."

While serving out his sentence, Santangelo met fellow inmate Edward Levy, a disbarred attorney incarcerated due to his involvement in a Waterbury political scandal. The two became fast friends and, with a handshake deal, decided to establish a legitimate publishing concern upon their release. Levy and Santangelo both had infant sons named Charles, inspiring them to name their newfound business Charlton Publishing.

Levy and Santangelo secured licensing rights (officially this time) and launched their black and white magazine line with evolved versions of Santangelo's bootleg sheet: *Hit Parader* and *Song Hits*. They would publish their first comic book, *Zoo Funnies*, in Autumn of 1945. The newborn comic book line wouldn't exceed more than a handful of titles and were all packaged by cartoonist Al Fago.

After years of sending out the printing to New York shops, Charlton set up operations in a 150,000 square-foot building in Derby in the late '40s. Levy and Santangelo expanded their line in 1951 when they bought an old comics printing press and hired an in-house comics department, with Fago overseeing the newly-hired staff of artists.

The partners' philosophy was that the cheapest and most efficient way to produce periodicals would be as an "all-in-one" operation; with everything under one roof—editorial, printing, distribution—both eliminating any middle-man expenses and maximizing their profit. The Charlton building housed three sister companies: Charlton Press, Charlton Publications, and Capitol Distribution, with off-site auxiliary concern The Colonial Paper Company.

The self-contained nature of Charlton is what probably saved their comics lines from the industry bust of the mid-'50s—one brought about by a combination of anti-comic sentiments and the downfall of the American News Company, the largest newsstand distributor for comic companies. Ever a stickler for a discount, Charlton acquired unpublished inventory and comic books from various sinking shops and packaging houses. From 1954 to 1955, they gained titles from Simon & Kirby's Crestwood, St. John, Fawcett Publications, and Superior Comics. Amongst these acquisitions was *The Blue Beetle*. It's unclear where Charlton acquired the rights, but is likely that they were bought from the Iger/Roche shop rather than Fox Comics.

Super-heroes got a shot in the arm from the success of *The Adventures of Superman* television show in the 1950s. Aside from cementing the Man of Steel even further into the cultural vernacular, it gave super-heroes a much-needed adrenal boost. Companies scrambled to cash in on the revived super-hero craze, with companies like Timely (now Atlas) bringing old characters out of the mothballs, and newcomer Magazine Enterprises publishing characters like *The Avenger*.

Charlton did their part by resurrecting The Blue Beetle in October-November 1954's *Space Adventures* #13. The Fago cover, recreated from *The Blue Beetle* #58, had the hero bursting through a newspaper that announced "The Blue Beetle Returns!" and "Blue Beetle Strikes Again: Fear Strikes the Underworld!." The ten-page reprint story, "Murder in the Ring," first appeared four years earlier in Fox's *The Blue Beetle* #58.

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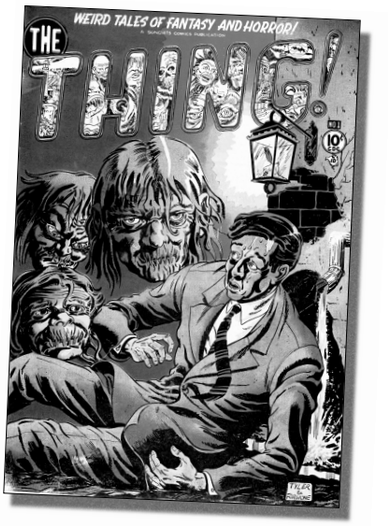
Charlton canceled the notoriously graphic title *The Thing!* with issue #17 and retitled it *The Blue Beetle* next issue, reprinting old Fox material for two more issues. Ironically, both *The Thing!* and Fox's "headlight" issues of *The Blue Beetle* had elicited the wrath of Frederick Wertham earlier in the decade. *The Blue Beetle* would escape from reprint hell with the twentieth issue, featuring original stories with art by Ted Galindo.

Still partnered with Mike Mannigan (who was now much thinner, much younger, and much smarter), Dan Garret was no longer the pride of the police force, but a rookie screw-up whose other identity would often interfere with police work. The stories were set in New York City now, and The Blue Beetle was an agent of Central Intelligence in Washington, much like his Holyoke days. He would fight crime with a Superman-like array of powers, including X-ray vision, and could even bear the brunt of a descending wrecking ball without injury.

Penciler Ted Galindo and inker Ray Osrin brought the chain-mail armor back to the Blue Beetle, and made the character more reminiscent of his early Fox days. Little is known of Galindo, but his work has more weight to it than the average Charlton artist, and he drew comics for Prize Comics, Marvel, and Archie. Galindo drew heavy creases in clothes and spotted blacks to create shadows and depths in the Blue Beetle's atmospheric new world. The cover to *Blue Beetle* #21 (possibly by Dick Giordano), shows the Blue Beetle flying over the ocean, his body twisting with a fluidity not known on many Charlton covers (or even interiors). His chain mail meticulously detailed and his muscles turning in a naturalistic manner, it's a shame that more Blue Beetle was not produced by the Galindo and Osrin team. His return would be cancelled that issue, with his title taken over and renamed *Mr. Muscles* with #22. The Golden Age Blue Beetle's final Charlton appearance would be in *Nature Boy* #3, and was ironically drawn by his supposed creator Charles Nicholas, who was then on staff at Charlton.



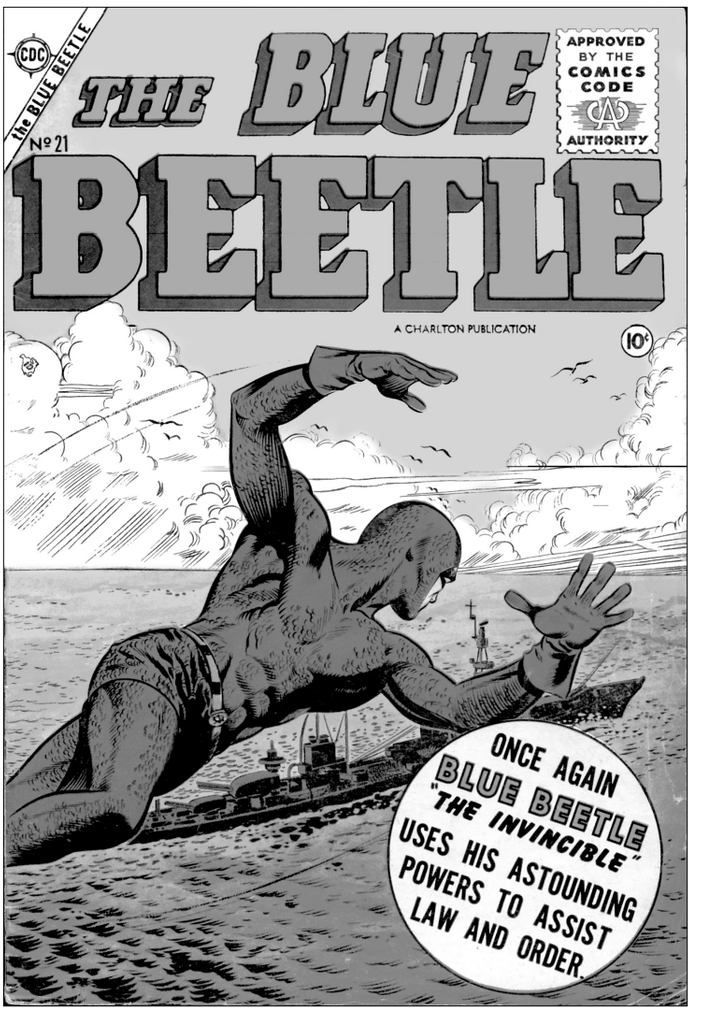
The Thing! #1 (February 1952).

"The Golden Age Blue Beetle was going nowhere," former Charlton editor Dick Giordano said. "[We] were putting out something akin to the Golden Age, which had no place in the marketplace that existed."

That didn't stop shady comics reprinter Israel Waldman from reprinting some Fox *Blue Beetle* stories in *The Human Fly* #1 in 1963. Featuring a crimefighter on the cover who apparently shopped at the same tailor as the Blue Beetle (maybe there was a discount on chain mail?), *The Human Fly* #1 reprinted *The Blue Beetle* #44. Waldman's was a last stop for failing studios and cartoonists (including Joe Simon) to unload their printing plates for much-needed cash. Waldman then sold lots of his comics to discount stores across the nation, taking less risk than if he were to sell via the return system of the newsstands.

When Simon inquired to Waldman about maintaining his copyright, Waldman's response was "So keep them. What do I need with copyrights?"

The super-hero bandwagon once again picked up momentum by the mid-'60s, thanks in no small part to Marvel Comics' introduction of influential books such as *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *The Fantastic Four*. Charlton hopped on that rushing bandwagon by bringing back their earlier attempts at super-heroes, as well as introducing a stable of new ones.



Blue Beetle flies high from *Blue Beetle* #21 (August 1955); cover possibly by Dick Giordano for a Galindo-drawn issue. Courtesy Marc Svensson.

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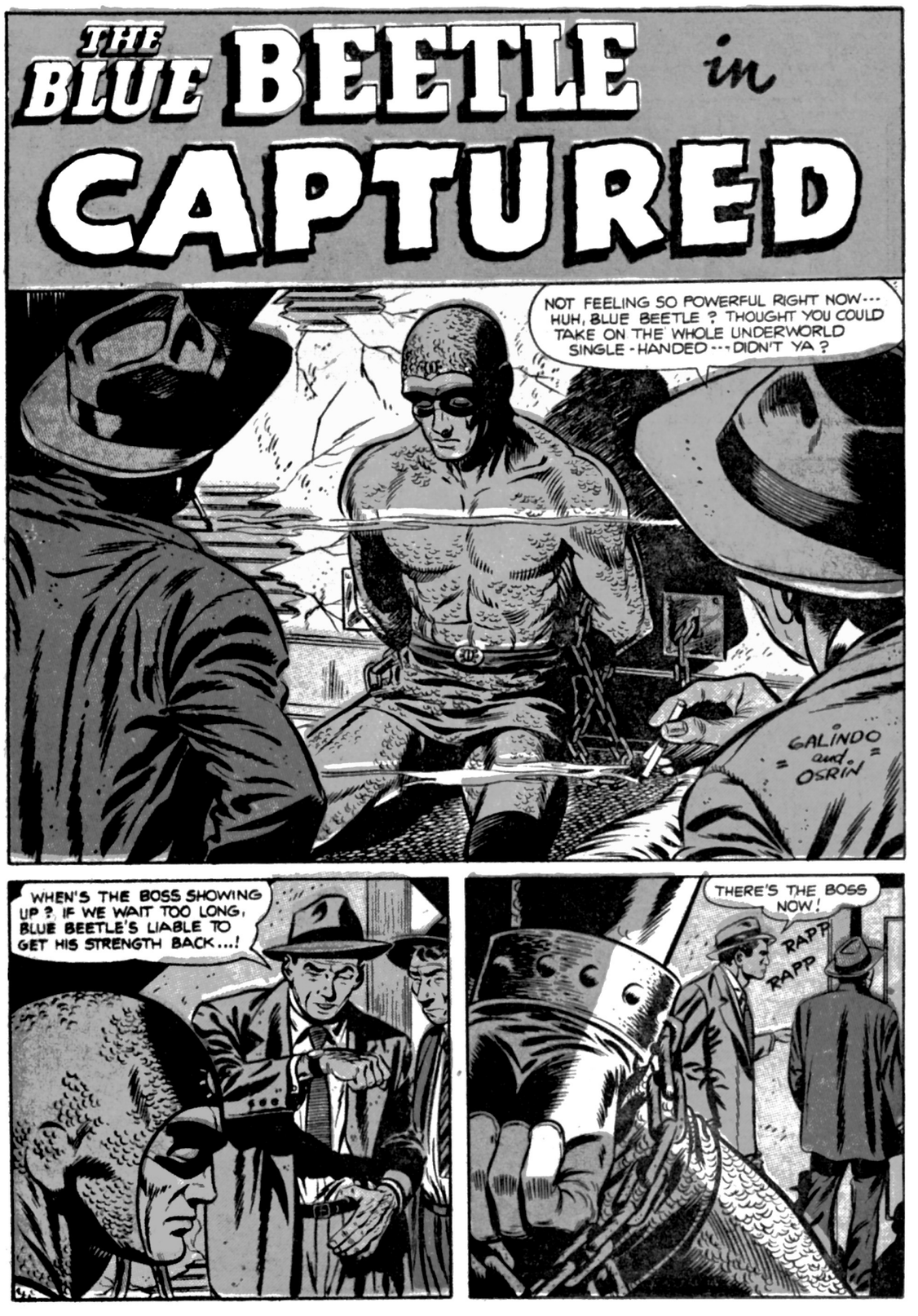

Galindo and Orsin's under-rated work on The Blue Beetle revival, from *The Blue Beetle* #21 (August 1955).

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The editorial structure at Charlton changed to accommodate this new line of books. Pat Masulli took on the editing of other sundry Charlton publications like crossword puzzles and music magazines, while Dick Giordano, an on-and-off staffer since 1952 (and assistant editor to Masulli), was pegged to take the editorial reins on the entire comic book line.

"No one ever told me 'Your job is to sell comics better,' there was no question about it," Giordano said. "I started on a plan to find new talent and to come up with new books. At that time, we were doing *Blue Beetle* and *Son of Vulcan*. Those were the only two super-heroes there when I started, and *Captain Atom*, I think, was on the drawing board. It was clear that, if there was anything in the field, there was some activity in super-heroes, so we decided that we had to take that route."

The Blue Beetle once again reared his blue-clad head out of comic book obscurity, and is arguably the first of the "Action Hero" line that Giordano masterminded (even though he premiered a good year-and-a-half before the term was coined, and had been edited by Masulli). With a January 1964 cover date, *The Blue Beetle* #1 debuted a heavily revamped version of the Golden Age character in the debut story "The Blue Beetle and the Giant Mummy Who Was Not Dead."

Rather than a patrolman, Dan Garrett (now with two "t's," perhaps so they could trademark his name from the possibly public domain "Garret") was now an archeologist who discovered a magic scarab in an Egyptian tomb. Speaking the phrase "Kaji Dha," Garrett magically transformed into the red-goggled super-powered Blue Beetle. This new Beetle was a far cry from his 1939 pulp counterpart. However, like the later '40s and '50s versions, the 1964 model was also a generic Superman with a sliding scale of super-powers. The stories were fun at their best, laughable at their worst, and a step back from even the Galindo stories of the '50s.

Like most Charlton books, *Blue Beetle* was written by the late Charlton Comics head writer Joe Gill, who was introduced to comics writing by his brother Ray Gill and his good friend (and legendary crime novelist) Mickey Spillane.

"My brother was an editor at Funnies, Inc., an editorial service that packaged comics for publishers," Gill said. "They put Goodman—who became Marvel later—into comics, and did the first [comics] in my brother's office. [Owners] Lloyd and Grace Jacquet were pioneers in comics. Anyway, my brother was an editor there. I met Mickey working as temporary help in a department store and brought him home and he liked it and all of us got along well.

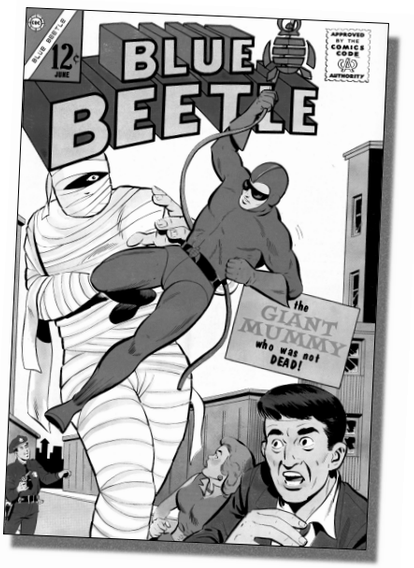
"After I went to service in the following September, Mickey went into Funnies, because that was a door. He would write a two-page filler for 50 cents. It was $1 a page for writing, but 50 cents for a filler—you could get a small story in for 50 cents in those days!"

After a short stint in the military during World War II as a radio operator, the writer returned to Brooklyn. "Mickey and my brother got together and opened a studio. It had to be painted and cleaned, so I helped them. I was going to go back to the Navy as a chief radio operator, but they said 'Don't do that; you're going to be a writer.' I said 'No!' Anyway, when they got through putting the place together, there was a position for me—a table, a chair, and a typewriter—so that's how I got started."

Joe continued to work on books for a variety of publishers in the late '40s, including Detective/National Comics and Timely/Marvel (for Stan Lee). When Charlton was expanding in the '50s, he became the head writer, starting at $4 a page. Gill felt that the low prices for a guaranteed amount of work a week beat freelancing for an undetermined amount of pages at a higher price.

"The drawback was that I'd only get $4 a page, and in New York, DC and others were paying more, but I didn't like pounding the pavement going from publisher to publisher," Gill admitted. "I didn't like kissing ass to editors, and I didn't like the uncertainty of whether or not I'd have assignments."

Dan Garret, apparently, still wasn't scared to borrow an occasional super-power.



The Silver Age Blue Beetle in his debut issue: *Blue Beetle* #1 (January 1964).

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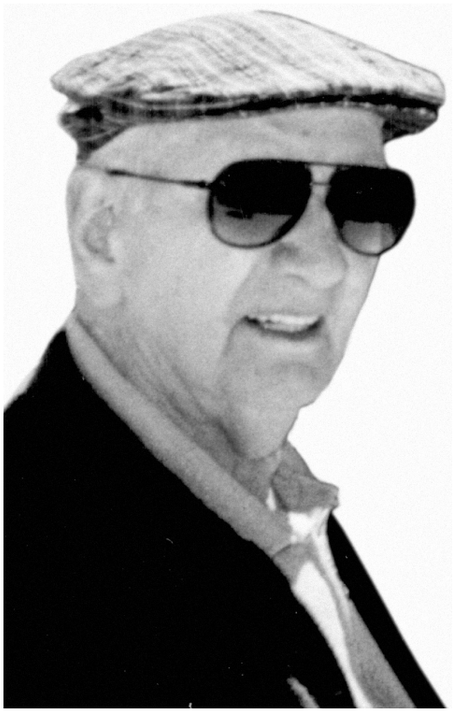

Charlton head writer Joe Gill in the late 1990s. Photo courtesy Joe Gill.

With a knack for cranking out scripts at a record pace, Gill undoubtedly cranked *The Blue Beetle* out with very little thought.

"I wasn't crazy about doing *Blue Beetle*," Gill said. "I only did a couple and then told Pat [Masulli, editor] to give it to somebody else...the character was too shallow. There wasn't anything to him, and I wasn't taking the time to make anything out of him. He wasn't mine, he was somebody else's."

Most of the new Dan Garrett's adventures were drawn by Charlton staffer Tony Tallarico, with assistance by Bill Fraccio. Both men mostly worked for Charlton, often under the joint "Tony Williamsune" pseudonym.

"We teamed up together at Charlton because I was getting tired of doing complete art jobs," Fraccio told Jim Amash. "I always hated to ink, anyway. Once I created the art and solved all the drawing problems, I didn't want to go over it again. It aggravated me a little bit. I was writing stories because of the time factor and I had enough going on, so Tony handled the inking."

Unlike Gill, Fraccio had fond memories of working on *Blue Beetle*.

"I also did *The Blue Beetle*, which I liked doing. *Blue Beetle* had a long publishing history and it was good...once," he laughed. "I liked it because it had plenty of action."

Gone were the generic gangsters and racketeers of the Fox *Blue Beetle*—they were traded in for science-fiction oriented adventure stories that involved mad bug men and atomic red knights. Being a super character, this new Blue Beetle needed super-powered villains, such as the Giant Mummy, Magnoman, Mr. Thunderbolt, and the laughable Praying Mantis-Man (literally a green-skinned man in a mantis costume).

As rushed as the artwork by Fracchio and Tallarico was, it kinetically bounces off the page with a spontaneity lost in more overly-rendered artwork. Charlton books were never amongst the best produced (a trait the company shared with Fox Features), but have the same crude charm as a B-movie.

The lettering in *Blue Beetle*, like most Charlton books, was credited to "A. Machine." In reality, the rather constipated typeset was done on a large comic-font typewriter called the Typositer machine.

"[Former editor] Pat Masulli designed a comic typeface for a large typewriter," Charlton artist Frank McLaughlin said. "The comic pages would fit in the typewriter and the copy would be typed right on the artwork. The results were a complete disaster that caused many more problems than it solved. It was a typical attempt to cut corners, but the finished product suffered greatly."

The typositer was often operated by either Charlton staffers John D'Agostino, D.C. Glanzman, or one of the company's female employees. D'Agostino drew some of Charlton's more cartoon-like books, such as *Kimmy the Ghost*, as well as working as a colorist on Charlton's staff, before moving to Archie Comics. The lettering has become a trademark of the entire Charlton Action Hero line.

Alter Ego editor Roy Thomas around 1967, flanked by custom models of Son of Vulcan and The Blue Beetle, both characters he first professionally wrote.

This new series only lasted five issues, until resuming the numbering of *Unusual Tales*, with *Blue Beetle* #50, two months later. *Blue Beetle* #54, the final issue, had the Blue Beetle face off against the Eye of Horus in a story written by then-aspiring Egyptologist Roy Thomas.

"It was badly drawn, and not that well-written (in my case, as well as others, either)," Thomas admitted decades later. "But, it was an

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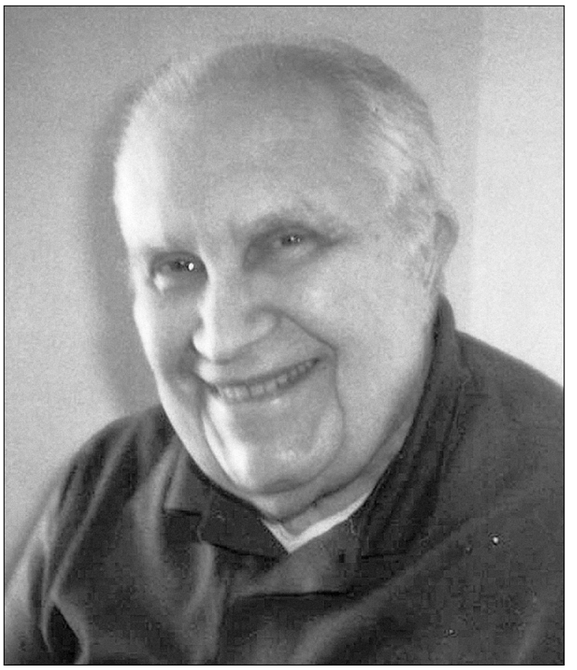
assignment, and I liked the concept of the character. I think that with the art and all, it didn't live up to what it should have been."

"The Eye of Horus" was Thomas' attempt at making Blue Beetle into a Marvel Comic: complete with Dan's unrequited love for a fellow Egyptologist, Luri, from his first appearance. In short, it consisted of the Blue Beetle fighting a giant eye reawakened by an unscrupulous museum head. The issue, and the series, ended with Dan Garrett pondering his unrequited love for Lori over his magic scarab in a very Lee and Ditko *Spider-Man*-like fashion.

Blue Beetle was once again sent to comics limbo, when his title was taken over and retitled *Ghostly Tales*. It would be another short-lived hiatus, one ended by Charlton's prodigal son: cartoonist Steve Ditko.

Best known for his collaborations with Stan Lee on *The Amazing Spider-Man* for Marvel, Ditko returned to Charlton after a creative disagreement with Lee. Ditko's departure from the relatively high page rates of The House of Ideas for the bottom-of-the-barrel Charlton rates is representative of the artist's firm philosophical convictions, something that would come more into being during his second stint at Charlton.



Blue Beetle artist Bill Fraccio.

The gangly Ditko, with Coke bottle glasses and slicked-back dark hair, is one of the more prolific cartoonists of the Silver Age. Ditko never drew beautifully: he drew effectively. The figures in his work contort off the page, joints bending and fingers splaying in directions impossible in real life—but completely effective on the comics page. His work could be simultaneously colorful and eerie, allowing him to work in a variety of genres, be it science fiction, monsters, or super-heroes.

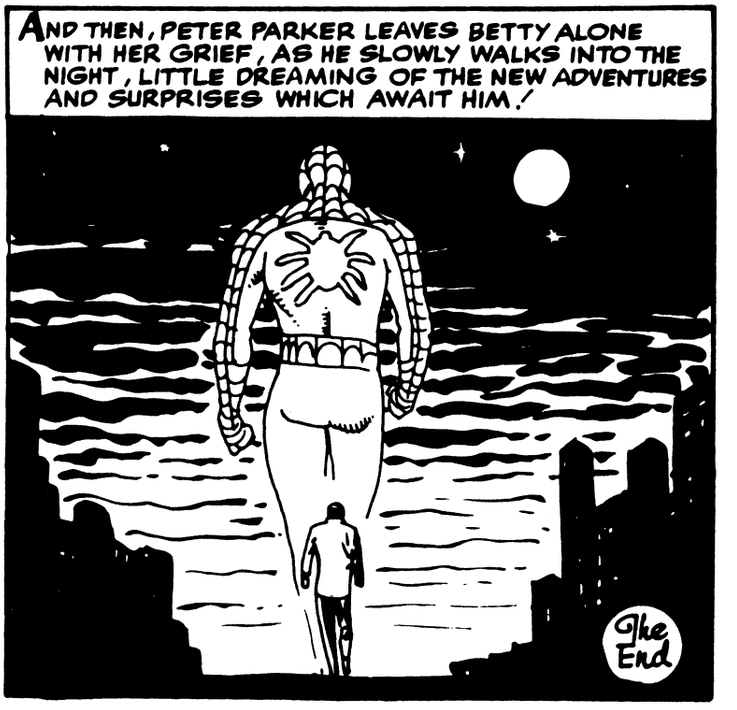
"Ditko was all right; we were good friends," Gill said. "We're not the same kind of people, but he and I were both living in the same hotel in Derby. Steve has ethics and stern beliefs, and he kept them. He wouldn't do bad work just because he was getting bad pay. He tried to do just as well for Charlton as he was for Marvel. He is a fine guy, and a good artist. He did everything 'The Ditko Way,' but he did a good job, and he made Spider-Man what it was."

"Steve and I cemented our friendship," Giordano continued. "He was suffering from a lung ailment all his life from, I think, Tuberculosis when he was younger. He was younger then and needed to exercise, so Steve and I used to spend a lot of time playing ping-pong. They had a table in the cafeteria, and we'd work up a sweat—that's how I learned to play, with Steve—and I had to defend myself when we started. By the time we finished playing, we were fairly equal, I think, but he'd still beat me more often than not."

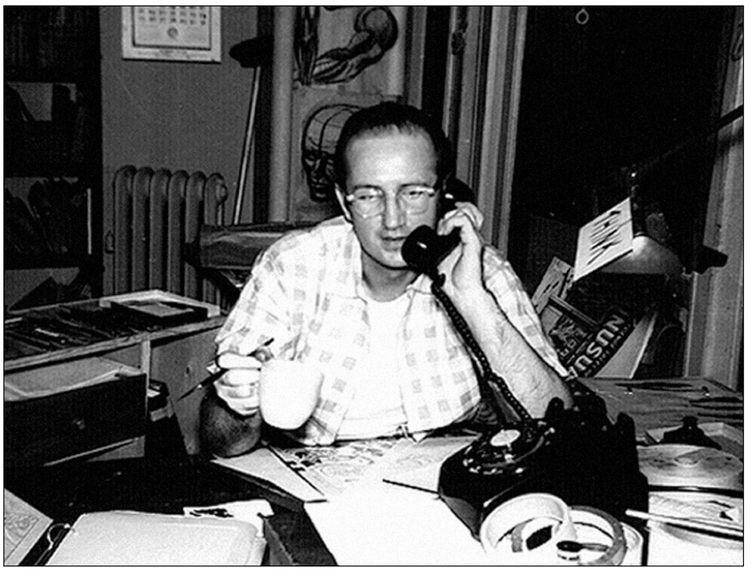
"Ditko lived in a local hotel in Derby for a while," McLaughlin said. "He was a very happy-go-lucky guy with a great sense of humor at that time, and always supplied the [female] color separators with candy and other little gifts."

When Steve Ditko premiered Ted Kord, the new Blue Beetle, in 1967, he had just come off a successful run on his most famous bug-inspired hero, Spider-Man. The trademark of the Spider-Man stories, the hero often sulking off into the sunset (below right), was also often seen at the end of Ted Kord's adventures (below left).

Spider-Man © 2007 Marvel Enterprises, Blue Beetle © 2007 DC Comics.



Blue Beetle descends from the bug, in a commission from artist Mike Zeck. Courtesy of Andy Mangels. Blue Beetle © 2007 DC Comics.



The enigmatic Steve Ditko, co-creator of Spider-Man and the Ted Kord Blue Beetle.

In November of 1966, the new Blue Beetle premiered as a back-up adventure in *Captain Atom* #83, and had traded in the traditional blue and red costume for a two-toned light and navy blue costume with a beetle design draped down over his shoulders, chest and back. Completing the costume was a distinctive goggled mask. Working without superpowers, this new Blue Beetle was young inventor Ted Kord, who operated out of his airship "The Bug." Rather than being vitamin-enhanced or a powerhouse, Kord relied on his acrobatic prowess and various inventions to fight crime.

The *Captain Atom* back-up stories were scripted by Gary Friedrich, who worked with plotted pencils by Ditko.

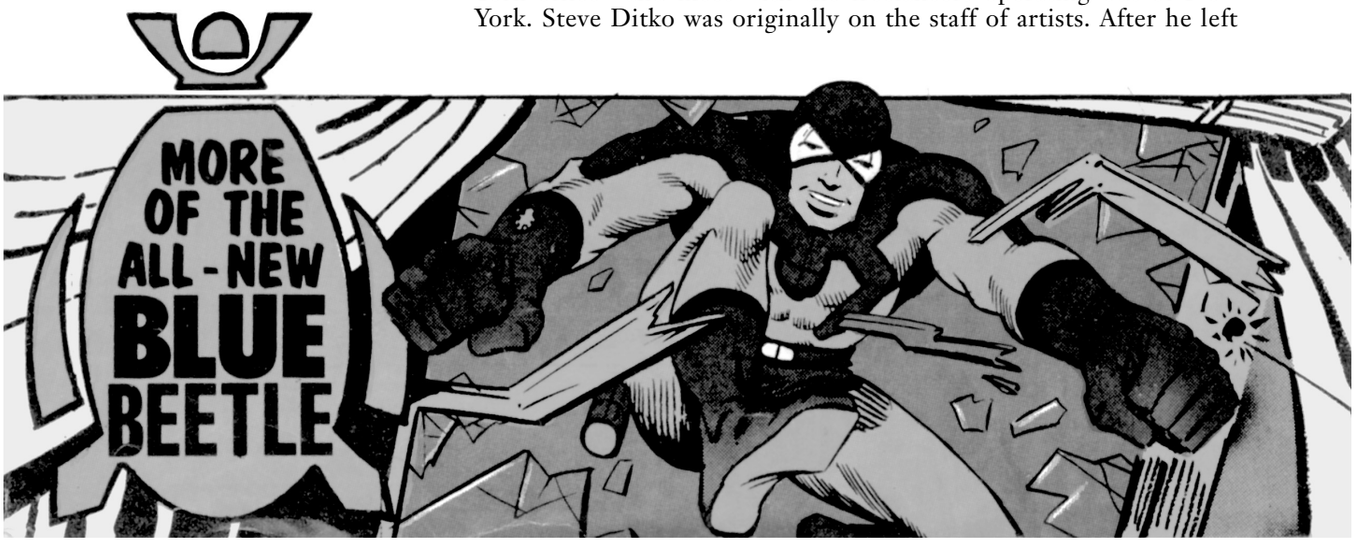
"As best I recall, Steve sent me very rough pencils which I dialogued," Friedrich stated. "I went up to Derby, Connecticut to meet with Dick before I started working for him. Then I seem to recall I went back one time when I met briefly with Dick and Steve Ditko about the Blue Beetle, but I really don't remember anything about the meeting other than that Steve didn't have much to say."

Friedrich's dialogue was littered with such phrases as "By Ringo's bangs!" and "the swingingest hideout in town" that made it read like the lovechild of Lee's dialogue on *The Amazing Spider-Man* and Bob Haney's writing on *Teen Titans*. It came across as a square trying too hard to be a hipster.

Ted's assistant Tracey and meddling police detective Fischer were the only regular supporting cast members (both of whom respectively tried to crack Ted's odd behavior and Dan Garrett's unexplained death). Fischer's pursuit of the truth behind Garrett's death on Pago Pago island was a recurring theme throughout the three *Captain Atom* stories and then June 1967's *Blue Beetle* #1. The next issue promised to reveal not only the origin of Ted Kord as the Blue Beetle, but also the fate of Dan Garrett.

Dick Giordano recalled the creation of this new Blue Beetle:

"I used to go into the city once a week—[Charlton] had a New York office—and meet with the freelancers operating out of New York. Steve Ditko was originally on the staff of artists. After he left



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to go freelance, we used to meet to pick up his assignments.

"It was there that we started to talk about Blue Beetle and decided to go ahead with it. Steve and I [later] sat down, and decided that we wanted a new Blue Beetle to come out of the old one. That's why #2 was the origin with Dan Garrett being killed on Pago Pago Island."

Blue Beetle #2 opens with The Bug landing on Pago Pago Island, only to find Tracey there, seeking evidence to prove Kord's innocence in Garrett's death. Then, Ditko had Blue Beetle do something unheard of in super-hero comics: the hero willingly revealed his identity to his love interest. It was not only a nice framing device, but created a new dynamic for the characters.

Ted explained his origin: Dan Garrett had helped Ted confront his mad scientist uncle Jarvis on Pago Pago. Overwhelmed by Jarvis' robot army, Dan revealed himself as the Blue Beetle, and was killed in the final battle. Garrett made a dying wish for Ted Kord to take over as the Blue Beetle, right before the floor underneath them gave way and Dan Garrett's body, as well as the magic scarab, were lost.

It was probably the second time an established super-hero's death resulted in the creation of a new one: The Hangman came into being to avenge his brother the Comet in 1941's *Pep Comics* #17 by MLJ (now Archie Comics). Other than perhaps the Shadow and Margo Lane, or even the Elongated Man and his wife Sue, it was one of the few instances where the love interest was also part of the hero's dual life.

Blue Beetle #1 (June 1967) & Pep Comics #17 (July 1941).
Hangman & The Shield TM & © Archie Comics

Blue Beetle started to become pure Ditko with the next issue; when the villainous Madmen get a hold of Blue Beetle's enigmatic gun, and incidentally can't get it to do more than buzz, they manage to use it to hold the public in check through fear alone. Many of the Ditko plotted-and-drawn *Spider-Man* stories had also put the focus more on how society deals with its heroes—rather than how the hero deals with society. As a result, it kept *Blue Beetle* from becoming yet another generic super-hero book.

It is in this period that Ditko begins to develop into the proactive cartoonist, using super-heroes as modern social commentary. Whether the Blue Beetle is dealing with the effects of non-lethal weapons in villainous hands or modern man's view of his own potential through art, Ditko injected a soul and self-awareness in *Blue Beetle*. In contrast to Ditko's prior work at Marvel, he was given a freer reign on his work, maybe even fully writing the entirety of his stories under someone else's name.

D.C. Glanzman served as Giordano's staff artist for a few years, often doing production work, as well as serving as liaison to the Comics Code association. Due to *Blue Beetle* artist Steve Ditko's preference, Glanzman is listed as *Blue Beetle*'s writer, even though the book was written by Ditko.

"Occasionally books had D.C. Glanzman down as a writer," Giordano revealed. "That was Steve Ditko really trying hard not to explain that he did everything."

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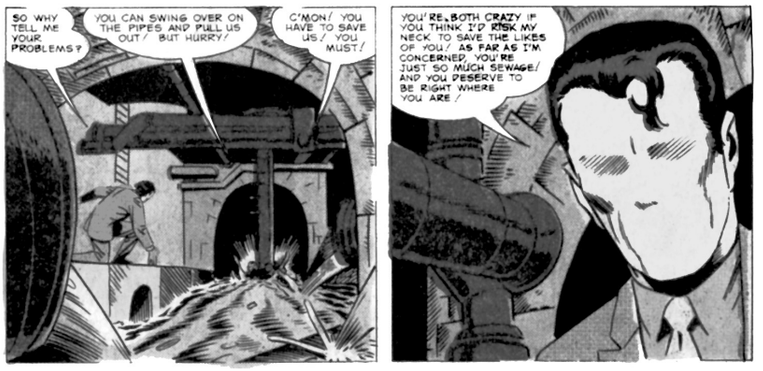
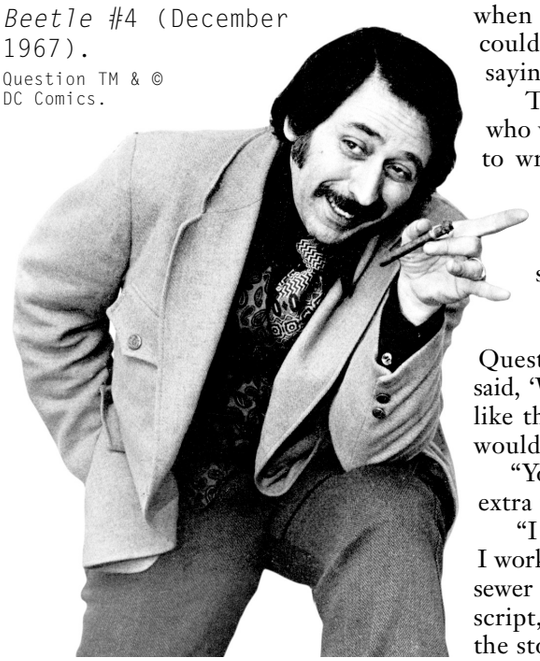


The Question from *Blue Beetle* #4 (December 1967).

Question TM & © DC Comics.



Charlton editor Dick Giordano hamming it up for a 1970s fumetti. (below) *Blue Beetle* #4 (December 1967).

Ditko has been comics' J.D. Salinger. Elusive for the past few decades, he doesn't make appearances and rarely grants interviews or has pictures taken of him. Ditko is known for his stern beliefs and is a follower of the Ayn Rand philosophy, something which apparently surfaced in his work with The Question story from December 1967's *Blue Beetle* #4.

"Ditko's beliefs did affect his work, and it started showing, I believe, in The Question, which he did for me as a back-up story at Charlton," Giordano said. "In fact, that became most obvious, I believe, when the Question (a hero) allows somebody (a villain) to die. He could have saved them. He didn't kill them, but allowed them to die, saying something along the lines of 'We're better off without him.'"

The story under scrutiny was dialogued by writer Steve Skeates, who was slated to take over writing *Blue Beetle* soon after. Not wanting to write both the feature and the back-up under the same name, Skeates took up the pseudonym "Warren Savin."

"[I was asked to do] a total rewrite job on this one Question story, while even getting scripting credit for doing so. I had to make Ditko's preliminary fairly sketchy dialogue sound more believable, make it come off more like the way people actually speak. Anyway...in that story, I had the Question say to the villain, in response to something that the villain said, 'Well, my friend, you didn't impress me that much,' or something like that. Ditko wrote me a six-page letter about why the Question would never call a villain 'my friend.'

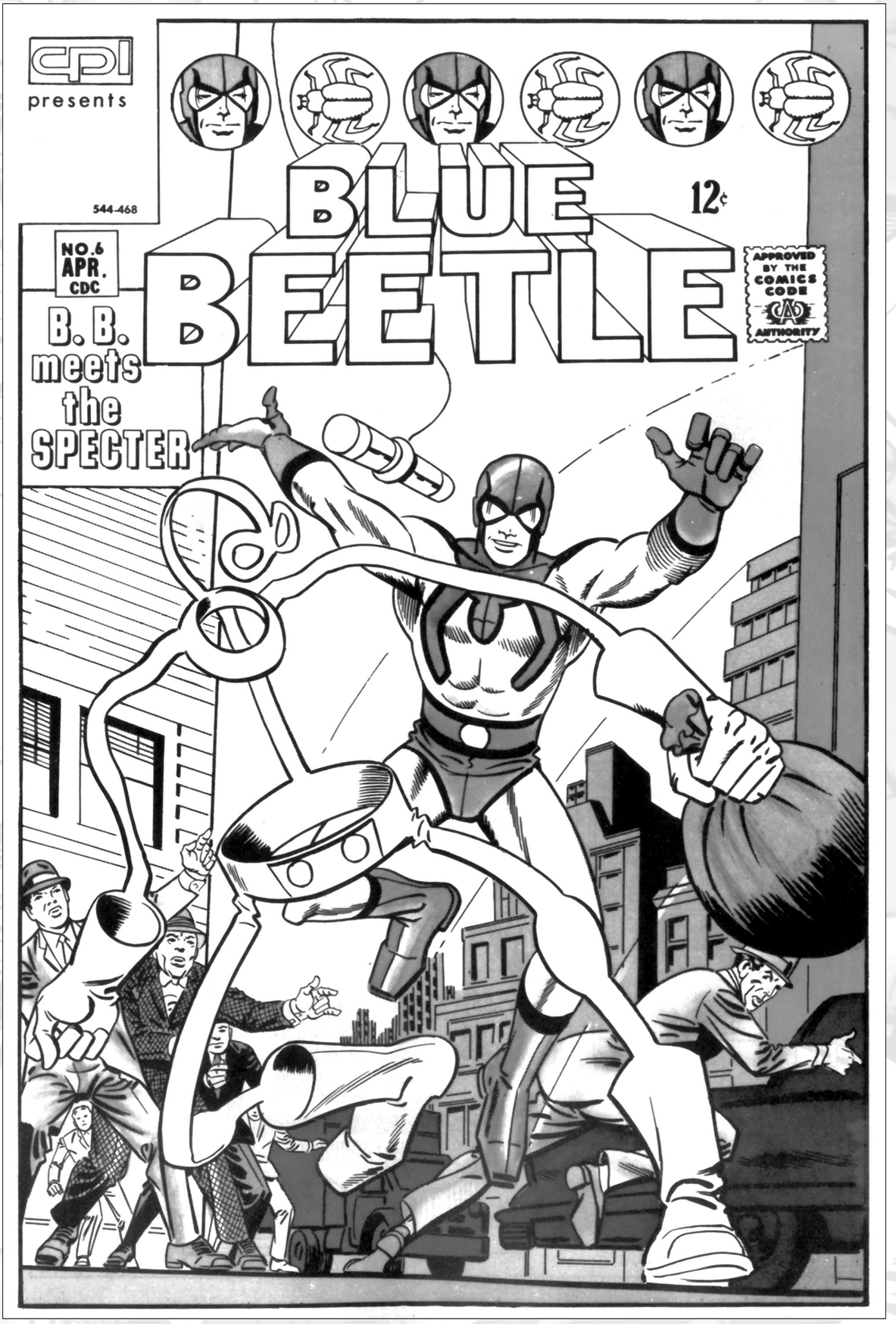
"You can see it in the story, too. There's one balloon with some extra white space at the beginning. 'Well, my friend' was cut out.

"I also find it rather fascinating that this lone Question story that I worked on, the one where the Question leaves the two badguys in the sewer to drown, is often cited as Ditko's most heartlessly conservative script, and then, when the reviewer goes on to quote dialogue from the story, it's all *my* dialogue, not Ditko's! And, politically, I'm about as far from a conservative as one can get! Guess that merely goes to show that one should never judge a man by what his characters say!"

Ditko continued the Question concept with his character Mr. A, a masked and trenchcoated crimefighter who (like the Question) was also a newsman. Where the Question's leaving two criminals to drown in one story was considered shocking, more than once does Mr. A leave a criminal alone to die.

"Of course, later on, *Mr. A* took probably the direction that The Question would have taken if the Question had been around that long," Giordano continued. "Mr. A was an exaggeration of the Question, and created expressly for Steve to express his viewpoints. He became enamored of Ayn Rand, and that philosophy. I'm neither criticizing or agreeing with the attitude that was there, but I've never believed that comic books (and I still don't) are the proper forum for explicit views of that sort. I don't want to see anything that reeks of politics in comic books; I don't think that helps. I think that the chances are, since we're pretty much split down the middle, if you take a conservative view you'll offend half of the people that are there. You'll find that most people are offended with anything that seems to mention a point of view."

While the new *Blue Beetle* series was unarguably the best the character had been at that point, it didn't last past issue #5 before the completed sixth issue could come out. The other Action Hero titles followed soon after, all dying within a year-and-a-half. Around that time prompted by Ditko, editor Giordano answered a call to work as an



This unpublished Ted Kord adventure (meant for *Blue Beetle* #6) saw the light of day in 1974's *Charlton Portfolio* #9 & 10. Blue Beetle © 2007 DC Comics.

(clockwise from top left): Dennis O'Neil, Steve Skeates, Dick Giordano, Rocke Masteriserio, and Dave Kaler at a mid-'60s convention panel.
(below) Detail by Dan Reed from *Charlton Bullseye* #1 (June 1981).

editor at DC Comics, taking writers Denny O'Neil and Steve Skeates, and artist Pat Boyette with him.

"When the offer came from DC, I jumped at it," Giordano admitted. "Charlton had a unique set-up, but they really didn't understand what it meant to them, and they weren't putting the tiniest effort into pushing it. The books were not promoted in any way, shape, or form. They were just thrown out there, like all of our other titles, with no promotion, so nobody knew they were there. There obviously was a cult following...but they weren't successful, and I was very disappointed, because I put a lot of effort and time into what was needed to get those books off the ground."

In 1974, the sixth issue was pulled out of storage and printed in *Charlton Portfolio*, a black and white fan magazine. The Blue Beetle fought an almost-invisible man in tones of grays and black, showcasing the brilliance color often dulls out of Ditko's work.

Like the Ajax-Farrell reprints of the '50s, Blue Beetle was briefly reprinted when a New York company licensed the Action Heroes rights. As part of the Modern Comics line, Blue Beetle was sold as part of bagged sets in a chain of Florida department stores in 1977.

In the 1970s, Charlton was the first distributor for *Hustler Magazine*, published by the infamous Larry Flynt.

"Flynt was quite a character," Charles Santangelo said. "And he figured out how much commission we were making, decided it was too much, and he broke the contract and went out on his own. We sued him, and he countersued. The judge went down the middle, but we lost to *Hustler*, a big loss. After that, things went down."

Things went further downhill for Charlton, with the company selling *Hit Parader* and other music magazines off to recoup finances. Larry Flynt, in the meantime, bought out Publishers Distributing Corporation to become his own distributor. Flynt was shot on March 6, 1978 during a legal battle in Georgia and crippled from the waist down. Joe Simon wrote about the incident in *The Comic Book Makers*:

"The fact that Larry Flynt was the target of a 'hit' that paralyzed him for life was coincidental and had nothing to do with [Charlton losing to *Hustler*]."

The Blue Beetle made another appearance in the first issue of the Charlton fan try-out book *Charlton Bullseye* in 1980. The arrangement with *Charlton Bullseye* was that fledgling writers or artists could contribute their work, get the input of professional editors, and ultimately get published in the *Bullseye* pages. While the writers and artists would not get paid, they would gain professional experience as well as exposure. *The Charlton Bullseye* was an idea fittingly created by a fan artist: Dan Reed.

"I was doing some fan stuff and had said 'Jeez, I'd love to get published,'" Reed recalled. "I'd sent samples over to both Marvel and DC, which would keep getting sent back with nice notes, like 'Not quite ready yet.' I thought, 'What about Charlton?' At the time, this was after their last gasp [and] they were just doing reprints. I went up and proposed

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the idea to [editor] George Wildman and Bill Pearson that they could put my work in. They said 'Well, we can't really do that, because we don't have any budget.'

"I said, 'It's okay, you don't have to pay me. Slip it into one of your magazines that you're doing now, and I would get the exposure and see what it looks like in print, and you would get free, new material.' They thought that was a good idea. *Charlton Bullseye* was born."

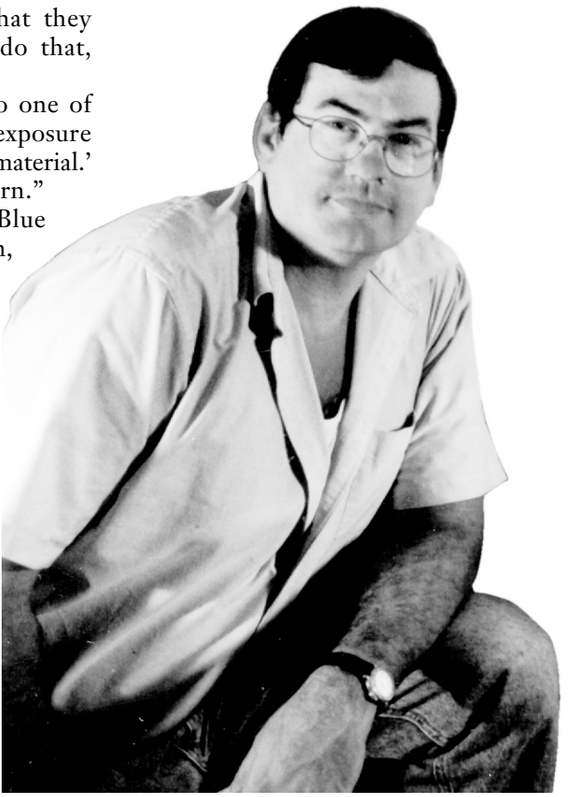
The story in June 1981's *Charlton Bullseye* #1 teamed the Blue Beetle with the Question, in a story written by Ben Smith, penciled by Reed, and inked by Al Val. A straight action story, the significance of the story is that it is the first actual teaming of the two Ditko creations (Blue Beetle had sort of teamed with Vic Sage in the final issue of *Blue Beetle*).

When Charlton Comics went out of business in the early '80s, Bill Pearson approached AC Comics' founder Bill Black about publishing leftover *Bullseye* material.

The Blue Beetle was once again featured, this time at his third company, in the third issue of AC Comics' *AmeriComics* in August 1983. AC Comics, started by cartoonist Bill Black, is most known for publishing *FemForce*, their flagship title featuring an all-female super-hero team.

"At that period, and I think it was because a lot of material that was laying around featured Charlton characters," AC Comics editor Mark Heike said, "they negotiated an agreement that AC Comics could use the Charlton characters for one year."

The opening story, written and drawn by Rik Levins with inks by Bill Black, featured the Blue Beetle fighting for his life against...the Dan Garrett Blue Beetle? The solution ties into the Ditko run pretty loyally, but not slavishly. The result is a fun super-hero story that is a step-up from the average Charlton comic, one that would be mirrored years later in a DC comic. The second story featured an alternate reality Jack Kirby pastiche of Dan Garrett's return, by artist Leo J. Haney and scripter Neal Stannard.



Artist Dan Reed, the force behind *Charlton Bullseye*.

The Blue Beetle also appeared in *AmeriComics Special No. 1: Sentinels of Justice*, a team book featuring Captain Atom, The Question, and Nightshade, before the character rights reverted back to Charlton to then be purchased by DC Comics.

Charlton Publishing would die a slow death in March 1991, with John Santangelo having passed away in 1979. What was once an empire with 250 employees from comic book artists to printers to immigrant bricklayers became a struggling company of eight. For the first time, the Blue Beetle would find himself a small fish in the large pond when he became part of the DC Universe.

(below) From *AmeriComics Special #1: Sentinels of Justice* (August 1983).

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Dan Garrett, back from the dead? Busting through in this splash page from AC Comics' *AmeriComics* #3 (August 1983). Art by Rik Levins and Bill Black. Courtesy of AC Comics. Blue Beetle © 2007 DC Comics. Art © 2007 AC Comics.

APPRECIATION:
Alan Weiss on completing a long circle

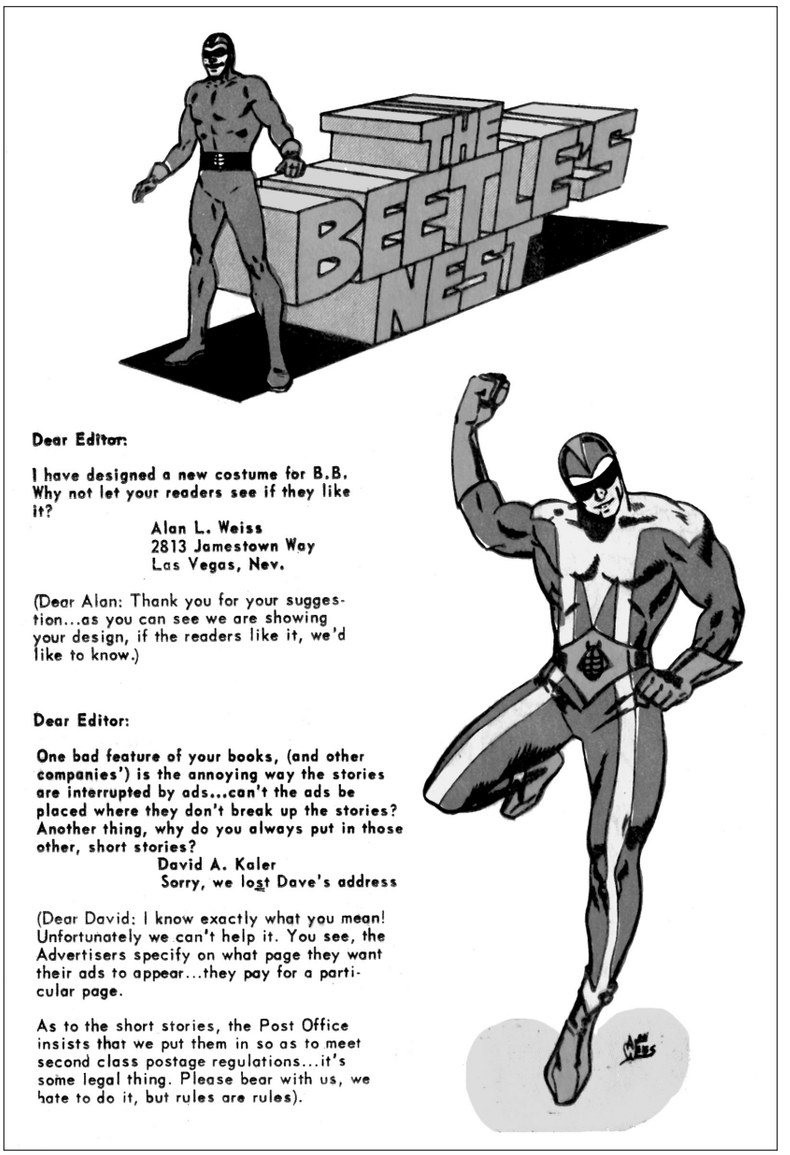
Emerging in the wave of 1970s cartoonists was Alan Weiss, whose work ranged from Westerns (DC's *El Diablo*, following his friend and mentor Gray Morrow's run), to horror (*House of Secrets* for DC), to super-heroes (*The Avengers* and *The Amazing Spider-Man* for Marvel). Weiss has done work for many companies, also including Gold Key, Defiant, Archie (on *Steel Sterling*), and Acclaim. Most recently, his art has graced the Young Tom Strong serial in Alan Moore's Wildstorm/DC comic book *Tom Strong's Terrific Tales*.

But before his firm body of professional work developed, Alan Weiss had artwork printed in Charlton's *The Blue Beetle* (vol. 2) #5 from early 1965. The teenage Weiss's fan redesign of the Blue Beetle is reprinted here...along with a new take, courtesy of Weiss.

On why he redesigned the Blue Beetle:
I thought that the Blue Beetle had one of the dullest, most uninteresting superhero outfits I'd ever come across. I couldn't believe they were even doing it and, of course, at the time I wasn't even familiar with the original Blue Beetle with the chain mail and all. I thought this guy needed something...But they didn't say anything about an original...This is right before comics fandom exploded, and you could [learn about comics] history.

Even as a teenager, I thought I could do better than that. I tried out a couple of ideas that didn't go too far from the original design that they had, but just jazzed it up a little bit. In essence, it was just a little piping here and a little color there. Here was a guy with no symbol, no cape —nothing. It was just so weak.

I just did it on a lark. I certainly didn't think there was an opportunity to have it published, and I'm not even sure there was a letters page when I did it. It came as a total surprise when I opened an issue of the magazine and there the thing was, and in color, too.



Alan Weiss' first published artwork was on this letters column.

Weiss on the 2006 redesign:
I wanted to have it be a combination of all the original elements that were indicative of the character. I liked the chain-mail feel. There's an element of his Egyptian origin that really didn't show up in any of the other outfits, other than the scarab. Then there was the attempt to try and meld the pulp feel with the super-hero feel. That was what it was. I think that's how come the headpiece looks so distinctively Egyptian.

The gunbelt was to give it a little more pulp than strict super-hero costume. You've got the pads on the knees so that there's some practicality of a guy that isn't invulnerable. Perhaps some of the costume could be bulletproof, but we don't know that, because this is a design waiting for a story.

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THE SILVER AGE BLUE BEETLE ISSUE GUIDE

Space Adventures #14 (Jan. 1955) and *The Blue Beetle* #20 (June 1955).

The following information was taken from *Charlton Portfolio*, The Grand Comics Database (*www.comics.org*) and an article in *Comic Book Marketplace* #17 by Michelle Nolan. Only the *Blue Beetle* stories are noted, omitting the filler and text stories.

FIRST SERIES
Charlton Comics
1954-1956

Space Adventures #13
(Oct.-Nov. 1954)
Cover: Al Fago
"Murder in the Ring"
Writer: Unknown
Art: Dick Giordano (Pencils and inks on one page only)
(The remainder of "Murder in the Ring" was reprinted from Fox's *The Blue Beetle* #58)
"Joan Mason, Reporter"
(Fox Comics reprints)

Space Adventures #14
(Dec. 1954 - Jan. 1955)
Cover: Al Fago
"Perils of the Blue Beetle"
Writer: Unknown
Art: Unknown
"Reproduction of Terror: Joan Mason, Reporter"
Writer: Unknown
Artist: Jack Kamen
(Fox Comics reprint)

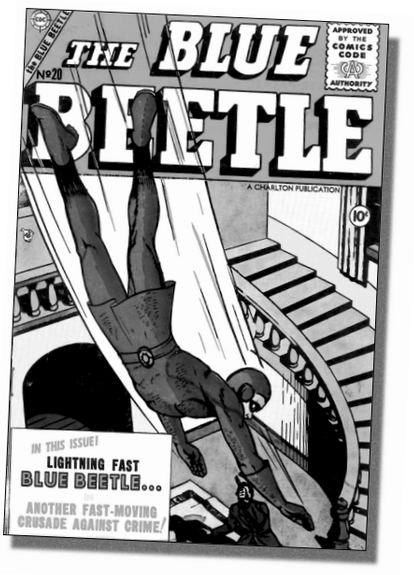
Blue Beetle #18 (Feb. 1955)
Cover art: Dick Giordano (?)
"Masks of Mystery"
Writer: Unknown
Art: Otis
"The Spider's Parlor: Joan Mason, Reporter"
Writer: Unknown
Artist: Art Allen
"The Man Who Stole 24 Hours"
Writer: Unknown
Art: Otis
(Fox Comics reprints from *The Blue Beetle* #40)

Blue Beetle #19 (Apr. 1955)
Cover art: Dick Giordano (?)
"Mystery of the Tolling Bell"
Writer: Unknown
Art: Unknown
"Anonymous Atom!"
Writer: Unknown
Art: Unknown

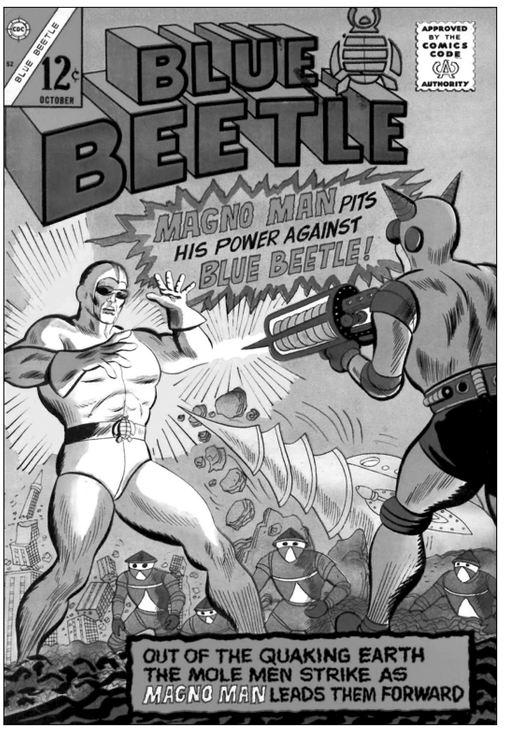
Blue Beetle #20 (June 1955)
Cover art: Dick Giordano (?)
"Rookie Trouble"
Writer: Joe Gill (?)
Pencils: Ted Galindo
Inks: Ray Osrin
"Last Chance"
Writer: Joe Gill (?)
Art: Ted Galindo & Ray Osrin

Blue Beetle #21 (Aug. 1955)
Cover art: Dick Giordano (?)
"The Unmasking"
Writer: Joe Gill (?)
Pencils: Ted Galindo
Inks: Ray Osrin
"Captured"
Writer: Joe Gill (?)
Pencils: Ted Galindo
Inks: Ray Osrin

Nature Boy #3 (Mar. 1956)
Cover art: John Buscema
"Unmasked"
Writer: Joe Gill (?)
Pencils: Charles Nicholas
Inks: Sal Trapani
(Note: This story is unrelated to the one printed the year prior)



The Human Fly #10 (1963) and *Blue Beetle* #52 (October 1965).



REPRINT SERIES
I.W. Publishing
1958 & 1963
The Human Fly #1 (1958)
Cover art: Sal Trapani
"Triple Trouble"
Writer: Manning Stokes (?)
Art: Unknown
(Fox Comics reprints from *The Blue Beetle* #44)

The Human Fly #10 (1963)
Cover: Ross Andru (pencils) & Mike Esposito (inks)
"Pyros, the Evil Auctioneer"
Writer: Unknown
Art: Unknown
"The Toga Terror"
Writer: Unknown
Artist: Otis
(Fox Comics reprints from *The Blue Beetle* #46)

SECOND SERIES
Charlton Comics
1964-1966
Blue Beetle #1 (June 1964)
Cover art: Frank McLaughlin (?)
Writer: Joe Gill
Pencils: Bill Fraccio
Inks: Tony Tallarico
"The Giant Mummy Who Was Not Dead": Origin of the Blue Beetle
"The Birth of Evil" (Part II)
"The Mummy's Return" (Part III)

Blue Beetle #2 (Sept. 1964)
Cover art: Bill Fraccio (pencils) & Frank McLaughlin (inks)
Writer: Joe Gill
Pencils: Bill Fraccio
Inks: Tony Tallarico
"Hot War in the Arctic"
"Prisoners of Time" (Part II)
"The Master Plan" (Part III)
"Atomic Death!" (Part IV)

Blue Beetle #3 (Nov. 1964)
Cover art: Dick Giordano
Writer: Joe Gill
Pencils: Bill Fraccio
Inks: Tony Tallarico
"Mr. Thunderbolt and the Superstar" (Part I)
"Storm of Fear" (Part II)
"Flames of Fury" (Part III)

Blue Beetle #4 (Jan. 1965)
Cover art: Dick Giordano
Writer: Joe Gill
Pencils: Bill Fraccio
Inks: Tony Tallarico
"The Praying Mantis-Man" (Part I)
"The Chlorophyll Man" (Part II)
"The Garden of Crawling Death" (Part III)
"The Mantis & the Beetle" (Part IV)

Blue Beetle #5 (Mar/Apr. 1965)
Cover art: Bill Fraccio (pencils) & Dick Giordano (inks)
Writer: Joe Gill
Pencils: Bill Fraccio
Inks: Tony Tallarico
"B.B. Challenges the Red Knight" (Part I)
"Capture of the White Queen" (Part II)
"Checkmate" (Part III)

Blue Beetle #50 (July 1965)
This issue assumes the numbering of *Unusual Tales*
Cover art: Bill Fracchio (pencils) and Tony Tallarico (inks)
Writer: Joe Gill
Pencils: Bill Fraccio
Inks: Tony Tallarico
"The Scorpion" (Part I)
"Tomb Beneath the Sea" (Part II)
"Oil Strike" (Part III)

Blue Beetle #51 (Aug 1965)
Cover art: Tony Tallarico
Writer: Joe Gill
Art: Fracchio and Tony Tallarico
"Mentor the Magnificent"

Blue Beetle #52 (Oct. 1965)
Cover art: Tony Tallarico
Writer: Joe Gill
Art: Tony Tallarico
"The Man Who Shakes the World" (Part I)
"Crater of Fire" (Part II)
"On the Trail of the Mole" (Part III)

Blue Beetle #53 (Dec. 1965)
Cover art: Tony Tallarico
Writer: Joe Gill
Art: Tony Tallarico
"The People Thieves"; the return of the Praying Mantis-Man (Part I)
"Baiting the Trap" (Part II)
"The Cave of the Living Sea" (Part III)

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Blue Beetle #54 (Feb/Mar. 1966)
Cover art: Tony Tallarico
Writer: Roy Thomas
Pencils: Bill Fraccio
Inks: Tony Tallarico
"The Eye of Horus" (Part I)
"Slaves of the Ancient Eye" (Part II)
"Menace of the Mind-world" (Part III)

Captain Atom #83 (Nov. 1966)
Cover Art: Steve Ditko
Writer: Gary Friedrich
Artist: Steve Ditko

Captain Atom #84 (Jan. 1967)
Cover Art: Steve Ditko
Writer: Gary Friedrich
Artist: Steve Ditko

Captain Atom #85(Mar. 1967)
Cover Art: Steve Ditko
Writer: Gary Friedrich
Artist: Steve Ditko

Captain Atom #86 (June 1967)
Cover Art: Steve Ditko
Writer: Gary Friedrich
Artist: Steve Ditko

THIRD SERIES
1967-1968
Charlton Comics
Blue Beetle #1 (June 1967)
Cover Art: Steve Ditko
Writer: D.C. Glanzman/ Steve Ditko
Art: Steve Ditko
"Blue Beetle Bugs the Squids"

Blue Beetle #2 (Aug 1967)
Cover Art: Steve Ditko
Writer: D.C. Glanzman/ Steve Ditko
Art: Steve Ditko
"The End is a Beginning"

Blue Beetle #3 (Oct 1967)
Cover Art: Steve Ditko
Writer: D.C. Glanzman/ Steve Ditko
Art: Steve Ditko
"The Madmen"

Blue Beetle #4 (Dec 1967)
Cover Art: Steve Ditko
Writer: D.C. Glanzman/ Steve Ditko
Art: Steve Ditko
"The Men of the Mask"

Charlton Premiere v2 #3 (Jan. 1968)
Cover: Henry Scarpelli
"Too Many Happy Endings": Sinestro, Boy Fiend
Writer: Joe Gill (?)
Artist: Henry Scarpelli
Cameo appearance by Blue Beetle

Blue Beetle #5 (Nov. 1968)
Cover Art: Steve Ditko
Writer: D.C. Glanzman/ Steve Ditko
Art: Steve Ditko
"...Faces the Destroyer of Heroes"

Charlton Portfolio #9 & #10 (1974)
Cover Art: Steve Ditko
Writer: D.C. Glanzman/ Steve Ditko
Art: Steve Ditko
"Blue Beetle Bugs the Squids"

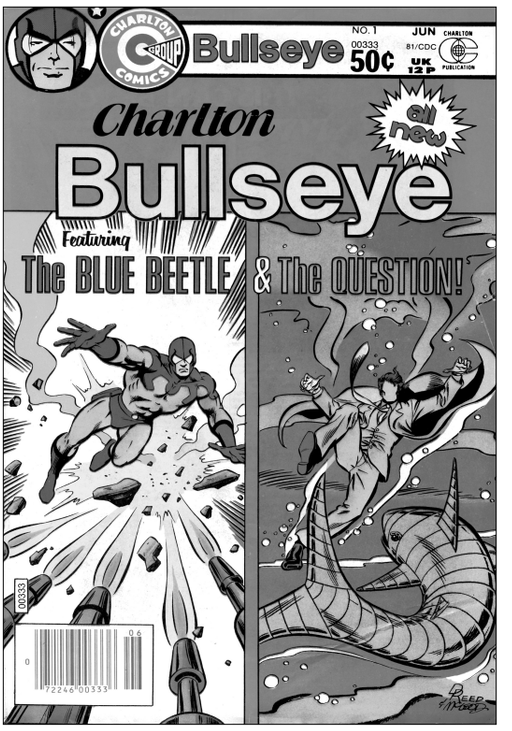
Ghost Manor #21 (Nov. 1974)
Cover Art: Sanho Kim
"Death in a Darkroom"
Writer: Nicholas Cuti
Artist: Steve Ditko
Cameo appearance by Blue Beetle

Charlton Bullseye #1 (June 1981)
Cover Art: Dan Reed (pencils) & Bob McLeod (inks)
"The Enigma!"
Writer: Benjamin Smith/A. Committee/Anon O. Mouse
Penciler: Dan Reed
Inker: Dan Reed & Al Val

AC Comics
1983
AmeriComics #3 (Aug. 1983)
Cover Art: Pat Broderick
"Return from Pago Island!"
Writer: Rik Levins
Penciler: Rik Levins
Inker: Bill Black
"To Live Again!"
Writer: Leo J. Haney
Penciler: Leo J. Haney
Inker: Bill Black

AmeriComics Special #1 (Aug. 1983)
Cover Art: Dan Reed (pencils) & Bob McLeod (inks)
"The Sentinels of Justice...A Fantastic Foursome!"
Writer: Dan St. John/Greg Guler
Penciler: Greg Guler/Matt Feazell (backgrounds)
Inker: Greg Guler/Matt Feazell (backgrounds)

Captain Atom #78 (December 1965) and *Charlton Bullseye* #1 (June 1981).



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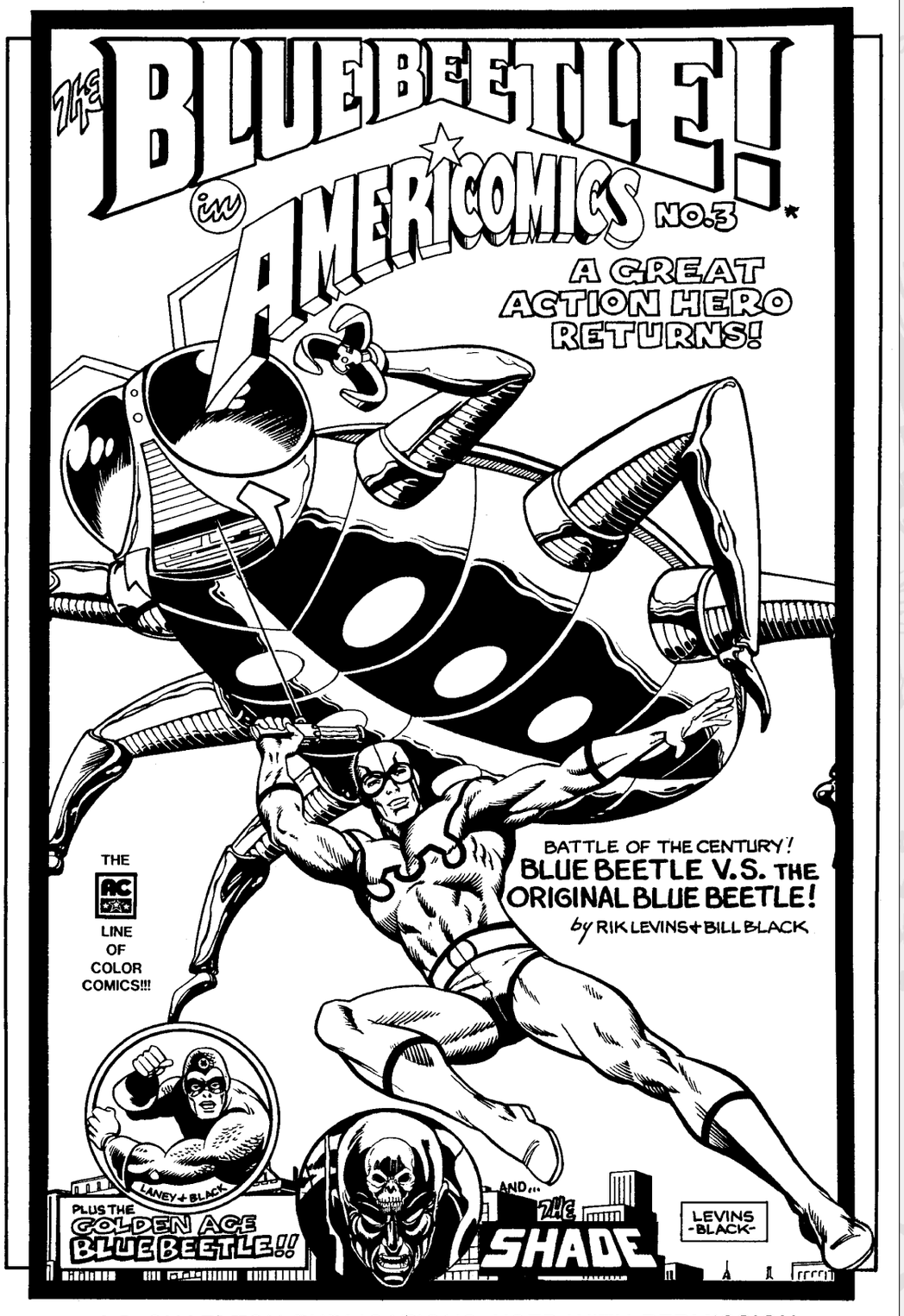

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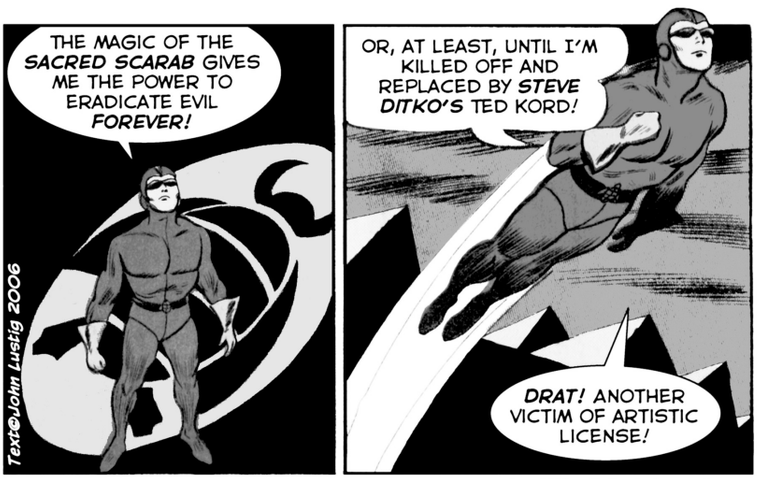
This AC Comics house ad from 1983 announced Ted Kord's brief stay.

Blue Beetle © 2007 DC Comics. Art © 2007 AC Comics.

TAKING A FINAL BOW... and a Last Kiss

Writer John Lustig, infamous for redialoguing Charlton's *First Kiss* romance comic book into his wonderfully demented *Last Kiss* comic strip, sunk his claws into a few issues of the Charlton *Blue Beetle* and gave Dan Garrett the same. Smattered throughout this chapter are Lustig's informative (yet hilarious) spin on the Silver Age Blue Beetle! You can check out more of John's unique brand of humor at *www.lastkissentertainment.com*.



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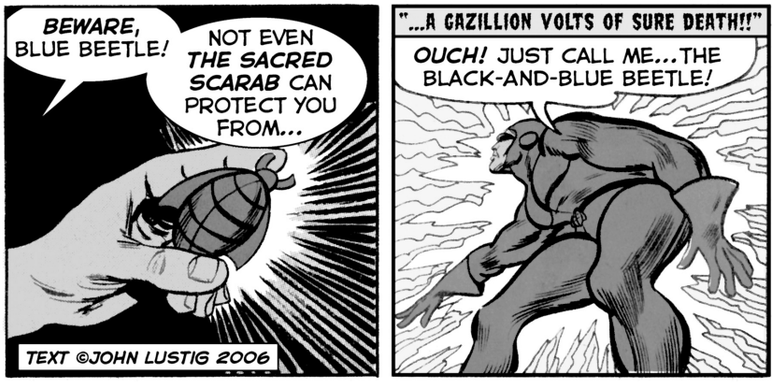

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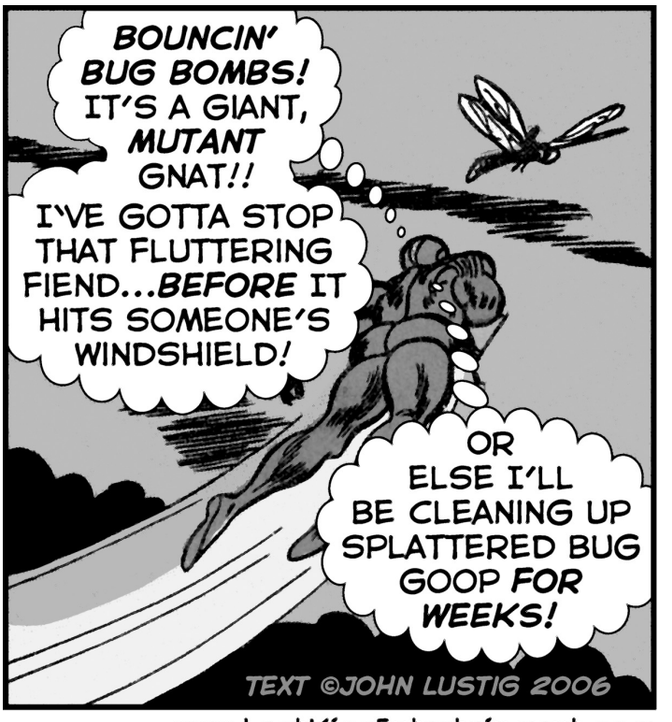
Art from all stories were taken from Charlton's *Blue Beetle* #5, #53, and #54.

www.LastKissEntertainment.com



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From the Golden Age Dan to Ted Kord, courtesy of *AmeriComics* #3 (August 1983). Art by Leo J. Haney and Bill Black.

Blue Beetle © 2007 DC Comics, all art and story © 2007 AC Comics.

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THE MODERN AGE

A WORLD NOT HIS OWN:
The Blue Beetle becomes part of the DC Universe

1986-Present

By the 1980s, Charlton had one foot well in the grave; the company that once published an empire's worth of comic books and magazines was now down to a handful of magazines. It isn't known exactly when Blue Beetle and the other Action Hero characters were bought outright from the sputtering Connecticut publisher (the exact figure has not been disclosed, due to proprietary reasons). Paul Levitz, DC's publisher and former comics fanboy, apparently bought them as a present to DC's then editor-in-chief Dick Giordano, the original mastermind behind the line in the '60s.

1986 was a huge year for DC: they launched their landmark twelve issue "maxi-series" *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, which resulted in massive company-wide editorial changes. When the Blue Beetle landed on a rooftop and fought a gang of thugs holding a girl hostage in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #1, George Pérez drew him to move like Ditko had him move...and writer Marv Wolfman had him speak like the Ditko version.

"That's my job," Beetle tells the grateful lady. "It goes with the blue union suit!"

And then...the Blue Beetle was pulled into the continuity of the DC Universe, and things would never again be the same for him.

Ted Kord's entrance: *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #1 (April 1985).
Blue Beetle TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

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Ted Kord finds himself in over his head, in this page from *Crisis* #3 (June 1985). Blue Beetle TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

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When *Crisis* wrapped, DC began a new *Blue Beetle* series, written by *Swamp Thing* co-creator Len Wein and drawn by artist Paris Cullins. The title launched in the promising second issue of *Secret Origins*, written by Wein and drawn by comics legend Gil Kane (the stubborn Irishman of comics, whose work dated back to the Golden Age at MLJ Comics). DC continuity didn't acknowledge the Golden Age Fox Comics version, and cut to the chase with the Dan Garrett archaeologist from Charlton. The issue led up to Dan's death and Ted's assumption of the Blue Beetle mantle, all powerfully drawn by Kane.

Blue Beetle was fully in action by his first issue from June 1986. Ted Kord became flamboyantly hip, dressed in clashing 1980s colors, patterns and styles. The sequence of the Beetle ship docking from an underwater entrance was there from the Ditko days, with Kord taking over Kord, Inc. from his father. With the supporting cast rounded out by his scientist girlfriend Melody and chemist Duncan, Ted's adventures as the Blue Beetle had the feeling of an earlier Ditko book: *The Amazing Spider-Man*.

"I asked DC to let me do *Blue Beetle*," Wein revealed. "Since I was my own editor for the first batch of issues, I essentially picked my own approach. I decided to do *Blue Beetle* as the *Spider-Man* book that Marvel wasn't doing at that point."

Blue Beetle was a love letter to Steve Ditko, with up to nine panels per page (like Ditko's *Spider-Man* work), and an overly introspective protagonist prone to monologues. Wein continued threads from the original Charlton run, such as having the Blue Beetle visit the remains of the lab on Pago Pago Island and bringing Dan Garrett back from the dead (under the control of the malevolent scarab).

"Much of what I did was continue what had been given to me by Ditko," Wein said. "I love those stories, which is why I wanted to do the book. There was an element of closure in coming back with Dan Garrett, wrapping it up and putting the scarab out there as a threat to the future."

While *Blue Beetle* was a fun book, its main character lacked the unique identity required to separate him from countless other masked crime-fighters in the DC Universe.

Paris Cullins left the book after a year and penciling was taken over by Don Heck and Ross Andru, respectively. Unfortunately, *Blue Beetle* didn't get the foothold it deserved and was cancelled with the twenty-fourth issue, making it the longest uninterrupted run that version of the character would ever experience.

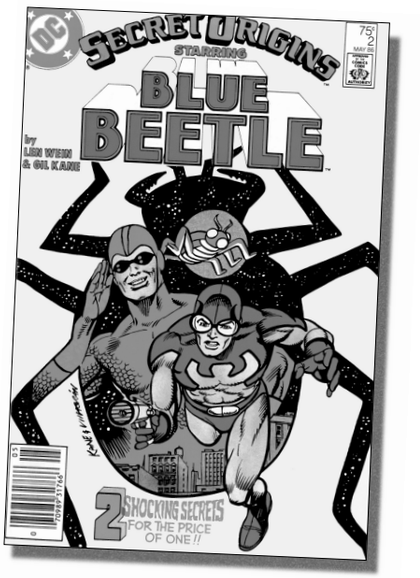
The Blue Beetle appeared in the six-issue *Legends* mini-series, which led into his inclusion in the Justice League, DC's team of super-heroes. The character's membership would change him for the rest of his life.

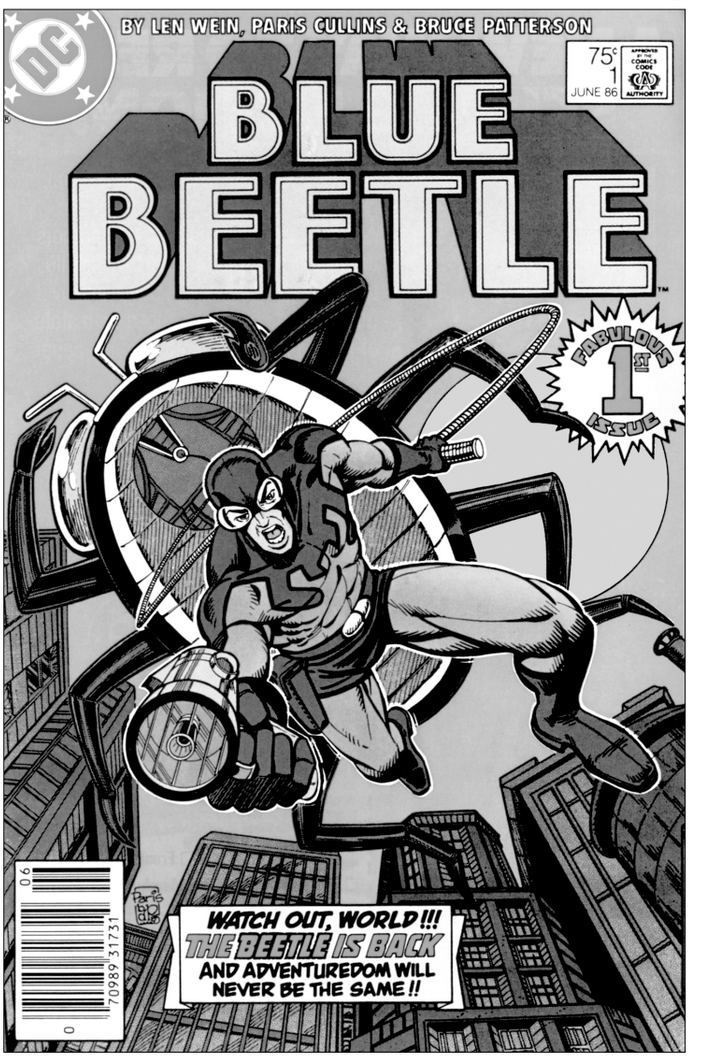
When *Justice League* #1 came out in May 1987 (a year before *Blue Beetle* was cancelled), writers Keith Giffen and J. M. DeMatteis, with artist Kevin Maguire, did something new.

They broke the Blue Beetle out of the Charlton mold and made him something different: the comic relief in an ensemble cast that included Batman, Black Canary, Martian Manhunter, and Mister Miracle.

"The only character from that new Justice League that I had any prior exposure to had been

Secret Origins #2 (May 1986) and Blue Beetle #1 (June 1986). Blue Beetle TM & © 2007 DC Comics.





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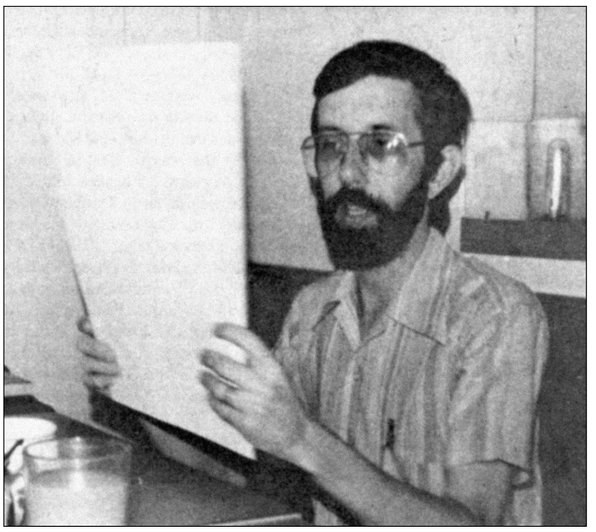
(above) John Byrne delineates Ted in this sequence from *Legends* #2 (December 1986). (below) Keith Giffen, who would help redefine Ted Kord in the 1980s.
Blue Beetle TM & © 2007 DC Comics.



Dr. Fate," co-writer Keith Giffen admitted. "The rest of the characters: Guy Gardner, the Blue Beetle, Captain Marvel...I'd not had any exposure to as far as working on them goes. Except for Batman, I had no idea who any of these characters were, which kind of worked in my favor, in that I felt emboldened to go in and force personalities on the characters.

"I don't know what it was about the Blue Beetle, but I just looked at the character, and was kind of familiar with what Steve Ditko had done with him at Charlton. I seem to remember a wise-cracking Spider-Man vibe? I went with that. Blue Beetle didn't really gel as the character he'd become, until [editor] Andy Helfer said 'Let's bring Booster Gold into the team.' For some odd reason, those two characters bounced off of one another perfectly, and Ted Kord became the tongue-in-cheek everyman."

Created by writer/artist Dan Jurgens, Booster Gold had premiered in February 1986's *Booster Gold* #1, the start of his short-lived series. Always in pursuit of the almighty dollar, Booster was a disgraced football star from the 25th century who stole relics from a museum and traveled to the 20th century to become a super-hero. The Blue Beetle would serve as the foil to Booster and his constant scheming. They would find themselves becoming super repo men, and even opening a disastrous resort on the fictitious Kooey Kooey Kooey island.

"The idea with the *Justice League* book was to create the kind of heroes you could see yourself sitting down and having a couple of beers with," Giffen said. "With the goggles and the Beetle ship, he struck me as being an everyday guy who thought that putting on that costume and swinging around the city was more fun than a God should allow a human being to have. It evolved from there. I don't think that I violated anything that Ditko had set up with Ted Kord, except that we really humanized him."

"I always wrote Ted to be our voice," Giffen later revealed. "He was the guy that had the weight problem. I never meant to take the Blue Beetle and say 'He's a schmuck.' I never meant it that way.

"He was the super-hero that kids would look up to and ask for his autograph, because he was a non-threatening super-hero, and yet for all of the complaints about him, he always got the job done. He was always there and that, to me, is not a buffoon."

"I hated it," Wein admitted of Giffen's portrayal of the Blue Beetle. "I hated that comedy relief super-heroes were also part of the main line. I have no problem with comedy relief heroes and was writing the Blue Beetle as a fun character to begin with. But if you want to do something that's slapstick and funny...don't take somebody's characters that someone has respect for and make them buffoons."

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Giffen, however, had a different view of the prototypical Ted Kord:

"You couldn't take him seriously. He was so derivative of so many characters. The name 'Blue Beetle,' to me, said that the guy was not taking it all that seriously himself. I want to point one thing out, just for the record: nothing we ever did with the Blue Beetle was meant to denigrate the character. Marc DeMatteis and I had a great deal of affection for the characters that came to be known as our Justice League. We're very proud of the way the Beetle/Booster team evolved.

"People will look at the old Blue Beetle of Ditko and even Paris Cullins and say 'How dare you make fun of him?' We were trying to do something with the character. Would you rather have this Blue Beetle, or no Blue Beetle? That was the only choice DC was giving at that point."

The Blue Beetle lasted in the *Justice League* books for about eight more years, only to disappear again for a couple more. Meanwhile, Dan Garrett appeared as a bit player in flashback stories, particularly the *Justice League of America: Year One* maxi-series, where he became a repeat victim of invading aliens.

In the summer of 1999, Dick Giordano and Bob Layton, both formerly of Charlton Comics, made an attempt at reviving the Charlton characters in a mini-series titled *The L.A.W.*.

"The Blue Beetle has been turned into a laughable buffoon," Layton said in 1999, before the mini-series' release. "But that's *not* how I remember the character from when I was a kid. I actually play off the Beetle's reputation as a clown to drive some serious points home in the series."

The L.A.W. didn't result in any lasting effects in the DC Universe, especially not with the Blue Beetle. Layton and Giordano's portrayal of Blue Beetle was more of a throwback to the Len Wein/Cullins version which, in itself, was a throwback to Ditko's Spider-Man.

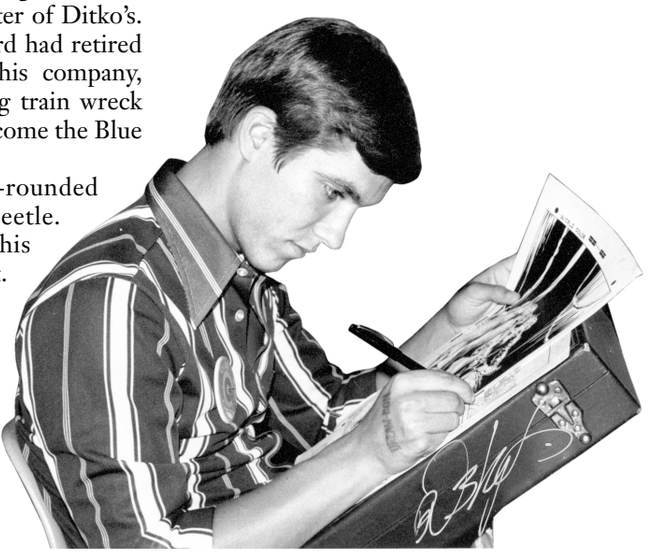
In March 2000, writer Chuck Dixon brought Ted Kord back in the pages of *Birds of Prey* #15, a title featuring the crime-fighting duo of Oracle (Barbara Gordon, the former Batgirl) and Black Canary. Dixon's portrayal of Ted Kord straddled the line between the light-hearted adventurer of Giffen's run, and the able-bodied crimefighter of Ditko's. Coming in to the picture as a friend of Barbara's, Ted Kord had retired as the Blue Beetle and decided to focus on running his company, Kordtronics. When Barbara and Ted encounter a burning train wreck while flying the Bug over Gotham City, Ted is forced to become the Blue Beetle once more, and continued to do so for a few issues.

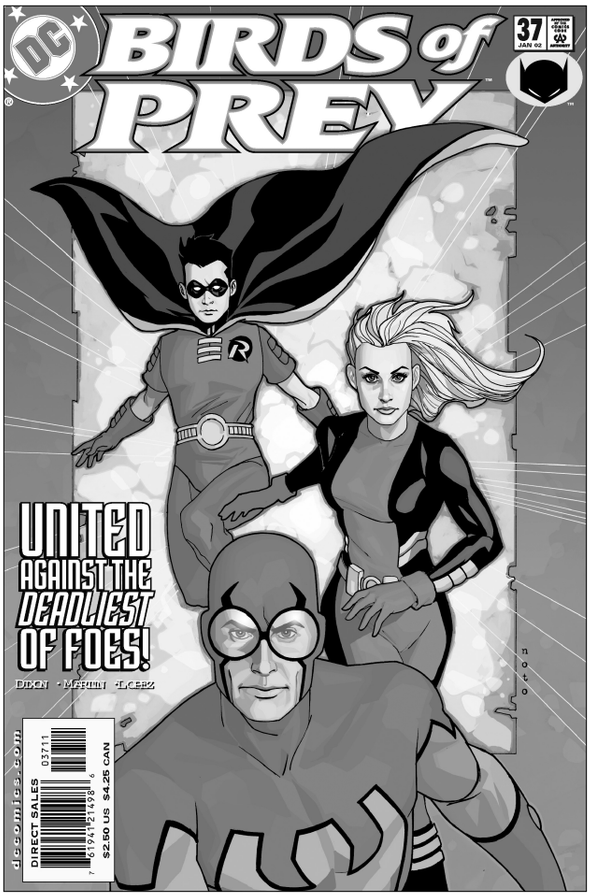
"I approached him kind of like he was a more well-rounded Bruce Wayne," writer Chuck Dixon says of his Blue Beetle. "He had a full private life and was very involved in his business as both a technological innovator and a capitalist. He enjoyed being the Blue Beetle and used it as an outlet for the frustrations he built up working in the corporate world. I also liked the idea that I think Keith Giffen initiated, that Ted had to work harder than most heroes to stay in shape."

In *Birds of Prey* #39, Ted Kord encountered a greater villain than any he ever faced: degenerative heart disease, diagnosed after Ted had unknowingly suffered from about three heart attacks.

(above) Beetle and Booster Gold swap insults in this page from *JLA: Classified* #4 (April 2005). Art by Kevin Maguire. (below) Bob Layton, Charlton alum and writer/inker of *The L.A.W.*

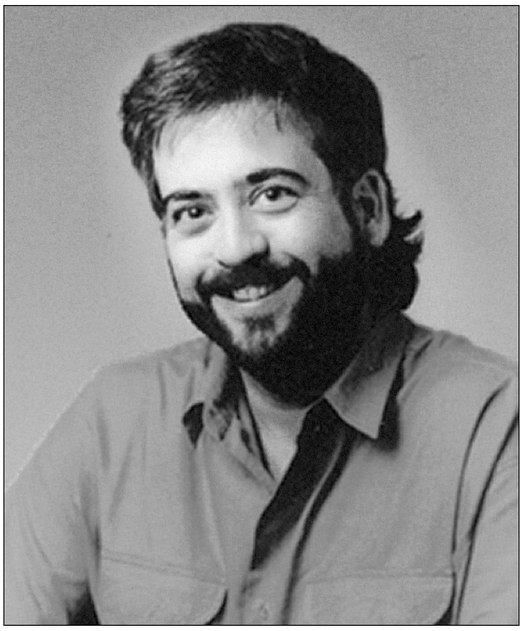
Blue Beetle, Booster Gold TM & © 2007 DC Comics.





(above) Blue Beetle makes a splash in *Birds of Prey* #37 (January 2002). (below) Birds of Prey writer Chuck Dixon.

Blue Beetle, Robin, Birds of Prey and Black Canary TM & © 2007 DC Comics.



"He had a debilitating disease for which there was no cure," Dixon recalled. "It added a drama to his character and I used it show off his sense of humor and courage in the face of adversity. I never planned on killing him and, since it's comics, his ailment could always be cured and he could be restored to status quo. But ultimately, I wanted him to be forced to retire and choose a successor to carry on his work."

Ted Kord's successor as the Blue Beetle would have entrenched him even further into DC continuity, affecting two characters in the *Batman* line of comics: Robin and fellow teenage crime-fighter Spoiler.

"The original idea was to have Tim Drake quit being Robin and take up Ted's offer to be the new Blue Beetle," Dixon revealed. "It was a perfect fit. Personality and interest-wise, Tim and Ted are far closer than Tim and Bruce [Wayne/Batman]. The plan was for Stephanie Brown, the Spoiler, to take over as Robin while Tim went off for a six-issue limited series as the Blue Beetle. Scott Beatty was to write this mini. At the end of the limited series, Tim would return to being Robin and a *Blue Beetle* monthly would be launched. In the monthly, an invalid Ted Kord would direct a half dozen Blue Beetles (all with different talents) to battle international crime.

"The idea had the support of a lot of folks at DC but the top people disliked the whole thing. It struck me as odd that they did the Spoiler-as-Robin stunt almost immediately after I left the book but without the dividend of upping Blue Beetle's profile or coming out of it with a new title."

Chuck Dixon left DC Comics to work exclusively for another company, the short-lived CrossGen, located in Florida. *Birds of Prey* would go to another writer, and Dixon's plans to revamp the Blue Beetle went with him. Interestingly enough, Spoiler did become Robin for a brief period...only to find herself killed and replaced by the returning Tim Drake.

Blue Beetle found himself back with Booster Gold and the rest of his Justice League team in *Formerly Known as The Justice League*, a 2003 mini-series that reunited writers Giffen and DeMatteis with penciler Kevin Maguire and inker Joe Rubinstein. Dragged into a heroes for hire scheme called the Superfriends by Max Lord, Ted Kord hopped back into the blue costume, despite his heart condition. Stuck back with Booster Gold (who'd married a much older rich woman for her money), it was almost like old times for the Beetle.

"He had matured and, contrary to popular belief, I try to honor the work of past writers, whether I agree with it or not," Giffen said. "I wasn't thrilled when I heard that Blue Beetle had developed a heart condition, but I was perverse enough to find it funny. I did the Blue Beetle as having outgrown the chasing a girl in a skirt phase."

With an April 2005 cover date, the Superfriends returned for one final turn in five issues of *JLA: Classified* for the *I Can't Believe It's Not The Justice League* storyline. The Blue Beetle came back in black: Maguire had changed the color scheme on the classic Ditko design.

"We were having some fun, revisiting the characters, but we knew this would be our last hurrah. The Blue Beetle came out from *Formerly Known as*...and *I Can't Believe It's Not The Justice League* as a stronger character. He was obviously the center, that core of gravity holding this group together."

Within the coming months, Blue Beetle would play a vital role in the goings-on of the DC Universe...one that would herald massive changes across the board.

Countdown to Infinite Crisis, a self-contained single comic book that jumpstarted DC Comics' *Infinite Crisis* crossover event, was released in April 2005. The cover, drawn by artist Jim Lee and painted by Alex Ross, features Batman holding the silhouetted figure of a comrade before other DC heroes. The identity of the fallen hero was kept secret for months before *Countdown*'s release.

Countdown opens with a down-on-his-luck Ted Kord bankrupted by an unknown adversary, and attacked by an equally mysterious assailant. Determined to get to the bottom of his troubles, the Blue Beetle uncovers a huge menace that threatens all of the heroes in the DC Universe: former ally Maxwell Lord has taken over the government agency Checkmate as their new Black King, and is using Batman's Brother One spy satellite for his own means. Blue Beetle is captured by Lord and, after refusing to help with his evil scheme, is shot in the head.

It was a dark end to a colorful character, and one that served as the beginning of change in DC's continuity. The decision to kill Blue Beetle specifically was made after deciding upon Lord as the apparent mastermind.

2003's *Formerly Known as the Justice League* #1.

All characters TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

"Back when we were doing *Countdown*, and decided the character we were bringing out behind the OMAC Project was Maxwell Lord, we wanted someone tied in to him to solve the story through," *Infinite Crisis* writer Geoff Johns revealed. "We wanted a character who was an underdog and would help uncover the machinations behind it. Blue Beetle was put on that list since he was a character everyone in the room liked, but hadn't been used lately. He fit everything we wanted. I loved the character (and I know that's ironic to say when you write the book where the character dies) and I thought he got a really nice spotlight in that issue."

Countdown reconciled Blue Beetle's reputation as a third-tier character with his actions as a first-level hero.

"There's a great line, where Maxwell Lord says 'I knew it'd be either you or Batman, and I was betting my money on you,'" Johns pointed out. "That put Blue Beetle in perspective right away. I think that anyone who started reading comics five to ten years ago didn't know who Blue Beetle was. We had a lot of readers (who'd read comics for under ten years), not have any idea who the Blue Beetle was."

Oddly enough, *I Can't Believe*...continued to come out after not only Blue Beetle's death, but Max Lord's being revealed a villain, and months after supporting character Sue Dibny had been killed in another, earlier, DC crossover called *Identity Crisis*.

"We did both Justice League books: *Formerly Known as the Justice League*, and *I Can't Believe It's Not The Justice League*, before we knew anything called *Identity Crisis* existed," Giffen revealed. "DeMatteis and my parts in that were done before we became aware of things that were going on. I discovered Blue Beetle was dying months after I was done with *I Can't Believe It's Not The Justice League*. We did not slant it a certain way. People always point to the fact that we dressed the Blue Beetle in black, foreshadowing [his death]. That just came about because Kevin said 'Let me reverse his colors.'"

The death of Ted Kord, from *Countdown to Infinite Crisis* (May 2005).

Blue Beetle, Max Lord TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

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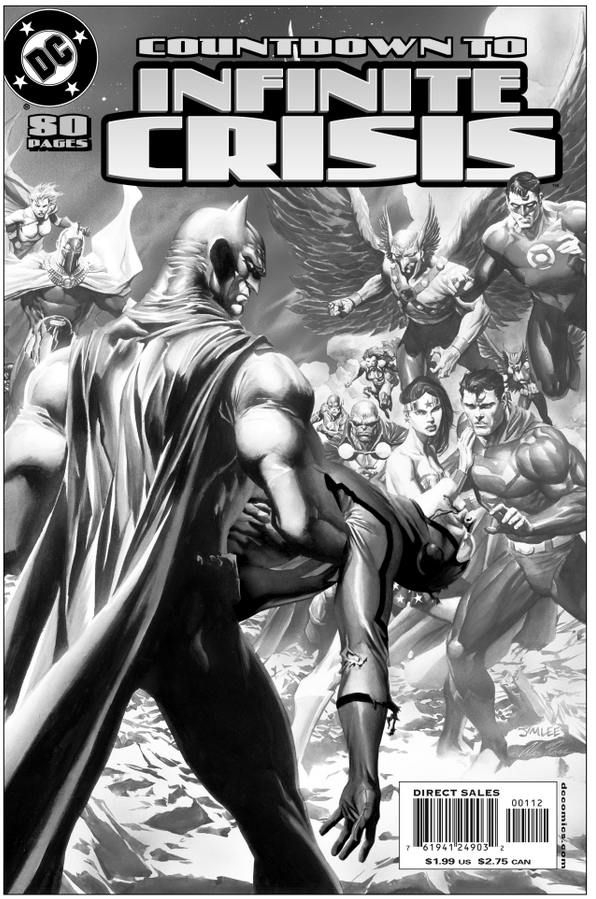

(above) Batman holding the body of Ted Kord, the fallen hero from *Countdown*. Art by Jim Lee and Alex Ross.
(below) A noir-ish portrait of artist Alex Ross.
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News of the Blue Beetle's death affected some writers and artists who'd worked on him more than others.

"It was a form of big regret," Alex Ross laughed about his painting the *Countdown to Infinite Crisis* cover. "The image itself was meant to invoke the classic image of *Crisis on Infinite Earths* with Superman holding Supergirl. It was meant to be a mystery towards who Batman was holding, which was part of the long list of things that Jim [Lee] was given to work with. I probably injured the piece by saying to Jim 'I don't really want to have you do a hundred different characters like in that original *Crisis* cover, because I'm not going to have the time to get that done.'

"This was a very quick deadline turnaround. I got a call one week and the piece was going to have to be done the following. Jim got his piece done and mailed it off to me and I had a total of two days to get it done. It wasn't entirely impossible, but I had other stuff I was committed to do in the meantime and had to push them aside. I did that under the thought that 'I'm part of the team here, and want to be a player and have more involvement with where DC is going.' It didn't work out and, in particular, I felt that I took a hand in killing a character..."

Ross had hopes that redesigns he'd done on the Blue Beetle for an earlier project would come in useful for the new version of the character.

"When it came time for DC's plans on killing and rebuilding the Blue Beetle, I thought 'Hey, I'm your guy! I've got this whole design, I'm willing to amend it for whatever purposes and we can work together on this,'" Ross said. "That's why I took the job and agreed to participate with the cover painting I did with Jim Lee, because I thought this would be about leading the character on to his next stage of importance, maybe brushing off the tarnish that stuck to him as being a buffoon character in the Giffen/Maguire run. They did a lot of fun stuff with him but, in the end, it wasn't helpful to the overall legend of the character. It degraded him."

"I knew about it in advance," Len Wein said of Kord's death. "Denny O'Neil filled me in, since he knew I had great love for the character. I thought he went out like a hero. That's exactly the antithesis to what Keith and company were doing, not that they did bad work, I just think it was not what I would have done. I didn't think it was well thought-out as to where it would put the characters later. They ruined him for the people who followed him."

Johns, like many of the *Countdown* writers, had to contend with one unhappy fan that hit close to home:

"Blue Beetle is one of my brother Jeremy's favorite characters," Johns admitted. "I got a nice phone call from him after we killed Ted Kord. It was all in good fun, which is what comics should be, and is always fun to debate. My brother, for years, said he really wanted Ted Kord to kick some ass, because he really felt he was under-utilized. His dream was to see Ted Kord get the scarab back, and he told me that his dreams were realized and shattered in one issue."

Despite Ted's death in *Countdown*, Giffen doesn't let it affect how he views his *Justice League* stories, as reflected in the last panel of *I Can't Believe It's Not The Justice League*, which has Ted and Max laughing together.

"DeMatteis and I did not know this, but that last panel where Beetle and Max are laughing and it says 'And they all lived Bwa-ha-happily ever after!'

"Gotcha."

"As far as I'm concerned—and again it's just me—those characters there, with that last caption: that's what happened. When Ted was

The Last Bwa-ha-hurrah by Kevin Maguire, from *JLA: Classified* #9 (September 2005).
Blue Beetle, Max Lord TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

killed, everyone expected me to be upset. I'm thinking 'I don't care.' After *I Can't Believe It's Not The Justice League*, DeMatteis and I had decided we didn't want to tell another story with these characters again. It wasn't that we didn't like the characters, but we didn't have any more stories that we felt passionate about telling, and it would have been hack work."

Through the machinations of *Infinite Crisis*, Dan Garrett's Blue Beetle scarab wound up in El Paso, Texas. In *Infinite Crisis* #3, teenager Jaime Reyes finds the scarab lying in rubble and takes off with it. Prompted by Booster Gold, the scarab attaches itself to Jaime's spine and generates a suit of blue armor around him...making Jaime the new Blue Beetle.

The architect of this new Blue Beetle was a name familiar to the character: Keith Giffen.

"[DC Editor-in-Chief] Dan Didio took me to lunch and said 'Blue Beetle and the scarab. That's all you can have. Are you interested?'," Giffen revealed. "The challenge was there, and I believe my decision right then was to make him Hispanic. I've been a huge agitator for more diversity in heroes; not all super-heroes are white and Anglo-Saxon. When I got the yes on that, I knew this was something I really wanted to do. *Blue Beetle* as a book, the tone, the location, the characters... I've been agitating for this for years. The fact that it was the Blue Beetle surprised me. I was also flattered that DC said 'It may as well be you since you have a knack for the character.'"

Giffen approached a disappointed Blue Beetle fan about co-writing the new book: Hollywood screenwriter John Rogers.

"One of the reasons I'm on the book is that, after Ted Kord was killed in the lead-up to *Infinite Crisis*, I had written this kind of snarky thing on my website about the tone that comics are on now," Rogers, writer of the *Catwoman* and *Transformers* films, said. "Keith, who I knew from other situations, called up and said 'They said they'd give me the scarab and free reign, so do you want to build the new book?' So I hopped on and, one of the things we wanted to do was tell good, simple stories with a great supporting cast, and the story of heroism."

Rounding out the initial *Blue Beetle* art team was artist Cully Hamner, a main member of Gaijin Studios in Atlanta, Georgia. His slickly delineated artwork has appeared in *Daredevil*, *Green Lantern: Mosaic*, and *Down* for Top Cow Comics.

"The editor, Joan Hilty, called me up and asked if I was interested," Hamner revealed about his initial involvement in the book. "I think it took a little while for both of us to decide that I would draw it. I hadn't

The new Blue Beetle bursts onto the cover of *Infinite Crisis* #5 (April 2005).
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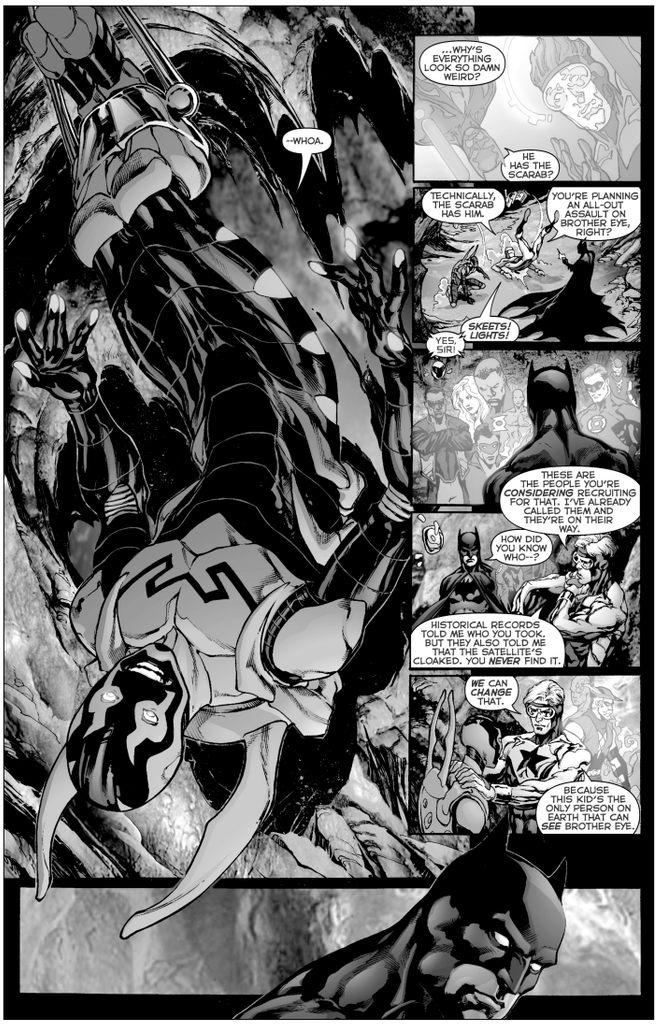

Jaime Reyes, the new kid, in *Infinite Crisis* #5 (April 2005) and (below) *Blue Beetle* #1 (May 2006).
All characters TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

done a monthly project in a while, and had a couple of attempts in a few years previous, but they didn't always work out. Because of things like that, my reputation at DC was not that of a monthly guy. Joan Hilty wanted, as she put it, a 'Gaijin' look.

"She asked if I was interested and filled me in on what the intent of the book was. She sent me a package with some of the outlines of what John and Keith had written, and a couple of design passes that other artists had done. I sat on it for about a week, and sat down on a Saturday to see what I could come up with for a design. There were a couple of false starts, but the first one I didn't tear up halfway through, was the first one I finished."

Giffen and Rogers, with artist Cully Hamner, created the fourth version of the Blue Beetle (the third for DC Comics), in time to become an important player in *Infinite Crisis* before launching into his own comic book. Johns did the honors of writing Jaime into the DC Universe, placing the new hero on an outer space mission with Batman and other super-heroes, to defeat Batman's out-of-control spy satellite: Brother Eye.

"What's interesting is that the one character who can help Batman locate his greatest sin, the Brother Eye satellite, represents the one character who died for it," Johns reflected. "The fact that they took one of Blue Beetle's Bugs up to fight the satellite goes back to the Blue Beetle's importance as a character. Ted Kord can't be forgotten."

Blue Beetle #1 came out with a cover date of May 2006. Jaime Reyes is a far cry from Ted Kord...or any of his other predecessors. Where the scarab was a gift to the Silver Age Dan Garrett version, and useless to Ted Kord, it is a curse to teenage Jaime Reyes, leaving him unable to account for a year of his life. Despite the vastly different approach and premise, the new Blue Beetle will not completely ignore what has come before.

"It's about a kid, and the scarab is giving him the kind of powers you don't want," Giffen said of the latest Azure Avenger's career. "If, in getting super powers, you have to have this scarab enter into your body and attach itself to your spine, you might think twice."

"But, that said, another thing people thought was that it would be a Day One re-imagining of the Blue Beetle, and that I would cross out the history. I've always tried as hard as possible to keep the past history of the character; not continuity [though]. Continuity binds, history enriches. There is a reason the scarab is reacting to Jaime differently. There is a reason that Ted Kord didn't get any superpowers when the scarab was in his possession, and there is a reason that Dan Garrett did. We've got the whole history of the scarab worked out to the day Dan Garrett found it. We're being very careful to not violate anything that came before. I was surprised when I started looking into it, how it almost points to what we're doing. People who have been fans of the Blue Beetle, ever since he was wearing chain mail, will find out that we're respecting the history of the character. We're saying 'Here's how it all works out and applies to the new character. We hope you get a kick out of it, because we want you to know you're not wasting your time in following this character.'

"If you're a new reader, it's still a damn good, horrific story."

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Blue Beetle is not set in one of DC's many fictitious cities, but in El Paso, Texas. There is a reason for choosing this out-of-the-way city for his teenage protagonist, according to Giffen:

"No one in the DC Universe is within miles of El Paso. It's a unique location and it's got this twin city across the bridge and river. It has this weird kind of duality, and we'll be exploring both sides of the river. Understand, *Blue Beetle* is not about being a Mexican-American sixteen-year-old kid, any more than *The Amazing Spider-Man* was about being a white Anglo-Saxon kid: it's about Blue Beetle, and a kid dealing with the powers. Any ethnicity it has is for background into Jaime's life; it's not about being Hispanic, it's about being Blue Beetle. It's about the horrible, soul-wrenching price you pay in doing the right thing."

Blue Beetle follows Jaime Reyes as he comes to terms with the changes his year absence has wrought upon his family: his mother fears drug use, his sister is scared of Jaime and his Blue Beetle armor, and Jaime's supportive and wise father limps on a cane due to having been shot during Jaime's absence. The Blue Beetle scarab and the super-powered element seem a backdrop to the human drama that enfolds.

"He's the B-average, doesn't really get in trouble, tries to honor his parents, has his own mind, good kid," Giffen noted about Reyes. "He's not above picking up a bit of dust here and there, but there's no serious trouble. He's the high school kids I see all the time who aren't into drugs, aren't into gangs, and aren't into wearing their pants halfway down, trying to pose as gangsters. He's a good kid and, left to his own devices, would probably have a relatively happy life, probably nothing spectacular. There's nothing spectacular about him and his friends, they're just kids. The scarab enters his life and it upends everything. It's about how he deals with it."

Comparisons between Reyes and Marvel's *Spider-Man* are to be expected: both are teenage super-heroes with great power unexpectedly thrust upon them...power that has unfortunate and sometimes tragic consequences. According to the *Blue Beetle* team, the comparison ends there.

"It's interesting because people go 'It's a *Spider-Man* knock-off,' and I go '*Spider-Man*? You mean the book about the twenty-something-year-old dude who's married to a supermodel?'" Rogers said. "This is a chance to live that legacy of the Blue Beetle, which is this mystic artifact that seems to find people who are inspired."

Before the first year was over with on *Blue Beetle*, two of the title's originators, Keith Giffen and Cully Hamner, moved on to other projects. Rogers remained as sole writer, with newcomer Rafael Albuquerque coming in to replace Hamner:

"Keith had worked with Rafael Albuquerque over at Boom Studios and loved his work," Rogers noted. "For Keith Giffen to say he likes

Jaime and his friends stumble upon the scarab, from *Blue Beetle* #1 (May 2006). Art by Cully Hamner.

Blue Beetle TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

(below) Jaime makes a landing in *Blue Beetle* #1 (May 2006). Art by Cully Hamner. (right) Digital artist Alex Wright takes a stab at Jaime in this mock cover.
Blue Beetle TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

an artist is something. He raved about him being fast, smart, and having a great style. Even though he's very untried with the big publishing companies, we went out and had him do a couple of sketches, and they seemed to land almost directly between Cully's very animation cell-like clean line, and [fill-in artist] Duncan Roleau's fluid, more artsy style. It seemed like a good match that wouldn't disrupt the book, and would give me a young artist that I could work with more closely. It seemed like a good time to make the switch."

The Blue Beetle legacy has been further added to with the inclusion of Dani Garrett, the granddaughter of the first Blue Beetle, Dan Garrett, who is a super-hero scholar on the fast-track to her Doctorate. Blue Beetle's plan is to become a legacy book different from any other legacy book:

"It was really weird when we started the book because people were going 'You're usurping Ted's legacy,'" Rogers observed. "Keith and I knew that, after we established the character, we'd spend a year paying it off, and dig in and show how the scarab makes sense, how it's been around, and how the legacy of both Dan and Ted will define Jaime to a great degree as a character. I've got the last two issues plotted out for this arc, and they're very dependent on Jaime knowing that he's the third one, with a lot of echoes to the previous guys, but not in a slavish way that requires reading the old books to get it. In the same way, we know we're a legacy character and want to get out of the box and do it differently.

"The first two years of *Blue Beetle* is us doing one long origin story, so that when you come out of year two, Jaime is ready for his super-hero career; it'll still be with the same quirky sense of humor and the same 'I don't belong with you people' vibe. He'll know what he's doing and knows how the armor works. It's a little insane, because most people do six- or three-issue origin stories. Keith and I realized 'Wouldn't it take a year for you to realize you had superpowers? Let's take the time and also show how your family feels about it.'"

Regardless of the success or failure of this new incarnation of the Blue Beetle, he will likely continue to live in the comic book world for several decades more...whether as a star or a character actor.

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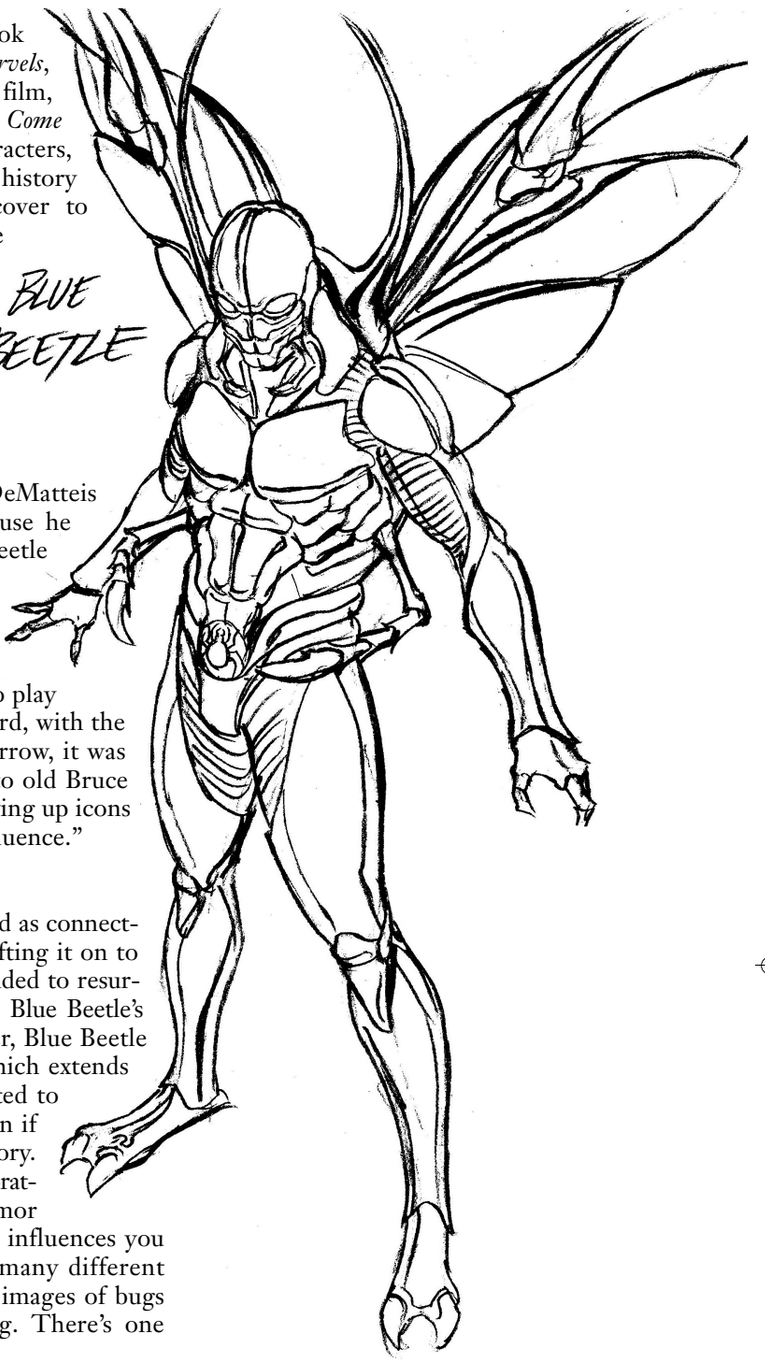
APPRECIATION:
Alex Ross on The Blue Beetle and his re-interpretations of the character

Alex Ross is most known for his painted comic book work on such projects as *Superman: Peace on Earth*, *Marvels*, *Uncle Sam*, the opening credits of the *Spider-Man 2* film, *Justice*, *Earth X*, and futuristic super-hero epic *Kingdom Come* (where he presented Ted Kord, among other DC characters, years in the future). Most significant to the character's history is Ross' painting over Jim Lee's pencils for the cover to *Countdown to Infinite Crisis*, where Ted Kord (Blue Beetle III) was killed.

Ross reveals his feelings on the Blue Beetle, as well as his conceptualization of the character for *The Kingdom*, the sequel to DC's futuristic super-hero epic *Kingdom Come*, that proceeded without his involvement.



On Blue Beetle's role in *Kingdom Come*:
"I knew that characters who were part of the Giffen/DeMatteis era of those *JLA* stories belonged with Batman because he took the time to lead that team. Somebody like Blue Beetle seems like an easy fit with Batman. Also, Ted Kord has a history that goes back to the '60s, and the character's history goes back to when Batman was invented. Blue Beetle is an important icon, and to really embrace him as a member of the Batman family was what I wanted to play out. When he first shows up out-of-costume as Ted Kord, with the out-of-costume versions of Black Canary and Green Arrow, it was to suggest that these were three of the closest people to old Bruce Wayne, and esteem his position as important. I was playing up icons as to how important they were to time, weight, and influence."

On the *Kingdom Come* Blue Beetle design:
"[I was] thinking that the scarab itself should be redrafted as connected strongly to Ted Kord. I was thinking about him grafting it on to a suit of armor or styling the suit after the scarab. It tended to resurrect that direct visual connection with the source of the Blue Beetle's powers. Even though he's not a super-powered character, Blue Beetle should be DC's Iron Man and have a suit of armor (which extends to where they've gone with the character now). I wanted to suggest that this is the kind of thing you can pick up on if you're super-attuned to the character and know his history.

"It's the very classical style of armor that's being incorporated. I wanted to be creative with the shape of pieces of armor combined with the beetle aesthetic. One of the oddest influences you can imagine is Rick Griffin, the popular artist of so many different psychedelic posters of the '60s and '70s who has done images of bugs [with] spectacularly rendered appendages and shelling. There's one

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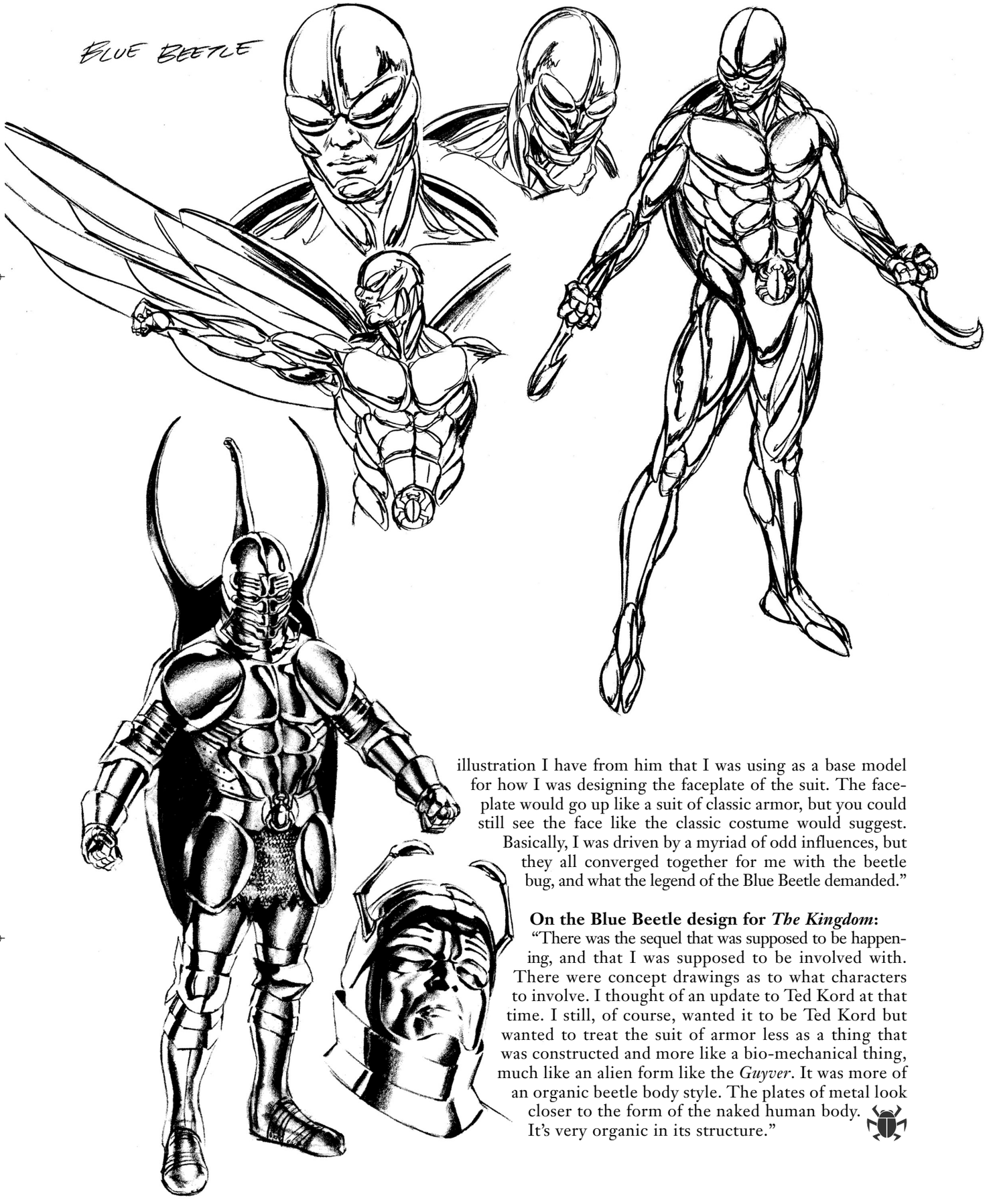

illustration I have from him that I was using as a base model for how I was designing the faceplate of the suit. The faceplate would go up like a suit of classic armor, but you could still see the face like the classic costume would suggest. Basically, I was driven by a myriad of odd influences, but they all converged together for me with the beetle bug, and what the legend of the Blue Beetle demanded."

On the Blue Beetle design for *The Kingdom*:
"There was the sequel that was supposed to be happening, and that I was supposed to be involved with. There were concept drawings as to what characters to involve. I thought of an update to Ted Kord at that time. I still, of course, wanted it to be Ted Kord but wanted to treat the suit of armor less as a thing that was constructed and more like a bio-mechanical thing, much like an alien form like the *Guyver*. It was more of an organic beetle body style. The plates of metal look closer to the form of the naked human body. It's very organic in its structure."

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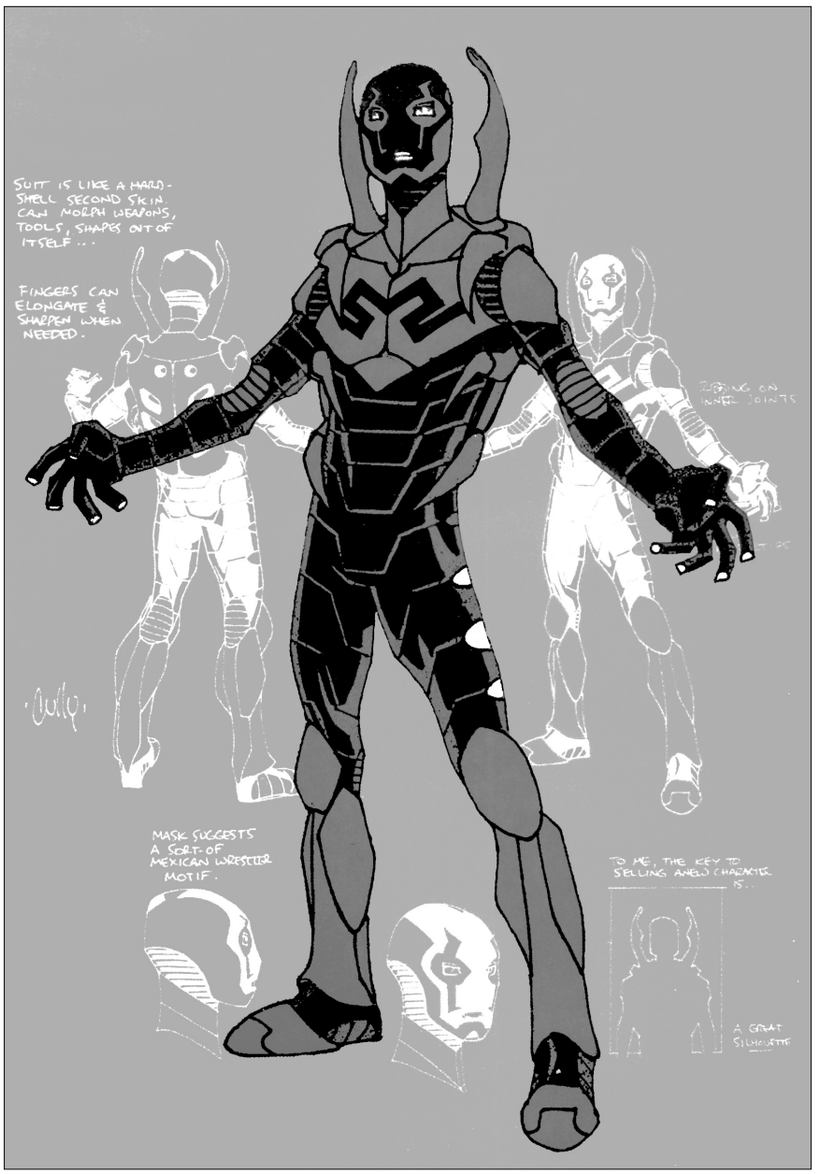
APPRECIATION:
Cully Hamner on his Blue Beetle design

That was essentially the design for Blue Beetle now, the only difference being that DC wanted something on his chest, as an insignia or graphic. I decided to do something similar to the Ted Kord insignia, and it works in tying the whole thing together.

He doesn't have two B's on his chest. It's a graphic that has a little bit of history behind it, which is just enough history to make it work, without it being slavish to the previous Blue Beetle. It worked for me, because part of the rationale that they wanted was a suit that was multi-functional and armor-ish. My thought was to do more of a second-skin that would have an armored exo-skeleton look that a beetle has, but not be so technical-looking. The conceit is that you don't know what the source of the armor is, whether magical or technological; the nature of things is going to be revealed, but you don't know what side of the spectrum the armor comes from. There are also several other influences: the mask is slightly influenced by Mexican wrestlers...

You look at a character like Batman, and you know him by silhouette. You just have to see the two ears and cape. All the best characters have that sense: even Spider-Man has a graphic to him, even if he's a black figure, you just have to put those two eyes on him to know. My intention was that if you even just saw him backlit, you'd know who it is. The bugpack (as I call it) backpack that he wears, gives it that. That was a very purposeful thing on my end.



Blue Beetle, 2005 style: Cully Hamner's original designs for the Jaime Reyes Blue Beetle.

Blue Beetle TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

Gravity artist Mike Norton's take on Ted Kord. Blue Beetle TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

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THE BLUE BEETLE INFLUENCE

The Blue Beetle has vicariously popped up in comic books in different forms, proving that you really can't kill a good concept.

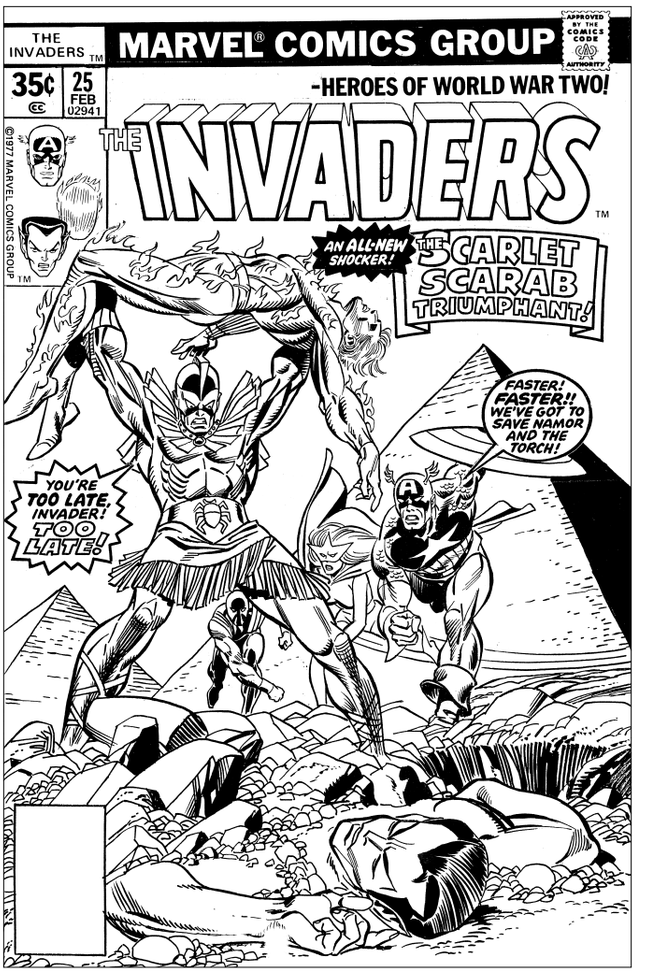
The Scarlet Scarab, *The Invaders*, Marvel Comics

Debuting in the pages of *The Invaders* #23 (December 1977) was The Scarlet Scarab, writer Roy Thomas' nod to the first super-hero he ever wrote: the Charlton Dan Garrett Blue Beetle. *The Invaders* was a team book that featured Marvel Comics' Golden Age heroes: Captain America, The Human Torch, and Namor the Sub-Mariner, as part of a team of 1940s World War II-era super-heroes.

"Scarlet Scarab in *Invaders* was less a nod to the Golden Age Blue Beetle than to the one whose final issue I wrote in 1965," Roy Thomas revealed. "But since there was a sort of vague continuity between that BB and the earlier one (at least in terms of appearance), setting it in the 1940s made sense to me. The Egyptian origins of the mid-'60s Blue Beetle fit in nicely with my desire to have the Invaders version be Egyptian, and have an Egyptian point of view."

Desiring to force American forces (and the second War) out of Egypt, Professor Abdul Faoul made his way into the tomb of Garret, a creator of a mystical ruby scarab, and Faoul became the Scarlet Scarab. As the Scarab, his powers were very similar to that of the super-powered Blue Beetle, and the tomb is obviously named after Blue Beetle's alter ego of Dan Garret.

The son of the original later appeared in *The Mighty Thor* #326 (December 1982), becoming the new Scarlet Scarab and encountering the Thunder God in his quest for the Eye of Horus, a mystical statue. The new Scarlet Scarab was created by writer Doug Moench and artist Alan Kupperberg.



Writer Roy Thomas' nod to the Silver Age Blue Beetle.

Invaders TM & © 2007 Marvel Characters, Inc.

The Silver Scarab: *Infinity, Inc.* #1, DC Comics

The son of DC Comics' Golden Age Hawkman and Hawkgirl, Hector Hall decided to become a crimefighter by fashioning a suit of armor of the Nth metal used by his parents to fly. The costume design is quite reminiscent of the Fox Comics version.

"The characters were designed by Mike Machlan and myself," *Infinity, Inc.* penciler Jerry Ordway recalled. "Mike was the inker on *All-Star Squadron* and *Infinity, Inc.* He did the first passes and major designs on the characters. The elements were from the Golden Age Blue Beetle, with the mask like the Silver Age, with the goggles. We

veered off, at that point, to the Infinity Man from Kirby's Forever People for inspiration.

"The idea was that he was the son of the original Hawkman, who'd had an Egyptian beginning, which was where the scarab came in. It was following a line from their origins, to come up with characters that were not obviously connected. Hawkman was also an Egyptologist."

Silver Scarab would eventually die, be reincarnated in the form of another DC hero (one of their numerous versions of the Sandman), killed again, brought back as the new Dr. Fate...only to disappear once more. Ironically, he is much like his progenitor, the Blue Beetle, in that respect.

Nite Owl: *Watchmen*, DC Comics

When writer Alan Moore pitched a 12-issue series to DC Comics titled Who Killed the Peacemaker?, Editor-in-Chief Dick Giordano requested the comics scribe not use the Charlton Action Heroes, but rather create new versions. The result? Peacemaker became the sadistic Comedian, The Question was Rorschach, and Blue Beetle became Nite Owl! Designed by artist Dave Gibbons, there were two versions of Nite Owl: a Golden Age (policeman Hollis Mason) and the Silver Age (Daniel Drieberg), both modeled off the Fox and Charlton versions, respectively.

Infinity, Inc. and Watchmen © 2007 DC Comics.

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THE BLUE BEETLE

CHARACTER FILES:
The Many Lives of the Blue Beetle

Dan Garret was born to an Irish policeman father on December 6, 1916, his mother presumably dying in childbirth, or soon after. With a sense of decency and fairness, Dan would often put the neighborhood bullies in their place. Although he wanted to become a policeman when he grew up, Dan's father, Mike, saved up for his son to go to college first. Getting out of high school with a full scholarship, Dan continued to excel in college in everything from academics to football, boxing, and even hockey.

The course of Dan Garret's life was forever changed when a telegram arrived his senior year: His father was fatally wounded in the line of duty. Dan arrived to barely catch his father's final words. Over his father's corpse, Dan vowed to Mike Mannigan (his father's partner) that he'd catch the criminals responsible. Dan became a beat cop partnered with Mannigan that summer, upon graduating college, and pursued vengeance against his father's killers.

Dan first appeared as The Blue Beetle when he broke in to police headquarters to procure a letter detailing his father's murderer: the criminal Chick Alonzo. Arriving in his blue chain-mail armor, The Blue Beetle single-handedly defeated Chick Alonzo and his gang.

The Blue Beetle employed a few allies during his career, while busting crime and corruption in York City. Mike Mannigan constantly swore to bring The Blue Beetle in, but sometimes found himself an unwilling ally on a few cases. The Blue Beetle's most important ally, however, was Dr. Franz, the chemist who owned a local apothecary shop. Dr. Franz not only equipped The Blue Beetle with his distinctive chain-mail armor and an arsenal that included his portable phone and magic raygun, but also invented the formula Vitamin 2-X. Vitamin 2-X was taken early in Dan's career to give him superhuman strength and enhanced reflexes, and was usually taken in capsule form.

By the outset of World War II, Dan Garret became a G-Man, and had many adventures the world around, and in his new base of Central City. Working with occasional sidekick Sparky J. Northrup, The Blue Beetle became a global adventurer who went on several missions for the U.S. government, sometimes behind enemy lines.

Dan returned to York City after the war, and continued fighting crime as The Blue Beetle. The main difference was that he no longer employed Dr. Franz's help, and had acquired a host of new superpowers. By the 1950s, The Blue Beetle worked for the government's Central Intelligence, but still maintained his Dan Garret persona.

The Blue Beetle's fate remains unknown, although one report was that he died at the hands of a mad scientist's bomb. Whatever the case, the Golden Age Blue Beetle ended like he began: a true man of mystery.

Name: Daniel Norton Garret
Base of Operations: York City, USA
Height: 6'2"
Weight: 195 lbs.
First Appearance: *Mystery Men Comics* #1 (Fox Comics; August 1939)

Blue Beetle TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

Name: Dr. Daniel Garrett
Base of Operations: Midwestern University, USA
Height: 6'0"
Weight: 189 lbs.
First Appearance: *Blue Beetle* #1 (June 1964)
Death (in flashback): *Blue Beetle* vol. 3, #2 (Aug. 1967)

When Dr. Dan Garrett was investigating the tomb of the pharaoh Kha-Ef-Re with fellow archaeologist Luri Hoshid, he stumbled upon a magic scarab. Granted the power of the scarab by the spirit of Kha-Ef-Re, Dan was transformed into the powerhouse Blue Beetle! Gifted with superhuman strength, telescopic x-ray vision, optic blasts, near-invulnerability, and power blasts, Blue Beetle fought a variety of super-foes.

Luri and Dan experienced an on-and-off romance, with Dan torn between his feelings for her and his duties to the world as Blue Beetle. He would often confer with the ghost of Kha-Ef-Re for advice on using his great power.

Dan met his ultimate fate on Pago Pago Island, when he was helping his friend Ted Kord defeat Ted's evil uncle, Jarvis. When Jarvis' androids overloaded, both Jarvis and Dan were caught in the backlash. With his dying words, Dan had Ted vow to take over as Blue Beetle...right before both Dan and the Scarab were swallowed by a rift in the ground.

Name: Edward "Ted" Kord
Base of Operations:
Hub City, USA; Chicago, Illinois, USA; Various
Height: 5'11"
Weight: 190 lbs.
First Appearance: *Captain Atom* #83 (November 1966)
Death: *Countdown to Infinite Crisis* (April 2005)

When Ted Kord realized his Uncle Jarvis had been using Ted's scientific prowess for evil purposes, Ted enlisted the aid of old friend Dr. Dan Garrett to help stop Jarvis from his Pago Pago Island stronghold. Arriving at Pago Pago, the two men were captured, and Jarvis revealed his plan to them. Discovering Dan's alter ego of Blue Beetle, Ted helped him battle Jarvis' robots, until Dan and Jarvis were both mortally wounded in the line of battle. Ted vowed to Dan to continue fighting crime as The Blue Beetle.

Ted became a member of the Justice League, through several incarnations, and befriended many crimefighters in his career. Colorful, acrobatic, and a technological genius, Ted Kord was a formidable hero in his own right. As Ted Kord, he was the head of Kord Industries, and all its various incarnations.

Ted's final mission as Blue Beetle ended in his death at the hands of former ally, Maxwell Lord, when he uncovered Lord's evil machinations.

Name: Jaime Reyes
Base of Operations: El Paso, Texas, USA
First Appearance: *Infinite Crisis* #3 (February 2006)

When teenager Jaime Reyes stumbled upon the scarab, he had no idea what he was in for: With the scarab fused to his spine and melded into his body, Jaime finds himself able to transform into the armored Blue Beetle when danger finds him! Aided by his best friends Brenda and Paco, as well as Dan Garrett's grand-daughter Dani, Jaime struggles with being a good son to his supportive parents while fighting crime and trying to solve the mysteries of the scarab that has become a part of him.

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AFTERWORD

"ACE" IRVING ON THE INSIDE
by Jon B. Cooke

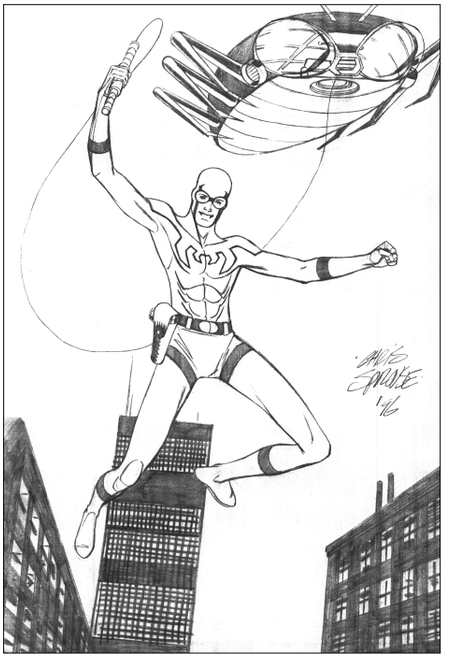
Remember the persistent, sharp-witted reporters you'd see populating those 1940s Preston Sturges' movies, always ready with some cynical observation and snappy retort? You know who I'm talking about: Newshounds out of "The Front Page," complete with weather-beaten hats, pencil stubs behind their ears and two-bit cigar butts protruding from perpetually yammerin' jaws. Correspondents who are always running for the nearest phone to holler "Gimme the city desk!" and bark their scoops at hapless rewrite men...think young Hume Cronyn in trench-coat relentlessly pounding the city beat in a Depression-era Gotham envisioned by Damon Runyon.

Well, guys and dolls, that's how this crusty ol' curmudgeon of a magazine editor will always remember his top investigative reporter, Chris "Ace" Irving—*Comic Book Artist*'s own "Irving on the Inside"—author of the tome you're now holding in hand. He's tenacious, thorough, exact, entertaining, and—above all else—endlessly enthusiastic and dedicated to his subject. I'd like to say I set the wunderkind off on his Blue Beetlemania, as Ye Ed assigned Ace to dig up the true story behind Charlton Comics a few years back for *CBA*, but truth to tell, Irving had already scribed an article about the bug man for some other publication beforehand, so his fascination with the super-hero obviously stretches back to infancy...

Though in my mind's eye I'll always think of Irving as a young pup, I suspect the author was born "old school." He loves the Golden Age stuff, is devoted to the artists and writers from that bygone era, and he has a "shucks, gee whiz" kind of old-fashioned get up and gumption. And I've no doubt this book will prove testament to his retrospective fascinations.

So, even though my one-time cub reporter (who's graduated the *CBA* beat, after helping yours truly to win five consecutive Eisner Awards for "Best Comics-Related Periodical," no less!) sent me sample chapters of this book, I don't have to read excerpts to know this volume is the inside scoop on the azure-tinted adventurer, the real deal about the cyanotic crime-fighter, and a typically comprehensive Irving job. Trust me: This clever chap delivers the goods. Anyway, I'd rather skip the draft-stage reading assignment, because I'm rather looking forward to taking the phone off the hook, putting my feet up on the editor's desk, cracking open my newly-printed comp copy and then delve into the savory findings of one Christopher Irving. After all, it gives me a chance to relive some nice memories of "I knew him when." I've got a right to be proud, you understand, because, after all, "Ace" Irving is always going to be my boy.

[*Jon B. Cooke, editor of* Comic Book Artist, *a magazine devoted to the appreciation of the good stuff, counts "Ace" Irving as one of* CBA*'s finest correspondents and he hopes that one day the big shot scribe might again grace the pages of* CBA *with a contribution or two.*]



Tom Strong artist Chris Sprouse delineates Ted Kord in this '96 convention sketch. Courtesy of Stuart Neft.
Blue Beetle © 2007 DC Comics.

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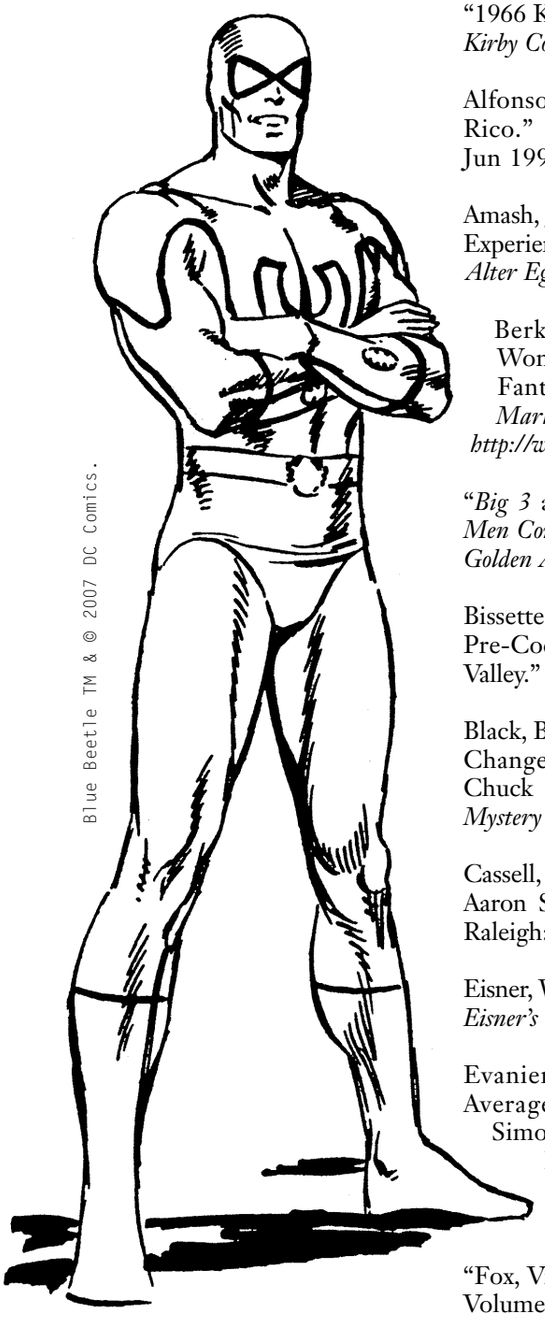

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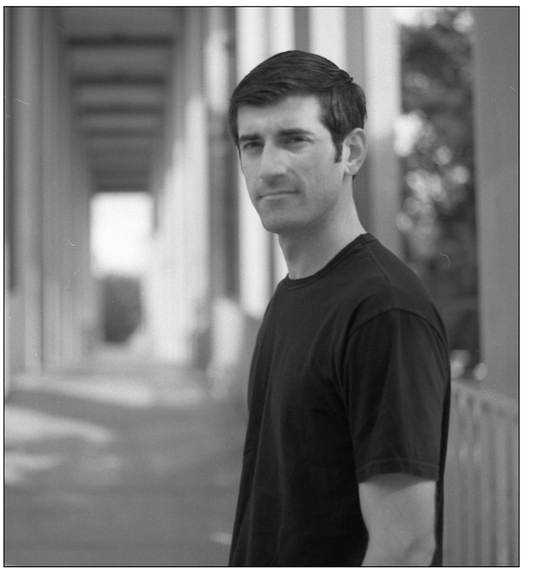
AUTHOR'S NOTE



Christopher Irving,
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I started research on what became this book in 1999 as my first comics history project, and was helped by so many people along the way.

An extra special thanks goes to Jon Berk and Will Murray for their invaluable scanning in of numerous pieces of artwork from original comics, as well as the constant benefit of their advice and knowledge. Thanks to Chris .R. Notarile, Bill Black, Jon Cooke, Tom De Haven, Michael Eury, Mark Heike, Dr. Thomas Inge, John Morrow, Will Murray, David Siegel, and Roy Thomas for helping foster me as a historian both then and now. Marc Svensson has not only scanned the majority of the *Blue Beetle* comic book art for this tome, but has also been a great sounding board and friend. Cully Hamner and Tom Feister produced the snazziest front and back covers one hopes people judge his books by. Mike Norton, Alex Ross, Joe Sinnott, Alan Weiss, and John Lustig (some of whom did work specifically for this project) have helped make this book the snazzy package I always dreamed it would be. Don Maris also contributed the ultra-rare scans of the *Blue Beetle* Sunday strip from the '40s.

None of the research would have happened without the tireless help of Cindy Jackson and Ray Bonis at Virginia Commonwealth University's Special Collections (*www.library.vcu.edu/jbc/speccoll/speccoll.html*), reference librarian Renee Bosman at VCU's Cabell Library, or Randall Scott at Michigan State University's Special Collections.

The Golden Age section first appeared, in a different form, in *Comic Book Marketplace* #79, edited by Gary Carter, while the Silver Age section has been retooled from research by myself and an article co-written and edited by Jon B. Cooke in *Comic Book Artist* #9.

On a personal note, thanks to my family and friends: Elliott Irving and Janet Breton for their patience with their weird comic-reading middle child, Shaun Irving for his research assistance and always being a ready ear, Ryan and Caroline Irving for putting me up (and up with me) while I visited the Library of Congress, Meagan Irving for being my best friend, Dalfonzo Williams for always believing, Meggin Irwin for spending too many hours in the library with me, Eric and Trish Hanson for always being there, Pocho Morrow for her support and the lessons she taught me through Gray's life, Baker and Bopp (you know who you are), and all of the others who contributed their support from start to finish.

Chris Irving has contributed articles to Comics Buyer's Guide, Alter Ego, Comic Book Artist *(where he also served as Associate Editor)*, The Jack Kirby Collector, Comics Scene, *and* Back Issue. *He and his black cat Elise currently live in Raleigh, North Carolina, where Chris works full-time for TwoMorrows Publishing.*

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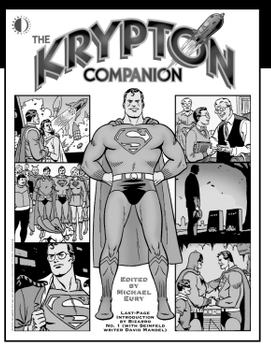

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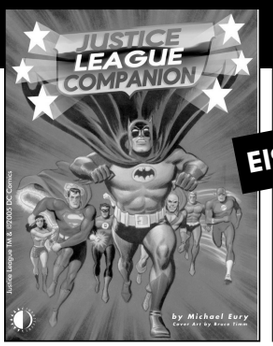

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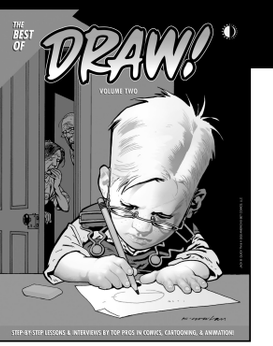

BEST OF DRAW! VOL. 2

Compiles material from issues #3 and #4 of **DRAW!,** including tutorials by, and interviews with, **ERIK LARSEN** (savage penciling), **DICK GIORDANO** (inking techniques), **BRET BLEVINS** (drawing the figure in action, and figure composition), **KEVIN NOWLAN** (penciling and inking), **MIKE MANLEY** (how-to demo on Web Comics), **DAVE COOPER** (digital coloring tutorial), and more! Cover by **KEVIN NOWLAN**!

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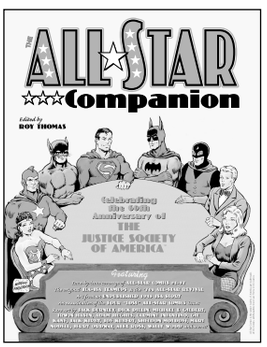

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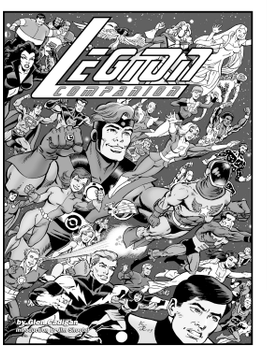

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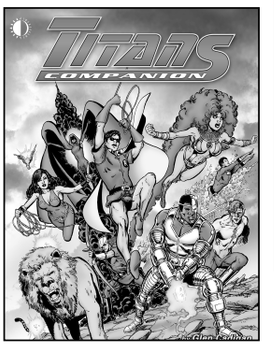

TITANS COMPANION

A comprehensive history of the **NEW TEEN TITANS,** with interviews and rare art by **MARV WOLFMAN, GEORGE PÉREZ, JOSÉ LUIS GARCÍA-LÓPEZ, LEN WEIN,** & others, a Silver Age section with **NEAL ADAMS, NICK CARDY, DICK GIORDANO,** & more, plus **CHRIS CLAREMONT** and **WALTER SIMONSON** on the **X-MEN/ TEEN TITANS** crossover, **TOM GRUMMETT, PHIL JIMENEZ** & **TERRY DODSON** on their '90s Titans work, a new cover by **JIMENEZ,** & intro by **GEOFF JOHNS!** Written by **GLEN CADIGAN.**

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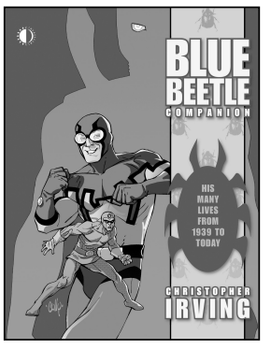

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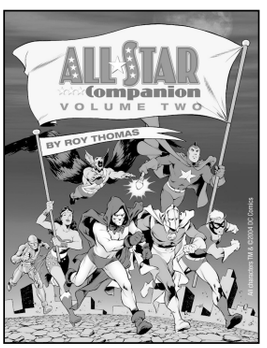

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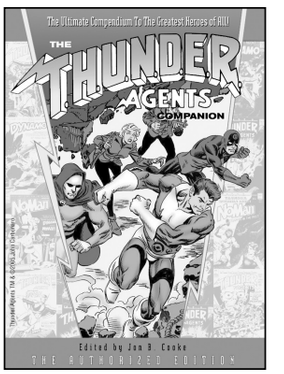

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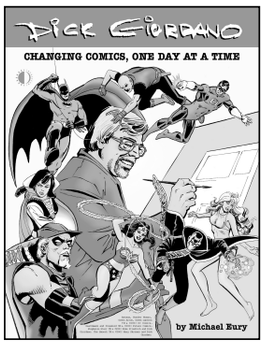

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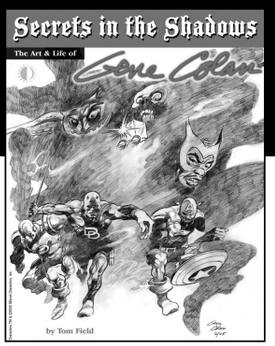

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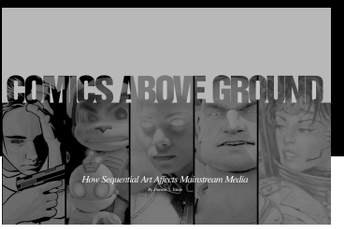

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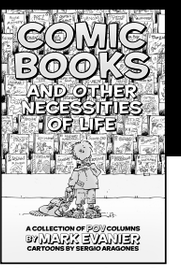

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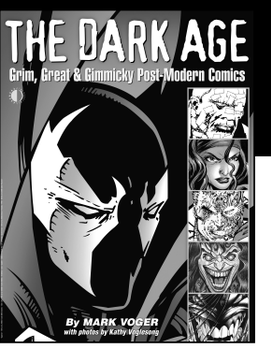

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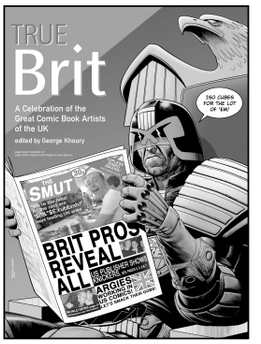

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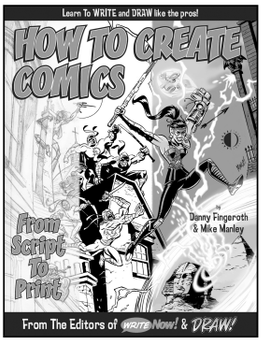

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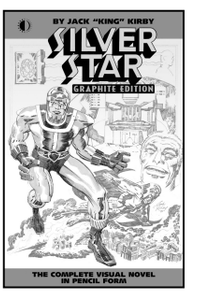

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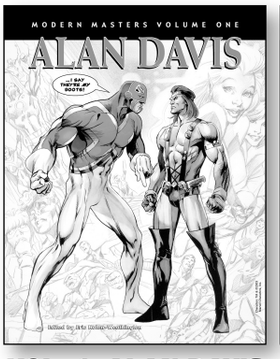

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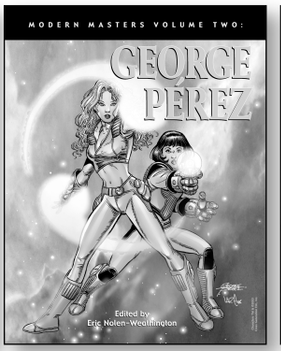

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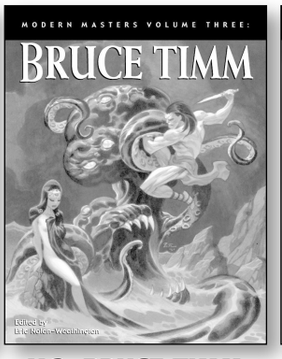

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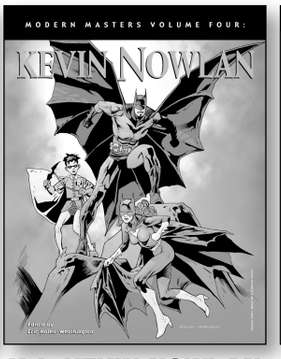

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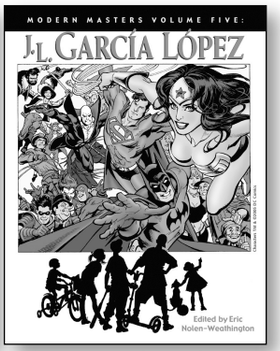

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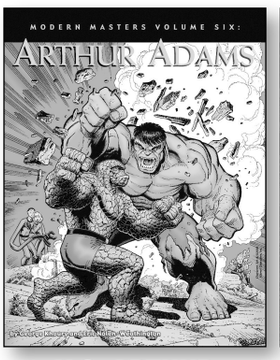

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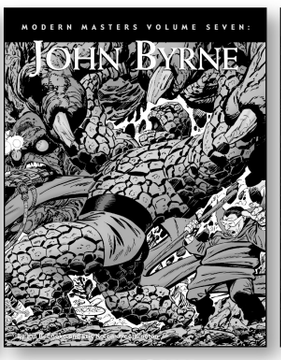

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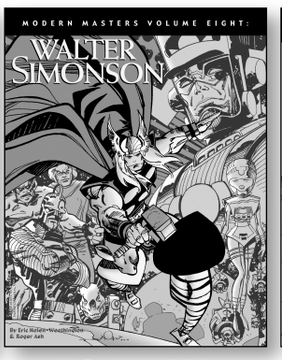

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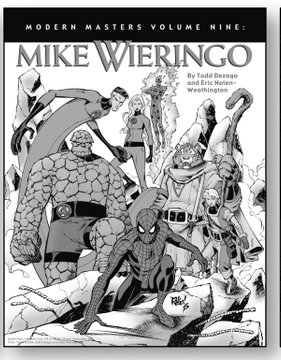

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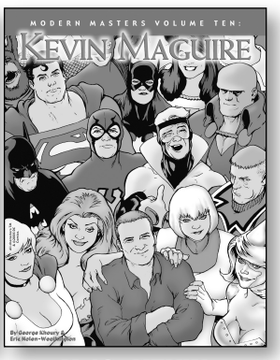

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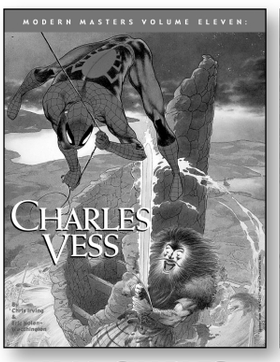

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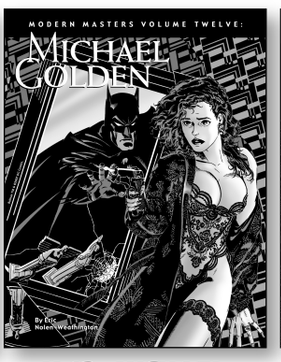

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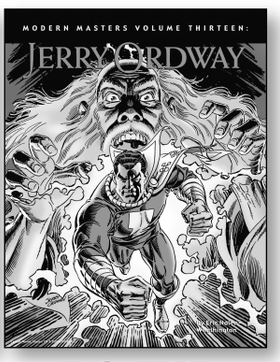

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