JOHN BUSCEMA
Portrait by **KEN MEYER, JR.**
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About Our Cover

Art & Colors by
JOHN BUSCEMA

Thor, Silver Surfer TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Above: This hand-colored recreation of the *Silver Surfer* #4 [Feb. '69] cover, all rendered by big John Buscema, depicts an issue that was to have profound consequences for the Marvel stalwart, as you'll find out about in Ye Ed.'s interview with the man featured in full this issue. The piece (ever so slightly revised here) was offered for sale on Heritage in 2016, one of a number of recreations of the same cover that have been auctioned off over the years, but apparently the only one sporting the artist's own watercolor hues.

comic book CREATOR™

May 2026 • The John Buscema Issue • Number 43

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Ye Ed's Rant: Does an amazing discovery in Mad Peck's vault mean a book is coming?.... 2

COMICS CHATTER

It's About Moore & Les: A charming Q+A with Alan Moore conducted by Les Daniels ... 3

Katz's Kingdom: Ivan Katz, son of Jack, on his relationship with the graphic novelist..... 8

Once Upon Long Ago: Steve Thompson about his "comics route" back in the day 15

Ten Questions: Darick Robertson on life with The Boys and the work that gratifies 16

Clancy Investigates: Shaun looks at Eastern Color Printing, first printer of comics..... 17

The Flenniken Files: Part two of our 2002 interview with Shary Flenniken about lessons learned from the Air Pirates collective and her days at *National Lampoon* 20

Ric Estrada: Steven Fears interviews the versatile artist on his love and war comics..... 31

Cruel Fate: A look at the tragedies that silenced Marvel Comics stalwart Bill Mantlo 40

Incoming: It's the Joe Frank show as our faithful correspondent shares his views..... 42

Comics in the Library: Richard Arndt on Brenna Thummler and 1½ of her *Sheets*..... 46

Hembeck's Dateline: Fred looks at the Martian hunter man, Killraven, and crew 47

THE MAIN EVENT

All Hail Big John Buscema!
In four separate interviews, including his blockbuster 1997 confessional with Ye Ed, the reluctant comics superstar candidly discusses his life in the American comic book scene, frustrations during the Marvel age of comics, joys of drawing the exploits of a certain Barbarian from Cimmeria and dislike of the super-hero genre, and time as art instructor of a new generation of comics pros with his Comic Book Workshop 48

BACK MATTER

Creators at the Con: Kendall Whitehouse's pix of the independence of Philly Expo!..... 78

Coming Attractions: Speeding your way in July: Rouge Enfant – Carmine Infantino!... 79

A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words: Charles Vess conjures up Hellblazer 80

Mea culpa: *Why Ye Ed. thought he could include a section devoted to John Buscema's comics workshop in this already-bursting issue is beyond my comprehension and my apologies to Shaun Clancy and all of "Buscema's Boys" for the woeful miscalculation.* CBC *will eventually feature an article on the former students, if that's any consolation. Plus, for yet another time, our Bazooka Joe piece didn't make the cut, so we'll have to stick it in some other ish.*

Right: *Awesome and iconic full-pager by John Buscema featuring The Vision, from* The Avengers *#58 [Nov. '68], a scene that confirmed the story title, "Even an Android Can Cry"! Inks by George Klein.*

COMIC BOOK CREATOR
is a proud joint production of
Jon B. Cooke/TwoMorrows

Comic Book Creator™ is published bi-monthly by TwoMorrows Publishing, 10407 Bedfordtown Dr., Raleigh, NC 27614 USA. Phone: (919) 449-0344. Jon B. Cooke, editor. John Morrow, publisher. *Comic Book Creator* editorial offices: P.O. Box 601, West Kingston, RI 02892 USA. E-mail: jonbcooke@aol.com. ***Send subscription funds to TwoMorrows, NOT to the editorial offices.*** Four-issue subscriptions: $53 US, $78 International, $19 Digital.

ISSN 2330-2437. Printed in China. FIRST PRINTING.

comic book CREATOR

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Daniels' Dossier

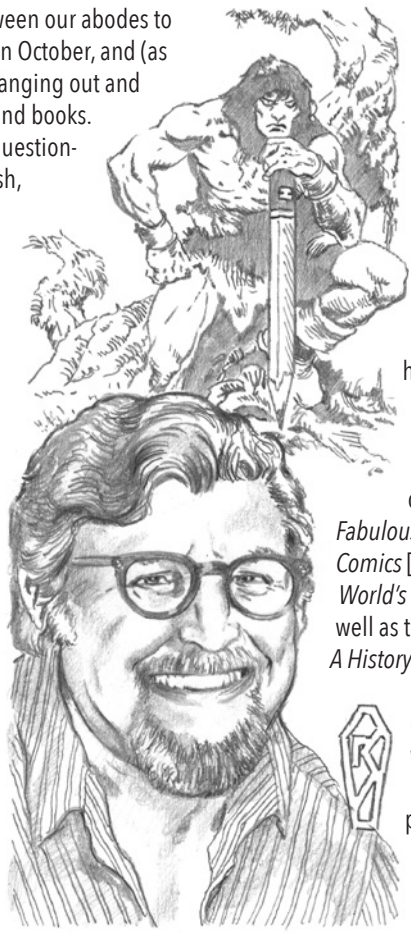
A stunning discovery made in the archives of John "The Mad" Peck

Me and Ye Pub. met halfway between our abodes to attend the Baltimore Comic Con in October, and (as always) we had a jammin' time hanging out and hawking the TwoMorrows mags and books. The hottest moving item was unquestionably *CBC* #40, the Dave Stevens ish, so hats off again to my buddy **Rob Yeremian**, who came up with the notion a few years back during one of my Friday visits to his Time Capsule comic book shop, in Cranston, R.I.

Rob's been a massive help to yours truly since before the turn of the century, when *Comic Book Artist* was still in the planning stages, as we had discussed his handling advertising, and, of course, a decade back, the man was publisher of our monthly *ACE: All Comics Considered* mag, which didn't quite catch on after three issues despite our very best efforts.

Currently, along with my myriad other projects, I'm working for Rob on a website dedicated to our late mutual pal, **The Mad Peck**, underground comix pioneer (and so very much more!) and the man otherwise known as Dr. Oldie, legendary rock 'n' roll deejay. Rob, who makes his living with two brick-&-mortar shops (the other is also named Time Capsule and is located in Seekonk, Mass.) and a slammin' eBay business – check out the "Of Times Past" store on the auction site – is in charge of John Peck's incredible archives, which I'm digging through, assessing, and scanning to put up in the online memorial site.

A few weeks ago, we're going through Peck's boxes o' stuff in Rob's warehouse and, with dramatic flair, he unveiled a Holy Grail I've been seeking for quite some time and one that will most certainly be super-charging *CBC* and future book projects starting in the very near future… in fact, I've incorporated one of the items in this very issue! I'll be honest and say I was positively giddy and dizzy as I gazed on such amazing treasures.



John Buscema by Ronn Sutton

Though I'd known about him and read his work for decades, I finally became a friend of Rhode Island legend **Les Daniels** when I was involved in the H.P. Lovecraft Centennial, back in 1990. I subsequently started a literary horror zine, *Tekeli-li! Journal of Terror,* and "Doc" Daniels was the debut number's first subject. (For those unaware, Les was a superb fiction writer and his novels starring vampire Don Sebastian de Villanueva are gems.)

Astute *CBC* readers doubtless recognize Les as author of the official company histories, *Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics* ['91] and *DC Comics: Sixty Years of the World's Favorite Comic Book Heroes* ['95], as well as the brilliant, ground-breaking *Comix: A History of Comic Books in America* ['71].

Peck was not only designer and cover illustrator of the latter, he also wrote the Marvel chapter. And, after Les passed away, in 2011, he came in possession of the Daniels files, about which I pestered the Mad One over the years. Y'see, I was interested in whether there existed Les's interview tapes for the incredible number of top figures in comics with whom he had conversations for the books. Peck didn't know exactly and material pertaining to Les's books were never readily at hand.

By now, I'm sure you guessed what was that Holy Grail: though no audio tapes were yet found, Les had transcribed almost every interview conducted for both the Marvel and DC histories by hand in reporter notebooks. His toil for the House of Ideas consisted of 18 interviews (the longest, with Stan the Man, took up four notebooks!) plus four with detailed interview notes. In 1991, Les described his delight over the Marvel chats: "Honestly, they were all terrific. I didn't think I could be so amused and entertained by so many. Everyone was fun to interview and it seems that in all the cases we ended up laughing about something, sooner or later."

Rob suggests TwoMorrows should put together a book of Les's Q+As. It's proven wise to listen to Rob.

– ***Ye Crusading Editor***
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It's About Moore & Les

An interview with legendary writer Alan Moore conducted by late comics historian Les Daniels

Conducted by LES DANIELS

[*The amazing find discussed in the editorial (opposite) yielded, among many other treasures, this charming conversation between two superior wordsmiths – Brit author Alan Moore and Yank Les Daniels, historian and horror writer – among my all-time favorite scribes. Conducted in January, 1995, this interview was for the* DC Comics: Sixty Years of the World's Favorite Comic Book Heroes *history published later that year – there was a separate Q+A about* Swamp Thing *– with this session focusing on John Constantine/Hellblazer and* Watchmen*, with some talk regarding Moore's Jack the Ripper graphic novel,* From Hell, *then still in progress. –* **Y.E.**]

Les Daniels: *This is a minor consideration. If you feel you have nothing to say on this subject, feel free to say nothing. John Constantine: does that spark any sort of comment from you? I mean, are you sort of interested in the fact that he emerged on his own? Is that sort of annoying or boring?*

Alan Moore: Well, John Constantine's still one of my favorite characters and, in some ways, he's one of the ones I most regret DC owning. The way the character came about was that Steve [Bissette] and John [Totleben], in the list of things that they wrote me in those early letters detailing stories that they might like to draw in the future. One of the notes that they made was that they'd like me to introduce a character that looked like Sting. Now I know that in the revisionist history of DC as dictated by their legal department, John Constantine doesn't look like Sting and has never looked like Sting. But take it from me, he looked like Sting.

Les: *Steve told me the same thing. He said, "We started drawing Sting in the background." That's about how he described it.*

Alan: That's it! He was in one of the early issues. Suddenly Sting turns up in the background. And under that sort of pressure I could only give in gracefully and make him a regular character. The whole idea of John Constantine was taking two unusual elements and juxtaposing them. I mean most comic book occultists are very po-faced. They take in archaic language and issue portentous statements.

Les: *Upper class, right?*

Alan: Yeah. Absolutely. The Doctor Strange/Sargon the Sorcerer kind of guys. And most of the occultists that I know live in bed-sits or squats or sort of… you know. I mean, they're street-level. And so, I thought it would be interesting to see that reflected. To get somebody who's basically very street-wise, London-wide boy. Who just happens to be upright in the field of the occult. And, like I say, it's a character that's sort of… he's very dear to me. That I have a strange relationship with him in some respects in that – I know this is going to sound completely mental, but I did actually meet him once. Which was one of the eeriest experiences of my life. And I don't expect you to believe this…

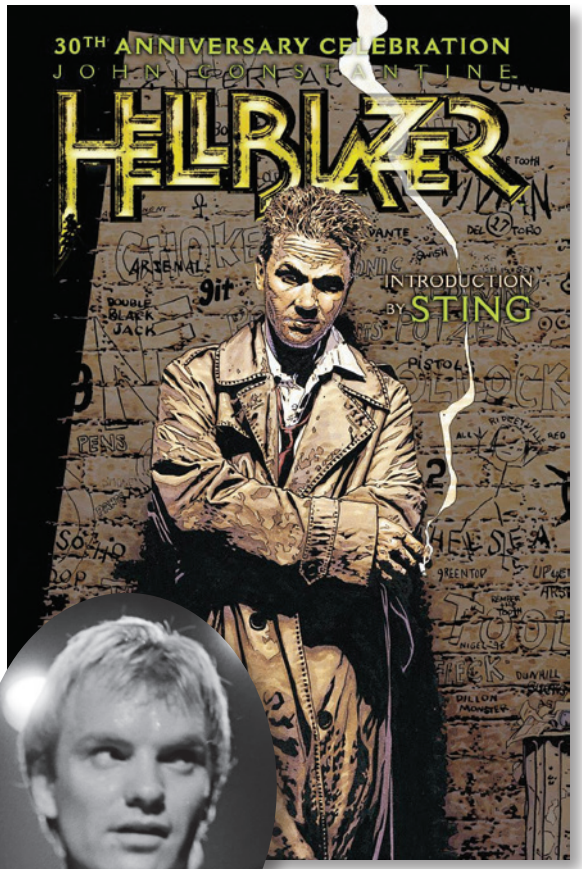
Les: *I don't know where you're coming from here, is this before or after you started writing him?*

Alan: This is after I was writing him. After I had written John Constantine as a character, I bumped into him. Which was – I know this doesn't make any sense, and I mean, I wouldn't believe it if I was listening to it.

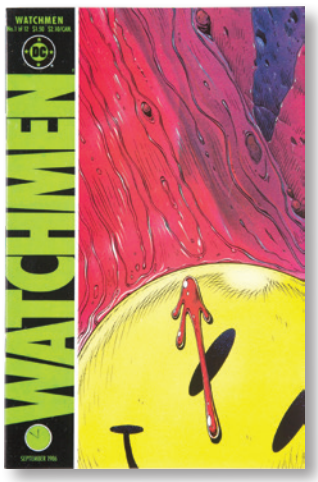
Les: *I have strange stories in my life, too. I'm not immune to the world of strange stories.*

Alan: Well, this is the only one I've ever had. I'll presume that other people have them occasionally, as well. But moments when the bottom drops out of your reality. And I was sitting in a sandwich bar, upstairs, somewhere in London – Westminster. And up the stairs came John Constantine. It wasn't Sting. It wasn't somebody who looked a bit like John Constantine. It was John Constantine. He'd got the same clothes. He'd got a suit on beneath a trench coat. The only difference was that he had a rucksack on his back. Which, again, somehow made it more realistic because it fitted with the character. He got to the top of the stairs, and I was gaping at him thinking, "Jesus Christ, that looks just like John Constantine," at which point he turned around, stared into my eyes, smiled, nodded (knowingly)

Above: *After his* Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics *['91] was published, DC approached author Les Daniels to write their official history,* DC Comics: Sixty Years of the World's Favorite Comic Book Heroes *['95]. Cover art by José Luis García López. This interview was conducted for the DC book in January, 1995.* **Below:** *Photos of Les and Alan Moore.*



Above: *Famously, Steve Bissette and John Totleben based the features of* Swamp Thing *supporting cast member John Constantine on Gordon Matthew Thomas Sumner, better known as the frontman for rock group The Police. Cover art by Tim Bradstreet for* Hellblazer *#134 [Feb. '99]. Photo of the rock star in an Atlanta concert, 1979.* **Below:** *Writer Alan Moore joined with artist Dave Gibbons to create the mini-series* Watchmen *in 1986. This is the cover for #1 [Sept. '86].*



and walked off around the corner of the sandwich bar. I thought "Christ. I can either go around sit down and ask him if he is who I think he is, or I can eat my sandwiches and leave." So, I thought I'd opt for the second option. I'm not a brave man when it comes down to it. Yeah, there's something a bit eerie about it. Certain characters, I know it's a cliche, but they possess a life of their own. I think some characters possess perhaps a life of their own in – unusual ways. Constantine was one of the those.

Les: *Who was it you said who used to call you up? Maybe he found an actor and sent him around.*

Alan: Well it's possible, but the thing was I remember hearing from Jamie Delano, who subsequently took over the character that he'd had a similar experience in London. He'd been walking down the road with Mark Buckingham and someone who looked very much like John Constantine had walked passed, and smiled and nodded at him in passing. This is like the Neil Gaiman/Dave McKean story where Dave McKean saw Death on an airplane. Sometimes, when you're a comic writer, you know what it's like, you spend too much of your time indoors, you know.

Les: *I write, you know, fiction too, and I've had a number of books published about the same character, but he hasn't shown up yet, so I'm not quite used to this.*

Alan: Wait until it happens, Les. You'll know it when you see it. It's sort of… there comes a point when this fiction stuff becomes dangerously bullard [unbelievable]. Anyway, that's pretty much the John Constantine story. I've not really read anything to do with the character really since I split from DC. Oh, I read Neil's thing in the *Book of Magic,* which I thought was a great take on the character.

Les: *But does it please you, this continuing, or is it sort of annoying to you? I mean I'm asking you, personally, in fact, you don't have to answer the question, I won't use the answer anyway.*

Alan: No, that's okay. I suppose it pleases me that the character is still out there. It pleases me when I look in occult magazines and I find references to John Constantine from serious occultists. And that pleases me. The only thing that doesn't please me is that DC owned the character. That's the only thing. But that's pretty much the story of my entire relationship with DC.

Les: *I do sympathize with you but, on the other hand, they've published some good stuff including your stuff, that's why I'm writing about them… Let me leap ahead to* Watchmen. *The Cold War theme: do you wish, in retrospect, that you hadn't used that? Do you feel that, like, it's lost something for people today, or was that the main reason for your wanting to do it?*

Alan: It was the main reason for me wanting to do it and I don't think… I don't know, I can't judge how much it's lost to a current audience. But I don't think *Watchmen* would have been the same book without that sort of tone of I don't know...uncertain, doubtful, and anxious energy running through it. I mean, as I remember the middle '80s, everyone was watching the sky. Or that's how if felt over here. We were sort of… still we have the American missile bases at the time, the Cold War was looking… what with Reagan, with Star Wars, with things like that, the Cold War was looking quite dangerous for a few years back there. I've got small children. These things, these considerations do tend to affect you. And at the time I got this strange knot in my stomach about the state of modern society. And *Watchmen* became a vehicle with which I expressed it. I mean, yeah sure there will be people who will probably look at it in a few years time, and it'll be as incomprehensible as some debate between the Whigs and the Tories back in the 19th century. But even so, I wouldn't really change a word of it.

Les: *So it wasn't that you wanted to do this strange take on super-heroes and you threw that in; it was that you wanted to do that and you put the super-heroes on top of it?*

Alan: A bit of both, really. We started out purely wanting to do a strange take on super-heroes. As the book evolved, it became clear, almost from the panel, what I'd really been writing about was something else. I mean, on the very first page, there's mentions of the imminence of apocalypse, there's mention of Harry Truman, who was the first, the only, world leader to use the atom bomb. There's an atmosphere of apocalypse right page one. It wasn't until #3 that it all started to all click together in my mind and I understood what I was doing. Sometimes intellect catches up with intuition. And I think *Watchmen* was a case of that. It did start our as "Hey, let's do something strange with super-heroes," but, around about #3, we realized exactly what it was that we wanted to do with them and that did involve, to some degree, trying to use super-heroes as a parable for stuff that was prominent in my mind at the time. It's strange the nuclear drift of *Watchmen* seems unmistakable. But I remember a prominent French critic discussing the book, and he missed it completely. I think largely his problem was that he thought Dr. Manhattan was named after the island rather than the project. So he tended to miss it.

Les: *Still you'd think you'd notice by the end!*

Alan: There's so many illusions to Hiroshima and all that stuff. *Watchmen* was designed to be a book that could be read on a number of levels. To a certain degree, all interpretations are true. We designed it so it got a kind of crystalline faceted structure, where you could, you could turn it around in your hands and look of different aspects of it. The pirate story – all of these different little threads of continuity which are all effectively telling the same story from different angles. Some of them are telling it symbolically like the pirate narrative for example.

Les: *I'm jumping ahead because you just mentioned it – was that, you know, you just wanted to kid around with Joe Orlando and then it got of control?*

Alan: Yeah, something like that. What it was–

Les: *I loved it. I loved the idea that pirate comics are what people are reading…*

Alan: I don't know what it was about really. It was sort of a thing where… me and Dave… the initial premise of *Watchmen* was a world in which super-heroes had consequence. Like Superman comes to Earth, the most powerful being in the solar system suddenly arrives on Earth, but there's no real consequence. Dr. Manhattan turns up and the whole world changes. Which is much more in keeping with the way I see things. And so, when we started trying to design this altered world, we started thinking about what little details might be different. A lot of the ideas were Dave's. I mean, sort of, was saying about the electric cars. Oh, and if they had electric cars, they'd have little electric hydrants on the corners to charge them up from. All these little you know… also it was suggested that there would be different fast foods, you know. That there'd be more Indian food in America.

Les: *It's coming to pass, I'll tell ya.*

Alan: It's funny: a lot of the things in *Watchmen*… that was another book where fiction and reality got a bit blurred. The thing about the comics was that we started thinking "Well, wonder what sort of comics they'd have in this world?" And we thought that super-heroes wouldn't be very popular in terms of a comic-book genre because if there's real super-heroes, that would change people's perception of super-heroes in comic books. I mean Marvel's Human Fly comic didn't do very well, did it? So Dave said he always liked pirate comics. And he thought, "Wouldn't it be fun if we just showed, just as a background detail, when we showed a newsstand there'd be no super-hero comics, but there'd be two or three pirate comics, ships and things like that?" We got into the idea and, like I say, in #3, I suddenly saw a way I could use this very bloody pirate narrative as a counterpoint for the main story. So we had the little kid sitting there against the warm electric hydrant and sort of… the whole thing with the news vendor and we started the pirate narrative. The elements were there in the first issue. Like I say, intellect catches up with intuition. The elements were there. It wasn't until around about #3 that we worked out how we can put them together and make some sense of them. The pirate comic is actually one of my favorite parts.

Les: *I love that. I don't know whether it means anything… It's just a tremendous story, in and of itself. The whole thing is just a tremendous piece of work. And there are so many things about it that bristle at me and I'm annoyed at and I want to argue with and all those kinds of things, but I read it when it was all collected; I didn't read it when it was coming out issue by issue. But you read that whole book and there's nothing like it. I don't think anybody has ever done anything like it.*

Alan: I must admit, with all due modesty, I think you're perhaps right at least in terms of – I don't think there's ever been a book as complex and as with the complexity of construction that *Watchmen* has, and I doubt there will be for a while. I mean like with the pirate narrative (sort of to finish it off) what it was meant to mean-… I mean, like a lot of things in *Watchmen*, we hid things. And, in the last episode, there's a little bit with Adrian Veidt is explaining to Dr. Manhattan how he feels about having killed millions of people in order to avert apocalypse. And he says, "I know that I've stumbled

or walked over the backs of dead men in an attempt to save the world I loved." There's an allusion there to the mariner on his raft of dead bodies. And then Veidt, at the end, says that the only qualm that he has is that, at night, he "dreams about swimming towards a monstrous..." and he towers off and says, "Oh, it doesn't matter." And that's the end of the black freighter narrative is the mariner… the doomed mariner swimming out towards the black ship that's waiting for him. So, in a sense, although we use the pirate narrative to counterpoint various episodes in the story, at the end of the day, it's a sort of a antique maritime retelling of the whole *Watchmen* story. It's about a guy who thinks he's trying to save his world that ends up becoming monstrous. So that was the point. Other than the fact that it was interesting and useful as a narrative device, the main point was to tell the *Watchmen* story in different terms.

Les: *It's interesting. I don't expect simple explanations, but I was almost going to ask you a naive question. I hear it going back and forth even as we're talking as to whether Adrian should have done that or not.*

Alan: Well that was the whole issue of *Watchmen*.

Above: *DC editor/former EC artist Joe Orlando drew this "random" page from the faux '50s title,* Tales of the Black Freighter. **Below:** *Dave Gibbons created this fake cover for the movie,* Watchmen.

Above: For a French portfolio depicting his and Alan's *Watchmen* series, Dave Gibbons produced a series of plates, including this one of Adrian Veidt, a.k.a. Ozymandias.

Below: Dave's pin-up image of Rorschach, watchman of integrity.

Les: *I understand. So you don't have an answer either.*

Alan: There isn't an answer is there? What we wanted to do with *Watchmen* was a book that didn't have a consistent moral viewpoint. All of the characters in there have got their point of view. Rorschach's point of view is very difficult to argue with in certain instances.

Les: *I was gonna get to that. I'll tell you, this is not even question, but I'll tell you that when I was reading it, I get very annoyed at the end, that – here's my re-write of the ending – I mean everyone does this and I'm sure you don't need this but… umm…*

Alan: No, go ahead!

Les: *I wish Dr. Manhattan had said to Adrian, "Yes, you're right," and… I mean, as I recall, I haven't read it in a while… Rorschach says, "I'm gonna tell," and so Dr. Manhattan kills him, in effect. What he could have done, what i wish he'd done, is say "Well, I'll kill Adrian instead. Will that shut you up?"*

Alan: [*Laughs*] I would have been happier killing Veidt, but…

Les: *I wish he'd done that. And then Rorschach would say "Well, all right, I guess that will do"…*

Alan: Yeah, but Rorschach wouldn't have said that. He's a nutcase. It was, about three issues in, I sort of… I was expecting Rorschach to live… to survive the book, but, about three issues in, after I had been writing him for a couple issues, I thought this character is only heading in one direction. There's no logical… this character is self-destructive. He's heading into the darkness, you know, and I realized, around #3, that he was not going to survive the book.

Les: *Issue three was clearly critical for you.*

Alan: It was critical that was where everything snapped into place. I suddenly realized that now Rorschach was gonna die. It's not fair that he should, but he's going to.

Les: *I felt it isn't fair even though he's a horrible creep, and there's a quote from William Blake – paraphrasing that Milton was of the Devil's party, whether he realized it or not. It seems that there some of that in your work, and even other work that I'm not going to talk to you about, that clearly say Night Owl is a decent fellow and Rorschach is a dangerous idiot and yet, somehow, you love Rorschach.*

Alan: Well, you know, Rorschach has also got an awful lot of integrity. I mean, he's probably got more moral integrity than anybody else in *Watchmen,* to a degree. That's his problem. Anybody who's got that much moral integrity is probably going to be a fanatic. That's the way it works, sadly. I'll tell you the strange thing, I mean, Rorschach was, to a degree, intended to be a comment upon the vigilante super-hero because I've problems with that notion. And I wanted to try and show the readers that the obsessed vigilante would not necessarily be a playboy living in a giant Batcave under a mansion with all this stuff, that he'd probably be a very lonely and almost dysfunctional guy in some ways because there'd no room for anything in his life other than fighting evil. The strange thing was that Rorschach was the character that most people identified with.

Les: *That's the funny thing: you stripped him of all that superficial glamour, and yet people still responded to, as you say, the integrity or the… something… There was something left even when you took everything good away…*

Alan: I've had some scary moments. Actually, in Northampton, where I live, there's a guy who's one of our resident psychopaths. We have quite a few of them, but this is a violently psychopathic junkie. He's sort of with a string of horror stories, it's our life is a string of horror stories and they're scarcely creditable. But I remember him corning up to me in the street and saying "I read *Watchmen*. I am Rorschach. That's my story." And I thought, "Yeah, it probably is!" He was patting me on the back and I'd rather be admired by people like that than stabbed by them certainly, you know. The same time you have to wonder. A lot of the kids I spoke to, they like Rorschach because he was scary and everyone was frightened of him. And that's a powerful male thing. I mean we'd all like to be the guy who walks in through saloon bar doors and the piano stops playing. To some degree. And that wasn't quite what I was trying to cater to. And if I've got any reservations about Rorschach as a character, it was that, in some ways, he succeeded, I don't know, in a different manner than what I had intended.

Les: *That's why I said that quote about Milton. I mean, Satan came out a little too well.*

Alan: That's it. Exactly. Satan comes out too well. I mean, you read *Paradise Lost,* and he's the hero, there's no doubt about it. And I suppose the same thing is true about Rorschach in *Watchmen*.

Les: *Let me just check with one thing: did you or did you not know the ending and know what the plot was that was being set in motion or did you come up with that after you were already working on it?*

Alan: The plot was already in place. We knew that sort of that it was Veidt that had done it, and we knew why Veidt had done it. The plot is only the bones. I wrote the synopsis to *Watchmen*. I said this will be a 12-issue series and DC said, "Fine. Go ahead." We started to write it and, as I started writing it and mapping it out properly, I suddenly realized that we only got enough plot for six issues. And so, that was why I thought, we'll have to concentrate… we've got six characters here, as well. We ought to do an issue concentrating on each character. So the structure tended to be, issue of plot, issue of character background, issue of plot, issue of character background. That worked. In fact, it was necessary.

Les: *You may not have mentioned the pirates in your synopsis, either…*

Alan: No, that's it. It's sort of like all these things – that was the flesh of *Watchmen* that we draped around the

bones. Although we had the basic ground plan all narrowed down before we started and we got a pretty fair idea of our general approach, we didn't know where that approach was gonna take us. So we left ourselves enough room to be able to respond to it as it went along and to sort of adapt and change things, you know.

Les: *Well, as I said, it came out tremendously. I don't mean to slight other stuff, because I'm very fond of* From Hell, *although I see the same problem. That I understand what you're going for, but when there's just one page where I see these giant gods appearing in the sky saying "Boy, this guy is doing some interesting stuff, even if he is a bad guy," you know…*

Alan: I know what you mean again there, he's the only person in *From Hell* who knows what's going on. He's the most sort of centered person this entire period, and he's a psychotic murderer. I've just finished #10 of that, which was "the one," as far as I'm concerned. It's the Mary Kelly murder.

Les: *You still have a long way to go, I guess. When do you think you'll be done with that?*

Alan: We're getting quite close to it. Well, I've finished episode 10, I'm halfway through episode 11 right now. And after that there's only three or four more. Which, to me, feels like I'm getting close to the finish line.

Les: *I guess so if you've done that much. That's what I tell myself all time, too. When I'm more than half-done, I say "Well, I am more than half-done. I've done that much. I have less to do now. I may make it."*

Alan: Well, considering I started *From Hell* in 1988. It's been six, seven years nearly. When it's done, it'll be worth it.

Les: *It's fine work.*

Alan: Well, thanks a lot man. There's this film burgeoning now, the *From Hell* movie, which Oliver Stone is apparently involved in, which we'll see.

Les: *Well, it's good for you. Maybe they'll give you some money or something. It won't work out to be as good as what you're doing, but that's always a risk you take.*

Alan: Absolutely. The problem with *Watchmen* was, after having finished it, I had to… having evolved so many story-telling techniques in the course of *Watchmen*, at the end of *Watchmen,* I had to abandon them all. Because, by that point, it would have been – like the work that's closest to Watchmen is *The Killing Joke,* which is a tremendous disappointment because it was too much influenced by the same transitions and technical effects of *Watchmen*. I pretty much had to throw all that out the window immediately after finishing *Watchmen* and try to come up with different ways of telling a story. Which is why, in *From Hell,* there are no clever scene transitions, no captions. It's sort of trying to do something as complex as *Watchmen* without all of *Watchmen*'s devices. It's shaping up all right.

Les: *Well, listen, why don't you get back to it? I've taken a lot of your time. I appreciate this very much, Alan.*

Alan: No problem, man. It was nice talking to you.

Les: *Nice talking to you, too. I enjoy your stuff. Keep it up.*

Alan: I shall, and likewise, it's mutual. I found a copy of the *Comix* book that you did, with that yellow cover.

Les: *Yeah, that's Stone Age stuff – "Banana Man." That's funny, because a lot of people know me from this. I've had a number of novels published and they're being re-issued in England, but people seem to know this stuff. I don't know if this is a clue to me. That I should be doing the non-fiction or not…*

Alan: Well, I didn't know you had any novels out – I don't keep in touch with you.

Les: *I understand that, but these* [comics histories] *have sold better, for some reason. I think it's because the novels are just too fine and noble to make any money.*

Alan: I'll, of course, check out the novels now that I know that you do them!

Les: *Do you know Steve Jones?*

Alan: Yeah, I know Steve Jones, he's a friend of Neil Gaiman's.

Les: *He's now editing Raven Books for some British publisher that's issuing three of my novels in one giant volume, but it would take you a long time to read it and you have finer things to do with your time.*

Alan: Well, I see if they're around.

Les: *Yeah, they're kicking around somewhere.*

Alan: I've got my first novel. I'm still four chapters from the end of that. Again, it was one of those things where I came up with a really smart idea which I was really pleased with, then I had to write the f*cking thing. I came up with this really complex idea that looked great in the synopsis.

Les: *I still have these science fiction ideas, where you think of an idea and you attach a machine to your brain and it comes out the other end and you're done.*

Alan: Wouldn't that be lovely? It's turned out to be a complete nightmare. I'm pleased with the work that's coming out, I think. But it's not like comics, you know. I mean, comics, I do a chapter and it gets published and people tell me what they write into it. This novel, I've been working on it for years and there's eight chapters out of 12 finished. All self-contained stories in their own right. It's in the void. No one's read it. It's sort of that strange free-fall feeling. But, as I say, another few months and I'll have that wrapped up.

Les: *I gotta get done with this book… I have another novel due, which I dropped off to do this because, I don't know, the money may be better! Listen, why don't you go back to work, I'll go to sleep, and we'll all be better men for it.*

Alan: Well, nice talking to you, man. I look forward to seeing this one when it comes out.

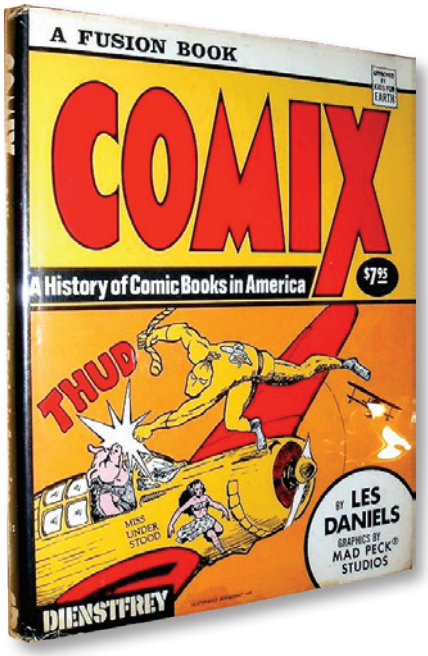
Les: *Thanks very much. I really appreciate it.*

Alan: Okay, then. You take care then, mate. Bye-bye.

fin

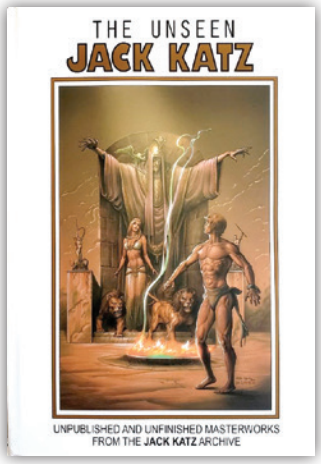
Above: *Moore's masterpiece-in-the-works at the lime of the Daniels interview was his (ahem) forensic examination of the Jack the Ripper murders, drawn by Eddie Campbell, From Hell. This is the cover to the complete collection ['98].*

Below: *Moore mentions to Daniels that he has a copy of the "yellow" book,* Comix: A History of Comic Books in America *['71], which the historian called "Stone Age stuff." It was the first comprehensive retrospective to include much of the U.S. scene, as it even gave attention to undergrounds.*



Son of Jack: Ivan Katz

A conversation with the offspring of the pioneering graphic novelist of First Kingdom, *Jack Katz*



Above: *Ted Jalbert, administrator of the Art of Jack Katz Facebook page, contributed an interview with Katz for* The Unseen Jack Katz *['21], published by artist Liam Sharp*

Conducted by TED JALBERT

[**Introduction:** *I originally met the artist, Jack Katz, in 2016, at the San Francisco Comic Convention. Jack had a table there and was selling signed copies of his* First Kingdom *books. I later wanted to do an video interview with Jack, but it turned out that contacting him was a little challenging. By 2019, I was finally able to meet up with the man at his home in California, and it turned out to be a whirlwind experience. My two-hour video interview with Jack will be published over the next two issues of* CBC.

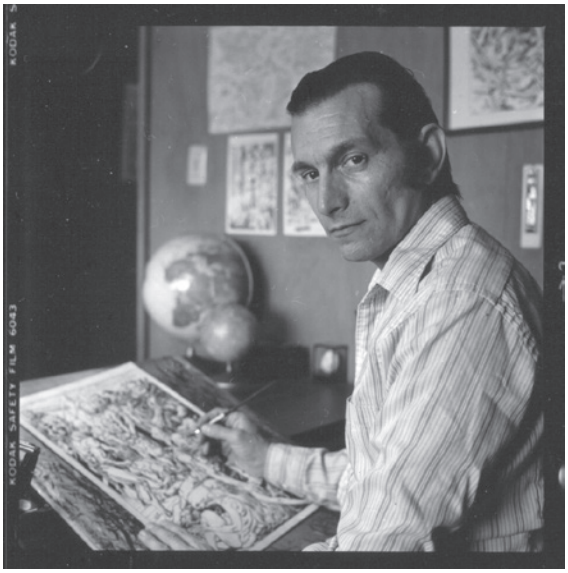
In 2020, Liam Sharp asked me to do another interview with Jack for the excellent Unseen Jack Katz. *So I went back to Jack's apartment and that had its own challenges. The new interview was completed in April, 2021, and the book was released in September of that year.*

Like a few other people in Jack's orbit, I was drawn into his world with his natural storytelling ability. And because Jack was in his 90s, he was a bit needy. When he saw I was willing to help out, he soon was calling me every day. Jack and I developed a sort of friendship from 2019–23. I would visit him regularly, take him to lunch, to his favorite diner, or even to a favorite organic grocery store. Jack was highly opinionated and he could talk about anything.

However, when it came to discussing his own family, Jack was a mystery. Jack did not want to discuss his family and when he did, I was never sure I was getting the whole story… and so I was patient. Eventually, after getting to know Jack and his oldest daughter, Beth, I was finally contacted by Jack's oldest son, Ivan, who had been out of touch with his father for years, but he remained a big fan of Jack's work. Ivan had saved some of Jack's old sketchbooks from the early 1960s and he scanned them for with me.

After Jack passed away at 97, last year, I got to know his son better and I realized we needed to hear Ivan's story. He was a young boy when Jack dropped out of comics, and it was Ivan who inspired his father to return to the industry, in 1969.

This interview was conducted on June 7, 2025, via phone. The transcript was edited by Ivan. – **T.J.**]



Inset right: *Katz in 1980 working on his* First Kingdom *graphic novel.*

Below: *A snapshot of Ivan Katz, the son of Jack Katz, from 2011.*

Ted Jalbert: *Can you share some memories of living with Jack and his painting he did every day?*

Ivan Katz: To start with, as a child, I never thought of Jack as a comic book artist. When I was growing up, there were a couple of comic books around the house. I remember one was called *Unseen*, and on the cover was a female vampire about to bite the neck of this terrified man. There was another story in another comic book called "Moon Madness," where a guy turns into a werewolf. I knew that he had done those, but I didn't know that he was or had been a comic book artist. With a few exceptions, my earliest memories begin at age two and are continuous thereafter. I knew Jack as a fine artist. He was a painter. Jack painted in oils. He painted every day. Our basement apartment smelled like turpentine and linseed oil. He used a restricted set of pigments composed of primary colors and black-&-white. He told me he could achieve any color using those paints only. He used titanium white. I don't remember what black he used, but cerulean blue, cadmium yellow, and alizarine crimson. Grumbacher Paints. That was his basic palette. He mixed all his colors from those. He used other colors such as burnt umber, burnt sienna, and some other primaries, but that was basically it. No greens, oranges, or purples. He painted with sable brushes on canvas. This being the pre-staple era, he stretched his own canvases and secured the canvas to the frame's stretchers with tacks. He winced after hitting his thumb with a hammer as he was holding the tack, with regularity.

He was frustrated by his inability to generate a lot of buzz or awareness of his work and was contemptuous of popular artists of that era. Contemporaries such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Jackson Pollock, all those guys; he thought they were phonies and that their work was crap. To be valued as an artist by Jack, it helped to already be dead. Michelangelo and Rembrandt were okay. De Kooning, not so much. He was always judgmental and vocal regarding his opinions, but I think, at least on this topic, there was

Ivan Katz photo courtesy of Ivan Katz.

an element of envy of the celebrity the more popular artists enjoyed.

He was a figurative artist exclusively. People were the medium through which he expressed beauty, grotesquerie, narrative, symbolism and metaphor. He would claim proudly that he had studied anatomy for eight years and could name every bone, foramen, suture, and muscle in the human body.

However, figurative art, in general, was not popular during that era. Abstract art, op-art, and pop-art were at the zenith of their popularity. Critics, gallery owners and the public in general frowned upon images of people. They considered the subject matter dated and sought artists they felt were original and ground-breaking. I remember visitors coming over to our house, women in particular, trying to sit with their backs to as much of his art, which adorned our walls, as they could. They were uncomfortable with the nudity. It took him a long time, but he finally did get exposure in one group show, and then a one-man show at the Panoras gallery. It was uptown [New York City], right off Madison Avenue and considered a prestigious venue.

So that's how I knew him. Until he separated from my mother, he painted. He also drew. He drew all the time. When he wasn't painting, he was drawing. When he wasn't drawing, he was reading and he did a lot of reading. All three of these activities were accompanied by music. Predominately late 19th to mid-20th century symphonic or chamber music. Mostly the drawings were sketches of people. He sketched my mom, my sister, and me a lot. We were readily available. It was his habit to draw us, preferably when we were either sitting very still or sleeping. He was fond of drawing Gloria, my mother, while she was reading. I remember how she held her carriage erect. Her posture was impeccable. He'd frequently sketch Beth and I when we were sleeping or when Beth had her thumb in her mouth or me with my pacifier in mine. He said it was the only time we would stay still. He also sketched old men on park benches or various people sitting captive on the subway. He was very good at quick sketches of people, preferably without their knowledge.

For income, he taught drawing and painting, either out of the house or at a YMHA [Young Men's Hebrew Association] to small groups or one-on-ones. Sometimes, he had me model for them. At four and five years of age, I had a really hard time staying still. My attention would wander, I'd lose my focus. My motor control was, as yet, immature. My father would growl at me to, "Be still." That would refocus me. Other times, he let me sit in and paint along with the rest of the class. And so that's how I knew him. He worked all the time and found raising his children and other domestic activities unwelcome distractions. He painted. He read. He listened. He taught.

Jack would use me and, to a lesser degree, my sister as models for painting or sketching. I remember one instance when I'd been recruited to pose for him, as he roughed in a composition with charcoal on a blank canvas. That's how he worked. He'd lay out a composition in charcoal, roughly sketching it in, before applying the first layer of oil paint. This usually involved refining compositional outlines and areas of shadow on figures using oils in the darker colors. Then the flesh tones followed by secondary light and finally, glazing. In this instance, he had me raise my arms so that they were parallel to the floor, and throw my head all the way back with my mouth as wide open as I could get it, as if I were singing to the heavens. It wasn't wide enough. "Wider!" he shouted. "Okay, now hold that, just like that." I don't know for how long I held that pose. It felt like a long time. My eyes were tearing. Eventually he told me I could relax. I couldn't close my mouth! My jaw was locked in that position. I started crying in earnest. He came over and shut my mouth. My jaw was sore for a week. Funny now.

He used the living room as his studio. The walls were covered with his paintings or stacked against a wall. There

Above: *Katz's gruesome cover for The Unseen #10 [May '53], published by Pines Publications.*

Inset left: *Ivan recalled this* Unseen *#7 [Nov. '52] werewolf story drawn by his father.*

Below: *Perhaps it was this issue of The Unseen [#14, Apr. '54] that young Ivan, today remembering the female figure as a vampire. Cover art believed to be by Mike Sekowsky (pencils), with inks by Mike Peppe.*

were hundreds, maybe up to 200 paintings. As far as I know, only a handful have survived.

After we moved out of the basement apartment in Brighton Beach and into a modern, well-lit, airy apartment in Luna Park, Coney Island, my father continued painting. The canvases got larger. The work more ambitious, I think, partly because we had more space. His marriage was not a happy one. My parents fought constantly. In February of 1963, Jack left with Eleanor, his model, then paramour, finally becoming his second wife. I mean, he just split, leaving a note behind for my mother to find when she returned from work at the end of the day. She did her best to keep it together; to continue to provide for my sister and I, but after a brief interval, she went off the deep end. In some ways, has never recovered completely. Over the next couple of months, she experimented heavily with drugs, alternative lifestyles, and had a series of boyfriends. At one point, she had 35 people living in our living room, lying on the floors, lounging on sofas, smoking hashish, and doing psychedelics. They were part of a group that called themselves the Karistens. (I don't know if my spelling is correct but that's how it sounded.) One night she pulled the paintings out of a closet where she had them all stored and started hacking them up with a scissors. So at least 160 paintings perished that night. The only ones that survived were the ones that had been sold before the event.

Ted: *Did you see his reaction to that?*

Ivan: Yes, I saw his reaction. I didn't see the event, but my sister, Beth, did, and she told us. I'd gotten out of there a month or two earlier when the opportunity presented itself and was living with Jack in Seagate at the time. Seagate was a little neighborhood at the tip of Coney Island. It was a gated community in an otherwise treacherous neighborhood.

Ted: *Was that with Eleanor?*

Ivan: Yes, she was there. So I heard this story from Beth, who came over to visit. He kind of turned white [when hearing of the paintings being destroyed] – but what could he do? So it was done. It's like learning that somebody had died, after they died. There's really nothing to be done. That was that!

Ted: *So he didn't say anything, he just turned white?*

Ivan: He probed and asked my sister what happened, how it happened. He was grim and silent. Beth told us the story: My mom's live-in guests were cheering her, applauding her, encouraging her great catharsis. She was symbolically ridding herself of my father's presence. Exorcising him; this odious burden that she carried. He had deserted her and run off with another woman. Left her alone to raise a family. All these people were there, celebrating her liberation. Applauding as she slashed those canvases up! She had all the encouragement she needed. So that's what happened.

THE TEENAGERS

Jack Katz

"Of Our Time"

By PHYLLIS STARKER

Jack Katz believes a true artist should not have to rely on unconventional surroundings for inspiration. And, his paintings, now on exhibit at the Panoras Gallery, 62 West 56th St., Manhattan, prove his point.

Jack Katz paints in his apartment in a room that overlooks the shore of Coney Island rather than the Left Bank of Paris. He lives in one of the Luna Park buildings on West 8th St. with his wife, Gloria and his two children. His wife is a Wall Street stock broker, and his children, Beth, 10-years-old, and Ivan, 8-years-old, attend Public School 100.

At the age of 16, Mr. Katz entered the commercial artfield and developed a successful career. But, six years ago, when he was 28, he decided to devote his talents to fine art. He also began giving private art lessons and teaching at the Brooklyn Museum Art School.

Last Monday, his first one-man exhibit opened at the Panoras Gallery.

Mr. Katz describes his paintings as "reflections of our time". The painting shown with this story is of people living in today's world, people who, as Mr. Katz points out, are aware of complexities of our age and of the ominous atomic threat. Of course this painting should be seen in its bold colors for full appreciation.

At first glance Mr. Katz's paintings, mostly of people, seem simple. But upon closer examination one realizes the skillful and interesting division of the canvas space. A close look at the colors reveal the variety of shades and textures Mr. Katz creates by a stroke on stroke, color on color technique.

The largest canvas is an intriguing beach scene composed of 32 individual figures which form one harmonious whole. Mr. Katz strongly feels that the total canvas composition is more important than any one part of the painting.

Perhaps the most precise comment that can be made by a critic with an appreciation and interest in art, but no formal background, is that after viewing the paintings one is compelled to see them again.

It's a shame because, honestly, in my opinion, during his earlier foray into painting, he was a better painter than he was in the 1990s and 2000s. His painting style had been similar to the mannerists, a la El Greco, an artist he admired. Elongated figures. His color palette was more mature. Ashen and somewhat desaturated. He used a glazing technique. He finished them. They weren't pastel-like paint sketches the way his later stuff looked. The later works became very busy, very dense. Lots of characters. People who looked broken, like they were stoned, compressed, beaten. Everyone looked oppressed, truncated, short. But the earlier stuff was quite good. Unfortunately, most of it didn't survive.

The new stuff, I think, is sitting in storage somewhere. Caroline should sell them or display them or something! At least somebody would see them! Maybe somebody will appreciate them. I don't. [*laughs*] But maybe somebody will! It's a shame when an artist dies – unless you're Bernini, Carpeaux, or Michelangelo– nobody sees your work! Your work disappears!

Ted: *There's a lot of artists like that!*

Ivan: I know! And a lot of them were good!… Oh well. But, as far as living with him when we were kids, generally, after we sent my mother off to work – and this was before I started school – we'd go for a walk.

Ted: *Was this when you were four years old?*

Ivan: Yes, three, four and five. This was before I started kindergarten. Once I started school, that was the end of the daily walks. But, from the time that I could walk until I started kindergarten, we went for a walk every day and we got back around midday. He'd feed me something. I was supposed to be exhausted after that, so he would paint in the afternoon. He'd turn on music, Mahler, Prokofiev, or Debussy; something like that and paint.

At age three-and-a-half, he felt I was demanding too much of his time and taking him away from his work. He asked me one day "Do you want learn how to read?" I said "Yeah!" So he taught me to read. I won't go into the painful details, but he called his teaching technique, "The Thigh Method." You may liberally infer what that involved. In actuality; it was worse. In six weeks or so, I was able to read simple stories like those found in Golden Books. They were hardcover books with a golden spine on them. I remember there was one called "Looking out the Window."

Later on, I got into stuff like *Tom Swift*. When I was eight, I was reading Burroughs, the *Mars* series, the *Pellucidar* series, the *Venus* series, and of course, all

Paintings © the estate of Jack Katz.

the *Tarzan*s. One of my favorites was a book called *The Boxcar Children,* by Gertrude Chandler Warner. In it, a group of children are living independently in an empty train boxcar. I was really disappointed when they were compelled to return to adult supervision. So I learned to read early on. By the time I started school I was reading fluently. At any rate, once I started school, Jack had the time he needed to paint, right, because I was gone…

We sometimes built model airplanes. I say we built, but the truth is, he built the model airplane while I hung around. You know, I would squeeze. Like, he would put glue on two pieces, and I would squeeze them together, until he said, "Okay, you can let go." The airplane glue took a little while to set. He'd hang them from the ceiling using thread because he didn't want me touching them once they were built. They wouldn't have lasted five minutes in my little hands. They looked as if they were suspended in flight.

Jack had a true love of aviation. He would tell me stories about some of the early pioneers of flying, such as the Wright brothers, Wiley Post, Reginald Mitchell, and Jimmy Doolittle, and of airplanes such as the SPAD, the Winnie Mae, and the Gee Bee. He drew biplanes and rocket ships all the time.

He told stories every night when he put us to bed. He'd tuck us in, and make up these stories. Incredible stories! They would go on for weeks. And every night, he'd leave the story in a cliffhanger. We'd urge him to keep going, but he'd say, "No, to be continued tomorrow." We had to wait until the next night to find out what was going to happen. Being a child of the radio drama era with an intensely creative mind, Jack was a very good storyteller. He told us about *The Lone Ranger, The Green Hornet,* and *The Shadow,* and how, as a child, he was transfixed by these radio dramas. I think they are, in part, responsible for Jack's development as a narrative artist, as, while listening to the radio, he learned to fill in the imagery he visualized, but could not see, from his imagination.

I lived differently from the way my peers did. They were all clothed all the time. We walked around the house naked all the time. Their homes had rooms that were off-limits to children. They had plastic slipcovers on upholstered furniture. They had coffee table books but no libraries. We had books all over the place, we had paintings on the walls, we had music on the hi-fi. The hi-fi was a cabinet with speakers on either end, and a turntable & receiver in the middle. We did have a 13-inch, black-&-white, television. My parents liked *Perry Mason, The Twilight Zone, The Alfred Hitchcock Show, The Defenders,* and *Route 66*. On Sunday nights we all watched Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom*, the Walt Disney show, and *Ed Sullivan*.

My parents would host salons on weekends, inviting their friends and acquaintances who were all in the arts. Performing artists, painters and writers would assemble at our basement apartment for drinks, food and animated conversation. I remember Murray Nobelman; he was the creative director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic, they used to do a simulcast on WQXR every Sunday at 10 a.m. Arthur Cohen, another serious artist and personal friend of Jack's from high school… You know, various minor creative celebrities of that era, late 50s, early 60s.

My father had agoraphobia for which he was treated by Paul Goodman, a cultural celebrity of that period. He was afraid to leave the house, in fact, that's why he got fired by Jack Kirby. He had been working for Kirby as a freelance artist. He would send my mother with his finished pencils into the city to deliver them. They'd make corrections, and circle things saying, "This needs to be bigger, this needs to be in the foreground," and she would bring the pencils back to Brighton Beach with all of the corrections and changes. Working this way took too long. They finally said, "we can't work this way, we don't have enough time." So they kind of fired him. That's how he got into fine art, that's when he decided that he was going to paint.

Ted: *So, the stuff he did for Kirby was before your time?*

Ivan: Yes. Before I was born, I think. Or at least I was too young to remember it. I got this from my sister. She said she remembers my mother going into the city with an art portfolio and coming back with instructions for corrections, and things like that. So it was before my time. I had no idea that he was a comic book artist. I always knew him as a fine artist. A painter. Although he also did a lot of ballpoint, pastels, and some colored pencils too.

Ted: *How did you see Jack return to the comic book industry in 1969?*

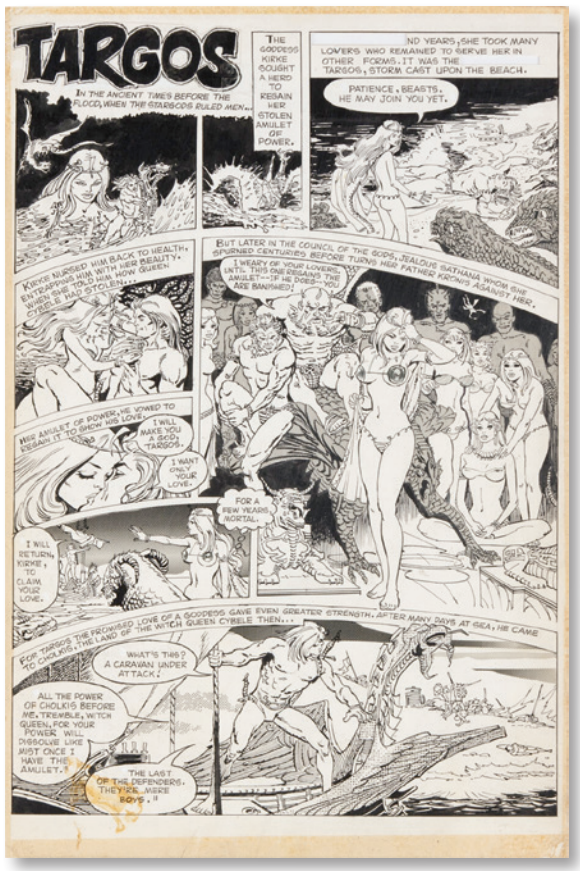
Above: *In 1960, the Katz family poses for a portrait in a New Jersey glade.*

Inset left: *A recently discovered painting by Jack Katz, dated approximately 1960.*

Previous page: *At top is article from the Brooklyn weekly newspaper,* The King's Courier *[Sept.9, '62], which makes mention of eight-year-old Ivan. At bottom is Katz painting from about 1990.*

Below: *Katz toils at his canvas in the late '90s.*

This page: *Katz re-entered comics in the late '60s working for Skywald (above,* Jungle Adventures *#1, Mar. '71, with inks by Frank Giacoia) and for Warren Publications (below, from* Creepy *#42, May '72).*



Ivan: I had a friend in fifth grade when I was ten years old. Colin… he got me hooked on comics. About once a week, we'd go on a comic-book buying rampage. More titles every month and we knew the release dates of all the titles. After school, we'd impatiently wait for the candy store owner to cut the wire that bound all the comics and magazines together and for him to put everything out for display and purchase. Then we would swarm. I remember the first one I got was *Tales of Suspense*, it was Iron Man and Captain America. I think the villain was the Crimson Dynamo. Roughly 1965-ish. I remember going nuts when Thor was battling the Ulik who was threatening to withdraw the Odinsword from its scabbard. Left in merciless suspense for four months as I impatiently awaited the next installment. I remember when Jim Steranko started doing "Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D." He also did a couple of early *Captain America*s when he got his own title. The inks were by a guy named Syd Shores. He had a very heavy ink style. Brushwork. I loved his style of inking. It was so different than the typical inking style of guys like Joe Sinnott and Vince Colletta, who used a pen. A crosshatching technique. So, I loved Syd Shores! That must have been around 1968 or 1969.

My sister and I had maintained a secret relationship with Jack that my mother was not aware of. It lasted for about a decade. Anyway, around 1968, with some trepidation, I told him of my passion for comics, thinking to myself, he knew nothing about comics and wondering if he was going to excoriate me for my interest in such a superficial and juvenile media form. I said to my father, "I don't know if you're gonna appreciate this, but…" I'd brought these comic books over to his apartment – he had an apartment on Kings Highway, in Brooklyn, and showed him some Steranko, I showed him some stuff by Gene Colan, who was doing *Daredevil* at the time. It was a totally different style. I showed him some John Buscema and Neal Adams too. And I said, "I collect these comics. I love this stuff!" And he said to me, "You know, I used to do comics." And I said, "Wha–? You did?! You were a comic book artist?"

Soon thereafter, he started to approach some of the comic companies. He went to Marvel. I wasn't with him on his trip to Marvel, but I went with him on a trip to DC. I think the address was 909 Third Avenue. It was way up, maybe on the 20th floor. I met Dick Giordano, he was a portly guy, big boned, he had a mustache and a beard, long wavy hair, a big ruddy, fleshy kind of face, you know, a big Italian guy! He was very nice to me, very polite. My father showed him some of his work. He was impressed. A bunch of guys gathered around from the bullpen, they loved looking at his pencils. The pencils were unbelievable! They were nothing like the stuff that the other comic book artists were doing. Jack really wasn't a comic book artist. He was an artist that did narrative, figurative art. Dense, anatomically correct, complex compositions, unusual perspectives. It really didn't look like anything any of the other artists were doing at that time. They were stylists.

Jack had an original and highly eccentric style, but he wasn't really trying to distinguish himself with it. I think he returned to comics simply because he had done it professionally as a teenager and it was familiar to him. That, and the fact that he needed income. This work was familiar, something he knew he could do. He also knew some of the guys. Perhaps my enthusiasm might have played some small part, but maybe it was, in part, because Jack recognized that the industry was opening up a little bit to new voices, stylistically. Anyway, he got back into it. He really didn't do much during that era. Romance comics, war and cowboy stories in little six-page shorts.

Ted: *Do you remember any other details from your visit to the DC offices?*

Ivan: It was a modern office building, the layout of the place was pretty modern. It was well lit. I remember the exterior of the building. It had these concrete, almost three-dimensional forms around all the windows… Interesting from an architectural point of view. There was a post office at the street level. I don't remember much else… I went with him that one time. I knew he went back and forth with his stories, and so forth. But that's about all I can tell you about his re-connecting with the comic book world, after having tried to be a fine artist for a long time…

He didn't do any of the super-hero titles with the exception of one *Sub-Mariner,* and he didn't do all of it…. At any rate, it was terrible! I think it was finished or inked by Herb Trimpe. That guy couldn't draw knees to save his life. From there, he started working for Warren, *Creepy* and *Vampirella*.

Ted: *He did two stories for Warren.*

Ivan: And finally, he started working for Skywald. And he got his own title called *Zangar*. I don't know how long he did that. Not long, I think. He was trying to shop around the idea of a graphic novel. The publishers didn't understand what he was proposing. I remember my father saying, "Someday they're gonna make movies about these super-heroes,

and there gonna have different actors playing the same character." I couldn't wrap my head around that idea. I mean, how can you possibly have two different actors, say Tobey McGuire and Andrew Garfield, whatever, both playing the role of Spider-Man? They look completely different! So, I said "That's ridiculous! That's never gonna happen!" But, of course, it did happen.

So he was talking about a graphic novel, an adult comic, you know, with large scope, a big story, without any advertising, and they just didn't understand it. So, they like rejected the idea.

And then I didn't hear from him for a couple of years. He broke up with Ellie (his second wife), and he went out to California. By this time, I was a young adult living out all the chaos and changes that go with that… and then, one day, I went to a comic store in Boulder, Colorado, and lo and behold, I recognized the style immediately. It was *The First Kingdom* #2. The cover had a yellow background and these two guys fighting in the foreground. I called Bud Plant and said "My name is Ivan Katz. Could you put me in touch with Jack Katz?"

I've been through this with him a couple of times. Without warning, he'd disappear. I wouldn't have any contact for a couple of years. Periodically, I'd come across his work, I would track him down. Usually through a publisher. He'd return my call, one time 24 hours later at a phone booth on Central Park West. It was raining. Then we start communicating with one another again.

Ted: *I know you have the* Unseen Jack Katz *book and you read it. Did you have some comments on that interview that you want to share?*

Ivan: Well, let's put it this way: at some point (I don't know why), he decided to fictionalize certain aspects of his biography. Maybe he thought it made him seem more interesting. Honestly, I don't know what to make of a lot of that. Let's just say I grew up with a very different set of stories.

I'm intermittently in contact with a cousin, my father's brother's son. Jack had a brother named Joey, and Joey had two kids, and one of them was named Stevie or Steve. We've gotten together, and we talked a little bit about some of this stuff. He actually took classes from my father, in Richmond, California. Then he stopped. I asked him, for instance, in his biography he says he was born in New York and then soon after he moved to Canada, and he grew up in Canada. All I can tell you is when Steve asked his dad about this Joey said "We lived at the same address, in Borough Park," I think it was 178 23rd Street, "for our entire life, that's what I remember." Now it's possible, remote, but it is possible, that before Joey was born, some six years after my father, that maybe as an infant Jack was taken to Canada, lived there for a while. Upon their return to New York, Joey was born. I never heard that when I was growing up, I'd heard various stories about my father's past from him, but Canada had never been part of it. The only Canadian connection I was aware of was that my grandmother Mary had a sister who lived in Ottawa.

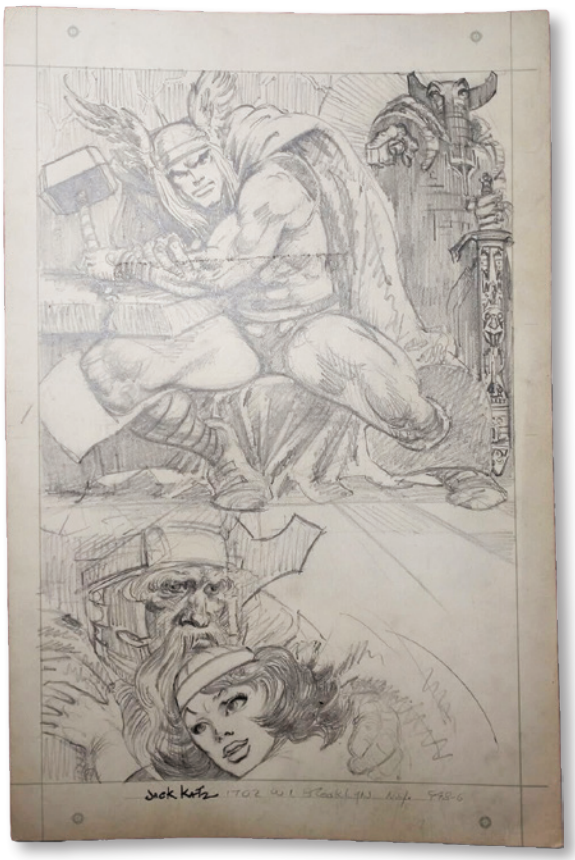
There was an interview in which he says he was in Hollywood as an infant and he was on this woman's lap and she had golden hair and he was looking up at her. That she was an actress. I looked her up. She did exist. She didn't do a lot of work. She wasn't a big star. But she did exist. I can't imagine what he would have been doing in Hollywood as an infant and I never heard those stories as a child but all of a sudden, they became part of his narrative later in life. So, I don't know what to make of a lot of that stuff.

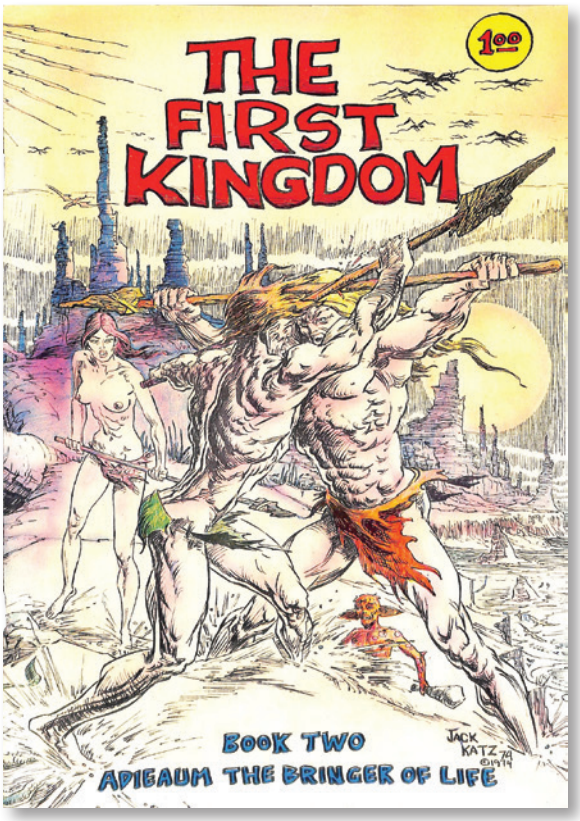
They sound a little bit unbelievable, based on the stories that I've heard as a child, but not completely implausible. They're possible, but I would say, unlikely. I asked him one time when I was visiting him at the skilled nursing facility where he was living, "Why did you do that? You didn't do that! Why did you say that?" He kind of sheepishly looked at me and he shrugged his shoulders. He didn't say anything. I said "You know, I was there, Dad! You know that I know! Why did you say that?! What was the point of fictionalizing your biography." He just, "Ahhhh…." You know, like that!

A lot of the stuff about Hollywood, Sal Mineo, and all that, this was all news to me. Did he maybe go to Hollywood at some point? Probably. He was living in California. He might have driven down the coast with somebody and gone to L.A. or something, but did he hobnob with celebrity actors like Sal Mineo, Rock Hudson, whatever, I don't know. I have no idea! I can't confirm or deny any of that stuff. To my mind, it's a stretch.

I can tell you this: that he was a good athlete, he played handball. I watched him play handball. He would go to the Ocean View Parkway courts at ten in the morning. The way they would do it, you'd challenge the person who held the court. If you won, you got the court. Then other challengers would try to take the court from you. He would have the court from ten in the morning 'til, like, 3:30 in the afternoon when he decided to quit. He beat everybody that he played at handball. He'd been a champion of the borough of Brooklyn for one day! He got all the

This page: *Looking to be a sample (below) drawn by Katz to try to get work at Marvel, this Thor page may have scored him the gig (above) to draw* Sub-Mariner *#17 [Sept. '69]. Alas, the art was extensively reworked by Marie Severin.*





Above: *It was seeing this issue of* First Kingdom *[#2, '78] that led to Ivan's near-reconnection with his father.* **Below:** *Jack Katz with* First Kingdom *pages in 1976.*

way through the tournament and challenged the champion. The champion was rested, awaiting the challenger who had defeated all the other competitors during the course of the tournament, earning the right to challenge him. Jack beat him! The next day, they had a rematch, and Jack lost. So he was champion for one day. That, I believe, having seen him play handball.

And also, he played doubles. I had a friend named Ruben Acevido, and his father played handball. My dad and Ruben's dad played doubles, and they beat everyone! This was after we moved to Luna Park. They beat everybody that played handball. So he was a good athlete. He was light. He was nimble. He'd go diving for balls, tumbling head over heels and skinning his knees and elbows but he always got the ball!

Ted: *You didn't talk to Jack for a long time, but you were reunited with him after he had a major stroke.*

Ivan: Yes.

Ted: *Do you want to talk about that? How you visited him at the nursing facility?*

Ivan: He'd already been installed at this skilled nursing facility. It's supposed to be mostly transitional for people who are convalescing– they would get physical therapy and things like that. But there were some full-time long-term residents, as well, and he was one of those.

So I hadn't seen him since 1978… Then I saw him briefly, maybe in 2007 or '08. I went to a comic convention at the convention center, in San Francisco. He had a table and he was drawing these beautiful, delicate figures. I was looking at it upside-down, because he was on the opposite side of the table, drawing. I was looking at what he was drawing, and then he looked up from what he was doing. He looked at me. I didn't say anything. Then his eyes went back down to his illustration. I realized he did not recognize me. So much time had gone by. I must have changed so much, that I had become unrecognizable to him. There was no look of recognition or anxiety or anything like that on his face. And so I just kind of backed away…

I didn't see him again until after the strokes at Pleasant Hill, the nursing home. It had been 46 years since we 'd spoken. He did not recognize me and told me so. We spoke of many things and, after a while, it became obvious to him that I must be his son. I knew so many details of his life and naturally, experiences we'd had in common. It took him a while to recognize me, but eventually he remembered me or some version of me.

I would bake a cheesecake and bring him a piece whenever I came. In the beginning, I was coming once a week, usually on a Friday or a Saturday.

I also arranged for him to have a relationship with his estranged daughter, my sister, Beth. Every week I'd set up a Zoom meeting at which they would talk. I'd play the music he loved over high-fidelity headphones I'd bring along. He would cry and say, "It's so beautiful." We had some very interesting conversations. We talking about fear being a motivator. He said, "Is there any other?" Apparently, based on his understanding, the prime motivator – for most people, he believed – was fear. I was arguing that's not completely true! That people do what they do, for a variety of reasons. I was taking the devil's advocate position. He was pretty adamant about it. He explained to me, or he would take my position and show me how actually, it was related to a fear.

So a couple of good conversations, but I would have to say, for the most part, we left a lot of topics unexplored. I think I could have been useful to him. Between the two of us, he could have used an editor! [*laughs*] I was the kind of person who could stand up to him. I have a strong personality. I listened and I learned from him. He was a really interesting person. I remember he was interested in various Kennedy assassination theories, then he got into Erich von Däniken, and then he got into Charles H. Hapgood, *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings,* the Piri Reis map. At any rate, he had a lot of different theories. He had theories about love, humankind and human development, and so forth. Some of them were very compelling. Some of them were well-supported. Some of them, less-so.

I remember at these salons, he used to take on all challengers, including licensed shrinks and psychologists about Freud and so forth. We had like a yard of books by Freud, you know, translated into English, that he had actually read. And he would take them on and, in those days, Freud was God. Most everyone thought the Freudian model explained just about everything. But he didn't believe that. He would talk about music with them. About various composers, their histories, the meaning of a particular composition and so forth. He was self-educated yet erudite. He never went to college, but he was thoughtful with an original, if somewhat eccentric, mind. He was quick, mercurial, and very charismatic. When he was younger, he actually did speak well. Not later on. In all the interviews I've seen he's stumbling over his words, can't remember things, and his vocabulary is atrocious. But when he was younger, his ability to express himself was really impressive. I wish you had known him when he was younger. He liked big words. Maybe a little too much. He didn't always use them properly and he couldn't spell to save his life. But he did a lot of reading. I remember he and Eleanor would lie in bed late at night, taking turns reading books to each other. He'd read a chapter, then she'd read a chapter. Like that. He was interested in the world around him.

For me at least, since his passing, the world has become just a little bit smaller.

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Coming Next Ish

Contributor Ted Jalbert lets the Katz out of the bag with the first of his two-part interview with the legendary Golden Age artist and graphic novelist, best known for his 24-part First Kingdom*!*

My Comic Routes & Me

Flash Thompson reminisces about his regular pilgrimages to the sacred stores selling comics

by STEVEN THOMPSON

When I was a little kid in the early 1960s, every time my dad would stop at a drugstore, he'd bring me home a couple of Harvey comic books – usually *Casper, the Friendly Ghost,* or *Hot Stuff, the Little Devil.* It seemed like drugstores were *the* place for comic books then. I didn't know it, of course, but we were less than a decade out from the height of the comic book scandals. Looking back, I'm surprised that anyone wanted to carry comic books.

In 1966, we moved into the apartment where we'd stay for the next 26 years. It was just two blocks away from a drugstore called Lampke Pharmacy. I went there with my dad one time, aged seven, and bought a copy of *Batman* #180, which I consider the start of my being a collector as opposed to just a reader.

That drugstore became my go-to supplier for several years. I was there so often on the day new comics came in, the kindly old clerk started letting me unpack them and put them on the spinner rack for him, at the same time choosing the best copies for myself! I felt privileged. It never occurred to me they were getting free labor out of me!

As I was allowed to roam further from home over the next few years, I started checking out all the drugstores. I discovered the Steiger-Neafach Pharmacy two blocks further on that actually seemed to receive different comics! Woolworth's, the uptown dimestore, also began displaying comic books, giving them a long shelf on the front of their magazine racks.

My best source of comics in those years would ultimately be a candy store about 11 blocks from our apartment called the Scroggins Confectionary! The woman who ran the place had a reputation for being grouchy, but she always seemed to like me. If I was a tad short on cash, she'd just let it slide. Oddly, I never once bought candy there, only comics. She kept the biggest display I had ever seen to that time!

Directly across the street from my favorite store was a dark and dusty junk shop run by another nice older lady, Mrs. Horn. She was constantly getting old comic books in. Sometimes I'd go in and there would be five or six boxes full! I picked up hundreds of Silver Age Marvels, DCs, ACGs, and others from her for a nickel each, as well as a complete run of Ian Fleming's James Bond books in mass market for a dime each! A couple of Kurtzman paperbacks, too!

As the '60s became the '70s, I began taking the bus across the river to downtown Cincinnati. Over time, I'd develop the route that I kept for quite a few years. Out of the bus station, I'd stop a block away at Fountain Square News for comics and obscure magazines. Then another block up to King's News, a controversial store always being busted for dirty books. They carried a large line of comics as well, though. Around the corner was Bell-Block News, and while they specialized in racing forms, newspapers, and greeting cards, they also had new comics faster than anyone else–as well as a full line of Walt Kelly *Pogo* books! From there, a quick stop at Kidd's Bookstore, where I bought fanzines, undergrounds, and comics histories in their basement, then the newly opened Wendy's for some take out. On the way back to the bus, I would sometimes stop at B. Dalton or Waldenbooks – depending on which direction I went. Although I had no way of knowing it at the time, that Waldenbooks would later be the site of my very first real job, the one that set me off on a three-decade bookselling career.

There was also Queen City Books, Acres of Books, and the Ohio Bookstore. The latter – the only one of these locations still here in 2025 – is a wonderful used bookstore, with five floors of old books, a collection of rare volumes, and rows and rows of old comic books and magazines. Back in the '70s, they started buying collections of Golden Age comics. I asked them to call me whenever they got more in, so I'd get first look. Over the years, I found out they were calling at least a dozen other collectors, too!

While all of the above was going on, the first actual comic shops were also opening around here. But that's a story for next time.

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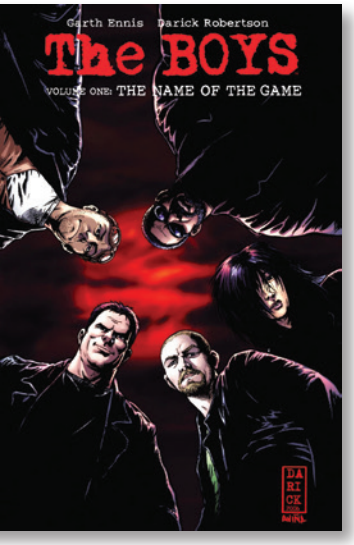
Top: *It's no Scroggins Confectionary of Covington, Kentucky (and the era this pic was clicked, the early '70s, is later than Steven's initial routine related here), but this shot of Gary Arlington's San Francisco Comic Book Store no doubt elicits the same wonderment!* **Above:** *The Steiger-Neafach drugstore of the Thompson route.* **Inset left:** *Penciler Gil Kane and inker Murphy Anderson's cover for* Batman *#180 [May '66], the issue that got seven-year-old Steven collecting comics.*

Creation: A Gift Unto Itself

The artist man behind The Boys *talks about the joy of seeking gratification from his artwork*



Above: *The Boys comic series co-created by writer Garth Ennis and artist Darick Robertson debuted in Oct. 2006. This cover is from their first collection,* The Name of the Game *[June '07].* **Inset right:** *Scribe Warren Ellis and Darick's* Transmetropolitan *was a series that ran between 1997–2002. Cover for* Book One *['19].* **Below:** *Artist of the covers depicted here, Darick Robertson.*

by DARRICK PATRICK

[*Darick Robertson is a professional illustrator whose work has appeared in such comics as* Transmetropolitan, Wolverine, Space Bastards, Nightcrawler, Oliver, Punisher: Born, Fury, *and more. Along with Garth Ennis, he co-created* The Boys *series, which was adapted as a TV show by Amazon Prime. Robertson is a co-executive producer for that hit series and its spin-off,* Gen V. *He resides in Northern California with his wife, Meredith.* – **Darrick.]**

Darrick Patrick: *With you finding enjoyment with artwork since being a child, do you remember when comic books in particular hit your radar?*

Darick Robertson: I have fond memories of weird random sci-fi EC-style comics without covers. Maybe *Tales to Astonish*? I'd also just pick up whatever was around the house that my older sister liked. I'd read *Archie, Richie Rich,* the Gold Key comics with Disney and Bugs Bunny characters, and romance comics. I found out later a lot of the guys drawing those romance comics were also drawing the superhero comics. I was just fascinated with the art form. Reading those romance comics taught me a lot about storytelling and making a quiet scene interesting visually.

Darrick: *Who are some of the people that greatly influenced you while growing up?*

Darick: Nobody anyone would know... like my father. My high school art teacher, Stanley Grosse, really made it clear to me though what the difference between being an artist and a "half-baked cartoonist" was.

Darrick: *Do you have any words of advice for other individuals looking to make a career with their artistic abilities?*

Darick: Don't expect overnight success or get frustrated if you don't make money right away. If you want to make money, go into banking. Creating is a gift unto itself. It can take years of sacrifice and devotion to get to a place where you can sustain yourself from your artwork. Do it because it makes you happy.

Darrick: *How do you spend your time on a typical workday?*

Darick: Lately, I find I spend more time answering emails, negotiating contracts, and the like than having actual time at my drawing board. Hoping that changes here in 2025.

Darrick: *Who are a few of the people in the comics industry that you hold a high deal of respect for?*

Darick: A lot of the early editors I worked with who took a chance on me and pushed me to improve. There's an element of on-the-job training that only experience provides and getting those early breaks made all the difference. Mike Carlin, Fabian Nicieza, Danny Fingeroth, Karen Berger, and Andy Helfer immediately come to mind.

Darrick: *Outside of creating artwork, what are your other interests?*

Darick: I love traveling, food, and playing music.

Darrick: *If you had a working time machine, what are some points in history that you would like to visit?*

Darick: It depends on what kind of time traveling we're talking about. Is it tourist only, like the Ray Bradbury model where the slightest change can topple the future... or is it like *Back to the Future*, where I can change the future by changing the past? I'd love to have seen the birth of rock and roll in the '50s and '60s. Also, to taste the food and wine and see the artwork in the Renaissance.

Darrick: *What is your oldest memory?*

Darick: A dream I had as a small child where my sister had a pet dinosaur made of Play-Doh that came to life after she ate part of it.

Darrick: *Tell us something about you that most people don't know.*

Darick: I am completely self-taught at art and couldn't afford school. I lived in Florence, Italy for a year, I speak some Italian, and I play the guitar, some piano, and write songs.

Darrick: *What comic book character do you relate to most?*

Darick: I always saw myself in Nightcrawler, as he was sort of the odd one surrounded by mission-oriented supes but stood apart as being more than what he seemed on the outside.

Eastern's Colorful Printing

Intrepid comics historian Shaun Clancy travels to Waterbury, Conn., to find Famous Funnies

by SHAUN CLANCY WITH JON B. COOKE

Up until 2015 or so, every year I would drive across the country in the summer to travel between Seattle and Boston, often stopping to visit comic-book people, usually folks who had never or rarely been interviewed. In 2013, after interviewing the man by phone a year before, I went to the Waterbury, Connecticut, offices of the city's *Republican-American* newspaper, to keep my appointment with publisher William James Pape, grandson of the founder of Eastern Color Printing Company, William Jamieson Pape [1873–1961]. It was late in the afternoon, about 90 minutes before the end of the workday, but he didn't rush me.

The newspaperman – Pape was said to chafe whenever anyone referred to him as a "journalist" – was obviously proud of his family's history in connection with the birth of American comics and, in that phone chat, he kindly answered questions and allowed access to amazing artifacts he had in the archives. He told me, "Eastern Color started as a subsidiary of the *Republican-American,* which was a daily and Sunday newspaper. The Pape family were the major shareholders of both the newspaper and Eastern Color."

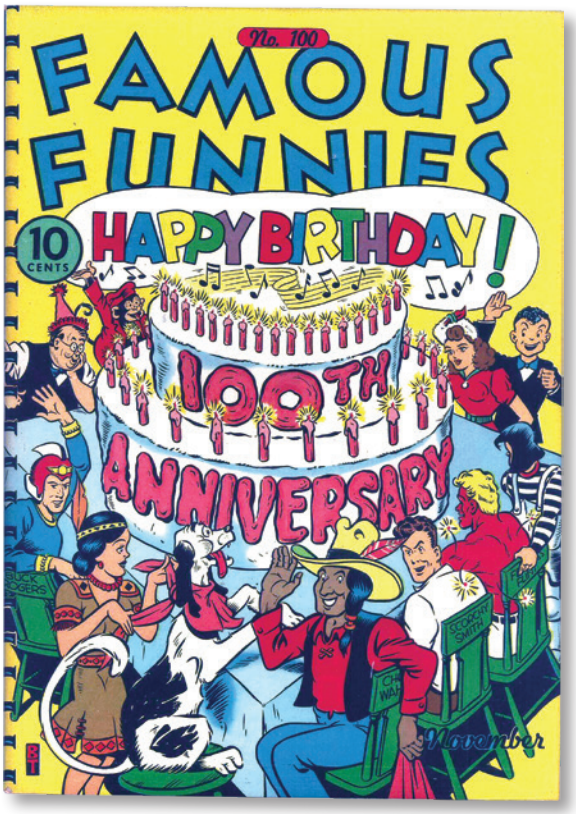
Born in 1931, Pape, who worked for Eastern between 1959–63, after discharge from the U.S. Navy, explained the company's roots. "They were printing Sunday comic sections mostly for newspapers on the East coast and they were printing circulars for Sears and Roebuck. They got into the circular printing business in the 1930s."

He continued, "Eastern Color got into the comic-book business in the early '30s with *Famous Funnies,* which had comic strips *Buck Rogers, Dickie Dare,* etc. and were sort of a mish-mash of Sunday comics put together and stuck in a comic book. We owned *Famous Funnies,* but we also printed comic bodies [interiors] for Western Printing and Lithographing.* We had a number of customers who had their own titles that we printed books for. We did the bodies for them and shipped them to Curtiss-Way up in Connecticut and they printed the glossy covers and did the stitching and binding [trimming, folding, and stapling]."

Famous Funnies, of course, is considered by many to be the very first true regularly published American comic book title, lasting between 1934–55 with 218 issues, all under the Eastern Color imprint. Pape, a very nice guy who let me look through anything I wanted, showed me the hardbound volumes of the *Famous Funnies* run, complete except for volume four, which Pape told me had been pilfered decades before from the office by some employee.

Pape clearly recalled the mid-'50s downturn in comics, a period during which *Famous Funnies* ended. Mentioning a publisher whose comics Eastern Color printed, he said, "One of our New York customers committed suicide by jumping out of his office window." Of the collapse, Pape added, "I was in college and in the Navy when the industry blew up, but my dad told me that he knew something was going wrong when the returns were coming back before the issues hit the stands."

When I suggested that the nation's concern over kids reading violent material was a factor, Pape added, "I think it was partly that and the advent of television. We got out of the comic book business about that time and concentrated on the circular business. We did a lot of things with Sears & Roebuck."



MEANWHILE, DOWNRIVER IN DERBY...

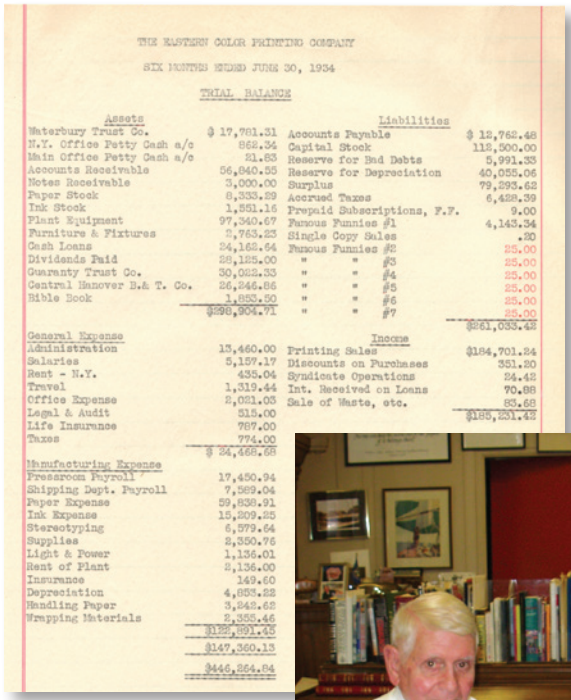
The publisher was amused when I naturally asked about the comic book firm situated down the Naugatuck River, in Derby. Did he know the founders of Charlton Comics, John Santangelo and Ed Levy? Pape let out a laugh and his answer alluded to the company's disreputable reputation. "Yes! I'll tell you a funny story about those guys: Levy ended up in the New Haven County sheriff's jail. The sheriff [J. Edward Slavin] had a sort of a boy's camp and Levy talked the sheriff into going into publishing comic books with Santangelo promoting this boy's camp. One day, the sheriff came to [*Republican-American* general manager James H.] Darcey to ask his opinion on why he wasn't making any money with these comic books. Darcey asked him who he was publishing comics with and he said, 'Santangelo and Levy!'" With that, we both laughed.

Interestingly, Pape revealed, his newspaper had won acclaim for covering the Waterbury city hall scandal that put

Top: *The celebratory 100th anniversary cover for* Famous Funnies *[Nov. '42], with art by Ben Thompson.* **Above:** *Undated shot of William James Pape, newspaperman.* **Below:** *Indicia of* Famous Funnies *#100, which mentions the Waterbury outfit.*

* Western long had the contract to package Dell Comics until that association ended in 1962 and Western launched its own line, Gold Key Comics.

FAMOUS FUNNIES No. 100, Nov. 1942. Published monthly by Famous Funnies, Inc., 500 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. Trade-mark registered U. S. Patent Office. All contents copyrighted. Yearly subscription, United States, $1.20, plus 30 cents for mailing, total $1.50. Foreign and Canada $2.00. Single copy: 10 cents in United States; 15 cents in Canada. Entered as second-class matter, March 19, 1935, at the Post Office, at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Additional second-class entry at the Post Office at Poughkeepsie, N. Y. Editorial and circulation offices, 50 Church St., New York, N. Y. Advertising representatives, Gilman, Nicoll & Ruthman, 19 West 44th St., New York. Branches—Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, San Francisco. General Office: 61 Leavenworth Street, Waterbury, Conn., U.S.A. William J. Pape, President; William B. Pape, Treasurer. Printed by The Eastern Color Printing Co., Waterbury, Conn. PRINTED IN U.S.A.



THE EASTERN COLOR PRINTING COMPANY

SIX MONTHS ENDED JUNE 30, 1934

TRIAL BALANCE

Assets		Liabilities	
Waterbury Trust Co.	$ 17,761.31	Accounts Payable	$ 12,762.48
N.Y. Office Petty Cash a/c	862.34	Capital Stock	118,500.00
Main Office Petty Cash a/c	21.63	Reserve for Bad Debts	5,991.33
Accounts Receivable	56,840.55	Reserve for Depreciation	40,055.06
Notes Receivable	3,000.00	Surplus	79,293.62
Paper Stock	8,333.29	Accrued Taxes	6,488.39
Ink Stock	1,551.16	Prepaid Subscriptions, F.F.	9.00
Plant Equipment	97,340.67	Famous Funnies #1	4,145.34
Furniture & Fixtures	2,763.23	Single Copy Sales	.20
Cash Loans	24,168.64	Famous Funnies #2	25.00
Dividends Paid	28,125.00	" " #3	25.00
Guaranty Trust Co.	30,022.33	" " #4	25.00
Central Hanover B.& T. Co.	26,246.86	" " #5	25.00
Bible Book	1,853.50	" " #6	25.00
	$298,804.71	" " #7	25.00
			$261,033.42
General Expense		**Income**	
Administration	13,460.00	Printing Sales	$184,701.24
Salaries	5,159.17	Discounts on Purchases	351.20
Rent - N.Y.	435.04	Syndicate Operations	24.42
Travel	1,319.44	Int. Received on Loans	70.88
Office Expense	2,021.03	Sale of Waste, etc.	83.68
Legal & Audit	515.00		$185,231.42
Life Insurance	787.00		
Taxes	774.00		
	$ 24,468.68		
Manufacturing Expense			
Pressroom Payroll	17,450.94		
Shipping Dept. Payroll	7,369.04		
Paper Expense	59,836.91		
Ink Expense	15,209.85		
Stereotyping	6,579.64		
Supplies	2,350.76		
Light & Power	1,136.01		
Rent of Plant	2,136.00		
Insurance	149.60		
Depreciation	4,853.22		
Handling Paper	3,243.62		
Wrapping Materials	2,355.46		
	$125,991.25		
	$147,360.13		
	$446,264.84		

WILLIAM J. PAPE, PRES. W. B. PAPE, VICE-PRES. J. H. DARCEY, TREAS. GEO. G. JANOSIK, SEC.

THE EASTERN COLOR PRINTING CO.

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50 CHURCH STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y.
TEL. CORTLANDT 7-4764

61 LEAVENWORTH STREET
WATERBURY, CONN.

This page: *Amazing artifacts from the publisher of America's first regularly produced comic book, Eastern Color Printing Company, of Waterbury, Connecticut. Above is only one of a number of accounting sheets compiled as part of their fiduciary responsibility, though this page pertains to the very first issue of Famous Funnies, released in the spring of 1934. At top is the company's letterhead, circa 1937. At right is William James Pape and Shaun Clancy during the historian's visit to the newspaperman's office circa 2005. Below is a blank Famous Funnies stock certificate (with slight digital manipulation).*

THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT

NUMBER

SHARES

Famous Funnies, Incorporated

CAPITAL STOCK $100,000.

SHARES $100. EACH

This Certifies that

is the owner of _____ Shares of the Capital Stock of

FAMOUS FUNNIES, INCORPORATED full paid and non-assessable

transferable only on the books of the Corporation by the holder hereof in person or by Attorney upon surrender of this Certificate properly endorsed.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the said Corporation has caused this Certificate to be signed by its duly authorized officers and its Corporate Seal to be hereunto affixed this _____ day of _____ A.D. 19__

SECRETARY-TREASURER

PRESIDENT

Levy in New Haven County Jail, where the disbarred lawyer would meet song-sheet bootlegger Santangelo and partner up with to start a publishing company. "In 1939, we won a Pulitzer Prize for exposing the [Waterbury] mayor and a whole bunch of about 15 people and them ending up in jail." When I followed up asking, "Did you enter into any business relationships with John Santangelo or Ed Levy?" Pape exclaimed, "No! We stayed clear of them."

Recalling the devastating flood in 1955 that engulfed Charlton Comics under 18 feet of water, I asked if Hurricane Diane had also impacted the newspaper. "Yes. Eastern Color was flooded and I was actually on leave from the Navy that summer, visiting a friend. My friend had a 1927 old fire engine at his home and when I heard about the flooding I called my dad and he said to bring over Mr. Forbes's fire engine and so my younger brother I brought it down to the plant after we found the keys. We tried to pump that water out with the fire engine… We had a whole bunch of wet motors and paper that had been in the cellar and the building was located where the *Valley Republican* is now. We had about three- or four-feet of water."

FUNNIES NO MORE

When Eastern Color ceased publishing *Famous Funnies,* Pape remembered that, at first, "They were remarkably successful. The comic book business did very well in the 1930s and '40s, but then went to hell in the 1950s. We were doing comic books at that time and it was Third World propaganda and I was working with the manager down in Washington, D.C., and our comics were distributed down there."

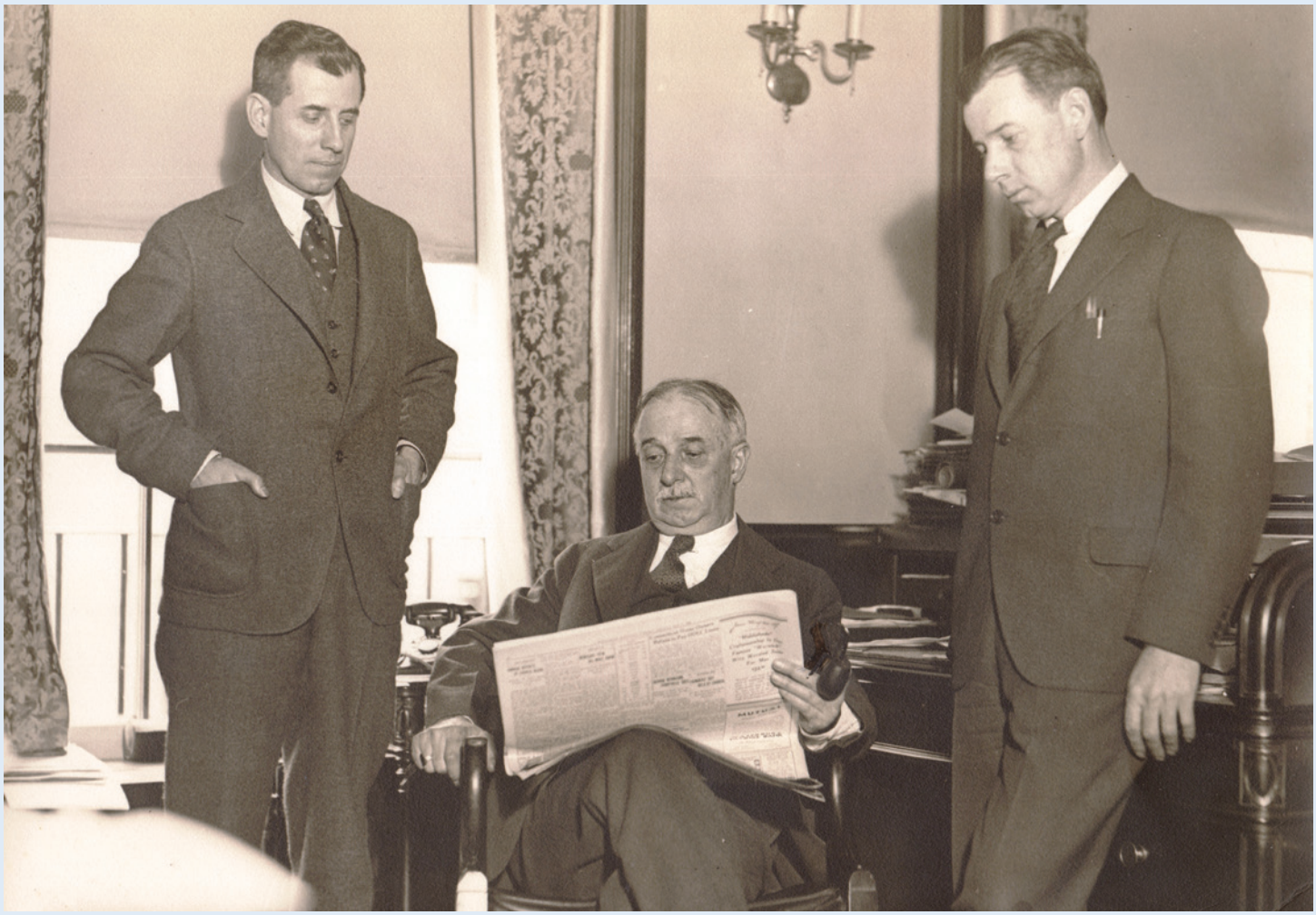
Alas, as the clock was winding down, I didn't learn any more details about the "Third World propaganda" comics, but Pape did earlier have something to say when, in the phone chat, I brought up the name Harold A. Moore, since the '30s a credited editor of the Eastern comics line. "Hap wasn't really an editor; he was a salesman. He was the sales manager for Eastern Color and he had an office in New York which he worked from. After the business went to hell, Hap sat in that office five days a week down there, overseeing just the one publisher we had and that's about all he did… When my dad died, Darcey was the publisher full-time and turned Eastern Color over to my brother, and… my brother realized Hap was sitting on his [rear] doing nothing…"

Did his brother Richard J. Pape [1934–77], appointed in 1961 as Eastern Color head in the wake of their grandfather's death, have a hand in the comics? "By then, the comics were gone," he revealed. "We weren't doing any comics except for those books that we were printing for the U.S.A."

While spending time with the friendly publisher, I scanned a treasure trove of corporate documents relating to Eastern Color, including its articles of incorporation, numerous accounting sheets, and even a Famous Funnies, Inc., stock certificate, and I cast an envious gaze over the hardbound copies of *Famous Funnies* (and, drat!, he wasn't interested in selling them). I did note they did not include the two 1933 giveaways, but they had *two* copies of volumes one through ten! Regarding the business papers, I only scanned the first few years' worth due to time constraints.

At 5:00, I bid Pape farewell after thanking him for his help, as my next destination that day was to visit the Connecticut home of the adopted son of the founder of Hillman Periodicals, Alex L. Hillman [1900–69], who published *Airboy* and comics featuring the work of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby in the Golden Age. Look for that chat in the issue after next!

All items courtesy of Shaun Clancy.



Above: *Undated shot of brothers Eric and William B. (William James's father) standing with their seated dad,* FF *founder William Jamieson Pape.* **Below:** FF *#1 [July '34] wraparound cover.*

On the Eastern Front

William James Pape passed away in 2019, at the age of 87. His obituary noted, "He started his career in 1959 as assistant treasurer of Eastern Color Printing Company, a [*Waterbury Republican-American*]-related company that printed the first comic book. His appreciation of comics continued throughout his career." Upon his demise, his own newspaper reported, "Though Pape could be taciturn and diffident, and shunned attention on himself, he shared anecdotes about his grandfather liberally and with infectious mirth. It was that kind devotion… that underscored Pape's commitment to his family and fierce support for press freedom."

Though it was certainly Eastern's most successful endeavor, *Famous Funnies* wasn't the only comics title published by the company, as it notably released *Jingle Jangle Comics* and *Heroic Comics,* as well as romance, sports, Western, and even *Juke Box Comics*. And it's important to note that the printing division, after the cancellation of *Famous Funnies,* continued to print copies for other clients, including Marvel, whose books ran off the Waterbury presses into the late 1960s.

A fascinating snapshot of the Eastern Color operations appeared in *The Hartford Courant,* of April 30, 1950, under the headline (which pertains to the average employee weekly income, the most lucrative wage in the state at the time), "Connecticut Print Trade Is Highest Paid At $66.51":

"Connecticut has become an important publication center for special newspaper features, currently popular color comic books, and fine magazines. The Eastern Color Printing Company, Famous Funnies, Inc., of Waterbury, and Curtiss-Way, Inc., of Meriden, are representative of mass production operations…

"Eastern Color Printing Company does one of the biggest mass printing production jobs of the east. Although not generally known, the [Sunday comics section] 'funny' supplements of most newspapers in this area, including the *Courant* are printed here. Press runs are 1.5 million weekly, 75 million a year. Twenty newspapers are regularly supplied. The text includes the drawings of popular cartoonists. The big production job of this company, however, is the book portion of the popular *Famous Funnies*. About 225 million copies are printed annually. Regular press runs of the Eastern Color Printing Company include comic tabloids printed in the Spanish language. They are translated editions of popular American comics. Thirty-five newspapers in 10 Latin American countries are supplied regularly. Editions run one million weekly.

"Curtiss-Way, Inc., of Meriden, is another unit in the Eastern Color group. The company regularly supplies the covers for the *Famous Funnies* books of the Eastern Color and also does the binding job."

Shary's *National* Exposure

The second part of our 2002 interview with National Lampoon *cartoonist Shary Flenniken*

Conducted by JON B. COOKE

[**Editor's Note:** *Last ish, in this previously unpublished 2002 interview, Shary Flenniken regaled us about her upbringing as daughter of a wanna-be cartoonist/military lifer, becoming a rebellious, runaway teen, and discussed her time as a member of the notorious Air Pirates collective, where she received a crash course in cartooning by her cohorts, Dan O'Neill and company. We pick up the discussion regarding her finding a regular gig at* National Lampoon, *with her* Trots and Bonnie *strip.* – **Y.E.**]

Comic Book Creator: *This seems like a really fast process: from 1970–72 is when you started contributing to the* National Lampoon, *right?*

Shary Flenniken: Yeah.
CBC: *Twenty-four months!*
Shary: Well, we didn't have other jobs. [*laughs*] We didn't need them, we were just *living* this stuff.
CBC: *What did you want to do? Did you want to get paying gigs?*
Shary: You have to remember that I was still giving my body to the cause. I was still essentially suicidal at that point, which made me totally relate to this enterprise against Disney. It really was like lemmings, the fact that *Lampoon* did *Lemmings**… we were total lemmings, we were going to rush over the Disney cliff, we're going to rush over the cliff, and fling ourselves at what we perceive as the enemy, you know? So I was just really flinging myself at things.
CBC: *Was it becoming increasingly apparent that you, in fact, were* not *going to die, that life did go on? Did you have a moment of, "I have to make a career," or something like that?*
Shary: I think what was really critical about my life around that time was that I got married to Bobby [London], I just became really afraid of flying. I think what that was, was my subconscious accepting the fact that I really didn't want to die. And being married was kind of the positive move that was saying, "This is worthwhile, and I have a responsibility to somebody else." I'm sure he didn't see it that way, but I was totally that way.
CBC: *And to yourself? You had a responsibility to yourself?*
Shary: I hardly ever think that way, but I guess. No, I thought of him, because watching that documentary about Altamont in the Rolling Stones…
CBC: *What,* Gimme Shelter*?*
Shary: Yeah. That was really pivotal to me when they took the guy who was stabbed away to the hospital in a helicopter and his girlfriend got left on the ground. And my thought, "I don't want to be that person on the ground." When you're married, they let you go in the helicopter. And here we are, in this really life-threatening, dangerous battle… which we thought, at the time. That's how we felt at the time. I want to be with my husband really, in love. I don't want to be left on the ground because I'm not legally attached to him.
CBC: *Can you, in a nutshell… what was Air Pirates? To the uninitiated…*
Shary: Oh, no! You're asking an awful lot of me! In a sense it was like a… I'm not really familiar with the old guilds, the way… it was sort of like a guild, because it was an alliance that was predicated on sharing skills and teaching skills. And part of that was becoming aware of your position in history, going in both directions. Where you were

**National Lampoon's Lemmings* was a 1973 stage performance that satirized mass conformity among rock fans in a pseudo-Woodstock show that ended with everyone running off to commit mass suicide.

coming from and what you were going to affect. And giving you the skills to be as powerful as you could be… and a reason. All that stuff. Little cartoon ideologies.

We were very much into sharing skills with other oppressed peoples. And I think there was a feeling that, in those guys helping me, they were helping all women. And it was something that they could do, to help the next woman help the next woman help the next woman to become stronger and more powerful. And we had people, we had Native Americans with us. We were trying to teach as many people as we could to pick up the torch.

CBC: *And what was the political act of the* Air Pirates *comic itself?*

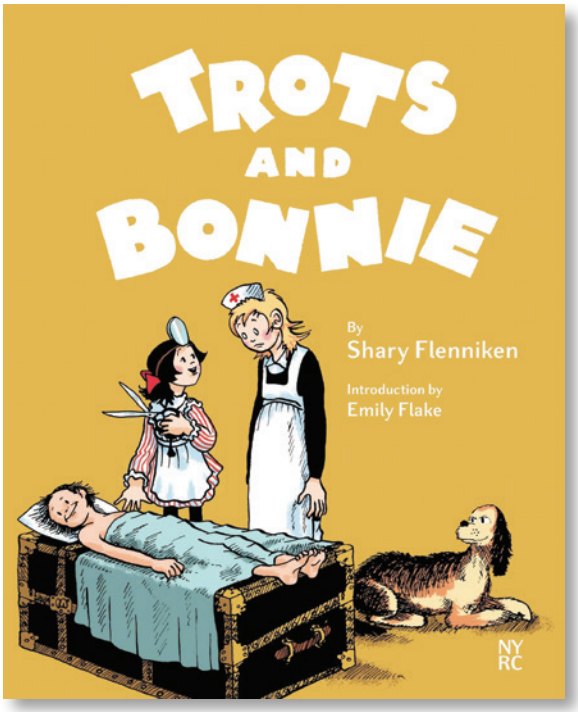
Shary: Well, you'll get a lot of different opinions on that. Dan [O'Neill] says that his motive was just getting his syndicated characters back… One of Bobby's positions there, as I see it, he was like Dan's lieutenant, and he would translate Dan's ideology, which was very much like what you see from the comic strip, really wild and imaginative…? Bobby would translate that literally into… because, you know I said he was very articulate about cartooning and humor, into things that we could relate to and understand. Dan's ideas, his imagination is fantastic, and a lot of times when you talk to him, you need to go, "Okay, what are you *actually* saying? Are you saying this or are you saying that?" (He still talks like that.) He'll go, "Gold! Gold is the focus for everything. Gold is the reason for everything." And I'm going, "Well, what do you mean? I thought oil was?" And then he will have to come down to earth and explain the whole thing. And he doesn't necessarily ever want to come down to earth with you. [*laughs*] He wants to remain on that plane. So Bobby translated a lot of what we were doing with Disney into things that I guess were easier to absorb, which is to say, read [Richard] Schickel's book, *The Disney Version* [*The Life, Times, Art, and Commerce of Walt Disney*, '68], and Disney has the patent on the spy satellites and stuff like that. The Disney Corporation is way more hooked into the military-industrial complex than we realized. Basically, the idea was that Disney had this self-professed image of innocence and delightfulness, in the form of Mickey Mouse and all these wonderful characters. And there was this other book about this, too [*How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, '71], where we're exporting Disney as we're exporting Coca-Cola. It's just one more front for American business, which is one more front for American control of other countries. It's really clear to this day that we do now, I think. I still believe it. That was the idea of using their own characters. I think if I had been in charge of that crew, I would have done less sex and more politics, but then I don't think it would have sold as well or been as fun. But, at the time, sexual repression was as ubiquitous and important a battle to fight as any other political thing. Now, it's a done deal, it's not a big battle anymore. Although it still is in some areas, some very Christian areas.

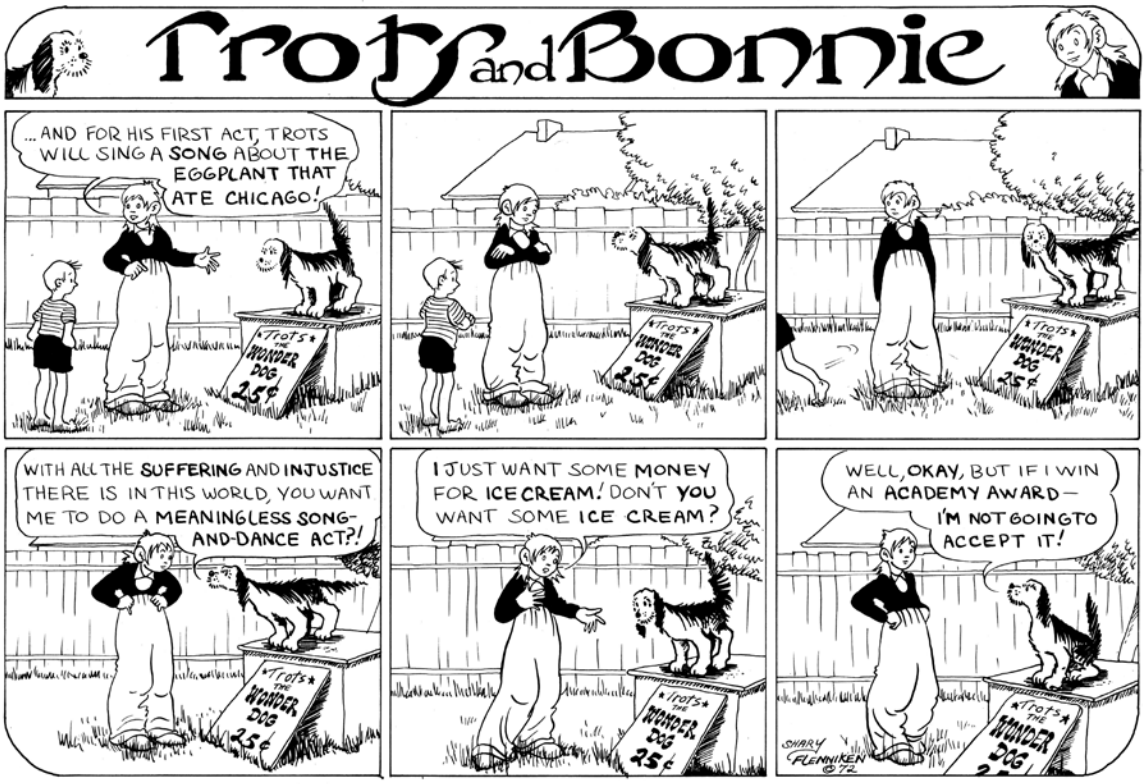
CBC: *So it was putting the Disney characters having sex and things like that, right? What was it, fundamentally, what did Disney take offense to?*

Shary: Well, what I heard – and people disagree with it – is that the only thing Disney took offense to was that they had to protect their characters in order to license them, and it was that simple. It had nothing to do with anything we were saying or anything else. And everything else was sort of just making their case. If you invent a comic character and you license it to other people, you have to protect it… You know, it's just like Xerox and Kleenex. They'll come after you in the same sense that they came after the Air Pirates.

The Air Pirates don't like

Above: *Shary Flenniken poses at the Short Run Comix & Art Festival 2022 in a photo by Chris Anthony Diaz.* **Opposite page:** *Shary's covers for* NatLamp *[Oct. '78] and Seattle's* Simpleton *#3 [Spr. '76].* **Below:** *The cartoonist's signature strip was collected in 2021 by New York Review Comics. Say what you will, her strips rank with Gahan Wilson's as the best in the mag.*





Above: *Shary had developed her Trots and Bonnie strip in various underground comix before the big debut in* National Lampoon, *instantly establishing, for the nationwide readership, that Trots would talk to Bonnie (and, from thereon in, typically deliver the punchline). The duo's first appearance, seen here, was in* National Lampoon *#32 [Nov. '72.*

Next page: *Trots and Bonnie T-shirt and* NatLamp *strip.*

Below: *Flenniken gag cartoon [*National Lampoon *#34, Jan '73].*

to think about it that way, because they want to think, "Oh, well, we were saying something so radical that…" I, personally, don't even believe that. And then you get into this thing where, you know, you kind of have the right to protect your characters. But that wasn't the point of what they were doing, which is the point of… They were absolutely right that it was legitimate parody. And Disney was saying that it was not legitimate parody, but it *was* legitimate parody. It's just that Disney defines "legitimate parody" as you can use our characters, but they have to be so badly drawn that you can't recognize them. [*laughs*] And then you're okay. And the Air Pirates were like, "No, we're going to do them perfect."

CBC: *I'm actually right now in the process of putting together an issue devoted to Gold Key Comics, and I –*

Shary: Oh, then you really know.

CBC: *No, I did not know that. Only reading your interview recently, and I have to get back to Mark Evanier…*

Shary: You do, because he was definitely my source on that; he's my only source. And what people say is not necessarily correct.*

CBC: *My mother was involved in the anti-war movement and we subsequently found out that we, in fact, did have a dossier at the old FBI office.*

Shary: Congratulations!

CBC: [Laughs] *A badge of honor! Did you ever get the feeling that you were being watched or you were of concern to Hoover or…?*

Shary: Well, I was already being watched and "of concern" to Hoover on an individual basis. I mean, I had the FBI agents come to my parents' house. But it wasn't about comics; it was just around my sense of humor. They came to my house because I had written a letter to a friend of mine who was in jail in Key West for whatever. And I was telling him that what he was doing, just sitting in jail, was a political statement. And then I put the return address on it, Timothy Leary and my parents' address. And I had no idea at the time that Timothy Leary had escaped from jail and was actually up here in Seattle.

CBC: [Laughs] *"We've got a lead!"*

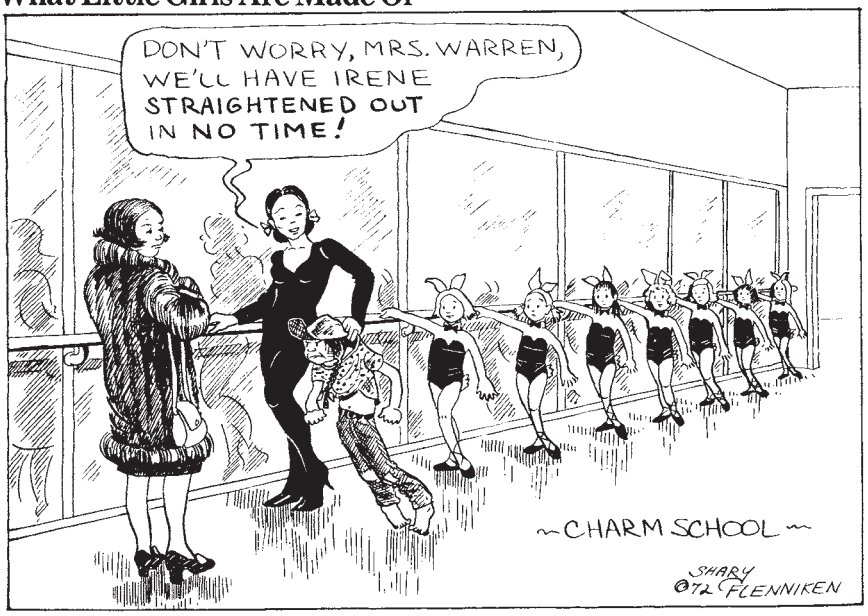
Shary: Yeah! So the two agents show up at the door. I wasn't even there. They came in and visited with my dad and found out that he'd been in Naval Intelligence. My dad has letters of commendation from J. Edgar Hoover. So these guys just had a rollicking good time, I guess, where my father was saying, "Oh, that daughter of mine! Getting out of hand again."

CBC: *"Those kids!"*

Shary: So we had that, and then I had another experience with agents coming to the door about some unrelated thing. I lived in a little commune for a while, a little political collective, and they were coming around for something. So I saw more of them then when I got involved in the commune. Whoever was doing it when we were doing cartoons was under deep cover or whatever.

CBC: *Did you hit it off with Bobby, were you tight with Bobby from the start?*

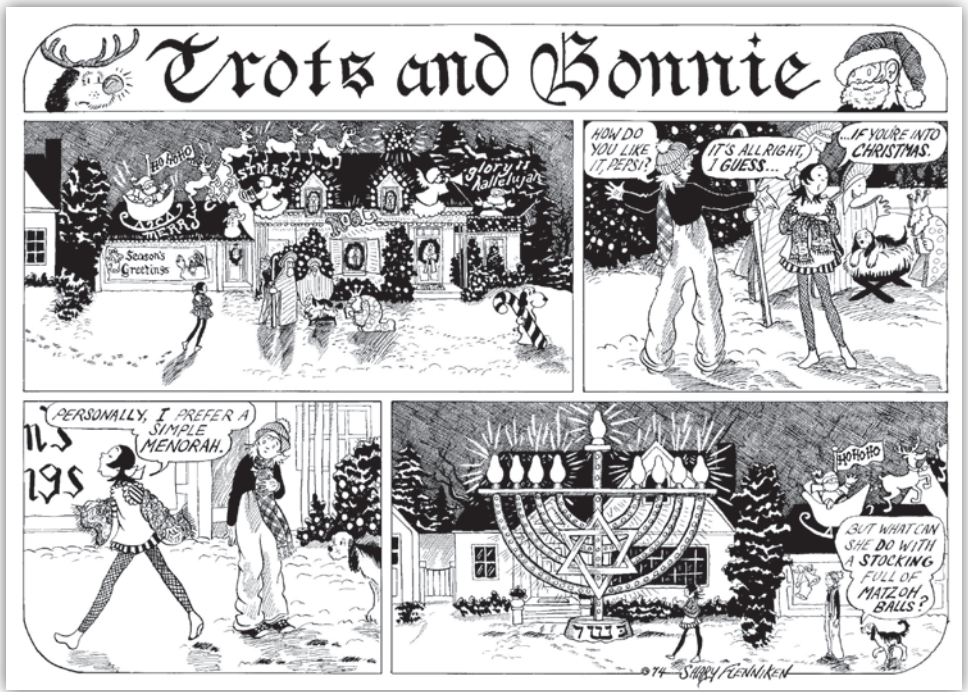
What Little Girls Are Made Of



* In her *Comics Journal* #146 [Nov. '91] interview, Flenniken said, "The thing about the Disney suit that I've heard since… I heard from Mark Evanier that the only reason that Disney sued to begin with was because – I think Gold Key was the comic book company – they had leased the characters to Gold Key, and Gold Key forced Disney to sue… This is what I heard, that they were asked to sue, that Disney wasn't going to pursue it, that they just weren't interested … who knows? They certainly don't sue all the fine artists who put Mickey Mouse in their paintings…"]

Shary: Oh, yeah. I would say "instant love "on my part. [*laughs*]
CBC: *When did you get married?*
Shary: Well, let's see… we met at Sky River, that would have been in August… then he went back to California, and came back to Seattle in January, on New Year's Eve. And we were together, it was like a romance, we were together, we were apart, he left for California, I came down to California, Berkeley, in late April, May, and then we started seeing each other again, and then within a few weeks or a month, I was living over in the Air Pirates loft on Harrison Street, in a pretty short time. And, I think, by the next year, we were getting married, on New Year's Eve.
CBC: *So how long were you married?*
Shary: Five years, basically.
CBC: *What led you to the* National Lampoon*?*
Shary: Michel Choquette. You know about him?
CBC: *Oh, yeah.*
Shary: A fabulous person, a wonderful person.
CBC: *Where did you meet him?*
Shary: Well, Bobby and I were married, we were living in San Francisco. The trial was on, I think. And Michel was recruiting for *The Someday Funnies.* And… do you know about that?
CBC: *Oh, yeah. This is the "Great Mystery" of the '70s.*

Shary: The notorious book. I think he still has my artwork, I don't know…
CBC: *He still has a lot of people's artwork, I think.*
Shary: He should put it out there and make a thousand dollars online, that's what it selling for there. Anyway, so he got us to contribute to the book, and then, I guess, you could say we went on some sort of a belated honeymoon that summer after we met Michel. My parents picked us up, took us to Seattle, put us on a train across Canada. We went across Canada, took a bus from Montreal down to New York, and lived with Bobby's parents for, like, a long time. Months. And we started going into Manhattan and hanging out at *Lampoon*. Terry Southern was there, laying around the office, and all these cartoonists that we'd heard about. [*Lampoon* art director] Michael Gross just welcomed us into the office and said, "Hey, can you do a page for us? Can you do this stuff?" And they had me illustrate a feature by Ed Bluestone, "Telling a Kid His Parents are Dead" [*NL* #34, Jan. 1973]. And that was one of the first things I did for them. I did a "Trots and Bonnie" strip for them.



CBC: *Was that the first appearance of Trots and Bonnie?*
Shary: Oh, no. I had been doing "Trots and Bonnie" in comics before that. And they're in one Disney-cited comic, *The Tortoise and the Hare*. "Trots and Bonnie" is in there. And they were in *Merton of the Movement* and other undergrounds.
CBC: *What's the genesis of "Trots and Bonnie"?*
Shary: Well, I remember the night I invented Trots and Bonnie. I remember there laying in a sleeping bag in the Air Pirates loft, trying to think of a concept for a comic strip. And Bonnie was the name of my dog, and somehow I thought "Trots." You know, it's another word for diarrhea. [*Jon laughs*] And I guess… I forget why I thought that was a good name for a dog except that I've had dogs, I clean up after dogs. So I just named the dog that, and named the strip that. It was a real, very much, a gut-level process in terms of: there was a lot of intellectual crafting going on. But the material was really coming from my gut. I think it was the very first professional comic strip I ever did. I mean, we were aware, craft-wise, that we needed to introduce a character. So I introduced Bonnie in one strip to the underground comic audience, and I introduced her again in the Lampoon audience. So the first strips that I did for those, literally, "I have to introduce these guys in some way to the audience." And, in the comics, it was Bonnie gets kicked out of her house for reading feminist literature. So that's very much my history and very much my experience.

And then, in *Lampoon*, it's… I think, at Bobby's suggestion, I introduced the fact that the dog can talk. 'Cause that's the most novel thing that's going on, and you don't want to take that for granted. So, in the first "Trots and Bonnie" strip in *Lampoon* [#32, Nov. '72], it's the little girl with a talking dog trying to make money by having her dog perform. And he doesn't want to perform, so he doesn't do it. And then he does, because she says, "Well, don't you want to make money for ice cream?" And he's, like, "Well, okay. But if I'm really great and I win an Academy Award doing this, I'm not going to accept it," which was a reference to Marlon Brando and [the Native American controversy]. And that was very much my feeling for working for what was basically an establishment business, the *Lampoon*. The *Lampoon* was a totally establishment business to *me*, from where I was coming from. It was selling out, basically. *And*, when I brought my first *Lampoon*, not one that I was in, but brought it

Above: *Trots and Bonnie* two-page color strip that appeared in National Lampoon *#78 [Sept. '76].*

Below: *It was Canadian writer Michel Choquette who facilitated Flenniken and Bobby London's introduction to* National Lampoon. *Throughout the '70s, Choquette, a* NatLamp *regular, was gathering submissions for his mammoth undertaking,* The Someday Funnies, *which went unpublished for many decades. (Ye Ed. takes pride having played a tiny role in it finally seeing print in 2011 – for proof, check out the book's acknowledgments!)*

back into the Air Pirates lair, they tore it up. One of the other guys tore it up.

CBC: Really?

Shary: In the same way that the underground newspaper people made me burn my Christmas tree…? They tore up the *Lampoon*, because it was an establishment kind of thing. Because that's, I imagine you remember that's the way the Left was. We were so stratified; it was a real weakness. But it was just there.

CBC: *Who is Bonnie, how would you describe her?*

Shary: You know, I've come to appreciate her as a character more and more, as time has gone by, and I look back at her. She is very much me, in the sense that, all this activity swirls around her, she has no opinion on it. It's just that events are happening around her. And she's not a classic protagonist in that sense, because she never really picks up the spear. But she is a great vehicle for me because she represents that feeling of "Oh my God, what's happening around me?" A real observer of things… And not just an observer, or victim, or whatever. So she's a really useful main character, because you can just stick her anywhere, in any circumstance. I mean, I could stick Bonnie down on Wall Street. So there's an incredible wealth of material for the character.

CBC: *Is she the "Great Innocent," like Charlie Chaplin, being dropped anywhere?*

Shary: Yeah, people love to refer to her as being innocent, but she's… I don't like the word "innocent." And that was one of the things that I actively tried to turn around in my comic strip, because I was very aware of the "Disney version" of teenage-hood, and she's 13. The Hollywood/Disney version of teenagers and pubescence is this incredibly innocent character. They're just *so* squeaky clean. And my character masturbated and read dirty books.

CBC: *I guess I meant innocent under quotes, like perhaps the passive one, what you just said…*

Shary: Well, yes, there are better words to use than "innocent," because "innocent" gets my back up about… there was nothing innocent about her, she was willing to absorb this information. She wasn't fighting it off. She had no desire to remain squeaky clean. She was more curious than innocent, do you know what I mean? And also, no offense, but I think guys really like to see that character as innocent in the same way that they like blondes, and little girls, and small kids, and all the things that are kind of, that untainted sexual thing. You know, men want that unfurrowed…

CBC: *The "virgin."*

Shary: And I really don't like that. And I think they really jerk off to that character with that in mind. I mean, no offense but –

CBC: [Laughs] *You ain't throwin' me in there! I don't think I've ever jerked off to a cartoon, but…* [laughs]

Shary: Tons of guys readily admit that.

CBC: *Even the most extreme stuff, I don't know, I look at it aesthetically, that would never arouse me…* [laughs]

Shary: Oh, it *does*, and a lot of guys do that in jail…

CBC: *Oh, obviously. Then again, if I was in prison, hmm…*

Shary: And I'm really personally mortified if that's the

only thing they got out of that strip.

CBC: *What do the big ears represent? Is that the same thing as having the big feet, of that strip that you had of the little women with the big feet, something self-conscious…?*

Shary: No, no. It's way simpler than that. There is really a character that I copied for Bonnie. And it's a little boy. And probably, I think I can find it, I think I have the book right here, I can probably send… I think it's even in my *Comics Journal* interview, maybe, I don't know…

CBC: *Yeah, I didn't notice big ears on the guy.*

Shary: The big ears may have grown over time, that may be my exception, because I really kind of made that my own. I mean, the hair changed and everything mostly because it's hard to draw exactly like somebody else. And I took the personality of that character in that cartoon, which is, this woman is standing next to this little boy, talking, and he obviously is in love with her and she doesn't realize it, the unrequited love. And that whole personality really touched me. So, when I was first using this character, the Air Pirates were going, "Take an existing character and do something with it," that's the character I took. It's just that I pretty much made it my own. I would apologize to anybody for copying, but it was just something we were doing then, as an exercise. How was I to know it was going to be greeted with all this success. I mean, it really has been pretty successful.

CBC: *She obviously developed her own personality.*

Shary: I was doing it to make a point back when it was still an exercise. It just went on.

CBC: *And Trots was basically a counterpoint, a way of…*

Shary: Yeah, he is, I think, a really classic kind of Greek character coming in, he's the narrator, in a sense. I don't think he ever actually narrated anything, but he's the guy who steps into the play and tells you what it all meant.

CBC: *The host. The Rod Serling.*

Shary: Okay, yeah…

CBC: *And Pepsi?*

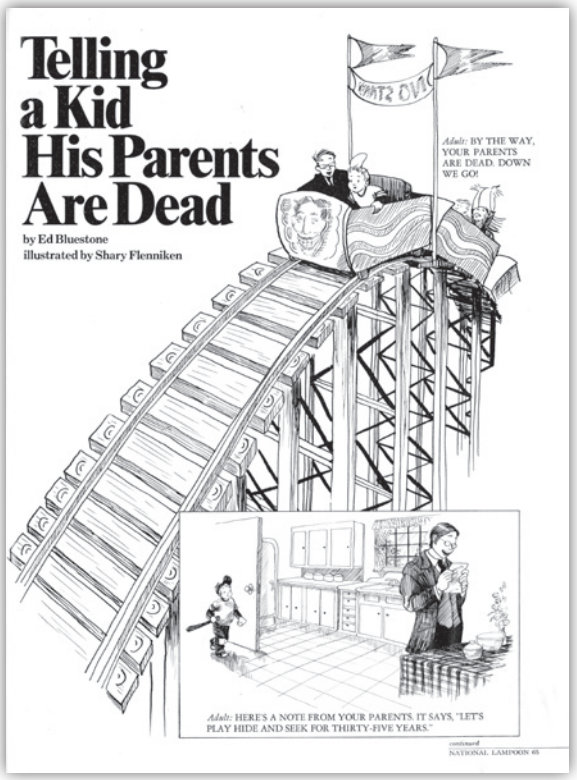
Shary: Pepsi was based on women who are really like that, characters that I know that have instant opinions on things, they seem to have sprung from the womb with an opinion and a lot of guts. And I've always been very attracted to women like that, because… Oh, I just love them. They're great, they're just so sure of themselves, so confident in their opinions, and I respect that. It's a whole different kind of person, and it made a great counterpoint, because she was the person who introduced all this other stuff to Bonnie.

CBC: *The great corruptor.*

Shary: Oh, yeah. She knew everything already.

CBC: *It's really hard to describe, for me, what "Trots and Bonnie" was… there was a real wholesome element about it, and yet it was obviously there was a lot of sexual awakening going on. It was dealing with really intense adolescent emotions and things that was going on. And you did it in such a classic way of… within the Sunday page tradition, even though you often had multi-page stories and stuff like that, this was a little episode, this was an episode in their lives. And they were eternally young. Do you know what I mean? And she still had resonance today because she's eternal.*

Shary: Well, thank you! That was part of this Air Pirates training, and part history. Part coming from the great American tradition of cartooning and very much the positive influence of, I would guess, Michael Gross, but a lot just the whole atmosphere of *Lampoon*, the way they gave cartoonists freedom like you wouldn't believe. While Hugh Hefner was heavily editing the comics pages in *Playboy* – rewriting stuff and changing the art and having a lot of influence, the *Lampoon* guys had virtually *no* influence. They would kind of give you an idea. The worst thing they would do is not print your strip, and they did that to me, like, twice – not buy the strip. The first time that happened was the second comic strip I did, I think… It was like the second or third one, and they didn't print it because, I think it was about cars. It was about the automobile industry and wheelchair… or did they print that one… ? Oh, no. Anyway, the line from them was, "This could have been in the Sunday paper," and therefore they did not want it. So therefore I gleaned the editorial stance was to always do something in that strip that would be too offensive or too controversial to go in the Sunday newspaper. Which is a good thing. I mean, that's a pretty good editorial guideline. But they just did not… and the copy editors would come in and change a few words and do, like, a paste-over, but that was just copy-editing, correcting words, or something. They just did not touch people; it was wonderful. It was amazing. It is so rare that happens. One of the most amazing things they ever did.



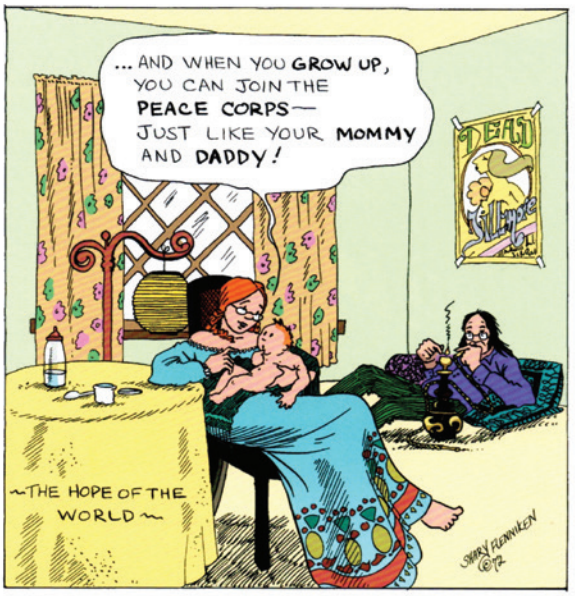
This page: *One of Flenniken's earliest assignments at National Lampoon was to illustrate this feature by Ed Bluestone.* **Left:** *Hapless boy listening to his romantic interest pine on about her "ideal" beau, who possessed none of this kid's attributes. This big-eared cartoon character by H.T. Webster was adapted by Flenniken when she designed Bonnie.* **Below:** *At the time this interview was conducted, Flenniken laments her* Someday Funnies *cartoons were lost.*

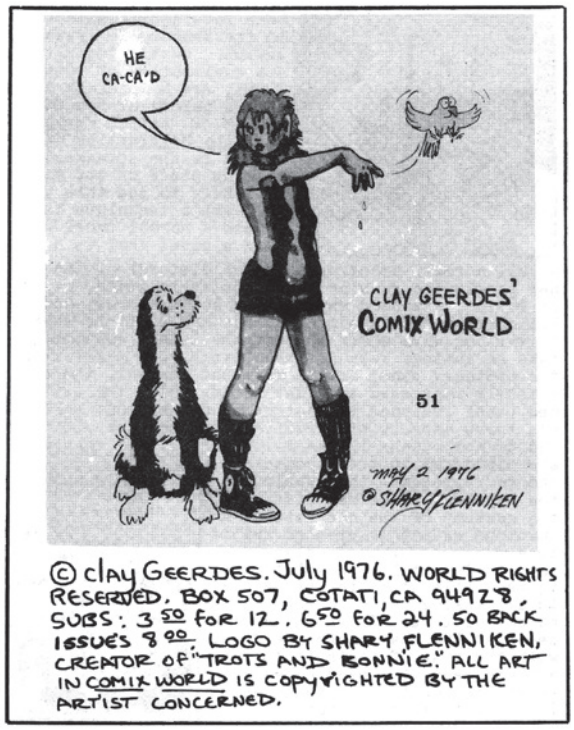
CBC: *I spent six hours talking to Michael Gross, and it was almost like he felt a moral obligation to recognize what the Air Pirates situation had done and could possibly do, that you and Bobby and Ted, there would be a home at* National Lampoon.

Shary: Oh, that is such a lovely thought!

CBC: *Did you ever get that feeling? Did you ever know? Did you ever get the feeling that they felt a political obligation? In a positive way, I mean.*

Shary: Well, I guess that you could say that, except





Above: *In May '76, Shary draws her pastiche of Sanjulian's Vampirella pose (seen on a 1972 Seuling con souvenir book).* **Below:** *Clay Geerdes 1971 pic of Bobby London & then wife Flenniken.*

that I was just *so* clueless. I was just *amazingly* clueless all through my 20s about what was going on or why anybody wanted anything or… I mean, I could have thought they wanted my comic strip because I was personally cute, you know what I mean? You know, they liked my ass or something, yes. [*laughter*]

CBC: *I think he expressed that, too!* [laughter] *He said you were incredibly vivacious and immediately captivating when you came in, as a person. And obviously your work, it was just… he clicked to it immediately.*

Shary: I wasn't really personally aware of that. I had acne up into my 40s. I mean, I was more conscious of having a zit on my nose than anything else. But I made up my mind – and this is totally an aside about my personality – I made up my mind that… I was raised in a neighborhood with all boys, and I used to… not to be a tomboy, because I was always the nurse in the war games, but there was one book I read about Mata Hari, and I made up my mind to have a good personality. That I wasn't going to focus on being pretty like all those girls who were wearing cashmere sweaters at school. But to really develop a personality. And I consciously wanted to do that. Because Mata Hari, that's what they said about her. She never took her bra off when she danced.

CBC: *What, she was one of the guys, so to speak?*

Shary: No, but she captivated people with her charm, her personality, not with her looks. And even with this very physical pursuit that she had, her career, it was still her mind that really made her so interesting. And, I don't know, Mata Hari was an influence on me. Can you believe that? Not having anything to do with drawing…

CBC: *Perhaps that resolve that you had to be that way really… obviously worked in these really male-dominated situations.*

Shary: It did. And having grown up with boys worked in those situations, too, because I'm not easily offended at all.

CBC: *Had you always been contemplating, when you were in your 20s, were you contemplating a lot what it was like to be an adolescent? Had you been doing that anyway? "Trots and Bonnie" became a study of that.*

Shary: I would say I was scarred by the whole experience. [*laughs*] And plus, think about it, like I was saying, Hollywood and Disney present me with this ideal of childhood and this ideal of being a teenager. And I experienced *none* of that. They never presented you with kids who had acne. And they still don't, in a lot of ways. I dunno, maybe rap music is more real, do you know what I mean? It's like, people die around you, there are serious things… That stuff was never presented to me in the entertainment media. And I was hungry for it. I mean, I was reading John O'Hara novels, *Butterfield 8* and stuff, where people had illicit sex and illegitimate children, and died and all this kind of stuff. I was like, "Wait a minute, the world is not this mainstream thing." I was just irritated, really irritated that this stuff was not presented to us. And it went hand-in-hand with all the lies about the Tonkin Gulf incident and everything else that people were trying to shove down our throats. It *still* bugs me. It still makes me mad, you know?

CBC: *I always thought Disney is the Great Satan.* [*laughs*]

Shary: You do?

CBC: *Really! A part of me really hates Disney with such a passion, especially having three kids, as I see the influence so strongly. Each one of my kids, at a certain age, had Disney media dominate their viewing. Disney cable is really focusing on adolescence now, burgeoning adolescence. Like, what do*

they call that… the 'tween years… ? But anyway, that they're focusing on defenseless kids… they're so market-savvy, it just feels more evil. But Nickelodeon, there's a bit more anarchy to it, so it's a little less antiseptic. I just get exposed to it both, it's so calculated…

Shary: That anarchy is from their focus groups, Nickelodeon focus-groups as much as anybody else.

CBC: *Oh, I know that. But, at least, it gives the impression that diversity is fun and that sometimes people have authentic feelings other than just happiness… There's something about it. It's more healthy, I think, while Disney is so sterile and so unfunny. Which I was able to feed into as a kid, too. I liked the comics, but I despised the whole television thing. The whole* Mouseketeers Club… *(as much as I loved Annette… I liked Annette much better in the beach movies; there was a little more reality).*

*You know, there's one thing that does not come through your work and certainly does not come through either the interviews or me talking to you now, is that… For instance, I was a political cartoonist, for a period of time, and the reason my humor never worked was because I was just too f*cking angry. And I just came across as being very preachy. So, as much as I tried not to be condescending and talking down… I never had a soft hand, I was always very ham-fisted. It was very difficult and I was very frustrated, so I basically walked away from it, because I'm just too… ridiculously angry. And you seem to have a much healthier point of view, sardonic, ironic, wry sense of humor. I don't know what I'm trying to say, other than an observation. You haven't stressed that you were angry…*

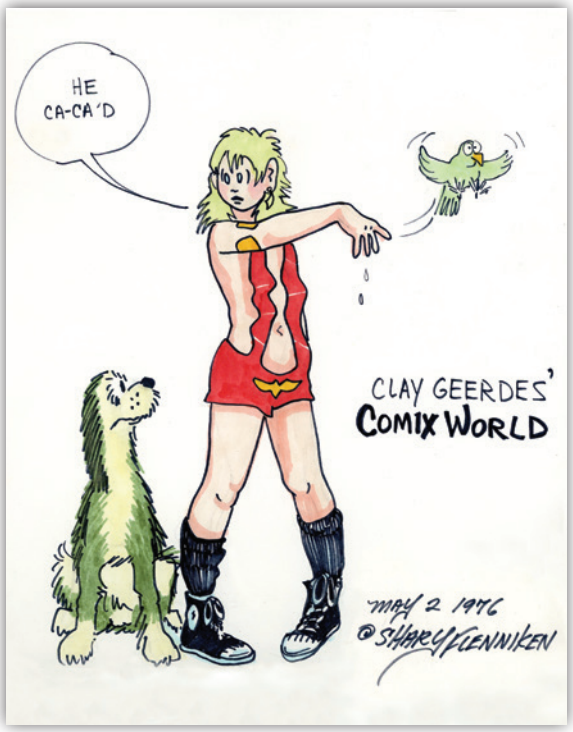
Shary: Well, I haven't seen what you've done, so I might love what you've done and not think it's at all preachy. And I think my stuff certainly… I guess it's preachy sometimes, but it's closer to what I want than not. And I'd rather have it be preachy than have it do nothing.

CBC: *But for me there seems to always be that wink.*

Shary: I did stuff that I look back on it and I'm, like [groans]. My worst nightmare is that I'm misunderstood, y'know, in that… "Trots and Bonnie meet Idi Amin" is really the best example of it. I was really trying to say something that I think is still valid… I mean, it had nothing to do with sex. It had everything to do with African tribal warfare and how it affects American Black people. And I had a totally valid, salient point that I think maybe nobody got. And then I had in it, just for kicks, I had my character naked in it, just to keep your attention. Because a lot of times I would be saying something and I would just take off everybody's clothes. Because nobody cares what you say if you have them walking around naked, you know what I mean? [*laughter*] I don't know what it is, they don't get the point or something. I mean, here you go, here's Idi Amin killing off other Black people there, and here in this country Black people are killing other Black people. And it's real simple. Don't sh*t where you eat; don't kill your own kind; don't kill your brother. Work together, make a better world. Killing the guy next to you is not going to do that.

CBC: *So is your audience important to you in how your work is perceived?*

Shary: Oh… well, let me say this: Right around age 40, I realized that my work was not as important as I thought it was. And it was a big, cold water splashed in the face kind of thing. Because here I had gone from underground comics to a magazine that sold… what was it?… over half-a-million copies, anyway. It seemed like a lot of people at the time. And I really as greeted with a lot of appreciation and success, and I'm in this huge national magazine. And then you realize that I've been sitting all this time and said all this stuff and nothing's really changed. I mean, I'll get people who will say… I had a friend tell me that I changed the way men think about sex with my comic strip, a certain percentage of men. And it made me feel really good, because that is probably about the best thing that anybody could say to me. And I thought, "Well, okay, I did something that I wanted to do. That's what I wanted to do." You know what I mean? So that's the importance of the audience.



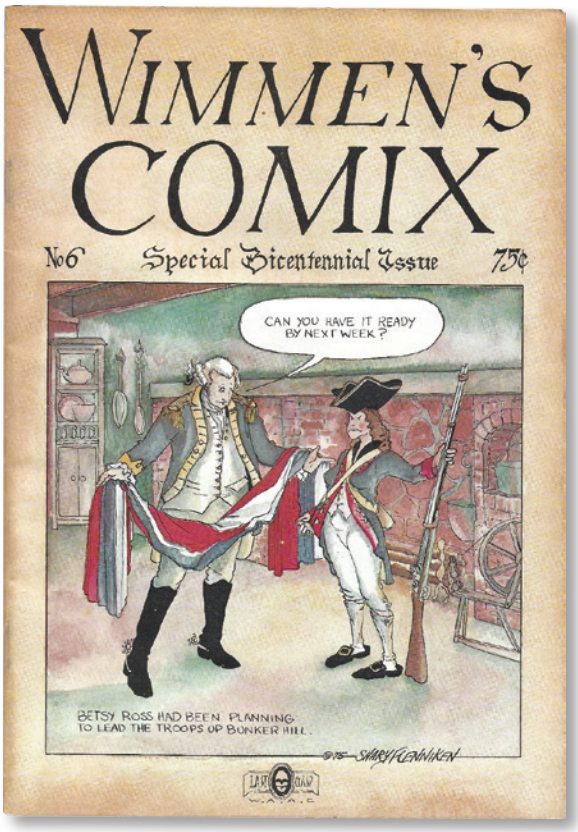
Above: *In the Clay Geerdes archives, David Miller, estate executor, found Shary Flenniken's "Vampirella" pastiche discussed in the previous page!*

Above: *Self caricature.* **Below:** *In an undated photo by Clay Geerdes, it's Flenniken being visibly amused by her mentor and longtime friend, Dan O'Neill, head instigator of the Air Pirates collective.*

CBC: *As a kid, obviously, I was looking for the provocative and the titillating, but it was that you always had a presence in the magazine, so they became characters that I actually read with regularity and started caring about. And that was a cool thing; that it got beyond the titillation. And it really was probably the only honest expression… Geez, I'm almost thinking about this universally, one of the only honest expressions of what it's like to be a teenage girl in America. Really honest.*

Shary: Yeah, not like Veronica and Betty, right?

CBC: *Yeah, right. Because it's almost like you can't do that. But you had the stage that you were able to do it that* did



Above: *Flenniken contributed this bi-centennial-themed cover for* Wimmen's Comix *#6 [Dec. '75]. That ish was co-edited by Becky Wilson, who (so long as she's cool with it) will be profiled in a future issue of* CBC. *Ye Ed. had the pleasure of chatting with Wilson at length for his* Mind Candy *history of Last Gasp, and we commiserated with one another when Trina Robbins passed away.* **Below:** *Flenniken self-published a 52-page book of her cartoons commenting on the 1977 California water drought and she also was co-screenwriter of* National Lampoon's Movie Madness *['82] motion picture.*

get print, that was *seen by 500,000 people with regularity. You couldn't do that anywhere else, almost.*

Shary: No, you can't.

CBC: *Because otherwise it's child porn, or…*

Shary: No, exactly. You can't do it anymore. And I apply for teaching jobs and stuff, I don't want people to know that I did that. I try to hide it, because it was really valid while it was going on, but the world changed. People are going, "Well, why don't you keep doing 'Trots and Bonnie'?" And I'm, like… I don't *think* so! It's legal. I could do actual cartoon child porn and it would be legal now, but by a hair. And that wasn't the point. And a lot of those points have been made, or if they didn't get it then, they're not gonna get it now. I've got plenty left to say, and I'm still saying it. It's just that, I'll tell you: I've never been wedded to comics or cartooning. I love it, I appreciate its power, I enjoy doing it, to a certain extent. If I got paid more, I would enjoy it more. But it's a vehicle. It's like any other vehicle. If I thought that I could get across my little, personal opinion in another means, I would do it.

CBC: *But it's an awfully powerful one, and certainly, probably in the end, certainly with no offense, but admiration given, is that's what you will be remembered for. That's perhaps what your impact is going to* be.

Shary: I am halfway through my first novel now, and it's a crapshoot. I'm aware of what a crapshoot that is, but it's a game I want to play right now. Of all the gambling games, that's the game I want to play. So I'm not, like, sending my stuff to a syndicate right now, not working on the great American syndicated comic strip. I'm working on something where I can pack a lot of material in and put a lot more words in, and it's a blast! I know how to do this; it's fun. I've written movies, you know, so…

CBC: *There are other vehicles.*

Shary: There are vehicles. And they all have their own attractions and they all have their own negatives. I'm giving a talk on the 20th here. It's called "Do the Math," because I was never good at math, and I started doing the math in terms of how much money you can make doing cartoons and comics, and stuff, having to do with self-publishing or books or whatever. See, what we were thinking about was the publicity that the Air Pirates is getting, there's a book coming out on the Air Pirates [Bob Levin's *The Pirates and the Mouse: Disney' War Against the Counterculture,* 2003], and there were some *Comics Journal* articles about Dan. And we were thinking it would be really cool to do an *Air Pirates* book, now, of comics. And divide up a 150-page book five ways and produce something maybe on an ongoing basis. And what I did was, I did the math on it. Which, if you look at a cover price and you look at the time it takes and the number of pages, you can pretty much figure out what everybody's going to get per page. And it's not enough money to live on. We can't afford to do it. You figure you get 10, 15, 20%, at most, of the cover price of the book for a royalty for your work. It's not enough money that any of us can afford to do it.

CBC: *Sobering.*

Shary: It is! That's exactly what Gary Hallgren said. And the other thing is that cartoonists, right now, if you wanted to be a cartoonist and just do cartooning, and do comic book for Fantagraphics, which is one of my examples. You'll make maybe $8,000 a year. You can twist it around and you can juggle the numbers and you might get to the point where you make more, but my challenge to anybody like that, is figure out, as a businessman, how people can make $35,000 a year to live on. And that's real difficult.

CBC: *It's really sad that I can make far more money… not an astronomical fee, but make a really good, solid living out of doing a magazine* about *comic books rather than doing comics books themselves.* It's bizarre. I'm simply in better shape than an awful lot of people that I talk to on a daily basis.*

Shary: But you know what? It's all marketing and distribution. Because my sobering figures would not be sobering if the distribution was adequate. That's all we need, is just more people who are interested in it. And you've put yourself in a focal point in a market where you have the numbers. And that's all we need is the numbers. So all anybody would have to do is figure out how to get people to read more things. And there are ways. So my little project doesn't end on a negative note, it ends on a positive note of, instead of being the little comic book

*Ahh… the early '00s! Back when that was, indeed, the case… Nowadays? Not so much. – **Y.E.***

company that people with alternative ways of thinking, instead of them attacking their brothers – as in my "Idi Amin" comic strip – instead of attacking the guy next to them, the other little underground publisher, they all get together and figure out how to build the market, because it's *there*. 'Cause it's there internationally, it's there through the internet… the people are out there that are hungry for information and material and they're not connecting now. Instead of reaching out, they're creating these little tight-knit societies of critical groups, which is totally useless and they need to get out of that.

CBC: *You're talking about doing an Air Pirates book like that. Well, my first mental reaction to that was why should you focus on the, pardon the expression, the brand that you guys are* truly *recognized for…*

Shary: I wanted to do a comics-oriented spin-off from *Lampoon* called *The Funny Pages*. We'd have comic stories, Foto Funnies, and image related prose, whatever. I knew it could pay for itself with advertising from liquor and cigarettes at the time. So I called ad agencies and advertisers and pitched it to them. They were all if not totally enthusiastic, at least nice to me. I put a proposal together and handed it to [*NatLamp* publisher] Matty [Simmons]. It said, "Let's do this, it'll look like this, it'll be this many pages, this is what's gonna be in it, and these are the advertisers who think it's a great idea. Levi Jeans thinks this is a great idea." You know, the media buyer. And he was mortified, because here I am as freelance, by that time, and I'm calling their advertisers! [*laughs*] It *was* a good idea, I think.

CBC: *Did you notice a change in the company when the buyout took place, after the founding members basically took the money and ran?*

Shary: That first initial buyout?

CBC: *Yeah, when* [*NatLamp* founders] *Doug [Kinney] and Henry [Beard] split.*

Shary: Well, it was pretty constantly evolving. And, sure, there was a big change there, and P.J. brought in a big change, but that included bringing me and John Hughes, among other things.

CBC: *I talked to Sean Kelly at length last night…* [Shary groans] *and it's not only him alone… I read Tony Hendra's book* [Going Too Far, '87] *and there was a lot said about P.J. and about the change that took place in the philosophy of humor in the magazine. Did you perceive that?*

Shary: Well, to tell you the truth, as to the philosophy of humor at the magazine, I, for the most part, was not party to that in the early days. I was a freelancer sending a page in and hoping they were going to like it. I had my own opinions about some of the humor and some of the stuff that was in there. Some of it I loved, and some of it I really didn't love, y'know? Because I was coming from this real different political ideology. So I guess you could… I mean, I liked P.J. I had some big problems with his politics, personally, and the stuff that was in writing. And a lot of the times I just didn't understand *any* of those guys. I would go to a bar with them and I would listen to them talk, and I felt like a farm girl around a bunch of graduate school guys. They were just so immensely more sophisticated than I was. And P.J. was less sophisticated than these Harvard guys. And they all had different personalities, and they all had these unique backgrounds where they were coming from. Doug Kenney, definitely… I don't know that much about Doug's background, but he was, like, Harvard old money, with that kind of sense of humor and stuff like that. And then you had the Canadians, where they were coming from, and Sean is so intellectual and so steeped in the academia, and has such a vast knowledge of humor. All these guys were just eminently accessible for what they did. And the thing that P.J. brought to that was a very different… He brought the Midwest sensibility to the magazine, I would say.

[*Conversation is, again, needlessly dominated by Ye Ed. spouting his opinion of different editors at* NatLamp *until…*]

CBC: *I'm probably babbling again, but the idea of these guys all generally coming from Harvard, generally coming from these very over-educated backgrounds. And the reality of it was that the magazine's success was because they were still in touch with adolescence, for instance. They were in touch with hypocrisy. They were in touch with destroying sacred cows. For me, the revelation was the cover with Che Guevara getting a pie in the face. I think that's just such an incredible political statement to make, because you're right in the belly of the beast and you're saying "Ha, ha!" You're going after the Leftists in a very playful way, but still saying, "Have a sense of humor. Don't forget that." And it was almost radical because everyone took themselves so seriously back then, when they did something like that, they pissed off a lot of people.*

Shary: Yeah! I admit it. And to tell you the truth, I'm probably more on the side of the people who would be pissed off about that.

CBC: *And I would never get that from your work.*

Shary: Yeah, I mean, personally. And again, that's just my logic. Don't go for the guy sitting next to you; go for the big target. So, if you're an anti-establishment magazine, don't go after the other anti-establishment people, go after the establishment! But we all have a

Above: *Flenniken edited this collection of stories about Washington's Emerald City, published in 1994.* Seattle Laughs: Comic Stories About Seattle *included work by Jim Woodring and Ellen Fornay. Today, Flenniken contributes to* The American Bystander *magazine.* **Below:** *The cartoonist's cover art for* The Comics Journal *#146 [Nov. '91], which contained a career-spanning chat with her.*

right to our opinion, and I think I can co-exist with other people. I mean, I'm not, like, mad at them. Basically, I think everybody should have a voice.

CBC: *There's two schools of kind of humor in the sense that, I think it's… What I find, is that people who pick on other people without pointing out their own foibles, and I think real humor, sometimes very strong, resonant humor, comes from picking on your own foibles,* then *you can pick on everybody else's. You make fun of yourself, you're saying, "I'm not better than them," as let's say, Jay Leno, you almost see him just* mean*, it's mean-spirited, it's I'm better than everyone else kind of humor. A lot of P.J.'s stuff is like that. And then there's the Doug Kenney kind of stuff of navel- gazing and saying, "Boy, aren't I stupid."*

Shary: Doug was amazing. And you're right, I think those guys were beyond our own feeling of insecurity or whatever, which I had in abundance. They were basically very easy to talk to. They were very fun to talk to. So there's no, y'know… no problem with that. I mean, they're just, like, awesome.

CBC: *When did you come on as an editor?*

Shary: Well, let's see. I was in L.A., and they asked me to do it, and I had to go pack up all my stuff in Florida and then move up there. So it took me a couple of months. Of course, John Hughes came on as an editor around the same time, and he never did move from Chicago. He would just fly in. [*laughs*]

CBC: *Oh, really?*

Shary: He said, "Oh my God, I've got two houses and I can't sell them and I'll move to New York as soon as I can sell my houses," and he never moved to New York. [*laughter*] It was really funny. Then he just went straight to L.A. to work, anyway. And even then he didn't move to L.A., he bought a house in Scottsdale for his family, because he was very protective of his family, in a most wonderful way. A very interesting person. Anyway, I believe that was in 1979.

CBC: *So you moved to the city. Had you experience of the process of putting the magazine together anyway, prior to that?*

Shary: No, I was virtually clueless. I read [book editor] Michael Korda's *Power* ['75], so I could swim with the sharks. [*laughter*] Because there *was* a corporate thing at *Lampoon*. And what had happened was, I had spent time in New York and spent time there. I spent some months. I would go for a couple of weeks and end up staying some months, and hanging out at *Lampoon* a lot. So it wasn't like walking into an office that I wasn't familiar with. But I really was not the cartoon editor, per se. They would hand me these manuscripts that people would send in, and I would look at them (and now, I realize, they were so badly written that they weren't even worth gazing at, but then I thought I just didn't understand them). [*laughs*] So I would read these things and then I would have to pass them to somebody else and go, "*I* don't know, you tell me if it's any good." It's like, "Hey, you tune my guitar, because I can't do it."

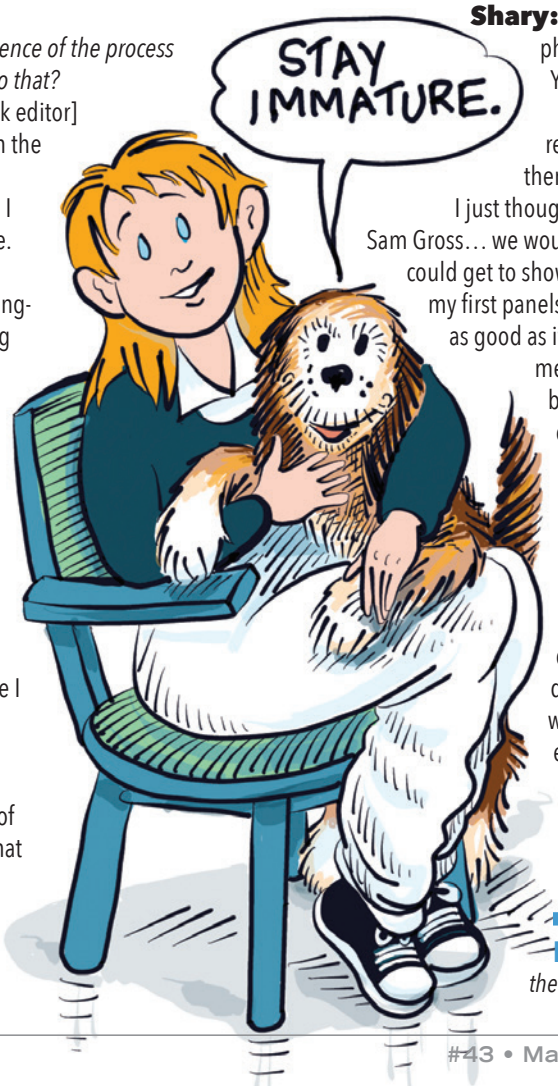
They really just weren't funny at all, and one thing that I'm good at is I'm really good at organizing things. So I really organized their system of incoming/outgoing submissions and stuff like that and improved that. And I brought on a bunch of really neat people like Rick Geary and Jane Brucker. There were a bunch of people that came in when I was there. Because, with Rick Geary, I took all these little books that he did. I Xeroxed them, and then cut up the Xeroxes and pasted them up into a page form and showed them to P.J. (because everything would have to be run by him because he was editor-in-chief). And I said, "Hey, what do you think of this?" And he was like, "I *love* it." It's a whole different look, it's a whole different sensibility, it was very funny. I sent the Xerox to Rick Geary and said, "Hey, we want to print this!" [*laughs*] "And we want you to do more of these!" So I'm really proud of being instrumental in his career.

I had Mimi Pond for a while… and I forget who else. And then we did a lot of merchandising. I tried to bring in more of the stuff that I was saying that they never did in the magazine, and tried to use more of the cartoonists for marketing purposes, more so than just selling products. Because I had been hanging out with Charlie Lippincott, who marketed *Star Wars* and *Alien*, and gotten a real sense of the power of marketing. *Star Wars* opened the way it did because of Charlie's marketing technique, which was real specific targeting of the audience. And I said, "Hey, I go to these conventions all the time, that's a huge audience. People buy this magazine for its comics. Here are these conventions where you get all these tens of thousands of people. Let's reach out to them and do some real targeted marketing." And Jerry Taylor, the husband of Mary Travers, was the vice president (or president,) at the time, of the company. He was mostly… I don't know… a marketing guy and he just said, "Here, take a bunch of boxes of the magazine and give them away for free." And they paid for our cartoonists to go to San Diego to the convention. And everybody had a great time and glad-handed everybody, and made a bunch of really good contacts. And I think it had a really positive effect. I know that when we did little buttons of all the comic characters, they were the most popular-selling items on the merchandising page that they had. So I really had a good time there.

CBC: *Did you feel that you really made an impact at San Diego?*

Shary: Oh, yeah! We went up to Toronto, Philadelphia. We were certainly at Phil Seuling's New York conventions. We went all over the place.

Marketing is the kind of thing you have to really keep up with. You can't just do it once and then expect it to be reaching your target audience. I just thought it was a real neat facet. And I would have Sam Gross… we would have panels of whatever cartoonists we could get to show up, and they would talk about… One of my first panels that I put on was, "Why is the *Lampoon* not as good as it used to be?" Which is, like, it's intriguing to me, it's intriguing to you, but it was a bad panel, because it was negative and it was not openly entertaining. And it had no real meaning for anybody. And what I found was, where do the cartoonists get their ideas was fascinating to me, it was hugely entertaining, and it left our audience with something they could walk away with that was good. And people like Sam Gross were just a blast to listen to. Where do you get your ideas. Because it's an easy question to answer, really, but you get people who will really talk about it, and that's what everybody wants to know. Even though it's kind of a stupid question, you know? It is! Because you get your ideas all over the place. But people want to hear that. That was a really successful topic.



Trots and Bonnie bookplate TM & ©Shary Flenniken.

Not cool. *Lost in conversation, I didn't wind up the chat, which ended here, but it is what it is… Sigh.*

Ric Estrada: Love and War

The comic book artist knew almost everyone — even Hemingway!—as Steven Fears learns

Conducted by STEVEN FEARS

[*I had the privilege of meeting Ricardo Leon Estrada [b.1928] and lovely wife Loretta during Comic-Con International 2000, when he was a guest of the con and the Big Five War Collectors, where he also attended their annual banquet. I had long admired his art and was hoping to one day meet and tell him Well, I got that chance and arranged an interview to find out more about his many interests. What was revealed, as we spoke, was his rich background and constant evolution as an artist since he started developing his talents.*

But what is also important to consider is the depth of that talent and the anchor he had in his faith and family. He was who he was because of his character. His art was an extension of his genuineness as a person, as he was consistently exploring new ideas, ever moving and pushing his abilities to new heights.

He was also one of the nicest people to be in the comics industry. From working for Harvey Kurtzman to DC, doing such things as romance, mystery, Wonder Woman, *and the war books, he was always working, always improving, and always entertaining us, the readers.*

I hope you will enjoy reading this interview as much as I enjoyed talking to Mr. Estrada. What a great guy he truly was. This interview was conducted in 2000 and previously published in a small CD magazine for a tiny audience. Unfortunately, for all of us, Ric passed away on May 1, 2009. He left a wonderful body of work for all of us to still enjoy. I miss his smile and his warm greetings whenever we saw each other in San Diego. – **S.F.**]

Falling in Love, Blitzkrieg TM & © DC Comics. Photo by Seth Estrada. *Blitzkrieg* detail courtesy of Steven Kro.

Steven Fears: *I'll start with the traditional first question: where and when were you born?*

Ric Estrada: I was born in Havana, Cuba, on February 26, 1928.

Steven: *What was it like growing up in Cuba?*

Ric: Tropical heat, blue skies, white clouds, flash showers in the summers, Gulf Stream breezes all year round, heavy traffic, non-stop music from a million radios, lots of big and little revolutions, shootings, bombs, a happy childhood in general, playing cops 'n' robbers, tag, hopscotch, flying kites, going to the beach, going to the movies, but scared of the various revolutions. That was my childhood."

Steven: *That covered several of my questions, but my next question is how long did you live in Cuba?*

Ric: Until the age of 19, and then I moved to New York.

Steven: *And you've been in the United States ever since?*

Ric: Yes, except for six years in Europe and the Middle East, and one year in Mexico.

Steven: *What were some of your early artistic influences?*

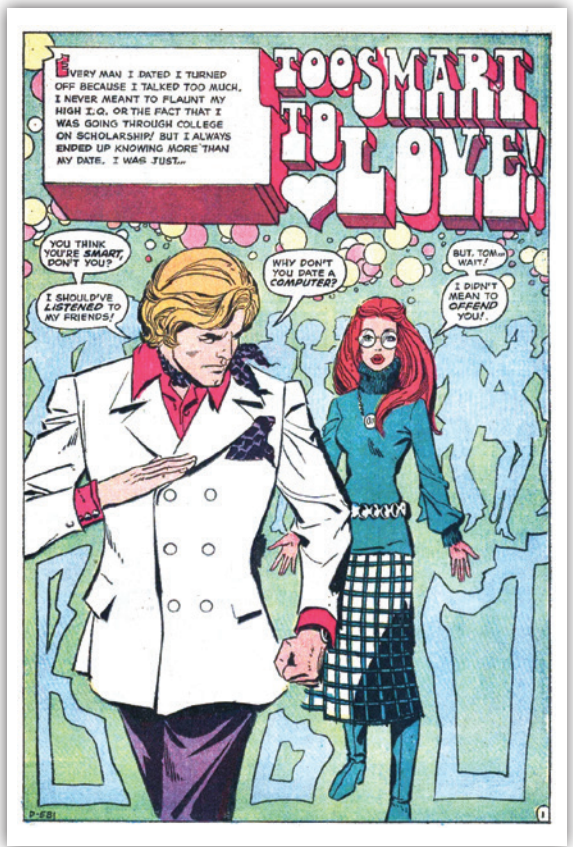
Ric: *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling, which my mother read to me as a child; the *Tarzan* stories which my mother also read to me; *The Folk Stories of the World,* which I read when I learned how to read; *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* by Selma Lagerlof, a Swedish writer – that influenced me a lot – about a little child who traveled all over by riding on the back of a goose, and who was shrunk into a small size, and that give me the desire to travel and see the world; and I also saw a lot of movies on Saturdays.

Steven: *What were some of your favorites?*

Ric: Oh, the serials, the adventure movies, the Westerns; detective and mystery movies; *The Lone Ranger, Dick Tracy, Green Hornet, Black Spider,* and *The Shadow.* I also loved the comics in the Sunday pages: *Tarzan, Tim Tyler's Luck, Flash Gordon, Terry and the Pirates,* and *Captain Easy.* I read them over and over. Every Sunday they would come in, and I would sit there for two or three hours reading them.

Top: *Photo of the artist by his son Seth.* **Above:** *Detail from Estrada's story in* Blitzkrieg *#3 [June '76].* **Inset:** *Estrada cover for* Falling in Love *#99 [May '68].* **Below:** *Cover of* The Wonderful Adventures of Nils *['22] by Selma Lagerlof.*

Above: *"Bunker" page drawn by Estrada over Kurtzman layouts. From* Two-Fisted Tales *#30 [Dec. '52]. Estrada splash from* Falling in Love *#137 [Oct. '72].* **Inset top:** *Cintio Vitier, who helped refine Estrada's art appreciation.* **Inset bottom:** *Landon School ad.*



Steven: *What were some of your favorite comic strips?*

Ric: Well, my favorites were *Prince Valiant, Tarzan, Mickey Mouse, Terry and the Pirates,* and *Captain Easy.* I not only read and re-read them, but I studied their styles, lines, and techniques. No one could draw beautiful girls like Roy Crane or Alex Raymond; action like Milton Caniff; humor like Harriman's *Krazy Kat;* realism like Harold Foster. I studied them all.

Steven: *When did you first become interested in art or even cartooning?*

Ric: Very early; I must have been three or four.

Steven: *Probably the Sunday funnies influence?*

Ric: There was a little boy who lived next door who had a "copy book," and he would copy the funnies. He drew a character per page, and I began to imitate him and got myself a copy book. I copied the comics, one page per character, and that's what got me started. I also love Will Eisner's *The Spirit.* No one could tell a story with more mood. But that came later. I often wonder what happened to that little boy next door. Did he become a cartoonist? I owe him my beginnings.

Steven: *At what age did you get serious about developing your artistic interests?*

Ric: Serious? From my very earliest memories, when I was about then years old, my parents sent for the Landon School of Cartooning Correspondence Course, from Cleveland, Ohio. That's the same course taken by Milton Caniff, creator of *Terry and the Pirates*. And Bill Mauldin, the war cartoonist. And also Roy Crane. As I met other cartoonists in New York, the Landon Course was popular among many.

Steven: *Were there any painters, or other fine artists, who influenced you?*

Ric: I had a friend, older than me, his name was Cintio Vitier, who later became a well-known Cuban poet, and who showed me prints by Picasso and got me interested in modern art. Cintio would ask me, "Who will last longer, Picasso or your *Terry and the Pirates*?" I've never quite been able to answer that since Caniff's creation is as much a landmark in popular art as Picasso is in painting.

I began to look at Picasso, Matisse, and Braque; the Impressionists like Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Degas. I loved Lautrec's linear style, a big influence. My mother and father gave me a book on Frans Hals, the Flemish painter, which I still own. And my mother, a school teacher and poetess, wrote little notes on the margins about success and trying hard and pursuing one's dream–inspirational thoughts. That book became like another bible to me. I treasure it.

Then my father gave me *Figure Drawing for All Its Worth* by Andrew Loomis, one of the classics on drawing. I've had that book since about age fourteen. I copied many of the figures and learned a lot about human anatomy. Those are my early influences.

Steven: *I understand that you were encouraged by Ernest Hemingway to come to the United States. Could you tell me a little about that?*

Ric: Ernest Hemingway was a friend of my uncle, Sergio Carbo, a famous Cuban journalist. They knew and admired each other and their war exploits. My uncle, you see, had been in the Revolution of '33 and had been a fighter as Hemingway had been in three wars… Hemingway and Uncle Sergio were comparing war scars as they looked at my sketchbook. Hemingway's wife, Mary Welsh, said that the figures I drew reminded her of the soldiers that she had seen as a combat correspondent during World War II… She and Hemingway encouraged me to pursue my career. Then, through Hemingway's connections with the U.S. Consulate in Havana, I was able to cut much of the red tape to come to the U.S.A. On the day I departed, my Uncle Sergio and his dear wife, Clara, put $2,000 in my hand – a fortune in those days – and wished me Godspeed. I was incredibly blessed to have such a generous family and a friend like Hemingway. My parents were highly educated, but poor. My uncle and aunt were also educated, but rich and very, very generous.

Steven: *And this was around 1947 or '48?*

Ric: It was about 1947. I met Hemingway in about 1946 or 1947. It was the beginning of a very nice friendship. A few years later, when they were filming *The Old Man and the Sea,* off Cojimar Bay, outside of Havana, I went back to Cuba for a short visit and participated in the filming from one of the boats. I watched Hemingway in action and also the cameraman. It was a great experience. I also got royally seasick. I was about 25 or so at this time, and Hemingway said I had

been very brave holding on through the day's shooting, sick as I was; I must have looked green. But I'd be darned rather than sail back to shore. I met Hemingway again a few years later in Venice. He invited me to a party in his suite at the Pitti Palace Hotel. But I was catching a train for Rome in the morning and declined. I often wish I hadn't. I never saw him again.

Steven: *You were about 19 when you moved to New York. Was this your first time away from Cuba?*

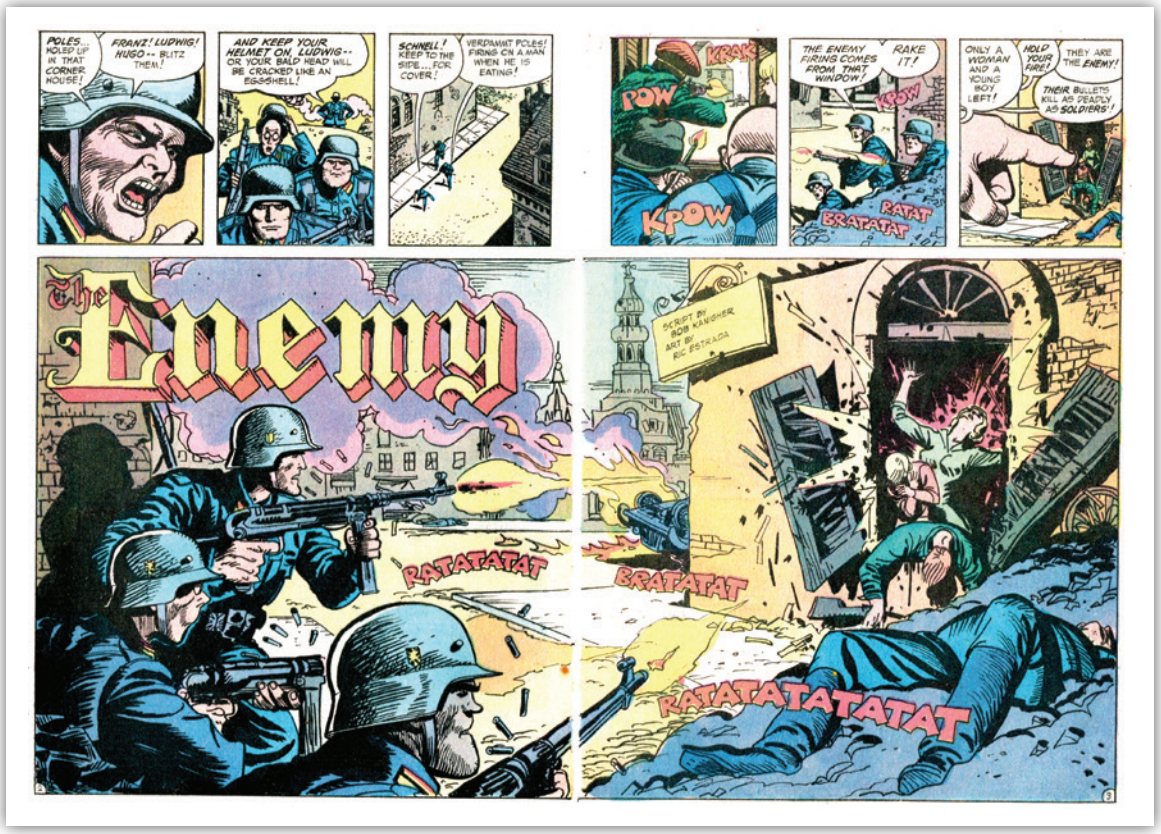
Ric: This was the second time. I had been in Mexico once with my Uncle Sergio for a long weekend, in Merida, Yucatan, to watch a bull fight. I had never seen a bullfight; it was not a Cuban thing – in Cuba, they killed people, not animals, too cruel (a joke). Uncle Sergio took me there with his son, Ulises, and we spent part of a long weekend watching a great bull fight by the bullfighter, Armillita, who was retiring. On that trip, I met the wonderful Gabriela Mistral, the Nobel Prize poetess from South America and was able to sketch her. She autographed my drawing afterward. I also met a famous Cuban terrorist, nicknamed "El Colorado" (he was a hot-blooded redhead), who was taking asylum in Mexico and sat at our breakfast table for a little while, schmoozing with my uncle, the journalist. I also sketched him, and then heard a few months later that he had been shot to death in a gunfight in Havana. Very interesting weekend for a young 19-year-old, still wet behind the ears like me.

Steven: *By the time you were 19, you had experienced more than most people your age.*

Ric: I've been very lucky. Years later, in Berlin, I met another terrorist, the infamous Andreas Baader, head of the Baader-Meinhof Gang. He was my landlord, a crazy young guy running this huge boarding house on Schutzenstrasse off the Kurfurstendam. And he was making bombs and blowing people up all over Germany, a fact I didn't learn about 'til I read about his capture and death years later.

Steven: *Amazing! When you moved to New York, you studied at what school?*

Ric: I went to the Art Students League of New York. I studied with Howard Trafton, one of the best teachers there. There were illustrators like Ken Riley, who taught everybody the Ken Riliey style, or like John Gross, a war cartoonist, who illustrated one of Hemingway's books, *Men Without Women*. There was also Robert Brackman and Kunioshi and other great art instructors – the best. I did not study with any of them because they taught their own style, but Howard Trafton taught many different styles in order to let you discover your own.



His system was, one week you would look at Picasso's drawings, and you would draw and paint like Picasso. The following week would be your own way. The next week you would draw or paint like Toulouse-Lautrec. By the end of a couple of years of this alternating system, I had learned to do many different styles, and that's the way he taught us how to be flexible and discover our own style. This would help me in years to come to switch from one field to another: comics, TV, advertising, children's books, etc., and survive as an artist.

Steven: *How many years did you study there?*

Ric: Two years – about '49 and '50.

Steven: *Were there some future artists there that you met who were also studying?*

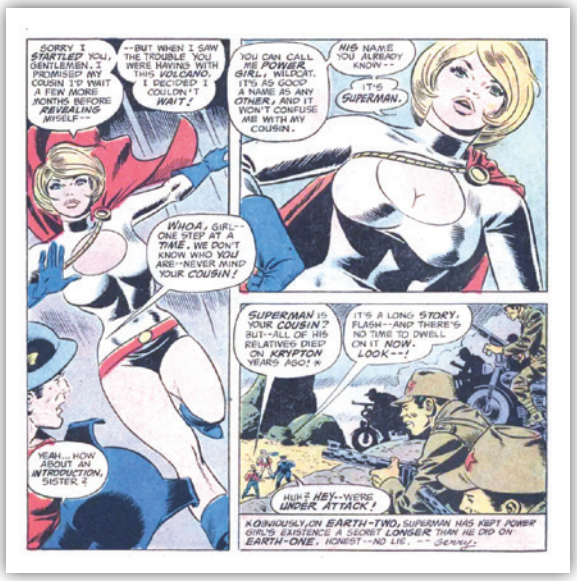
Ric: I met some fellows who became illustrators, like Orval Browning, from Texas, and Bob Anderson (whom I bumped into in West Berlin years later), but I lost touch with my fellow students. I do remember actress Nina Foch's mother, though. We painted side-by-side, and she'd rave about her daughter's career in Hollywood.

Steven: *What was your first break into the professional world of illustration?*

Ric: In 1948 and the beginning of 1949. When I first arrived in New York in 1947, my Uncle Sergio had given me a letter of recommendation to a newspaper supply dealer in New York named Carneiro. There,

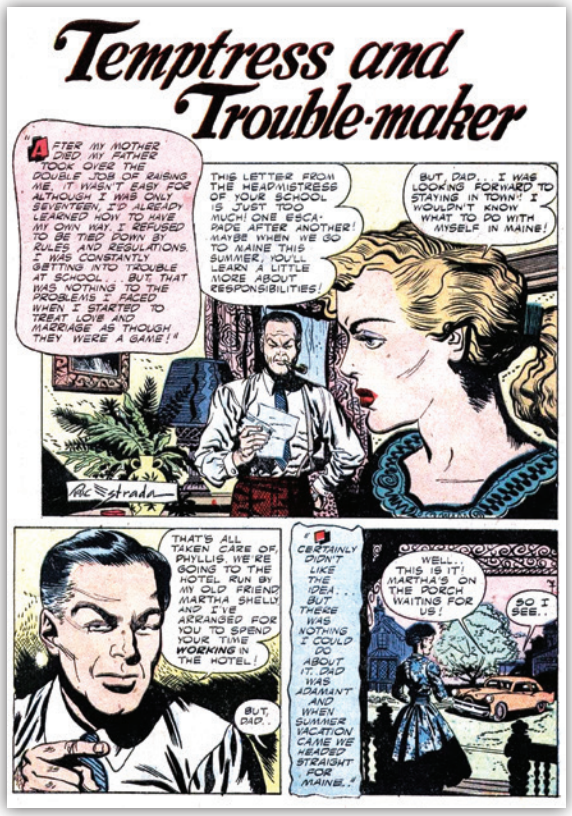
Above: *Spectacular double-page Estrada opening spread,* Blitzkrieg *#1 [Feb. '76]. In the later '70s, the artist worked on a plethora of DC Comics titles, even beyond their romance and war offerings, including* Plop!; Welcome Back, Kotter; Richard Dragon, Kung Fu Fighter; Blackhawk; Super Friends, Legion of Super-Heroes, *and – especially well-remembered –* All Star Comics, *with the Justice Society.*

Below: *Inked by Wally Wood, Estrada drew Power Girl, introduced in* All-Star *#58 [Feb. '76]. Here's a trio of panels from her intro.*



Blitzkrieg, All-Star Comics TM & © DC Comics.

Above: *Boy, Ric Estrada, who came into the comics realm after a stint freelancing for Woody Gelman (and, working with Rene Klapak on Topps bubble gum trading cards, Estrada drew the Frank Buck Bring 'em Back Alive set ['50], one card seen here), it's impossible to illustrate this interview adequately given the limited space here.* **Right:** *Snapshot of St. John staffer Marion McDermott, who edited their legendary romance comics line.* **Below:** *A sample of Estrada's romance work for St. John, the splash for* Teen-Age Romances *#28 [Dec. '52].*



in his office, by the grace of God, I met Carneiro's nephew, Ralph Duyas, who had some friends with a studio in Greenwich Village, and these two artists were De Blackmar and Nell Clairmonte, older than me by 20 years. They saw my work and said, "We can't hire you since we're freelancers, but we invite you to be apprenticed to us, and we'll teach you whatever we know until you get a job on your own." So, I worked with them for about a year, all through 1948, and learned a lot of technical things.

At the end of that year, another freelance artist who worked there, Shane Miller, introduced me to Woody Gelman, who later became publisher of Nostalgia Press. You may have seen some of those cartoon collections: *Little Nemo* by Windsor McKay, Flash Gordon, *Scorchy Smith* by Noel Sickles, etc. Woody Gelman and his partner, Benny Solomon, gave me my first job in New York, in their small art studio, doing mostly picture postcards for Topps Chewing Gum, their main account. I did the Frank Buck *Bring 'em Back Alive* series, and the cartoons on the backs of baseball cards, and *Ripley's Believe It or Not,* and a World War II series, as well. I worked in tandem with a fine Czech artist, René Klapak, who watercolored my pencil-and-ink illustrations. I learned all of the basics of art studio work at S&G on the 11th floor of the old New York Tribune Building, on Broadway and 41st Street.

Steven: *Do you go into comics after that or were there other art jobs before you wound up doing comic book work?*

Ric: I worked for Woody Gelman and Benny Solomon for about two years, and, around 1950 or so, I was laid off because they moved in with Topps Chewing Gum, in the Brooklyn building. They became the art department for Topps, which was already fully staffed. They always gave me freelance work for the next 20 years, though I began to do comics in 1950.

Steven: *What was some of your early comics work?*

Ric: I worked for lots of publishers. Standard Publications, Hillman, Ziff-Davis, St. John. I even did one Western story, under and assumed name, for National Publications (the old DC Comics). I was bailing another artist out of a tough deadline. His name, I think, was Walter Johnson. In those days, the three favorite genres were Westerns, romance, and detectives. I used a movie magazine called *Western Stars* for reference. They published entire movie still sequences. I learned to draw horses from them. I also learned to draw pretty girls in stylish clothes from *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* magazines. Editor Marion McDermott, from St. John Publications, always praised my stylish girls. Miss McDermott, a stylish young woman herself, was a joy to work for, as was her publisher, Archer St. John, a very affable gentleman. Those were my beginnings in comics. Joe Kubert, I recall, worked either for them or had a studio next door. I'd run into him in the hall.

I also worked for editor Ed Cronin – blue-eyed, wry, dead serious, and very Ivy League – always dressed in seersucker suits, bow ties, and saddle shoes. He was with Hillman Publishing. He was fun. Every week I would bring in my work, and he would look at it and say, very deadpan, "Do you know how to draw a hat? First, you draw the head, like an egg. Then you draw a fez. And then you draw the brim." And he did this every week for a year. He was teaching every artist who brought in work how to draw a hat – week after week after week. It was hilarious. Otherwise, he was very good at storytelling and editing. From him, I learned to work in a very simple line which I kept for the rest of my life. He encouraged me to simplify – a great lesson in art – and also to be "cinematic."

Steven: *You did a little work for EC. I was wondering how you met Harvey Kurtzman.*

Ric: I was working at De Blackmar's studio, and Dan Barry, during his first or second year of doing *Flash Gordon*, also rented space there. We had adjacent desks, and Harvey Kurtzman came over to deliver a story that he was writing for *Flash Gordon*. He saw my work and asked, "Would you like to do some work for me?" I said, "Fine." So, the next day he showed up with a helmet and cartridge belt. He said, "Here's the story and some authentic research stuff," and he gave me a script called "Bunker" [*Two-Fisted Tales* #30, Dec. '52].

Steven: *I've seen it. It's a good story.*

Ric: It was funny working with Kurtzman. His scripts were laid out panel by panel on tracing paper, full of his dynamic cartoony figures. He said, "These are my layouts, but you can change anything you want." So, I changed a couple of things and, when I delivered the work, he said, "You changed a couple of things." I said, "You told me I could." He said, "Well, hmm, okay." But his nose was out of joint. Kurtzman was a great editor, though, a dynamic artist, and a very innovative writer. Totally fearless, he tackled subjects like race discrimination and anti-war sentiments when these were still taboos in the publishing industry. "Bunker," I was told years later, was the first comics story ever to feature a Black hero. Kurtzman scored many "firsts" in comics. I was about 23-years-old when I worked with him.

Steven: *So you were growing up and developing as an adult artist around that time. Were you expanding your horizons, traveling a bit, and getting other influences because in New York there were museums and artwork everywhere.*

Ric: I went to museums every week. Every weekend, I'd go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art or to the Museum of

Photo courtesy of Shaun Clancy.

the City of New York, or to the Museum of Modern Art, or the Natural History Museum, or the Planetarium. I also did a lot of snooping around like to the Brooklyn Museum, Coney Island, Times Square, and the Statue of Liberty. I really did the sights. New York was a great nurturing experience for me.

Every summer I'd also travel down the Eastern seaboard all the way to Miami and Key West, and then sailed to Havana to see my family for a week or two. Thus, I got to know much about the U.S.A., from New England to the deep South. The West would come later. And I did something I wish I was still doing. I had a voluminous sketchbook, and I sketched people all of the time. I would sit in the subway and sketch people. I'd sketch Bowery bums, beautiful girls, old ladies, waiters, and policemen. I'd sketch people in cafeterias like at the Horn and Hardart Automat, which was very popular in those days. In fact, one day, the manager at the Horn and Hardart, on 57th Street, came over to me and said, "I would request from you that you do not sketch the customers; they have a right to their privacy." I was sketching people all of the time.

Steven: *Were you developing any kind of philosophy about life or art or anything?*

Ric: Yes, De Blackmar was a great influence in my thinking. He was very much into the *Power of Positive Thinking* [a book by Norman Vincent Peale] and attended the First Church of Religious Science regularly. He taught me to be very positive; accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative; and to trust in the power of God.

Nell Claremonte and Shane Miller were interested in the supernatural and invited me to join them in the Cayce Group. We studied the readings of Edgar Cayce, the Sleeping Psychic of Virginia Beach. For about two or three years, I commuted between the Church of Religious Science with De and Elizabeth Blackmar and the Cayce Group with Nell and Shane. In fact, Nell, Shane, and I founded the A.R.E. – Association for Research and Enlightenment – based on the psychic and Christian readings of Edgar Cayce. We met there weekly with a bunch of other students of the supernatural. I learned a lot about the supernatural, about positive thinking, and about God with a group of very nice people. So, that really formed my philosophy which, in addition to my mother, who was a non-churchgoing but very devoted Christian, cemented my beliefs. Years later, when I became a Mormon, which is a very Christian religion, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints – the name tells it all – but the foundation was laid there during my early years.

Steven: *What were you wanting to do artistically? Besides cartooning, you were into illustrating and advertising.*

Ric: Yes, in fact, at the time, I was freelancing with De Blackmar, Nell Claremonte, Dan Barry, and Shane Miller. One day, a salesman came to the studio to sell me the Famous Artist Course, and he saw my work and said, "I don't know whether to sell you the Advanced Course or the Beginner's Course? Why don't you come with me to Albert Dorne's studio. You'll meet him, and he'll be able to advise you."

Albert Dorne, as you may know, was the highest paid illustrator in America, so we went over to 57th Street to his studio, and there he was: a warm, affable man; very down to earth in spite of his fame and talent. He saw my work, and liked it and me. He asked me to come back. A few weeks later, he offered me a job. I freelanced for him for the next 20 years. He became a friend, mentor, and big influence in my life. I've been told some of my action drawings reflect his style (I wish). He even recommended me to his big-time agent and, years later, peddled my first full-length screenplay to United Artists in Hollywood.

Above: *Photo of Estrada from the Summer 1964 issue of* Famous Artists Magazine, *which accompanied his article on sketching while traveling. Appropriately, his essay was titled, "The Hungry Eye… The Restless Foot." The artist lived in Europe for three years and traveled extensively in the Middle East (as evidenced by the camel above!*

Ric Estrada

Steven: *This was probably during the mid- to late '50s and into the early '60s. What was some of the work that you were doing around that time?*

Ric: I was doing comics, advertising, children's books, and cartoons for various newspapers. I did work for NBC. I did a caricature of Andy Griffith, which was published in *The New York Times*. I did pictures of bowling champions for the American Foundry Company. I also caricatured several Broadway actors for magazines and did monthly illustrations for *Manhunt* and *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*. I illustrated the Famous Writer's Course for the Famous Artist's School. With the money I made, which was a lot at the time, in 1959, I decided to spend one year in Europe. That one year became six years! I lived in London, Denmark, Venice,

Below: *A batch of Estrada's travel sketches appeared in the above-mentioned* Famous Artists Magazine. *The artist was associated with Albert Dorne's "Famous Artists" correspondence course company for some two decades.*

Athens, the Greek Islands, Paris, Turkey, Jerusalem, and, finally, the last three years in West Berlin!

Steven: *Wow! What kind of art were you doing for six years? Were you learning, also? Was your style changing? Were you experimenting with other things with your art?*

Ric: Yes, I was experimenting and growing. During my years in Europe, 1960–66, I was doing some ghosting work for Dan Barry's *Flash Gordon* comic strip. I was sending work to Woody Gelman at Topps Chewing Gum. I opened an art gallery on the island of Mykonos with my friends and fellow painters, Lily and Luis Orozco. I sold many watercolors to tourists. Many celebrities came to the island: Jackie Kennedy, Frank Sinatra, Aristotle Onassis, Yehudi Menuhin, among others. I was hired by the *Jerusalem Times* and became a cartoonist and rewrite man at the time of Kennedy's assassination! What a shocking week! Then, I worked for three years in West Berlin, holding two jobs. One for the *Spandaur Volksblatt,* doing political cartoons; one cartoon per day for three years. Another, doing TV commercials for Deutsche Dokumentar Verbefilm. In the morning, I would go to the film company and do a storyboard for some TV commercial.

I covered two Berlin Film Festivals for the paper and interviewed and caricatured many actors and directors: Lee Marvin, Gina Lollobrigida, Geraldine Chaplin, Jean-Luc Godard, Satyayit Ray, Guy Madison, Roman Polanski, Lynn Redgrave, among others. I also interviewed the future president of the Mormon Church, Ezra Taft Benson, former Minister of Agriculture in the Eisenhower Administration. I also covered two Miss Berlin beauty pageants. Berlin was a growing experience for me in more ways than one.

Steven: *You were a very busy person! Was your art expanding in lots of different directions?*

Ric: I was getting a lot of experience because I was doing so many different things, and I learned many approaches to almost any kind of job. I even delivered newspapers for a couple of weeks in Berlin, before I landed those two fabulous jobs. I developed a great facility to tackle anything and talk to all kinds of people. From Albert Dorne, I learned a very good principle. He said, "You look at your blank paper, make a couple of quick sketches, then make up your mind; and, once you make up your mind, you do it! Because every time you change your mind, you lose money: your own or somebody else's.' That's one of the big things I learned early in life: "Make a decision and go for it!"

My frustration in the film and animation industry is working with people who constantly change their minds about everything. Big egos. No creative mettle… but then, they're scared abut losing their jobs… or their millions. Who can blame them?

Steven: *My next question was what is your work ethic, but you pretty well covered it. You set a goal; you tackle it; and you do the best to your ability…*

Ric: And trust in your intuition. You put it down, and you say, "This is the best I can do now. I could make a thousand other changes, but I'll go for this, for better or for worse."

Steven: *Considering your work from the '50s and '60s to work done in the '70s on up to the more recent past, how do you compare your work from the past to now?"*

Ric: Oh, my figures are much better structured now, and my sense of space and composition is vital. I've improved a lot. After all, drawing is the depiction of a three-dimensional image on a two-dimensional surface. You have to create an illusion – it's all an illusion – so you have to understand how the flat surface works and to see that it is divided into invisible segments and make use of the space so that everything creates the illusion of depth. One, two, three, ten levels of depth on a flat surface. It's trickery, technique, graphic magic.

Steven: *I think that this is one of the most important aspects of illustration, creating the illusion of depth on a flat surface.*

Ric: Right. Even movies are the illusion of depth on a flat, silver screen. What you're really doing is dividing your space so that it creates the fantasy of something going from "here," close, to "there," far away, but it's all flat. The magic happens in the eye of the beholder and in the mind.

Steven: *I guess you've always worked in other studios, but do you have your own studio at home, now or do you still go into an office of some sort?*

Ric: Yes, to both. I put in time in a commercial studio. I also work at home. I've always had a studio at home. Even a lap board in the kitchen, though a separate room with a good window, good lighting, and a view is always better. I'm a homebody as well as a restless globetrotter.

When I came back to America, six years after going to Europe, I did two things: King Features Syndicate offered me a comic book on *Flash Gordon* because they knew I had been ghosting some of the *Flash Gordon* daily strips, and Al Williamson, who had done three or four of the comic books, could not meet the deadline or was busy with something else, so they gave me the *Flash Gordon* comic book to do. I worked with Bill Harris, who currently works for the *New York Times.* He writes travel books and beautiful photo books on New York City and various other cities. Bill Harris offered me a job while I was still in Germany. He sent me scripts, which I illustrated, and that money enabled me to get back to America.

At that time, I was hired by the Famous Artists School as an art director, and I directed the Famous Artists Course for Talented Young People, which was geared toward teenagers. It was a great experience. I worked there for a year. Albert Dorne had died the year before, but his successor hired me. It was a terrific experience working with artists like Robert Fawcett, Austin Briggs, Bernie Fuchs, Peter Helck, and Norman Rockwell. They came in and out to look at work, supervise, and bring in samples of their work. It was a tremendous growing experience. After one year with them, in 1966, I went back to freelancing and connected with DC Comics. Carmine Infantino, Joe Kubert, Joe Orlando, and Dick Giordano were interested in my work, and I began to do mostly romance comics for them edited by Jack Miller. I also did *Wonder Woman* books for Robert Kanigher. Murray Boltinoff (Henry Boltinoff's brother), who was doing the war line, began to hand me scripts later on. Murray

Photo courtesy of Steven Fears.

liked to grouch a lot, but we became good friends. I also befriended Joe Orlando, my romance editor, and Joe Kubert, one of my ideals (along with Alex Toth) in comics. And so, for the next 16 years, I freelanced at DC. I also spent one or two days a week doing advertising for various agencies for the big money. Comics was good pay-the-rent, bread-and-butter money, but advertising was the gravy.

Steven: *I understand that you're ambidextrous. Has that been a big plus for you to be able to do that?*

Ric: Yes, to me, it has been, but I'm really left-handed. When I was in school, as a child in Cuba, left-handed children were forced to use their right hands, so that's how I became ambidextrous. When I was in school, I would write with my right hand, but when I got home, I would do my homework with my left. That's how I developed the skill with both hands.

Steven: *Of what are you most proud in your art career? Since you've done so much, is it difficult to pick out one or two things?*

Ric: As you know, I have thoroughly enjoyed drawing those war comic books. How can a peace-loving guy like me enjoy war stories? I grew up during WWII, in a patriotic atmosphere, reading about the exploits of ordinary men and women rising to heights of heroism, privation, fear, and emotional victory over the horrors of armed conflict. They were kids in their late teens and early 20s participating in the biggest human drama in all of history. Those who came back alive had done a lot of growing during those two, three, or four years of hell. Some never survived emotionally. Others became prematurely mature. That was the pull that war stories had for me: the human drama. Plus, having grown up in a violent country like Cuba and having witnessed shootings, bombings, revolutions – my earliest memory was of a mob shooting my home to pieces – I had many demons to exorcise since, but I love drawing and storytelling in any form.

I have enjoyed a lot of the work I've done; most of it, in fact. The Famous Writers Course was a real landmark. The Famous Photographers Technical Manual was another landmark. The DC war comics, as I said, were a great landmark. The 20 or so educational children's books were also a delight, especially Draw 50 Goons and Extra-Terrestrials in collaboration with Lee Ames, creator of the Draw 50 series, and a dear friend. In the 1970s, the Mormon Church commissioned me to do the New Testament Stories for Children. That was a highlight. It's still in print and has sold something like six million copies worldwide. I don't get royalties, but it's wonderful to know that so many children have read the book.

Steven: *I know that your wife, Loretta, and you have just celebrated your 31st anniversary. Congratulations. When did you meet and how is her influence with your life and career?"*

Ric: My wonderful wife, Loretta, has been a tremendous influences in my life. She has been an inspiration, and, because she has a tremendous ethical sense, in spite of my philosophies that I brought into our marriage, she has given me a greater sense of ethics and sanity than I ever had. As you can see by my life, I was very restless and mobile, and she has been a steadying force. I met her in New York City not long after I joined the Mormon Church. We were married in London, in 1970. We have begotten (to use a Biblical term) and raised five sons and three daughters since. Loretta always reminds me: "You're not in the business of drawing cartoons – that's only a means – you're in the business of raising a family." She keeps my thinking straight and my feet on the ground. She gave up her career as a physical therapist, and her dreams of also pursuing a singing career to put her professional voice training – she's a wonderful alto – to good use, in favor of raising our great family. I'm deeply thankful for her dedication and love.

Above: *The number of varied, often eclectic gigs Estrada worked on as a freelancer is staggering. Here's a cute comics-related illo from the children's book of finances,* Barter, Bills, and Banks *['70] by Barry Tarshis.* **Previous page:** *From left is Walter Simonson, Angelo Torres, Estrada, Sam Glanzman, Russ Heath, and Gray Morrow during a "Big 5" get-together in San Diego, circa 2000.* **Next page:** *At top is Estrada's "DC Profiles" from* Star Hunters *#7 [Nov. '78]; at bottom, pin-up for a comic collectors group drawn in 2001.*

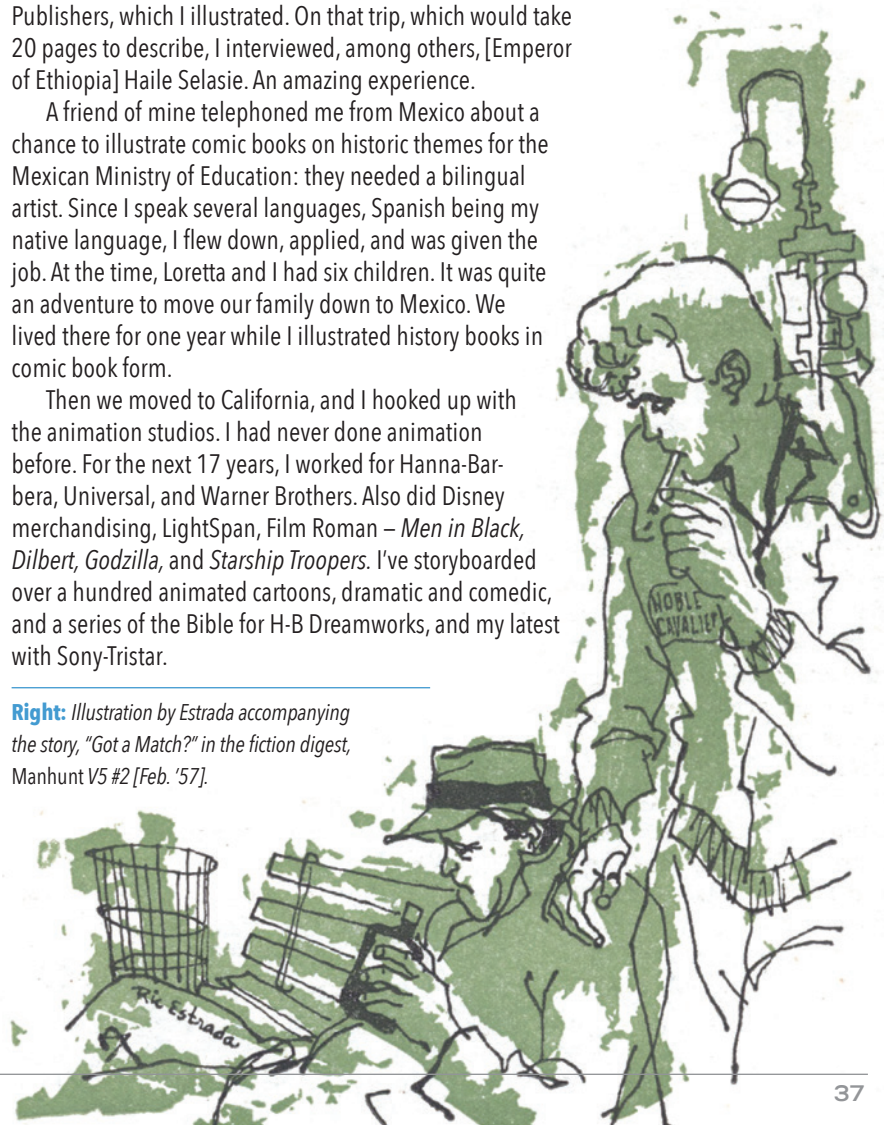
Steven: *What are some of the things you're doing now?*

Ric: In the last 20 or so years, we lived in New York City, doing work for Famous Artists Courses, DC Comics, and advertising. I also traveled to Ethiopia to research a children's book, *The Goat That Ate the Leopard,* for Thomas Crowell Publishers, which I illustrated. On that trip, which would take 20 pages to describe, I interviewed, among others, [Emperor of Ethiopia] Haile Selasie. An amazing experience.

A friend of mine telephoned me from Mexico about a chance to illustrate comic books on historic themes for the Mexican Ministry of Education: they needed a bilingual artist. Since I speak several languages, Spanish being my native language, I flew down, applied, and was given the job. At the time, Loretta and I had six children. It was quite an adventure to move our family down to Mexico. We lived there for one year while I illustrated history books in comic book form.

Then we moved to California, and I hooked up with the animation studios. I had never done animation before. For the next 17 years, I worked for Hanna-Barbera, Universal, and Warner Brothers. Also did Disney merchandising, LightSpan, Film Roman – *Men in Black, Dilbert, Godzilla,* and *Starship Troopers.* I've storyboarded over a hundred animated cartoons, dramatic and comedic, and a series of the Bible for H-B Dreamworks, and my latest with Sony-Tristar.

Right: *Illustration by Estrada accompanying the story, "Got a Match?" in the fiction digest,* Manhunt *V5 #2 [Feb. '57].*



Steven: *You've never lacked for work. You knock on the doors, and they've opened for you.*

Ric: It's not as simple as that: you knock on many doors. God opens the right ones for you. I trust Him. I believe very much in Divine Providence. You also have to hustle in order to prove your worth.

Steven: *Are you as busy now as you ever have been or are you relaxing a bit?*

Ric: "Relaxing"? What's that? When I was working for Sony Entertainment, I met Mark Swan, who has his studio in Utah. He heard about my work, called me, and offered me a job working for his and Forest Baker, president of Feature Films for Families, a company based in Salt Lake City, Utah. They do wholesome animation and live-action movies for families: no sex, no violence, and no bad language; very sweet stuff. It sounded very attractive. Since this lovely southern Utah town is pretty much a retirement community with golf courses, a great swimming facility, and wonderful local theater, my wife and I thought that this would be a nice bridge between now and the time I decide to retire. We moved here, and I've been working for Mark Swan and Feature Films for Families for supervising the actors recording and finally the animation which is done at Pinnonia Studios in Budapest, Hungary. I travel there once or twice a year.

Steven: *Do you feel like you're starting to receive some recognition after many years in the illustration industry or comic book industry?*

Ric: Well, it's been very nice to receive the Inkpot Award and the Hall of Fame Award from the Big Five. They were happy surprises. I've spent a lifetime just running, trying to pay the rent, make a living, raise a family, and not consciously thinking about recognition. We all want to be acknowledged, but it's been very rewarding to get a pat on the back at long last.

Steven: *Had you been to any conventions before Comic-Con International?*

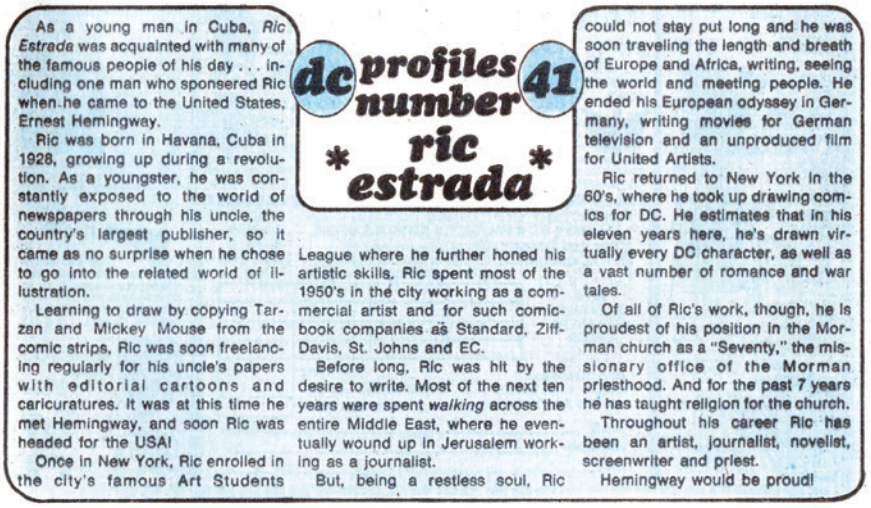
Ric: I've been to about three, maybe four, conventions. They were so jumbled, busy, and crowded that I was overwhelmed. Each time I'd say 'No, I'm not going back.' But this time, and the time before, because the Big Five were so kind to me, I said, "Gee, how could I possibly stay away from these nice people? They're wonderful." So I changed my mind.

Steven: *I hope this one was less hectic.*

Ric: It was wonderful. I love the Big Five, the American Association of Comicbook Collectors, the Eisner Awards people, and the Comic-Con organizers. They treat us humble cartoonists as royalty. And I'm thankful.

Steven: *About Cuba: if the U.S. allowed visitation, would you like to go?*

Ric: Strangely enough, the only living relatives I have are my cousin Ulises Carbo, a hero of the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and his children who live in Miami, Florida. I haven't had any desire to go back to Cuba except maybe for a week to show my wife and my children my home, the school where I went, and whatever is there that is left of that time. It's been more than 50 years since I left, and Cuba has changed so much, from what I read, that I would be shocked and even disappointed and saddened, to see what has happened. I cringe at the thought of going back. Castro and Communism, it seems, have turned a tropical paradise, the former "Paris of Latin America" into a slum. Sad, but true.


dc profiles number 41
* ric estrada *

As a young man in Cuba, *Ric Estrada* was acquainted with many of the famous people of his day . . . including one man who sponsered Ric when he came to the United States, Ernest Hemingway.

Ric was born in Havana, Cuba in 1928, growing up during a revolution. As a youngster, he was constantly exposed to the world of newspapers through his uncle, the country's largest publisher, so it came as no surprise when he chose to go into the related world of illustration.

Learning to draw by copying Tarzan and Mickey Mouse from the comic strips, Ric was soon freelancing regularly for his uncle's papers with editorial cartoons and caricuratures. It was at this time he met Hemingway, and soon Ric was headed for the USA!

Once in New York, Ric enrolled in the city's famous Art Students League where he further honed his artistic skills. Ric spent most of the 1950's in the city working as a commercial artist and for such comic-book companies as Standard, Ziff-Davis, St. Johns and EC.

Before long, Ric was hit by the desire to write. Most of the next ten years were spent *walking* across the entire Middle East, where he eventually wound up in Jerusalem working as a journalist.

But, being a restless soul, Ric could not stay put long and he was soon traveling the length and breath of Europe and Africa, writing, seeing the world and meeting people. He ended his European odyssey in Germany, writing movies for German television and an unproduced film for United Artists.

Ric returned to New York in the 60's, where he took up drawing comics for DC. He estimates that in his eleven years here, he's drawn virtually every DC character, as well as a vast number of romance and war tales.

Of all of Ric's work, though, he is proudest of his position in the Morman church as a "Seventy," the missionary office of the Morman priesthood. And for the past 7 years he has taught religion for the church.

Throughout his career Ric has been an artist, journalist, novelist, screenwriter and priest.

Hemingway would be proud!

Steven: *I think that you would prefer the memories that you have rather than replace them with some kind of different reality.*

Ric: That's maybe part of it, but I would love to show my family my stomping grounds from when I was a child.

Steven: *I hope that might be possible someday.*

Ric: It would be nice.

Steven: *I know what you told me about your philosophy toward art and life, early in your career, and in the middle of your career, but now you have your feet on the ground and an anchor in your faith, I'd say that is the best philosophy.*

Ric: My faith is important. Those years wandering about the world, in Europe and the Middle East – I once tackled walking to China, through Turkey and the Syrian desert, with only $100 in my pocket and a backpack on my shoulders. My wife says, "How could you have done that?" I always had complete faith that God was looking after me, and as a result, I suppose, I met nothing but nice people along the way, even though a couple of times I was held at gunpoint in the Syrian desert and Turkey. Somehow, I always have this wonderful feeling that there is a Power that is looking after each of us; call it Guardian Angels, or the Holy Ghost, or God, but there's a Higher Force that sent us here and looks after us in big and little ways. We have our free will, but if we can be in tune with that power or trust that power, somehow, we see our way through. That's been a big philosophy with me all the way through. God works in mysterious ways, even during our hardest trials, and cares for all His children… I always trusted in Him, even when I was doing stupid things – and I've had my share of those.

Steven: *It gives you roots, puts your feet on the ground, and gives you direction in life.*

Ric: It doesn't mean that I haven't been scared stiff many times; it doesn't mean that I haven't worried about where the next job is coming from, or the next meal… but it means, in general, I have that faith that something is looking out for me and mine.

Steven: *What advice would you give artists as they begin the early stages of their hopeful careers in comics and illustration?*

Ric: Draw – a lot! To study – always! To learn new things all of the time. Study the masters – cartoonists, illustrators, and fine artists. Look at nature. Sketch people, landscapes, and things. Learn perspective, anatomy, characterization, and composition. Listen to music; all kinds of music. And to not take themselves too seriously, because there is always someone better than them, and when they meet their betters, try to learn from them.

Steven: *Do you have some favorite memories of some of the people you've worked with?*

Ric: That would take about three days. I've met many wonderful artists and writers like the ones I've mentioned. Also, people like Nick Cardy. Working with Joe Kubert was wonderful. Robin Snyder, who has a wonderful newsletter now. Allan Asherman, Neal Adams, Tex Blaisdell, Johnny Giunta, Lee Ames, Irwin Hasen, Bob Kanigher, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, Bill Finger, Alex Toth, Frank Giacoia, editor Marion McDermott, Ben Oda, Bob Haney, Sam Glanzman, Ray Bradbury, André LeBlanc, Mike Peppe, and Gil Kane. The list goes on. It would take me ages to remember the many names and the wonderful moments. I think that working with artists and writers is the best experience that any person can have because most artists and writers are full of dreams, ideas, and visions, and most are self-effacing and yet visionary with powerful imaginations. And, as Einstein said, "Imagination is more powerful than intelligence."

Steven: *What are some things that you still want to accomplish with your art?*

Ric: As you know, I've not only drawn comic books, I've written comic books, articles, short stories, and novels. Over the years, I've read treatises on writing courses at the New School and New York University. I have written ten novels, not yet published. Also, three full-length screenplays – one seriously considered by United Artists. In my later years, I'd like to promote and publish a lot of my writing. And to pursue my love for watercolor painting, in addition to writing. I'd also like to do some missionary work with my wife, for the Mormon Church.

Steven: *It seems that some artists want to be writers, and some writers want to be artists. I think there is a definite connection between both of them.*

Ric: There is a thinking in images which can turn into either words or drawings. I like to write stories and illustrate them.

Steven: *Hopefully, some of those written things will see the light of day.*

Ric: One of my dreams is to have all those novels published. Write a few more. Illustrate some. I just wrote a new play not so long ago. I'm working on a graphic novel and would like to find a publisher. I've also written ten short animation screenplays in my present job in the last two years.

Steven: *You've been blessed with quite a lot in your career, and, I'm sure, you will find outlets for your creativity. What do you like to do for entertainment away from doing art?*

Ric: I like to swim; I like to walk, hopefully, where there are lots of trees or by the seashore or even in the city, but just walk and look at people and nature. It helps me think and develop ideas. Of course, then there are movies. And also, aerobic dancing and ballroom dancing. I love music and movement. One of my five sons is a professional dancer. Maybe, he got the idea watching me tap dance while doing dishes. Loretta and I often dance in the kitchen.

Steven: *You are what is called a Renaissance Man. You're a man of many talents and influences and interests, and you haven't stopped yet. And you're probably still discovering things that you find interesting. I want to thank you for your time. It's been an honor and pleasure talking with you and having you share your life with me. You and your wife are wonderful people, and it's great to know you both. I really appreciate your thoughts and insights.*

Ric: Thank you, too. It's been good talking with you. I'm sure to talk with you again. I think I've told you more about my career than I've told any other interviewer. Thanks for your interest and patience with me. It's been a pleasure.

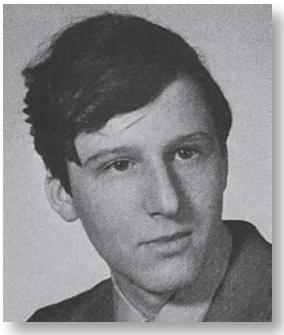
fin

[*The word "great" is used a lot, but when it comes to Ric Estrada, he truly personified that word*! – **S.F.**]

Above: *Shaun Clancy purchased the above Estrada illo and enlisted Bob Sharen to color it.* **Below:** The Tarrytown Daily News *featured these fantasy scenarios Estrada drew after erroneously receiving $30 million in his bank account.*

To Make Them Believe

After a horrific 1992 traffic accident, writer Bill Mantlo has been bedridden all his days since



Above: *Bill Mantlo's senior portrait from the 1969* Prism *yearbook, for New York's Art and Design High School.* **Inset right:** *in the '10s, bedridden Bill Mantlo smiled for the camera while displaying a* Hulk Omnibus *volume featuring his* Incredible Hulk *#271 [May '82] story – yes, for real, this is the actual title – "Now, Somewhere in the Black Holes of Sirius Major There Lived a Young Boy Name of Rocket Raccoon."* **Below:** *Mantlo on his ten-speed posing with his infant daughter Corrina, seen in baby carriage, at bottom, in 1980.*

by JON B. COOKE

I didn't read a lot of William Timothy Mantlo's work when he was a prolific mainstay at Marvel Comics in the '70s and '80s, but I do recall being impressed with his *Cloak and Dagger,* enough to call myself a fan and avidly buy the duo's comics. I also reckoned Rocket Racoon's name was clever wordplay with that Beatles' song, plus I had a weird passion for his Woodgod, a Satyr-like character that was so strange and so offbeat, I thought it was very cool indeed. And, while I wasn't much interested in the toy tie-ins *Micronauts* and *Rom* he wrote, I knew some extolled the titles as fun stuff.

Yet, somehow I didn't know of the tragedy that befell the scribe decades prior until stumbling across a stunning account found while surfing the internet. Bill Coffin's "A Tragic Tale," posted two days before Mantlo's 60th birthday, related the following under a subheading, "Hit and Run":

"On Friday, July 17, 1992, Bill left work early for the weekend, and made his usual three-mile rollerblade journey through Brooklyn traffic to his apartment near Morningside Park. Just four blocks from home, a car came around a corner and hit Bill. The left side of Bill's head impacted the windshield. He rolled across the hood of the car, and the right side of his head impacted the pavement. The driver never stopped and was never identified.

"The accident jostled Bill's head so violently that his brain squashed against the inside of his skull, and his brain stem severed. This did not paralyze him, but it would make it very difficult for Bill's body – particularly his extremities – to accurately receive and process electrical messages from his brain.

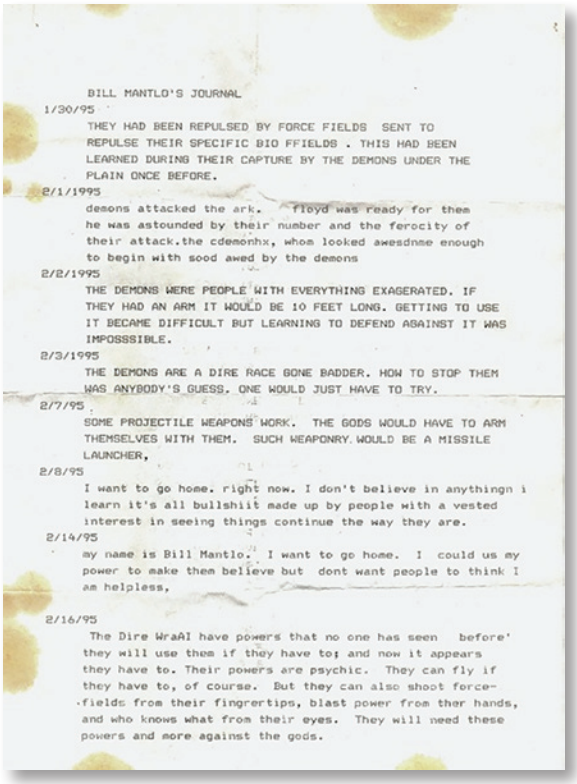
"Bill spent the next two weeks in a coma at Saint Luke's hospital in midtown Manhattan, after which he remained in critical care for another two months. During this time, he was still on a ventilator and a feeding tube, as his brain was too damaged to tell his body how to swallow or breathe."

Mantlo did awaken from the coma and would regain some rudimentary facilities, but he thereafter required assistance for even the simplest of tasks. And, after a brief period when a full recovery wasn't out of the realm of the possible, the writer has, since 1995, been under 24/7 care at the Queens-Nassau Rehabilitation and Nursing Center, which specializes in treating patients with severe head trauma. (Mantlo's condition was diagnosed as a "closed head brain injury," in which the skull and membrane remain intact despite trauma to the brain.)

Since then, the tragedy has been compounded due to ruthless treatment by the health insurance provider, and strains on Mantlo's family did take a toll. But, to its credit, there was – though not without prodding! – recognition from Marvel regarding the writer's co-creation of Rocket Raccoon, a character used in the *Guardian of the Galaxy* film trilogy, and there was also the short-lived TV series, *Cloak & Dagger*, all reportedly accompanied by helpful checks from Disney. Plus, in 2017, the CW made use of his *Invasion!* concept in a super-hero TV crossover event. And, most importantly, Mantlo had his younger brother Mike on his side.

If the man ever had a champion, it was Michael Mantlo, who fought tooth and nail for his brother against the insurance company, all the while working for FedEx full-time, as the sibling devoted a significant chunk of his life providing whatever assistance he could for Bill's welfare. Comicbook.com shared, "Michael is well-known by fans of Bill's work, not just for helping to take care of his brother, but for the larger-than-life efforts he has gone to in order to keep Bill's legacy in comics alive. Michael was a driving force in persuading Marvel (with the help of director James Gunn) to set up a private, advance screening of *Guardians of the Galaxy* for Bill, who was not capable of going to the theater." Sadly, Bill's greatest ally – and biggest fundraising presence on Facebook and GoFundMe – died in May of 2020.

*Coffin's piece, originally a cover story published in *National Underwriters Life & Health Magazine*, Vol. 115, #21 [Nov. 7, 2011], can still be found online at *https://www.thinkadvisor.com/2011/11/07/tragic-tale/.*



BILL MANTLO'S JOURNAL

1/30/95
THEY HAD BEEN REPULSED BY FORCE FIELDS SENT TO REPULSE THEIR SPECIFIC BIO FFIELDS . THIS HAD BEEN LEARNED DURING THEIR CAPTURE BY THE DEMONS UNDER THE PLAIN ONCE BEFORE.

2/1/1995
demons attacked the ark. floyd was ready for them he was astounded by their number and the ferocity of their attack.the cdemonhx, whom looked awesdnme enough to begin with sood awed by the demons

2/2/1995
THE DEMONS WERE PEOPLE WITH EVERYTHING EXAGERATED. IF THEY HAD AN ARM IT WOULD BE 10 FEET LONG. GETTING TO USE IT BECAME DIFFICULT BUT LEARNING TO DEFEND AGAINST IT WAS IMPOSSSIBLE.

2/3/1995
THE DEMONS ARE A DIRE RACE GONE BADDER. HOW TO STOP THEM WAS ANYBODY'S GUESS. ONE WOULD JUST HAVE TO TRY.

2/7/95
SOME PROJECTILE WEAPONS WORK. THE GODS WOULD HAVE TO ARM THEMSELVES WITH THEM. SUCH WEAPONRY WOULD BE A MISSILE LAUNCHER,

2/8/95
I want to go home. right now. I don't believe in anythingn i learn it's all bullshiit made up by people with a vested interest in seeing things continue the way they are.

2/14/95
my name is Bill Mantlo. I want to go home. I could us my power to make them believe but dont want people to think I am helpless,

2/16/95
The Dire WraAI have powers that no one has seen before' they will use them if they have to; and now it appears they have to. Their powers are psychic. They can fly if they have to, of course. But they can also shoot force-fields from their fingrertips, blast power from ther hands, and who knows what from their eyes. They will need these powers and more against the gods.

In 1985, before he was permanently on the outs at the House of Ideas, Bill Mantlo was asked by a young Kurt Busiek how was he able to be so prolific. The writer replied in that *Marvel Age* interview, "I don't know, I've been doing it for a long time. I'm very disciplined. I get up in the morning, I go to work, I finish work, I take care of my daughter, I go to school, I fall asleep, I start all over again the next day. As long as I maintain that discipline, I never seem to have a problem coming up with ideas. The nice part is that, because I'm so involved with raising children – I've got two kids – and going to law school and studying and working in the court system and working for lawyers – and reading constantly, when I'm not exhausted – the ideas that I bring to comics are all from the world outside,* it's all filtering back into the format I love the most, which is comic books."

Maybe that was the first inkling the comics world had about Mantlo seeking a career outside the field but, with dwindling assignments at Marvel as higher-ups disapproved of his attempts to unionize freelance writers, he put himself through law school. Passing the bar in 1987, he joined up with the Legal Aid Society, which provided legal representation to those in need. Coffin wrote, "In court, Bill lived up to his reputation as the Boisterous One, earning numerous warnings from the bench for his fiery brand of delivery, especially while cross-examining police officers. As one justice recalled, Mantlo was the nicest person he ever had to hold in contempt of court. Once, Bill was arrested as part of a sweep against a sit-in by a local school union he was representing. He used his phone call not to arrange for bail, but to order pizza for himself and everybody else in the holding cell."

*And, sometimes ideas were apparently taken from other writers, as Barry Windsor-Smith long maintained that Mantlo swiped his "Hulk-as-an-abused-child" concept, eventually used in BWS's Eisner-winning graphic novel, *Monsters*). Plus, Harlan Ellison was gifted with a lifetime subscription to Marvel's comics line after he complained that Mantlo stole an idea from an Ellison-scripted *Outer Limits* episode.

Among the meanest of cruelties Bill Mantlo endured was for his debilitation to steal the man's method of creative expression. Three years or so after the accident, after promising episodes of seeming improvement, Mantlo's skills deteriorated to the point where he forever lost the ability to write. His last journal entry – the final time the scribe would ever type a word – were notes on a science fiction yarn dated February 16, 1995. And two days before, on Valentine's Day, he made this poignant, desperate plea: "My name is Bill Mantlo. I want to go home. I could us [sic] my power to make them believe but dont want people to think I am helpless."

Try as I might, I was unable to get a response from those friends and family I reached out to, folks who might provide an update on Mantlo's current condition, but to no avail. The man will turn 75 this coming November and he is unlikely, ever again, to get the attention he did when the *New York Times* and other papers came to Mike to ask about the new *Guardians* movie coming out. Today, Bill's greatest protector, the brother who tirelessly beat the drum for him, is gone.

But the writer's daughter, Corinna, did post this on an online Bill Mantlo appreciation page in May of last year: "Hi everyone, just wanted to mention that if you would like to send my dad a postcard, letter, or drawings, I read them to him every time I visit. He was once famous for answering every letter he received, though this is no longer possible, he does love to hear the stories that people send to him! All mail, large and small, can be sent to our P.O. Box: Bill Mantlo, 329 Beach 59st, Unit 920756, Arverne, NY 11692."

Proof he is still well-remembered is in the warm wishes and fond memories of his comics posted almost daily on Facebook's "Bill Mantlo" group page, where multitudinous fans remain determined to continually honor the Boisterous One for having fought the good fight.

Above: *Bill Coffin's remarkable story on Mantlo's plight was cover featured in* National Underwriters Life & Health Magazine, *Vol. 115, #21 [Nov. 7, 2011].* **Inset left:** *Coffin wrote, "His entry on 2/14/95 is the last personal message he ever wrote… his brother Mike says this document is particularly painful… to read."* **Bottom:** *Article from* The Independent, *Feb. 23, 2014.*


Boisterous BILL MANTLO

Marvel man in need of a superhero

As Rocket Raccoon is poised to earn millions, his creator lies in a nursing home with no hope of royalties. By **Tim Walker**

Unless you're a die-hard fan of comics, you may not have heard of Rocket Raccoon just yet, but by this time next year you'll probably own the action figure. The first trailer for Marvel's latest superhero franchise film, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, appeared online this week – and many expect its break-out star to be the gun-toting, wise-cracking raccoon voiced by Bradley Cooper.

Marvel's most recent movie, *Thor: The Dark World*, has passed the $200m (£120m) mark at the US box office, and the studio could earn up to a half a billion more from Rocket and co when *Guardians* is released in August. The character was originally created in 1976 by Bill Mantlo, but Marvel's ownership of the title means Mr Mantlo will not benefit directly from the movie's anticipated success.

That fact is all the more poignant because Mr Mantlo – once one of Marvel's most beloved contributors – has been seriously disabled since a hit-and-run accident in 1992. His family has struggled to pay his medical bills, and thanks to the vagaries of the US healthcare system, he now lives in unsatisfactory long-term care at an assisted-living facility in New York.

This week, fans have used the exposure of the *Guardians* promotional push to put Mr Mantlo's predicament back in the spotlight, and to urge others to contribute to his ongoing treatment.

Mr Mantlo was born in 1951 in Brooklyn, where one of his neighbours was the legendary comic-book artist Jack Kirby. He first went to work at Marvel as an intern in 1973, and ended up as a prolific writer, contributing to Spider-Man, Iron Man and Hulk titles during his career. He also created his own cult favourites, including Micronauts, ROM the Spaceknight and Rocket Raccoon, who made his first appearance in *Marvel Preview #7* in 1976.

The character was inspired by the Beatles' song "Rocky Raccoon" and came from the planet Halfworld: an abandoned colony for the mentally ill, where the patients' animal companions had been genetically engineered to develop human IQs and the ability to walk on their hind-legs.

In the late 1980s, Mr Mantlo switched careers, becoming a criminal defence lawyer for the non-profit Legal Aid Society. But in July 1992, as he was rollerblading home from work in Brooklyn, he was struck by a car and left severely brain damaged.

A 2011 article for *National Underwriter* magazine chronicled his medical travails. His emergency treatment cost more than $1m, and as it dragged on, his health insurance provider became increasingly reluctant to provide the necessary cover. Finally, Mr Mantlo's family was forced to sell his assets, including his precious collection of comics and memorabilia.

Now 63, he is a permanent resident of the spartan Queens-Nassau Rehabilitation Center and Nursing Home in Queens, New York. His family says that even the recent Obamacare reforms would have done little to improve his long-term residential treatment. Yet according to the magazine article, he has benefited from the kindness of comic fans, who have contributed to his care via the Hero Initiative, a charity providing financial aid to comic-book professionals in need.

On Wednesday last week, in a post that was shared multiple times, Tumblr user and comics fan Charlotte of Oz invited others to contribute at least the cost of their *Guardians* cinema ticket to Mr Mantlo's care directly, or to the Hero Initiative; she wrote that while his situation is in large part a product of the flawed US healthcare system, "The fact that he doesn't see much in the way of royalties for his work cannot possibly be helping.

"Marvel is about to release a movie that will probably pull in half a billion dollars at the minimum, and Mr Mantlo's family won't see anything from it. If a comic taught me anything, it taught me that that isn't right."

COVER STORIES
Bill Mantlo's comic creation and (main, centre) on screen in *Guardians of the Galaxy*

Scan page to see a trailer for Guardians of the Galaxy

Frank Letters o' Comment

Plus another of Joe Frank's always-appreciated, ever-dependable LOCs gets trimmed by Ye Ed

[*CBC has no more dependable reader response than the letters of comment we receive about each and every issue from Joe Frank, whose missives to comics related mags stretch back to at least the early 1980s, according to the Grand Comics Database, so we're thankful for his correspondence that keeps our "Incoming" feature a regular thing! Thanks, Joe!…* **Ye Ed.**]

Joe Frank

Though I'm quite familiar with Dave Steven's work, I learned so much I didn't remember, realize, or ever know, during your look back at his career and personal life in the astoundingly thorough *CBC* #40. It took me a full week to get through all your many tangents. Loved it. Seemed more like a vital book.

I came across Dave's work in an odd way; one I'd not seen mentioned by anyone. He was the other feature in *Pacific Presents* #1. I bought it for Steve Ditko's "Missing Man." Yet "The Rocketeer," unknown to me, looked interesting, as well. By way of understatement, it was. So an intriguing mix: SD and DS.

I'd have been thrilled with a long monthly run of both features but, no, that was not to be. Here, you had Dave explaining that was never his intention. That he had too many other obligations and wasn't cut out just to be a comics artist as a full-time gig. He was a perfectionist and already jammed with work in other industries.

Like his friend Jim Steranko, he wasn't going to self-limit his creative endeavors strictly to comics. So he was a realist, too, much as we might wish otherwise. Fans, rather than being disgruntled, should just be grateful for what he did give us. His choice.

Quite touching how other pros welcomed and encouraged him – Kirby, Manning, Toth, Sekowsky, Wildey, etc. – and how others gravitated towards him as friends. So not only a success in his field(s), but as a warm, amiable guy. I came to realize that, but only years after passing his table, in San Diego, and not having a conversation. He was always dressed so classy, I thought he must be upper crust or snooty. Dave proved me wrong, one year, as I tentatively requested an autograph. He couldn't have been more pleasant or cordial. And, without my asking, he drew a Rocketeer head sketch, besides. It demonstrated how kind and approachable he really was.

Here, honestly, I was shocked when I read he'd been first diagnosed back in 1996. I had no clue. I thought it must've been sudden or something near his passing in 2008. No, he just wasn't looking for sympathy or a change in the way people interacted with him. Yet, even with that ticking clock, I think he had an amazing life and many accomplishments; personal and professional. He was a success on his own terms. To already be a well-regarded artist and go back to school, to learn more, is inspiring. He was doing that for personal growth, not to please anyone else.

Besides the many revealing interviews with Dave himself, the discussion I preferred was the one with his sister. It had a particular warmth and honesty to it, focusing on him as a caring, fun brother rather than solely as a cool artist.

So that might be a welcome resource, in the future, for creators who are sadly gone now. A family member who recalls the warm human side of them.…

Also, though most remembrances were glowingly positive, some comments slipped in which weren't exactly the stuff of testimonial dinners. Nothing too extreme, but they did stop me a time or two. In thinking about it, it just suggests someone had a problem with some aspect and didn't think to filter their comments.

In seeing all the cheesecake shots, it made me consider what was so remarkable about them. It was that, in the great majority, there's an innocent charm; a sweetness and beauty. It's not hardcore or explicit. The only one I felt went over the line, offhand, was *Cheval Noir,* with leather and masks. But that seemed a rarity, where one didn't have to use their imagination…

A great and memorable issue, Jon. Who will you give the next double-size deep-dive? In the meanwhile, there's the bi-monthly issues with the Silver and Bronze Agers still to come. Can't wait for the Gene Colan tribute. What, a mere ten months to go?

[*Sorry for the slight editing, Joe. I'm happy you particularly enjoyed the chat with Dave's sister, Jennifer Bawcum (without whom we would not have been able to do the tribute) and you're absolutely right about family being a potential resource. Currently I'm working on a book-length history of* Treasure Chest

Below: *Ye Ed. would absolutely love to know the story behind Dave Stevens contributing to the* Who's Who: The Definitive Directory of the DC Universe *series in the mid-'80s. The amazing artist illustrated the character profiles for Phantom Lady and Dolphin. Dave's charming original art for the latter is seen below, courtesy of Kelvin Mao!*

comics and, considering that title's run started 80 years ago and ended in 1972, almost none of the contributors are still alive, so I often have to rely on talking with descendants to get a fuller picture of those lives now gone. It adds a remarkable dimension to the biographical examinations. So, whether or not you're familiar with that Catholic comic book series (that lasted over 500 issues!), if you enjoyed my Charlton Companion, *you'll enjoy this deep dive into the comics of Geo. A. Pflaum, Pub. Inc.* – **Y.E.**]

Joe Frank

Well, with distributor delays, the double-thick Dave Stevens issue and such, your new bi-monthly release schedule, with classic talent in the spotlight, still just barely managed to land this year. Reaction [to *CBC* #41]? Mostly positive with more suggestions rather than outright complaints.

At this late date, with so many well-loved talents gone, your coverage is contingent on unearthing previously recorded interviews, by yourself and others. I have no problem with that. I appreciate what can be brought to light, whether it's more time-specific rather than wide-ranging over their whole career. It's still informing us of matters, from their viewpoint, in their own words, we might not have known. Yet, you aren't limited to that. You could still add essays, testimonials, career updates, comments by family members, etc. to supplement the interview; make it far more of a spotlight on points not covered in the earlier radio discussion. Or views of them as a close relative or friend rather than simply a noted writer or artist. It would include more insightful comments than radio listeners during pre-dawn hours. Here it was a laugh seeing Len, early on, with straight hair and no beard. Also loved the shot of him palling with Trina Robbins and Jack Kirby. A gem.

Len seemed willing to let Alan Moore have his independence on Swamp Thing, one of his co-creations, which seemed both thoughtful and kind. He was less than pleased, however, at Alan's conclusion to *Watchmen*, He left and Alan finished it up as per his intentions. Could Len have stayed and insisted it be changed? Or would that have caused Alan to quit at the eleventh hour and matching issue?

I was a little less sympathetic to his citing the imbalance of Chris Claremont getting huge sales checks on *X-Men*. Chris and his partners stayed a long while and did outstanding work. They added a lot. Len had the assignment first and opted to depart. It's like leaving a slot machine early on which a subsequent player hits the jackpot. Len can and should take credit for his vital, primary additions and contributions. I agree there. He and others got it going. But, afterwards, he can't go back and retroactively change the deal.

I don't see any harm in the Marvel and DC books having an unofficial crossover with the Rutland Halloween sequences. All light fun. But as a future editor, himself, how wild would he be about the hired help covertly including material with a deeper significance, without his knowledge? That undercuts his authority and puts him on the spot, needlessly, if something hits the fan.…

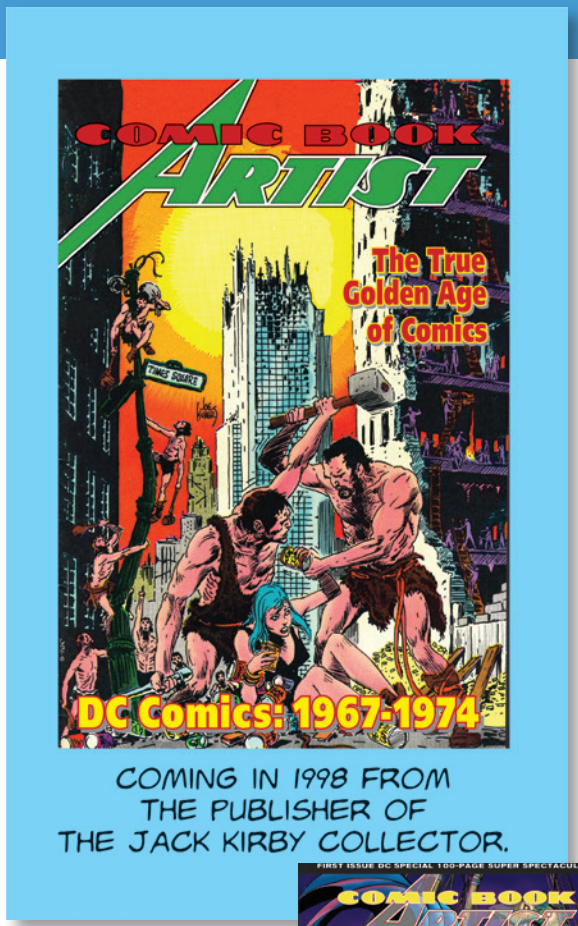
Enjoyed quite a few of the shorter features this time… The talk with Jay Scott Pike, about Dolphin and his career, though short, was excellent. Loved the painting he did of her. Brilliant! And spotlighting his appearance on Neal's "Deadman" cover. It was interesting that he wanted the rights to Dolphin. But he should have noted that before he let them publish it. Otherwise, it's a done deal and easier to tell him no. His consolation is that DC, in that time frame, was cancel-happy. It likely wouldn't have lasted long there. The Daring and the Different was short-lived because of the Scared and the Skeptical were in positions of management…

The most stunning article to me, which I never expected, was a mere page long. It was the coverage of Bill Mumy on Woody Woodbury explaining his comic collecting hobby back in 1968. I loved *Lost in Space* – still do – but never expected it to be included here. It does have that comic book connection and even more since he introduced the Comet Man, did a *Star Trek* comic with surrogate Robinsons, a Spectre story with Steve Ditko, and numerous issues of the Innovation *Lost in Space* comic, along with a graphic novel conclusion. Perhaps you can devote a page, even two, to his years of collecting? When he started and what he was into? He also hosted a dinner, with friends, for Jack Kirby, Bob Kane, and Jerry Siegel. How cool is that? (Even the second season photo was new to me!)

The brilliant part about printing that page? It prevents me from grousing about some other obscure features you include. Someone is likely euphoric with a variety angle there, too.

[*Hmmm… that's interesting, Joe. I've been in touch with Mr. Mumy in the past, so why not see if he'll consent to an interview, eh? Thanks for planting that seed and I'll keep ye appraised if anything happens… Thanks, too, for your indulgence regarding my edits, but I needed some space to respond to a few things you bring up. First, regarding your Len Wein and Jay Scott Pike comments, deals are changed retroactively all the time; it gets down to who has deeper pockets and better lawyers, I guess. My reflex is to always support the little guy…*

Second, I was amused with your playful phrase, "The Scared and the Skeptical," which prompts me to discuss not only your request for additional material to supplement radio interviews, but also a few projects, one sooner , the other later. Honestly, I began this comics history biz out of love for Jack Kirby and for the DC Comics of 1967–74, the latter manifesting into Comic Book Artist *V1 #1 and #5. Sometime during my first* CBA *incarnation, Mark Evanier observed I'm better off producing the "carpet-bombing" retrospectives for books. And he's right. I was getting fatigued working under deadlines to produce those histories, and such exhaustion is the point as to why I typically don't add complementary material; creating such matter takes an additional effort better spent working on books, though see my piece on DC honcho Carmine Infantino next ish! That said, my DC Comics: Daring and Different book (tentative title, that) should arrive in the next few years!* **– Y.E.**]



This page: *Back in 1997, for a convention, I conjured up this crude mock-up as my debut* CBA *cover, with image swiped (and heavily Photoshopped) from Joe Kubert's* Strange Adventures *#219 [Aug. '69] cover. That and my* CBA *V1 #1 and #5 are testaments to my love for DC Comics of that era!*

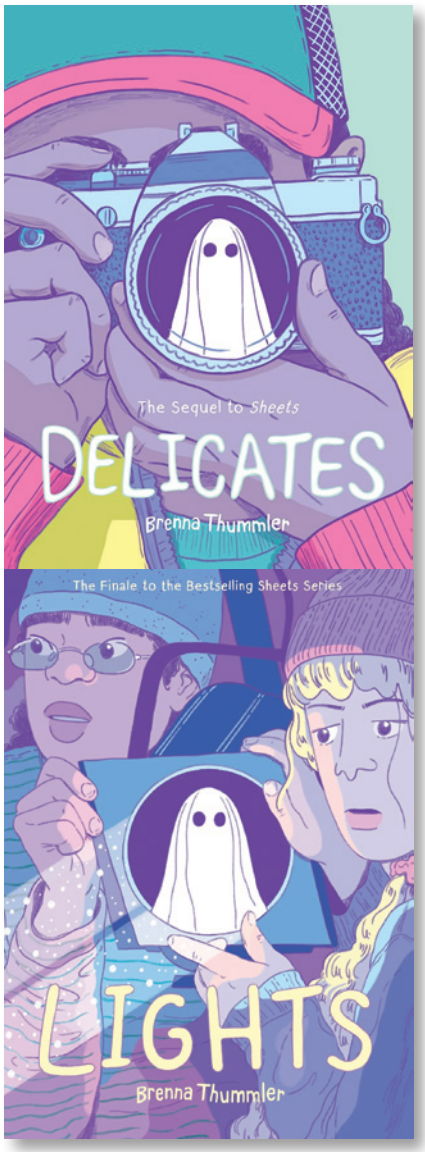
This spread h

here every ish

Half of 2 and All of 3 *Sheets*

Our comics-loving librarian on the remainder of Brenna Thummler's brilliant Sheets *trilogy*

by RICHARD J. ARNDT



In our last column, we were right in the middle of *Delicates*, the second volume of the *Sheets* trilogy by Brenna Thummler. Eliza had her photos of ghosts stolen, ripped up, and dumped in the lake by the Mean Kids, a loss that begins to edge her into considering suicide. She begins a walkabout through her town, wearing a bedsheet costume like Wendell's, not realizing yet that he is an *actual* ghost wearing a bedsheet with cut-out eyes. On her return home, she and her parents decide to have a post-Halloween party on November 1st, but nobody shows up. (To be honest, I'm not sure Eliza ever actually invited anybody.)

Meanwhile, Wendell is planning to run away from home – the laundromat – because Marjorie won't admit he's real to anyone and wants to keep him hidden in that establishment. Marjorie talks him out of it and she finally agrees to admit he's real, first to her little brother, who figures that his big sister is pulling his leg, and then, eventually, to Eliza.

All the ghosts and Marjorie attempt to cheer Eliza up over the bullying she's experiencing and the destruction of both her ghost photos and her camera. In that effort, Marjorie suggests a fall dance, which everyone will attend in cut-out eyes bedsheets, so that everyone is both anonymous and on a level playing field. The head Mean Girl hates the idea since she won't be able to show off her new hairdo, new clothes, etc., but the faculty dance coordinator, who happens to be Eliza's father, likes the idea and okays it as the theme for the fall dance.

As the dance approaches, Wendell tries to convince Marjorie how desperate Eliza is becoming, based on the writing she's done on the back of her ghost pictures, which Wendell has recovered from the lake where they were thrown by Mean Girl.

With the urging of Wendell, Marjorie gradually realizes that he is right about Eliza being suicidal, and Marjorie finally gets off her butt and she, Wendell, and all the other ghosts at the laundromat are enlisted to track down Eliza, who is discovered alone in the local abandoned lighthouse.

Marjorie tries to convince Eliza that life's worth living and that Eliza is not as alone as she feels in her struggle to find a reason for living. In an effort to prove this, Marjorie introduces the town's ghost children, including Wendell, to Eliza. Later, at the Come-as-a Ghost dance, Marjorie, Eliza, and Wendell have a good time dancing, talking, sharing thoughts, and coming to… well, if not a solution, then at least a start on how all three of them can deal with the dramas of both life and death, loneliness, and sorrow.

This volume features a pretty nice and well-written ending. If it sounds like the trilogy is plot-heavy, you'd be right. Both last issue's column and this barely scratch at the plot twists in these books. This volume also includes a 10-page preview of *Lights*, the third and final (at least for now) book of the trilogy.

Lights opens with the approach of Marjorie's birthday, Nov. 17th, the week before Thanksgiving. Note the fact that all three books take place in a single month. It's already quite cold outside, and there's several inches on snow on the ground.

Wendell remembers some fragments of his living life and very much wants to remember more. All three of our heroes join forces to try and discover how Wendell actually died. They turn out to be pretty good detectives for 12-year-olds (and whatever age Wendell was when he died). The first thing they do is track down where Wendell lived. The house is abandoned but just seeing it restores more of Wendell's memories.

Later, Marjorie and Eliza join a Hunting-for-Ghosts school project that has them looking for evidence of ghosts in the next closest town's supposedly haunted hotel, using modern technology. Wendell can't go along because it's four girls to a room, a fact which annoys Eliza, since she has a hard time warming up to anyone new.

The only town local in their group is a "girl in a hoodie" and she is even more unsocial than Eliza. She actually acts more like a creepy ghost than the real Wendell-type ones. Both Marjorie and Eliza think she may be in the club to harm actual ghosts.

Along the way, the trio find themselves at a performance of *The Nutcracker,* where Wendell inadvertently becomes a prop blanket for one of the actors and discovers a few more ghosts in the theater. Wendell also begins to remember bits and pieces of his life before drowning.

As Christmas approaches, tensions arise between Marjorie and Eliza as they both struggle with teen-age angst intruding on their search for the true story behind Wendell's death. Marjorie's dad finally starts to come out of his grief isolation. And Wendell does finally remember the circumstances of his death, helped by Marjorie and Eliza.

I loved this series. The players in this drama – both dead and alive – are fully realized characters. And I must tell you that it is rare in any graphic novel to have the locale to be such an imposing part in the narrative. When our trio of heroes are standing in the snow-covered woods, it is exactly like standing in a real woods in real snow. The theater is an honest-to-God Globe Theater. Every building is a perfect background. This little town and its inhabitants are as real as Gormenghast.

If it seems like I've told a lot of the plot – well, I really haven't. There's stuff twisting and turning in nearly every panel.

I loved this trilogy. You might, too.

fin

Sheets, Delicates, Lights TM & © Brenna Thummler.

Dateline: @?#!!!!!!

by FRED HEMBECK 2025

BRAM STOKER, SAX ROHMER, H.G. WELLS.

LITERARY ICONS ALL--AND ALL INADVERTANTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR SOME OF THE BEST MARVEL COMICS PUBLISHED IN THE SEVENTIES.

TOMB OF DRACULA BY WOLFMAN, COLAN, AND PALMER. MASTER OF KUNG FU BY MOENCH AND GULACY. AND WAR OF THE WORLDS BY MC GREGOR AND RUSSELL.

BETTER KNOWN AS KILLRAVEN.

HOWEVER, BEFORE DON AND P. CRAIG RUSSELL GRABBED THE REINS, THERE WAS THOMAS, ADAMS, CONWAY, CHAYKIN, AND WOLFMAN -- AND THEN THERE WAS COLAN, BUCKLER, AND TRIMPE TEAMING WITH MC GREGOR PRIOR TO RUSSELL COMING ABOARD.

BUT, oh my, WHEN HE *DID*!!..

THE EXPLOITS OF KILLRAVEN AND HIS FREEMEN -- M'SHULLA, CARMILLA FROST, AND OLD SKULL -- AS THEY FOUGHT MARTIAN INVADERS IN THE PROVERBIAL FAR-FLUNG FUTURE WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A FEAST FOR THE EYES UNDER RUSSELL'S CLASSIC STAGING AND EXQUISITE LINE WORK, PERFECTLY MATCHING MC GREGOR'S IMAGINATIVE PLOTS AND EVOCATIVE VERBIAGE.

IT WAS, IN SHORT, A DAMN GOOD COMIC BOOK.

AND ON A PERSONAL NOTE, IT -- ALONG WITH THOSE OTHER SERIES PREVIOUSLY NOTED -- KEPT MY LOVE FOR THE MEDIUM ALIVE AND THRIVING IN MY EARLY TWENTIES, AS I ATTEMPTED TO MAKE MY WAY INTO THE FIELD.

Y'KNOW, I MOSTLY HERALD THE COMICS OF MY YOUTH (THE SIXTIES) WITHOUT GIVING PROPER PROPS TO WORK THAT INSPIRED ME TO KEEP PLUGGING AWAY AT MY QUEST TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL CARTOONIST.

SO THANKS, DON AND CRAIG -- YOUR BRILLIANT WORK NOURISHED MY LOVE FOR THE COMICS MEDIUM AT A VERY IMPORTANT TIME

HEY, FROM ONE OLD SKULL TO ANOTHER, IT WAS A PRIVILEGE TO KNOW YOU!!


ALL HAIL
Colors by Glenn Whitmore
All characters TM & © Marvel Characters Inc.

BIG JOHN

Four Interviews with magnificent illustrator and comic book artist
JOHN BUSCEMA [1927–2002]

American comic fans of a certain type from a specific time have their favorite John Buscema eras, when the artist first made an impact and his work was recognized as something beyond the Marvel house-style, not just a knock-off of Jack Kirby's approach. For me, it was his late 1960s art on *The Avengers*, when he was inked by the underrated George Klein. I perceived there was a compelling

REGAL MAJESTY

to his elegant figures, imbued with expressions evoking a certain Shakespearean quality, if you will, that could be, as needed, either achingly tender or possessing an untethered ferocity… I just loved it. So imagine my surprise to hear the man's "dese and dose" Brooklyn accent when first we spoke in 1997, but the interview revealed a sensitive yet earthy man contrasting the drama infused in his work. ¶ For this tribute, we've gathered a quartet of interviews, one in the form of a narrative and the fourth being the aforementioned conversation I conducted, a Q-&-A I will never forget. So, in our salute to the artist, let's start this celebration with the interview from *The Art of John Buscema* by Sal Quartuccio and Bob Keenan…

BIG JOHN: 1978

[Introduction to *The Art of John Buscema*: *As a young man, John decided he wanted to be a contender. Boxing was a love as great as art for him. He and his brother, Sal, would train at the old Stillman's gym across the street from the original Madison Square Garden. It was there, however, that John decided to be an artist. After working out, he would do little watercolors of the boxers. Nothing special, just for his own amusement. The word got around and, pretty soon, John was doing full portraits of fighters, champs, and would-be contenders at $125 each. John realized he could make more money with his hands than with his fists.*

[*John Buscema was born December 11th, 1927, in Brooklyn, New York. Even as a child, John showed a tremendous interest for art, especially the art he found in the funnies. Copying such notables as Hal Foster, Alex Raymond, and all the other great illustrators, John soon became enthralled with the world of art.*

[*Attending the High School of Art and Design, he began to seriously train for his chosen profession. Later, John would go to the Pratt Institute at night while still going to Art and Design during the day. His first professional work was four gag cartoons he did for the now defunct* Hobo News. *He received a dollar apiece for them and was extremely gratified to get it.*

[*For the next few years, John would go from job to job, painting murals, signs, any odd job that required art. Then, in 1948, John got a job at Timely Comics from a nice young man who worked there named Stan Lee. Stan gave John a staff job working for $75 a week. To John's mind, this was $75 more than he was worth, but he was grateful for the work. His first story was the seven-pager entitled, "They Had Robbed Lincoln's Grave," a dubious start for one who would later create such classics of his own.*

[*After a year-and-a-half, Timely disbanded the staff and everyone either worked freelance or left. John stayed on for another six months, but finally left Timely. Seeing comics were on their way out, he worked odd jobs until he was drafted for the Korean War. Having had an ulcer since he was 14, he was unable to serve. This fact took five months for the Army to find out. John received his honorable discharge after much red tape.*

[*John married in 1953 to his wife, Delores. In 1955, they had their first child, Dianne, in 1956. Much to John's relief, he landed a very good job in advertising. The traveling from Long Island to Manhattan every day was a grind, but well worth the effort.*

[*In 1966, Stan Lee tracked down John and invited him back to Marvel. It seemed comics were in a much better shape than when John had left. With the chance to do more illustration work and cutting his commuting down to zero in order to be with his family, John agreed. As they say, the rest* really *is history. John's work for Silver Surfer, The Avengers, The Fantastic Four, Thor, and Conan has made the Marvel Comics Group the success it is. When you talk about drawing comics or drawing the "Marvel way," you're really just trying to be more like John Buscema. For a man who started his life wanting to be a boxer, a contender, it can truly be said, the gentleman* is *a champ!*

[*To John, his lovely life wife, Delores, and their two children, Diane and John Jr., we thank them for allowing us into their home. This book was a labor of love and respect.* **– Sal Quartuccio and Bob Keenan.**]

Sal Quartuccio/Bob Keenan: *When did you become interested in art?*

John Buscema: When I remember as a kid, the thing that would drive me up the wall was that I couldn't draw Popeye. I loved Popeye. I would get the daily paper and I just couldn't draw him. I did it over and over until it was coming out of my ears. I think I was seven- or eight-years-old at the time and I couldn't draw a Popeye. I don't know if I could draw him today. [*laughter*]

Sal/Bob: *Why did you get into comics?*

John: You know, comics were supposed to be a temporary thing. I never wanted to be in comics. I wanted to be an illustrator. I never had the training to be an illustrator, so I took what I thought was the easiest job I could find, which was comics. I found out differently. It wasn't that easy. It's a tough job and it was only supposed to be for a year or two.

I was supposed to go back to art school, only I never *did* go back to art school, and I stayed in comics until comics almost folded up. I think it was the middle '50s and that's when I left… I left… *I was out.* [*laughter*] I couldn't find a job and I went into advertising.

Sal/Bob: *And so, the advertising went from the middle '50s to the middle '60s?*

John: And then Stan called me up… he denies it. He said I went there, but he called me up. In fact, Sol Brodsky called also. They had traced me down to this studio I was working at. I had space there and I was freelancing. [Stan] asked me if I'd be interested in going back to comics. Now, I'll tell you one of the reasons I went back into comics: I had to commute every day from here in Long Island to New York, which was three hours, door to door, which was six hours a day. Now, I knew when I was doing comics, I didn't have to travel at all. I worked at home, so that was one of the real big determining factors of my getting back into comics again, plus the fact I had seen the comics were doing well again. They weren't on the verge of disaster as when I had left them.

Sal/Bob: *When you first came back to Marvel in the '60s, what was the first book you worked on?*

John: It was "Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.," and I didn't pencil it. Jack Kirby broke it down and that's how much confidence Stan had in me. He had Jack Kirby break down the job and I penciled over it and re-pencilled the whole thing. I erased every panel and redrew it because I couldn't draw like Kirby and it came out pathetic. I think John Tartaglione or someone like that inked it. I believe it was him. The name seems to stand out in my mind. That was the very first job and the second was "The Hulk."

Sal/Bob: *Do you think the Marvel style of synopsis – art and [then] dialogue – is better than working straight from a script?*

John: Definitely. That's the best way to work. That's the *only* way to work. I will not work from a script. A lot of young writers at Marvel will give me a detailed, outlined script. I work with them *once* – I will not work with them again! Because I want something to work with. I don't want to be strait-jacketed into a corner and told how many panels I have to work with, and what they're doing in each panel. I love the freedom that Marvel gives us with the synopsis.

SALVATORE QUARTUCCIO *(Sal Q): Born in 1952 in Manhattan, N.Y.C. Early years in Queens and then Brooklyn, and raised on comic books, jell bars, bubble gum cards, and chocolate egg creams! That's the life! Attended my first convention, the 1969 NY Comic Con, spent all my money on back issues of* Witzend, *and that began the notion of being a fanzine publisher. Fifty+ years publishing thousands of products: comics, art books, portfolios, T-shirts, posters, card sets, prints, buttons, pins, and on and on. Gradually retiring with my adorable wife Ruth.*

Rocketed to Brooklyn by his parents from a dying planet, **BOB KEENAN** *has been the design and production person at SQP Art Books since its inception in 1973. Learning the art of promotion from studiously absorbing "Stan's Soapbox" as a child, he's been the company's public voice when marketing the full line of SQP's fantasy and pin-up art books. Thanks to the miracle of the interwebs, he can maintain these duties to the New Jersey-based concern while living large live in sunny (and occasionally engulfed in flames) Los Angeles. He is sliding into his golden years in remarkably good heath and relative sanity.*

That's the *best* way.

Sal/Bob: *Where do you see comics going?*

John: [*Long pause, then laughter*] If they don't do something soon, it's going to go down the drain, as far as I'm concerned. I think maybe I'm too close to it, but they had their "golden" days. They haven't changed. I think, if anything, they've deteriorated. Except the Conan character. That's the only thing, I think, is really good, really interesting in comics today.

Sal/Bob: *Do you think comics have improved at all over the years?*

John: In certain respects, it has. I think for example, today we do things that, years ago, we would never do. From what I can remember of the '40s and the '50s, there weren't as many good draftsmen as there are today. Although there were great guys back then, like Lou Fine and Joe Kubert, but I think today you've got a hell of a lot of talent. The only thing is, they don't have any place to develop like we did. Now, we would get into comics in those days and latch onto an illustrator. I happened to like Albert Dorne. Albert Dorne was one of the real exciting illustrators. He had a comic style – I loved his stuff! And I used to try and draw like him.

Robert Fawcett, another great illustrator. I loved Alex Raymond and Hal Foster! All the different draftsmen. Today, the young people coming along don't have the illustrators to look up to that we did, the great talents. Today, all they have to look up to is me and people like me; which, to me, is second-rate or at least second-hand to the great artists we looked up to. They don't have the scope that we did. We had *dozens* and *dozens* of illustrators that we could pick from. Norman Rockwell to Albert Dorne, which is quite a run. They don't. All they have is comics. Who do they have to look up to?

Sal/Bob: *Do you think one of the recent improvements in comics today is Marvel's try for full offset color rather than traditional flat comic color? They used this process on your Conan and black-&-white book.*

John: I saw the originals that Marie Severin had colored. They were beautiful! The [printed] book was a disaster! The colors were washed out – even the ink lines were lost! I think it was approached in the wrong way. I think they should have used a different paper for printing. I think they should have used a different technique for inking. I think they should have simplified the inking and concentrated on the coloring or vice versa. Simple coloring and a lot of detail in the inking, but not both.

Sal/Bob: *So you think the process has a ways to go?*

John: I think they're in the experimental stage right now. I think if they do it the right way, it can be a bang up job. I know I saw some work in Europe that is close to what Marvel wants to do, full color paintings with ink lines around them.

Sal/Bob: *Who is your favorite comic artist?*

John: I'll tell you, I'm at the point where I'm not impressed with anyone anymore. I was always looking for the good draftsmanship. Later on, I was interested in the storytelling aspect of comics. I think Hal Foster is perhaps the best storyteller in comics, as was Milton Caniff. A lot of guys, like Roy Crane – all great.

I did admire them, but now that I'm older, I've been in it for so many years, I can see things they didn't see before. I have the experience now. I have all the books of the collected works of Raymond and of Hal Foster, and I've looked at the work of the old-timers and I'm not as impressed anymore. In fact, I see a lot of things they did, they could have improved upon. I see things now that leave me cold. I'm not impressed with anything in comics today. The only thing in recent times that I was impressed with but not really floored by was *Tarzan* by Joe Kubert. I think it was one of the best comics produced of all times. I admire the guy. I think he's fantastic. I really do, but that's it. Maybe I'm too close to comics.

Sal/Bob: *Did you ever try your hand at writing?*

John: I would never write! I don't like writing! I can't even spell. [*laughter*] I just don't like writing. I'd like to plot stories and to leave the dialogue to the writer. I don't want to write… I know it's enough for me to sit down and write a letter.

Sal/Bob: *How instrumental are you in plotting, scripting, and final realization of a story?*

John: Well, it depends on the story. I'm adapting a Conan story from one of the books Howard wrote. I follow that pretty close. I love to follow it as close as I can. I wish I had more panels to be able to follow every single step. He creates a visual picture in my mind that I don't have enough panels to convey. When Roy Thomas hands me a plot, I have a lot of leeway. Roy gives me the most essential parts and then leaves quite a bit up to me.

Sal/Bob: *Why did you start your own comic arts school?*

John: There were so many people, over the years, asking me and other people in the field for advice. You'd get letters from kids writing to Marvel and they'd forward them to me all saying, "John, is there a school I could go to?" And they'd send me samples to critique, so I thought it would be a good idea to start a school. I had approached a few other artists in the field and they were interested, but they never went ahead with it. They didn't think they could keep up with it. Neither did I, what with my having to go into the city every day from Long Island, but I thought, "What the hell. Let me try it." I figured, "Let's give it a stab and see what happens. The first year of the school, 1975, was a big success.

Sal/Bob: *Where did you get these students?*

John: I put a two-inch ad in Marvel comics – one time! And I got thousands of responses. At least 2,500, from that one ad. I *still* get letters from an ad I put in that long ago. I got six of them just today, but getting back to the school, I just didn't have the time to continue it. It was a big hassle with the employees. It ended in 1977.

Sal/Bob: *Were their any graduates from the course who are working in comics today?*

John: Oh, sure. There's Bob Hall, assistant editor up at Marvel – he draws, as well. And there's Juan Ortiz, who is working for DC Comics. There's another kid in the field, [though] I'm not sure I can take credit for, Bruce Patterson. He was never in my classes, he'd just show for an hour and then leave, so I don't think I can take too much credit for him. [*laughter*] Then there are one or two youngsters working as assistants to other artists. I think these students, out of the initial 28 guys, isn't too bad for an average.

Sal/Bob: *Who is your favorite inker?*

John: If you want to talk about ink, I think, for me – for *my* work – my brother Sal does the best job, because we've work together for so many

Pages 48–49: *On left, John Buscema's pin-up in* Marvel Treasury Edition *#3 ['74], colored by Glenn Whitmore. On right, undated photo of the artist, courtesy of Shaun Clancy.*
Previous page: *Production art, cover of* The Art of John Buscema *['78].* **Above:** *Cover of same.* **Next page:** *Buscema's original cover art for* Conan the Barbarian *#124 [July '81].*

years. He knows my style, he works the way I work. He puts a line down the way I do, so he can ink me like no one else can. Sal remains closest to my originals. Not that he traces, mind you, but he retains the drawing without killing it!

Sal/Bob: *Is there anyone else in your family who is interested in art?*

John: My daughter, who has a lot of talent, but she doesn't have the patience for art. I tried to help her, give her some instruction, but she's very impatient. Besides her, there really isn't anyone else in my family who draws.

Sal/Bob: *Did DC Comics ever approach you to become one of their artists?*

John: Once, they did. Carmine Infantino called me at one time. He asked me if I'd be interested in working for DC. I said I would, but I couldn't, because I was working for Marvel and didn't want to split myself working for two companies. I'd prefer working for one outlet at a time.

Sal/Bob: *If you had decided to work for DC, are there any characters there that you would've enjoyed working on?*

John: I can't say that I would've liked to work on any characters at DC, because the only two that I'm really familiar with are Superman and Batman. I don't know any of the other characters at DC. I don't read comics, DCs or Marvels. I don't like comics! [*laughter*] The people up at the office send me copies of the Marvel books. I have thousands piled up in my art room. My son has them. He saves them. I'm not familiar at all with what a DC is doing.

Sal/Bob: *Which characters do you enjoy doing the most?*

John: *Conan!* Conan is my favorite character. In fact, I recently asked Roy Thomas… or rather, I *told* Marvel and Roy, I'd like to do Conan exclusively. It's the only project in comics that I've ever done that I really enjoy! Because he is not one of these guys who flies or can drill himself into the ground headfirst, or anything like that! To me, Conan is real! I can actually *do* things with this body, move him in certain ways that *I* can understand. I cannot understand a guy flying through a building or somebody stretching himself around a lamppost and making himself into a pretzel – I can't relate to that, I don't enjoy that, I hate it with a passion. I hated doing The Avengers and I hate doing any super-hero! [*laughter*] I told everybody up at Marvel. I love doing Conan. He's my kind of guy.

Sal/Bob: *He's a regular kind of guy.* [laughter]

John: He's more than a regular kind of guy! He's the kind of guy I've always wanted to draw – for years! Even more than Tarzan. I thought that Tarzan would be a thing I enjoy doing, but I didn't. They held me back. They wanted Tarzan drawn slim, the way he was drawn for years. Not like Conan. Conan is *huge*, like a bodybuilder! But I had to slim Tarzan down. Otherwise, I would've drawn him like Conan.

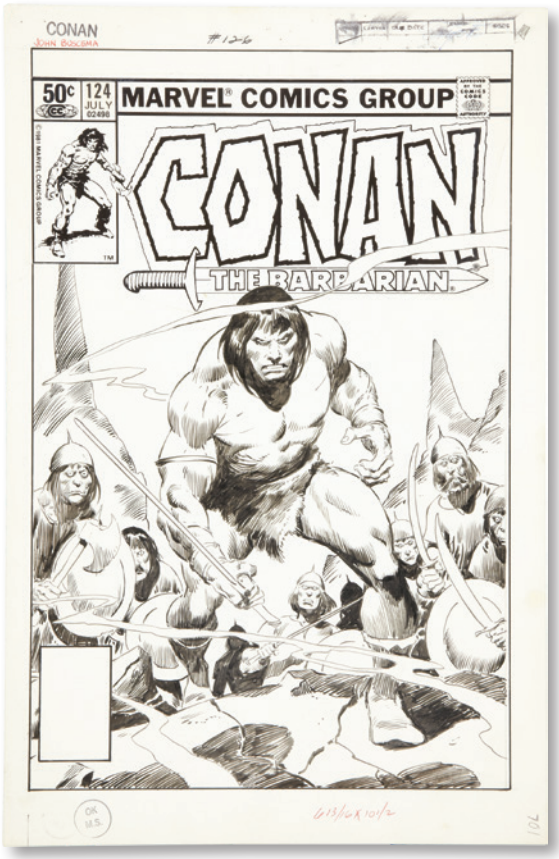
Sal/Bob: *What character did you dislike having to do?*

John: Like I said before, the super-heroes. However, I don't mind Thor as much. As a matter of fact, I'm doing *Thor* now. *Thor*, I enjoy more than the others. But, when it comes to *The Avengers,* or the *Hulk*, or the *Fantastic Four* or anything like that…they're just a pain in the ass.

Sal/Bob: *What is your relationship with Stan Lee?*

John: He's the boss and I'm the penciler. [*laughter*] What can I tell you? Do you mean is it a pleasant relationship?

Sal/Bob: *Well, do you enjoy working with him?*



John: Well, I'll tell you something –

Sal/Bob: *That's it, John. Get it off your chest.* [laughter]

John: No, I'll give it to you straight. When I was working with Stan, we worked on *Silver Surfer, Thor,* and the *Fantastic Four*; of all the writers I've ever worked with, Stan gave me the least amount of plot! But he gave it to me in such a way that I enjoyed working with him. I loved working on stories with Stan more than anything else then.

Today, I enjoy working with Roy, which is why I stick with him. Roy and I have been working together since *The Avengers,* which is about 10 years now. I know what Roy wants and Roy knows what I want, so we work hand in glove. As a matter of fact, I started with Roy, then worked with Stan and back with Roy, but I loved working with Stan when he was writing. It was an enjoyable period.

Outside of that, I'll occasionally see him. It's very rare at that. I usually talk to him on the phone. My relationship with Stan is good. No problems.

Sal/Bob: *How did you get involved with* How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way *book?*

John: I had talked to Stan about two years ago about my doing a book. He suggested that we collaborate – no, I didn't even *say* collaborate. I just said I wanted to do a book. Stan had said he, too, was thinking about doing a book and that someday we'd get together and do it. Time went on and nothing ever happened. In the meantime, Stan had started doing a series of books for Simon and Schuster and I started my art school. At the time, I suppose Stan decided, "Well, now's the time to do an art book for Simon and Schuster!" And I suppose it was the logical choice for me to do the book because I had the art school. I had the experience of teaching, which came in a very handy, by the way. I used a lot of my lessons in class as lessons in the book. I would make notes about my class… and that's really how the book came about.

Sal/Bob: *If you had the time and the money, is there anything John Buscema would really like to do?*

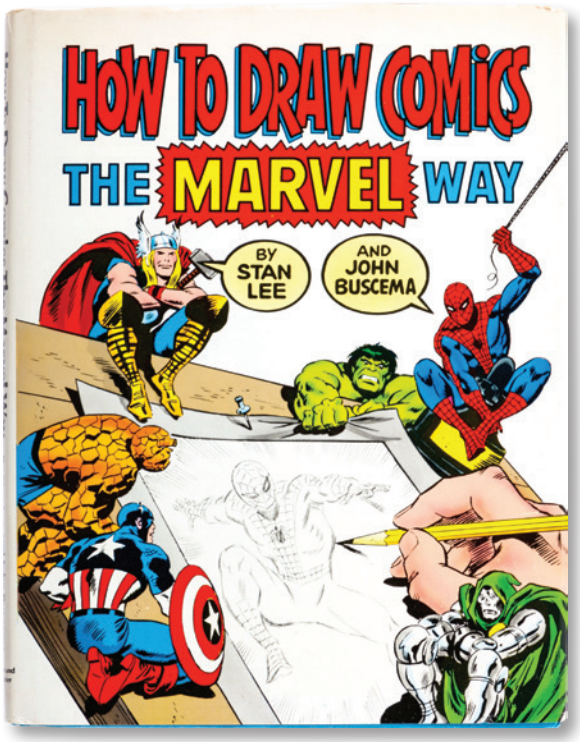
John: Oh, geez, that's a dream! I would just like to get a canvas and paint all the time! To go out and see a forest, or a landscape, or a person, and just paint. I'm so tired of working from memory. I would love to use models to use *real* things and paint them or draw them. Anything I felt like drawing them or anytime I felt like drawing them, it would probably be more hours than I do it now. When I'm finished working, I'm usually back in the studio, after dinner, doing illustrations like those that are being used in this book. *I love to draw!* I could draw all day, 24 hours! On the weekends, I'm drawing. I don't work on the weekends. I just draw. I really like to just paint and draw whenever I felt like it.

Sal/Bob: *If this fantasy of doing whatever you wanted was restricted just to comics, what would you like to do?*

John: I would love to do *Conan*… I just love *Conan*… I don't know if I've made that clear. [*laughter*]

Sal/Bob: *I think we've got the idea you like* Conan.

John: I love *Conan*. I love doing historical things. I love to do King Arthur, *but* I would like to do it not six panels to a page, or four, but one or two panels with no word balloons, the way Hal Foster did it. It doesn't interfere with the picture. Just stick the copy on the bottom out of the way – or no copy at all! [*laughter*] – and spend time on a panel. Do research on the costume and pick out a little bit from this period and a little bit from that period, and



This page: How To Draw Comics the Marvel Way *['78] was initially inspired by Stan Lee's visit to John's Comic Book Workshop as guest lecturer, whereafter he asked the artist for the two of them to produce a "how to" book. As can be ascertained by John's cover rough below, the title of* How to Draw Comic Book Super-Heroes *had been considered. Ye Ed.'s 2004 Fireside edition indicated it was the 34th printing. Atria has been publishing the book since 2019, with at least three printings to date.*

put it together and originate a new costume. If a period I'm working on doesn't exist. For example, in *Conan*, I don't think I've given it as much as I should. I feel guilty about it. I'd love to do more research in swords and costuming, but what I do mainly is breakdowns and what the hell can you do in breakdowns? You can't do much, except give an indication as to what you want.

Sal/Bob: *You do breakdowns for everything? The* Conan *series, the* Conan *black-&-whites,* Tarzan*, and* Thor*?*

John: Everything. It's all breakdowns except the covers. Those are finished pencils, but they look like the breakdowns after the inker gets through with them.

Sal/Bob: *Then you enjoy doing paintings, like the early* Savage Sword of Conan *covers?*

John: Oh, that was a disaster. The second one I did was a disaster. *Both* of them, they were bad. I wish that they were destroyed. I wish they had never been printed.

Sal/Bob: *Would you ever want the chance to do another cover painting?*

John: Yes, but they don't pay enough, so I'm not even going to try. [*laughter*]

Sal/Bob: *Maybe Marvel will get some hints from this interview.*

John: I've told them. I don't give them hints. I tell them! They don't pay enough!

Sal/Bob: *What other interests besides artwork do you have?*

John: I'm not really a sports enthusiast as far as being a fan. I'm not that crazy about baseball. I used to be a *bug* for the Dodgers when they were in Brooklyn. This was before you guys even knew there *was* a Dodgers. [*laughter*] When they left Brooklyn, I think it was then that I lost interest in the game. As a fan, I love the Jets when they were just coming up with Joe Namath and when they won the championship. After that, I lost interest in football. *I love boxing!* I think Muhammad Ali is a bum, contrary to universal opinion. I don't think the guy ever learned to box!

Sal/Bob: *So in other words, we won't be seeing a* Conan versus Muhammad Ali *book in the near future.*

John: Not as far as I'm concerned, no! [*laughter*]

Sal/Bob: *How is it working on the Marvel/DC* Wizard of Oz *book?*

John: There's a funny story about that. I did that entire book from memory. There were no stills available from the movie and all Marvel had given me were stills of Dorothy, the Lion, Scarecrow, etc. I had seen the movie about two years before, and several times before that, and retained a good amount. If there were parts in the book that didn't look right, that's when my memory wasn't there. Roy had seen the movie prior to his writing of the script and he called me up, and I would relate my versions of the movie, and Roy would correct me and tell me if it was out of sequence. And I'd say I was right about 95% of the time.

Sal/Bob: *There was no initial script from which you could work?*

John: No, there was nothing! I did the whole story on my own, which annoyed Roy. I have a fantastic memory, visually. Visually, I can remember many details. If I see a movie and I like it, two years later I can remember it, every damn detail from the beginning to the end.

Sal/Bob: *What's the entire story about the* Conan [*strip*]*?*

John: First of all, I don't know who approached who. There's a syndicate in the Midwest and I don't know if they approach Marvel or Marvel approached them. I have a feeling the syndicate approach Marvel. They started with *Spider-Man*, then *Howard the Duck*, and then started looking for more characters, so *Conan* came up and that's how I got involved with it. I understand they're going to syndicate the *Hulk*. They're very interested in syndicating a lot of the super-heroes.

Sal/Bob: *Did they automatically choose you?*

John: Well, I'm on *Conan*. I suppose if someone else was working on *Conan*, he'd get it, but I got it because I'm the major artist on it.

Sal/Bob: *Will you be doing the pencils and inks?*

John: Yes, I'm in complete control of the artwork. Roy is writing, of course.

Sal/Bob: *What's your feeling about conventions?*

John: I think they're alright. I think there's too many of them, but I enjoy them. I think they're overdoing it, coming out with five or six a year.

Sal/Bob: *And that's only in New York.*

John: Really? I don't know. I only go to one a year. I'll be going to the San Diego Convention this year and that's it. I try to hold it down to one a year. Actually, it'd be my second convention since I was at one in France, in January. See, I'm already breaking my rule.

Sal/Bob: *Could you tell us about that convention in France?*

John: Well, I was invited to go. I wasn't their first choice either. Their first choice was Hal Foster, but he's too old to do any traveling. Their second choice was Charles Schultz of *Peanuts*, and *I* was their third choice. The reason for that is because the Silver Surfer is such a popular thing over there. They'd wish we'd turn out more *Silver Surfers* so they wouldn't have to keep reprinting them.

I was amazed at how popular comics are over there. It's treated more like a fine art. I was in a museum there and one of the rooms had a comic art collection of originals. They had no foreigners, just French comic art, and there were some really beautiful pieces there.

At their conventions, unlike ours, they have psychol-

Above: *John's intro "topper" panel ran on the* Conan the Barbarian *Sundays (incorporated by papers that made use of the device). The strip lasted between Sept. 4, 1978, until April 12, 1981, with John contributing 48 strips, ending on Christmas eve, '78. He also drew a handful of Sundays.* **Below:** *Ad that appeared in Marvel Comics circa 1975 promoting John's Comic Book Workshop, held in Manhattan.* **Bottom:** *John Buscema Comic Book Workshop participants (top row, from left) Freddy Greenberg, Rob Doorack, Rick Rangel (who shared this photo with Shaun Clancy), instructor John Buscema, and John Collier. In front is Josh Zissman and unknown.*

ogists and professors discussing comics in relation to society and the history of comics and all the aspects that are involved. They took it all so seriously! But when we look at comics, the very word "comic" makes it sound like a joke but, to them, it's a serious thing. When I told them I hate comics, they couldn't believe it! And I criticized so many things that were being done. Now I couldn't criticize their stuff because I didn't know what the hell they were doing! But I could criticize American work. They would praise a certain strip. They would think it was great, and I'd say, 'It's garbage!" And, oh! They'd start yelling and screaming, getting excited and throw their hands in the air! [*laughter*]

Sal/Bob: *So you were there to start trouble?*

John: No, it's just that they had never met anyone with an attitude towards comics the way that I have. In fact, I don't think there are many guys in the business today with my attitude.

Sal/Bob: *It's not very likely.*

John: Someday, I think the day I retire, I would like to talk about comics. Right now, I don't want to create a situation for myself. But the day I retire, if anyone is interested, I would like to tell them how I feel about comics and what certain people are doing in comics.

Sal/Bob: *The reason most people don't say they hate comics is because they can't do anything else but comics unlike yourself, an illustrator, who can do work other than comics.*

John: No, I don't feel that way. I would love to do comics, all the time. I would love to do comics the way I *feel* they should be done. But they'll never do it that way because it would be too damned expensive. I think they're trying to do it at Marvel. They're trying, but I think, right now, they're light years away from what I'd like to do.

Sal/Bob: *You'd like more exacting reproduction?*

John: I would like, as I said, one or two panels, maybe three panels on a page, where there was a sequence that would make it interesting. Even 20 panels on a page! But, where that's not necessary, one panel on a page. I loved when we used to do one big panel at Marvel. But you use 17 of those full panels, and you're not going to have much room for a story for the reader, especially today, with the rising prices and less pages.

Sal/Bob: *How do you feel about fans?*

John: I like them. Most fans I come in contact with, I've loved them. Without them, where am I going to be? [*laughter*] They support me, they pay the butcher's bill, and so on. I think, overall, fans are great. A few times I've met up with a couple of them and they're real pains in the neck.

Sal/Bob: *It's like any other group of people.*

John: Yes, it is nice to have fans.

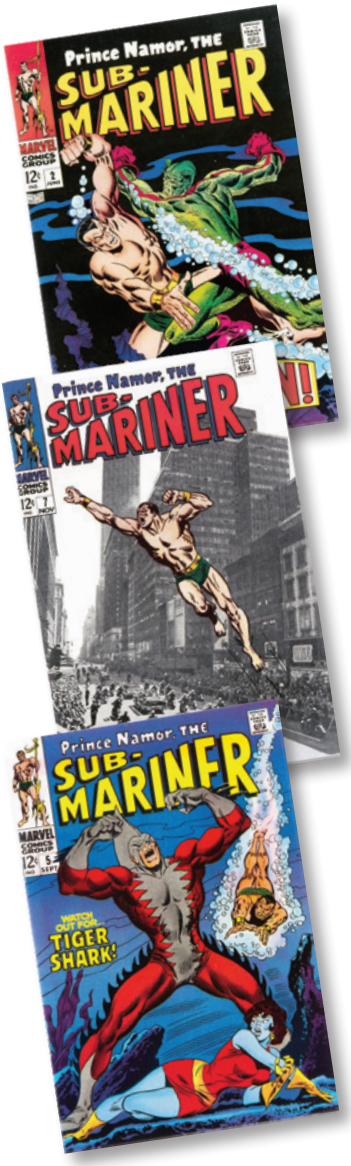
BIG JOHN: 1984

[**Introduction to *Comics Feature* #31 [Sept. '84]appearance:** *One of the most respected talents in the comic book industry, the prolific John Buscema is welcomed at conventions as far apart as Long Island, his home of 25 years, and France, where his work is considered to be among the best in the world. He has drawn classic stories for* The Avengers *(including the origin of the Vision),* The Silver Surfer, Thor, The Fantastic Four, *and, for more than 12 years,* Conan the Barbarian. – **John Peel**.]

John was born in Brooklyn "a long time ago," he laughs. "I grew up in a very rough neighborhood." He spent a couple of years hanging about the local pool hall, and seeing life. He is fond of telling stories about the types that he observed there. A large pool table dominates his room where we spoke.

"My cell," he jokes. That room is filled with an art-table, work stacked about all with the Buscema stamp of quality, bookshelves containing art volumes, fitness magazines, the collected strips of *Prince Valiant,* and the only two books he has left with covers, dating from his work of the early '60s.

He always wanted to be an illustrator. While he was still in high school, he started training and going to night classes. "I went to the Brooklyn Museum Art School, which was running Saturday morning drawing classes. I enjoyed that, I thought it was great." His brother, Sal, is also an artist and has, from time to time, inked John's pencils.



JOHN PEEL *was born in England at a time when American comics were just being allowed into the country. He grew up with the Marvel Age of Comics, and fell in love with a lot of the artists' work – Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Don Heck, Johnny Romita, Gene Colan – and Big John Buscema. He moved to the U.S.A. in 1981, and seized his chance to meet some of his heroes, especially John Buscema. Oh, yeah – he's also the author of some 120 novels.*

Timely Days

In the late 1940s, he started working for Timely Comics, the forerunner of today's Marvel Group. "I scrounged about for two years before I broke into the art field," he recalled. "My first job was with Marvel Comics, in 1948. It was a different situation in those days. We had 62-page books, and you didn't do an entire book; you did a segment of a book. You had four or five artists working on one book. Some of the stories ran to four or five pages, some ran up to 12. And it was great. Even if you didn't have the abilities to carry a book, the other artists carried the book and you learned! There wasn't much of an investment in taking a young guy and giving him a four-page story. If he fell on his face, they put it in the book anyway, because you'd have the really good man carrying the book. Nowadays, you're responsible for the book and, if you can't hack it, you've had it."

He liked this system of working. "It's too bad they don't do that today. They could bring in more people. It was a training ground. We worked in a large room, and I was exposed to so many different artists at one time. Today, no one works at the studios. Everyone's at home. To see different ways that people work, you'd have to travel to people's homes and studios and look over their shoulders.

"I worked with [Carl] Burgos, who did 'Human Torch.' I worked with Syd Shores, who took over *Captain America*. Syd Shores was probably one of the greatest draftsmen in the business in those days. I learned a lot from him. Then there was Gene Colan – in fact, Gene started about two months before I did. Danny DeCarlo – he still does *Archie*. Mike Sekowsky – he was a genius, the super-artist in those days. I learned from all these guys."

The days didn't last, unfortunately. "I didn't leave comics," he reflected. "Let's say comics folded. Back in the '40s, when I broke into comics, there were dozens of comic book companies. In fact, at one point, I was working for four of them at once. And they all folded, except for Marvel, DC, and Dell. And Archie books were the only things that were really selling."

John continued working in the field as long as possible, this time for Dell on their movie tie-Ins. "I used to do *Roy Rogers* for Dell for a number of years. Then I did a bunch of their movie books – *Helen of Troy*, [*The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*], *The Vikings* – that was a lot of fun. I worked from stills on those, except for *The Vikings*. *Spartacus*, with Peter Ustinov – I enjoyed that and I still have all the stills. I think one of the best books I ever did was [*The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*]. But, for some reason, the industry was folding.

"People were blaming all sorts of reasons, like television. 'Television is breaking into comic audiences, turning them away.' Well, television was new, and I guess that it was one of the reasons. Another was that we were turning out garbage, dreadful stuff. So all that survived were Dell, Marvel, and DC. You couldn't get into DC – I know, I tried! Many years later, when I was very popular at Marvel, I got a call from Carmine Infantino, and he asked me to go over to DC. I said, 'No. Where the hell were you guys when I needed you?'

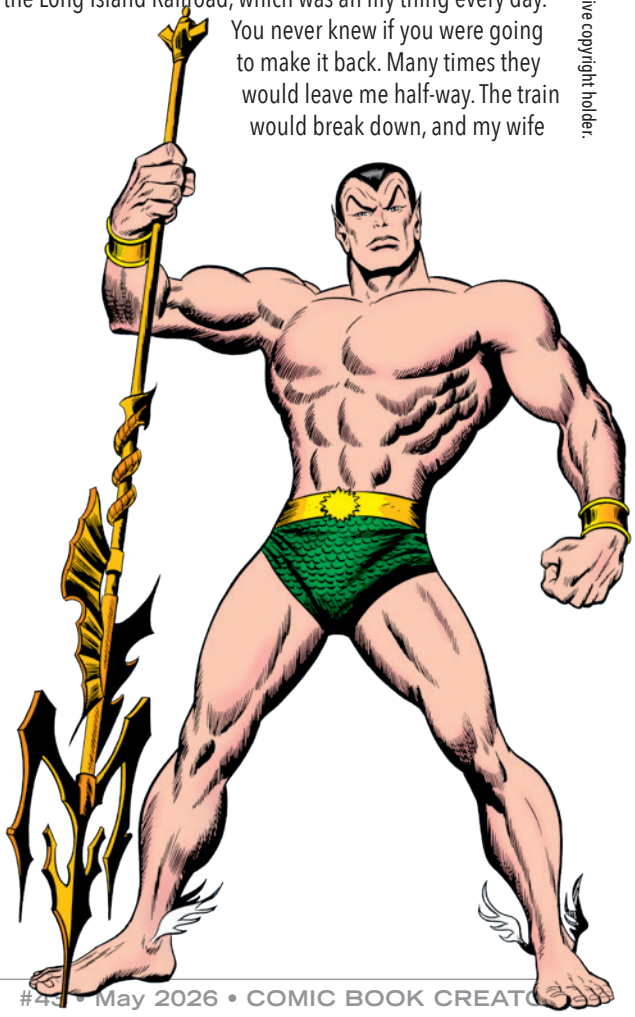
"I went to Stan Lee, to Marvel, because I had been working for an outfit called [Orbit] Publications and they had folded. At that time, Stan was turning out three books, and I think Don Heck was doing one of them." Don and John are good friends, living close to one another. "Stan had a little cubby-hole, and he was surrounded by filing cabinets. He just had the three books, and they were still doing five- or seven-page stories. He gave me $21, $22, pencil and ink. I just couldn't survive on that rate, so I had to go."

Back to Marvel

This was a rough time tor John. "I just couldn't get any more work," he said. "Places were folding up one after another. I'd do a few books for a company, and then they'd fold. Maybe I was doing it!" He laughed again. "No, really, it was a state. I had no work. I started making the rounds of advertising agencies. I made the rounds for about ten months, and I had no work whatsoever in that time. Finally, I hit it at a really terrific studio in those days. I was given an opportunity, because the head saw something in my drawing. I knew *nothing* about the field! But he said he'd give me a break, and he sat me at a table, and there I learned. I learned doing layouts, which is what I mostly did there. Before then, I knew nothing about painting or anything like that. So there I was, in advertising, and from there I broke into doing paperbacks.

"I didn't do science fiction paperbacks; I did historical adventures. I was in that field for eight or nine years, and then I got a call from Stan Lee one day. He asked me if I'd be interested in going back into comics.''

Since leaving the comics field, John had moved to Long Island and married his wife, Delores. "I had been commuting from here into the city every day. Now, that's three hours going, three hours back, door to door. And I was using the Long Island Railroad, which was an iffy thing every day. You never knew if you were going to make it back. Many times they would leave me half-way. The train would break down, and my wife



would have to come and pick me up. They had no buses, no courtesy to the passengers. They'd just leave you and that was it. 'Sorry, the train has broken down.' I had had it, all those years commuting, and so it was either move into the city or get something else.

"It's funny how things turn up," he reflected. "I got this call from Stan Lee, and I had no idea how he had found me. At the time I left Marvel, I was living in Brooklyn. How the hell did he get my number? He never told me – I still have no idea! 'I have my ways, John,' he said. He made me an offer that was pretty good for the time, and I liked the idea of getting back into comics then. They were doing three or four panels to a page, and this was beautiful." In the '40s, of course, there were considerably more panels to a page, and the resulting drawings tended to be too cramped for John's style. "I would sit down and knock those pages out," he says of his '60s work. "I loved it. Stan said, 'Do one panel, two panels a page, it's up to you. It's not like the old days – you won't even have a full script, just an outline.' It was a good deal, so I went back to work for Marvel."

Pure Buscema

Art is his first love, and he is his own severest critic. "What you see, what everyone sees me do, is not John Buscema. It's Jack Kirby. I've taken a bit of Jack Kirby, and a bit of this and a bit of that, and put together a 'comic book style.'

"I'm not saying that it was 100% Kirby. There was John Buscema there! What I'm saying is that it wasn't *pure*, like Jack Kirby is pure. But, if I were to sit down and draw the way that John Buscema would draw, naturally it would be totally different from what you see. Consequently, over the years, different books I've done look different, like a different John Buscema."

He laughed again. "People may say 'What are you doing in this field if you don't feel comfortable?' To me, it's the easiest way to make money."

He admits to having made mistakes in his approach to comics, and some of them have made him very unhappy. For example, "I've not been doing finished artwork, but breakdowns. Consequently, there's very little control over an inker on my part. If I do a finished drawing, the inker can do just so much, but if I only do a breakdown, he can go in any direction he wants. I've been very unhappy about it, but it was simple economics. I make a lot of money breaking down pages. I can draw, five, six pages a day. Doing the finished drawing, I can only do two-and-a-half, three a day. I seem to make more money with the lower rate I get for breakdowns than on the higher rate I get for finished art."

Struggles

He sighed. "I just got to the point where I was disgusted with what they've been doing to my stuff over the years, and I said 'I'll take it over.' But I didn't realize the problems I was going to have. I haven't inked in years and, consequently, it's been a struggle, an absolute struggle. It's not something you can just pick up after you haven't done it 10, 15 years. You can't just pick it up! I had thought 'I'll do it! I know I can do it – I've done it before! In a few weeks I'll get it.' But it's been *months*, and I'm still not happy with it. But now I'm beginning to get what I wanted. Because of this period, everything has suffered – the drawing, the storytelling, because I was more concerned with how the finished product would be, and I wasn't concentrating on the storytelling.

"I think I've got It now. Because of what I'm doing. I'm *happy* with it."

He is a dedicated worker, and constantly striving for improvement In his art. He works long hours, even when he isn't doing his comic book pages. "I get up in the morning and I go into my cell over there," he jokes, pointing to his studio. "I'm stuck in this place, day in and day out. At the end of the day, I just don't have the energy to get up and do anything. I put in a long day.

"I was up today at 5:30, and this is my day, every day. One day this week, I was up at 1:30 in the morning. I wake up in the middle of the night, whatever time it is, and I can't get back to sleep. So I come down, have breakfast, read the paper, and then go to work. At the end of the day, at 8 or 9 o'clock, I just can't keep my eyes open!"

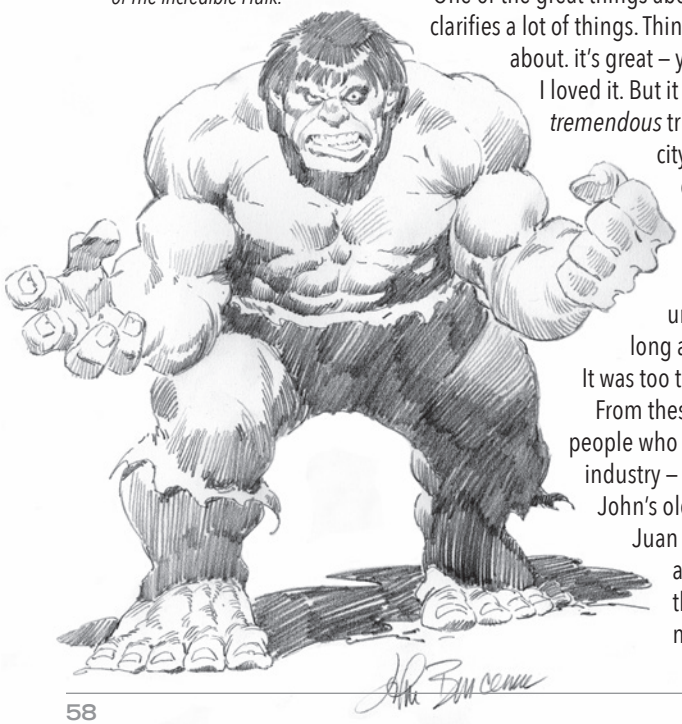
The Buscema Art School

John's art is instantly recognizable, as opposed to the similarity of a lot of the younger artists. "One of the reasons is that they latch onto the most popular artist of the day," John explained. "The guy who happens to be selling. They're fans, you see. They grew up on comics and a lot of them haven't had any art training. Really, none of the basics. So, consequently, what they do is to latch onto somebody. When I taught at my school, I had guys who had graduated from art school, who couldn't draw and didn't know anything

Above: *We believe it was Tom Palmer's suggestion to paint this portrait of his late friend, John Buscema, after merely being asked to participate in my* Comic Book Artist *#21 [Aug. '02] tribute. His piece was gratefully used as the issue's cover.* **Previous page:** *John's* Sub-Mariner *covers, all cover-dated 1968. Inks on #2, 5 Frank Giacoia; #7, Dan Adkins.* Sub-Mariner *#1 [May '68] cover detail by John, with Sol Brodsky inks.* **Below:** *John's iconic* Avengers Annual *#2 [Sept. '68] cover, with inks by Giacoia.*

Above: *What a terrific run of books were helmed by writer Roy Thomas and artist John Buscema for the latter '60s issues of* The Avengers! *That era included the arrival of a modern-day incarnation of The Vision, an android character loosely based on the same-name Simon and Kirby hero of the '40s. Cover of #57 [Oct. '68], was penciled (and maybe inked) by John.*

Below: *John's awesome rendition of The Incredible Hulk.*



about composing. I'm talking about the colleges, not some private school that some guy put together. Some of the guys in my class were *amazed* at how the figure was constructed. They were never taught the drawing of the figure – simple draftsmanship. They weren't taught how to put a picture together. What they were taught was how to express yourself. But you can't earn a living expressing yourself. You have to learn the basics. And there are a lot of guys who can draw, but can't tell a story."

John started a comic book art school in 1975, which ran for three years in Manhattan. Why did he start this venture? "People were asking, 'Can you recommend a comic book school?' Now, there is no such thing as a comic book school. No one went to comic book school; we went to art school. We learned to draw, to paint pictures, to put pictures together. So I got together with a couple of guys in the field and I said, 'Look, why don't we start up a school?' They agreed, but they chickened out. They thought they were going to commit themselves and fall behind in their work. And they dropped out. There were three guys. I'm not going to mention names – they know who they are!" he laughed. "I thought that maybe I'd give up the idea, but then I thought 'Why should I?' And I did it on my own. I taught this class. The second or third year, Don Heck took over one of my classes.

"One of the great things about teaching art is that it clarifies a lot of things. Things that you don't think about. it's great – you learn while you teach. I loved it. But it didn't pay for me. It's a *tremendous* trip for me, going into the city. After a day of work, I'd quit at four and leave the house. The class would begin at seven o'clock, and run for three hours until ten o'clock. It was too long a day, three times a week. It was too tiring."

From these classes, there emerged people who are now working in the industry – Bob Hall, who works on John's old book, *The Avengers*; Juan Ortiz; Richard Howell; and a few others. The three years were by no means wasted.

Storytelling

"I despise the super-heroes!" he proclaimed loudly. "I cannot draw them without vomiting!" He broke into deep laughter at his remarks. His renditions of many of the super-heroes have been much praised, but he doesn't see them that way. "I hated every minute of it," he confessed. "The only book I ever worked on that I really enjoyed was *Thor*. But, after a while, even that was a hack thing. I enjoyed it when they were in Asgard, but whenever they brought him down to Earth, it became a bore. I don't like drawing cars or buildings. I like drawing buildings that I can make up."

The essence of his craft, as John sees it, is storytelling. "I've worked with a lot of writers," he remarked. "I've worked with Stan Lee and with Roy Thomas. To me, they're two of the best writers in the business. They each have a different philosophy. Stan wanted a story to *flow*, so you could read the story without having to look at the dialogue or the captions. He always felt that the reader could pick up the book and flip the pages and tell what the story was about. Roy always felt the opposite. He said, 'If the pictures can tell the story, what's the point of the writer?' I tried to work with both of them, but I tend to lean towards Stan's way of doing a book. Whether it's right or wrong, that's the way I've been doing it.

"I think that if you leave it to an *experienced* artist, then *he's* the guy who's telling the story. I think that the most successful strips are the ones written and drawn by the same man.

"The thing I find with writers is that they don't visualize what they are writing. If I tell a story, I visualize it before I draw it. Now, I'll get a script from one of the writers, and he'll say, 'So-and-so takes out a knife and stabs someone.' But we've already established that the knife was dropped in a canyon somewhere. The writer doesn't remember that because he doesn't *visualize* it."

Robert E. Howard

Conan is his big love. Buscema speaks with enjoyment of the original stories of Robert E. Howard. "When I was working from the Howard books, Conan was the greatest joy in my life," he admitted. "He wrote everything. I could *see* the dungeon, I could *see* the castle, I could *see* the people, the atmosphere. Unfortunately, again, the biggest mistake I ever did was that I didn't do the finished drawings on those stories or ink them. They gave them to inkers who did whatever they wanted with those pages, and they destroyed the entire concept. I wish I could do every one of those stories again, working from the Howard books.

"It was like I didn't have to draw them. I just sat there and *swiped* what Howard gave me in that book. It was like looking at a movie. He's great; I love his works. The people who've taken over *Conan*, like [Lin] Carter and [L. Sprague] deCamp, and all the other people, they're absolutely lost. They don't understand Conan. The only one who ever did was Howard. He could describe a scene in sentences where it would take pages for other people to do it."

After 12 years on *Conan*, how does he feel? "It's getting a little dull for me now," he confessed. "It doesn't have to be boring, but the writers do not give me the plots that I think there should be. It's always the same situations, over and

over. They don't have the same imagination that Howard has." He laughed. "But then again, few people do!

"I enjoyed Roy Thomas' *Conan* plots. I didn't always agree with them! We'd sometimes get on the phone and argue them over. I felt that Conan was a very strong person, more than the average guy, and Roy was always afraid that I'd make him into a super-hero, take him away from the real world and have him with almost the strength of a Spider-Man. But I feel that there are people today who are so strong it's unbelievable. I was just reading the other day of a guy who lifted 6,000 pounds with his back. This is unbelievable. Six-thousand pounds! He had a back board with a group of people sitting on it, got under it and lifted it off the ground. Now, this is in the realm of a Superman or a Spider-Man. But Roy Thomas was always afraid of that.

"One thing I feel is that there's no point in having a very strong guy like Conan, with all this action going on, and always have him use a sword. You don't need a powerful man for that. Give Conan things to do with his strength – then it's justified that he's big and strong. But they *still* don't do that. If he gets into a fight, he's going to be using a sword.

Graphic Novel

"Now, I've plotted a 64-page book that's going to be turned into a graphic novel. I'm going to draw and ink it and everything." He chuckled at the thought. "They gave me an advance on it three years ago, and I haven't started it yet. One of these days, they're going to take me to court or something." He laughed. "Anyhow, I have scenes in there where Conan loses his sword and he's going to get out of this situation with his strength. With his ability to jump, and leap, and to crush skulls with one punch, just as Howard envisaged. In one of the books, he crushes a guy's skull with one blow. No one, in the ring, has ever crushed anyone's skull in all the years of fighting. Even the bare knuckle days; no one. So Conan is super-human."

John came to the *Conan* series after it had been started. The first artist on the strip was Barry Smith, and he created the feel to the series that it still possesses. John doesn't like the way that it was done. "It was wrong," he said. "I think it was too civilized. This story takes place thousands of years ago, before recorded history. I'm not saying that they should have had people living in caves, but there should have been a primitive look involved. But the buildings that were established in these books were very ornate. It shouldn't be that way. It was a wrong concept. I visualize something different.

"Now, when I do this graphic novel, I'm going to design my own buildings. I'm going back to the Norse way, where they used wood and skins. This is the way that I think the buildings should have been constructed in the *Conan* books. Not with plaster and mortar and curlicues all over the place, and art deco. Art deco? No! It doesn't have the flavor of *Conan* as I visualized it when I first saw it.

"Conan is fantasy," he explained. "They just don't seem to realize it's fantasy. There's a lot of magic in it, a lot of things coming up from under the ground and so on."

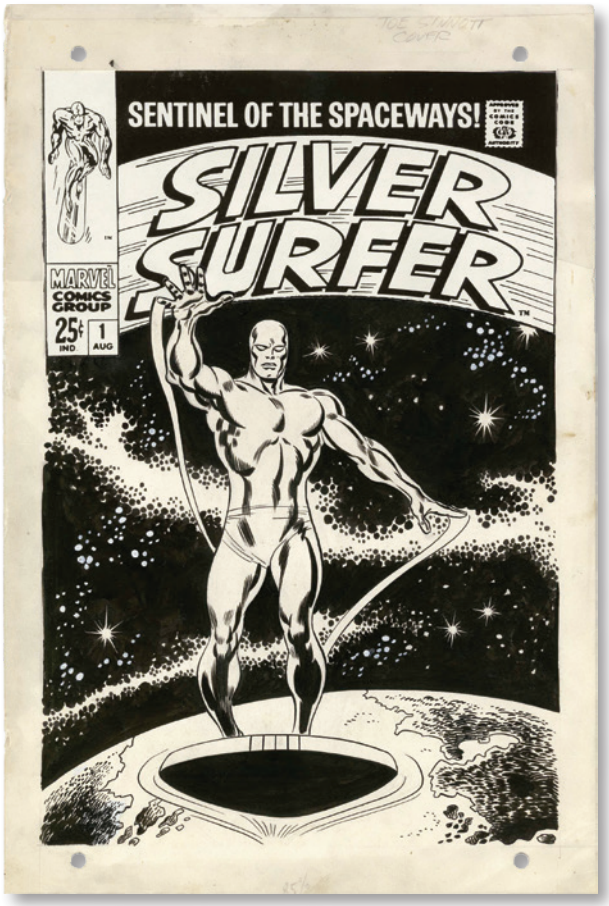
Royalty Problems

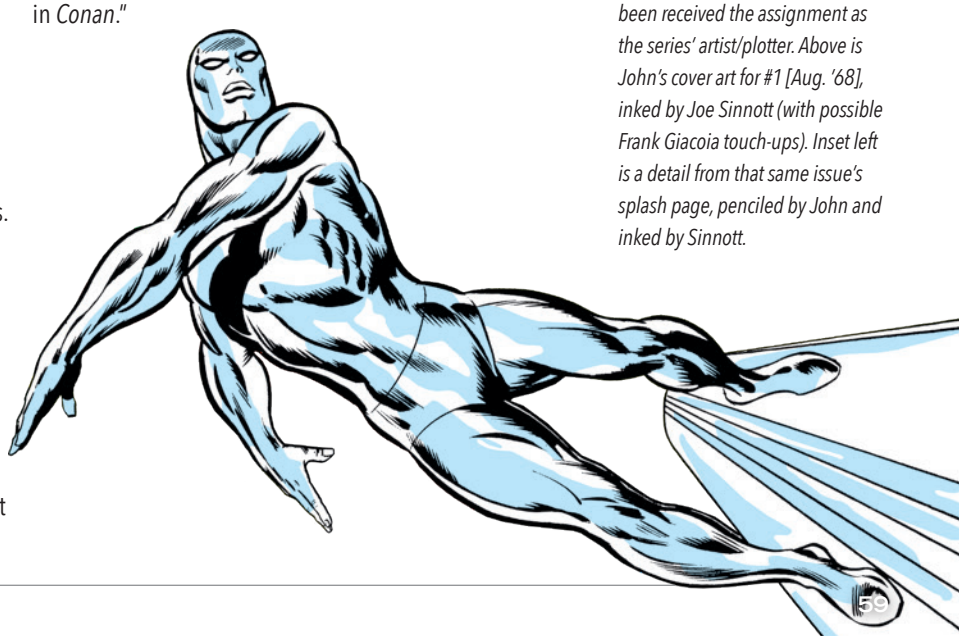
"There is a problem," he revealed. "A lot of writers don't want to work on *Conan* because the royalties earned are less than on the super-hero books. These royalties can amount to quite a sum of money. But they don't seem to realize that if we can do a damned good job on *Conan*, the royalties will go up.

"We turn out so many comics that you can't expect a classic every time. But let's not have every book with him riding on a pony! There are other ways to have him go from one place to another. I could pick up any ten *Conan* books that I've done, and half-a-dozen will have camping scenes. Or they're on a horse going from one place to another. It's not necessary.

"Humor? There's no such thing as humor in these books! And we used to do it years ago with Stan Lee. Stan always wanted to inject maybe a panel or something, a bit of humor.

"One sequence I did recently, Conan is trying to make out with two girls on a balcony, and this little guy comes running by and knocks him over. He's running away from a couple of bullies, who catch him. For one reason or another, they're going to cut him up. Meanwhile, the girls walk away, because they see the fight, and Conan is really upset, losing his chance. He turns around and sees this little guy being taken advantage of, and he says 'Great, beat the hell out of him.' But when the bullies pull out knives and cut the little guy's nose, Conan beats them up. I have this little guy walking 'round through the whole story with his nose bandaged up. It's no big deal, but it's a little something different. And Conan tries to get rid of the little guy, but he's following Conan all over. He's a leech. It's been done a thousand times, I know, but not in *Conan*. We never do it in *Conan*."





This page: *As related in Ye Ed.'s interview with Big John this ish, the artist had mixed feelings about working on his beloved* Silver Surfer *series during its original 1968–70 run. While initially giving his absolute best to the work – especially #4 [Feb. '69], the one with Thor and Asgard, writer/editor Stan Lee's criticism of that job discouraged him in the extreme. Plus he empathized with the character's creator, Jack Kirby, who was reportedly very upset to not have been received the assignment as the series' artist/plotter. Above is John's cover art for #1 [Aug. '68], inked by Joe Sinnott (with possible Frank Giacoia touch-ups). Inset left is a detail from that same issue's splash page, penciled by John and inked by Sinnott.*

Charlie Chaplin

This aspect of humor in *Conan* interests John greatly. He sees Conan as essentially different from modern man. He wouldn't find verbal jokes so funny, perhaps, but he might favor slapstick. "His sense of humor?" John mused. "Well, if a guy stumbles on a spear and impales himself, maybe that's funny to him. Because the guy was a klutz, or whatever. Conan is a *barbarian*. I don't think he'd laugh at Bob Hope jokes! I think he might laugh at Charlie Chaplin, at visual humor.

"They have Conan analyzing things. He isn't the type who analyzes things; he acts. I've known people like that. He has a simple way of looking at things. He's a barbarian," he emphasizes again. "He has no education, he's never gone to school. He lives by his wits. But they have him doing things that Sherlock Holmes would do. He can't figure out how a magician does this or that – no way! Conan can't sit back and analyze things. Maybe he has the ability, but he doesn't do it. He won't do it."

Great Paintings

Although *Conan* is virtually John's only work right now, he recently drew a page for a portfolio of "the world's greatest comic book artists" which came out in France. He enjoyed his trip overseas and loves Europe. Being of Italian descent, he is enchanted with Italy, and speaks highly of most of the countries that he visited. He admits he'd love to work over there, given a chance.

"I've been thinking about doing something different," he said. "As soon as I finish that graphic novel. If I finally get to it!" He laughed at the thought of the much-promised book. "I'd like to do something away from the barbarian thing."

How does John relax from his long day at the art table? "I love reading art books," he grinned. "I've got a big collection of them. You should see Don Heck's collection, though-I drool every time I go over! He's got this huge wall, all filled with art books! If I had to live my life over again, I'd be a painter.

"People ask, 'Who do you like?', but it's like music. You like Beethoven, you like Brahms, you like Mendelssohn, all of them. I cannot go through a day without music. I listen to them all, and enjoy every one. I can't say *everything* – I don't like anything before Mozart. Bach, I just can't take. But Mozart on, I can live with any of that.

"It's the same thing with paintings. Mention any painter! I've been to Europe several times, and I'll go, say, to the Louvre. You've got to see the museums, or what's the point in going?" he asked. I heartily agreed, being a museum addict myself. "And I see paintings, great paintings, and I have never even heard of some of these artists. Beautiful, unbelievable paintings. There are thousands of painters over the years that did great work, and we don't even know that they lived. There are so many great paintings around, really. The Metropolitan Museum of Art [in New York] is loaded with them.

"There's a picture there, a French impressionist, I think, and it's a guy looking in a mirror. He looks like a dandy, and is dressed in a bowler hat. It was done at the turn of the century, and is the most beautiful painting you could imagine. You hear about Manet, Monet, Degas, but there are other ones. I love them all, every one.

"Recently, I came across a small book by an amazing artist, a Hungarian. I had to buy the book. But I had never heard of him until I came across that book. I can really get lost in art!"

This brought him back to his own youth, when he was captivated by art for the first time. "There was a time," he said, "that if people didn't work like Norman Rockwell, forget it. I thought Norman Rockwell was the end when I was in high school. Then I was exposed to Van Gogh, and to Manet, and they didn't work like Rockwell, so they weren't as good. Then I went to the extreme – I became Van Gogh crazy. And all my Norman Rockwells, years of illustrations – I tore up and threw away. You go from one extreme to another when you're young. As you get older, you realize that every one of them is good. Norman Rockwell is good for what he does, Van Gogh is great for what he does, and you have to attempt to understand what they are trying to accomplish. Now I kick myself for having thrown away all those Norman Rockwells! But when you're young, there's only black-&-white, no gray."

Prince Valiant

Not all of his taste runs to the classic painters and artists. He also strongly admires the earlier illustrators of the comic strip. "I did the same thing with Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant,*" he said regretfully. "I had hundreds of them that I saved from the *New York Journal*, Don Heck has them all, I think. He has a collection that's unbelievable! I had them as a kid, but I grew beyond comics, and I threw everything away. I could kick myself – they're paying a fortune for it nowadays.

"I read the other day that one of Norman Rockwell's paintings – and not really one of his better ones – went for half-a-million dollars. And there was a time when he was giving them away to people as gifts! Probably if you had asked Hal Foster, he'd have given you original pages of *Prince Valiant.* They used to give them away for nothing. I knew guys who worked up at the syndicate who were taking his stuff and giving it to their friends. Now a Hal Foster full page runs for $3,000!

"When I read comics as a kid, the only comics that were valid to me were *Prince Valiant* – Hal Foster – Alex Raymond and Burne Hogarth. These were the only three I could tolerate in comics. Again, it was a matter of black-&-white. All the other guys didn't measure up to Hal Foster and Alex Raymond. Raymond was a supreme draftsman, but although it was drawn beautifully, it just didn't have the life of Hal Foster. Foster may not have been the draftsman that Raymond was, but his stuff had much more life to it. You can respond to his material. I think the greatest strip ever drawn in comics is *Prince Valiant.* No, you can't call it comics, it's illustration – pure illustration.

"I was at one of those lunches once, where they honored Hal Foster, and they asked him how long he spent working on a page. And he said 50 hours a week – on one page!" In Spain, he met a comics artist who spends two days on a page, producing beautiful work – but gets paid just the same rate that John gets for the same period of time and four times the volume!

Modern Times

We talked about comic work that he admires now. "Joe Kubert," he offered promptly. "I was talking to some of the guys in New York a few months ago, discussing which books sell and why. I was surprised to find out just how well some of the books are selling. They do nothing to me. I get them every month and look at them – nothing. But I look at a Joe Kubert book…" He leaned forward for emphasis. "I hate the guy's guts, he's so good! I hate him!" He broke into laughter. "He's the master today, to me. He's got the whole thing, he knows how to do it.

"There is one book that I enjoy looking at," he said on reflection. "I enjoy looking at the drawings because I think the guy is one of the best draftsmen in the business. That's *Atari Force*, by Garcia Lopez. This guy is a draftsman. I don't know how long he's been in the field, but he's doing some terrific stuff." Oddly enough, Don Heck had also mentioned to me that he enjoyed Garcia Lopez's work. "One of the reasons is that we're artists," John explained. "We look at the draftsman ship, the composition, how the guy tells the story. We look at all these things, where the average reader doesn't.

"We've got a unique thing in comics that no other publication has. We've got to appeal to people from seven to 30 years old. There is no book on the market, no publication, that has that kind of spectrum of age. And we have to depend on those readers. The majority of our readers are teenagers, from ten through college. It's tough. If you get one group, one age, it's not enough to support a book. You have to get them all. And I don't know how it's done. I don't think anybody knows how it's done, because if we did every book would be a winner!

"I think one of the dullest books today is *Superman*," he observed. "And yet it sells. Why? The reputation? It's been selling for 40 years. Another dull book is *Spider-Man*. Well, maybe not now, because they've changed the costume. I haven't read it recently, but they have a beautiful costume, I will say that. It's a tremendous improvement. But before the new costume came out, *Spider-Man* was a best-selling book. Why? I don't understand."

I mentioned the introspection so favored in comics nowadays as adding to the dullness of them. "The entire industry is being worked by fans," he agreed. "I didn't grow up on comics. Jack Kirby didn't grow up on comics – he *started* comics! Syd Shore didn't grow up on comics, nor did Joe Kubert, John Romita, or Gene Colan. None of us did. We worked in it, but we didn't grow up in it.

"They take it all so seriously. There's no humor in it, no tongue-in-cheek. No way! This is all serious stuff to them. Maybe that's what's selling, I don't know. None of us as kids ever saved books. We'd read them and throw them away, or we'd trade them. That's it. Then the fans came in…"

BIG JOHN: 1994

[**Introduction to *Comic Book Artist* #21 appearance:** *On Oct. 2, 1994, John Buscema was in London as star guest at UKCAC (United Kingdom Comic Arts Convention). Securing John was a major coup for the organizers, who had lined him up on panels and signings throughout what must have proved a very long day. During a break, we sat in a corner and he good-naturedly granted the following interview. The artist was good-humored, sharp, and not above catching me out occasionally – in short, far from the intimidating ogre of rumor. The interview appeared originally in the March 1995 issue (#37) of the long-defunct British magazine* Comic World. *This is the verbatim transcript.* – **Alan R. Woollcombe.**]

Alan R. Woollcombe: *I read an interview with Steve Englehart recently. He said that in the mid-1970s you and he were both hired by Jenette Kahn at DC briefly, but then Stan [Lee] came back to you with a bigger offer of money.*

John Buscema: That's a fabrication. I never worked for DC in my entire life. I was approached three times: once many years ago by Carmine Infantino and twice by Jenette Kahn. (Actually, I shouldn't say Jenette Kahn; it was one of her editors.) I did meet Jenette twice, and twice we couldn't, err, come to any sort of, err… They couldn't take me away from Marvel, okay? What I had at Marvel I could never get at DC.

Above : *Exuberant pin-up of the Earth's Mightiest Heroes from* The Avengers Annual *#2 [Sept. '68], penciled by John and inked by Bill Everett (who very likely did full art on the Hercules figure).* **Previous page:** *Corner box art by John and inker Klaus Janson,* Wolverine *#1 [Nov. '88].* **Below:** *John's Mephisto from* The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe *#7 [July '83]. Inks by Joe Rubinstein.*

Above: *A rare occurrence for the artist to perform both tasks, Big John both penciled and inked this iconic Thunder God figure for the cover of* Thor *#370 [Aug. '86].*

ALAN WOOLLCOMBE*'s many writing credits span both comics and general press in the U.K. and U.S. He's written news, reviews, obituaries, and conducted interviews for outlets that include* The Independent, Jewish Chronicle, Press Gazette, Mayfair, *Marvel Comics,* Comics International, Western Morning New, Devon Today, *Fantagraphics, and Titan. He was also scriptwriter on* Rupert Bear *for Marvel UK and cartoonist on* Enlightenment *magazine and* Fast Lane. *He was also joint organizer of "The Unseen Frank Bellamy" exhibition at the Basement Gallery, Brixton, in 1990.*

Alan: *What do you have at Marvel?*

John: One of the things I have at Marvel is *Conan*, which I love. DC wanted me to work on *Superman,* which I think is probably as dull as *Spider-Man* – I wouldn't be happy working on it. Also, the benefits that I have, which is very difficult for another company to match, really. I've been there a long time and they've been very generous with me, and DC could never match what I have at Marvel.

Alan: *Have you ever worked for another comic company?*

John: Oh, before – many years ago, I worked with quite a few companies, but every one of them closed up like a domino effect. This was back in the '50s. [*chuckles*]

Alan: *Did you ever work with Joe Kubert?*

John: No, no, never worked with Joe Kubert. It's a funny thing – if I've been in the field for 47 years, I think Joe has been in it for about 50 years or better. I met him [for the first time] about five years ago. I met [DC editor] Julie Schwartz at a convention and I mentioned that I would love to meet Joe Kubert. He told me that the next time I got up to the city [New York] to give him a call and he would make sure that Joe would be there, and we would meet. In fact, we did. We had lunch together and I was very impressed with Joe. I think he's a fabulous artist, I think he's fantastic, and I think he's the same thing as a man. He's really a very interesting person, and we seemed to get along very well.

I had an embarrassing situation: Joe has a school [the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art] and he asked me if I would be willing to have a graduation exercise or something with the students, would I be willing to go to [New] Jersey and be a guest speaker? I agreed, and then I had to back out because I was so busy and that's quite a distance – I would have had to kill an entire day and I just couldn't have afforded that day. And he said "Well, maybe next time" – and I had to turn him down a second time because of the same situation. He never called me again! [*chuckles*] So I feel kind of embarrassed – I don't want to meet him face to face! [*laughter*]

Alan: *You mentioned you were bored by* Spider-Man*, but you did ink some early issues of* Amazing Spider-Man*….*

John: No, I have never inked any job except mine up at Marvel. I penciled – I forget who inked, maybe….

Alan: *Mickey Demeo?*

John: Mickey Demeo was Frank Giacoia, by the way. Did you know that?

Alan: *I thought Frankie Ray was Frank Giacoia.*

John: And I think he was also… wait a minute, Mickey Demeo is [Mike] Esposito. That is not a real [name] – somebody is using a double, like Frank Giacoia used Frankie Ray, and Demeo is the same situation.

Alan: *And Gene Colan used Adam Austin.*

John: Yes, I know that. And John Buscema used John Buscema! [*chuckles*] I don't know why the hell they do it. Well, I do know about Giacoia, I know why that happened, but I won't go into it, because it's his personal affair.

Alan: *But you did pencil* Amazing Spider-Man*?*

John: Yes, I did pencil *Spider-Man* – I did maybe half a dozen issues, but all I did was breakdowns. I didn't do finished pencils. I can't remember who inked, but I know I didn't. In fact, I was very upset doing *Spider-Man*, I thought it would blow my mind if I kept working on it. I mentioned it to Roy Thomas, and he told Stan Lee, and Stan Lee took me off the *Spider-Man*.

Alan: *So what is it about Spider-Man?*

John: I think it's dull, I don't like the character. Look, I feel that way about most super-heroes. The only one I have a bit of interest in – a bit – would be Thor, because of Asgard. Whenever I did *Thor* and they had it on Asgard, I enjoyed doing it. They'd take him off Asgard and put him on Earth, I was bored to tears with it.

Alan: *What about* The Avengers*?*

John: I never had a care for it – in fact, I hated it because they had so many damn characters running all over the place. I can't remember the past two or three books that I've done, I completely obliterate everything from my mind…

Alan: *Well, that sounds like a promising introduction for my questions about your career!*

John: [*Laughter*] Oh, that I can [do]. My career started in '48 with Marvel, which was Timely, at the time. They were in the Empire State Building at the time, on the 14th floor – I remember that, I can never forget that!

Alan: *Was Stan* [*Lee*] *in charge at the time?*

John: Yes, he was. That was April, 1948, and he gave me my first job at Marvel, on staff, for a salary. I started off with $75 a week, a hell of a lot of money in those days.

Alan: *Were you sweeping the floors?*

John: No, no, I was drawing with all the greats. When I walked into that room, I was on another plane when I saw those great comic book men that I had grown up with, you know – Carl Burgos (on "The Human Torch")…

Alan: *Bill "Sub-Mariner" Everett?*

John: Well, Bill Everett – I met him, but he wasn't on staff, he was freelancing. Syd Shores (great draftsman)…

Alan: *Did he ever ink any of your work?*

John: No… Yes! A few years ago, before he passed away, I think he inked one or two things that I did, I don't remember exactly which ones. Danny DeCarlo was there, Mike Sekowsky was up there – what a roomful of talent! Absolutely fabulous – I was in another world with these guys.

Alan: *Do you remember your first story?*

John: My very first story was a four- or five-pager about these men who decided they were going to rob Abraham Lincoln's grave, and I had the toughest time drawing Abraham Lincoln! [*chuckles*] The editor took a penny out of his pocket and said "This is what Abraham Lincoln looks like!" [*laughter*] Anyway, it was a rough four pages and I hated it, but I couldn't wait to see it published. But we were not allowed to touch the books when they came in – they would

bring all the new books into the office, place them on a table in the foyer, and no one could touch them. Today, you get every book in creation – you get them from DC, you get them from Marvel, you get them from the other publishers. I'm piled with books from all the publishers. In those days you couldn't touch them, you had to go out and buy the book if you wanted it, so that's what I did – I went out and bought my first book!

Alan: *Were you penciling and inking?*

John: I was just penciling. I was with Marvel, Timely, for about a year-and-a-half, and then they put everyone out on freelance. I freelanced and then I started moving to other companies. I worked for small outfits – one was Our Publications (which was later known as Orbit). I worked for Western Printing (which was Dell).

Alan: *Anything for EC?*

John: No. DC.

Alan: *Harvey?*

John: I might have, but I don't remember. I worked for several small outfits, and I don't remember the names or what I did at those places.

Alan: *And did you specialize in any particular field?*

John: No, it was anything. Science fiction, Western, crime, romance…

Alan: *Three-D?*

John: No, I never did a 3-D book. But they had a large variety of stories in them. Not today. Today, it's just super-heroes. In those days, you could do almost anything. It was very interesting. I enjoyed it.

Alan: *What about film adaptations?*

John: Yes, I did a hell of a lot of those in the early '50s for Western Printing. I did the one with Tony Curtis and Kirk Douglas, *The Vikings,* with Ernest Borgnine as the father. I did *Helen of Troy*, I did one with Victor Mature. I did quite a few. Also classics adaptations – I did work on the book, *The Count of Monte Cristo.*

Alan: *Did you work on anybody else's super-heroes, like the DC ones in the '50s?*

John: No. In fact I went up to DC at a very bad period – they told me they couldn't use me, they had just enough work for the people that they employed. It was a bad period in comics. Marvel had nothing – they had just a few books each month and they had the guys working on them. I think Don Heck was one of the guys that they employed. I'm not sure if Jack Kirby was doing anything for them. All I know is that Stan said, "John, we don't have that much work, and I'm sorry I can't give you any." That was '58, I think. That's when I went out into another field. I went into advertising. I was fortunate in getting into a very large studio, loaded with talent, great illustrators. It was a wonderful period of my life. I learned how to paint. I did a lot of things: I did paperback covers, layouts, editorial illustration, textbook illustrations, all kinds of stuff. I enjoyed it a lot.

Alan: *That was from '58 to…?*

John: 'Sixty-six. It was a very difficult life. Advertising was a cyclical thing, where you worked maybe six or seven months and then you sat on your hands for the rest of the year. So, those few months that you worked, you made a year's salary, but you were never home. I was never home: my son was born in 1964, and for his first year, I don't remember my son, I never saw him. Really! That's the truth! I would get home and he would be asleep, I would leave and he would be asleep. The weekends would come around and I could go home, but I'd be working.

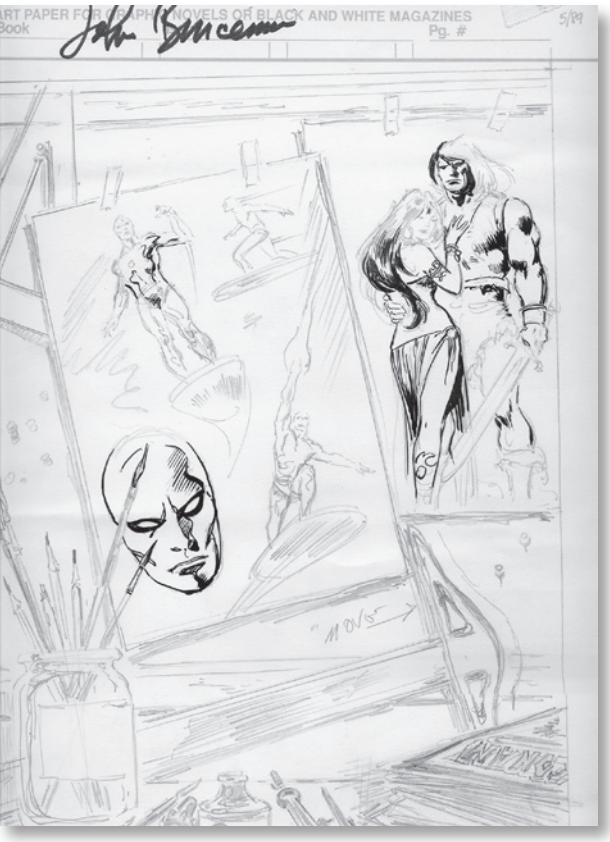
Above: *From left is John, Don Heck, and Joe Sinnott at the 1974 New York Comic Art Convention, held over July 4th weekend at Manhattan's Hotel Commodore.*

I started out on salary for about a year-and-a-half. Then I left and I went freelancing, but I had space in the city, and you had to be available to the client. When that client approached the studio for a job, you had to be there for that client. He may not give you anything for a whole week – and then, on the weekend, you'd get loaded with work. I worked for a client for two years on a freelance basis; I missed one deadline and never got another account, and it wasn't my fault, I was snowbound. He lost the account because I was late with the job and he never gave me another job. It was a real cutthroat business. Today, the studio system, as I used to know it (we used to work for all the agencies), doesn't exist, because a lot of the work is being done in-house, for example: TV storyboards.

Alan: *What prompted you to get back into comics?*

John: There was a situation. I lived in the suburbs, I was commuting by train and it was a three-hour trip into the city, door to door, and then three hours back. I just couldn't continue that way – I did it for six years, then I started commuting by car, [which] was a bit better but not that much better. My wife and I had planned "Well, we've had it – I just

Below: *John's pencils for the 1975 Mighty Marvel Comicon poster, which was inked by Joe Sinnott. That show was also located at the Commodore Hotel, which would close the following year and be reborn as the Grand Hyatt.*



Above: *Unfinished commission by John. Date on the piece is May, 1989.* **Below:** *"Conan at 55" self-caricature by John, drawn for Terry Austin.* **Bottom:** Subby *#8 [Dec. '68] cover, by John and Dan Adkins (inks).*

don't want to do this commuting." My wife was upset because she never saw me, I didn't see the kids, she was rearing up two children without me. I said, "Look, the only solution is, let's get rid of the house, and we'll move closer in to the city."

Just about that time, I got a call from Marvel. Sol Brodsky, the production manager, called and I went up there. I was afraid, I didn't want to leave what I had; I had a very good situation, I had clients. They made me a fabulous offer. Stan said, "What do you earn?" And gave me a better offer. It was a very difficult decision. I said, "I will do the books, but I'm not going to leave my job." So I kept commuting, but it was such a hassle that finally I realized that they were serious, they had plenty of work and I dropped the advertising. I didn't want to move back into the city – I wanted to stay out where I am. I love it out there, it was very rural at that time and a great place to bring up kids. (This is Long Island.) Anyway, I went into the comics, and I've been happy ever since. That started in '66.

Alan: *And you've worked for Marvel ever since?*

John: I've worked for Marvel ever since, and only Marvel. I haven't done anything for anyone else.

Alan: *What was the first book you did on your return?*

John: One of the first books I did was "Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D." [in *Strange Tales*]. After that, I did a "Hulk" [in *Tales to Astonish*] and, after that, I don't remember what I worked on. It was a short time after I was there that they put me on *The Avengers,* and I worked with Roy Thomas for quite a while on that.

Alan: *How did you get onto* The Silver Surfer*?*

John: [*The Avengers*] was very popular, doing very well, and Stan came up with the idea of doing a large book on the Silver Surfer. Books were, I think, a dime at the time and this was a 25¢ book – which was outrageously expensive, but he said it would be successful. He took me off *The Avengers* and I started with *The Silver Surfer*. I did 16 issues and Jack Kirby did the last one; it was a desperation move on Stan's part, trying to resuscitate the book, but the character was never popular with the public. Today, it's one of the better books up at Marvel, but, at the time, I guess they weren't prepared for it.

Alan: *Why did you change your style of drawing the Surfer himself?*

John: Can I tell you what happened? When Stan gave me *The Silver Surfer,* I assumed this guy was coated with silver. I assumed everybody would assume that, right? Well, Stan wasn't happy. He said, "It's not silver, John, it's a white plastic Styrofoam covering." [*laughter*] It wasn't my idea! The book started off like a house on fire, and each issue sold less, less and less. Stan was nitpicking, you know? I said "Stan, okay, fine." I wish he had told me this from the beginning, I would have made it plastic – as if anyone could tell the difference! "You're the only guy who ever mentioned that." [*laughter*]

Alan: *Is* The Silver Surfer *one of your favorites?*

John: Yes, I enjoyed doing *The Silver Surfer,* because it had a hell of a lot of freedom, especially in the first couple of books. Stan more or less gave me a rough outline of what he wanted, and I took it from there and developed the books. But then, as I say, the sales were going down and he was getting more and more control over the story plot. We got to a point where Stan would give me a plot over the phone and he'd say "What do you think, John?" I'd say, "Okay, Stan," or "Gee, Stan, I don't think that's going to work," and we'd work it over the phone. It got to a point where it just had to stop – it wasn't going anywhere. I feel strongly that the public wasn't prepared for a book like that.

Alan: *You also took over* Fantastic Four *and* Thor*.*

John: Jack Kirby left and I took the *Fantastic Four* and *Thor*. It was a real black period for Marvel – Stan called me in and said, "Jack left and we want you to take over these books." You're following Jack Kirby, man… that's a rough situation. But he felt I could do it and the books survived, they didn't die. Let me tell you something: everything I've done, I haven't seen. I don't know what the hell it looks like, I don't want to know what it looks like, I couldn't care what I've done… .[*laughs*]

Alan: *So you don't have a collection of your work at home?*

John: I have a couple of things that I saved. *The Silver Surfer*s have been gone for years. Now, I understand they're worth quite a bit of money with people collecting them, but, at the time, I couldn't care less. Maybe because I've been in it for so long, but I have no interest in….

Alan: *Is it fair to say that you look at it as simply your nine-to- five job?*

John: That's it, that's it. It's a job that keeps me out of debt, and that's the only thing I look at it as.

Alan: *Do you do painting or something like that for relaxation?*

John: I wish I could. I wish I had the time for that. But when you're working from 7:30 or 8:00 in the morning, and I don't take a long lunch break, I work straight through, I have a bite, I take off maybe 20-30 minutes, then I'll have another 15- to 20-minute nap later in the afternoon, and then I work right until five. That's it. After that, I don't have the energy – or the desire – to do anything really, I become a blob, okay? [*chuckles*] Until the next day, when I start the whole routine all over.

Alan: *So what do you do for relaxation? Are you into theatrical productions?*

John: No, no, no, no. No way, no how – but I've been teaching. It's a workshop I got involved with last year. Jack Beal, a very well known painter in America, has this workshop, and I applied for his class. He called me up and said "Are you John Buscema who wrote *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*?" I said "Yes, I am." He said, "I want you to teach," which was a shock to me. So I took a stab at it and last year I taught design (this is not for comics, by the way). This year I taught anatomy, which I enjoyed. It's sort of a vacation and I love to teach. I'll probably do it for maybe another couple of years. At the moment, that's what I'm doing outside of comics.

Alan: *Going back to your work, what are your ambitions still?*

John: I don't want to do comics. I have no ambitions to do comics, I have had enough comics to last me for the rest of my life. I'm looking forward to retirement eventually – I'm thinking in the next couple of years. Because of circumstances I have… I want to retire, and what I would love to do, the ideal situation for me, anyway, is [that] I love to teach and I love to paint. I want to paint, I want to draw, I want to do what I want to do. I don't want anyone to tell me, "John, here's an assignment – do it." I don't want to work that way any more. I've had it. All my life, I've worked that way. That's all I want – I'll be the happiest guy in the world. I don't give a damn if I don't sell a painting, I don't give a damn if I sell a painting, I have no desire to sell anything. All I want to do is do it for myself, give it away to my friends if they want it… That's all I want to do.

Alan: *Would you like to say anything about your brother Sal?*

John: In what respect? As a brother or as an artist? [*laughter*]

Alan: *Well, you mentioned that you don't see much of him because you're in different parts of the country.*

John: We're quite a distance apart, yeah.

Alan: *His style has changed incredibly over the years…*

John: Yeah, [it's] become very stylized. [*long pause*]

Alan: *Is there anything you would like to say about his artwork?*

John: Ah, no, because I'm too close to him. If I say anything, if I don't say it the right way, someone might say "Well, it's because it's his brother" You know what I'm saying? So I would just leave it that I'm very happy that he is successful at what he's doing. It seems that, as the years go by, he has become more and more popular with *Spider-Man*. Great, this is what I want, but I'm not going to go beyond that. I'm not going to say he's a genius or anything, because I'm the only genius in the family! [laughter] Got you there, didn't I?

Alan: *Why didn't you get onto* Conan *right from the start?*

John: I was approached by Roy Thomas with the project to do *Conan*. He mailed a couple of the paperbacks to me and I read 'em and I loved it. I told Roy "This is what I want, something that I can really sink my teeth into, especially the way [*Conan* creator Robert E.] Howard writes it." I could visualize this.

Well, apparently, at the time, Marvel was owned by Martin Goodman, and he felt that my rate was too high to take a gamble on some new kind of [project]. It was entirely different, it wasn't a super-hero or anything that had been done before. The closest thing to that would be *Tarzan*. Anyway, he had no confidence in spending too much money on the book, and that's where Barry Smith came in – [he was] very cheap. I know what he got paid, and I'd be embarrassed to tell you how much it was, because I'd be embarrassed for Marvel. I told that to Stan, too, but that's beside the point. Anyway, he did the book and it became popular. I don't know why Barry left and they gave it to me, but I was originally the first one. And I've enjoyed it ever since. I love doing it.

Alan: *And you did it more or less continuously up until a few years ago.*

John: Yeah. When Roy left Marvel, left *Conan*, the writers that picked it up didn't understand the character. They were tearing him down, every story just annoyed me. It was a helter-skelter thing, picking him up here, dropping him off there. It wasn't even Conan! In fact, I had a disagreement with the editor. He said Conan was not really the main character in this concept; he was just a catalyst for other adventures. In other words, he's not really the important one, it's the period – that was his concept! It didn't make sense to me. This character is a very interesting character – he may be a barbarian but I love this character.

So I said "To hell with it! I've had it," and I walked out. I didn't walk out, I said I wanted something else and they took me off and gave me something. That's one thing about Marvel, they're very understanding. I worked on *Wolverine* and *The Punisher* and a couple of other things, I don't remember what the other things were. I wasn't happy.

Roy Thomas came back and I was very happy to hear it, and I decided this might be the time to go back to *Conan*. [Conan editor] Richard [Ashford] was very kind… At the moment, I'm happy with *Conan*. Next week, I may change my mind!

Alan: *Are you working on anything else?*

John: No, nothing.

Alan: *What about* How to Draw More Marvel Comics *or anything like that?*

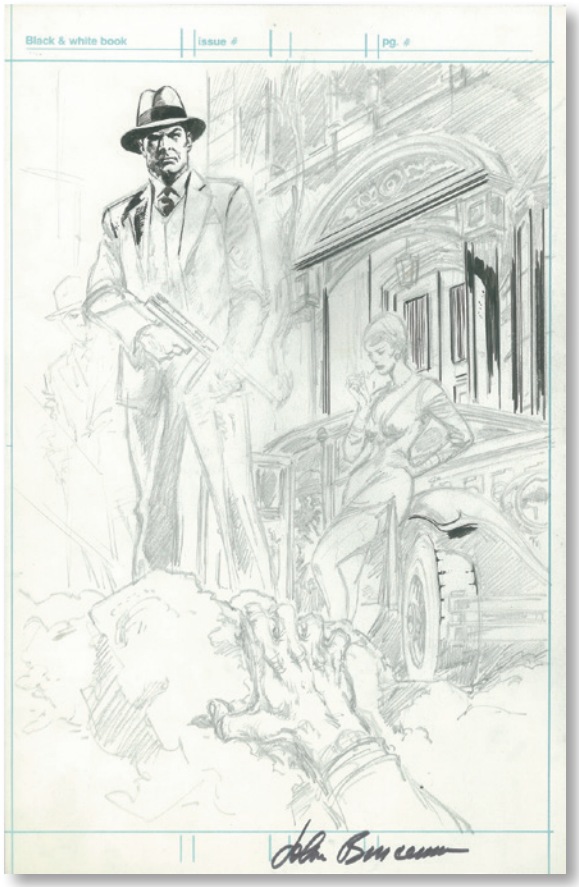
John: To do it on my own is a pretty big undertaking. I'd have to draw the entire thing. It's a very successful book, it's been selling since 1976–77, something like that, and it's selling better every year, which I cannot understand because Simon and Shuster, the publisher, does not spend one dime to promote the book! Marvel doesn't promote it, because Marvel hasn't got any interest in it, just Stan Lee and myself.

Alan: *Who have been your influences as an artist?*

John: Now, are you talking about comics or are you talking about general?

Alan: *I'm talking about comics.*

John: Comics. Well, the guys I admired when I first started were Hal Foster, Alex Raymond, Burne Hogarth… As far as comics go, Jack Kirby was a great influence when I went back in '66. In fact, I readily admit it to anyone (I really don't care if they believe me or not): if it wasn't for Kirby, I wouldn't be in comics. Because what I did, when I went back to comics, the stuff was dead, dull, and I just didn't know how to tell a story. And if it wasn't for Kirby's stuff, maybe I would have gotten it from someone else – but I got it from Kirby. I was at least successful in what I was doing, because of Kirby. And I have a tremendous admiration for the man.



Above: *Unfinished page John discarded and then redrew for the frontispiece of* Marvel Preview *#16 [Fall '78].* **Below:** *Self-caricature by John given to Joe Rubinstein.* **Bottom:** Fantastic Four *#112 [July '71], by John, Frank Giacoia (inks).*

Gangster art, John Buscema caricature © the estate of John Buscema. *Fantastic Four* TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. Caricature courtesy of Joe Rubinstein.

Above: *Note the* Marvel Treasury Edition *#21 ['79] cover by Bob Budiansky and Bob McLeod, a swipe from Big John and Joe Sinnott's concluding page from* Fantastic Four *#121 [Apr. '72].*

J.B. Cooke: *Y'all know me. Know how I earn a livin'. I'll catch this bird for you, but it ain't gonna be easy. Bad fish. Not like goin' down to the pond and chasin' bluegills and tommycods. This shark, swallow you whole!*

Many people have asked me "Who do you think is the best draftsman in comics?" and I've always said Jack Kirby. They ask me "Why the hell do you say that?" My reasoning is: drawing is communication, just like using words. If you can't communicate with someone with words, you're not a writer. Kirby communicates with pictures, and when he draws a picture he communicates his idea – you know instantly what the hell is going on in that panel. He's a great draftsman because he tells you exactly what he wants you to know, and you know instantly. That's my idea of a great draftsman.

Anatomy…? I know – I'm not mentioning any names – men who have absolutely flawless draftsmanship, but can't tell a story to save their lives. This is not art. What the hell good is having an extensive vocabulary if you can't express yourself? It's the same analogy: what the hell good is knowing anatomy if you don't know what to do with the figure?

Alan: *Who do you rate amongst current artists?*

John: Young guys coming up… I admire John Romita, Jr. I think he's a marvelous talent and what amazes me is he's so far different than his father. Usually the fathers are a great influence, like Kubert – you can see his sons were influenced by the father. But John Romita, Jr., you don't see his father at all.

Anyway, I admire the Kubert sons, although I think they're prostituting their talent because of what the editors want. They're losing that wonderful draftsmanship that they had, but that's what the editors want.

Bill Sienkiewicz, I think, is an absolute marvelous talent, but I don't think he should be in comics. I think he should be a painter. He's a fabulous talent.

There are a couple of other guys, I cannot remember their names….

Alan: *Frank Miller?*

John: I will not get on to Frank Miller – he may be a good writer, but he's a lousy artist.

Alan: *John Byrne I would think would be more your cup of tea….*

John: N-no, no. Let's not get into names. Cutesy stuff does not go with me, okay? Who the hell was it…? He was doing *Wolverine,* but he left, he went off with these young guys…

Alan: *Oh, Image. Jim Lee?*

John: No, no! [*Ringing, Gothic horror tones, and laughter*]… He uses a lot of blacks, solid blacks…

Alan: *Mike Mignola?*

John: Good, great, but there's another guy… Anyway, there are a few guys out there that I see – I can't remember their names because I don't really apply myself, I don't pick up the books and read them. I flip through, if I see something I'm interested in, I'll look at it.

Alan: *And seeing as how this is a British magazine, are there any British artists...?*

John: I'm not familiar…. Don't embarrass me! [*laughter*] I'm familiar with a couple of people in Europe, for example [Victor] de la Fuente and [Jean] Giraud. Outside of those guys, I don't know too many. I've seen a lot of great stuff….

Alan: *So much for comics artists. What about comics writers?*

John: I can't tell you any, because I don't read 'em. The only ones I'm familiar with are the guys I've worked with – Roy Thomas, Stan Lee. I do not read comics – I have no desire, I have no interest, and I couldn't care less. I don't know what that sounds like, but that's the way I feel.

BIG JOHN: 1997

[**Introduction to *The Jack Kirby Collector* #18 appearance:** *John Buscema came to join the Marvel Age of Comics in 1966, first working on "Nick Fury" and "The Hulk." His exceptional artistry is fondly recalled on his repeated* Avengers *runs,* Conan, *the early* Sub-Mariner *issues, and the* Fantastic Four. *His* Silver Surfer *series is considered by some to be the finest super-hero comics ever to appear from the House of Ideas. John was interviewed via telephone on November 18, 1997.* **Addendum:** *That* TJKC *appearance was extensively edited for space, so I've re-transcribed the audio tape in full and decided to include the occasional asides that hopefully enhances and enlivens the conversation for those who read the original edit.* – **Jon B. Cooke.**]

Jon B. Cooke: [Mentions prior interviews with Herb Trimpe and George Roussos] *I wonder if we can get your take on Mr. Kirby.*

John Buscema: Sure!

JBC: *Did you read comics as a kid?*

John: Yeah, I think I started around at age 12. The first comic I ever saw blew my mind. It was *Superman*. I wish I had that issue! I read it. I think, by the age of 14 or 15, I stopped reading comics.

JBC: *Right. So what was that, in the early '40s?*

John: Oh, yeah. That was back in… I think it was… how old was I…? I think it was in 1939, '40, '41… something like that.

JBC: *Wow, right at the beginning.*

John: Oh yeah. In fact, I have, believe it or not, I must been maybe about 12 or 13, a cover I did that I copied of *Superman*.

JBC: *Oh, yeah? Do you still got that?*

John: Oh, sure. I've had it for years. I've got a lot of drawings from when I was a kid. I have the Human Torch… yeah, they go way back.

JBC: *Do you remember seeing Kirby's work when you were kid?*

John: No, I don't. I probably did. I probably did, but I saw Kirby's stuff… in fact, I didn't see that much of it… just a bit

of it, when I started working for Marvel back in 1948. I saw one or two pages of pencils that he had been done that were laying around the studio there one time. I don't know if he was working for Marvel at that time or if he was working for someone else.

JBC: *Jack left Marvel in 1940, '41, and then he came back in '57.*

John: Yeah. These things were probably just lying around there and, in fact, I was very impressed with the drawing. I mean, it was a different style that he had up until he passed away, a much different style… very loose. I was really blown away by the drawing. I said, "Who drew all this great stuff?" And they told me Jack Kirby had done it.

JBC: *Did you draw some being a little kid?*

John: Oh, sure! We all did, I guess, all the people in the field. We all started by holding a pencil in our hand. [*chuckles*]

JBC: *Were you an avid reader of comic strips?*

John: I really was never that interested in the story; I was always interested in drawing. I became interested… What I wouldn't read were the daily and Sunday [strips]. We're talking about… wow, back in the early '40s, the mid-'30s, there were three major newspapers that had comics: the *Daily News,* the *Daily Mirror,* and the *Journal American.* And the *Journal American* had *Prince Valiant* and *Flash Gordon* and, if I remember, I think the *Mirror* had *Tarzan*. (You know, we're going way back.) And the *Daily News* had *Dick Tracy* and *Li'l Abner* and… not *Steve Canyon,* but *Terry and the Pirates.*

My three guys I loved and always followed was Hal Foster, Alex Raymond, and Burne Hogarth. I saved… I don't know *how* many years of strips I saved… Oh, I think was in 1957 or '58, I threw everything away. Yes! I could've put a hole in my head…[*laughs*] Yeah, I was angry… I had… Well, you wouldn't remember, but back in the '50s there, comics were really… they were in a bad situation and I couldn't buy a job in those days. I had worked for Marvel, I had worked for Fawcett, I worked for… I don't know how many different outfits. They all folded; it was like a domino effect and I started working in advertising, I think, in '57 and '58, working for an agency, and I just got ticked off, and I came home and I came across all these Sunday strips I had saved over years and I threw everything out. When I think about, I hate talking to you about it! [*chuckles*] Tears well up in my eyes. [*laughs*] I remember seeing, about 15 years ago, some guy had a pile of Hal Fosters, he was selling the whole thing for about $2,000.

JBC: *Did you go to art school?*

John: I went to the High School of Music and Art, which was more for the fine arts, rather than… I don't know if you're familiar with the School of Industrial Arts, which, I think, John Romita went to, and Gil Kane, and several other people. I went to Music and Art for painting, mostly painting with watercolors, oils, and that stuff. I was coming out of there and you had an appreciation of art, but you couldn't go out and earn a living, while the Industrial Art school, its companion, was for commercial art. I went there and then I went to Pratt Institute, while I was going high school, at night. I think I was 16 or 17. I went there for about a year and I took their life [drawing] class. And then I had a life class at the Brooklyn Museum for about a year. That's where I got my training.

JBC: *Do you remember any of your classmates? Anyone became professional in comics?*

John: In comics? No, but several guys I went to high school became world-famous painters.

JBC: *Oh, yeah?*

John: Oh, yeah! I don't know if you're familiar with painters from around then. Burton Silverman? He went to school there. And a couple of other guys, whose names I can't think of right now. As far as comics go, I don't know any guys…

JBC: *So –*

John: Wait a minute, wait! Joe Kubert! Joe Kubert…I'm not 100 percent sure, but I think he went to the High School of Music and Art.

JBC: *Yeah, I think he did, too.*

John: Yeah. But I don't know if he's a year older or a year younger than myself. We never met in school.

JBC: *Yeah, I think he was 15 years old in 1940. So maybe he was born in '25.* [*Kubert was 13 and 14 in 1940, born September 18, 1926. –* **Y.E.**]

John: Geez, I wouldn't know. [*chuckles*]

JBC: *I think so, from the stories I heard of him working for* [*Eisner*]*. Did you have any aspirations to be a comic strip or comic book artist?*

John: No, I never really wanted…

JBC: *What'd you want to be?*

John: I wanted to paint. I wanted to be a painter. I wanted to do what I wanted, but who could earn a living that way, y'know? You have to be very dedicated and I probably wasn't that dedicated. I also didn't have enough… there wasn't any money to go to college.

JBC: *Where'd you grow up?*

John: Brooklyn. Red Hook.

JBC: *I know it.*

John: You know it?

JBC: *Yeah! My brother was* [*location*] *manager on a movie that shot there… What was the name of it? Oh, yeah,* Last Exit to Brooklyn.

John: How about *Moonstruck*?

JBC: *Yeah!*

John: I lived on that block!

JBC: *He did some work on that. That old guy* [*Robert Weil*] *who played the waiter in* Moonstruck. *I met him on the* [Last Exit] *set. That was cool.*

John: Oh really?

JBC: *Yeah, he was a real nice guy. Yeah, I like Red Hook! It's a real…*

John: Yeah! Well, you know the bakery where the guy was down in the cellar…
JBC: *Yeah!*
John: Well I used to buy bread over there!
JBC: *Oh, did you?*
John: Yeah! I lived right across the street from the bakery. It was interesting to see it…
JBC: *The neighborhood, that could be tough, huh? What was it a tough neighborhood?*
John: Geez, I don't know. I guess, in those days, it was maybe a little rougher than the average… but I don't think it was "tough." We had our fights as kids, but it wasn't bad neighborhood… although a lot of famous gangsters grew up down there. [*chuckles*] But I was a kid, y'know? And I left there when I was about 24, so I didn't have any run-ins with anybody. As far as I was concerned, I grew up in a neighborhood [where] we had a lot of fun. We played baseball and football and all that…
JBC: *Sure.*
John: While the trolley car was coming down! [*chuckles*] We played fistball; we didn't play baseball. We played fistball.
JBC: *Yeah? With your hands?*
John: Yeah! You hit it with your fist! And you counted to see how many sewers you could hit. One sewer, you were a sissy. Two sewers, you were okay. Three sewers, my god, you were a superstar!
JBC: *You mean manhole covers?*
John: Yeah! That was what we called sewers, manhole covers. And we used to go about that way. The guy who could hit two-and-a-half, three sewers was a superstar. And the trolley cars…. We'd have to stop playing until the trolley car came by. But it was a lot of fun when I think back.
JBC: *How much older are you than your brother Sal?*
John: Eight years.
JBC: *Did he kind of follow in your footsteps or…*
John: Yeah, he did. He went through Music and Art. Then he… Well, he was drafted and he went into the Army. And then he did a lot of commercial work.
JBC: *He went into the Army during Korea?*
John: No, it wasn't during Korea; he was much younger than me. And when he came out of the Army, he worked in advertising for a while and then, one day, he decided he wanted to get into comics and applied at Marvel. And he started working for Marvel and has been working there ever since. Well, now I understand he's now working for both, Marvel and DC.
JBC: *And he's doing some fine work. Are you guys close?*
John: No, he lives out in Virginia… It's hard… not "hard." It's just we don't have… We don't like traveling, y'know? [*chuckles*]
JBC: *Any other brothers or sisters?*
John: Well, I have an older brother, who's retired. He was a housepainter. And I have a sister and that's it. Well, I have a sister in Italy, but we don't talk about her… No, I'm only kidding! [*laughter*] Yeah, she… my sister happens to…
JBC: *Is your name Italian?*
John: Yeah, sure! It's pronounced "Boosh-amma."
JBC: *What part of Italy?*
John: Sicily. Where else? The only part of Italy that I wanna be from… [*laughs*]
JBC: *Red Hook's a part of Italy, right?* [chuckles]
John: Yeah, right! All the Italians there… There's a big contingent of Sicilians down there…
JBC: *I remember the shipyard down there…*
John: You come from Brooklyn?
JBC: *No, no. I come from upstate New York, a little bit away, Westchester, but we spent some time in the city. So how you get into comics?*
John: Well, how I got into comics was that… when I got out of high school, I was looking for a job and I had a friend of mine, who had been doing comics for many, many years… well, not "many, many years." He wasn't *that* old, but he had been doing it since high school. He was doing page fillers. I don't know if you know what a page filler is…?
JBC: *One gag for a page?*
John: That's right! He was a great, talented guy.
JBC: *What's his name?*
John: Jerry [Luciano?]. He passed away about 30 years ago. He was only 40 years when he died. He really was a great talent.
JBC: *His heart give out?*
John: No, no. Cancer, he had bone marrow cancer. Anyway, we met in high school and he was doing page fillers and he gave me some addresses of contacts. In those days, there were guys who were getting work from the publishers for their own books and they would get a bunch of young guys to work on them, and they'd scalp you and you'd work for peanuts. But you got the experience. And I made the rounds.

It's funny. I never got anything that way until, one time, I happened to be looking in *The New York Times* and there was an ad there looking for comic book [artists], cartoonists – I don't remember how the ad was written – and I applied and I was up at Marvel! And that was the first time I ever met Stan Lee.
JBC: *What was he like? When you first met him, what was he like?*
John: Like he is today, I guess, but he had a little more hair. [*laughter*] But, yeah, he was a real… he was a very energetic guy, a very personable guy, very… Well, at the time, I thought he was a genius, because I knew nothing about comics. And he gave me a staff job, my first job in comics, and I walked into a large room with a bunch of artists… If I mention a name, you're gonna… Do you know Carl Burgos…?

Above: *Fantastic Four commission by John, colors by Bob McLeod.* **Page 67:** Marvel Treasury Edition *#23 ['79] cover art by John, with inks by Joe Sinnott.* **Previous page:** *At top is Avengers commission by John. At bottom are two covers sporting co-creations of John's,* The Savage She-Hulk *#1 [Feb. '80] and* Ms. Marvel *#2 [Feb. '77], art by John (Dick Giordano inks on latter).*

JBC: *Yeah!*
John: Syd Shore. Danny DeCarlo.
JBC: *Danny DeCarlo! I didn't know he went that far back!*
John: Oh, yeah! You kiddin'? Danny is older than me, for chrissake!
JBC: *He's a good cartoonist!*
John: He was doing *Millie the Model.* And Gene Colan was there…
JBC: *Gene Colan! In '48! Wow!*
John: Yeah! Well, we both started at the same time.
JBC: *I didn't know that.*
John: Yeah, he started, he was there a moment or two before me. And… who else was there?… Oh, a whole bunch of guys…
JBC: *Was Bill Everett still there?*
John: Bill Everett worked [for Timely], but he wasn't on staff. He was freelancing. Mike Sekowsky.… have you ever heard of him?
JBC: *Oh, yeah!*
John: Mike Sekowsky was working there until about… geez, we're talking about what…? Fifty years ago! [*laughter*] Until we were all laid off because of the [incident]… But those are the names that come to me.
JBC: *Did you hang out with anyone in particular? Did you socialize?*
John: There was a guy there who, in fact, he inked Danny's stuff, Rudy Lapick.* You never heard of him?
JBC: *No.*
John: He's still working, now for Archie Comics… Anyway, I hung out with a couple of… him and another guy… Joe something, a young guy. But mostly I hung out with…
JBC: *Maneely?*
John: That might be it… Oh, no! *Not* Maneely. No, no. The guy's name was Joe, a young guy, a short guy… He was a helluva lot of fun. We used to have so much fun up there. We were the three youngest guys, me, him, and Gene, but I hung around with this other guy I told you about… who passed away…? Jerry. We were very, *very* close. In fact, we attended each other's weddings when we got married. And he moved out on the Island and I'd follow him about two or three years later. We were *very* close. I worked with him when I was in advertising. He had his own studio and he'd hand me some freelance stuff, y'know. We were *very* friendly, *very* close. And he was the guy I hung around with, and a couple of other guys…
JBC: *What was Mike Sekowsky like?*
John: I didn't socialize. I barely knew the guy. He was working in another part of the… uhh, we worked up on the 14th floor of the Empire State Building and they had half the floor, I think it was. And there was several rooms there and Mike worked in another room. I very rarely would run into the guy.
JBC: *Were you there when the plane hit* [*the building*]*?*
John: Ah, gee, y'know, I think that was during the war, something like that, and I started in '48, but I saw it from where I lived.
JBC: *Did you?*
John: Oh sure!
JBC: *My grandfather was in the building when that happened. He was an* [*engineer*].
John: He wasn't there when it happened, was he?
JBC: *Yeah, he was.*
John: You're kidding!

* Rudy Lapick told Jim Amash in *Alter Ego* #22 [Mar. '03]: John Buscema was an Elvis Presley type. He had a nice head of hair and he was always combing it. He had a very nice build and he'd stick his chest out and comb his hair. Gene Colan and I used to laugh at him when he did that. John was a nice guy who was kind of laid-back. In a crowd, he'd just sit and listen.

JBC: *Yeah, he said there was a tremendous* [*crash*]…
John: Yeah, I remember seeing it! Because I lived in Brooklyn and could see the Empire State Building… I wasn't that close, but you could see damage on the side. I could see some parts of the building, whatever the hell it was. Oh, that was really… So the fortunate thing was it happened on a weekend.
JBC: *Yeah, that's right! It was a Sunday, wasn't it?*
John: I don't remember. But the building was almost empty… The elevators… Oh, there would've been a real tragedy. I don't really… Are you familiar with the Empire State Building?
JBC: *Yeah, somewhat.*
John: Alright, well, if you go downstairs, you'll see there are dozens and dozens of elevators.
JBC: *Oh, yeah. Right!*
John: They go to different levels and, God, it would've been a disaster, really a terrible thing…
JBC: *So what were you doing? Were you doing Westerns?*
John: Well, I started with… I think crime comics and then I graduated to Westerns and then I did romance, bounced around, whatever was popular at the time. I worked for Marvel. At that time, it was Timely Comics, and I worked for them for about a year-and-a-half, and that's when they put everybody on freelance.
JBC: *Oh, yeah?*
John: Oh, you don't know the story…? Oh, it's a very interesting story. It seems that, one day, Martin Goodman – that's the guy who owned the place – opened up a closet… This is the story I was told… opened up one of the closets and found hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of pages piled up in this closet that were never published.
JBC: *Inventory?*
John: No, it wasn't inventory; it was jobs that people had done they weren't happy with, whatever the hell it was, they just tossed in this closet. Now, inventory, you can have maybe a half-dozen, a dozen stories. These we were talking about were hundreds and hundreds of pages just discarded and put in the closet. And Martin Goodman finally went through the ceiling and said, "No more staff. Only freelance." And we all put out on a freelance basis.
JBC: *Oy.*
John: No, I don't know "oy"! I *loved* it! I was working at home and, not only that, I started working for other companies! I worked for… oh, I don't think you know *any* of these places: Our [Publications/Orbit-Wanted]…?
JBC: *No.*
John: Aww, gee, I worked for maybe… I'll tell ya, I was working for so many different companies at one time I had guys working on my stuff. I was just roughing it in and they were doing the tightening and inking.
JBC: *Oh, yeah?*

This page: *Rough, color guide, production art for* Conan the Rogue *['91] graphic novel page with art and plot by Big John.*

John: Yeah!
JBC: *So you just did penciling?*
John: At that time, yeah.
JBC: *Did you ever work for Simon and Kirby?*
John: No. After a while, I started working for Western Printing and I worked for them for quite a few years.
JBC: *They did the Gold Key stuff?*
John: Yeah. I did *Roy Rogers* and I did movie books. I did maybe a dozen of those – *Helen of Troy, Hercules,* all that crap – and… uhh… geez, I can't remember. Anyway that's the extent… I can't even remember how many years I was there. I worked there maybe five, six years. I don't recall exactly how long…
JBC: *Were you living in Red Hook when you were doing freelance?*
John: Oh, no… Well, I did when they put me on freelance, yeah, I was in Red Hook. Then, in 1950… [*searching*] oh, if my wife could see, she'd kill me… In 1953, we got married and we moved out to Queens – Holliswood – I don't know if you know the area… A small, very nice neighborhood. We lived there for about five years. And then, in 1957, 1958, we moved out here [Port Jefferson] and we've been here ever since, for 40 years.
JBC: *Same house?*
John: Same house! I love it. It's great.
JBC: *So, in '54, what did you think about all the stuff that was coming down about Fredric Wertham?*
John: Oh, the guy was… [*laughs*] It wasn't only him! It was other people! There was that singer… what's her name?… Kate Smith, remember her? She was against comics. Y'know, look, people are always looking for somebody to attack, so they should've been reading the books today! [*laughs*] They wouldn't stand them!
JBC: *Did you like any of the work that you were doing at the time? Did you have any interest in it?*
John: No. I never really gave them a chance, the comics. It was always something that I had… In the back of my mind, I was going to get out of it. And, after 50 years, I got out it! I never really was happy with comics for the simple reason. I think that, if I was paid enough, that I could turn out a page every two days or every three days, maybe I would've been happy… But I've always been pushing. I've always pushed to get out as many pages as I can in a day. It was always a matter of, "How much could I earn today?" It was never a matter of let me see what I can do as far as something different.

For example, Jack Kirby: he lived it, he breathed it. This was his *life*. Everything was comics-related. And he was constantly thinking of plots, constantly thinking of characters. In fact, the book he turned out – or someone turned out – of all of those characters that he came up with…?
JBC: The New Gods?
John: No, I don't know what it's called. I don't

know. I think he presented it to his wife…?

JBC: *Oh right, right, right!* Heroes and Villains.

John: Yeah. Y'know, I would never, *never* have done it! I had no interest in comics. The only interest I had was, "How much could I earn and how fast could I make it?"

JBC: *How many pages would you average?*

John: Well, I did average, at one time, I was doing three pages a day on a steady basis. At one time, I was doing the *Conan* black-&-white and the *Conan* color book, and that was about 75 pages a month.

JBC: *Wow.*

John: And I was doing that, the penciling, knocking the stuff out. Apparently, they sold! – nobody fired me! [*laughs*]

JBC: *Did you have a strict regimen? Did you get up in the morning…?*

John: Oh, yeah! *Very* disciplined. If you're not disciplined… I know guys, god, who were always having a financial problem. *Always*. And it's a common thing in this business, *very* common, because you've got to have the discipline to sit down, get up in the morning, sit there, and turn out X-amount of pages a day. Otherwise you're just going to starve! There were guys that always having a problem making ends meet. Really. And thank God that I have… Not that I have any great… I dunno what you would call it… but I've always… I shouldn't say "always," because, when I was working for Western Printing, I was always late. *Always* late! I once got a reprimand from one of the editors up there who said, "John, if you're late once more, that's it, you're not getting any more books."

Now, when I got hit with that bad period in the '50s, when all the comic houses were folding up and I couldn't find a job, it was *really* bad. That's when I learned to meet the deadlines. When I was in advertising, I learned how to meet a deadline. I tell you how it was in advertising: I had a client I had been doing work for two years and got hit with a bad snowstorm out here one day and I couldn't deliver the job! I was late for, I think, one or two days and I lost the account. That was because my client who had the account missed *his* deadline. So I learned to meet those deadlines! In fact, one of things, when I had a school workshop, one of the things, I stressed was it was absolutely imperative to hand the job in on time. It may not be the best you can do, but get that job in on time. "If that book isn't out of the stands, the publisher is going to be very upset."

JBC: *Then they can't make a buck…*

John: Yeah! They don't care about any [excuses]. They're in business to make money, but you're always going to be late? I know guys, they couldn't buy a job because they're always late… In fact, I helped out a lot of editors who called me up and said, "John, such-and-such a book [needs to be done] and the guy is going on vacation," or, "I can't find him. Can you finish the book?" I'd say, "Yeah, sure, let me have it." Or somebody's father-in-law passed away or something and wouldn't finish the job, so they called me and I'd knock it out

JBC: *Did you work excessively or were you like nine -to-five kind of guy?*

John: No, I'm an early-riser. I get up at 5:30 in the morning and I'd be at the board by 7:00. And I would quit at five o'clock in the evening. Usually, my hours were anywhere from 7:00 or 8:00 to 5:00 in the evening. That was it. And the weekends…? *Never!* I would *never* work the weekend. Because I had had… I was in advertising almost, I think… oh, eight or nine years, I can't remember exactly. And there were periods I had to see… well, in fact, it was so bad the first year of my son's life, when he was born, the first year, I don't remember. I don't remember him at all. I was always in the city working on the weekend or working at night. I would come home at night. My son would be sleeping. I'd leave in the morning, he'd be sleeping. So, for the first year, the first year, I never saw him. And when I started working at the house, it was like a vacation when I started doing comics!

JBC: *When was your son born?*

John: Nineteen sixty-four. He's 32, in fact, this week. Thirty-two or 33…? My wife is gonna kill me! [*laughter*]

JBC: *Well, you'll get a chance to check this* [*transcript*] *out. So, in advertising, what were you doing? Were you doing storyboards?*

John: Yes, I did storyboards, I did layouts, I did paperback covers, painting paintings.

JBC: *Paintings! Do you remember any that were memorable?*

John: Well, I have a couple over here that I was able to find. [*laughs*] There were Civil War things that I had done… now, we're talking about 30 years ago, so these are books probably no one ever remembers. I did a few of those. I did some editorial illustrations for the *American Legion* magazine and *Air Force*. I did something. I did a little fashion. I did almost everything.

JBC: *Did you work for a specific agency or were you freelancer?*

John: No, I didn't work for an agency; I worked for a *studio* and they, in turn, got the work from the agency. We worked on accounts, such as United Airlines, Texaco, Pepsi Cola – huge, *huge* accounts for the biggest agencies in New York. I did the layouts.

JBC: *As photography started to take over, were you getting less and less work?*

John: At the time I left, I wasn't afraid of not making money. In fact, if they did use photography, they still had to have a sketch, you understand? In other words, you have to sell the idea to the client…

JBC: *Right, for sure. Pitch the idea, the concept… right.*

John: That's what I did. Mainly, most of what I did was I would sketch ideas out on sketchpads.

JBC: *Oh, did you sit in on brainstorming sessions?*

John: Did I what?

JBC: *Sit in on concept meetings… I'm in advertising myself, and we have brainstorming sessions, where somebody would sketch out a rough layout…*

John: What would happen was, for example, either we would go to the agency… I wasn't employed [by the agency]; I was freelancing in the studio. I didn't work for salary. They would come over, sit down, and have these rough ideas of what they wanted and I would take notes. And they would leave and I'd go ahead and do the sketches. And, for example, I remember doing a storyboard for Pall Mall cigarettes, which was advertised on TV in those days, and I would do maybe a half-dozen different concepts. One

would be, for example, people smoking in New Orleans, another was in Central Park – from different locations.

JBC: *Do you have a big swipe file?*

John: Yeah, you had to have a swipe file for things like that: locations. I had a *huge* file on food.

JBC: *Food?*

John: Yeah, I did a lot of layouts for food products. For example we would do beer, and do a setting, a motif of a table for different foods… salads or whatever they wanted to put in it. Yeah, I remember food was one of the big subjects because we worked on point of sale… I don't know if you're familiar with that term.

JBC: *Sure.*

John: Okay. We worked on that a lot, for displays and things like that. I *hated* it! It was the most *boring* job in the world! [*laughter*]

JBC: *Tell me about it!* [*chuckles*] *How'd you get into… when did you… did you meet Kirby in the '50s, at all?*

John: Lemme say this, I was called… Back in '66, something like that – '65, '66 – I got a call from Marvel and they wanted me to go back. To tell the truth, to be honest with you, I was afraid. But the thing that was appealing to me because I wouldn't have to commute. I could work at home. And it was a tremendous, tremendous effort for me to make that decision. I was really very [worried], I didn't want to get hit again working in comics… especially after the failure of such an order. Anyway, I started working in '66, and I think I met Jack one day in Stan's office. I was in Stan's office and we were talking about a plot and Jack walked in and Stan introduced me. That was the extent of it. We just met, "Hi, how's it going?" Jack had something to say to Stan and that was it. As far meeting with Jack, I think I can count the times on one hand, just for short periods. When I would be out to the convention California.

JBC: *San Diego?*

John: Yeah, San Diego. I saw him there and we exchanged a few words, pleasantries, whatever. I met him a couple of times at Marvel and, I think, we drove home once, when he lived on the Island, many years ago, and Don Heck drove us home. That's about extent. I didn't have that much contact with Jack. Although, I'll tell ya – and I've told this to many, many people – I would *not* have been able to have survived in comics if it wasn't for Jack Kirby. When Stan called me back, in '66, I had one hell of a time trying to get back into the groove. Y'know, you can do illustrations and you can do layouts, but comics are a *whole* different ballgame. And Stan gave me a book to do… I think it was "The Hulk," I'm not sure, and it wasn't the best. Stan called me into his office and, trying to sort of get me back into the groove, he gave me a pile of Jack Kirby books… Well, everybody was given Jack Kirby books! [*laughs*] And I saw that stuff… I hadn't seen… this was the first time I seen his stuff – this was before the break [when Kirby left Marvel]. And I took his stuff and I started working from it and that's what saved me.

JBC: *What'd you learn from it?*

John: The *layouts*, for cryin' out loud! I copied every time I needed a panel! I'd look up one of his panels and I just rearrange it and then draw the figures the way I would draw them, if you look at some of the early stuff I have, with an explosion with a bunch of guys flying all over the place. I'd swipe them cold, for cryin' out loud! [*JBC chuckles*] Stan was *happy!* As long as they're happy, I'm happy! [*laughs*] It never meant that much to me. The important thing was that I satisfied the client and he was happy.

JBC: *Did you get a step up in pay or was it a lateral move when you went into comics or was it a step down?*

John: No, no, it was up.

JBC: *Good.*

John: Not *that* much. But the thing that I was wary of was [*sighs*] how long was this going to last? But Stan was very convincing. He'd say, "John, things are different today. Y'know, we're making a big comeback. Business is picking up. We're making tremendous strides." He gave me a real lift. "Okay, let's try it. Let's see what happens." Like I said, I wanted to get away from the city. I didn't want to commute anymore. It was taking me six hours a day just to commute! That's a *helluva* long time to commute! In that time, I could be working!

JBC: *Did you drive in once a week?*

John: No, I drove in every day.

JBC: *No, no, no. I mean when you were doing* comics*, when you would deliver a job.*

John: Oh, my god. I think the first few books I brought in as I did them and I think, after a few months, I go in whenever I felt like it. In fact, there were times I'd go in maybe three or four times year and that was it.

JBC: *Really?*

John: Oh, sure.

JBC: *That's quite a* [*big*] *package to bring in.*

John: Oh, no. We'd mail. Federal Express is making a bundle off them, now! No, I would *very* rarely go into the city.

JBC: *Did you ever have an instance of something getting lost in the mail?*

John: No, never. Don Heck lost a job once in the mail and, at that point, he decided he was going to Xerox everything that he did. But I was fortunate, I never lost anything in the mail.

JBC: *Were you close with Don?*

John: Yeah, he lived maybe 15 minutes away from me. We were pretty close, y'know. We'd visit each other and have dinner together.

JBC: *Did you like the business?*

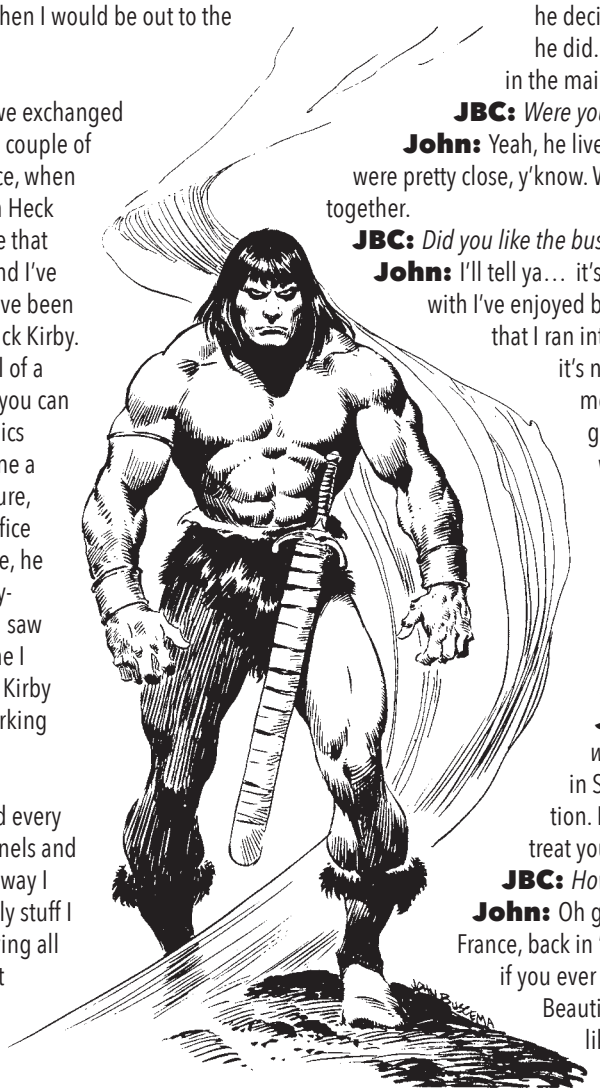
John: I'll tell ya… it's…. I find that most of people I've worked with I've enjoyed being with, but there were a couple of guys that I ran into that we didn't [get along]. But, overall, it's not a bad business. It's been very good to me, let me put it that way. I know there were guys that have complained about it. There were guys having a problem. But I really made a lot of friends at conventions that I still keep in touch with, especially in Europe. In fact, one of the people I was invited to their convention, will come over here and will be spending some time with me after Christmas.

JBC: *From the Italian convention?*

John: Yeah… I'll tell ya, they treat you *wonderfully* over there! In fact, I was just up in Spain about three weeks ago, at a convention. I loved those people in Europe. They really treat you like a king.

JBC: *How long have you been going to Europe?*

John: Oh geez, I started… my first convention was in France, back in '75 or '76. It was Angoulême. I don't know if you ever heard of it. In the southern part of France. Beautiful area. Very old, very old city, goes back, like, a couple thousand years! [*chuckles*] I loved the convention and the *food* was



outrageous! And the people were great. I made friends there and, in fact, I still see some of the people from Angoulême.

JBC: *Do you remember… did you have any inkling of the relationship between Stan and Jack back then?*

John: I didn't really. Like I said, I would go into the city maybe three or four times a year, and occasionally I would have lunch with Stan and, like I said, I met Jack maybe a half-dozen times. I mean everything that I know about Jack and Stan is all second-hand, y'know. From what I've heard, I've heard this…you know, you just can't accept everything you hear because many things are colored by some person's way of feeling about what they feel about Stan and what they feel about Jack. I'm not an expert on either one! [*laughs*] Now, *my* relationship with Stan, *that's* a different ballgame! I've known Stan for many, many years, y'know.

JBC: *So what kind of story conferences did you have with Stan? What were they like? Were they on the phone?*

John: Oh yeah, they were both. In the beginning, I would go in and discuss the story and we would throw ideas back and forth. Then, as Stan became more confident in my ability to tell stories, he'd call me up (or I'd call him up), and Stan said, "Are you ready for a plot? What did you have in mind?" And we'd throw ideas back and forth.

JBC: *How much was give and how much was take?*

John: Oh, it's hard to say… The last time I worked with Stan was on *The Silver Surfer.* When did those books come out? In the '70s…?

JBC: *'Sixty-eight.*

John: So, after that, I started working with Roy Thomas. In fact, I worked with Roy Thomas before, when we worked on *The Avengers*. And then I started working with Roy again on *Conan*. And then I worked with a lot of different writers. The time I worked with Stan was just on *The Silver Surfer.* And maybe an occasional book that we'd do.

JBC: *Right. Was there any issue with the fourth issue of* Silver Surfer*? I believe it was the "Thor" issue…? Was there a problem with that story?*

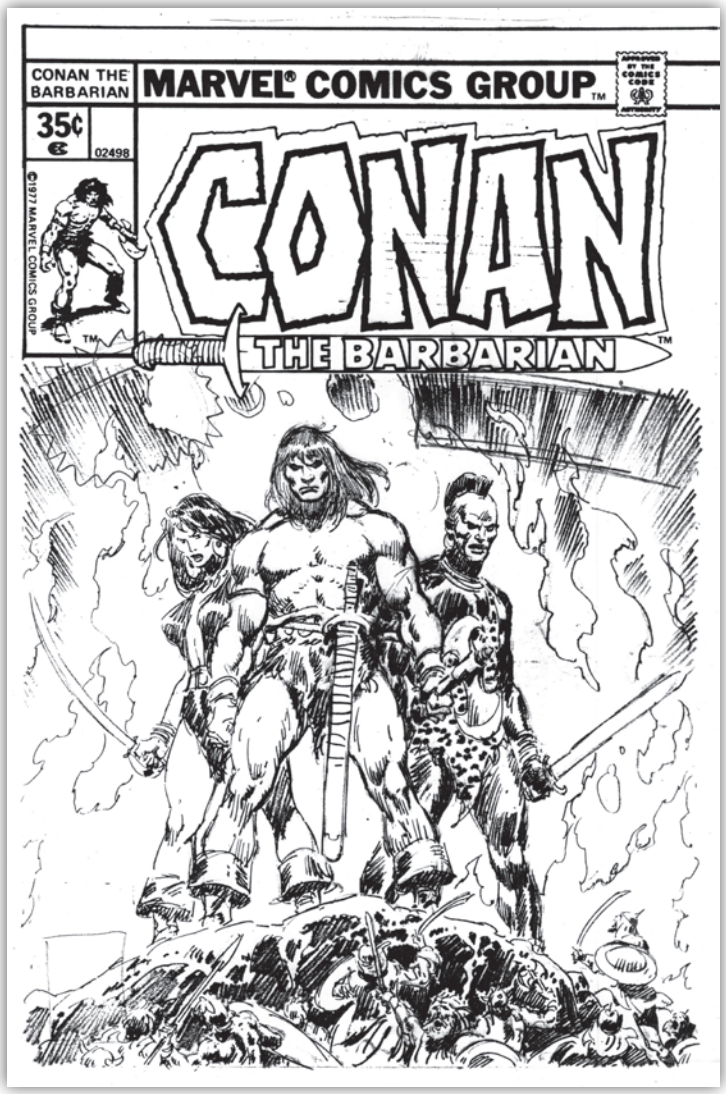
John: [*Laughs*] You heard a story about that?

JBC: *My editor told me something.*

John: Well, I tell this story to everyone. It's not just a… It's a personal thing that happened to me. I think it has a moral behind it or whatever. We worked on the plot, Stan and I, and I was very, *very* excited about doing Silver Surfer up at Asgard. I said, "This is one job I am so excited about. With this one job, I'm going to get away from Kirby. I'm going to try about to do something different." Which I did. I think it had a different look about it from the previous stuff that I'd been doing. Well, anyway, I took a trip into the city and went up to Stan's, and everybody I had met, I had met so many people that congratulated me on this particular job. They thought it was great! I was very excited about it and I went into Stan's office and Stan sat me down and he tore the book to pieces. He started with the front pages and said, "Okay, not bad," and he went on and on and on, and every third or second page, he ripped to shreds! "This needs to be done this way, and this should be done that way. This didn't come off on this panel, you didn't do it on this page. This page is too…" Whatever the hell it was.

I walked out of that goddamn office of his. I'm telling you, I was cross-eyed. I didn't know what the hell which way was up or down. I was completely, *completely* demoralized. I was so mad, I walked into John Romita's office and he saw that I was very upset and I said, "John, how the hell do you do comics?" This is *exactly* what I asked: "John, how do you do comics?" That's how bad I [felt I] was. So John looked at me and how the hell is he, in about five minutes, going to tell me, "This is the way you do it, John"?

Well anyway, I went home, I was *completely* demoralized and I said, "The hell with it, I'll go back to doing what I've been doing for years, the Jack Kirby stuff. The hell with it, that's it." Well, some years had gone by, maybe seven, eight, maybe 10 years, I don't remember, and I got a call from Stan one morning, and we exchanged pleasantries, and Stan called me an S.O.B. or something. I said, "What's up, Stan? What did I wrong?" He said, "John,



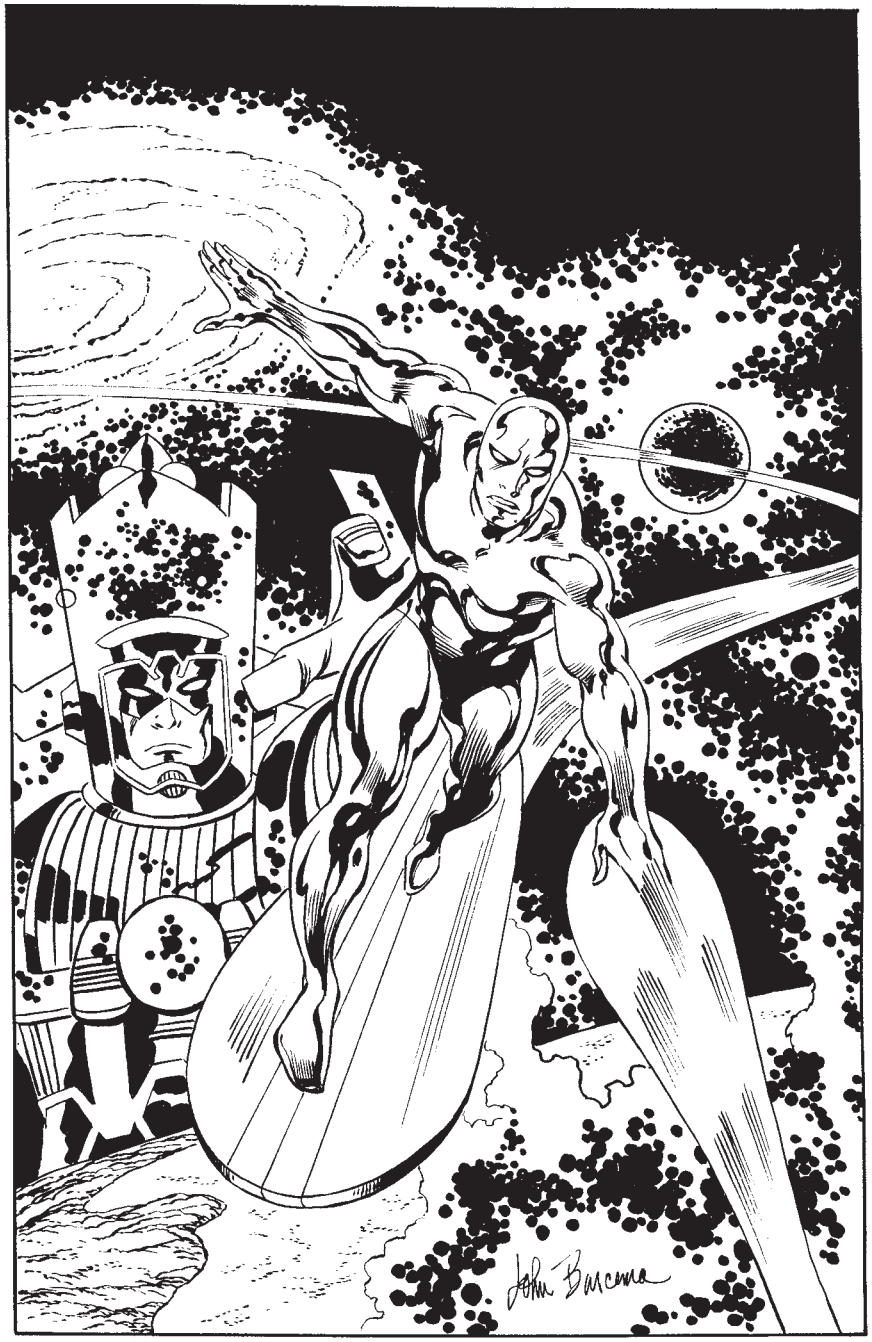
do you remember that book we worked on together, the Silver Surfer and Thor book?" I said, "I remember it *very* well." Stan said, "That was the *greatest* thing you've ever done! It was the greatest comic ever done in comics! The greatest thing you and I ever turned out!"

Well, I thought he was pulling my leg or something, whatever the hell it was. I didn't say a damn word. Stan is, "John, are you still there? Just say something." I said, "Stan, are you kidding? Are you serious? Are you pulling my leg?" He said, "No, John, I'm really serious." Well, I tried to refresh his memory. Stan said, "John, I don't remember ever saying anything like that. The book is beautiful. How could I possibly…?"

What I say, what I tell to many, many people. How many guys have been ruined, destroyed by an editor? By some guy who just happened to get up on a wrong side of the bed in the morning and said to some guy, who just put *everything* he had into the job, "This is garbage." You know how that really kills a guy? It can *destroy* him. I know that happened to Don Heck. I remember Don Heck coming to me and saying, "John, help me! I don't know what the hell to do anymore." I tell this story to everyone who wants to know [about] our relationship, between me and Stan. I tell ya, he really hit me that day.

JBC: *Did you have to redraw it?*

John: No, no. The book was put out, the book was published. But what happened was, in those days, for some reason, *The Silver Surfer* just didn't click. The number one issue sold fabulously and each succeeding issue lost sales, just went down. This was what probably was bothering Stan. Many years later, Stan told me, when we were having lunch one day, and he said, "John, there was enough room for the book [on the stands]; I just didn't know what the hell to do with it after [the first issue]. I didn't know what



Above: *Undated commission by John featuring Galactus and his one-time herald, the Silver Surfer.* **Page 71:** *Conan commission by John.* **Page 72:** Conan Portfolio *['80] art by John.* **Previous page:** *Pencils for Conan the Barbarian #88 [July '78].* **Next page:** *Ken Meyer, Jr.'s "end of issue" portrait of John Buscema and, center inset, the late artist in a photograph taken, no doubt, at some formal affair. Reproduced rom the children's book,* John Buscema, *['07], by Sue Hamilton, which features an absolute treasure trove of family photos of the man born Giovanni Natale Buscema, on December 11, 1927, and who passed away on January 10, 2002.*

direction we were going. So, y'know, what can I tell ya?

I know guys an editor could really lambaste and really give a guy a hard time, and could destroy him. Me? I couldn't care less. I said, "Hey, I'll go back to the old crap. Fine, it's okay with me. I was trying for something different. Maybe you can't see it, maybe other people can't, but I was doing what I was doing, trying to get away from the Jack Kirby stuff." But, what are you gonna do? Who the hell cares?

JBC: *Did you know that it's been said that Jack was upset that he had his own vision of the Silver Surfer* [*in mind*]*?*

John: Oh, yeah! Oh yeah. I'll tell ya, when Stan gave me the book to do, I asked him, "How come Jack isn't doing it?" I forgot what he told me, but I could understand Jack's resentment. Hey, this was his baby, this was his idea, this was his creation, and yet it got taken away from him and given to me. When I asked Stan, I would have gone without [the assignment]. [*pauses*] You don't expect to be treated fair in this life, believe me. You get [unfairness] from everybody, but the best thing you can do is make the most of it .

JBC: *Yeah. Do you think Jack was treated fairly by Marvel?*

John: [*Sighs*] You know the story better than I do. You know the people… like I said, the only thing I know was secondhand. We all know how Jack was treated and he was treated very, very, poorly, as far as I can see. Especially… I dunno… when they cut his page rate. You know the story?

JBC: *No.*

John: Well, Jack Kirby was *very* fast and *very* good. This is, again, secondhand told to me by someone (I don't remember who) that Martin Goodman was upset that Jack Kirby was making so much money, and he felt, "Well, he's turning out so much work, let's cut his rate." That's when Jack left Marvel. This is the story that was told to me, okay? I didn't hear it from… and I'll never forget, when I walked into Stan's office and I heard that Jack left… I thought they were ready to put a key in the lock! [*laughs*] I thought they were going to close up! As far as I was concerned, Jack was the backbone of Marvel. I said, "Stan, Christ, what happens now?" Stan was *really* upset, I know that. He said, "Well, John, we're *all* expendable." So what can I tell ya?

JBC: *Yeah. Did you have to hustle fast to work on books then, do you remember, when Jack quit?*

John: I didn't have to work any faster. I was always very fast.

JBC: *You were suddenly drawing on…*

John: *Fantastic Four.* That's very intimidating, following the best! I did what I could. I worked on, I think it was, *Thor* and *Fantastic Four.*

JBC: *Did you have any favorite inkers?*

John: Oh, there was Frank Giacoia… my brother…

JBC: *He was good.*

John: He did a fabulous job. And Tom Palmer, who did some absolutely unbelievable stuff on the early *Avengers*…

JBC: *Absolutely. Do you remember George Klein?*

John: George Klein had a very heavy hit… Lemme think… I don't remember too many guys.

JBC: *How about you? Are you one of your favorite inkers?*

John: Oh, naturally! [*laughs*] I know *exactly* what I want. You know the sad part of it is I never inked that much. I would ink one occasionally, but if you don't keep up, you don't really turn out… I had problems! This was something you should keep doing all the time. I think Joe Kubert is the smartest guy in the business. He pencils and inks his own stuff. And nobody could do a better job than Joe.

JBC: *So you were just pumping out the pages in the '70s…*

John: Yeah, pencils, all pencils.

JBC: *When you were doing* The Avengers, *were you particularly jazzed to be doing that work?*

John: No, I never cared for it. Y'know, to me, comics…The *only* time really enjoyed doing comics was when I started working on *Conan*.

JBC: *Were you familiar with Howard's work beforehand?*

John: Oh, yeah. What happened was, Roy sent me a couple of the paperback books. He said, "John, read 'em and lemme know what you think." I went right into the room and said, "*Wow!* This is *great* stuff!" I *loved* working on it! The period… I didn't have to draw cars or guns or any of that crap.

JBC: [Laughs] *You can make stuff up, huh?*

John: Yeah, exactly. So I called, "Yeah, Roy." Next thing I heard [they] gave the stuff to Barry Smith. The reason they

gave to Barry Smith was because Martin Goodman had no faith in this particular character. He wasn't going to spend… the budget just was that much. My rate was way out of sight for that book, so they gave it to the lowest paid guy on the totem pole. At the time, I think he was working for green stamps or something like that. They gave him the book and it started picking up. I always thought that the book very popular, because I heard people bragging about it. But Roy Thomas said, "John, that book wasn't selling that good until you got on it. Then it really started hitting its stride." I always thought the book, the way [Smith] treated Conan… I mean, the guy looked emaciated. But the guy's a *monster!* He's supposed to be able to tear people apart with his bare hands!

JBC: *A barbarian…*

John: Yeah, exactly! Y'know, you can hit a guy… If you know anything about sports, it's very hard for a guy to knock out someone with one punch, y'know, a boxer. Conan is supposed to smash a skull in one punch! This guy that Barry Smith drew… Christ, this guy looked like he'd just come out of junior high school! [*laughs*] So, when they asked me to take it over, I was very happy about it. I stuck with it… what?… 15 years, something like that. I really enjoyed it.

JBC: *Did you like Alfredo* [*Alcala*]*'s inking?*

John: I think Alfredo should have his arms broken, in my opinion. I think he destroyed the character. I know the first time I walked into Marvel and they were telling me that Alfredo had inked my stuff stuff and were, oh, they were floating, they were happy. "Alfredo did a bang up job!" I hadn't seen it. So I said, "I'd like to see it," and they gave it to me and it almost turned my stomach. The guy changed my drawings! I never drew girls the way he did it! The girls he drew, they looked like my grandmother, for criss-sake. One thing I pride myself is the fact I can draw a pretty decent looking girl. He had to put individual eyelashes on the eyes, and all that crap. And what he did with the bodies, the muscles… he destroyed it! I mean, he put in all that shading! [*pauses*] People's eyes were bedazzled with all that technique, but that doesn't mean anything. I want see the *drawing*. Don't kill the drawing. Don't kill the [postures]. He destroyed it.

JBC: *Did you have any particular genre that you would've liked to work in besides sword-&-sorcery?*

John: No, that was it. There wasn't anything else, unless I did something like *Prince Valiant*, something with costumes and castles. [*Conan*] was the one book I really enjoyed… I enjoyed up to a point. I enjoyed working from Howard's books and I enjoyed working from Roy Thomas's plots. When Roy Thomas dropped it, the book went down the tubes. The editors didn't know what the hell to do with it. The writers they hired didn't understand the character or anything about it. I was very disgusted, very disgusted, the fact that I left it after a while.

JBC: *Did Marvel change when Stan stop being the editor-in-chief?*

John: Not that I know of. If there was a change, I wasn't aware of it.

JBC: *The company was growing. Was there any change?*

John: [*Sighs*] How many times do I need to say it? I've been isolated out here for 30 years. From '66 until… when did I quit… '96, '95? I don't remember. Anyway, I had very little to do with anything up at Marvel. I didn't know of any policy changes. I had no idea who was coming in, who was leaving. The only information I got was all secondhand. Occasionally, I would go in and have lunch with a couple of guys, either an editor, or writer, or whatever. And that was the extent of my connection up at Marvel… very, very little. I sat at home. They didn't bother me. I didn't bother them. [*chuckles*]

JBC: *How was it doing the book,* How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*?*

John: Well that came out of the workshop that I had. That was

1975, I think. I had invited a few of the guys to come up. I had invited Roy Thomas, Neal Adams, Gil Kane, Stan Lee to come up and give a talk to these guys and I had about 30 students in my class. Stan came up and he was very impressed and he said, "John, why don't we do a book?" I said, "Stan, why don't we?" And that's what we did: we did a book and the book has been selling for every year since.

JBC: *And it's still in print?*

John: Yep, after over 20 years.

JBC: *So when the original art… you must have gotten a* boatload *of original art back in '85.*

John: Oh, yeah.

JBC: *Did you get everything back?*

John: No! Not at all. I got back, I think, one *Silver Surfer* book. I know there's a *lot* of stuff out there, a lot of *Silver Surfer* pages, but they're out there and they're stolen… there's an awful lot of stolen stuff out there.

JBC: *Does that bug you?*

John: I couldn't care less… Sure, it bugs me. I know the stuff is selling for a bundle, but what am I gonna do? I'm not going to grow gray hair over it.

JBC: *Have you sold all your original art?*

John: No. I couldn't sell the stuff that I worked on, stuff that I penciled and inked. I don't know why. [*chuckles*] I just want to keep 'em.

JBC: *So, all those years, when you didn't work weekends, did you have a hobby? Did you have a hobby that you pursued?*

John: Well, I like to draw. I draw obsessively. In fact, one of the reasons… a lot of the pages that I did, people would want them for the *back* of the pages.

JBC: *I remember my first inkling of seeing that you were an illustrator was seeing a full-page illustration of a Black guy's face in a convention.*

John: Yeah, I have that drawing hanging up in my house.

JBC: *That's beautiful.* [*Discussion turns to getting material to accompany printed Q+A.*] *Well, thank you very much, John. It's been a pleasure.*

John: Yeah, it's been a pleasure, too.

fin

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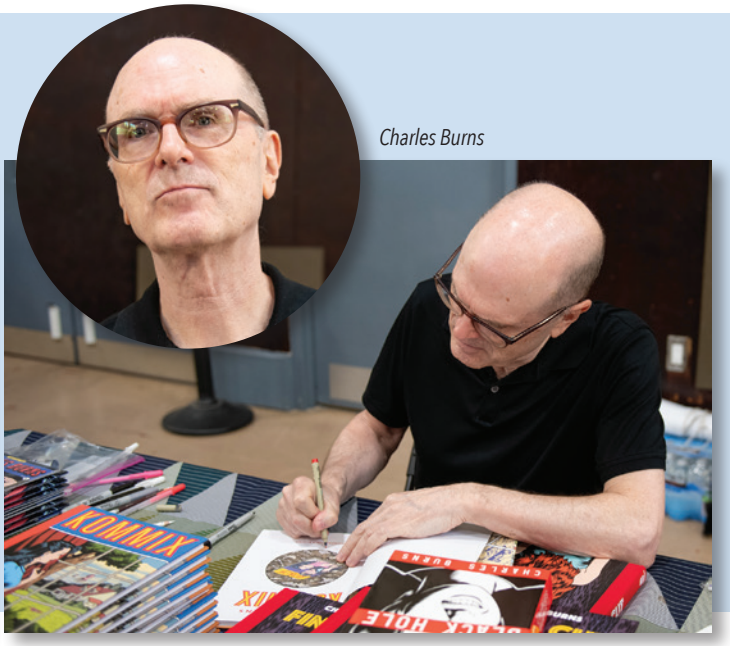

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coming attractions: cbc #44 shines bright in july

Putting "Rogue Enfant" Into Perspective

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CARMINE INFANTINO's profound influence as premier artist and publisher at DC Comics from the exceptionally creatively fruitful late '60s/mid-'70s era is spotlighted in *CBC* #44, our main feature section which includes his "Nuff Said" radio interview as well as ruminations by Ye Ed. on the man's impact – both positive and negative – during his executive reign. Also included is a revealing and frank interview with writer extraordinaire **ROBERT KANIGHER** from 1989, recorded during a UK Comic Art Con and conducted by **STEVE WHITAKER** and **TIM BATEMAN**, plus the first portion of our three-part interview with scribe Joseph Hillström King, better known the world over as **JOE HILL**, with **GLEN CADIGAN** asking the probing questions. We feature all of comics über-fan **BERNIE BUBNIS**'s "Spotlight on the Pros" mid-1960s fanzine articles about his visiting **KIRBY, DITKO, SEKOWSKY, INFANTINO,** and dropping by the offices of **GOLD KEY** and **MARVEL COMICS**! There's also part one of **TED JALBERT**'s Q+A with **JACK KATZ** and we take a look at **DAVE COCKRUM**'s Aurora model kit work. *Sheesh!* Ain't that enough for ya? If not, there's also our usual gang of columnists, including the great **HEMBECK**!

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from the archives of Tom Ziuko

One of the great things about my career coloring comic books is that, over the years, I got to collaborate with almost every artist whose work I loved – from the original industry giants like Kirby, Kubert, and Kane to modern day masters like Charles Vess.

Another wonderful thing is that I was able to work in almost every storytelling genre imaginable, from super-hero to science fiction and fantasy. This is an example of the latter – my original color guide for Charlie's pin-up page art that appeared in *Hellblazer Special* #1 [1993]. It was done in the pre-digital era, hand colored on Strathmore paper with Dr. Martin dyes.

Sometimes I only got one opportunity to work with an artist – such is the case here. And I couldn't ask for a more beautiful and evocative illustration to lend my hues to – thank you, comic book gods…!

– TZ