



comic book CREATOR™

Sept. 2026 • The Gene Colan Issue • Number 45

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THE MAIN EVENT

Shadow Man: Gene Colan – A 100th Birthday Celebration

A century ago, on September 1, 1926, Eugene Jules Colan was born and he grew to become among the greatest comic book artists of all time. In honor of the masterful creator, we present a transcript of his 75th surprise birthday celebration held at the 2001 San Diego Comic-Con, with moderator Mark Evanier, and guests John Romita, Marie Severin, John Buscema, Don McGregor, and Marv Wolfman. Plus Tom Field, author of *Secrets in the Shadows*, the Colan biography, shares memories of Gene, as does fan and patron of the artist Chris Lambert in his remembrance 48

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Crikey! How that erroneous Alan Moore description of John Constantine being called "London-wide" got by me and our proofreader in CBC #43, I haven't a bloody clue. We all know that, in actuality, the bloke is a rather slim character who is, as his Brit creator actually put it, "London-wise."

Right: Detail from Gene Colan's illustration of the Transylvanian vampire nobleman in the 1977 Marvel Memory Album Calendar, sporting inks by the Dean's greatest embellisher, Tom Palmer. Courtesy of Chris Ryall.

Please note: Some images in this issue were enhanced by digital software.

GENE COLAN

Portrait by **KEN MEYER, JR.**
©2026 Ken Meyer, Jr.

About Our Cover

Pencils by

GENE COLAN

Inks by

DAVE GUTIERREZ

Colors by

GLENN WHITMORE



Above: Our pick for "Most Prolific Contributor of the Ish," Marc Svensson, tells us that Dave Gutierrez was Gene Colan's chosen inker for his penciled commissions in the early '00s, no doubt when this piece was done.

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Livin' la Vida LOC

My love of lettercols and enduring pathological need for attention

Coupla things happened last issue that's got me thinking about letters o' comment. Three, actually: one was getting Ben Gross's commentary about Kirby and fascism in the nick of time, which enabled me to include an "Incoming" section. Two was Steven Thompson's "Once Upon a Long Ago" column, where "Flash" reminisced about his appearing in lettercols. And, three, a distressing dearth so far of missives from y'all this ish.

Thinking back to my youth, I'm surprised I didn't write any letters to mainstream comics, as I would have assuredly loved to join the ranks of **Guy Lillian III**, **Irene Vartanoff**, and **Rich Morrissey**, to become a bona fide published letter hack. But, for whatever reason, I never made that connection, instead focusing on producing a "Cooke brothers" fanzine, *O.C.M.R. – the Omega Comic Magazine Review* – which **J.D. King** (bless 'im), a pal from my teen years, modified to the snappy and catchy title of **Omegazine**.

But that zine lasted only so long, maybe seven issues, with a combined circulation of, at most, a dozen. While it was fun, it evoked nowhere near the thrill I would experience, years later, when I saw my name in print while a writer and cartoonist for my college campus magazine, **The Great Swamp Gazette**. Boy, that irrevocably got me hooked on publishing and, like any print junkie, I craved seeing my byline on paper!

Now, as far as LOCs – letters of comment – to comics and zines...? I sent in very few in my 67 years of livin' and before doing this TwoMorrows magazine stuff, I'd go for long stretches not having any work printed, but in the mid-'80s, I did get one in print. Not only did **Michael T. Gilbert** excerpt a letter addressed to his **Doc Stearn... Mr. Monster**, in #6 [June '86], he also included a sketch I drew of the good doctor (a fave hero of mine!) quipping about "Ghastly" Graham Ingels!



Gene Colan by Ronn Sutton

(Update: MTG checked the ish for me to say only the cartoon and no LOC made it in...)

Offhand, the only other letter I remember writing to a funnybook was to the last incarnation of **Dark Horse Presents** a few years back, though I've always been one to appreciate lively lettercols, going back to my teens, when often the letters pages were the first things I'd start reading in a given comic book. (For those who'd care to know, I scribed a long essay that involves the letters pages of Jack Kirby's '70s Marvel titles in **Marvelmation**, the **Jack Kirby Collector** #98 trade paperback coming next month.)

The point of all of this is to plead for LOCs from CBC readers, particularly from those with a strong opinion about the mag. I'd love for things to get stirred up by you guys and maybe keep an open dialogue. It can get a little isolating churning out these issues – though I love it, I won't lie – so drop me a line sometime, 'kay?

Hats off to two Colan compadres

who helped out this ish, especially **Marc Svensson**, who provided, transcribed, and annotated the hugely entertaining 2001 San Diego Comic-Con Surprise Panel celebrating Gene Colan's 75th birthday, featuring the participation of top-flight guest stars. He also procured all the relevant Colan artifacts and helped procure some beautiful artwork appearing here. Marc is among my favorite people in the realm of comics fandom, a dude of remarkable achievement. A tremendous contributor!

A tip of the CBC cap also to **Tom Field**, author of **Secrets in the Shadows: The Art & Life of Gene Colan**, the great 2005 biography still available in digital format from TwoMorrows. In addition to his sharing a personal remembrance inside this mag, Tom helped tremendously many, many moons ago with Gentleman Gene's feature in *Comic Book Artist* #13 [May '01] and it is great to be collaborating with my friend once again!

Me? I'm still making a final polish on *Mind Candy*, my Last Gasp history. It'll be done soon, I promise!

– **Ye Crusading Editor**
jonbcooke@aol.com

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Glenn Bray	Mike Howlett	Manny Maris	Bart Sears	Rick Trembles	THANKS ON PG. 66

Gene Colan portrait © 2026 Ronn Sutton.

What Lay Has To Say

L.A. woman cartoonist Carol Lay reveals that comic-book storytelling is a puzzle to be solved

by JON B. COOKE

The puzzle of Carol Lay – why isn't the cartoonist more widely known and celebrated? – has long been baffling to me. I mean, geez, she's been doing everything, everywhere, for, like, forever! Starting out in the business lettering for Marvel, she moved on to doing layouts for Hanna-Barbera animation, inking funny animal stuff for Western, dipping into undergrounds, storyboarding in Hollywood, having her own alt comics title, snagging a weekly comic strip, freelancing magazine work for the slicks and big name clients, writing a super-hero novel(!), and, most recently, producing her own graphic novels. With my encountering her name in so many diverse places, I had to learn more about the California-born and L.A.-based artist.

Comics didn't become a thing for Carol until college, when she attended UCLA. She told Kent Worcester in *The Comics Journal* [#213, June '99], "I got into the school as an art major and it was a great experience. But it started out kind of explosively. In my first couple of weeks, there I discovered sex, drugs, *ZAP Comix*, and Frank Zappa. This was 1970 and I instantly turned into a hippie because it was fun. I copied drawings by Neon Park and Robert Crumb. But *ZAP Comix* really blew me away."

Disenchanted with the pretentious fine arts scene, Carol told me, she graduated from the university, and attended a community college, "Just to learn how to use mechanical pens, and French curves, and all the stuff that you need to make a living as a commercial artist. They don't teach that at UCLA, where it's all fine art, history, and politicking, which actually turned me off on wanting to be an artist."

Carol landed an \$80-a-week gig, drawing random items for *Yellow Pages* ads – "It was a great job," she said to Worcester – and then, recruited by her mom, a first-grade teacher, she illustrated a series of flash cards. "And that was so much fun," she told me, "it brought me back to the basics of drawing, which is a cartoon. And, what I also loved about it was, it was pragmatic. It had a use. Whereas fine art, it's just too fancy for me. I'm just not that kind of person."

"Anyway, I did these number cartoons, submitted them to an educational products company, and they sat on it for a few months and then gave me a gentle rejection. But that sort of brought me back to earth. And I was hanging around a science fiction store called A Change of Hobbit, in Westwood Village. And I met someone who gave me a crash course in comics. So... I was instantly fascinated. I just loved the combination of story and art. It's way more fascinating to me than just art or just story. So the two together are a very unique puzzle that I get to create and then solve. So I was really bad for a number of years, but I got my foot in the door... And just sort of climbed the ladder and made some friends along the way that helped me do that."

HER WORK ANGEL

"Some friends along the way" included a bunch of comic book pros she met at an Orange County comic convention in the mid-'70s, among them Mark Evanier. "I think Mark spotted my potential right away," she told me. (In his introduction to a Lay collection, *Strip Joint* ['98], Evanier said, "Her sketchbook looked like 18 illustrators (no two of them from the same planet) had jammed to fill up pages.") Animation, comedy, and comics writer Evanier became, she said, "Sort of a work angel for me for decades. It's, like, I would be broke and need a job, and he'd say, 'Well, I bet you could do storyboards. Here's a script, here's a sample, go do this.' And I did it, learned it, got a job. And so, part of the reason I have so much breadth, is that I needed to feed myself. It's like I wasn't taught how to be a cartoonist; I had to figure it out as I went along. So I took odd jobs wherever they came up, like I worked for Mattel or I did storyboards for commercials or animation or live action films, whatever would pay the bills.

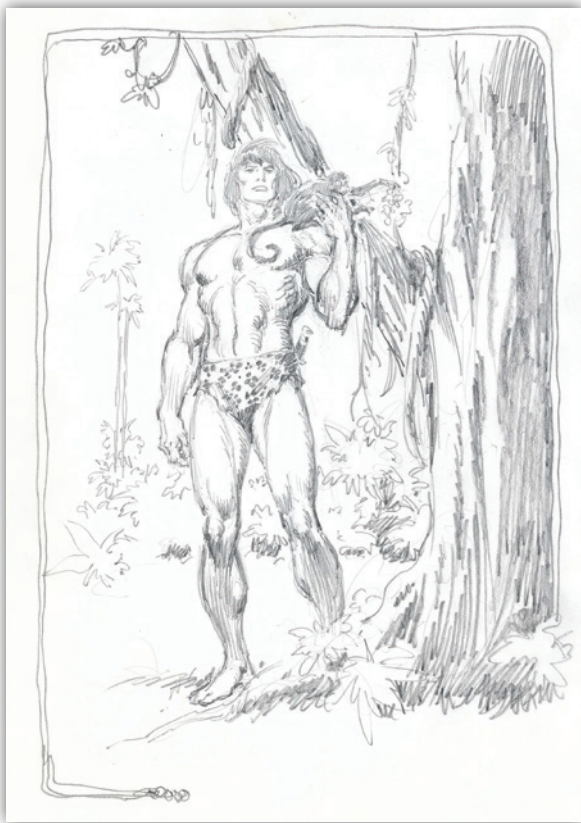
Here's a script, here's a sample, go do this.' And I did it, learned it, got a job. And so, part of the reason I have so much breadth, is that I needed to feed myself. It's like I wasn't taught how to be a cartoonist; I had to figure it out as I went along. So I took odd jobs wherever they came up, like I worked for Mattel or I did storyboards for commercials or animation or live action films, whatever would pay the bills.



Above: Portrait of the artist from a few years back. Below: Displaying characteristic with the back cover of Carol Lay's *Now, Endsville* collection, an autobiographical, albeit elliptical, look at her life.



"In No Uncertain Terms" © Carol Lay. Photo portrait courtesy of Carol Lay.



But my first love is comics and there's really not a great way to make a living at it right now unless you're a special kind of person. And I'm more of a generalist."

LETTERS & INKS

Carol's first pro duties were as letterer for Marvel Comics – "Which was a little like Dunkin' Donuts hiring the young Wolfgang Puck to twist crullers," Evanier opined – with assignments coming from Roy Thomas, former editor-in-chief and now freelancer, who served as a nexus (of a sort) for Marvel West. Besides lettering *Star Wars* (to this day, she remembers the exact ish: #6 [Dec. '77]), *Kull* comics, and *The Invaders*, the original art for an issue of *Tarzan* was in her hands.



CALIFORNIA GIRL

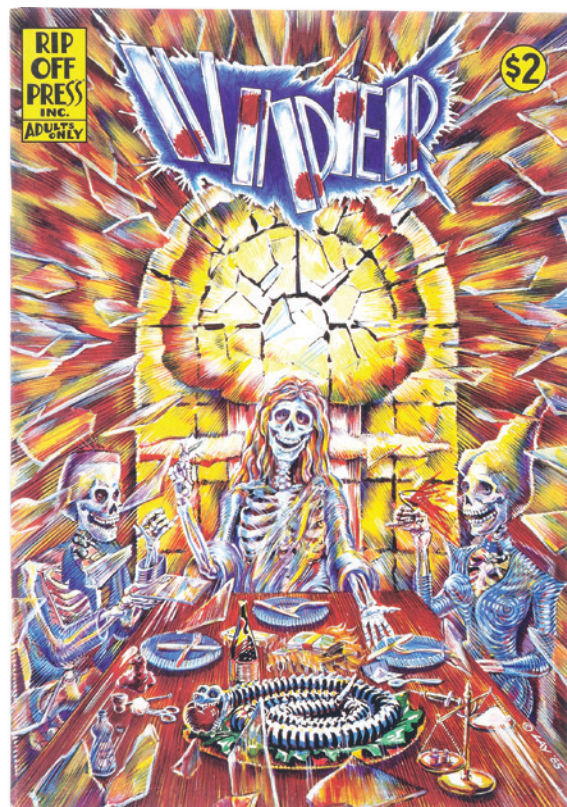
Naturally, living in the Golden State, Carol hooked into the San Diego Comic-Con scene and was connecting with a vast array of Left Coast comics folk, including artists from underground comix, alternative comics, mini comics, and mainstream comics. With Scott Shaw!, she contributed to *Fear and Laughter* and *Barn of Fear*; for editor George DiCaprio, she wrote and drew a two-pager for *Cocaine Comix*, and then there was a six-week jam session with underground cartoonist Kim Deitch to put together a comic book adaptation of a satirical art house movie, *Eating Raoul* ['82]. Deitch told Gary Groth [*The Comics Journal* #292, Oct. '08], "Basically, I turned Carol Lay's apartment into a comic-book shop. It's the only time I ever really worked in that

This page: Clockwise from above is a John Buscema Tarzan piece; sweatshirt sporting Carol's splash page for a music video prop; her cover painting for *Viper* #1 ['85]; and *Star Wars* #6 [Dec. '77] credits.

"I clearly remember this job. It was a John Buscema montage page of Tarzan with various wild animals in Africa, beautiful pencils. And I was so afraid of putting ink to that page, like, 'What if I screw it up?' So I finally screwed up the courage to just start lettering on that page, and that was a huge [game-changer]. Once I crested that, I was fine. All of a sudden, I can work on other people's beautiful work. So then, after lettering, I would trace off some of these beautiful pencils and look at how they would be inked, and then I taught myself to ink. Back then, it was all sable ink brushes."

Another L.A.-based comics outfit was Western Publishing, where she inked licensed funny animal comics, "Just inking over artists like Peter Alvarado," she told me, "who would do beautiful Disney characters and ducks. I did a lot of ducks, and so I would look at how [Carl] Barks worked and I asked the editor what kind of pens did he use. So I'd scour antique stores for pen nibs and buy boatloads of them..."

Early on, Evanier hired Carol to work on Hanna-Barbera comics then being published by Marvel in the late '70s, which utilized her lettering, inking, and even writing. About her ascent, he explained, "Soon she was everywhere and in every style – doing advertising design, drawing underground and mainstream comics, and doing storyboards for commercials, rock videos, movies and animation. Everyone wanted to hire her." (For proof of one of her wilder gigs, check out the 1987 Def Leppard music video for the song, "Women," on YouTube. Carol drew a 10-page comic book story, *Def Leppard and the Women of Doom* (with writing contributions by Mitzi Rothzeit), which tell the story through panel close-ups interspersed with the actual band rocking out in a warehouse. Alas, the only copy of that science fiction tale, depicting the hero named Def Leppard on a quest for "the unique woman," was used for the framing sequence of a real-life kid skateboarder reading the comic book.)



Tarzan TM & © Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. Def Leppard © Bludgeon Rifola Limited. Viper TM & © the estate of Erick Gilbert. Star Wars TM & © Lucasfilm Ltd., LLC.

kind of a shop system, and we got that book out." Carol recalled, "Kim couldn't handle it alone, so he got me on board. I think we both worked on layouts, but he specialized in the Paul Bartel character and I did the Mary Woronov character. And then, to meet a deadline, we had to hire some other people – [DiCaprio-connected cartoonists] Rich Chidlaw and Shawn Kerri. So it was kind of a motley crew. And sometimes there were four desks set up in the living room of my apartment and we're just cranking away. It was mostly me and Kim, and we met the deadline and there you go! Yeah, that was a good project."

Soon enough, Carol was appearing in cutting-edge comics anthologies, including *RAW*, *Weirdo*, *Viper*, *Cannibal Romance*, as well as Ray Zone mini comics and Fantagraphics titles, but there still was the gotta-make-a-living commercial work to attend to. For Mattel, there were package art and comic inserts on Barbie, He-Man, and the enjoyable Mad Scientist stints; storyboards for Hollywood movies, including *Top Secret!* ['84] and *Nice Girls Don't Explode* ['87], and for animated shows, like (the Evanier-scripted) *Garfield and Friends* ['88-'94], and *The Real Ghostbusters* ['86-'91]; and sometime mainstream comics job, such as a three-issue *Captain Carrot* series for DC, a pencils-&-ink job that introduced Carol to a new tool.

"I graduated to dip pens when I worked on *The Oz-Wonderland Wars* ['86]," she told me, "because I had to copy [Alice in Wonderland illustrator Sir John] Tenniel or [Oz book artist] John R. Neill drawings. And those guys worked with dip pens, and, boy, they made it beautiful! So I copied their work and learned from them."

SUFFER FOOLS GLADLY... NOT!

In my conversation with her, Carol expressed a reticence to talk about a few commercial projects she was involved in, including drawing issues of one of her few super-hero art credits, *Champions* ['86], published by Eclipse, but she was forthright regarding her contempt for ineptitude.

"Some jobs," she said, "I'm just not suited for, though I'll often try because I'm always game to try something but, if I'm not well suited for it, it becomes painful." Diplomatically, she added, "And sometimes I was teamed with co-workers with whom I was not compatible."

She continued, "Alt comics work is all mine. I often don't get paid well for it; but that's okay because I just love doing it (I mean, it's *not* okay; we should all be paid well for our work). As for commercial work, I go into that with a different attitude. Somebody has paid me very well to do this thing, so I am for-hire and I will do that to the best of my ability.



Above: Taken by Jackie Estrada at the 1979 San Diego Comic-Con, a photo of young Carol Lay, in the lower right, posing in the front row alongside fellow muralists (from left) Melinda Gebbie, Bob Foster, and Trina Robbins. Among those in the back row are Byron Werner (left), Larry Rippee (with cap), Shel Dorf, and Steve Leialoha. (Does any reader have an idea who those other two gents are?)

Below: Carol contributed this cover painting for Twisted Sisters Comics #2 (May '94). Her 12-page "God for a Day" appeared therein, along with a one-pager, "Perfect."

If I am teamed up with somebody, on certain mainstream comics, if they're not very good, I will end up leaving the job because I cannot suffer the fools and because they drag the whole thing down. No matter how much effort I put into something, it can be easy to muck up."

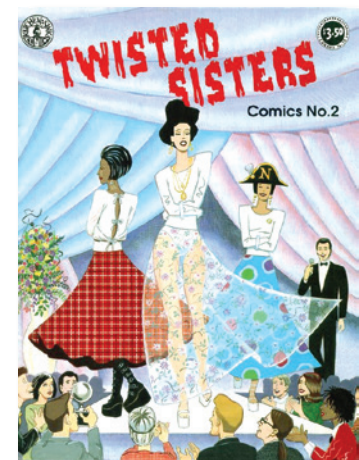
THEN CAME IRENE

Inspired by a turbulent relationship; the trade paperback collection, *Heart Throbs: The Best of DC Romance Comics* ['79]; *Tarzan* comics; and photos of African tribeswomen, Carol tackled a 10-page pastiche, "Face the Facts of Love," a story from 1980 which featured what would become her signature character, Irene Van de Camp. The yarn, she told me, "Let's say, visually symbolized my state of mind, feeling like a weirdo in this normal, stupid Southern California society."

On his *Slings and Arrows* website, Frank Plowright – among Carol's most ardent fans – described the character: "An American baby was orphaned in an unnamed African country when baboons murdered her parents, and adopted by the Bongodian tribe. Brought up amongst them, she willingly underwent facial modification techniques to meet their traditional standards of beauty, having her bottom lip extended to hold a plate in her mouth, scarification, and her top lip extended over her nose. In a sequence pastiching *Tarzan of the Apes*, she's eventually located and returns to the U.S.A. as an heiress, but from a society where she's accepted to one where her image repulses people."

Carol used that one-off story a year or two after its initial appearance in the Church of the SubGenius newsletter, *Stark Fist of Removal* [V17 #39, though actually #3, '82], to pitch Fantagraphics publisher Gary Groth, upon his company's recent move to L.A. ("Face the Facts of Love" also appeared in *El Vibora*, the Spanish alternative comics anthology.)

"In the mid-'80s," she explained in the Fantagraphics history, *We Told You So: Comics as Art* ['17], "I was storyboarding on films... at the same time I was trying to keep





Above: Carol worked with comic legend Kim Deitch to produce this film adaptation from '82. **Inset center right:** As mentioned in her comments about puzzle solving, here's a rough of one of Carol's storytelling fixes on her current book. **Inset bottom right:** Between 1986-91, Carol created six issues of *Good Girls*, starring her character, Irene Van de Camp. **Below:** Carol at Burning Man.



my hand in comics. I can't remember why I approached Fantagraphics, but it was probably because I admired *Love and Rockets* so much. And they were local to Los Angeles."

In later years, Irene's creator would have probably rendered her most beloved character a bit more authentically. She shared, "If I had it to do again, I would draw her face truer to actual African designs. It did mutate over the years, but the basic urinal look stayed throughout the series."

GOOD GIRLS

For Fantagraphics, Carol extrapolated "Face the Facts of Love" into a serial and also launched a companion storyline, "Ms. Lonelyhearts," featuring Monica Saunders, newspaper advice columnist for the lovelorn. Those two features constituted her semi-annual series, *Good Girls*, a 32-page black-&-white "floppy" comic book that launched in the spring of 1987. As *Reflex* magazine writer Nicole Panter – former wife of cartoonist Gary Panter – wrote in a 1992 profile, rudely titled "World's Greatest Lay":

"Initially, *Good Girls** had two different storylines: the first dealt with a punky heroine who wrote a lonelyhearts column for a throwaway paper. Amusing and well-drawn, Lay now admits to being so bored with the character that she 'turned her into a submissive wimp just so I could torture her.' Irene, the heroine of 'Face the Facts of Love,' was a different matter altogether..."

Indeed, Carol delighted in chronicling the romantic tribulations and comic misadventures of the sensitive billionaire heiress, as she added increasingly absurd and weird situations and mondo bizarre supporting characters, and yet always remaining true to the essence of Irene's guileless nature in an ongoing commentary on female

*Author Chris Gore, who quotes Carol's own description, writes, "*Good Girls* is, at heart, a tragi-comic romance, which we so often experience in life. It just so happens to feature a lead character who has 'a lip disc, a nose plug, scarification, and a duck-tailed haircut.'"

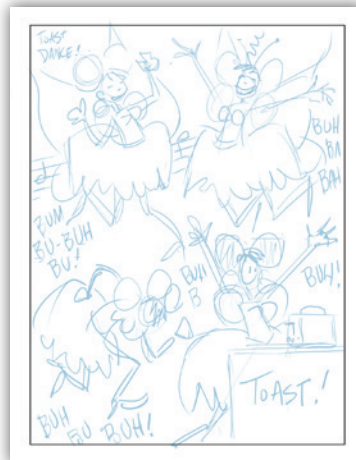
self-esteem. She told Panter, "Every character you do is based on some part of yourself. People have accused me of having a bad self-image because of the way I depicted Irene – but, really, every woman has self-image problems, even if she's very beautiful, especially living in Hollywood, because we compare ourselves to these girls who act in beer commercials. The Irene stories deal with beauty and honesty and basic relationship problems."

Carol continued, "When I started writing them, I'd read a bunch of romance comics... and there was only one story that I even vaguely liked – the one with an unhappy ending, because it was the most realistic and honest. I gave Irene an unhappy ending at first because it was true-to-life. I torture people in my comics because, for me, that's where the fun comes in – setting up problems for characters to solve."

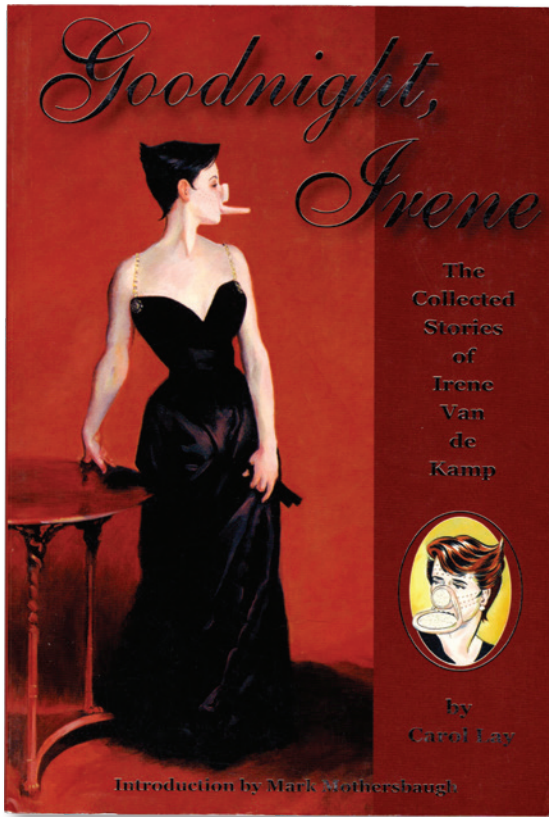
THE PUZZLE OF COMICS

A theme pervading my talk with Carol was her perception of comics as a puzzle to be solved, so I asked about that. "When I construct a page," she replied, "and, right now, I'm in the process of laying out a 230-page book, everything has to fit in a certain way that makes it a comic... I've got a blank piece of paper and I've got a page of text. So I copy the text, and this is all digital now, I copy it onto the blank paper, and I arrange it into four, five, or six panels, whatever it is. And then I rough in my panels, and then I need to inject the art into it. And the art has to lead the eye around the page and the dialogue has to lead the eye around the page. There has to be, at least in my style, contrast and composition in each panel that also fits with the composition of the whole page, and that page has to lead into the next page. I mean, hopefully a scene will end on the last panel of a page, so that it is contained, but also part of a whole.

"So there's all these different storytelling devices that play into a page, which has parts and is also part of a whole. And it's so complex and it just is a never-ending delight... It has to fit and so that's very puzzle-like to me."



Eating Raoul TM & © the respective copyright holder. Wonder Woman, Myths TM & © DC Comics. Page rough, *Good Girls* TM & © Carol Lay. Photo courtesy of C.L.



As an example, Carol said, "On my current project, I realized I needed a panel at the end of a page to show a character moving to another location. I couldn't squeeze it in on page x, nor on page y, so I added a whole page in which she dances from one place to the other. It's so full of energy, I was glad that problem made me come up with it."

AMONG THE GREATEST MOVIES NEVER MADE

The irresistible story of Irene Van de Camp was just oddball enough to pitch as a movie and Carol accommodated by writing a screenplay. Still, for the book, *The 50 Greatest Movies Never Made* [99], she admitted to knowing her movie script, *Good Girls*, wouldn't be embraced by Hollywood. "I think it's too weird, which is exactly why it should be made. The first time it fell through was my doing, but I can only imagine why no one picked it up after that. My theory is conventionally minded men run the show and these kinds of men don't get why Irene is fabulous. If a woman looks like anything other than a Playmate, they don't want to look at her. Irene's face is extreme." She added, "The beauty theme that runs through it is always timely, but maybe it would help if she would explode. Guys like that."

Good Girls lasted for five issues at Fantagraphics, with Rip Off Press printing the final issue, #6, in 1991. (ROP co-publisher Kathe Todd recently confirmed she was behind the one-off coming from her comix imprint. "Yes, I was an admirer of her work and arranged with her to publish it.")* The title, which had long since evicted Ms. Lonelyhearts from its pages, ended with Irene becoming engaged to be married to her blind boyfriend, nicely tying up the run.

*About Carol, Todd added, "She later moved on to a more cartoonish, less illustrative drawing style that enabled her to work faster. You should check out her 'The Thing Under the Futon' story' [five-pager in *L.A. Weekly*, '90]." She also appeared in three issues of *Rip Off Comix*.

"But Irene wasn't done with me yet," Irene's creator admitted in a collection preface. "When I was living in New York, I wrote and drew another installment, just because it was such a pleasure to live in her world. And, when I approached [Last Gasp publisher] Ron Turner to publish this book, he asked for – and got – an even longer story that brings Irene up to date."

Goodnight, Irene: The Collected Stories of Irene Van de Camp [07] did include those two post-*Good Girls* stories, one the 18-page final entry, "About Face," featuring Irene's teenaged daughter, who ponders facial modification. The finale of Irene's saga was, unlike her debut, an upbeat one.

STROKES OF SUBGENIUS

The writer of *Goodnight, Irene*'s introduction was Mark Mothersbaugh, the co-founder and keyboardist of new wave band Devo (who also has had a significant musical career in his own right), and he reminisced about first encountering the artist around 1980, when she showed up unannounced to unveil a painting she had made of the group. The image depicted the band members resplendent in their trademark caps and otherwise totally buck naked, with their (ahem) members bare. (A cropped version of her canvas, sans peckers, was used as the cover art of Devo's 2019 vinyl collection, *Turn Around: B-Sides and More 1978–1984*.) In his intro, Mothersbaugh noted, "We were at a loss for words and flattered; no one had ever gotten our 'anatomy' correct in the past. We talked for a few minutes, and she left with the painting, all of us taken by surprise."

It was likely the two had encountered one another's name soon thereafter as their respective names appear on the same spread in The Church of SubGenius newsletter, *The Stark Fist of Removal*, the same issue that featured Irene's debut, undoubtedly where Mothersbaugh's love for the dame began. He said, "Irene is still my favorite comic story and character of all time, bar none, and is the one I've most wanted to meet. (I kind of would have liked to meet Dick Tracy, but during the '50s, when he was a real sadist.)"

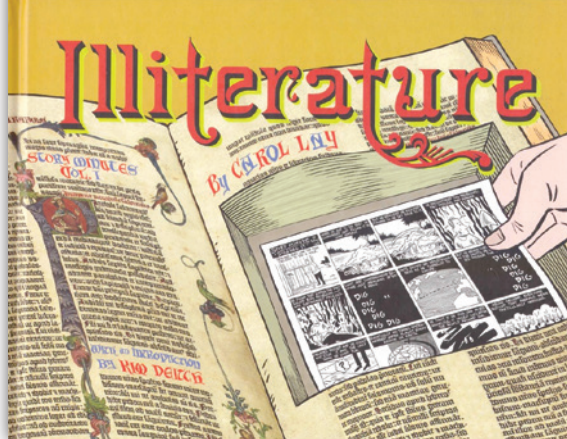
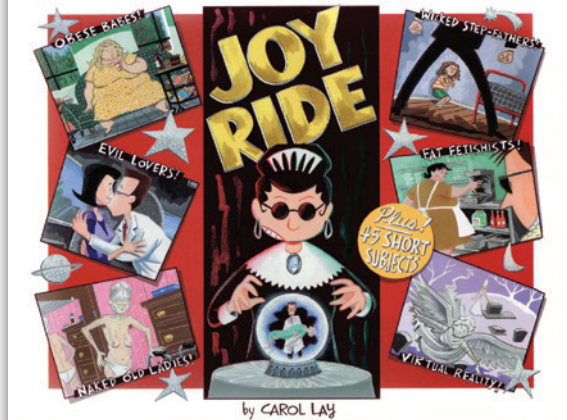
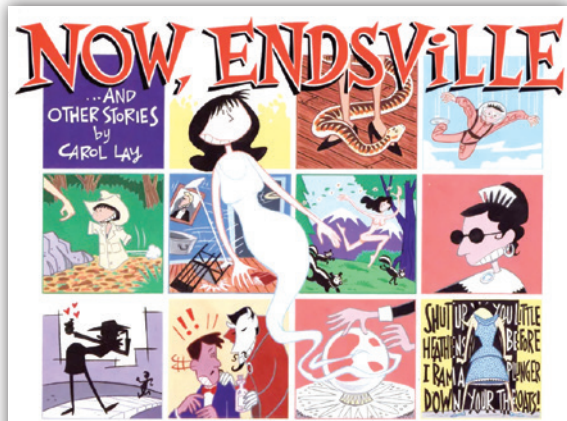


"BOBRA" Carol



Above: One of Carol's inspirations in creating Irene Van de Camp was this DC romance comics collection from 1979. **Inset left:** The cover of *Goodnight, Irene* was a pastiche of Joseph Singer Sargent's "Portrait of Madame X" painting. **Below:** Often erroneously attributed to the non-existent "Ubangi" tribe, it was the Mursi women of Ethiopia who were adorned with lip plates. **Bottom:** Carol introduces Irene.





This page: Four trade paperback collections of Carol's alternative paper comic strips, along with a photo of her with pal and Devo co-founder Mark Mothersbaugh and her Dali-inspired painting. **Next page:** Clockwise from top left is an ad from *Slash Magazine* V2 #4 [Mar '79] sporting her *Pep Girls* logo; two caricatures from *The Big Skinny* ['08]; and Carol's two most recent books, *My Time Machine* ['24] and *Murderburg* ['25].

STRIP SHOW

The demise of *Good Girls* came from economic necessity. She told *We Told You So*, "Eventually, though, the need to spend energy on work that paid actual money won out and I decided to wrap up Irene." Still, talking with me, she also observed the series had run its course. "Some comics are frozen in time and others evolve," Carol said. "And this one evolved to the point where I just thought, 'Okay, I'm done.' It had a happy ending."

On a Portland radio show, in 2007, she made this observation: "If a woman is smart enough to do comics, she's smart enough to get into something that pays better. But I just fell in love with the medium, because it satisfies so many things I like to do. I'm not the best artist; I'm not the best writer, but I'm really good at the hybrid, which is comics."

Through her friend Byron Werner, Carol met Matt Groening, who she remembers working at the Licorice Pizza record store on Sunset Boulevard, drawing *Life in Hell* as a mini comic. After Groening (who later referred to Carol as "a virtuoso artist who's got some really wild ideas") and his Evergreen State College alumni, Lynda Barry and Charles Burns, all had strips running in L.A.'s alternative weeklies, "When Charles Burns gave up his strip, I saw my opportunity. I made a pitch and I got my weekly strip started." That was in the early '90s.

Thereafter – for decades – Carol maintained a weekly comic strip – at different times, variously named *Way Lay* and *Lay Lines*, but mostly *Story Minute* – many produced on a 12-panel grid which she used to typically tell a story adhering to a basic M.O. She told Kent Worcester, "I start with an absurd idea, and take it to its logical end, which is also absurd." *Comics Journal* critic Ray Mescallado put it pretty much the same way, with a little more flair: "Lay's formula is to start with a purposefully silly premise, steadily increase the absurdity of the situation, then deliver a whammy with a last-panel punchline irony."

Explaining to Worcester she moved to New York City to be near the action, Carol said, "Because then you can get illustration jobs on the side. This is the magazine capital. I was already getting illustration gigs from the *Village Voice* and *Entertainment Weekly*. For one illustration, you make as much as you do for a whole underground comic."

But once securing the steady *Story Minute* gig, she recognized she could send in her assignment from anywhere. "You'd just mail it to all these alternative weekly newspapers," she told me, "which was a good way to make a living for a number of years until the internet killed us all... Between *L.A. Weekly*, *Salon*, the *San Francisco Examiner* and *New York Press*, when you get into one or two of these papers, you get noticed by other editors and they might call you instead of you soliciting them."

So far, there have been four trade paperback collections of her strips with many being found online at *GoComics.com*. Of the strip, she told me, "I'm still doing it now, but I've only got one outlet online. I only do it for a Patreon connection page, which pays sh*t, but whatever... Every once in a while, somebody sees it and they hire me or buy something. So it's a good way to just have a presence in the digital world, which is now a vast sea of content." (She maintains a website at *carollay.com* and her Patreon account is *patreon.com/laylines*.)



All © Carol Lay. Photo courtesy of Carol.



LIFE AMONG THE ART BOYS

In his *Goodnight, Irene* intro, Mark Mothersbaugh described his friend as: "A definite art-chick with glasses and cool thrift shop clothing," and given her decidedly wacky and smart sense of humor, it's no wonder she fit rather well in the outré L.A. community. "We were all kind of in the same crowd," she relayed to me. "Robert Williams, Ray Zone, Matt, the Brays, Kim [Deitch] (when he was in town), the DiCaprios and Byron, me, and various other people coming in and out, as people moved in or out of town. Anyway, we might all collect over at George DiCaprio's place and take a walk around Silver Lake." Williams dubbed the gang, "The Art Boys."

"One time, I showed up with a box of spray cans and George said, 'Oh, great! Let's go to the river.' So we all went to the L.A. River, broke out the cans, and spray painted cartoons all over the place – Gary Panter did a big thing, Matt did a big thing... I did something that some lame brain attached a comment to (and I was upset by that). But all of that stuff is gone. It's been painted over by the city, which is too bad, because it was quite a gallery."

In her travels, she also hung out with Robert Crumb, who encouraged her to do more autobiographical stories and one result was "Midwestern Wedding," which appeared in *Weirdo* #10 [Summer '84], a mostly true-to-life account of her encounters during her younger brother's nuptial day. For *Weirdo* #27 [Spr. '90], Carol wrote and drew another autobiographical tale, "The Prince and the Art Girl."

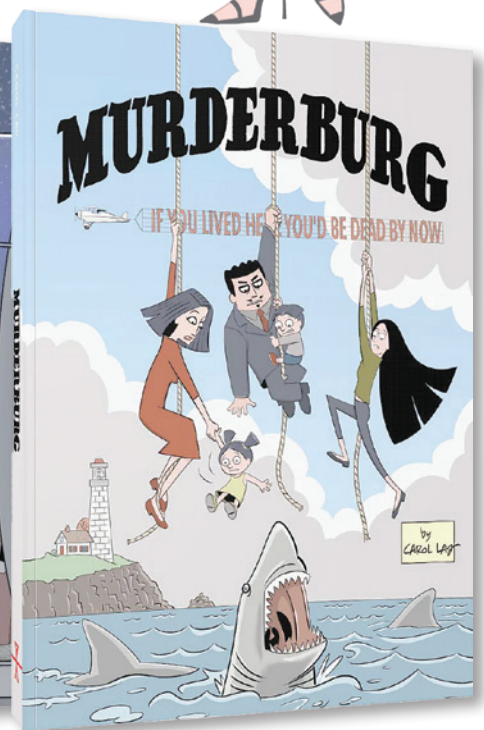
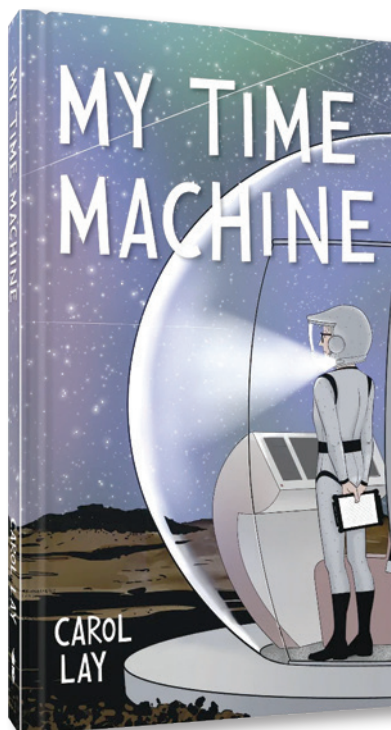
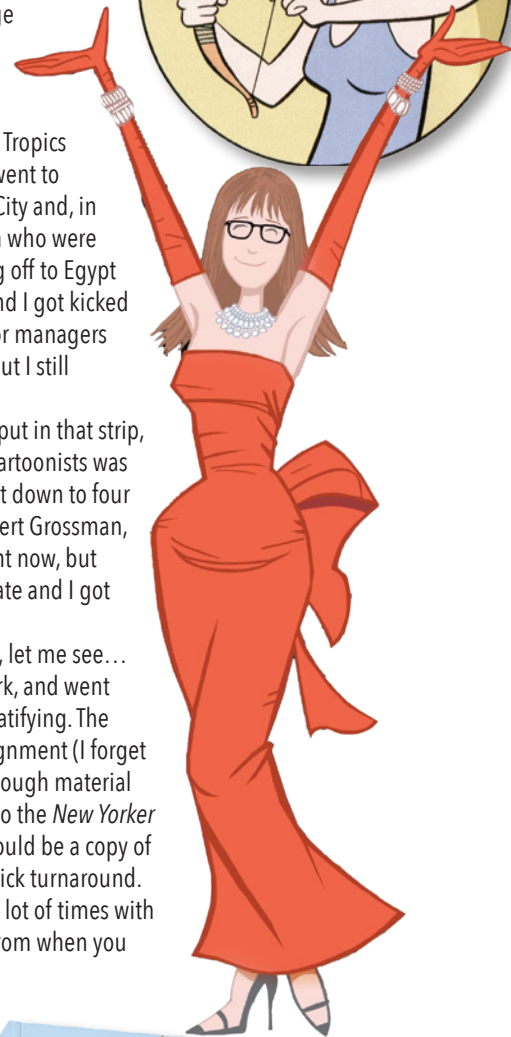
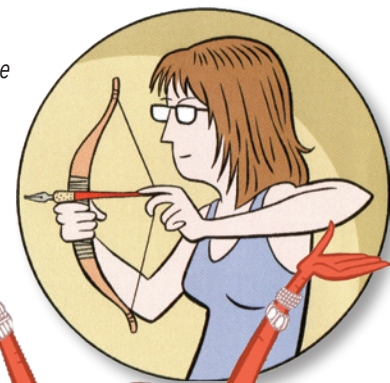
Some of Carol's more trippy work, including a few stories in *Rip Off Comix*, appeared in what few outlets remained of the underground. Among them was "Closed Circuit," about a plug in search of an electrical outlet, in *Wimmen's Comix* #12 [Nov. '87, for which she also contributed the cover painting], and "Panty Raid," about (you guessed it) fraternity house shenanigans, in *Young Lust* #8 ['93]. But, as she had mentioned to Worcester, comix work paid far less than the commercial work, and, during her short stay in the Big Apple, Carol scored a particularly prestigious assignment.

IN A NEW YORKER MINUTE

After Carol's first collection was published, *Now, Endsville and Other Stories* ['93], she sent a copy to Art Spiegelman and, shortly thereafter, his wife and *New Yorker* art director, Françoise Mouly called her. Carol told me, "Françoise was assigned by [editor] Tina Brown to do the 'Talk of the Town' comics reportage that ran across the top of a double-page spread, and she used rotating cartoonists every week... My first one was 'Winter Wonderwear' [subtitled, "Shopping for the Tropics at New York Department Stores"], where I went to every fancy department store in New York City and, in the dead of winter, I was bothering women who were buying swimwear because they were going off to Egypt or the Seychelles or someplace like that. And I got kicked out of every department store because floor managers didn't want me bothering the customers, but I still managed to get a strip out of it."

The cartoonist continued, "Soon after I put in that strip, Françoise decided that juggling so many cartoonists was just too much of a chore, so she narrowed it down to four of us. I think it was Dave Mazzucchelli, Robert Grossman, and one other name that's eluding me right now, but it was three guys and me. So we would rotate and I got some pretty cool assignments.

"I went to the New York Auto Show and, let me see... I interviewed carriage drivers in Central Park, and went to a big poetry thing. And those were so gratifying. The deadline was tight. So I would get the assignment (I forget when), but I had less than a week to get enough material and then turn it into a color strip, turn it into the *New Yorker* on a Friday. And then, on Monday, there would be a copy of it, in print, at my doorstep. It was *such* a quick turnaround. That was just part of the reward, because, a lot of times with magazines, you got to wait three months from when you turn it in to when it shows up in print."





BIG TOOTH STYLINGS

After (or maybe before) an incoming *New Yorker* editor killed the feature, Carol scored a regular *Wall Street Journal* assignment, as well as a monthly strip in *Worth* magazine. Starting a few years prior, she was honing a new visual signature for her work – big teeth – where the bottom jaw of her characters have been replaced with gi-normous gnashers. Asked where that look started, Carol told me it commenced maybe on a movie poster she produced, *The Blue Iguana* ['88], but she, years earlier, recalled in her *Comics Journal* interview, it was in a handful of stories she produced for *Rip Off Comix*.

"I first came up with that in one of my 8-Ball stories. Now, 8-Ball is a character I created before Dan Clowes did his comic called *Eightball*, and has nothing at all to do with it. I did those stories for *Rip Off* – three of them. It started when I was going through withdrawal from cocaine. I turned into one of the biggest assholes on earth. So I wrote the 8-Ball as that part of my ego; as an asshole who doesn't care about people and is reckless and stupid. It may be the only alter-ego I've written that's male. It was good for my recovery to get into this character. It was just plain fun. I got really cartoony on it... In the second story I did, I was already very cartoony, but on one character, I just drew a slash for a mouth at the bottom of her very broad face. It looked so cool. It was a way of doing the mouth that took away from the cuteness of the cartoon look. That style really needed it, because I can do cute really easily."

Ray Mescallardo, in his *T CJ* review of another collection, *Strip Joint* ['98], praised the visual trope's effectiveness and offered, "The long-in-tooth look populates Lay's strips with blank-staring fools, the ludicrously disgruntled, and the occasional heroine seeking personal happiness." But, at some point, she left that affectation aside. "I did that kind of 'Big Tooth' style because it looked edgy. I leaned toward cute and I wanted something to offset that. So the teeth put it on edge and I did that for a number of years until I got tired of its limitations. I wanted to show expressions better. So I sort of started introducing full mouths now and then, and now I've left that toothy thing in the past."

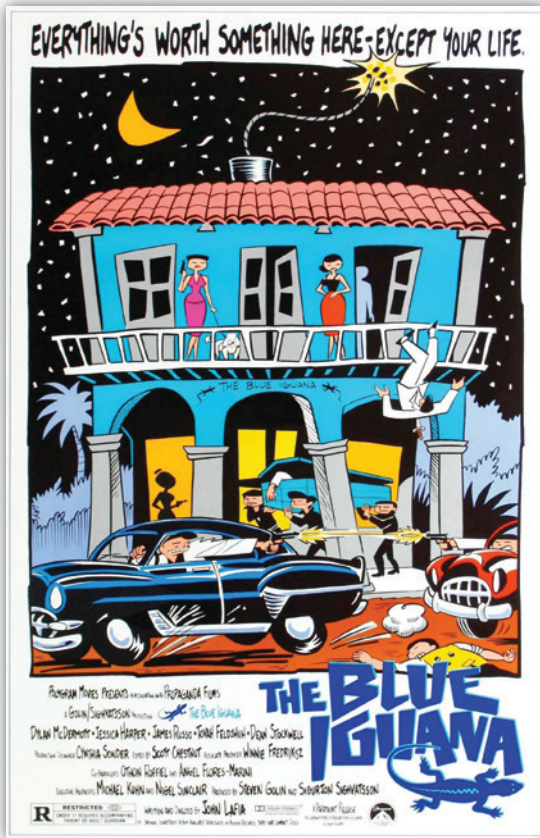
THE BIG SKINNY

At some point, Carol decided to move back West. "I'm a California girl," she told Hart Seely of the *Ahoy Comics* website. "Third generation. It's kind of in my blood." And soon thereafter, she became determined to lose weight, which started a journey that led to her trade paperback, the 208-page, all-comics *The Big Skinny: How I Changed My Fattitude* ['08].

"I call it a cartoon diet book. Random House had other ideas. They wanted to name it a memoir because that was hot the year before (or something like that). And it had a couple of memoir-ish chapters, but basically it's a how-to book. And the idea for it came because I had been fat most of my life and, at one point, I tipped into obesity. When I was about 50, I saw a picture of myself and didn't like what I saw, and just went on a campaign. So I did it very methodically. And instead of [writing it]... When I have something I want to share, it's just easier for me to write it down and put it in a comic. So that's what I did.

"I think the cover came first, and I met Betsy Amster, a literary agent, and she liked it and, when she was shopping books around in New York, nobody wanted it because they couldn't tell what it was. Is it a diet book? Is it a graphic novel? Is it a memoir? Is it... whatever? Where would bookstores place this? In what section? So finally, she was talking to an editor at Random House and the editor saw this cover sticking out of her bag. 'What's that?' And she bought it. So all it takes is one. And it was a lot of work. This is before I was drawing digitally. The coloring was done digitally, but everything else was done by hand.

"I'm not saying everybody has to do this [diet] and I'm not fat shaming. It's just that I feel better being at my proper weight. It's healthier, clothes fit better, I'm comfortable. And if somebody wants to know how I did it, here it is." She added, "And my eating has evolved since then. I am a vegan now for the last eight years, and that's even better for me."



"Dive Buddy" illustration © Carol Lay.

The Blue Iguana TM & © the respective owner.

SPRINGFIELD STAY

In the late '00s/early '10s, Carol came into the orbit of longtime friend Matt Groening's phenomenally successful creation, and did a stint at Bongo Comics, where she worked on *The Simpsons* comics line, and it was likely another old pal's recommendation that got her the job.

"I think Mark Evanier suggested me to [editor] Bill Morrison, who called me. I met Bill at the offices, over there in Santa Monica, and pitched him an idea on the spot. And, with *The Simpsons* comics, they were hauling in people like Beto [Gilbert Hernandez] or Jaime [Hernandez] or whomever, and [the cartoonists] could draw in their own style. They didn't have to do *Simpsons*-style. But, having worked in studios and on comics that have models, if it's got a model, I'm going to try to do that because... I don't know... that's the way I am." She added, "It was a lot of fun because I got to write the stories. And I so love Lisa Simpson, who's the moral center of that universe."

LAY HAS SOMETHING TO SAY

It's hardly surprising, given the thoughtful structure and clever wordplay of her *Story Minute* vignettes, that Carol would be singularly sought after for her writing skills. After giving her *Good Girls* screenplay a read, then DC editor Charlie Kochman enlisted her to write a *Wonder Woman* novel, *Mythos* ['02], a job which had its challenges as A) she had never written professional prose before and B) she knew next to nothing about the DC super-heroes. "And then I studied up on Green Lantern, Batman, Superman, and all that stuff," she told me. "Some writer at DC had decided to kill off Wonder Woman's mother, Hippolyta. And I thought, 'No!' Because mother/daughter dynamics are very interesting, so I just wrote it as if that storyline hadn't happened."

And, recently, the folks at Ahoy Comics have tapped her to write a series of 700-word tales, some of them quite disturbing. "I've done about 30 of those little short stories with attendant illustrations that either run across the top of the page or along the side, like a column. And I've done a couple of longer form comic stories, one for the *Edgar Allan Poe's Snifter of Terror* and one for *Project Cryptid*."



MY TIME MACHINE, MURDERBURG, & THE NEXT THING

As of late, Carol has been focused making use of her skills as both writer and artist for a series of books published by Fantagraphics. In our discussion about her multitude of art styles, Carol told me, "Now, as far as my style goes, it is determined by the story I'm telling. Take for instance, my latest two books, *Murderburg*, which is a collection of six stories, or *My Time Machine*, which is a graphic novel. *My Time Machine* is more or less serious science fiction, more or less a contemporary sequel to *The Time Machine*, by H.G. Wells. So I started the art pretty much when the pandemic locked us all down and I modeled the protagonist on myself. So I ended up posing and taking photos with my iPhone to use as a reference to get hand gestures right, or leg positions, or whatever. I am not a natural artist. I need reference."

"*Murderburg*," she explained, "is cartoony and I was playing with a more angular style. This is after having worked on *Simpsons* comics for a few years and it's just fun." The stories are, she offered, "Obviously a comic take on what if you crossed *The Addams Family* with *The Sopranos*. And *My Time Machine* is what if all your fears are coming true and you have a time machine to go into the future."

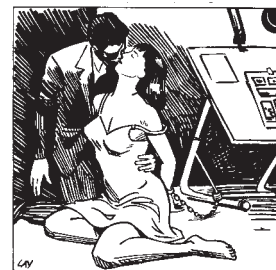
Maybe the Carol Lay essence is to recognize that, beyond the material's playfulness and regardless of the joy she experiences producing such an impressive life's work, she gives enormous thought to any given project. Overall, she said, "I care about how everything looks. I am a perfectionist."

Carol's also a tough nut to crack. Despite my probing,

all she would share about her next graphic novel was an impressive page length – 230 – and that she's still puzzling out how to make it all fit together to her satisfaction. And, of course, admitting that she's having great fun along the way.

This spread: Clockwise from opposite page far left is Carol's illustration that adorned her chilling short story, "Dive Buddy," that appeared in *Billionaire Island* #6 ['20]; panel from her (sorta) autobiographical tale, "The Visitation," *Good Girls* #4 [Feb. '89]; Carol's "slave to her drawing table" self-portrait she submitted to *Twisted Sisters: A Collection of Bad Girl Art* ['91]; Carol's pastiche featuring his Jeff and Akbar appeared on a poster honoring Matt Groening retirement from his *Life in Hell* comic strip in 2012; and Carol's coolio poster art for a 1986 B-movie.

YE ED. REGRETS... There is so much more to cover in a Carol Lay life-spanning feature – including the unjust "Pep Girls" saga; weird, tragic story of her apartment fire; "Persistence of Kat Klocks" painting; importance of "The Thing Under the Futon"; being the girl "Art Boy"; etc. – but we truly hope this piece gives a fair indication of the woman's astonishingly wide range of accomplishments!



Wannabe Metal: Oh, Gasm!

Mark Wheatley on Myron Fass and creating the "Spaced Out Illustrated Fantasy" magazine

by JON B. COOKE



Above: Mark Wheatley during his fanzine days. **Below:** That publication was Nucleus (#8 with Bernie Wrightson cover). **Inset right:** Before he helped launch Gasm, Wheatley produced a comics feature for Rock magazine, "Hootz and Tootz." **Bottom:** Countrywide publisher Myron Fass, himself.



And, lo, so it was that The Man, in his generous and glorious benevolence, decreed the young artist should go forth and journey to the Great City and be granted entrance to the fabled House of Ideas. Thus, would begin the lad's ascent to creative greatness. Or something like that, if not exactly.

That "young artist" is today the creative juggernaut who founded Insight Studios Group, Mark Wheatley, an artist/writer/editor who still retains the same stubborn tenacity and relentless ambition he had displayed since childhood. An early example of that drive was the time his parents seized the kid's comics and young Mark, in an indignant response to such grave injustice, started drawing his own.

That stick-to-it-iveness continued into his teen years, when he discovered comics fandom and connected with Gary Groth, then publishing *Fantastic Fanzine*. "And he didn't particularly want to publish the first drawings I was sending him (and they were pretty bad, so I don't blame him)," Wheatley told me. "But I decided, once again in that defiant mood, to start publishing my own fanzines so that I could get my stuff in print. And I did."

And, enrolled at the Virginia Commonwealth University, the young man attained vast publication production experience, and he also made a suggestion to the dean for Stan Lee, Marvel's big kahuna, to come and lecture at the school about comics. Of course, Wheatley enticed the comics legend to check out his portfolio, and Lee told him to drop by the Manhattan bullpen and meet art director John Romita.

Alas, while Romita confirmed the grad's talents were considerable, the times, they were tough. DC's implosion was imminent and Charlton had shut down its comics line, and Marvel wasn't hiring. "So I went over and I saw my buddy, John Workman – who I had published in my fanzine – at DC Comics, and he gave me the name of Countrywide Publishing and said, 'They probably will give you some illustration work.' So I went down there and they did."

MYRON THE MADMAN

Countrywide Publications, Inc., was owned by "a gun-wielding lunatic Jew from Brooklyn – the 'demon god of pulp magazines'" (as described in *Dirty! Dirty! Dirty!: Of Playboys, Pigs, and Penthouse Paupers*



[11]), former Pre-Code horror comic book artist Myron Fass. The first thing to know about the man is that he was wildly successful, sometimes publishing as many as 50 different titles every year.

To prove his worth to a *Village Voice* writer, Fass pointed to his office door. Mark Jacobson observed, "On it, in plain view – just so the peons know who they're dealing with – is a Dun and Bradstreet report saying Myron's Countrywide Publications grossed \$25 million last year; this year, Myron says, the gross will double. In fact, Myron is presently the single largest 'multi-title' newsstand publisher in the country."

The second thing to realize about Fass is that his behavior was usually beyond the pale. There was the time he pistol-whipped* his partner, Stanley Harris, in view of the entire staff. Plus the man would say anything. Jacobson wrote, "Myron is at least as shrewd as he is crude. Talking to him is fun. He's like a good-copy machine. He can't resist saying certain things he knows he shouldn't say. But it's exhausting, too. A conversation with Myron is like a visit to a sadistic dentist who keeps probing with different kinds of abuse until he finds the one wound that's tender. Then he rams the high-speed drill in there and leans on it."

*Fass – who joined up with Carl Burgos to take on the Marvel Comics Group with a short-lived comics line, M.F. Enterprises, with the "Let's Split!" version of *Captain Marvel* – always had a Colt .45 pistol holstered to his hip and wasn't shy about waving it around the office.

Nucleus #8 cover courtesy of Manny Maris; Nucleus; "Gasm" artwork courtesy of TM & © Mark Wheatley.



WHEATLEY GOES OFF BROADWAY

While ultimately Fass was the boss man at Countrywide, Wheatley reported to Jeffrey Goodman, the company's editor-in-chief. "He was a young guy my age," Wheatley said, "and, as my mother would say, he had a lot of chutzpah... and we kind of latched on to each other there."

Wheatley continued, "The first day I go there, I'm in the waiting room and there's a tiny little glass window for the receptionist, so it's almost like prison... They called me in and I went inside. Countrywide was the whole floor of this building down around Broadway. And the entire floor was an open floor except for two offices at the front and one office at the back, and then a storage area. Everything was open.

"What was unusual was that there were armed guards around the periphery with rifles and pistols slung on their hips and looking really menacing. And I walked by these guys with my portfolio, and I got to Jeff and he looked at my portfolio and was very impressed and started assigning me stuff to illustrate. He needed illustrations for *UFO* magazine, *Rock* magazine, *Acid Rock* magazine, things like this. And, when it became clear that we had some sort of rapport going on, and he actually liked what I was doing, we were comfortable with one another. I said, 'What's with the armed guards?' And he said, 'So Myron Fass and Stanley Harris are partners in Countrywide Publications, and Stanley is cleaning out his office and those are his bodyguards. The reason he's cleaning out his office is that the partnership is dissolving because Myron pistol-whipped him and put him in the hospital a few weeks ago.' So that was the day Stanley Harris went off to form Harris Publications."

Wheatley was then ushered in to meet the notorious magazine mogul himself. "And Myron really liked my stuff. Myron was a comic book artist at one time and had a soft spot for comic art. And he saw that I had some logo designs in my portfolio. He said, 'Can you design some for my magazines?' And I said, 'Sure!' So I started designing logos and the first couple I did were fairly straightforward with just a couple of Rubylith overlays, for different shadow effects and things. And since I knew printing, I knew how to get those

effects. So he gave me *Acid Rock* to do, which was because of its psychedelic nature. I went nuts with overlays and things to create color holds and kind of a trippy sort of look to the logo with eyes staring out at you. And so it had something like (I don't know) maybe 10 overlays."

From the beginning, Wheatley explained, "Myron always wanted to see my work when I brought it in. And so I brought the *Acid Rock* logo in this day, and he looked at it, he looked at me, and I was feeling pretty cocky about it because I knew what I was doing. But he says, 'I don't think anybody could ever figure out how the f*ck to print using this!' And I said, 'No, anybody could do this.'"

Fass brings in a worker from the production department and, Wheatley continued, "The guy looks at the stuff and says it mostly makes sense... and so he leaves. Now, Myron always has to sign off on my invoice, but refused. He looked in my face, threw the logo on the floor, and told me, unless I peed on my original art I had done for that logo, he wouldn't pay me! Because he knew I was proud of my work. So I looked at him, summed him up, and said, 'Myron, I wouldn't dream of pissing on that logo because you're the head man here. That's your responsibility to pee on it.' And he started laughing and laughing, and he said, 'I knew there was a reason why I liked you.' And he signed off on my invoice."

TAKING THE "OR" OUT OF "GASM"

The genesis of *Gasm*, Wheatley explained, happened thusly: "So I had been doing back-up comics for one of their rock magazines. I think it was for *Rock* magazine, a feature called 'Hootz and Tootz,' which were these super-powered characters who somehow were also performers in the music industry and they would be playing clubs and stuff. I think I did



Top: *Gasm* #1-3 [Nov. '77-Feb. '78], with respective covers by Terry Pastor (#1 and 2) and Steve Hickman. **Above:** Note Wheatley's *Acid Rock* logo. **Below:** Wheatley self-caricature from *Rump* #1. **Bottom:** Countrywide letterhead.



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Above: *Gasm* ad mentioning Wheatley's "Gasm" character. **Inset right:** Wheatley's serial lasted for the entire run of *Gasm*. **Below:** Rump #1-3. **Next page:** Photo of Wheatley and Marc Hempel at the 1978 Comic Art Con, where the future collaborators first met.

like four or five pages each issue for maybe three issues, something like that. And at that point they decided they wanted to do maybe some kind of comic magazine that would aim at the then current hippie market. And so they were thinking their agenda was something sexy and science fiction. And so, sitting there in the cubicle with Jeff, I said, 'We should just call it *Gasm*, by taking the 'Or' out of 'Orgasm.'" And he said, 'Well, if you can go work up a presentation for it, I'll take it in and pitch it to Myron.' And I did.

"I was only supposed to come up with the title and a cover, but once I came up with the title, I came up with a character and worked out a story and did some sample pages and took that back as well. And Jeff and I pitched it to Myron and Myron said, 'Yeah, sure, go do it.' And that was it. One good thing you have to say about Countrywide is there was not much red tape!"

Gasm #1 was cover-dated November 1977 – appearing about seven months after *Heavy Metal's* debut on the stands – and the 64-page premiere featured work by Raul Venzina (best known for his Fantaco comics), Canadian artist Gene Day, the then-husband and wife team of Chuck Dixon* and Judith Hunt, Arvell Jones, the possibly never-seen-again-in-comics Seaton Hancock, John Workman, and renowned alt cartoonist, Ben Katchor. David Bowie album cover artist Terry Pastor's painting served as the cover, but Wheatley scored with a 12-page color section devoted to his serial, "Gasm."

The much-celebrated Katchor was fuzzy about his three *Gasm* submissions, as he shared with me, "I don't recall how I heard about the launching of *Gasm*. It was a low-budget magazine out of the Countrywide magazine mill. I sold them a few strips. The editor, Jeff Goodman, did it as a personal interest project among the hundreds of other magazines they published – *UFO*, *True Crime*, etc."

Asked about Goodman being the person receiving most of the credit for creating *Gasm*, Wheatley shrugs. "Well, I'm not surprised... Although, it all started with a conversation where Jeff asked me to come up with something. But *Heavy Metal* had not yet happened at that point. We were thinking undergrounds. I was already doing comics for his other mags. And logo designs. And illustrations."

*Dixon, who also wrote and drew his own strips for *Gasm*, as well as scribed those nicely rendered yarns by his then-wife, told Lou Mouglin in *Comics Interview*, "My first comic work was with a very small-time low-budget lowbrow outfit called Countrywide. They did an odious book called *Gasm* which I was in for three issues... They went to [Richard] Corben reprints toward the end. It was an experience, like working for one of those slave shops of the '40s. That chased me away from comics for a good long while."

COMICS CONSULTANT

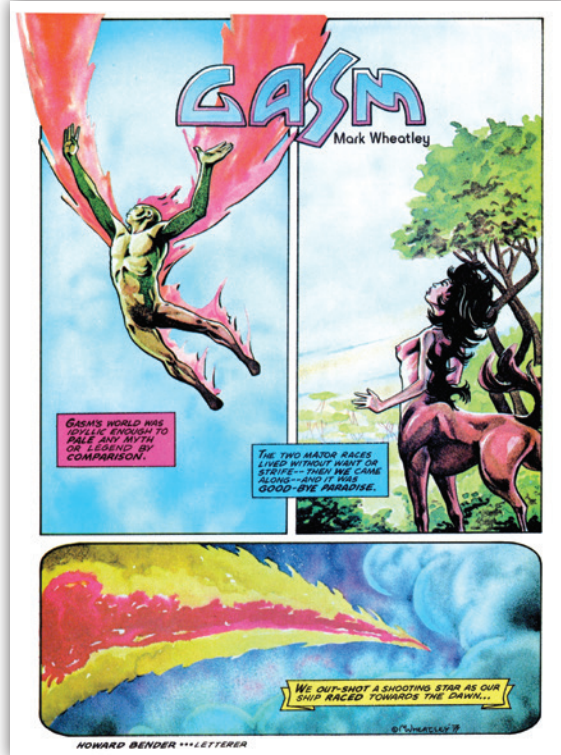
While he wouldn't describe himself as the de facto editor, he did help recruit talent to fill the pages of *Gasm*, which was described in house ads as a periodical filled with "berserk computers, naked wenches, crazed robots, lurid lust-crazed lunatics, insane aliens, and much more."

Wheatley said, "I had to fill it up with comic artists and so I had to reach out to people I knew. I went back to Continuity where I knew a couple people from having talked with Neal and I got John Workman on board and [future Wheatley creative partner] Marc [Hempel] was still in college at the time, but I think I got a page or two from him. I ended up having to go through people's portfolios in that reception room off the lobby elevators because Countrywide didn't want to let 'em in to the office. So that's where I met Judith Hunt and Chuck Dixon and James O'Barr and Don Lomax."

As Wheatley didn't have his own office on the premises, "I pretty much was off in my studio doing my own work. And, when I would come in, they would have me meet with people. They started scheduling people to bring their portfolios on the day that I was coming in. And so that's how I ran into these guys. And we probably only did that maybe three times before we had enough people to fill the magazine. It was all pretty loose, extremely, extremely loose."

To keep freelance expenses within budget, "I was encouraged to reach out for second publication rights. They didn't have enough money for covers of decent quality, so I encouraged them to reach out to Steve Hickman and to Patrick Woodroffe for second publication rights for covers. And they found Jim Burns, I think."

About his own material, Wheatley admitted, "I had never done full-color comics, so I worked out my own techniques and had to do eight or 10 pages every issue, however frequently it was published... And one thing I do remember is I still felt like there was no place for me in comics because they kept telling me they couldn't hire anybody."



Gasm TM & © Mark Wheatley. Rump TM & © the respective copyright holder.

DEFINE SEXY

Wheatley did receive some encouragement regarding his nicely reproduced color comics. "I ran into Howard Chaykin after the second issue of *Gasm* came out – I had published Howard's first comic in my fanzine – so we kind of knew each other, although we'd only met face-to-face when I got to New York.

And he was raving to me about what I was

doing with my comics in *Gasm*. And, of course, I just felt dirty because of the way *Countrywide* was. No, it just didn't feel like I was doing anything worthwhile with that thing. So, when he suddenly was going on about how he liked what I was doing, maybe I *was* doing something. I don't know."

He continued, "But the problem I had is that I was really – *seriously* – innocent when they said they wanted 'sexy science fiction,' I thought we were going to be doing *sexy* science fiction. But all they *really* wanted was excuses to have a lot of naked women in the magazine, preferably giving blow jobs. In fact, Myron had a written request that we feature at least five blow jobs in each issue. I argued with Jeff about it, but he said, 'If that's what he wants, that's what he gets.' So I worked a whole sequence of multi-

breasted ladies performing oral sex on my main character in 'Gasm.' And, when I delivered it, Myron took a look and said, 'Oh my god! You're going to bring the FBI down on me! They're going to shut me down! We can't print this!' I said, 'This is what you were asking for!' He said, 'Yeah, but you're not really supposed to *show* it!' So I had to go back and I had to paste pillows over the body parts, but it just wasn't really... it wasn't what I had imagined doing quality work was going to be."

GOODBYE, GASM

Overall, *Gasm* lasted for five bi-monthly issues, giving up the ghost (without warning) in mid-'78. After #1, subsequent contributors included Ned Sonntag, Matt Howarth, James O'Barr, Marc Hempel, and reprints of work by Richard Corben, Gary Winnick, and Frank Cirroco (though the latter two appear to have also submitted original material, as well), all in addition to most of the premiere issue's crew. Despite the clumsily inserted smut scenes, of note is the excellence of some art, especially the pages by Gene Day, who would soon die far too young, at age 31, in 1982. And there's exceptional art by Vietnam veteran Don Lomax, his first published comic tales.

In his coyly titled essay, "The Little Death of *Gasm*," Richard J. Arndt concludes, "So what to make of *Gasm*? It's a footnote really. It didn't last long enough to pose any serious threat to *Heavy Metal* or [Warren Publishing's] *1984*, which debuted two months after *Gasm*'s final issue. Unlike [even more short-lived] *Web of Horror* [three issues, '69-'70], whose fanzine artists (such as Bernie Wrightson, Mike Kaluta, Ralph Reese, Frank Brunner, and Bruce Jones) soon changed the way the industry looked, most of the artists



in *Gasm* would take years to make their impact on American comics and, none of them, including the excellent Gene Day, would have the impact of the *Web* crew on how comics are viewed. What you have with *Gasm* is simply a surprisingly good magazine, with stories that range from acceptable to excellent and some fine artwork by artists just at the beginning of their

long, worthwhile careers."

That said, not to be overlooked is the vile, often violent misogyny exhibited throughout the series, albeit not unusual for adult comics of the day.

THE TROUBLE WITH RUMP

Little known is the fact Myron Fass published a three-issue run of a quarterly comics magazine called *Rump* [Summer '81–Winter '81], with all black-&-white interiors, which went ahead and reprinted a whole bunch of *Gasm* material, seemingly without permission. It even appropriated the tagline, "Spaced-Out Fantasies," reused two *Gasm* covers, and published Wheatley's pornographic parody of *Star Trek*, an eight-pager elegantly titled, "Star F*ck."

"I had gotten a signed contract with Myron," Wheatley revealed about learning of *Rump*, "with his signatures all over it that I owned *Gasm*. And that the rights to the title, the characters, and the comics I had done were mine, 100%. And that no reprint would be authorized or allowed. And he signed that, and that was our agreement.

"So, when *Rump* came out representing my stuff, I went to him. By the way, they had closed that office by then and gone off and started another, dumping a bunch of debt and starting another publishing company under another name. And I was able to track down [Myron brother and *Countrywide* bookkeeper] Irving Fass's home phone number. And I called him and he said, 'Oh sh*t, I'm sorry, Mark, what if we paid you \$800 for the issue we published and we won't use any more of your work?' I said, 'Okay, thank you.'"

(Perhaps the only noteworthy material to appear in *Rump* was Joe Coleman's work in #3, where he contributed the great, super-grotesque cover and a tripped-out four-pager, "Last Call," though Gene Day does have a neat parody of the rock 'n roll band, Kiss, in his story called, "Cuss Off.")

Gasm is, of course, hardly a blip in the illustrative career of artist/writer/editor/graphic novelist/inventor Mark Wheatley, who very soon thereafter established Insight Studios, where he was joined by Marc Hempel in 1980. Together they would create the beloved First Comics series, *Mars*, and both remain prolific creators in the comics field. Still, despite it being decades since his days toiling in the realm of Mad Myron and the denizens of *Countrywide*, just invite the man to supper and Mark Wheatley would be more than happy to regale fellow diners all about those crazy, fantastical, spaced out days of that strange and glorious magazine called *Gasm*.

GASM

Jack Katz, Graphic Novelist

The artist reveals about a brief return to mainstream comics and independent magnum opus

Below: Cover for the first printing of *The First Kingdom* #1 [July '74], which sported Larry Todd's paints over Jack Katz's line art. Todd's work was replaced for the 1975 reprint. Publisher Bud Plant explained, "Jack decided he did not like the fact his inks pretty much disappeared under Larry's work, so we did a new pen-&-ink plus [standard] color for the next editions." This was the first chapter of Katz's magnum opus, which concluded with #24 ['86].

Conducted by TED JALBERT

[Introduction: *The first portion of this interview covered Jack Katz's early days in Brooklyn, break into comics, and painting career. The Q+A was conducted over several sessions, between mid-2019 to early '21. Jack passed away in 2025. His son, Ivan, was interviewed in CBC #43. – T.J.]*

1969-74: A RETURN TO THE COMICS INDUSTRY

Ted Jalbert: You continued to paint until 1969. What made you return to comics?

Jack Katz: My son, Ivan, showed me some of the stuff that was being made.... black-&-white comics, stuff like that, and again I got the bug, one more time. And I decided

I wanted to get back, and I made up samples and immediately at Marvel, the god that existed (Stan Lee), accepted my work immediately. It was evident that I had the talent. I did a number of things at Marvel, I did a number of things at DC.

I got back in the business and, until 1973, I was doing comics again, until finally I just put the idea of working for anybody else out of my mind. I wrote a lot of stories during this period, and I completed many stories which were never published. I did a lot of romance stuff... Young romance, old romance! I got to know Bill Everett, who did the *Sub-Mariner*, and we became extremely good friends. And so, Bill said, "I'd like to ink your stuff." Because he loved my drawing, you know! Bill Everett saved my life. I hitchhiked from Berkeley to New York. Bill Everett's place was on 40th Street, right next to the New York Public Library. And that's how Bill and I got to know each other.

Jim Steranko was very, very important in a certain sense. I saw how he was trying to handle some of the stuff for Marvel, and I figured out that maybe this is a way to go, that I might be able to actually do my own thing... by working within the companies, see, like a sneak. But it didn't work out.

Ted: You returned to Marvel in 1969.

Jack: And then I also did another story at the same time, at Marvel, it was a frantic time. And when I did that *Sub-Mariner* story, I had him kidnapped by aliens from another planet. Well, Stan went up the wall. With me he was always up the wall, I'm telling you! It's a miracle I didn't give him gall stones or something! He says "Jack, you can't do this with my characters!" And so, he gave the 20-pager over to Marie Severin, and she took about 12 pages out of it and changed the whole damn thing. And Marie was very good, she was a mechanic, a very good mechanic. All of these people are really very good.

Also, I got a job at Skywald, in which I was doing all the premium work there. But Skywald was terribly under-financed. Everybody was trying to find a guiding light to help them. And they did for a while...

Ted: How did you connect with Skywald?

Jack: They knew about me, so it was very easy to get work. Sol Brodsky called me. He said to me, "Jack, stop trying to please Stan Lee. Do me a favor, come over to us. You can do anything you want. Carte blanche, whatever you want to do!" But Sol was as clever as they come... So, the first thing, I go over, the first day, I had severed my relationship with DC, I go over there, and he says "Jack, you know what? We need a new kind of Tarzan!" I said "What?!" He says "Yeah, you like Hal Foster..." So, I did three issues of *Zangar* [*Jungle Adventures*]. But I said "Sol, you said I could do my own things!" So, he gave me a chance in the black-&-whites.

So, in *Zangar*, it was still germinating issues of what were coming up to the surface... was *The First Kingdom*. In fact,



The First Kingdom TM & © the estate of Jack Katz.

in the black-&-white that I did for Warren, in "Targos," I was starting to outline *The First Kingdom*... The third book that I did with Zangar is the beginning of *The First Kingdom*. It was a test situation and, of course, it was extremely original, and they didn't like the idea that I wrote it. Skywald was under-financed. So, what they did, they sent me out to the provinces. It was the last time that I came out to California, and I stayed.

Ted: Skywald sent you to California?

Jack: Yeah, they wanted me to see how the distribution was going.

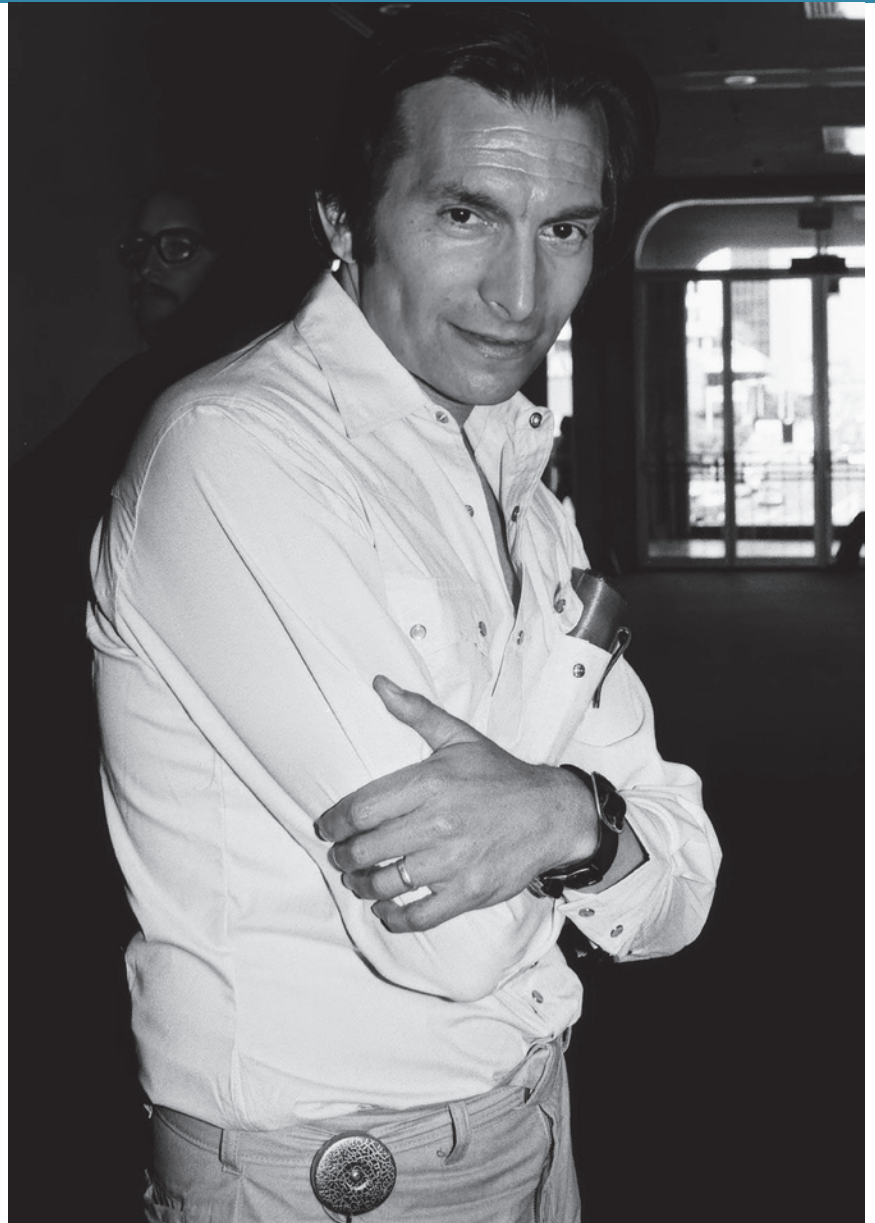
Ted: You did a few romance stories in the early 1970s. How did you feel about working on these romance stories?

Jack: Well, it was a relief to me, because it was close to reality. I tried my best to accommodate all the people who were involved. I was always falling in love. The enspellment [sic] was always better than the disenchantment. It took me about three-six hours to pencil a page. I was living in Oakland when I drew these stories.

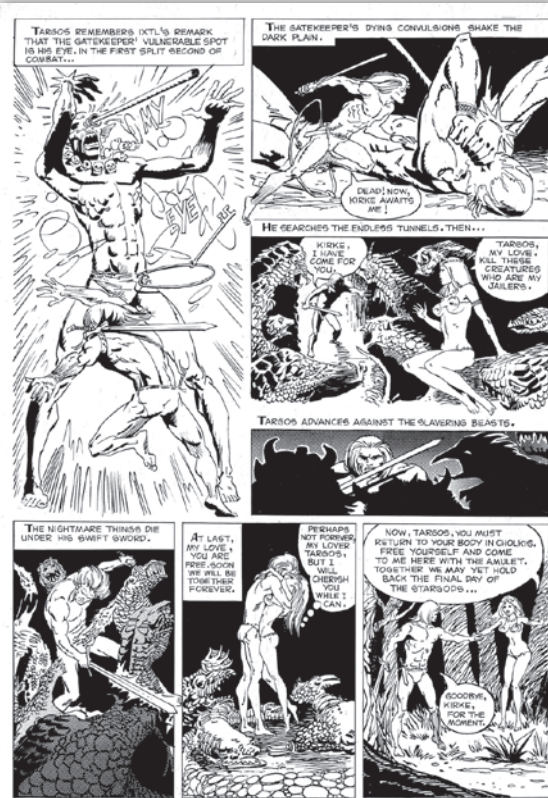
Ted: How did you like working with Dorothy Woolfolk, the romance editor at DC Comics?

Jack: She fell in love with my work. Oh my god, and I was going through this divorce at that time. And she just loved my stuff. Dorothy was a very sensitive young lady really, and I never realized how hungry she was for good artwork. She knew my stuff, she had seen it. She was very... concerned. "Jack, remember to do this. And remember to do that." She was very good person.

There were some people who should never have been editors. She had a heart, which is the worst thing in the world, because she picked me up when everybody else



Above: The artist posed for Jackie Estrada at the 1980 San Diego Comic-Con. **Inset left:** Page from Katz's singular story for Warren Publications, "Targos" [Creepy #45, May '72]. **Below:** Katz's work appeared in *Nightmare* #1 [Dec. '70].



[said], "Oh Jack Katz, it's gonna take a year for him to do a page!" She stressed one area of the story or another one. The one she gave me, which I hated and I realized she was right, eventually, was about this girl who was taller than all the boys ("Too Tall to Love") and they were making fun of her.

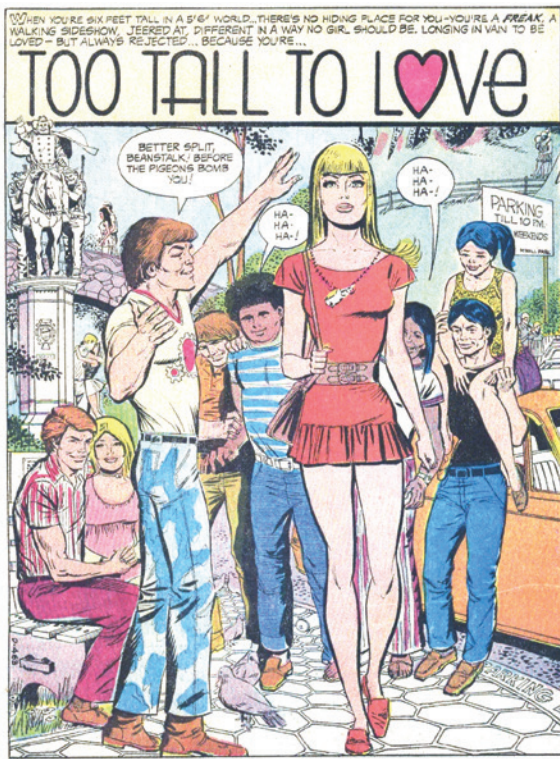
Ted: You also did the "Targos" story for Warren Publishing, which was a precursor to *The First Kingdom*.

Jack: You betcha! There's *The First Kingdom* again... I was telescoping all these ideas together...

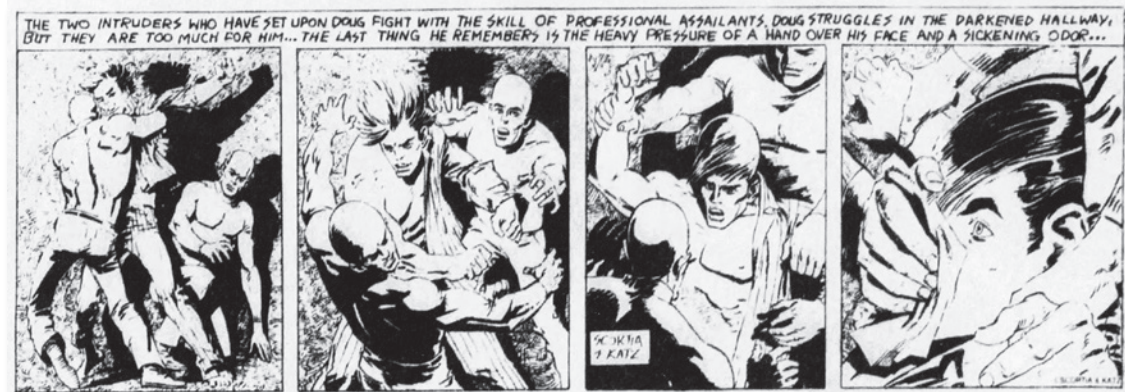
Ted: Galactic Prime was a newspaper comic strip you did with author Tom Scortia.

Jack: In 1978, I drew the *Galactic Prime* comic strip, which ran for seven weeks in a local newspaper. I was always drawing. It was written by Tom Scortia, who said we should do a science fiction thing. So I did seven weeks for the *Independent-Gazette*, in Berkeley. It was about this young man whose teacher is actually a captain aboard a starship. And it was very carefully illustrated. But something happened with Tom. They started to do computerized witchcraft and all kinds of stuff... so I dropped out. I told them I can't do this





Above: Splash to Jack's story in *Falling in Love* #130 [Mar. '72] **Inset right:** Jack's cover, *Jungle Adventures* #3 [June '71]. **Next page:** First two pages of *The First Kingdom* #1 [Aug. '74], reformatted from initial newspaper strip layout. **Below:** Jack's cover, *Young Romance* #193 [May '73]. **Bottom:** Galactic Prime strip [July 24, '78].



any more.

Ted: How did you connect with Tom Scortia?

Jack: I met Tom Scortia and Frank Robinson in Redwood City. Dick Lupoff used to put on comic cons, and so I got to know a lot of people during that period. The Mystery Writers of America got a hold of me, and they wanted me to give a speech. And I did, and Tom was working at NASA. Tom Scortia and Frank Robinson also did *The Glass Inferno*, which was adapted to film as *Towering Inferno*.

MOVING TO CALIFORNIA

Ted: You moved to California in 1969.

Jack: By that time, one of the influences of my going out was I met a young lady

with an extremely well-endowed body, and I decided, well, maybe the better part of valor is to go out there. I stayed at her place on Hudson Street, in Redwood City, right in the middle of pimp headquarters. They were all young ladies who had dropped out of school, they were very pretty... There was a lot of stuff in those days... I was very unhappy, because I was still going through problems with marriages, and this pall that I was living in... I just didn't think I could do something of substance.

Ted: When did you live in a commune?

Jack: The commune was in Berkeley. It was very short, three months, and I had to get out. This guy used to come down butt naked with his thing hanging out. There's no way. These people, they're very nice people, they were paralyzed with fear, but they didn't know it. And so, they put on this excessive tolerance for almost everything. They sometimes took little mushrooms... but nothing worked with me.

Ted: After that you moved to Oakland, California.

Jack: I was living on 220th Street, in Oakland, it was an enormous place, 14-foot ceilings. You've never seen anything like it. The back was as long and as big... it was like a forest! Trees, you can't imagine, I thought I saw Tarzan swinging in those trees. The place was six rooms, the

ceilings were 14 feet high. My landlord was an industrialist of sort. One of the reasons he let me stay in this place is he said "Would you be able to paint the interior?" Well, these were 14-foot ceilings! These were formally mansions. And, one day, while I was painting, I put my foot into a bucket of paint! I had to get new shoes.

And that's when I met Derek, and Derek and I became partners in a company, and we shared a van. He had been a captain in the Army, and something happened to him, and he was crazy. Derek and I were called "The Outsiders," and we used to do these jobs and so, many times, we were pursued by the union people, because they wanted those jobs. We were doing well. We did house-painting on the inside and outside. We had scaffolds... and then it just didn't take anymore. And he wanted me to keep working. We were together for close to two years. He left me with the



van, and he took the tools and moved to Los Angeles. Those tools were worth three times as much as the van.

There were odd jobs that my roommate, Jerry, was able to give me. There was a Safeway, and this was a before a holiday, and they said they needed some extra help. And I said "I'm not union." They said, "It doesn't matter." So I had a job there for three weeks, and, boy, I tell you, it was a godsend, because I got paid pretty well.

And then somebody had to have their backyard cleared. And when I hear this, backyard cleared... my god! Methuselah must have made a dump there

Falling in Love, Young Romance TM & © DC Comics; Jungle Adventures, Galactic Prime TM & © the respective copyright holders.

because it was just incredible! There was so much crap there, and I used to come home filthy, and come back to that room...!

After that I was living in the Berkeley Hills with a sleeping bag. I was completely homeless. Somehow, I managed to get enough money to eat during the day. This was in 1971, I think. I was always meeting people. I met this guy who had a spare room in Kensington, so this was my lodgings basically....

And then I met Caroline, my third wife, in 1972, and we seemed to hit it off pretty well in the beginning. We met on the Living Love Bus in Berkeley. (laughs) We got a place together in Berkeley. We still speak to each other, we're very good friends. We've become civilized with each other. Why not, you know.....?

1974-86: THE FIRST KINGDOM

Ted: Talk about The First Kingdom.

Jack: By the time I started *The First Kingdom* – and this is for all you kids who think you're losing time – I was 45 years old! This is a major thing!... My whole aim with *The First Kingdom* was I wanted to mature the field! I said, "Maybe I'm taking a terrible gamble, but somebody's gotta do it." And I felt compelled to do this thing! I felt that I was an assignee to fulfill a mission...

An atomic war had occurred... the resurrection of the human race, regeneration of the human race after an atomic holocaust. Everything has changed. The cartography has changed, the animals become either larger or smaller, there were Ogerons at that time, hunters of men... I still draw it in my head. How I got this, how this thing happened, I don't know. One day, I

was at Milton Caniff's home, we were talking, and I said to him, "Milton, I'm hyperventilating all the time!... because everything's so important to me, what I'm putting down." I was doing the *Kingdom* at the time. And he says, "Jack, you're not a turd. You're not a mechanic. The tide of creativity is inside you!"

Everything that I put down on these pages I've seen in my dreams. I've seen visions. So I had to have what we call the penultimate, it's also the overture, which is *The First Kingdom*. And so I reviewed what goes on in the world. It's science fiction, it's knights in armor, exploring... I did get a Inkpot Award (1976) at San Diego Comic Con. And a number of the younger artists began to realize I was doing something that had never been done before. I opened up an avenue of expression unlike anything that had been done.

I was invited to quite a number of conventions... and I talked, and nobody understood what I was saying then... During the time I was doing the *Kingdom*, there was a great uncertainty. If not for my wife, who had a fantastic job at the University of California, I could have never been able to do it. She actually carried me through. She was also able to spell well. She helped me with those things. And as abstruse and as occult and as strange as *The First Kingdom* is, she was kind of willing to do this. I think she felt, in the long run, it would pay off and it will. It really will. No question, she has her name on the copyright.

Ted: You originally proposed *The First Kingdom* to the *San Francisco Chronicle* [newspaper] as a comic strip.

Jack: I did the first seven pages. I went all over. I went up to the *San Francisco Chronicle* and they said it would never work. DC said it would never fly. Almost everybody. I even went over to Stan Lee at Marvel Comics,





Above: In 2013, Titan Books began reprinting *The First Kingdom* epic saga behind hard covers in a series of six volumes, a smartly designed project. **Below:** The Unseen Jack Katz [21], edited by artist Liam Sharp, was launched as a Kickstarter campaign, resulting in a remarkable volume of previously unseen Jack Katz art.

California, and I'm gonna try the Comix and Comics store, there were four people running that store, (Robert Beerbohm, Bud Plant, John Barrett, and John Campbell) And I went there and, the minute they saw it, they said, "Okay, just do the book, and we'll [publish] it." They were young kids and it was very meaningful to have something like this. I spent a rough six cents on each of those sheets for the art. [laughs] I was taking a gamble and we had very little money. So it worked out... I also changed the size of the page, so that it would be keeping with what I wanted to do. I think it's important

at the time, and he said "This science fiction will never work. You don't know what you're doing, Jack! Just do the stories!" [laughs]

Everybody was working the underground. So I went to the undergrounds, I figured there's got to be a way that I can do this as freely as I can, and I did! I was gonna go to Last Gasp. I went to Phil Seuling, and he said to me "I'll have to keep the originals..." I said, "No, that's not gonna work." I figured there's got to be a way that I can do this as freely as I can, and I did!

Ted: Robert Beerbohm was the one who decided to publish *The First Kingdom* originally.

Jack: I said, this is California, and I'm gonna try the Comix and Comics store, there were four people running that store, (Robert Beerbohm, Bud Plant, John Barrett, and John Campbell) And I went there and, the minute they saw it, they said, "Okay, just do the book, and we'll [publish] it." They were young kids and it was very meaningful to have something like this. I spent a rough six cents on each of those sheets for the art. [laughs] I was taking a gamble and we had very little money. So it worked out... I also changed the size of the page, so that it would be keeping with what I wanted to do. I think it's important for people who do not understand what I was doing. Sometimes you have to wait, you have to be patient. And at 92, I'm really patient.

Now what I did was I created a page, unlike anything that had been done before. And we started to do the *Kingdom*. I used the format and I created the first graphic novel.

Ted: Bud Plant took over the publishing of the series.

Jack: Eventually the other three partners walked out, and Bud was the remaining partner. And he kept it alive until the last book was published. Bud did a good job. He really did. He got the covers into a lot of his other publications. And Bud did an amazing job. He was very young at the time. It was amazing.

Ted: Do you remember the first time you brought the art of *The First Kingdom* into the store and showed it to Robert Beerbohm?

Jack: Yeah, I do. It was in the evening, they took a look, they said "yeah, we'll do it." There was no hesitation at all. They were young, and ambitious, and very, very involved in comics. They saw that it was doing very well. And so I started *The First Kingdom*, at this point. The art paper I had was six cents a sheet. But I took a gamble and it started to move. I was doing *The First Kingdom*, and it was really beginning to gel for me, and I ended up making \$100 a week, about \$5,000 a year. That's exactly what I made... but it was worth it to me! I was doing what I wanted, it was my own original story. I stole from nobody. I wasn't happy, I wasn't sad, I just felt comfortable with myself. And, if not for Caroline, at that time, who lived with me... we did pretty well.

Ted: How did *The First Kingdom* affect your life? You went to San Diego Comic-Con to accept an award, in 1976.

Jack: Only in an effort to try to get people to read *The Kingdom*... I went to San Diego many times. The one thing I miss about going down to San Diego Comic-Con, we used to go down the coast of California, to every one of the little tidal pools, and we found places where we could swim naked.

I met Alex Niño, Alfredo Alcalá – the Filipino group. I saw Frank Capra, Burne Hogarth, Neal Adams. I met everybody in the industry. Shel Dorf thought I was doing some interesting things. I met Stan Lynde, who did *Rick O'Shay*. Jim Steranko said to me, "Jack, why are you using a pen? You'll never finish this damn thing! Use a brush, it's faster!" Well, I still had some of the old Windsor-Newton brushes, and I began to use a brush, and most of *The First Kingdom* is done with brush, some of the pages are done a little bit with pen. But most of the pages are done with brush.

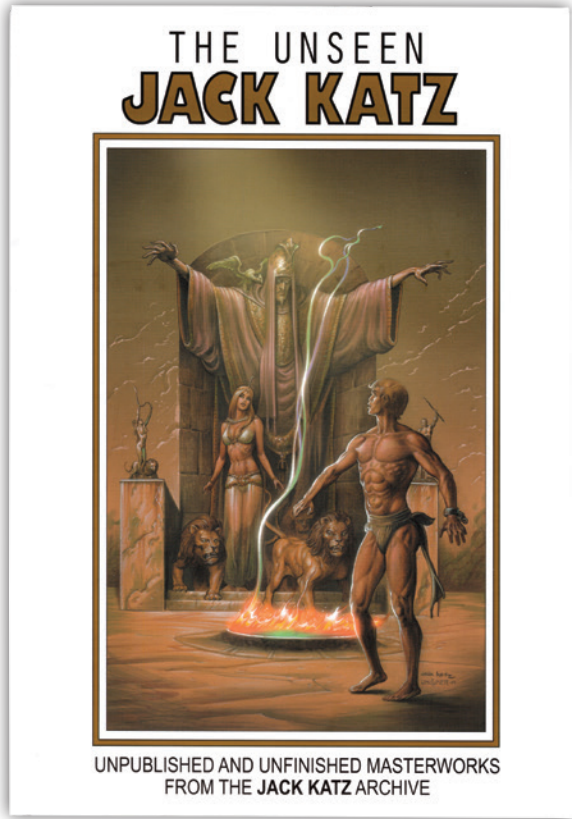
I met Milt Caniff, and I stayed at Milt's place, in Palm Springs. The nicest part is we always used to go to this hotel, that the 1920s actors had created there. It was amazing to see the actors there.

Ted: How did Caroline help you on *The First Kingdom*?

Jack: My former wife, Caroline, without her help... I'll never know to this day why she put up with this lunatic, the *Kingdom* couldn't have been made. And we limped along... Well, it was her money that came in every week, from UC-Berkeley. Without her salary at UC-Berkeley, I could not have survived on \$100 a week and paid rent. So she was instrumental in keeping alive this work which was unlike anything that had ever been done before. And this is how we lived. Nobody else could help me with the artwork, no matter what. And I don't know if she understood how arcane it was. It was different from anything that had ever been done before. And those words are mine.

During the time I was doing the *Kingdom*, there a great uncertainty. If not for my wife, who had a fantastic job at the University of California, I could have never been able to do it. She actually carried me through. She was also able to spell well. She helped me with those things. And as abstruse, and as occult, and as strange as the *Kingdom* is, she was kind of willing to do this. I think she felt in the long run it would pay off and it will. It really will. No question, she has her name on the copyright.

My wife, Caroline, said, "How long is this going to go



on?" By the time I got to Book 20, she said "Please Jack, finish this thing!" It took a lot of time, tremendous amount of time, mostly the writing and the rewriting. As the story progressed, as these visual began to come in contact with my inner-vision, I had to explain them.

Ted: *She helped paste up some of the typesetting?*

Jack: She did a lot of typesetting in the beginning, when I was in my primitive stage of publishing. Sometimes I'd give her a little black section, and I'd say "Just put in some little white dots, and we'll make believe that they're stars." And she did, she did a very good job, she was very assiduous. Oh, and she did one other thing: she checked my spelling, because I'm the worst speller in the history of the human race.

Ted: *Have you met any hardcore fans of The First Kingdom?*

Jack: I have, and they scare me! [*laughs*] In fact, they all want to get my telephone number and this and that.... Little do they know that I live in this fortress. You realize, you know, how did you get up to the second terrace there? So, it's a hermitage! What do you expect from a hermit? [*laughs*]

Ted: *You said you've had visions for The First Kingdom your whole life.*

Jack: Yes. The motivation behind *The First Kingdom* is not for the aggrandizement of my art, or to make more money, or become special. Almost all of *The First Kingdom* were visions of past civilizations and reincarnations of what we know of as what we think of as our infiniteverse. It's not like anything you can imagine. And I saw how these tremendous epical impacts that affected what we know as our own infiniteverse. And the recreation constantly... I did dream about the Milky Way, and I saw the extended arm of the Milky Way. And we are at the extreme end of the extended arm. And I saw how our little galaxy somehow was put together, and how the formulization of our earth... we have more than nine planets... The meteors that struck the earth and the changes, the fauna and flora, the three instincts that drive everybody – the instinct to survive, the instinct to replicate, and the instinct to migrate. It's all there.

1986-2021: AFTER THE KINGDOM

Ted: *After you finished The First Kingdom, you still had a lot of ideas. You spent a few years drawing comics, hoping to sell those to DC Comics.*

Jack: Yes, I did. Dick Giordano came here to see me, 'cause he had heard about the stuff I was doing. And we met at this little hotel. We had a very long conversation. Even though I was a rebel who had walked out of the business, he felt that I had enough substance to carry things... You don't know how hit and miss this whole thing is.

I had a set of unfinished stories. The detail to which I did these things was amazing. He said, "Jack the only thing I can use would be *The Imaginator*." He thought DC could use it. But they had other ideas about what the *Imaginator* would do... but they were comic book ideas.

I was like a volatile thing... because I had walked out of the mainstream comics at which I could have kept getting work. The only one who actually appreciated that was Jim Steranko. I just can't see working for another company.

Ted: *So you drew these comics for DC for a couple years,*

but they never got published. Why did you go back to oil painting and teaching, in Albany, California?

Jack: Because I felt it was hopeless. It wouldn't have mattered... It's back to comics again. It's back to children's books, that's what it is... Adults with the imagination of a one-year-old...

I taught in Albany, California, for a long time. I taught at the adult school at night, but finally they couldn't afford to have me there, as there wasn't enough students, because they all went to San Francisco. They go to the big name places and they think that, if you have a name, it must be important. They just do not realize how I'm out to elevate and promote life, which is what my work is about. And then I went to the Albany Senior Center to teach my weekly life drawing class, which I still continue to do.

Ted: *Did you stop going to the comic conventions at that time?*

Jack: Yes. After a while there's nothing in those conventions, really. It's the same thing over and over. And you can keep repeating the same mistakes... And most of the characters are still in a state of arrested development. And it becomes the theater of the absurd! So how is that going to help me? I was out to mature the field.

Ted: *So you were living with Caroline, and you focused on painting, from 1986-2001.*

Jack: Yes, Caroline worked at UC-Berkeley for 23 years... Finally she quit.

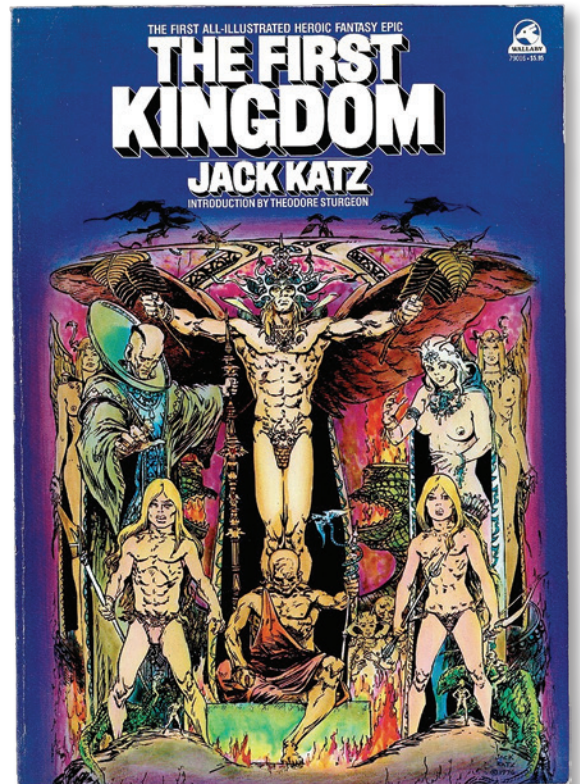
Ted: *So you were doing oil painting during the 1990s, and then you switched gears and you went back to comics with the graphic novel, Legacy, in 2009. How did your Legacy with Charlie Novinskie come about?*

Jack: It was my idea and my story, but he thought I was using a lexicon that no longer... even Shakespeare would have difficulties. So Charlie tamed it down to what he thought was more acceptable to Americana.



Above: In 1981, Bud Plant released a *First Kingdom* portfolio, numbered and signed by the artist.

Below: The initial half-dozen issues of *The First Kingdom* were collected in a trade paperback published by Wallaby Books, in 1978, the only one of a planned six volumes to see print.





We handled it much like a motion picture, because we showed the credits... And, also, I gave an extraordinary honor to those who had fought and died to give me the chance not take it in the arm or to become an idiot, but to realize my own abilities. I love America, okay? Yes, I am conservative! Okay, kiddies? You don't like it, go crap! I don't care!

Ted: What inspired *Legacy*? It's very much like a Hollywood movie!

Jack: It is! I wanted to show people that you could make a Hollywood movie in a graphic novel! And the characters, everything that you can possibly imagine, were typecast in a sense. Plus, the visuals about

Above: It was Jack Katz's being exposed to Jim Steranko's innovative comics work of the late '60s which helped to inspire the Golden Age artist's return to comics. Here are the two artists captured by Jackie Estrada's camera lens at the 1976 San Diego Comic-Con. **Below:** At SDCC, in '76, he had the opportunity to observe famed Hollywood movie director Frank Capra looking through his debut issue of *The First Kingdom*. To the right of Capra and his wife is Katz champion Robert Beerbohm, one of the Comics & Comix partners who published the first issue of Katz's magnum opus. Photo by Clay Geerdes.

them. *Legacy* is an incredible story. It flew out of my hands. If anything could become a Hollywood movie, it would be *Legacy*. I worked very hard on this thing, and I wanted so much to give it as much... Well, I was making a movie! Maybe someday... *Legacy* was one of the best stories I ever did, about a guy who disinherits his whole family. It's a more of a human tragedy. It's about a young man... and I decided to do this story about somebody who disinherits his entire family. Why? What happened to him? What possessed him to do a thing like that? They were trillionaires!! They owned everything, airlines, you name it. And the vicissitudes of existence certainly rested on his shoulders and it's a serious and yet a very beautiful thing.

Ted: Then you worked on the graphic novel *Beyond the Beyond*, from 2014-19.

Jack: It was a sequel to *The First Kingdom*. This was what happens when they go out into space, and they address all the vicissitudes and problems involved in everything. And

Beyond the Beyond also introduced how DNA is manufactured, so I really went into the science. *Beyond the Beyond* was only 500 pages. *The First Kingdom* was 1,070 pages. The work I'm doing now, *The Engenderment*, is only going to be 333 pages. *Beyond the Beyond*, which I wanted to do in the beginning, even before *The First Kingdom*, and the reason why, this is the most important thing I've ever done. It's very revelatory, it has to do with the nature of what we are in terms of our composition, in terms of our DNA and that which makes DNA. I never thought that I'd get to do *Beyond the Beyond*, and then, by the time I got here... I said, "Maybe I'll take a chance anyways." I revised it many, many times as I was doing it. Every time I'd write out a page, when I put it on the art board, it didn't look right to me, so I had to change it. I'm constantly in a state of redacting or editing, whatever you want to call it. It's a work that had to be done, I'm an assignee! I was given a mission, and that's what I did. I didn't argue with God.

[Interviewer's note: Jack produced 280 pages of his graphic novel, *The Engenderment of the Voids Exegesis*, but was never able to complete it due to health issues. – T.J.]

Ted: Can you discuss *The Engenderment of the Voids Exegesis*, which you began in 2019?

Jack: I guess I was 12 years old... and I had to put it on the counter... 450 thousand years before the birth of Abraham, there were these people, and they knew an event took place that split the animate and the inanimate. I was fortunate enough pick up a number of books at the library, when I was very young, that gave chapter and verse about this, and they were perplexed at the fact that this event separated us to a point... it's like two-halves of something that you can't part of a whole. So I'm acting as the fulcrum between the yin and yang or the positive and negative.

There was a group of people who did not know they had been dead, for the past vigintillion times vigintillion years. They thought that they were alive, and when they went out into space, they said there are no more stars, all the planets and the galaxies had separated, and so they go out with Galactic Hunters, okay?

Ted: You've been keeping journals for many years. And you've been transcribing these into your *Engenderment* book.

Jack: The journals give not only hints, but they give incidentals. But also, in the journals I may go off on a tangent. I'm always going off on different asides.

Ted: When did you start keeping these journals?

Jack: Oh god, I'm on my 25th journal now....

Ted: Were you keeping these journals during *The First Kingdom*?

Jack: Oh, yes!

Ted: So even before that?

Jack: Yes. You see everybody has a proximity screen, and the visuals depict themselves on your proximity screen. And then that adds itself to the inner-vision that people have.

Ted: You have a love of science, cinema, literature, psychology, aviation, a fascination with UFOs and the history of religion, and how various religions have influenced each other.

Jack: The thing is I've been involved in science, I'm crazy about aviation. The idea of lifting something heavier than air... Every one of our inventions are only part of the visuals



Top photo © and courtesy of Jackie Estrada. Bottom photo © the estate of Clay Geerdes, courtesy of David Miller. Both used with permission.

I see. I remember one day I became insane about nuclear fission...

Ted: *What about evolution?*

Jack: Oh, definitely. There's as many a variety of life forms as there are grains of sand on the earth.

IN THE 2020s: MODERN LIFE IN CALIFORNIA

In his later years in California, Jack continued to draw every day. He completed about two pages a week for his graphic novel. Despite the COVID pandemic, Jack was undeterred and plowed forward with his singular vision. Jack claimed he would go for days without eating or sleeping as he continued to draw pages for his novel. He dreamed that someday Ridley Scott will make a movie out of his *First Kingdom* series. He listened to classical music and talk radio at home, and enjoyed his collection of DVD movies.

Jack's local friends – Brian Miller, Deanna Hovarth, Cindy Mosca – were all loyal and checked on him regularly, visiting every week. They would bring him groceries, cook meals, clean his apartment, take out the trash... And other friends and fans came to visit and record interviews with Jack.

Ted: *Talk about how you feel living here in Northern California?*

Jack: I'm living in a little hermitage. I can isolate myself. I have a place here by the water where I can meditate if I have to. This is the largest marina in California. It's comfortable... It's a Mediterranean kind of climate... It's the most even-handed weather, and they leave you alone here. There's no real gossip... There's a stillness, it's not intrusive or anything like that. Most of the people here are insanely liberal... I live with dictionaries in my home today. My home is a plethora of atlases, dictionaries, and thesauruses. As you know, I don't have a computer, I will not have a disinformation highway in my house. I'm inured to the pain as well... Sometimes you just have to live your life regardless... Beethoven couldn't even hear and he was composing symphonies.

Ted: *Do you enjoy living here by the waterside?*

Jack: Well, where I live now, there's a couple of benches in which you can look out over the marina. When I take a break, I sit down on the bench, and I try to review some of the things that I'm doing, but also, it's a way of closing down the myriad of concepts and ideas that are fighting for prominence and my attention so that they should be included in the story. The marina, it's different, is particularly wonderful, it's cool. You can contemplate... Sometimes there's tremendous winds here...

Ted: *You've outlived so many of your contemporaries.*

Jack: Yes, being 93 is interesting... During my lifetime, I've had 17 doctors tell me I was doing the wrong thing. Every one of them is now dead. They wanted me to do what they told me they should do, because they were doing it. And being 93, and having as much energy as I do without eating sometimes for two or three days, or not sleeping for three or four days, it all depends on what you're composed with. The inventory of my life includes many interims, many interludes, people I've known for years have disappeared. Everyone I've known is dead now, in the really far past. So, people do disappear. And yet they come in and out of my

life. The memories of these people are alive. Memory can never be destroyed, no matter how hard you try.

Ted: *Can you talk about Brian and Deanna and your team of supporters?*

Jack: Brian Miller, I've known for over 20 years, he's been photographing every page of my book, *Beyond the Beyond*, and *The Engenderment*. I was teaching and he was a student, and he's still a student, if we ever get back to that class again (after this pandemic ends). But Brian has a very practical perspective on existence. He's unlike anybody I've ever met. He has an indifferent and cold realism about him. He's helped me, he comes over and take photographs of every page. We take walks together, I'm thankful for that. He drove me to San Diego for the Comic-Con a couple of times.

Ted: *Tell us about Deanna Hovarth.*

Jack: Deanna was a student of mine, and the minute she heard me talking, she realized this was a reference from an advance perspective of the nature of what we are as a hominoid species. And now, we are working on something that is going to be more original than any of the motion pictures, and any graphic novels and documentaries. It's something very unusual... I've known Deanna at least 11 years, and she makes me an egg salad whenever she can, and occasionally she'll buy me some food when she can. On top of that, she has bought me portfolios and paper so I can work on my drawings.

Ted: *How is Liam Sharp connected to you?*

Jack: Liam has been a fan of mine, even before I knew him. I looked at the introduction which Liam wrote in 2013 to *The First Kingdom* hardcover (Titan Books), and I said, "I've got to be able to talk to this guy somehow." Through my agent, we got to know each other. Immediately we just fell in love with each other's work, because I could see that he was just as hungry to do something, to actualize something original



Above: Jack Katz displaying his works at Comics & Comix, in Berkeley, in 1980. Photo by Clay Geerdes.

Next page: Katz in October, 2020, outside his exhibition, *The Golden Age and Beyond*, held in Berkeley.

Below: In another pic by Clay Geerdes, Jack and Caroline Katz, at the 1974 San Diego Comic-Con.



as I did. We've known each other quite a while, since around 2014. I love him and his family, who have been very good to me. In fact, I stayed over his home one day. I don't see him for months at a time. Occasionally, he'll call me to show me that he's still alive and living in California. I know he's working hard to make ends meet, these are not the best times. These have been the worst times and the worst of times. But because he has such responsibilities, family, a home, automobiles... He's been inured to the punishment of survival.

[Interviewer's note: Liam Sharp published The Unseen Jack Katz (a Kickstarted-funded project) in 2021. The book contained many stories and drawing that had never been published, dating back to 1971. Jack was thrilled to see how much money was raised for this project: \$43,164. -T.J.]

OCTOBER 2020: THE GOLDEN AGE AND BEYOND

In October, 2020, Deanna Hovarth arranged a solo exhibit of Jack's artwork in Berkeley, California. With the help of Jack's close friends, they were able to display comic art, paintings, and drawings covering Jack's entire career.

MARCH 2025: COMICS SANS FRONTIERES

In March, 2025, Rice University, in Houston, Texas, held the exhibit, "Comics Sans Frontières." Special for the conference was a presentation of the work of Jack Katz from his ground-breaking graphic novel series, *The First Kingdom*, as part of the student-curated and artist-led Moody Project Wall installation, "Christopher Sperandio: Comics Without Borders." Guests can see how Rice students co-curated a selection of original comic art sourced from the archive of American comic book artist Jack Katz from the Jack Katz and Caroline Gold Comic and Paranormal Art Collection, recently donated to Rice University.



THE MOVIE BUFF

The first time I visited Jack at his condo, he immediately forced me to sit down and watch a Robert Mitchum movie, *Pursued* ['47]. So we watched the first 10 minutes together. He was gaga over that movie. Jack was always enjoying watching old movies, especially from the 1940s and '50s. Later on, he raved about all kinds of other movies which I sought out and watched. I noticed a truly melodramatic tone to many of these films. Jack despised most modern films, but there were a few he raved about: *The Pelican Brief* ['93], *Body Heat* ['81], and *Sabrina* ['95 remake]. *Sabrina*, he watched over and over again, because he had a crush on Julie Ormond.

I asked Jack if he liked *The Godfather* ['72], and he said he walked out on it. Jack said he walked out on a lot of modern films (many of which are now regarded as classics). He provided me a list of favorite films. As we discussed films of his childhood, I realized that he was keen on the films of 1935.

Ted: You love old Hollywood movies.

Jack: Those movies somehow transcribe the human equation, and try to make sense of our inability to handle our lives. These people were extraordinary. I was influenced by the Hollywood movies. I went to see *Frankenstein* in 1931. Then I saw *The Mummy* ['82]. The movies were very interesting because they had the same square that I had, and within that frame so much was done. Westerns movies, the ones I enjoyed more than anything else, were more psychological intrigue. *Red River* ['48] was good one. *Pursued* with Robert Mitchum. *The Four Feathers* ['39]; *King Kong* ['33]; *Portrait of*

Jennie ['49]; *Now, Voyager* ['42]; *Son of Fury* ['42]; *The Southerner* ['45]; *The Killers* ['46]; *Fantasia* ['40]; *Creation of the Humanoids* ['62]... The most important movie to me is *The Hurricane* ['37]. That movie is just whole cloth!

Ted: How have these Hollywood movies influenced your work?

Jack: The cinematography... are you kidding me? What they can do with that little square? How they can build a three-dimensional image into a flat screen is just amazing. They helped me frame some of the stuff I've done in the comic book industry.

Ted: You have a great love of classical music, especially movie soundtracks!

Jack: Music from movies is extraordinary. These guys were amazing. Max Steiner, Bernard Herrmann, Franz Waxman, Alfred Newman... my god, what a slew! These people had such an ability to really work so hard... there'll never be anything like them! My mind was involved with the three arts. One of the major contributions was done by the composers in Hollywood. I've been very involved in classical music since I was two-and-a-half. I used to do some notation for an orchestra in 1947. I knew one of the players in the New York Philharmonic. But what I would explain to them was that music is simply intelligence in sound with harmony. I know that you have people like Stravinsky, and the 12 tonal scales, and all this stuff. I know some of the modern composers. Some of the best stuff ever made was after World War I, by a group of English composers, such as Arthur Bliss.

Ted: How did the movie *Things to Come* influence you?

Jack: *Things to Come* came out in 1936, when I was eight years old.

When I saw the advertisements I went completely apesh*t. I said "My god, this is the world I was dreaming about!" When I saw that changeover after that atomic war, and what we have now, the walking sickness 'cause people got disgusted they didn't even care. I was going completely crazy during that movie! I'd never seen anything that was so close to what I'd seen in the visions that I had! So I saw the movie two-and-a-half times that day, and my mother and father had to look for me with the matron with a flashlight and they finally took me home, and I just really wanted to stay. It stuck with me

all my life. For those of you who've never seen the movie, just look at the last three or four minutes, in which there's a discussion on the two ways of looking at life, and what it's all about. One of the things Passworthy says, "We're so fragile, we need rest." And John Cabal says "Yes, rest comes too soon, and we call it death! But mankind must go on..." I have the original book, which in very few ways is an intellectual treatise on how the human race can be put into a position where we would be able to trade with each other honorably. And, I don't know, so far it has not worked, and it's not just greed; it's the fact that we are the prisoners of fear, jealousy, and conceit.

Ted: Can you talk about the visuals of that movie and how it influenced you?

Jack: Well, the visuals are interesting for one reason. I would never draw people with costumes like that. As a matter of fact, in my books, they are almost completely nude, and the reason why is that I don't want to identify somebody because he has a little police uniform, or this one's a nurse or that one's this... No, the body tells the story. And, when they asked me at school, "What is art?" I said it's for honoring the glorification of the human body, of life, you know.

So the costumes were beautiful for the movie. And, for the first time, you saw a helicopter which they still haven't been able to design anything as beautiful as that now.

The gods that I created, the trans-gods, the science fiction that I developed, it grew from there. All of the characters... it's unlike anything that had ever been done before and at that time.



LCSs, Conventions, & Me

Flash recalls the comic shops and comic book conventions in and around the Cincinnati area

by **STEVEN THOMPSON**

For years, the only places you could buy your comic books in the Cincinnati area were drugstores, dime stores, candy stores, a few downtown newsstands, and bus stations! That all changed in 1974.

On October 17, 1974, a newspaper ad appeared for Comic Corner on Dixie Highway in Florence, Kentucky. As a lifelong bus rider, I knew that the Florence buses went straight down Dixie, so I figured that store would be easy to find. When the bus started to turn off the highway, though, I got out and still had to walk a couple miles to find the place!

Comic Corner was run by a man named Steve Conner and it was literally a corner in the back of a garden store run by his father. I sat there for hours, going through more boxes of back issues than I had ever seen in one place! Soon afterward, Steve opened the Northern Kentucky Bookstore. Closer and, while on the bus route, it didn't last long.

Meanwhile, up in nearby Corryville, Ohio, a delightful little urban village near the University of Cincinnati, the Yellow Kid Comic Shoppe was opened by Andy Voris, on weekends, in the back room of Mole's Record Exchange. Andy was an indulgent father and once told me he started the shop just to keep his 10-year-old son, Cy, happy. When Cy wished there to be a local comic convention here, it was his dad who made it happen.

The 1st Annual Cincinnati Comic and Nostalgia Convention was held, in January of 1975, in the aging Netherland Hilton Hotel downtown. At 16, I nervously entered a dealers' room for the first time. I had already been a comic book collector for a decade, but I had never imagined anything like this. There had to have been a hundred dealers there, each displaying comics, magazines, posters, and/or original art. This was the very first original art I had ever seen anywhere!

Not to be outdone, Steve Conner scheduled a show called the Mid-America Comic Con, at Covington's Holiday Inn, just two months later, on a cold, snowy

March day. It was within walking distance of my house, so I walked down in the snow.

The 2nd Annual Cincinnati Comic Book and Nostalgia Convention was back at the Hilton, in January of 1976, again sponsored by the Vorises. The difference was that this one had some big-name guests, including super-hot writer Steve Gerber, his writing partner Mary Skrenes, DC scribe

Martin Pasko, and Bruce Carlin, who wrote humor for Marvel.

(Years later, I spoke to Pasko online about the day. "Wow," he said, "I remember that convention weekend vividly. Big snowstorm in Cincinnati... That was the weekend we found out that Carmine Infantino had been fired and DC would get a new CCO.")

The Yellow Kid Comic Shoppe apparently exhausted its budget on that convention, as they soon closed. Cy Voris would later turn up in Hollywood writing *Bulletproof Monk* and *Kung-Fu Panda*.

Around that same time, George Bacher opened the Phantasy Emporium, on Calhoun Street, even closer to UC. Steve Conner resurfaced with a comic book shop in his home's attic late in the decade and later made one last short-lived try with a storefront shop on the outskirts of downtown Covington, around Christmas of 1981.

A more consistent outlet for comics was the Paperback Junction, which existed for several years in Cincinnati's Western Hills. I had to take two buses to get there every week, but

it was there I discovered British comics and magazines including *2000AD*, so I was ahead of the curve by the time Alan Moore and the rest of the '80s British invasion creators made their names on this side of the Atlantic.

A man I had met numerous times while shopping at Steve's various stores was Paul Mullins, who, at the time, drove a truck for a vending machine company. In 1982, Paul opened Book World (later Comic Book World), also on Dixie Highway, not far from where the Northern Kentucky Bookstore

had been.

Within a couple of years, he had moved to a nearby location next to a convenient store. As business soared with the '80s boom, Paul kept expanding. Despite more competition in the years since, Comic Book World is still around, almost a direct link from that Comic Corner ad I spotted in the newspaper half-a-century ago!



This page: "Flash" shares some artifacts he's saved from his early Cincinnati-area comics-related travels, plus a clipping from The Boone County Recorder [Jan. 2, '75] about the first comic con he attended.



Items courtesy of Steven Thompson.



The Man Named McLeod

Through perseverance and undaunted tenacity, the Sunshine State artist shines as a comics pro

Inset right: Among the major breaks in Bob McLeod's professional career was the success of his creation with writer Chris Claremont, *The New Mutants*. Marvel Graphic Novel #4 [Oct. '82] featured the team's first appearance. In the past, the artist has remarked that initial work on the series was frustrating because he could not keep up the pace on the regular series as both penciler and inker. **Below:** In 2009, the artist drew this rendition of the team. **Bottom:** The artist himself in his Pennsylvania studio.

by **DARRICK PATRICK**

[Bob McLeod is a Florida-born artist and inker who is best known for co-creating *The New Mutants* with writer Chris Claremont. He has worked on titles such as *The Incredible Hulk*, *Detective Comics*, *Conan the Barbarian*, *Wonder Woman*, *Star Wars*, *Action Comics*, *Wolverine*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Crazy magazine*, *Howard the Duck*, etc. One of my personal favorite batches of his work is the inking of Mike Zeck's pencils across the *Spider-Man* titles for *Fearful Symmetry: Kraven's Last Hunt*, in 1987. Bob received the Joe Sinnott Hall of Fame Award, at the Inkwell Awards Ceremony, in 2018. — D.P.]

Darrick Patrick: What was the journey that led you to a career as an illustrator?

Bob McLeod: I decided when I was five years old that I wanted to be a cartoonist when I grew up. I was generally known as the best artist in my schools from first through 12th grades. In my early teens, I tried to get a job as an assistant to Fred Lasswell, a local comic strip artist who drew the *Snuffy Smith* strip, but was rejected. I drew cartoons for my high school and college newspapers, but I quit college and art school because they didn't teach cartooning. At age 19, I submitted a comic book story and art to Warren Publications, but was rejected. At age 21, I wrote, hand-lettered and did the art for 36 strips of a comic strip about a private detective I called "Tom Nosey" and submitted it to King Features,



but was rejected. At age 23, I sold my car to finance a trip to New York City to attempt to start my career. I went to Marvel Comics and was rejected. I went to DC Comics and the art director told me I needed to go back to school and learn how to draw. Instead, I kept drawing samples and eventually showed them to Neal Adams, who called Marvel and got me a job in their production department doing lettering corrections. I worked my way up to doing art corrections and, about six months later, started getting inking jobs. After a couple of years, I had trouble getting more inking work, so I moved back to my hometown and did advertising art for a year. I then moved back to N.Y.C. and restarted my comics career. First at Gold Key, then again at Marvel and DC. Three years later, I got my first penciling job at Marvel, and my career really took off from there.

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

Bob: My parents always supported my art ambitions, even when I was repeatedly getting rejections. I have to credit them as my biggest influences. They gave me a strong work ethic and confidence in myself. My high school humanities teacher and my art teacher both praised my talent and encouraged my artistic ambitions.

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

Bob: I would advise them to have confidence in themselves when facing rejection and persevere. Learn from your failures and study hard to be the best you can be. It isn't

The New Mutants TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. Photo courtesy of Bob McLeod.

enough to have talent. It takes a lot of hard work and study to reach a professional level.

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

Bob: I usually work in silence, with no music or TV to distract me... although I sometimes listen to an audiobook. I take several breaks to walk the dog, eat lunch, check the mail, run errands, etc. I try to work from about 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. When I was single, I preferred to work at night until about 3:00 a.m. and sleep until noon but, after I got married and started raising a family, I needed a more practical schedule.

Darrick: For new readers who may not be familiar with your work, what are some projects of yours that you would recommend to begin with?

Bob: I'm best known for co-creating *The New Mutants* for Marvel, and that's probably a good introduction to my work. I also did some of my best work on *Superman* for DC Comics. But I would like them to seek out my satire work for Marvel's *Crazy* magazine, as well. That was some of my favorite work because I'm a humor artist at heart.

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

Bob: There are so many great artists in comics. Neal Adams gave me my start and was certainly one of the best. My idol was Mort Drucker in *MAD* magazine. John Buscema was my favorite artist to ink over. Tom Palmer was my favorite inker. From there, the list is almost endless: Joe Kubert, Russ Heath, Gil Kane, Will Eisner, Wally Wood, Jack Davis,

Frank Frazetta, Bernie Wrightson, Jim Aparo, Gene Colan, Bill Sienkiewicz, John Romita, Marie Severin, Jean Giraud, Paul Gillon, Jose Luis Garcia Lopez, Jose Luis Salinas, and many more. And, of course, the great strip artists such as Hal Foster, Alex Raymond, Milton Caniff, Roy Crane, Stan Drake, Leonard Starr, John Prentice, Alex Kotzky, Bill Watterson, Charles Schulz, Walt Kelly, Hank Ketcham, and many others.

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

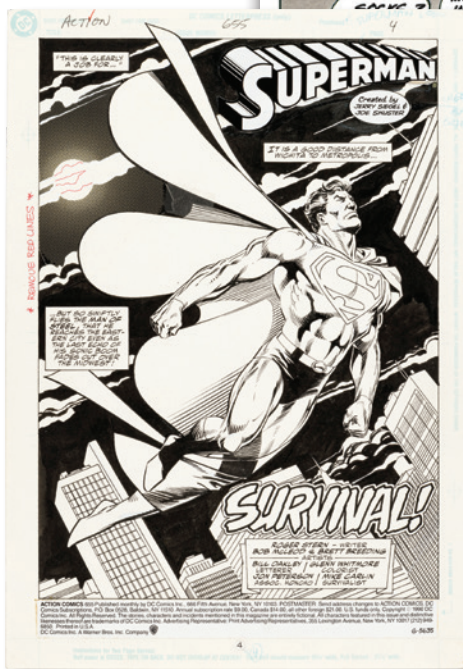
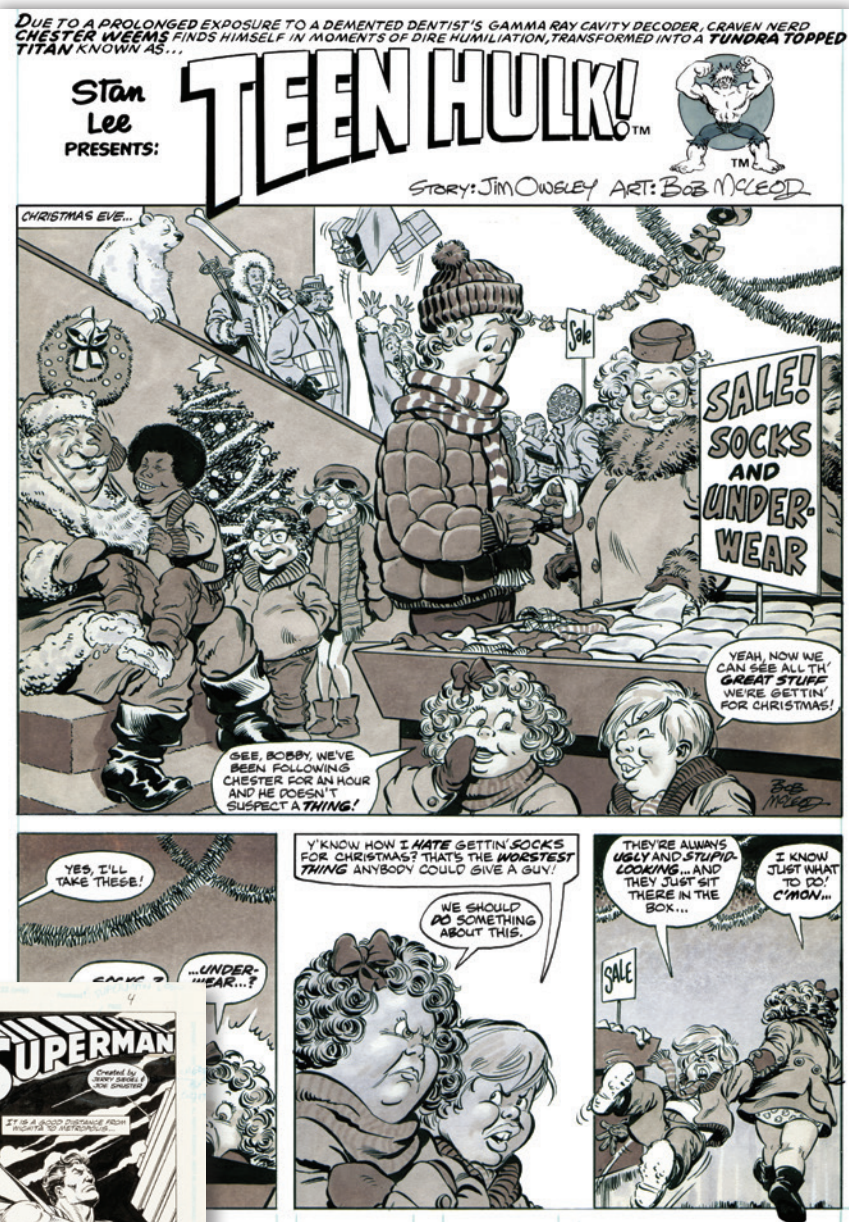
Bob: I loved playing the trumpet in school, but gave it up to focus on art. I played piano a little, too. I did a lot of water skiing growing up in Florida.

I loved playing tennis, mostly doubles, but had to give it up due to back problems.

I enjoy bike riding, watching TV and movies, and Broadway shows. I'm also always reading a book and listening to an audiobook.

Darrick: What is your oldest memory?

Bob: Maybe because I was embarrassed, I remember swimming in a little pool with the girl next door in our underwear when I was about four years old.



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

Bob: I think I already have! But probably most people don't know that I'm kind of a handy man. I used to help my father, who was a builder, so I can do some basic handy man stuff. I put a new roof on our garage, and built a mud room off of our kitchen, among other projects.

Darrick: When you're no longer amongst the living, how would you most like to be remembered?

Bob: I hope people will remember me in the same way I hope they think of me now: as a good artist, a kind person, a loving husband and father, and as someone who tried to do my best at everything I attempted.

Above: Great example of Bob's humor work. *Crazy* #83 [Feb. '82]

Inset left: Bob counts his *Superman* work as among his best. *Splash for Action Comics* #655 [July '90] penciled by Bob. I

Below: The man remains forever in the *TwoMorrows* family for his editorship of the fondly recalled magazine, *Rough Stuff* ['06-'08].



Hillman Pubs and the F.B.I.

A snapshot of the Golden Age publisher as well as the G-Men effort to investigate his mags

Below: Natch, Hillman Periodicals is probably best remembered for the *Airboy* [V9 #3, Apr. '52] co-star and swamp critter, *The Heap!*

by **SHAUN CLANCY** with **JON B. COOKE**

Anyone with a modicum of knowledge regarding the origins of American comic book publishing would think it no surprise that Alexander Lester Hillman [1900-68], publisher of Golden Age comics house Hillman Periodicals, started off in the publishing business by producing rather sensational material. First it was books, among them *Woman for Sale* and *Here is My Body*; and then came prurient "confession" magazines, including *Real Story* and *Crime Detective*. In 1938, he established Hillman Periodicals and, by '40, he jumped into the lucrative comic book game.

After a couple of also-rans, Hillman hit pay dirt with *Air Fighters Comics*, which soon enough became *Airboy*, the imprint's longest-lasting series. The latter, of course, spawned *The Heap*, the fearsome four-color monster that established the weird swamp creature

genre which culminated with *Swamp Thing* and *Man-Thing*. (It's worth noting that the team of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby did a few assignments for the company before they left and found success over at Prize by creating the romance comic.)

Intrepid Shaun Clancy went in search of information about the company's owner and its comic book line, so he had a chat with Hillman's youngest son, in the spring of 2012. During their talk, Alex revealed he'd been adopted and hadn't spoken much to his father about his business before the latter died in '68, when Alex was seven. But he did later learn of his father's considerable achievements.

Of his dad's start, Alex recalled hearing, "I know my father worked for a broadcasting company... and I think [his subsequent career] stems from that. He made the first radio broadcast out of Shanghai – out of China! In 1926!... From then, he was in broadcasting and I think he got into publishing not long after, so he would have been in his 20s, at the point. He met my mother and they were married in '32... My mother's family was involved in the record industry. Her father started Okeh Records, Columbia Records,

and a whole bunch of things. They signed on Satchmo... Louie Armstrong!"

Though he heard little about the comics division of Hillman Periodicals, an outfit renowned for its editors, which included Herb Rogoff and especially Ed Cronin, "The one I knew the best was Sidney Carroll," the younger Alex said. "He wrote the movie, *The Hustler*, with Jackie Gleason...? And he did some other things, as well, and became a screenwriter. Bill Stone was one of my father's photographers and he did that big spread on Madonna before Madonna was famous – it ended up in *Penthouse* or something...?"

Before and after the patriarch's retirement in 1961 as a publishing mogul, he and wife Rita were celebrated patrons of New York City's modern art scene having, over the decades, amassed an impressive collection of French impressionist work. And, after père Alex's 1968 passing from cirrhosis, Rita delved into philanthropic efforts, which included her donating a portion of the \$17 million received from an auctioned Picasso painting to establish a nursing scholars program. In 2007, she passed away, at age 95.

Doubtless, the most remembered Hillman magazine is *Pageant*, a digest-size general interest publication that launched in 1944, best known in comics circles for prompting the reformatting of *MAD* comics into a magazine-size affair, leading to phenomenally beneficial results for both editor Harvey Kurtzman and E.C. Publications.

Interestingly, Alex the younger revealed one of his father's abiding interests was of the political persuasion. "He published Barry Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative* ['60]... I knew more about his political career: what he did after World War II, with the Marshall Plan... He never fought, but he did a lot of work with the U.S. State Department during World War II, like, as Truman's advisor and, after the war, he oversaw the Italian elections and he had a private consult with the Pope."

Alex opined, "I would say he was an old-style conservative, not what you see today in the Republican Party. He was of a mindset that government [should be small and] shouldn't get in other people's business. He would be of the mindset, like, if somebody wanted to marry his duck, so be it... So that was sort of my father's thinking."

His parents, he said, "They knew [U.S. Senator] Joe McCarthy. They were at his wedding! They felt that he was kind of a patsy to others. I think that they really looked down on what was going on... I don't know what extent McCarthyism was having on my father's business, but I don't think it was a personal thing, because my father was a really die-hard American kind of person. So I doubt there was any issue there, having been with the State Department, and all that."

Whether the elder Alex's political leanings were appreciated by the U.S. Department of Justice can only be guessed, but known with certainty is the fact he had endured repeat-



Below: Joe Simon relates an amusing anecdote about a visit to Hillman editor Ed Cronin's office in his memoir, *The Comic Book Makers*, which involves the gun-hating *Gun Master* character. Cover [#10, Oct. '46] drawn by Fred Kida.



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ed probes by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The first inquiry was launched after Assistant U.S. Attorney Gerald A. Gleeson alerted the Philadelphia field office that an issue of *Crime Detective* #3 [Feb. '39] included a story entitled, "Philadelphia – Sink of Crime, Corruption of American Cities," which some city elders found offensive (as some had photos of themselves appear therein). Within days, no less than F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover ordered an investigation into whether that magazine could be determined to be obscene, its distribution thus violating interstate commerce laws.

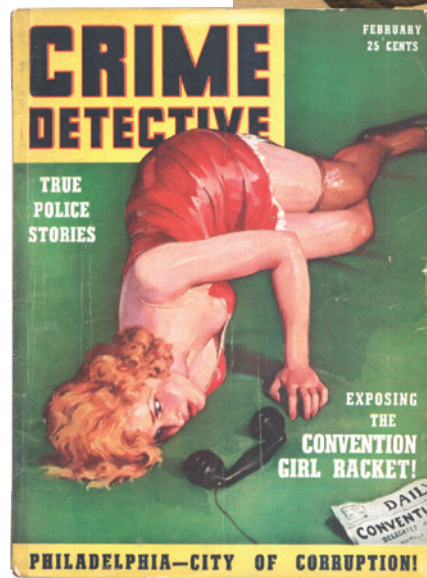
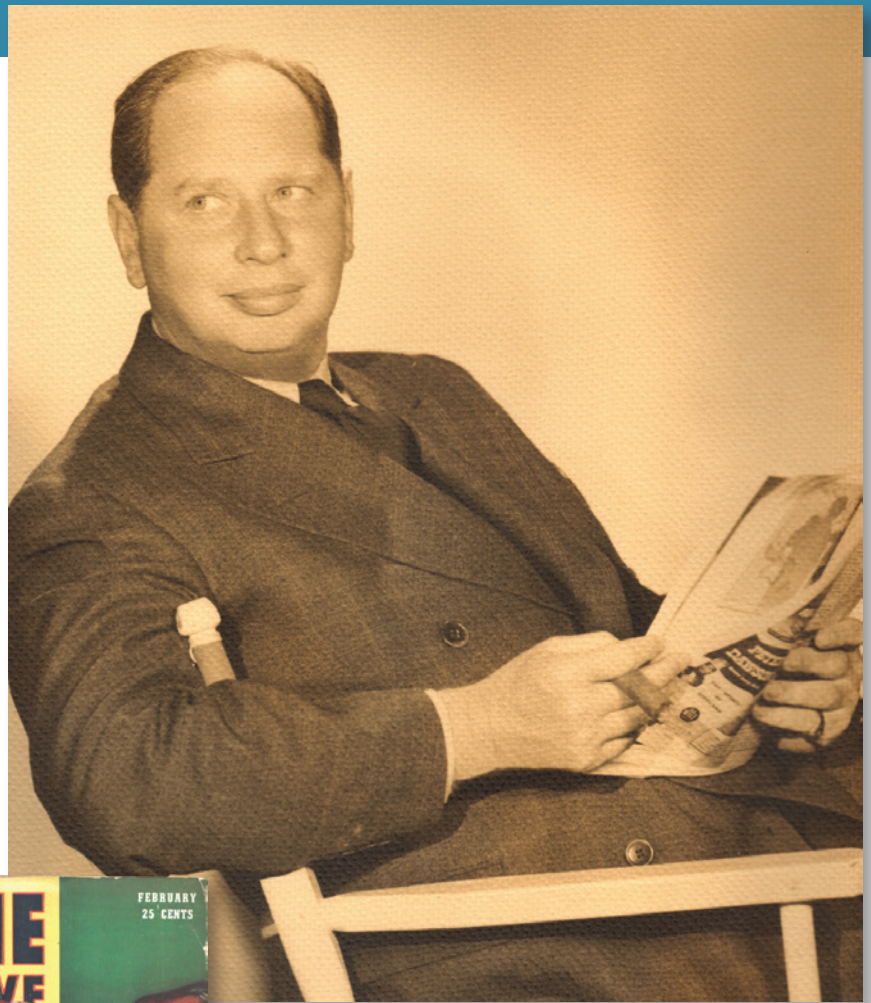
After that article was determined to be merely an exposé regarding city corruption, the rest of the mag, containing provocative "other articles, stories, and advertisements," was still to be investigated as obscene "at the special instance" of the U.S. Attorney. (The investigative reports in the case file give a fascinating glimpse for those folks interested in the minutiae of the magazine business, replete with precise numbers and specifics of distribution.) By 1940, the case was closed when it was determined all of *Crime Detective* #3 was "no more obscene than numerous other periodicals being published, such as *Liberty* and *The New Yorker*."

One would think, given said prior scrutiny by the Feds, that Hillman would be careful not to offend the F.B.I., and yet *People Today*, a digest usually adorned with cutie-pie, come hither covers, plastered J. Edgar's face beside the headline "The Smear Against the FBI," on its August 27, 1952, issue. Despite the article being just mildly critical – "FBI publicity depicting the Bureau as infallible created a false picture" – the agency immediately pounced, with the initial memorandum taking a vigorous swipe at the publisher.

The memo related that, on August 29, 1942, a confidential informant of the New York field office called Hillman "a successful publisher who had made much money from various enterprises, many of which were barely on the legitimate side. Hillman was stated to hide behind dummy corporations which made large sums of money by putting out smutty books disguised as classics."

That Aug. 14, 1952, memo ended with this: "Since Hillman bears a bad business reputation, and since publications of Hillman Periodicals, Inc., have gained a reputation for use of smutty, 'spicy,' and indecent pictures and articles, it is recommended that the New York and Newark Offices be directed to discretely ascertain the names of all publications and business enterprises in which Hillman has an interest, so that these publications can be closely reviewed for the purpose of gathering evidence for possible prosecution under the interstate transportation of indecent literature statute or for possible rescinding of mailing privileges of Hillman publications."

Photo courtesy of Alex Hillman.



The next memo noted decades-old legal entanglements involving publisher Hillman, and upon identifying the previously mentioned informant as "Robert M.," the report added, "Other informants also stated that Hillman Periodicals ran a 'cheap outfit with a lot of cheap magazines.'"

That same memo, dated September 23, 1952, provided a thorough look by a confidential informant at the company – one "CSNY 1" – who "states that the tangible net worth in 1950 was approximately \$1,600,000. In May, 1951, it had a net worth of about \$1,000,000. In 1952, the volume is still holding and the net worth is in excess of \$1,000,000. The company is highly regarded in banking quarters." (As a comparison, note that a million bucks in 1950 dollars is worth about \$12.25 million today.)

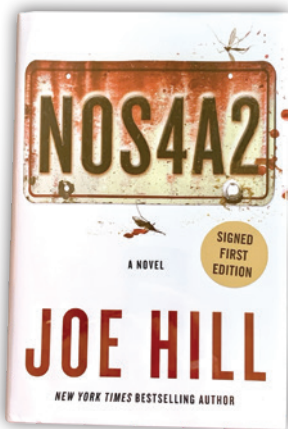
Evidently, the inquiry was closed after that survey, given no more documents were released by the Bureau compelled by a 2013 Freedom of Information request – the files are available to all at archive.org – with the F.B.I. finally letting Alex Hillman attend to his own business, which he sold to rival Macfadden Publications. Soon thereafter, Alex and Rita adopted the younger Alex, who chose to assume his father's name after the senior Alex's passing.

Above: Alexander Lester Hillman in a publicity shot from (presumably) the 1940s. **Inset left:** It was this issue of Hillman's true crime magazine, *Crime Detective* [#3, Feb. 1939], which engendered the critical gaze of a Federal Bureau of Investigation intent on declaring the contents obscene. **Below:** Why, given the previous scrutiny of the Feds, Hillman would poke Director J. Edgar Hoover with this issue of *People Today* [Aug. 27, '52], remains a mystery.



Joe Hill in Christmasland

The horror author on brilliant artist collaborator Gabe Rodriguez and Locke & Key's future



Conducted by **GLEN CADIGAN**

[Previously, in part one of our interview with Joe Hill, we covered his growing up as a comic-book fan and struggles that Joe had while trying to make it as a professional author. In the following middle portion, we discuss his creative process, what makes for a good horror story, and dig into the world of Locke & Key, including its future prospects. And, skipping an issue, stay tuned for the concluding portion in CBC #47, which will cover Joe's "Hill House Comics" imprint for DC, as well as a crossover between L&K and the Sandman universe! The entire interview was conducted via Zoom in September, 2024 (with thanks to Chris Ryall for facilitating the conversation). – G.C.]

Above: Urged on by many – including his famous father, Stephen King – the author Joe Hill extracted a huge sequence from the manuscript of NOS4A2 [13] and that formed the basis of comic-book saga Wraith's prologue. **Below:** Hill signing copies of (among others) his post-apocalyptic novel, The Fireman, at the 2019 BookCon, held at the Jacob Javits Convention Center, in Manhattan.

Glen Cadigan: When you get an idea for a story, how do you know whether it's a comic book story or a prose story?

Joe Hill: Well, I always just know. I know right from the start. I'm either seeing it as a series of panels or I'm not, in which case, it's a prose story. I have never written a comic that I thought should have actually been a novel or a short story. I have a couple times written stuff as prose, and then realized afterwards it should have been a comic book. One example of that would be when I turned in the second draft of NOS4A2. It was a fairly long book and, in the second half of the book, there was a long section that gave us Charlie Manx's backstory.

So Charlie Manx is the villain of NOS4A2, this man who has been driving the back roads of America for a hundred years, and he stayed young by draining the spirit from children. And I told his whole backstory in this, almost like an enclosed novella within NOS4A2. And then, when my dad [author Stephen King] read the book, he said, "Joe, it's a great book. I think that the action slows down when you tell Charlie Manx's backstory, and I think you oughta cut 30 pages out of that." And then my English editor read it, and she said, "Joe, NOS4A2 is a great book. I love it. I think things slow down when we tell Charlie Manx's backstory. I think you ought to cut 40 pages out of

it." My American editor looked at it, said she loved the book. She thought it slowed down at the Charlie Manx backstory, we ought to cut 50 pages out of it. And I thought, "F*ck all of ya! I'm gonna cut the whole thing out!"

And I cut the whole backstory right out of the novel. I thought, "No one needs to know anything about the shark's childhood in Jaws, so I'm just taking all of this out." But I still thought that stuff about Charlie Manx before he turned into a monster was pretty good. I still thought it was a pretty exciting and interesting story, it just had no place in the novel. It was just sitting there on my desk, and I think, at some point, maybe [editor] Chris [Ryall] said, "Is there any way to do a comic book set in the universe of NOS4A2?" And I thought, "I wonder if I can tell that story here." And, it turned out, I could. I think the whole enclosed novella that told Charlie Manx's backstory was 90 pages long in the original manuscript, but I was able to tell the whole story, on the page, in the comic book, in 26 pages. I think the whole issue is 26 pages long, and then that becomes the prologue to Wraith.

Charlie Manx has this place. He feeds off children, and when he's done with them, they're creepy little monsters and he dumps them in this place that's not really in our world, this dark inversion of Peter Pan's Neverland called Christmasland. And the plot of Wraith is basically Con Air in Christmasland. Five escaped felons wind up in Christmasland together and have to fight their way out. So that's the majority of the story.

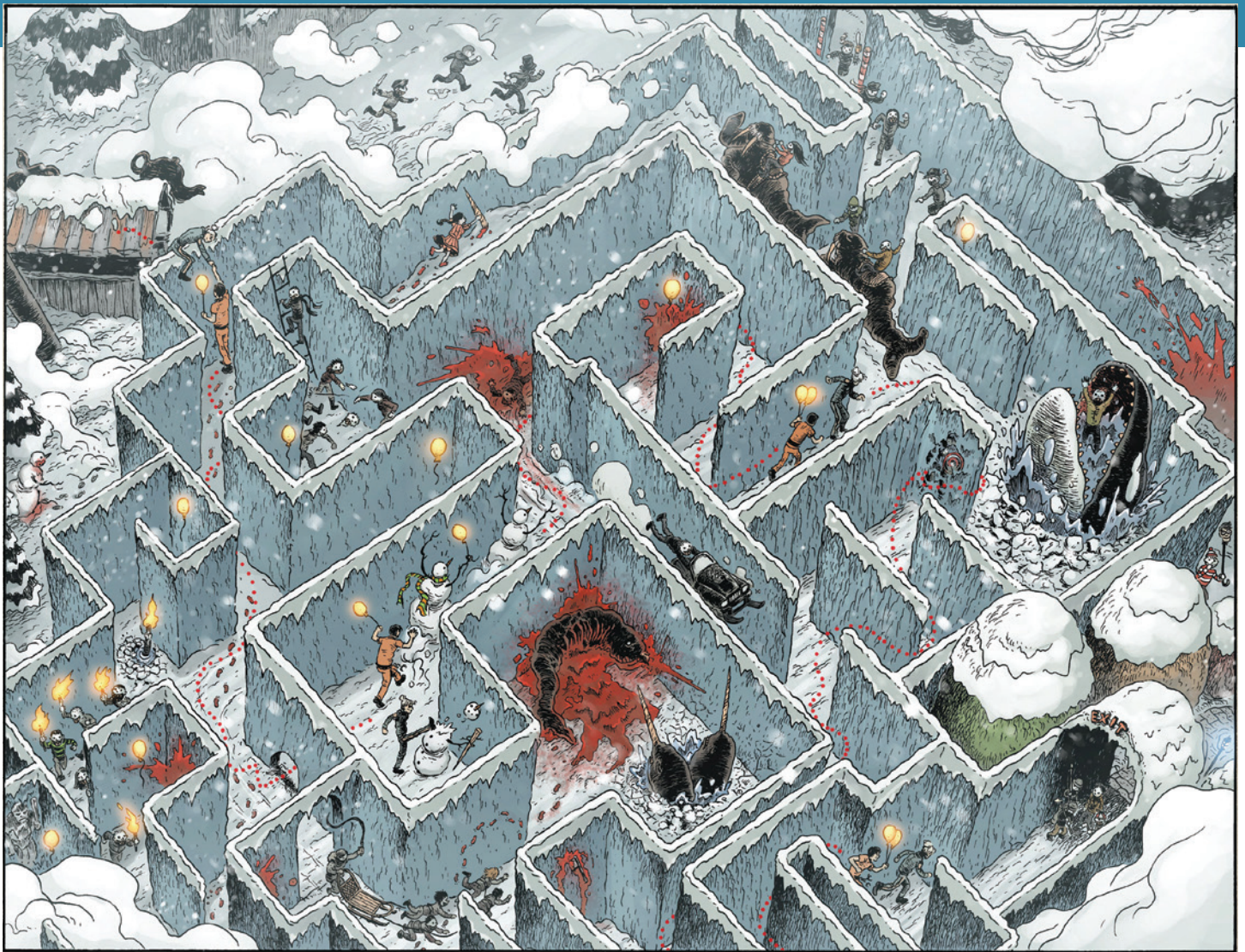
It's very comic book friendly. There's a lot of action. Christmasland is a place where surreal things are possible, and so you get a lot of really surreal, strange imagery. There's a lot of gross-out humor. At one point, there's a two-page spread that shows an ice maze, and that ice maze is basically Where's Waldo? Which was so much fun for C.P. [Wilson] to draw. I'm sure his hand just about fell off, but it's an awesome two-page spread. So, I guess, sometimes I've gotten it wrong in terms of writing prose but, a lot of times, I just know. I have the idea and I think, "That would make a great comic." Or "That's a short story."

Oh, I know how I know: if the story is fundamentally visual, if the story is uniquely visual, so that the reader will want to see it, then it's probably best as a comic book. I think that all my books and stories, I want them to feel cinematic. I want them to feel visual, but some stories will so clearly benefit from being illustrated by Gabriel Rodriguez, or being illustrated by Stuart Immonen, I can just say, "Oh, no, no, no, no. I've got to do this as a comic."

Glen: What did you bring with you from prose over to the comic book world?

Joe: With the comic books and my prose, and then also the screenwriting, I found that the skills you build in one





area transfer over to the other in interesting ways. I sometimes compare it to being a farmer, and one of the things farmers know is you can't raise the same crop in the same field over and over again. You kill the soil; the soil dies. And so what they do is a crop rotation. You have one plant one season, then the next season you do something else with the field. That reinvigorates the soil.

I try to pace my novels like a comic book. When I'm working on comic books, I try to write character the way I would in a novel, so I'm looking for the complexity of character that you hope you'll find in a good novel. I want each character to have an inner life, a deep inner world. In *Head Games*, we actually examine that idea literally by having people open their heads, and being able to explore their vast inner landscape. I'm interested in characters who have regrets, who have ridiculous dreams, who have unresolved hostilities, who have a sense of guilt, who are passionately committed to someone or something. My favorite thing about a character is exploring who they really are, testing them and finding out which way they'll jump when they're under pressure. So I've always tried to bring that into the comic books, even though I think that's generally a more novelistic skill.

But, by the same token, I think, when you're writing commercial fiction, so much of it is about pace. It's gotta move. Things gotta happen. And comic books have been great

training for keeping the pedal down. I found out, years ago, that before Mickey Spillane wrote crime novels, he wrote comic books. Lawrence Block once said, "You don't have to like Mickey Spillane. You can think the novels are stupid. But if you read them, you can at least appreciate that they never slow down."

You know, in chapter one, Mike Hammer is shooting some woman in the belly, and in the next chapter he's drowning some guy in a toilet. I mean, it's just relentless. It's just action, action, action, incident, incident. Even the dialogue feels like people throwing punches. And so, I think being able to deliver fast-paced action on the page is a terrific skill for a novelist to acquire, and if you don't have that skill, you'll never make it in comics. People want kinetic action. They want to see things happening. People do not go to comic books looking for a primarily interior experience. They read prose for that, to be deep inside someone's psychology. A lot of people read comics to watch guys in spandex and capes punch each other in the sky.

Glen: In the Venn diagram of people who read your comic book work and people who read your novels, how much overlap do you think there is?

Joe: Everyone who reads the comics reads the novels. Maybe about 35% of the people who read the novels read the comics. The comic book audience is smaller. I think in

Above: Charles P. Wilson III, Hill's artist collaborator on *Wraith*, drew this intricate double-page spread representing the "Christmasland Maze" for that title. See if you can find the head of the star of "Where's Waldo" on a pike.

Below: Wilson's character design for the sinister Charlie Manx, villain of *Wraith*, a seven-issue mini-series written by Hill and published by IDW between 2013-14.





Above: The King family resided in this house, built in the Victorian era – precisely in 1854 – and located in Bangor, Maine, up until 2020 or so. The Keyhouse in *Locke & Key* was, of course, inspired in part by this, Joe Hill's boyhood home.

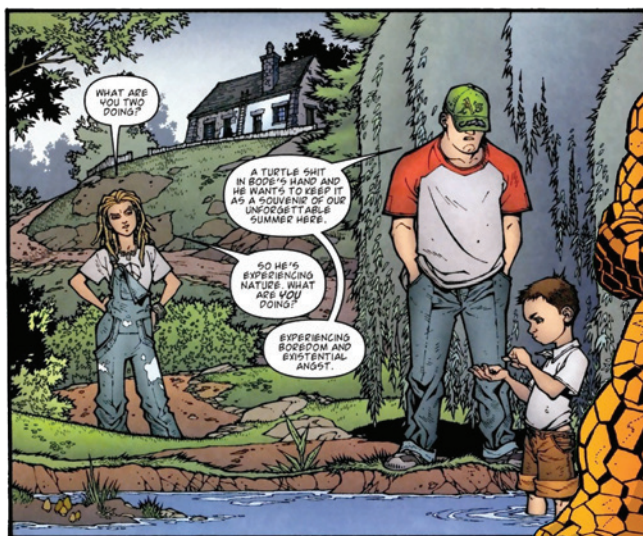


Below: As Hill reveals in this interview, the character of Tyler in *Locke & Key* is based on the biggest member of the *Fantastic Four*, Benjamin Grimm, a.k.a. the Thing. This panel is from *Locke & Key* #1 [Feb. '08], depicting (from left) Kinsey, Tyler, and Bode, in the Welcome to Lovecraft story arc. Art by Gabriel Rodriguez. **Inset right:** Cover detail, *Fantastic Four* #51 [June '66], art by Jack Kirby (pencils) and Joe Sinnott (inks).

some ways the comic book audience is more intense and more passionate. There are a lot of people who read prose, who have loved the novels, who really dug *Heart-Shaped Box* or *Horns* or whatever, but comics aren't for them. Scott McCloud has talked about how comics have a visual grammar that has to be learned and, when you're a kid and you read comics, you internalize that grammar without even realizing you're doing it. In the same way children learn language, that's also when people learn how to read comics. You're seven, or you're eight, and you're reading a comic, and your brain understands how to follow the action from panel to panel to panel. If you don't keep practicing that grammar, you lose it.

So if you read a few comics when you were seven, but then you don't read them again until you're in your 20s, it can be hard to understand what's happening. It can be difficult sometimes to figure out where your eye is supposed to go next, and difficult to bridge the gutters between panels. People fall out of the habit of reading comics, and then even if the writer they like is doing comics, they can find it hard to follow them into that media because when they look at the comic, it doesn't completely make sense. They don't know how to read it.

So, yeah, I would say that the audience of the comic books reads everything. If they read *Locke & Key*, they probably read *Heart-Shaped Box*, too. If they discovered me in



comics, they're like, "Oh, he wrote books, too! I'm gonna read those. That's great!" But if they discover me in prose and then find out I write comics, they might or might not check them out and, even if they check them out, they might find it hard to enjoy them, to get a toe in, because it's not the kind of thing they usually read.

Glen: How much did you draw upon your own experiences as a parent and as a brother while writing *Locke & Key*?

Joe: [Long pause] Let me think about that. I think the other way to take your question is: how much of it is autobiographical? I grew up in a New England Victorian; a lot of my childhood was spent in a New England Victorian, a pretty well-known one, in Bangor, Maine, and *Locke & Key* is set in a house like that. Bangor is inland, and the Keyhouse exists on Lovecraft Island, in Massachusetts, which is a stand-in for the real Nahant. I'm calling it an island; Nahant and Lovecraft are both connected to the mainland by a causeway, but it kind of feels like an island, out on a spit, and there's a prep school there – Lovecraft Academy – and I went to a prep school like that. I went to Milton Academy, in Milton, Massachusetts.

So there are some flashes there of autobiography, but the children aren't really based on [anyone specific]. I based Tyler, the lead character in the story, on Ben Grimm from the *Fantastic Four*. I thought it would be fun; I didn't want to write a sensitive emo lead character of the sort that was, I felt, gaining popularity in comic books at the time. I wanted to write about someone who's blunt, big, probably too big. He feels uncomfortable in his own skin because he's so much bigger than the other kids, and someone who's not terribly articulate, and so is covering his feelings with shows of brawny brutality. Someone who has settled into being a bit of a tough as a defensive measure. He's into hockey, and I think that he's partially a hockey player because no one messes with hockey players. And I also thought, people love Ben Grimm. If they love Ben Grimm, they'll love Tyler. Ben Grimm is so funny because the Thing is such a... I don't want to say "trash talker" but he has a kind of thuggish appeal to him, a kind of no bullsh*t, brassy appeal.

And so Tyler wasn't based on any of my kids. And he wasn't based on me, or my brother, or really anyone I knew. He was my spin on a popular type in comic books, which is the Thing. To a degree, Wolverine is a little bit like that.

I'm 52 now. I've had five children. I have an infield, and every single one of them is a boy. I don't know what it's like to raise a daughter. When I was in high school, I was in a boy's dormitory. I grew up close to my brother and my dad, so how did I – 'cause people seem to really respond to Kinsey and like her, and I'm like, "Yeah, how'd I come up with that character?" I don't really know. [long pause]

And I don't have an answer. I couldn't really tell you. I did mention earlier that I did #2 again and again and again and again. I worked on #2, 17 drafts. Part of the problem was I didn't know who I was writing about. I only really knew two characters. I knew Tyler – I had a strong, clear vision of Tyler. And I knew Bode, because Bode is the one autobiographical element. Bode – as a character – was loosely based on, at that point, my

small boy, Ryan. Loosely based on Ryan, and Gabe based the illustration of Bode on one of his kids, one of his small sons. And I still remember Gabe saying to me, "Bode is the one character we can never kill. Because we both based him on one of our boys." And, even when he said it, I remember thinking, "Oh, Gabe. I don't know what to tell you. I'm not sure I can promise that." But Bode is also the representation of the idealized American six-year-old: adventurous, mischievous. And in that way, he's also kind of based on Calvin from *Calvin and Hobbes*.

Glen: You had a whole issue that was basically a tribute to Calvin and Hobbes.

Joe: That's why we did it, in part. To acknowledge where Bode came from. But also, I mentioned earlier that there are things you can do in comic books that you can't do in prose fiction, and there are things you can do in prose fiction that you can't do in comic books.

I wanted to do a comic book that paid tribute to the gag strips. Because I love gag strips. I love that kind of thing. And I love *Calvin and Hobbes* and *Peanuts*. And so I wanted to do something that was a comic where every page was a four-panel strip with a punchline at the end. I also wanted to see if I could write it. I have a lot of favorite issues of *Locke & Key*. That is definitely [a] top-five favorite issue of *Locke & Key*, that first issue, which is in *Keys to the Kingdom*. It's called "Sparrow."

I had tried once to write a short story that felt like a Charles Addams cartoon. In *20th Century Ghosts*, there's a short story called "Last Breath," and "Last Breath" was my attempt to write a Charles Addams cartoon as a short story. So a Charles Addams cartoon is a single panel with a funny caption. To do the same thing in prose fiction required 17 pages. I think it's a pretty good short story. I'm very proud of "Last Breath." I think it's a fun short story and, I think, when you read it, you get the same effect of looking at a Charles Addams cartoon, but that says something about what each media can do. What Charles Addams could do in one panel, it took me 17 pages.

Glen: You had a few issues where you experimented with style. You had an issue which was a tribute to Little Nemo, you had an issue where it was all splash pages...

Joe: Again, I wanted *Locke & Key* to do everything a comic book could do, and I wanted to play with form. I like to play with form in prose, too. I like to test the boundaries of what people expect, and *NOS4A2*, one of the things I did there still makes some readers crazy. Sometimes I ended chapters mid-sentence, and then you turn the page and the next chapter starts, and you get the rest of the sentence. Just 'cause I thought, "Oh, that's fun. Let's see what effect that has on the reader."

And definitely Gabe and I were always up to play. Generally speaking, writing itself is a very lonely act. You shut yourself in a room and you spend hours by yourself, sinking deeper and deeper into your own head to create an invented world. It's pretty isolating. But writing comic books is different. Writing comic books is the closest I'll ever come to feeling what it must feel like to be in a live performing rock 'n' roll band, where you're feeding off each other's energy. One guy plays something great and so you play something great, feeding off of that.

And it's always been that way, more in *Locke & Key* than any other comics I've done. I'd write some stuff because I wanted to see Gabe draw it. I just thought, Gabe is going to kill this. This is going to be a great sequence to see Gabe draw. And then Gabe would draw something that was even more amazing than what I was imagining, and Jay Fotos would bring in his colors. I've always felt Jay Fotos is one of the unsung heroes of *Locke & Key* because he's not coloring a panel, he's lighting a scene. He's much more like the lighting team on a feature film than he is just a guy throwing colors on a page. Right in the first issue of *Locke & Key*, there's a scene where Bode climbs through a barred window into a well house, and the sunlight coming through behind Bode is autumnal, somehow. It's this clear, burnished golden light that just feels like the beginning of September, in New England, and that wasn't there until Jay Fotos put it there. And Robbie Robbins would figure out ways to show emotion and feeling just in his lettering. And Chris Ryall, who edited every issue, he was like our recording engineer, like George Martin in the recording booth, who could figure out how to take our nine and a half minute, self-indulgent, multi-part rock opera, and force it down into a three-minute hit single.

All of us would just feed off this crackle of energy from each other. And every time we finished an issue, we wanted the next issue to be even better; we just wanted to do it again. It still charges me up thinking about it. Still, one of the great creative experiences of my life was working on *Locke & Key* with those guys. And so we would do stuff where I would think, "This would be a great thing to try in an issue; I want to see the guys do this."

I had this idea to do a kaiju fight, to have a giant 50-foot tall Tyler fight a giant 50-foot tall shadow beast in *Crown of Shadows*, and the whole story built up to this one issue where



Top: In homage to Bill Watterson's great comic strip, Calvin and Hobbes, Hill and Rodriguez pay tribute with "Sparrow," in the first issue of *Locke and Key: Keys to the Kingdom* [Aug. '10]. **Above:** The boy and his tiger enjoying the funnies. **Below:** The kaiju fight in *Locke and Key: Crown of Shadows*, as depicted on the cover of #5 [Feb. '10]. Art by Gabriel Rodriguez.





learn what I didn't need to write. There was some stuff Gabe needed to know, but there was a lot of other stuff I didn't need to write because Gabe already knew. He would intuit, he would understand, you know? It was almost like in the course of writing the comic we developed our own private language, and so later scripts, if I wrote a 24-page issue, the script might only be 32 pages long. But that was much later in the series. That was probably by the time I got around to writing the last few issues of *Clockworks*. I was in my most economical mode, and could turn in a script at a reasonable length. I heard Alan Moore, a lot of his scripts are supposedly 60, 70, 80 pages long.

Glen: Have you seen one?

Joe: I have read a couple of them because they've published a couple of them, and they're so erudite and beautifully crafted. At this point, it seems like Alan Moore is pretty much committed to being a prose writer, and I think that's great. I would love for there to be a half-dozen novels by Alan Moore. I think that would be great. I love *Voice of the Fire*. Tremendous.

Glen: Speaking of prose, you continued to work in prose while you were writing *Locke & Key*. How did you balance the two out?

Joe: With great difficulty. With tremendous difficulty. There's a reason it was so long between novels because I'd have to completely focus on *Locke & Key* for a while to make sure I didn't screw things up, and then I'd turn around and completely focus on a book. And so I might get half of one draft written, and then have to put the book aside for a couple months. A lot of start and stop. For a while, I used to say that the two things worked well together, that if I was having a hard time writing the novel, I could turn to the comic, and it would be fun, and I'd get a bunch of pages written. Then if I was having trouble with the comic, I could turn to the novel. That's what I used to say, and I think sometimes I believed it.

But in general, I think it's better to just focus on one project at a time, and not try to juggle two or three or four things if you can avoid it. There's an efficiency of motion when you're just focused on a single thing. I was saying, if I was having trouble in the novel, I'd switch to the comic. If I was having trouble in the comic, I'd switch to the novel. But part of the reason I was having trouble was because your imagination is just this one motor and it can only produce so much energy. It can only do so much work, and if you're asking it to operate two big machines at the same time, it has to power switch. It can only drive energy to one project at a time, and so that's why you'd get stuck on something. I'd be stuck on the novel because my head is off in the comic. If you're not juggling two projects, then your head is just on the single project you have in front of you, and you tend not to get stuck.

I should add that I think I'm mostly out of the comic business now. I actually think that the part of my life where I'm a comic book writer is mostly over. I have some ideas about what I want to accomplish in the next 10 years, and I think, if I play hooky with comic books, that I might not be able to get it done. I've had the chance to have this terrific adventure writing *Locke & Key*, and I got to do the Hill House comics. I got to do *Dying is Easy*, my crime comic, and I got

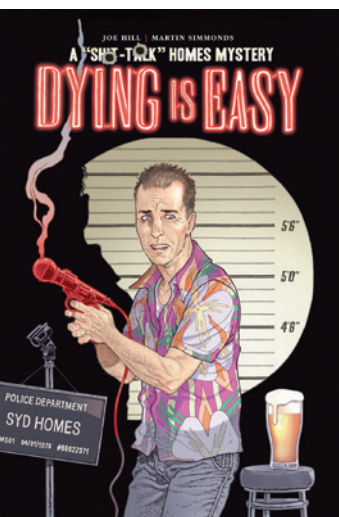
Above: This detail of the *Locke & Key: Head Games #3* [Mar. '09] cover by Gabriel Rodriguez is, as any aficionado of EC Comics would alert one to, a pastiche of the Johnny Craig cover of *Crime SuspenStories #22* [May '54]. As we learned in last issue, Hill appreciated his dad's love for the notorious "Entertaining Comics" of the 1950s. **Below:** Variant cover by Gabe Rodriguez for *Dying is Easy #1* [Dec. '19].

every page is completely silent. None of my text, none of this crapping-up the page with my words, just one page after another of Tyler and Dodge in his shadow form slugging it out on the coast of Lovecraft Island. And boy, it just looks great; it's just a great-looking issue!

I also remember when I was writing the script, the script is full of jokes, because, in the script, I would write four sentences describing page 14, and then I'd say, "By the way, Chris, I get my full-page rate. It took me 10 minutes to write this page, and I get paid exactly the same amount as I get paid for every other page. Don't forget! I'll be looking for the check!" Actually, that was a really funny issue. So I did 17 drafts of *Welcome to Lovecraft #2*; I probably wrote all of the kaiju issue in an hour-and-a-half.

I was reading somewhere that Mark Millar writes a lot of his issues in a single day, which kind of blows my mind. I don't love everything Mark Millar has written, but I think he's pretty good. I think he's definitely an A-list imagination for a reason. [A] terrifically inventive, funny writer, but it just blows my mind, if I've heard correctly, that he writes a lot of these issues in one day, because even when I knew completely what I was doing for most of *Locke & Key*, most of the issues had five drafts. Most of them took a while to write, you know?

I would say, for the first two-thirds of *Locke & Key*, most of the scripts were 50–70 pages long. It was not unheard of for me to turn in an issue that was almost 100 pages in script form. Over time, the scripts got leaner, shorter, more economical, because, at this point, Gabe and I are like an old married couple who finish each other's sentences. I began to



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to do *Wrath*, and it's been a hell of a good time. Some of those projects have been among my favorite projects, ever, but I don't see any more comics in the foreseeable future. I would love to return to *Locke & Key* to do *World War Key*, and I know Gabe would love to, too, but I'm not sure it's ever going to happen. I hope that wasn't too much of a bummer.

Glen: *Never say never.*

Joe: Never say never. Absolutely not. I have a pretty clear idea of most of what happens in *World War Key*, which is the comic that Gabe and I have teased since we finished the first run. And in some ways, in the *Locke & Key* run we did that's part of *The Golden Age*, that was almost a soft launch of *World War Key* because *World War Key* would be another 36 issues that would be broken into a half-dozen six-issue mini-series. And in the first mini-series, *World War Key: Revolution*, we would tell a six-issue story about Keyhouse in the Revolutionary War. And then in the next six-issue series, *World War Key: Resurrection*, we would tell a story set now. Well, actually, not now, probably closer to 2012, 2013, that would return us to the Locke kids, that would return us to Tyler, Kinsey, and Bode.

Tyler was the lead character of a lot of the original run. Kinsey and Bode would be the leads of *World War Key*, and I have some pretty clear ideas about what that story would look like, but it's one thing to imagine it; it's another thing to actually take the time to write it. And Gabe would have to be free, as well. It's not looking likely that it's ever actually going to happen.

Glen: *Well, people used to say that about Oasis getting back together.*

Joe: Hey, hey, and let's hear it for that! Listen, Oasis is like my religion. I love that band. I was up at three in the morning to buy Oasis tickets for Wembley. No, I didn't get them, but my hope burns eternally. And they've announced some new dates. And, if I don't get seats for that, maybe they'll come to America. Getting a chance to see Oasis live is everything to me. So yeah, you never know.

The other thing is, there's a lot of complications about what more *Locke & Key* would look like if I did do it. And one thing which doesn't help is, it's my impression that IDW, the company that originally published *Locke & Key*, is not in terribly great shape. This is very inside baseball, this is very behind the scenes business stuff, but my sense is that IDW has been in quite a bit of disarray ever since they let Chris Ryall go. I can't tell what the future of that company looks like. Recently, in a call with shareholders, the guy running IDW said they're going to do comics for just \$200 a page. That's \$200 for everything: art, coloring, writing, lettering. Boy, I bet those are gonna be some great reads. You get what you pay for, you know? So that's one more thing that suggests that a future for *Locke & Key* is cloudy. There are simple professional and business reasons that make more stories of Keyhouse unlikely.

Glen: *You won the Eisner award for best writer for Locke & Key in 2011.*

Joe: Yeah. Brian Vaughan took that year off. I think Brian Vaughan and Ed Brubaker took that year off. So I had a chance to slip in there. *[laughs]*

Glen: *But it must have been gratifying.*

Joe: You know something? It's the only award that I've

ever won where I was just blown away and speechless and thrilled. I mean, every time I've won an award, I've been grateful. It's so wonderful to receive the approval of your peers. That feels good. But I've never won an award that really could do me any good in a professional sense. The short story awards that I started to win, by the time I started to win them, I didn't need them to help me get published. There was a time earlier when winning one of those awards would have made a huge difference in terms of me getting my foot in the door but, by the time I actually did win them, my foot was already in the door, and so their benefit to me on a professional level was fairly limited.

I always think you don't want to lose sight of the goal, which is to thrill readers and give them an experience that feels special and powerful, emotionally meaningful, and that makes them want to read more, to come back again for another party. And so, in that sense – I hope this doesn't sound too crass – I think maybe sales matter to me more than awards. I feel like if you've got a readership and they're excited – they're responding on social media and on Goodreads and StoryGraph and leaving good Amazon reviews and Barnes & Noble reviews – I feel like, if you're connecting with that audience, then winning an award is terrific, but the audience is the thing. What matters is the reader's experience, whether or not you win an award. But the Eisner Award was different. It was just so amazing that my peers thought so well of *Locke & Key*, and I felt tremendously honored, and still feel a little foolish even talking about it. I don't know how I won. I'm not under the delusion that I was the best writer working that year. I hope I was doing some good work. But winning the Eisner Award was really important to me, a tremendous honor, and a peak professional moment, a really special thing.

Glen: *One of the ways writing a comic book series*



Above: *It's the Locke & Key creative team, all meeting in person for the first time, on February 5, 2020, posing in front of a L.A. billboard for the Locke & Key Netflix series. Front row from left is editor Chris Ryall, artist Gabriel Rodriguez, and colorist Jay Hill. Behind the trio is writer Joe Hill.*
Below: *C.P. Wilson III's advent calendar subscription cover for Wrath #1 [Nov. 2013].*





Above: The interior of Bode's skull is revealed to be quite the technicolor spectacle in this panel from *Locke & Key: Head Games* #2 [Feb. '09]. Art by Gabriel Rodriguez with colors by Jay Fotos. **Opposite page:** Promo for the Netflix series, *Locke & Key*. **Below:** Self-portrait by Gabe Rodriguez. The artist was born in Santiago, Chile, and studied architecture before launching his career as comic book artist. In addition to his collaborating with Joe Hill on *Locke & Key*, he and fellow Chilean artist Nelson Daniel produced *Little Nemo: Return to Slumberland* ['14].

is different than a novel is people get the novel when it's finished, but when you're writing a comic book month after month, they're reading it as it's being written.

Joe: And when you're writing it, you're writing episodically, and I don't know how it works for other comics, but sometimes I didn't always know how things were going to end. I was making it up as I went along. Probably most outfits do treatments; you would probably turn in, here's what's going to happen in each issue but, at IDW, it was pretty informal. We never did that. I just turned in a script and Gabe would start drawing.

One thing which was great, though, was I could write a lot faster than Gabe could draw. Even with all my drafts and stuff, I was still working faster than Gabe. So by the time he'd finish #1, I'd be writing #6, and then I could go back to #2 and #3 and I could fix things up to make sure that I had set everything up properly for the final issue. I could foreshadow, I could set up clues and opportunities early on that would then pay off four or five issues later, and I could do that because Gabe is a real craftsman. He works with tremendous care. He's not really a page-a-day guy, so drawing a 24-page comic for him would usually take... I want to say 40 days, or 35, 40 days. And actually, as we went on, he also got nominated for "Best Illustrator," and people

Glen: How did he become associated with the project?

Joe: The story there is, I sent Chris Ryall the first script for *Locke & Key*, and he said, "Okay, this is great. We gotta find an artist," and he sent me samples of three artists: Gabe and two guys who were terrible. Later, Chris admitted he did that because he wanted to give me the illusion of choice. That's maybe not a quite-true story; he says that, but actually the other two guys he showed me I think were pretty good, technically. They were good at drawing gore and viscera. They had pretty good monsters. But I remember looking at Gabe's art and thinking his characters seemed so alive; there was so much humanity and emotion in their features. They were so emotionally expressive, and I thought, "Well, that's the guy I want. I want the guy who can draw characters we're going to love." Because good horror isn't about sadism or brutality; it isn't about throwing gore at the camera. Good horror is about sympathy; it's about empathy. Successful horror works because you have some characters you love and profoundly connect with, and then you see them forced to face the worst. We see them put in situations of terrible peril, and because we love them and care about them, we're desperate to see them survive; we're rooting for them the whole way. And that feeling of sympathy, that feeling of caring for other people, is why horror is the most empathic and compassionate genre, and why horror works.

Now, there's a lot of stuff, like the *Friday the 13th* movies, which I would say is bad horror but good slapstick comedy. So a *Friday the 13th* thing; every character is a type. You've got the cheerleader, you've got the good girl – the virgin – you've got the jock, you've got the stoner, and they have no depth to them. They're all about an inch deep. They have one telling characteristic, and that stands for their whole per-



Locke & Key™ & © Joe Hill & IDW Publishing. Self-portrait © Gabriel Rodriguez.



sonality. And then we watch Jason Vorhees walk around and butcher them in increasingly creative ways. This one with a sledgehammer, that one with a meat cleaver, this one... I don't know, gets a piano dropped on him. Whatever Jason is in the mood for in this particular movie, and you don't care for any of the teenagers. You laugh when they die. It gets a hoot of laughter when they get killed. It's like slapstick comedy, and I like a little slapstick comedy. That's okay, but I also don't want to be on the side of rooting for the bad guy. I don't want to root for Jason Vorhees. He's a serial killer! I want to root for the human beings who stop Jason Vorhees. And so good horror does not place you in the position of rooting for Freddy Krueger. Good horror puts you in the position of rooting for someone to survive a terrible situation, and that was the philosophy we took into *Locke & Key*.

Glen: My next question is did the feedback you got from the readers ever change anything you did, or were going to do, in *Locke & Key*?

Joe: I think it did. I'm struggling to remember a specific example, but I think sometimes it did. I think we were very attuned to the reader's responses, Gabe and Chris and I. I'd love to ask them if there was anything we specifically did, either because readers wanted it, or didn't want it, or were wondering what would happen... But I think, yes, occasionally we did. We did explore an idea because readers would wonder about it, or explore a situation because readers wanted to see it. I do know there was one reader that I was hyper-responsive to, and that reader was Gabriel Rodriguez.

So *Locke & Key* was adapted for television not once, but three times. They filmed a pilot in 2010 in Pittsburgh, working from a script by Josh Friedman, who was the showrunner of *The Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, directed by Mark Romanek, who had directed a film called *One Hour Photo*. That was the first pilot. It was filmed for Fox. It never got on the air. Another pilot was filmed several years later working from my script, directed by Andy Muschietti, right on the tails of him directing *It: Chapter One*. His pilot is absolutely f*cking brilliant. It was just stunningly perfect, stunningly scary, beautifully acted, beautifully composed. Carlton Cuse produced. Everyone who saw it, loved it. Hulu opted not to air it and take it to series. Even the producers at Hulu couldn't really explain why they weren't going forward with it, because there wasn't really an explanation. The explanation was they were in this weird song-and-dance with Disney about who owned Hulu and what direction they were going in. Disney was on the verge of absorbing Hulu, but had not quite [done it] yet. There was a lot of uncertainty at the top in the upper levels of production about who was getting fired, who would come over to Disney, and in the midst of all that uncertainty, very little was going forward.

So no one will ever get to see the Andy Muschietti pilot, which just picks up right where *It: Chapter One* left off. It's just as scary, just as powerful, just as intense, wonderful. But somehow we got lucky and we got a chance for a third try, and the third time was the charm. And credit there goes to Carlton Cuse, who finally cracked the puzzle, and figured out how to get a TV show that people wanted to see put on the air.

But anyway, I mention all this because, in 2010, they were filming the first try at *Locke & Key*, in Pittsburgh, and Gabriel Rodriguez flew in from Chile, and Chris Ryall flew in from San Diego, and I drove down, and we all hung out for about a week while they were making the TV show. It was fun to watch them make the show, but what was really good was going back to the hotel afterwards. Gabe and Chris and I would sit together in the bar, and we

talked about *Locke & Key*, which was very much still going, and we were half-way through the series at that time. One night at the bar, Gabe said, "Why don't they just make a key? Why don't they just use the Whispering Iron to make a key to destroy demons?" And I smashed my hand on the table and said, "That's how we're gonna end it. You just solved it."

And that was Gabe's idea, and it started as a joke. So I always think it's important to emphasize how much *Locke & Key* is the result of a collaborative effort. It's not like Gabe drew a bunch of pretty pictures for my words, and it's my story. It's our story. I learned as much about those characters from the way Gabe drew them as he ever learned from me about the way he drew them. I looked at the characters on the page and was able to figure out who they were.

Maybe that's the answer. I was saying earlier, "How did I come up with Kinsey?" But maybe I didn't come up with Kinsey. Maybe Gabe came up with her, and then I could look at her on the page and I could say, "Oooh, I know who she is. Okay, I know what kind of music she listens to. I know what she's afraid of. I know what her brothers mean to her, and how she relates to them." I could see it on the page and so I knew how to write her.

Gabe's humor and his imagination constantly informed storylines. Another thing is, early on, I wrote a lot of dialogue, but I started writing less and less dialogue as I went along, and we had this hilarious moment at the end of *Keys to the Kingdom*. In the final issue of *Keys to the Kingdom*, we got the comic all done and they sent it to the press. It got printed up, and Chris Ryall called me up one afternoon. He said, "Joe, it finally happened. It was gonna happen someday. It would be nice if this never happened, but sooner or later it was gonna happen. We f*cked up. We sent the file to be printed, and we forgot to put the text on this one page. We sent it without the text layer." When they transmitted the issue to the printer, they transmitted it without the dialogue on this one page. There was one page that was supposed to have conversation, and the conversation isn't there. It's completely silent.

Chris said, "If this is what you want, this is what we're going to do. It's going to cost us a lot of money, but we're gonna destroy the issues, and we'll reprint. We'll be four weeks late, and it is gonna cost IDW a bunch of money, but this is our fault, and we will fix it." And I said, "Before you do anything, send me the issue. Let me take a look at the digital file that was transmitted." And he sent me the digital file, and I read it. I just sat there at my computer. I hung up the phone, got the file, sat there at the computer and read it. Picked up the phone, called him back, and I said, "It's fine. Just leave it. We don't need the words; the pictures tell the story." And he's like, "Well, we'll put it back when we do the graphic novel." I was like, "Do we need to? Are you sure? I'm not sure we need to."

And so that page still has no dialogue on it. We didn't need it! Gabe illustrated it so beautifully, it's so clear what's happening in the images, and what people are feeling and what they're thinking, my words were just taking up space. I'm glad that accident only happened once, because I would hate to find out how frequently my words are completely irrelevant on the page, because Gabe is already delivering everything anyone needs to know about the story.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Crossroads: CrossGen '03

An amazed yet skeptical Ye Ed. tours the all-in-one Florida comics company in a 2003 visit

Inset right: Mark Alessi sold his software services company, he told the Chicago Tribune, for "less than \$100 million and more than \$10 million," and he subsequently launched CrossGeneration Comics, outside Tampa, Florida. **Below:** His four initial releases, all based in the shared "Sigilverse," each lasting over 40 issues. **Bottom:** Aerial photo with arrow indicating the Oldsmar comic book factory.

by JON B. COOKE

"Freefall." That's the word *The Comics Journal* used to characterize the CrossGen of a month or so after I visited the Tampa area comics company, on April 14, 2003. But I had little sense of the financial turmoil it was beginning to endure when I stepped into the remarkable environs of Mark Albert Alessi's 13,500 square-foot comic book factory.

While my mid-morning appointment to tour the sprawling facility and interview its maverick owner didn't dispel my skepticism about the publisher's formula to succeed, I can still recall being massively impressed with the whole "all-in-one" aspect (well, "all" but printing and distribution), something the mainstream comics world hadn't seen since Charlton Comics closed its doors over a decade before.

Michael Dean, in his *TCJ* investigation of CrossGen, best described the "corporate headquarters, gallery of comic art, and creative design studio," as I witnessed it upon arrival in the otherwise unassuming industrial/office park: "Entering the glass doors at the front entrance of the building, one first encounters a reception area, management offices, a conference room, and a computer room complete with its own web server. Pieces of original art from Alessi's collection adorn the walls. Just past the computer room is an internal production facility for printing and scanning functions. Though CrossGen comics are printed at Quebecor, the company is capable of printing and binding its own sample comics onsite. A corridor to the left leads to an area that would qualify as living quarters, including a small 'cafeteria' (with refrigerator and microwave), a game room (with foosball table and video game systems), a bunk room (for employee naps), showers, and locker room dressing areas.



"A corridor to the right leads to administrative production and creative staff management offices. In between is the massive bullpen area, a courtyard-like central hub divided into large 'quads,' where artists and writers work at cubicle workstations. While the rest of the building has nine-foot ceilings, the quads have seven-foot cubicle walls and a 12-foot ceiling. Each quad holds workspace for a title's team of creators, including penciler, inker, and colorist, as well as a central conference area where the art team can confer with each other and the title's writer. Few publishing companies have gotten their start in the comics business at such an elaborately designed ground floor."

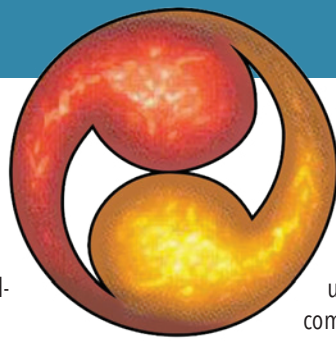
Most impressive to me (who feels ambiance plays a large part in making for a creative environment) was the comfortably dim lighting* in the centralized, carpeted bullpen – I got a feeling that here was the heart of the company – with the acoustics nicely subdued, accompanied by soft glows emanating from colorist computer screens in their cubicles. There was no glaring fluorescent lighting, no loud factory floor clamoring, no assembly line vibe here.

As he led me about the premises, my host/tour guide, facility manager John Smith, was amiable and he answered my questions engagingly enough, though I did feel a little hurried. He bragged that there was \$2.5 million worth

* CrossGen facility manager John Smith informed me, "The colorists leave the lights off here for [computer screen] calibration rates."

Alessi photo by Jon B. Cooke. CrossGen TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.





of comic book art gracing the entire facility (though a newspaper article cited \$1.5 million value that combined Allesi's comic book collection on the premises along with the art), which included pieces by Frank Frazetta, Jim Steranko, Al Williamson, Roy Krenkel, Jack Kirby, Bernie Wrightson, Dave Stevens, Barry Windsor-Smith, and Wallace Wood, to

CROSSGEN™ COMICS

name only a portion. Smith discussed the CrossGen Premier Retailer program, its regular outreach to keep Hollywood abreast of its comics, and he opted to throw me some numbers. I was informed CrossGen was currently employing 92 people and was also planning to expand its already considerable size and acquire an additional 10,500 square-foot next door for management, as well as in-house pencilers and inkers who, I was told, needed brighter lighting to work.

Joining the tour was Michelle Pugliese, freelance coordinator, and she explained CrossGen's creator-owned imprint Code 6 and the CGE sister brand focusing on licensed titles. She said Code 6 was named for Florida Highway Patrol signal code indicating an "escaped prisoner," equating comics pros busting from the confines of the Big Two to join with the publisher to develop creator-owned properties, where, she explained, "We are acting as a publishing agent."

Pugliese also introduced me to artists Jeff Johnson, Rick Maygar, and I met, in person for the first time – the dude I had initially reached out to ask about visiting the outfit – Butch Guice, whose work graced my favorite CrossGen title, *Ruse*. The freelance coordinator then explained the 4/1 equation for their monthly books – a schedule of four issues produced by an in-house art team and then one fill-in completed by freelancers, and the cycle then begins anew.

Armed with my new digital camera, I snapped a photo of Pugliese posing with the first issue of then new CGE/Code 6 title, *Brian Pulido's Lady Death: A Medieval Tale*, featuring a less buxom protagonist in a revamp which, *Wizard* reported, "jettisons the T&A and Heaven/Hell metaphysics of previous series in favor of high fantasy and historical fiction."

(Before its demise, CrossGen would partner not only with Pulido, but also with Don Bluth, John Carpenter, Mattel Toys, R.A. Salvatore, Rob Zombie, and Chris Gossett (of *The Red Star*) producing licensed comics in joint ventures.)

Before Smith and Pugliese returned to their own daily routines, I was palmed off on Bill Rosemann, marketing director, who detailed CrossGen's intent to create comics of international appeal. (Ain't It Cool News relayed that, in 2002, the CrossGen line was translated in eight different languages and published in at least 15 other countries.) "Everything was designed with the notion of spreading our heroes to the entire world," he said. "And so we came up with stories that aren't dictated by, say, just American ideals."

And the stories were composed specifically to appeal to

all ages – across generations, as the company name indicates – with special emphasis on luring female readers. AICN reported in 2002, "CrossGeneration Comics has set unprecedented sales records for a new start-up comics publisher by debuting nine releases on

the comic book industry distributor's Top 100 sales list. Since then they have grown into the comic industry's fifth largest publisher..."

Rosemann explained its efforts to seek new readers in the digital world with its "Comics on the Web" initiative, offering library access to its digitized comics for \$2 a month; the compact convenience of its *Traveler* format trade paperbacks; and the company's "Bridges" push to promote comics in classrooms to aid with student reading comprehension.

With that, I was ushered into Mark Alessi's office, the walls of which sported more provocative and less-general-audience framed artwork than that seen in the hallways. The publisher, who shook my hand and looked me over with his characteristic intense gaze, was in a friendly if also no-nonsense mood, and I started asking chronological questions. "I'm originally from Connecticut," he replied, "although I was born in Massachusetts, and most of my background is in technology. Getting out of school, I went to work for IBM and I stayed in technology for 27 years and I got into this particular role because I'm crazy... certifiable."

About his introduction to comics, he related, "Well, I was pretty fortunate. My mother taught me to read when I was like three, so, by the time I was in kindergarten, I was reading the *Hardy Boys* and *Tom Swift* novels, and my cousin, Gina, introduced me to comics in the probably early '60s, when the real Marvel comics were coming out – *Fantastic Four*, *Amazing Spider-Man*, etc., and I fell in love with them, and I've always loved comics since."

To my later regret, I would only recently learn of cousin Gina Villa's prominence in the publisher's origin myth, never mind the fact she was likely, at that very moment, sitting in an adjacent office, second only to her cousin in the corporate hierarchy as CrossGen's chief operating officer.

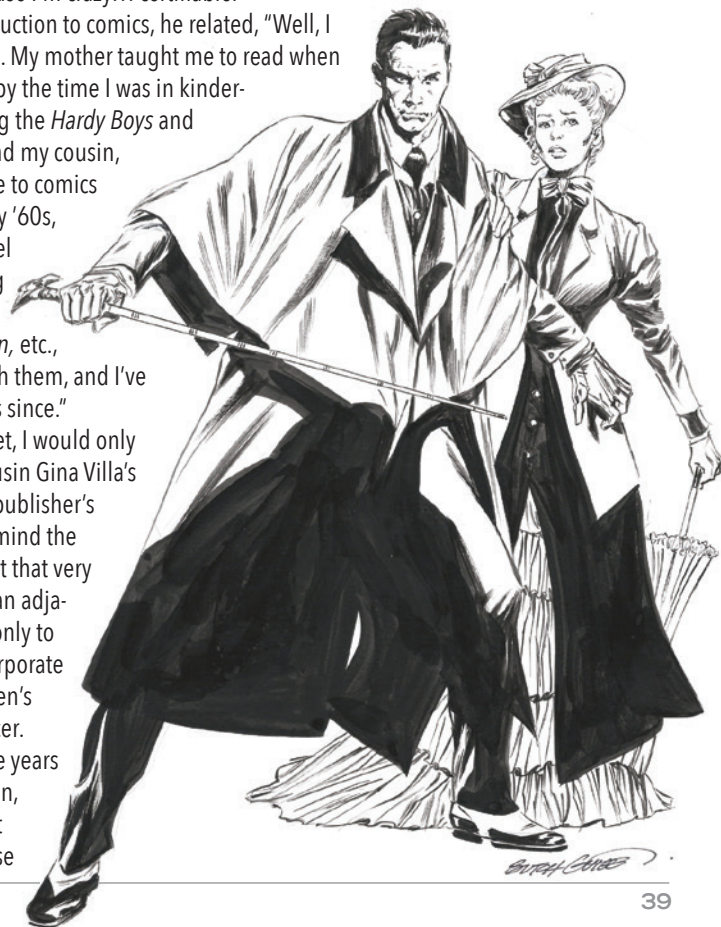
Villa, some three years older than her cousin, did indeed acquaint Alessi with the House



Above: The first issue of quarterly CrossGen Chronicles [June '00] preceded the initial four monthly titles. Cover by Claudio Castellini.

Inset left: CrossGen logo. F.Y.I.: in 2000, the publisher was recipient of the Diamond Gem Awards for "Comic Book Publisher of the Year (Under 5% Market Share)" and "New Publisher of the Year."

Below: Simon Archard and Emma Bishop, the stars of *Ruse*. Commission by Butch Guice.





Above: Original art by George Pérez and John Dill, Wizard CrossGen Special [Feb. '00].
Below: CrossGen freelance coordinator Michelle Pugliese poses in the Oldsmar comic book factory.



of Ideas work of Lee, Kirby, Ditko, and company, and he asked for her consul. Villa (who passed away in 2022) told Jennifer M. Contino, for Sequential Tart, "He called me and we hashed out the ideas for the first books in a few intense days of talk and note-taking while sitting by the pool."

As Michael Dean related in *T CJ*, "CrossGen is the comics company born out of conversations about artists, characters, and stories that took place between the teenage Mark Alessi and his cousin Gina Villa.* Fans can relate to this story because they've all conjured their own comics lines in the course of kitchen-table conversations with their own cousins and friends and with the guy behind the counter at their local comics shop. The difference was that the teenage Alessi grew up to become a young software magnate with all the money he needed to realize his fantasy of a Utopian comics bullpen."

* Previously, Villa had a 29-year career as high school physical education instructor. One CrossGen staffer shared, "Nice lady, but she was not at all equipped for the [COO] role, so we had to work around her, as well as teach her how everything worked. So those of us who knew what we were doing had to jump through those hoops constantly."

In contemplating the notion of CrossGen, one gets the sense that Alessi and Villa's dream was to recreate and improve on the early Marvel Age, with its interlocking comic book universe and make real the romantic illusion of an actual bullpen, where everyone worked elbow to elbow creating their tales to astonish. Ron Marz, a senior writer, told me, "From the beginning, there was also naivety about the process of making comics, and the business of making comics, that ultimately hamstrung the company. We were set up as a bullpen, with everyone working in a studio, because Mark Alessi believed the myth that Stan and Jack and Steve and Big John worked together in the Marvel bullpen in the '60s. He wanted to replicate something that never existed."

But, to his credit, Alessi wanted to treat his in-house crew far better than how Jack and fellow freelancers were dealt with by Marvel publisher Martin Goodman. "CrossGen started with the best of intentions and a genuine love of comics, and frankly a respect for the people who make comics," Marz explained. "We were largely treated as valuable pieces, rather than cogs in a machine, with salary, benefits, vacation, sick time, 401K – all things unavailable to comics freelancers."

The Sigilverse was Alessi and Villa's answer to the Marvel Universe, though instead of Lee, Kirby, and associates' organic development of concepts building on concepts over the years, the CrossGen cosmos was pre-planned (and frankly, however fascinating, quite complex), with core characters, each one bearing the same yin yang symbol as in the company logo, based on their respective planets, and all set in the 900th century.

Bold and ambitious as all of this universe-building was, with its storylines, CrossGen willfully chose to embrace genres not much exploited in modern comics – fantasy/magic, space opera, martial arts, pirates, detectives, etc. – but eschewed the most popular category in the industry, super-heroes, the genre that made Marvel and DC the juggernauts they were. "We've made business decisions two, three years ago to attack alternate forms of publishing, attack mainstream, and attack genres that had appeal to mainstream people," Alessi told me. "I mean, with all due respect to the 350,000 hardcore super-hero fans out there, there's 300 million Americans and there's billions of people worldwide, and the super-hero is an American phenomenon, not a world phenomenon. It's the concept of hero that's relevant. The concept of super-hero is only relevant in the United States." (My protest to consider the international success of the *Spider-Man* movie franchise was waved away.)

When I suggested that CrossGen Comics were refreshingly female-friendly, Alessi – prone to being contrary, I was learning – countered, "I wouldn't say that our product is necessarily female friendly. It's not female *insulting*, and those, I think, are two different concepts." (Certainly, the publisher himself could be female friendly, given his putting cousin Villa in an executive position, hiring feminist Barbara Randall Kesel as a head writer, and having the name of his teenage daughter, Ashleigh, used for a character in *Scion*, plus the girl modeled as the star of Kesel's *Meridian*. I mean, that ain't nothing.)

Alessi described to me the source of his fortune, Tampa-based Technical Resource Connections, which he founded in

1986: "It was an object technology development company. You've heard of Java [programming software]? We did a lot of the original precursor work to the development of Java for Sun Microsystems. Not that I did it, but other smart people did it. I just surround myself with very capable people, which allows me to look good."

In 1996, he sold TRC to Ross Perot's Perot Systems and walked away with a rumored \$30 million at age 43. I asked, half-jokingly, if CrossGen was part of his retirement.

"I don't know. Some days I think this is some sort of distorted form of purgatory. I don't think God's quite decided whether I should go to heaven. This is my testing ground."

Then, unprovoked, Alessi's bitterness came to the surface upon my asking why he got into comics, an industry in distress, when he did. "A brief moment of insanity, which I became so in-depth into the process and made commitments to so many people that I now am in a position to finishing them off. Plus, the more I got into this business, the more I found how disingenuous the players in this business are.

"Quite frankly, the ethics of this business leave much to be desired. I suppose if one were to choose between becoming a pimp and running a house of prostitution and running a comic book company, it would be a toss-up as to which trade had more integrity. Y'know, I think fondly about that house of prostitution I almost started. [chuckles] This system is a bad system and it's not designed for people to be successful, for companies to be successful. It's designed for one or two companies to monopolize, to be barely competent at best, and they're supported by an infrastructure that doesn't allow others to raise the bar – the standard – effectively. And I'm going to change that."

Certainly one source of Alessi's rage was after Diamond's Steve Geppi promised CrossGen could join DC, Marvel, Dark Horse, and Image to the front pages of the *Previews* catalog, only to have the distributor rescind the commitment. Bill Schanes, Diamond VP of purchasing, was the one to inform the news to Alessi. "Needless to say," Schanes posted on Facebook, "this was a very challenging phone call, one which, after informing Mark of this sudden change of direction, I listened for many minutes [to the] high degree of frustration from Mark over this reversal."

While we sparred over various subjects, Alessi did not project pessimism about the company's future. On the contrary, he said, "We've lost a sh*tload of money in our first couple of years, but we're starting to get the long-term paybacks now, and they'll continue to increase and increase over time. And very soon we'll have the kind of foundation that every company in this industry should have." Alas, before the year was out, the company would be put up for sale,

declare bankruptcy in June 2004, and, five months later, have its assets purchased by the Disney Company.

But the seeds of CrossGen's imminent collapse could be found at the time of the company's birth, due to a precipitous stock market downturn in early 2000. Marz, who benefited from the progressive labor policies as a senior writer, offered, "But treating us as employees was an expensive way to make comics, and the short version of why CrossGen failed is: we ran out of money. The promise made was that

the was enough money set aside to run the company for five years even if we made no profit. But when the dot-com bubble burst, about half of the owner's money evaporated overnight. That was really the beginning of the end, coupled with a swath of bad management decisions."

The saga of CrossGen is worthy of an in-depth book, one I'm tempted to pursue, and if any happy ending can be found in the story, it would be in discussing the origins of a charitable organization devoted to the field taking care of its own, the Hero Initiative. As the *New York Times* related, "In 2000, [Wizard contributing editor Jim McLaughlin] had a conversation with a fellow baseball fan, Mark Alessi, who had previously founded CrossGen, an independent comic book company. 'There

should be an organization like [Baseball Assistance Team] for the comic business,' Mr. McLaughlin recalled saying. Mr. Alessi offered the services of his lawyers and the idea quickly moved into reality. The organization was originally named A Commitment to Our Roots, or Actor, but in 2006, it became Hero, a word that resonated more strongly with the comic book industry."

Before passing away in 2011, the subject of this issue of *Comic Book Creator*, Gene Colan, spoke of the \$60,000 the not-for-profit contributed to his health and domestic needs at a trying time. "If there was no Hero Initiative," he said, "I probably would have gone under. Hero picked up the slack and made sure I didn't drown. They kept me going, paid the rent. That, to me, is a miracle. They saved me and my family."

Wrapping up the interview, I asked Alessi, given his unusual frankness as industry player, what made him different than his peers. "I tell the truth," he replied unhesitatingly, "and I keep my word. Isn't that a shame that would make me different? It's an indictment. There's probably a half-dozen management [people] in this entire industry, from publishers to distributors, that tell the truth and keep their word. Maybe a half-dozen. That's it. Like I told you, pimps and prostitutes are more honest and ethical."

On March 29, 2019, Mark Alessi suffered a massive heart attack and died at home. Though his demise garnered a fair amount of online remembrance from former CrossGenners, the industry itself barely said a word.



Above: Undated photo of Gina Villa, the Alessi cousin who co-conceived of the Sigilverse. **Inset left:** CrossGen Tales #1 [Jan. '23] was a Marvel one-shot published to keep current the trademarks. **Below:** Bill Rosemann poses in front of the CrossGen comic book factory. **Bottom:** Cousins Villa and Alessi in their teenage years, when they mused about having an imprint.



Alcatena's Starblazing Rise

An informative conversation with the brilliant and visionary Argentine comic book artist

by PABLO STADELMAN



Top: Enrique Alcatena. **Above:** Alcatena commission. **Inset right:** Illustration from Alcatena's *Esquilache en Xibalbá* [21], based on Mayan myth. **Below:** Alcatena's big break in the predominantly English-speaking realm came when he broke into D.C. Thomson, drawing for Brit bi-weekly *Starblazer*. Collected edition is from 2024.

Enrique Alcatena is a lover of the Silver Age and a great connoisseur of the heroic mythology of DC and Marvel, thanks to his artistic influences, such as Carmine Infantino, Gil Kane, Jack Kirby, and Barry Windsor-Smith. The man is also an outstanding English teacher and translator, as well as prose writer and cover artist. Between 1975-78, he worked as assistant to Chiche Medrano (Julio Cesar Medrano) at Record Publishing, where he saw published his first work, "Bushido," in the magazine, *Pif Paf*, in 1976. In '82, he began collaborating with the magazine, *Anteojito*, published by Garcia Ferre, where he worked until 1987.

His passion for fantasy and heroic tales was evident in one of his early works, "Shangor Kol de Lemuria," which led to his joining the prestigious Record Publishing, and, thanks to his immense talent, he began a career in British comics at D.C. Thomson, where he illustrated several of their iconic titles, such as *Starblazer*, *The Victor*, and *The Crunch*.

In the mid-1980s, with his style fully developed, he began working with Jorge Barreiro for *Skorpio*, on landmark stories, like "La Fortaleza Movil" and "El Mundo Subteraneo." He also collaborated with Eduardo Mazitelli on "Acero Liquido" and "Unitario," among others. Also, for *Skorpio*, he illustrated such as "Dinastia Maldita" and "Kairak."

His unmistakable style granted him entry to the North American market, working on various titles for DC and Marvel, such as *Batman*, *Flash*, *Punisher 2099*, *Conan*, *Green Lantern*, *Lobo*, *L.E.G.I.O.N.*, and *Hawkworld*.

Alcatena's work is replete with references to various mythologies, including those of the East, India, Europe and Latin America, as well as the elaborate costumes he draws for each of his characters. Furthermore, his stories are notable for incorporating elements of Argentine culture, lending a unique charm to each tale. His distinctive and dynamic style has allowed Alcatena to explore many genres of story, from science fiction, mythical warriors, war narratives, literary classics, monster stories, to super-hero tales.

Pablo Stadelman: How did your artistic career begin as assistant to Chiche Medrano and for Record Publishing?

Enrique Alcatena: At 17, I took a portfolio of samples to Record Publishing, very much in the style of Barry Windsor-Smith, one of my idols at the time (and always). That led the editor, Alfredo Scutti, to give me my first script, an adventure story set in Tibet that I never saw published. Since he knew that Chiche Medrano, also a collaborator at the publishing house, was looking for an assistant, he recommended that I go see him. That's how I ended up

working with Chiche for three years while also occasionally submitting my own comics. I learned a lot from him.

Pablo: Your first work for the European market was at D.C. Thomson, where you worked on weekly series with historical themes. Could you tell me more about this work and your involvement in *Starblazer*, *The Crunch*, and *The Victor*?

Enrique: In 1978, like many Argentine cartoonists, and through the efforts of the agent, also a cartoonist César Spadari, started working for Thomson (a kind of British Columba). They didn't pay much, but they provided a lot of work. It was only interrupted, for obvious reasons, during the Falklands War [Spring 1982], but then it continued steadily until the early '90s, when Thomson also suffered the effects of [British Prime Minister Margaret] Thatcher's policies. I thoroughly enjoyed collaborating with Thomson, mainly on the science fiction and fantasy books of *Starblazer*, but also on the serials in the anthologies you mentioned, *The Crunch* and *The Victor*, where I did everything from gladiators in the future to episodes of the Napoleonic Wars at sea. I remember the enormous size of the pages in those latter ones.

Pablo: Regarding your first work for DC Comics. How did you get this job, and what was it like drawing such an important title as *Hawkworld* by the brilliant Tim Truman.

Enrique: It was completely unexpected, but a very pleasant surprise it turns out that Truman had seen some of my work, which the Villagran brothers had given him, and



Big Bards, Mister Miracle TM & ©DC Comics. Esquilache en Xibalbá © the respective copyright holder. Starblazer TM & © D.C. Thomson.



he liked it He suggested me as the inker for his Hawkman mini-series (one of my favorite childhood characters) and that's how I started working with publishers in the U.S.

But, if the character gained any recognition thanks to that series, it was mainly due to Truman's work. That said, after a couple of jobs as an inker, I made it clear that I would only continue collaborating with them if I could handle both the pencils and inking. Luckily, I was able to.

Pablo: How would you define your work, starting with your first on the Conan the Savage series, with scripts by Chuck Dixon and Roy Thomas?

Enrique: Just to clarify: I didn't illustrate Thomas's scripts, mostly Dixon's, and a couple by Edington, I think. Being a fan of sword-&-sorcery as a genre, and fantasy in general, being able to illustrate *Conan* was a dream come true. Besides, working with Dixon was always a pleasure. An excellent storyteller and person.

Pablo: What is your opinion on the *Batman: Leatherwing* [Detective Comics Annual #7, June '94] story, and the impact it had on fans? What was it like working with Chuck Dixon on that and what details you contribute?

Enrique: It also had a completely fortuitous origin. Chuck had a notebook containing drawings he had requested from the artists who worked with him. I drew Long John Silver, one of the protagonists of Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, because we were both passionate about pirate stories. It just so happened that at that time, DC's annuals were all going to be Elseworlds (that is, versions of the characters set in words of eras different from their usual continuity). Chuck immediately came up with the idea of doing a pirate Batman and asked if I was up for it and I immediately agreed. I prepared four pin-ups (Batman, Catwoman, Robin, and the Joker, in their 17th century Caribbean pirate versions) to accompany the plot Chuck sent to the editors, and they gave us the go-ahead. In fact, they seemed to like the Batman pin-up enough to use it for the *Annual's* cover.

Pablo: In your work at Marvel, drawing Marvel Action Hour, featuring the *Fantastic Four* and *X-Men*, did you have free rein to draw the characters or did you have to follow any guidelines from the publisher?

Enrique: I never had to follow any guidelines, either at Marvel or DC. They were always very respectful of the artist's vision, at least during the years I worked for them.

Pablo: Regarding your extensive career in Argentina, with such diverse projects as Garcia Ferre publishing, Columba publishing, "Bushido," "La Fortaleza Móvil," and "El Mago," how did you approach such varied projects and how did you manage deadlines?

Enrique: Fortunately, I was always dedicated to projects I truly enjoyed, like those you mentioned, and also those I undertook, alone or in collaboration (mainly with Eduardo Mazzitelli) in the decades that followed.

With experience, one develops, almost instinctively and inevitably, a work discipline that allows you to organize yourself to meet deadlines and so on. If one intends to



dedicate oneself to this, that discipline is essential and, over time, it becomes nature.

Pablo: Finally, regarding your work for Eura Publishing, what was the work system like for this publishing house, and how long did it last?

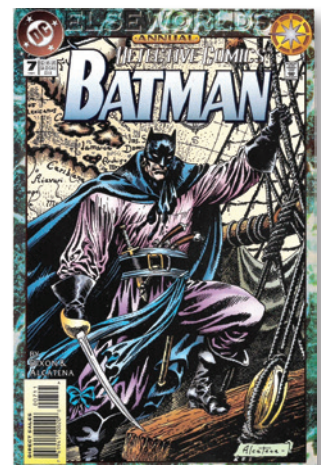
Enrique: It was a collaboration that lasted exactly 49 years. If it hadn't been interrupted this year by the equally inevitable ups and downs of the publishing industry, it would have been 50 years since that morning I showed up at Record

Publishing (Record had always been associated with that Italian publisher, which also had many names and incarnations over the years – Eura is just one of them, so what we did here was also published in Italy). Perhaps I'll work with them again, perhaps not. That the working relationship lasted so long is, despite everything, extraordinary, and if I was able to develop as an artist, it was thanks to the opportunity they gave me.

Above: Alcatena renders the "Mindless Ones" and Doctor Strange in this 2003 commission.

Below: Detective Comics Annual #7 [June '94] cover. by Alcatena

Alcatena



This spread h

ere every ish

Sleuths, Witches, & Mermaids

Another triumvirate of graphic novel recommendations from our well-read school librarian

by RICHARD J. ARNDT

From 2006–10, author Nancy Springer published six prose novels dealing with her Victorian heroine teen-age detective, Enola Holmes, who just so happens to be the younger sister of Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes. Both of the latter are depicted here as considerably younger than they ever appeared in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novels and story collections. Sherlock is somewhere in his mid-20s and already a consulting detective – although Doctor Watson is nowhere in sight – while Mycroft, the eldest brother, is not yet the enormous fat man acting as head of MI-6.

In 2020 and '22, Netflix presented two streaming films starring *Stranger Things* star Millie Bobby Brown as Enola, with former *Superman* actor Henry Cavill as Sherlock and Sam Claflin as Mycroft. These were excellent film adaptations, with great lead performances, which sparked new interest in the books.

One result of that interest is all six books have been condensed and adapted into two graphic novels, written and illustrated by Serena Blasco. The first of these adapts *The Case of the Missing Marquess*, *Case of the Left-Handed Lady*, and *Case of the Bizarre Bouquets*. The second adapts *The Case of the Peculiar Pink Fan*, *Case of the Cryptic Crinoline*, and *The Baker Street Station*.

Both adaptations are delightful and do a very nice job of condensing the novels without losing the flavor of Springer's actual full-length books. One note: the novels feature Enola's search for her mother as a subplot across all six novels. The film series concluded that plotline in the first movie, with a happy ending where Enola finds her mom.

Both Springer and Blasco both do a wonderful job, respectively, conveying the flavor of Doyle's Victorian stories of Holmes brothers, while adding a plucky heroine – a girl convincingly portrayed as belonging to the fabled Holmes lineage – in a fitting storyline that only a full-fledged Holmes sibling could tell.

I liked these adaptations enough so that I'm sending my copies to one of my granddaughters for Christmas, so she can enjoy and perhaps be prompted to read the excellent source novels. You could do worse than spending a few days reading both versions – and watching a third cinematic take.

(Don't confuse Blasco's graphic novel adaptations with the Simon & Schuster Netflix series tie-in, *Enola Holmes: Mycroft's Dangerous Game* ['22], which I haven't read.)

Our second set of graphic novels is *The Okay Witch* two-volume series, by Emma Steinkellner. I discussed Steinkellner's 2023–24 graphic fantasy series, *Nell of Gumbling*, several columns ago, but this earlier (2019–21) series has just arrived at my school library and I'm liking these a lot as well.

This series is considerably more derivative than the *Nell*

of *Gumbling*, as it features a young teenage witch who's just starting out in her witch-hood. She dresses in a contemporary fashion, goes to a regular school, rides a broomstick that she occasionally walks on its staff when she's flying and has a plump black cat as a familiar. If that sounds like an American version of the Japanese *Kiki's Special Delivery*, it's probably supposed to.

Young Moss Hush, who loves all things witchy, discovers she's an actual witch, being hidden in the town of Founder's Bluff, Massachusetts, by her mother, to escape Moss' grandmother's equally real and particularly dangerous life in an alternate world of witchery.

There's a lot going on in these two books – titled *The Okay Witch* and *The Okay Witch and the Hungry Shadow* – the discovering of family secrets (both good and not so), dodging demons and angry grandmothers, and dealing with the usual assortments of teenage angst and accompanying growing pains.

Both novels are quick and fun reads and, if not particularly profound... well, every book you read doesn't need to be. Sometimes they just need to be fun. And these are.

Our concluding book is *Fish Girl*, by noted young adult author Donna Jo Napoli and the three-time Caldecott Award illustrator David Wiesner, who's also co-author of this book.

Here is an aquatic tale focused on *Fish Girl*, a mermaid who's been trapped in a seaside aquarium for most of her life, with only the aquarium's sea life as her friends. She's been behind glass for so long that she doesn't really know of her origins in the sea. Her captor is the aquarium owner, who is exploiting her as his star attraction. She knows him only as Neptune, God of seas and storms. (Obviously, to the reader, he's a lying sack of crap, since he is actually an ordinary man, lording over and using her to be the main draw in his increasingly shabby establishment, while concealing the fact that she is an actual mermaid. In essence, *Fish Girl* is his slave.)

As *Fish Girl* tries to discover who she really is, she learns what a remote control is and realizes that he must be using the trident from his act to control the machinery of her tank. For the first time, she hauls her heavy body up the pool ladder and finds herself completely out of water. She activates the trident and discovers that the man has been lying to her on how things work in the real world.

With help from her best friend, the octopus, she manages to get back into her pool, with eyes and mind now aware of the faulty world she's been living in. Soon she is venturing outside her pool on a regular basis and discovers that, when her scales fall off outside the pool, she has real human legs under the scales. She begins to plot both her and her friends' escapes. This is a great story with real life questions and reality marching side-by-side with the fantasy. Good book.



This page: From top, first of Serena Blasco's *Enola Holmes* series; initial volume of *The Okay Witch* books by Emma Steinkellner; and Weisner and Napoli's *Fish Girl*.

SHAZOOM!!

IT'S SUPERDUPERMAN
VERSUS CAPTAIN
MARBLES!

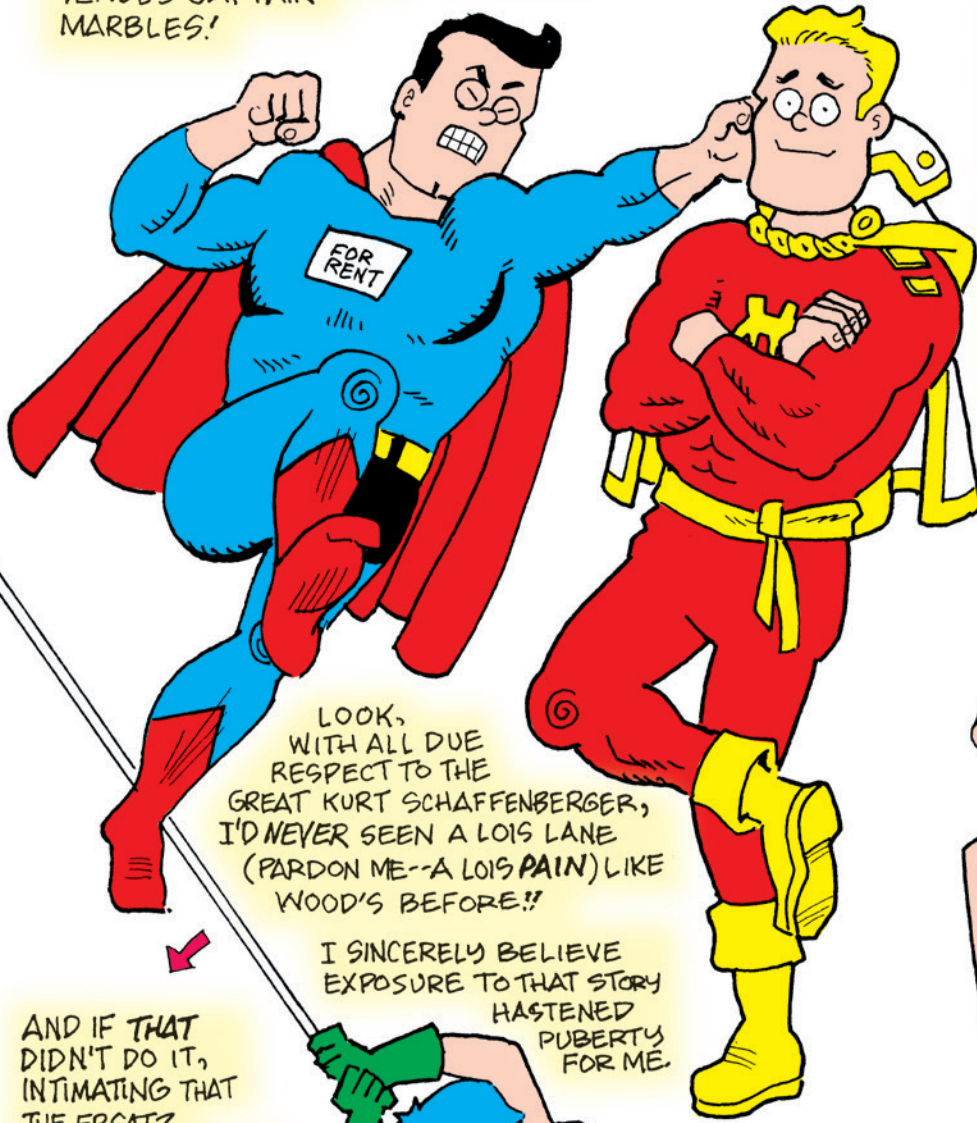
IT'S BAT BOY
AND RUBIN!

IT'S...WOMAN WONDER?
(ISN'T THAT BACKWARDS?)

IT'S MY
FAVORITE DC
COMICS CHARACTERS
(PLUS WONDER WOMAN) MOCKED
IN THE MAD READER AND OTHER
PAPERBACK COLLECTIONS, ONES
I'D DISCOVERED BACK IN 1962 WHEN
I WAS NINE YEARS OLD!

I'D NEVER SEEN COMICS LIKE
THESE DURING THAT SQUEAKY
CLEAN CODE-APPROVED ERA!!

I'D ALSO NEVER SEEN ARTWORK
LIKE WALLY WOOD'S -- OR BILL
ELDER'S -- BEFORE, NO SIRREE!



LOOK,
WITH ALL DUE
RESPECT TO THE
GREAT KURT SCHAFFENBERGER,
I'D NEVER SEEN A LOIS LANE
(PARDON ME--A LOIS PAIN) LIKE
WOOD'S BEFORE!!

I SINCERELY BELIEVE
EXPOSURE TO THAT STORY
HASTENED
PUBERTY
FOR ME.

AND IF THAT
DIDN'T DO IT,
INTIMATING THAT
THE ERSATZ
AMAZON BLITHELY
CHANGED INTO HER
COSTUME IN HER
TRANSPARENT GLASS
ROBOT PLANE--
I REPEAT, TRANSPARENT
GLASS ROBOT PLANE --
ALL THE WHILE PEEK-A-BOO
PARAMOUR STEVE ADORE
FROTHED AT THE MOUTH--
WELL, THAT SURE LEFT
AN INDELIBLE MARK ON MY
STILL-FORMATIVE NOGGIN!!

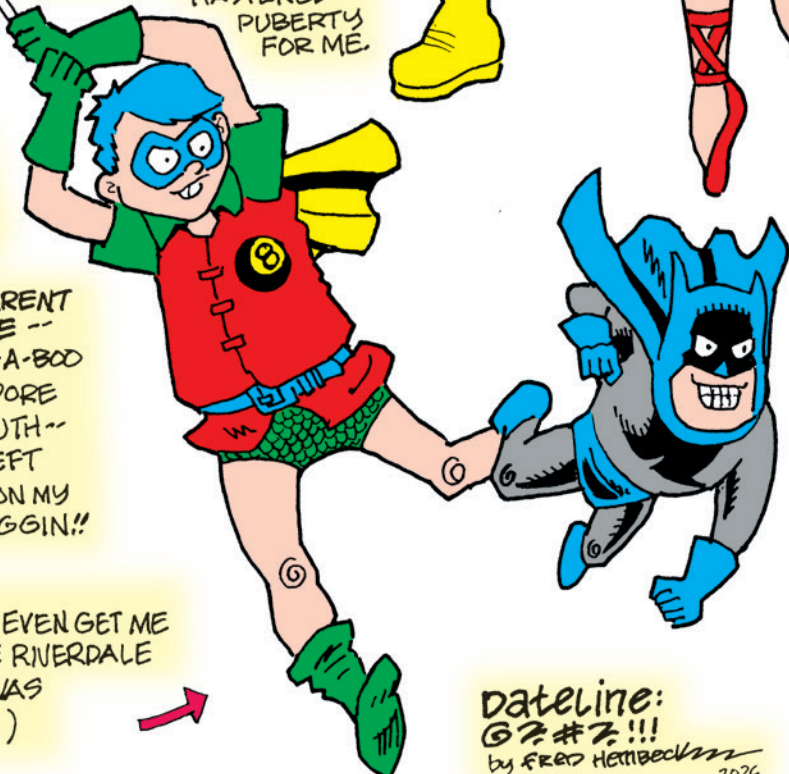
(AND HEY, DON'T EVEN GET ME
STARTED ON THE RIVERDALE
EXPOSE THAT WAS
"STARCHE"!!...)



MY LOVE OF
SUPERMAN IS
WHAT OPENED THE
DOOR TO MAD FOR ME.
I HAD NO IDEA WHO
CAPTAIN MARBLES WAS
SUPPOSED TO BE AT THE
TIME, BUT NO MATTER--
I WAS HOOKED!!

ODDLY AMUSING AND
MILDLY DISTURBING --
PRINTED IN STARK
BLACK AND WHITE--
THESE STORIES SOON
TURNED ME INTO A
REGULAR MAD
MAGAZINE READER!

...AND ALL BECAUSE I
WAS LURED IN WHEN
EC DID DC!!



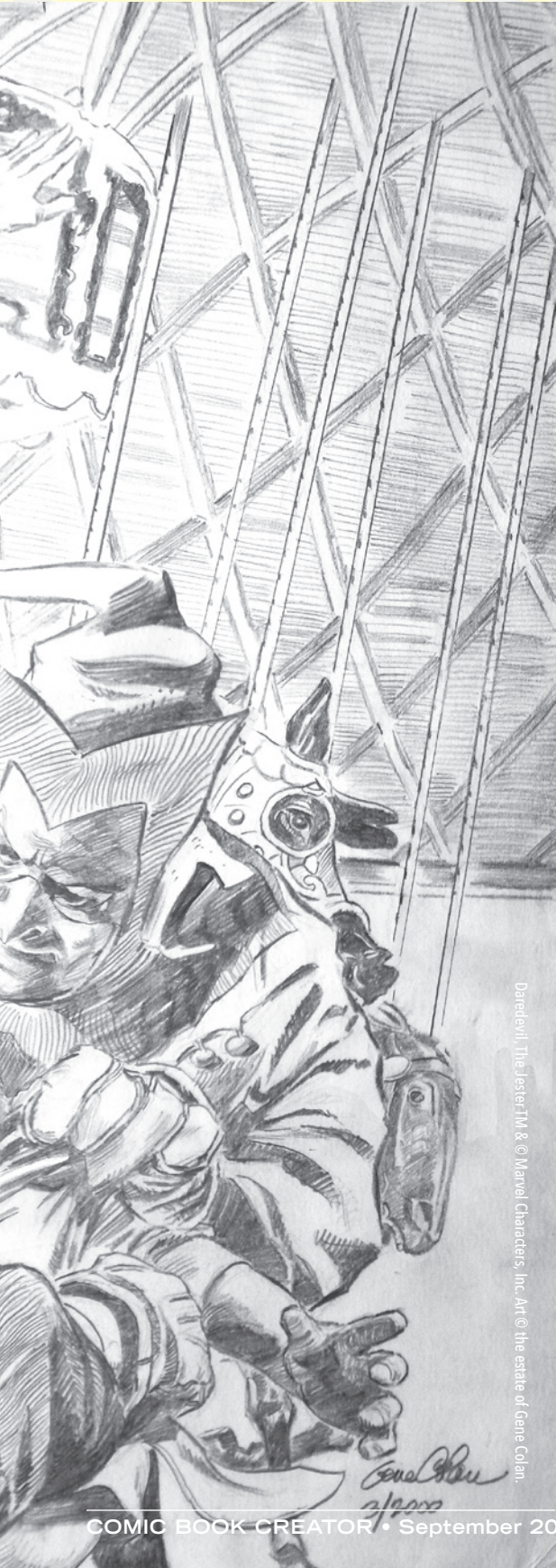
Dateline:
G? #? !!!
by Fred Hembeck
2026

SHAZOOM,
INDEED!!..

SHADOW MAN



GENE COLAN



Daredevil: The I-ester™ & © Marvel Characters, Inc. Art © the estate of Gene Colan

I. Surprise, Surprise, Surprise!



CBC's Gene Colan tribute begins with a transcript of the 2001 San Diego Comic-Con surprise party panel celebrating the artist supreme's 75th birthday. Moderated by Mark Evanier, the panel guest-stars John Romita, John Buscema, Marie Severin, Marv Wolfman, and Don McGregor, comics stalwarts all, present to honor their friend, "Gentleman Gene"!

The proceedings were immortalized by videographer and über comic book fan Marc Svensson, a friend of Gene and avid collector of the artist's work. A contributing CBC editor who videotaped many dozens of SDCC panels over the decades, Marc went above and beyond with this effort (to our eternal gratitude), no doubt fueled by his love for Eugene Jules Colan [Sept. 1, 1926–June 23, 2011].

[Setting the scene: *Gene is misled to believe he is on a panel, moderated by Mark E., devoted to discussing various art supplies – specifically erasers, believe it or not! – and is, unlike absolutely everyone else gathering in that room, completely unaware for what was coming. Seated in the audience is Gene's wife, Adrienne, who helped plan the surprise.]*

Mark Evanier: Well, anyway, I'm going to start this [while waiting] for our other panelists. The idea here was to talk about art techniques, in particular the use of erasers, and I suppose that that's one of the things we don't think too much about. Over the years, the tech-



This page: Top is Mark Evanier checking Gene Colan's ID. Below is detail of Tales of Suspense #79 [July '66], pencils by Gene, inks by Jack Abel. Bottom is Iron Man postage stamp ['07] and Gene, Mark Evanier, and John Romita.

nology of erasers has improved greatly. [Addressing Gene Colan] And you've been doing this... what... 25 years? And, in that time, have you been using a lot of erasers? What erasers do you tend to use?

People are trying to suppress their laughter. Gene begins to answer very seriously.

Gene: Anything I can get. Usually a kneaded eraser. It looks like clay. It's usually a little square piece eraser. Very handy... Takes off the top coating of the graphite.

Mark: And now how long have you been doing comics?

Gene: Well, I spoke to John yesterday, John Buscema, and I thought I started in '46 and he says no, it was '48, so I take his word for it, so 1948. [laughter]

Mark: Okay: in 1948, [you] would've been what...? About 15 years old?

Gene: Oh no, I was born in '26.

Mark: 'Twenty-six?

Gene: Yeah, '26.

Mark: 'Twenty-six. That means... No, that's not possible. Exactly. [In that] case would be 75 this year. You're not 75 years old.

Gene: September, I'll be 75.

In September: 75.

Mark: [To audience] How many people believe that? No, I don't think so. No. You got your driver's license?

Gene: Yeah.

[Gene takes out his wallet and hands his driver's license to Mark. Various comments and laughter can be heard in the audience – including “Is he carding him?” and “He is carding him!” Mark takes the license and looks at it.]

Mark: This is inked by Vince Colleta! [raucous laughter] I am sorry. I apologize. [to audience] The man's going to be 75. Let's screw this whole panel and let's have a party for Gene Colan! Come on!

[Crowd erupts in applause and a cake with lit candles is brought in from the right hand side of the panel, and the entire room stands and sings “happy birthday” to Gene. Cake is placed in front of Gene Colan, who proceeds to blow out the candles while everyone sings and claps.]

Mark: For those of you who can't see the cake, it is a wonderful rendition of a self-portrait Gene did several years ago and he is surrounded by Daredevil and Iron Man and Howard the Duck – and Dracula is wearing a party hat – and we will be showing this cake around and passing pieces out... probably very small pieces... to this crowd. [turns to Gene] You are the only person this convention that did not know about this. [to audience] And we would also like to thank Adrienne Colan who kept this from him. [applause as Mark addresses Gene] This panel is about you and your work and we're going to have some of the people who know you and love you and worked with you come up and talk about your work. Have a seat and we're going to talk about Gene Colan for a while here. But, first, let these people take your picture. [Mark motions for people to come up on the stage]

Mark: Don, want to come up? Marie, come on.

Don McGregor: [Jokingly] No! Gene is by himself on this one! Gene, you're by yourself!

Mark: This is Mr. Don McGregor. And this is Marie Severin! Mark Wolfman and John Buscema!

[Much talking, applause, and chaos as people come to the stage to take group pictures. Eventually the cake is moved to the side, and everyone takes a seat on the panel.]

Mark: Come on up! Have a seat! [indicating bogus names on panelist cards] These people do not exist! John [Romita] is about to leave us, but he wants to say a few words before he goes.

John Romita: When Colan and I were [at] Marvel in the '50s, I was horrified when they closed the comic industry down to the bone and I was out of work. I was lucky I ended up with DC. They paid me for eight years to fake the romance stuff. But Colan had been through that before. Same thing with John Buscema. December 1947, they were



Iron Man TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. Video screenshots © and courtesy of Marc Svemson.

in the Marvel bullpen, and it got shut down just like that. They pulled the rug out from under. So, in 1967, this is the third decade, Marvel was booming. Colan comes up, they asked him to do some books. I think it was "Iron Man," I'm not sure. He comes to me and he says, "I don't know if I want to trust this industry again. They pulled the rug out for him to me twice." He said, "In '47, I'm working, I'm paying my bills. Bang! I'm out of work. In '57, they did the same thing to me." He says, "It's '67 now, how can I trust them?" I said, "I dunno." [looks at Gene] Gene, I think, right? Remember? Yeah, a lot of us went into advertising and illustration and a lot of guys scrounged around.

Gene: A lot of us stopped.

John Buscema: A lot of us stopped...

John R.: A lot of us stopped and all I could tell 'em was that it felt different this time and I said, "Give it a chance. Maybe we'll get by '67 without having it blow up in our face." I think it was good advice, Gene, because I think, from then on, you showed the world what the hell you can do and we all are better off because of it. [applause, as John R. shakes Gene's hand and departs room]

Mark: [Places microphone before John Buscema] Do you want to say a few words?

John B.: I said enough before! [laughter]

Mark: Okay. Alright, let's ask Marie. Can we get a mic down there? Marie, talk a little bit about this man here.

Marie Severin: Which one? [laughter] That little one on the end? [indicates Don McGregor] That twerp? [laughter]

Mark: There was a period of time at Marvel where Marie's main function was drawing insulting caricatures of Don McGregor.

Marie: It was so easy! [laughter] I want to wish Gene, one of the nicest guys in the industry, a happy birthday. And I met Gene when we both

had brown hair – and all of it. Anyway, I was at E.C. [Comics], at the time. They had colorist and runner and everything, windows, whatever they wanted. And for some reason I had to bring something over to this guy, Gene Colan, and he was so cute. I could see him, he was adorable and it was very...

I always liked his work. I never saw that much of him because all the guys would come in and just deliver work and run out. It wasn't like the later bullpens, where people hung out...

big lunches and stuff like that. But anyway, I knew the name and then I got to know him at Marvel and [he was] always a gentleman and one of the good guys! Happy birthday, Gene! [applause]

Mark: [Addressing Don]

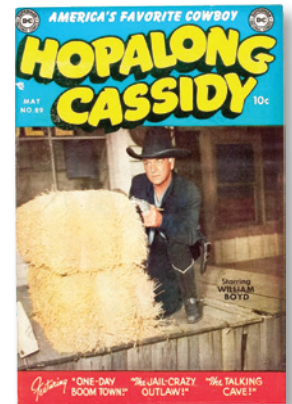


Why don't you take this? Take this microphone. Tell us about the first moment when somebody said, "Oh, your story's going to be drawn by Gene Colan."

Marie: In four volumes or less! [laughter]

Don: You know, many people who know my work know I'm a big Hopalong Cassidy fan. People who know Gene's work, going back, know that one of the first books that he did at DC was *Hopalong Cassidy*. So I was really aware of Gene's work for a long, long time – and Gene doesn't really get this...he doesn't understand it... but, to me, Gene was one of my heroes. I loved him. I knew his name. I didn't know what he looked like. I didn't know him personally, but it's like a movie star that you see or a TV actor that you see, and you say, "Oh, I really like what this person's projects." And I loved what Gene did. The kid that grew up in the state of Rhode Island had no idea that one day he would have the privilege of working with Gene Colan. I say this to Gene now and he goes: "What the hell are you talking about, Don?"

Above: Note the bogus name card in front of Don McGregor. **Below:** Cover and pages from Hopalong Cassidy #89 [May '54]. Story art by Gene (pencils), Joe Giella (inks).



SVENSSON NOTES: The original *Hopalong Cassidy* title was put out by Fawcett Publications, but DC Comics acquired the rights in the 1950s and continued the numbering starting with issue #86.

These two pages from *Hopalong Cassidy* #89 – see previous page – which went on sale on Mar. 17, '54, with a cover date of May '54, are penciled by Gene Colan. They're an example of Gene's earlier work that DonMcGregor would have seen. You can see elements of his later work, such as the panel of the solo firing gun and the leg tackle in the last panel, but it still a standard grid panel layout by Gene that he would later radically move away from. It also lacks any of the dynamic angles, the extreme perspective, and that "wide-angle lens" foreshortening that permeated Gene's later work.

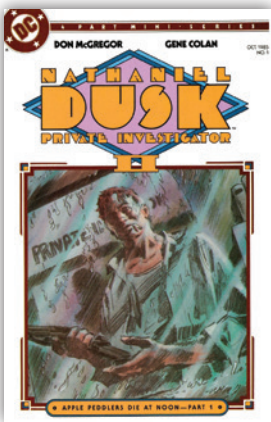
So, the first job that we did together – and Gene doesn't even remember it – I was really, really thrilled about it. It was only the second story that kind of made an impression on Gene and he remembered the story very, very well and actually told me, and I learned something about Gene then. First, I learned that Gene doesn't read anything ahead. So whatever you're writing in the story, like if it is going to pay off over here on page... 20 pages later, you damn well better make sure he

knows this because, it ain't gonna get... you've got to make sure it's there.

The other thing is that, Gene, and he's very much a gentleman. Marie is absolutely right. He's one of the great wonderful human beings working in this business. It's just such a pleasure just to know and to be in this company, but he also has a wicked sense of humor, and Gene will pull tricks on you all the time, and he loves to call you up at about midnight and he'll say... we were doing a series called *Nathaniel Dusk* and I had a villain called Lice Williams and I wanted Lice to have short-cropped hair and I described it so that it was like he'd been in the electric chair and just fried his hair up and put it in the jagged points, and drained all the blood out of his face and his flesh. And so I put this in the script of Gene.

I get a call from Gene one night about midnight and Gene goes, "Don, can't draw that character that way." "Oh, what's the matter, Gene?" "Too cartoony, Don. It's just too cartoony. I can't do it." He said, "You know I met this guy in the 1930s, he's got baggy trousers..." It goes on for about a half an hour describing this guy to me. And the guy sounds like... what...? He's loose limbed, he's like... gangly... Apparently, later on, Gene told me [he] is describing Stan Laurel. [laughter] I'm going, "Well Gene, okay, I don't want your drawing on your character you're not comfortable with." So Gene goes through, I agreed to it, Gene. The pages come in. It's exactly the way I wanted Lice Williams to look. You wanted to walk on the other side of the street.

But to give [it to] you, Gene... even at his wickedest... one day, he calls me up, we're doing the Black Panther, set in South Africa. And there's a sequence where a little boy is dying, he's in the hospital. The Black Panther has to do everything to try to save this kid. He gets him to the doctors, they try to save him. They



Above & Inset right: The two *Nathaniel Dusk* mini-series had Gene's art reproduced from his pencils with coloring by CBC's own Tom Zuko. Cover of *Nathaniel Dusk* II #1 [Oct. '85]; page from *NHII* #3 [Dec. '85], featuring Lice Williams. **Below:** Don McGregor give the birthday boy an embrace at Gene's 75th b-day panel.



legitimately try to save him. The kid dies. I get a call from Gene. Midnight. Ring! "Hello, Don?" "Yeah, Gene?" "I can't do it." "You can't do what, Gene?" "I can't draw it. Don't ask me to draw it." "Don't ask you to draw what? The kid, Gene?" "Don, the kid. I can't draw the kid." "What about the kid?" "He doesn't die. Don, the kid stays alive." I said, "No, Gene, listen, that changes the whole story. You can't." "No, no, no. Don, you don't understand. It's too heart-wrenching. I tried. I drew it with the kid dying. I can't do it. I had to tear the picture up. Please don't ask me to do this, Don. I cannot do this under any circumstances. This is too..." I said, "Gene, I don't want to let the readers off the hook." "I don't care about the readers, Don. I am the drawer!" For half an hour, we have this discussion, and then Gene bursts out laughing at about quarter of one in the morning. "Hi Don, I'm just kidding. I drew it just exactly the way you wanted it." [laughter]

Gene Colan is one of the warmest, dearest, most talented men I've ever met. It's a privilege for me to know him, to be with him. I know Marie Severin is going, "Why is he not done? You're running too damn long!" So, Gene, I'm going to cut it short. [laughter]

SVENSSON NOTES: "Lice" Williams is a professional mob "enforcer" with a Thomson submachine gun who first appears in the second series from 1985: *Nathaniel Dusk, Private Investigator II*, "Apple Peddlers Die at Noon." He is absent in the first issue and unnamed until the fourth (and last) issue of the series within the story, and then is only referred to as "Lice". Don does let us know his last name when he refers to the character in a text piece he writes, printed at the end of the third issue.

Nathaniel Dusk, Private Investigator II TM & © Don McGregor & Gene Colan. Video screenshot © and courtesy of Marc Svensson.

SVENSSON NOTES: The "Black Panther" story Don talks about is a scene from Black Panther: Panther's Quest, which was a serialized story taking place in Apartheid South Africa, that ran in the bi-weekly *Marvel Comics Presents* #13-37, starting in 1988 and concluding in '89. All chapters were eight pages, except the last chapter, #25, which was 16 pages. The boy, Theodore Olebogeng, catches fire after accidentally slipping and falling backwards into a gasoline puddle while saving the Black Panther in chapter 15, "Last Night I Wept for Freedom." The boy catches on fire when a vigilante gang member lights a match before fleeing, and Theodore later dies from his burns in Chapter 16, "Lost Promises," after Black Panther takes him to the nearest emergency services, a "whites only" hospital, where Panther must force a doctor to try and save him.

Panther's Quest was collected in a trade paperback in 2017, and I found, in retrospect, this was the best way to read the story, since each chapter was one story of numerous in each issue of *Marvel Comics Presents*.



Mark: Marv: alright, I believe I have the same question for you. First time somebody said to you, "I think we're going to have Gene Colan draw your story"...?

Marv Wolfman: Well, my interest in, actually, and being a fan of Gene's work is prior to it because you need to have that set up in order to understand what it meant later, goes back to somewhat with *The Sea Devils*. Gene did a short story in *The Sea Devils*, where he portrayed himself. If anyone here remembers, he did some incredible work

over at Warren magazines that were just mind-boggling. And, of course, he was doing a lot of stuff under a slightly different name over at Marvel for an awful long time, too. Obviously, you can tell Gene's style very strongly. So, I'm asked to do a story for *Tower of Shadows*, which was Marvel's sort of mystery/horror... whatever type of magazine those were back then. And this pretty much at the dawn of my career and I had no idea what I was doing at all for many, many, many years and some probably say still. [laughter]

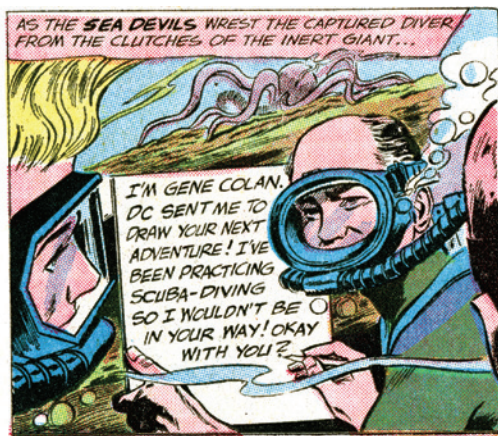
And I worked up a storyline and they told me Gene was going to draw it, and I just flipped because I absolutely was such a fan of all that material at Warren, where Gene's work was so clear to me and it was so evident how strong his horror work was and how, more importantly, how strong his character work was. And I was really nervous writing the story or dialoguing it because it was done in the plot style at that particular time and I had only written full scripts and Neal Adams was talking to me and said, "Just calm down, look at the pictures. They will tell you what to say." And, on *Tower of Shadows*, and on eight years of *Tomb of Dracula*, and several years of *Night Force* and *Curse of Dracula* and all the other work Gene and I have done here and there, I've looked at the pictures and there was nothing else those characters could say, but exactly what I had to write because they were so clear and so strong... [I am] such a fan of the man's work. I've said it in many introductions into various [books, etc.] and [addressing Gene] happy birthday, Gene.

John B.: All I can say is: happy birthday, Gene. We started together. I think Gene started up at Marvel, which was known as Timely, about a month before me. Right? Nineteen forty-eight, not '46. [laughter] Don't add two years to my age! And it's been a pleasure knowing Gene all these years.



Above: Marv Wolfman. **Inset left:** Splash page from "Panther's Quest" chapter 16, "Lost Promises," in *Marvel Comics Presents* #28 [Sept. '89]. Pencils by Gene and inks by Tom Palmer. **Below:** MCP #13 cover, pencils and inks by Gene. **Bottom:** John Buscema.





This page: Clockwise from above, panels featuring Gene's self-caricature in *Sea Devils* #13 [Oct. '63] and that issue's splash page, all penciled and inked by the Genial One; and splash page of "One Little Indian," featured in *Tower of Shadows* #4 [Mar. '70], penciled by Gene, inked by Dan Adkins, with caricature of GC by Marie Severin. Note the initials on his pipe!

A great draftsman, a great artist, great storyteller, and a great friend. Love you, Gene! [applause]
Mark: [Looks at John B.] John has to go to another panel.
John B.: I thought I was doing it here!
Mark: You're doing another panel... no, another panel. [banTERS with John B.] Anybody got a program book to tell this gentleman that he has another panel?
Audience Member: You're doing a panel with Stan.
Mark: You're doing a panel with Stan. [John B. asks where he's to go] I don't know, but somebody is going to figure this one out. Okay, thank you, sir. [to audience] John Buscema! [applause as John B. departs]

Speaking of *Tomb of Dracula*: we have a couple of notes that were sent in to be read here. A short birthday note to Gene: "Hi, Gene! For your edit: 'you're not getting older, you're only being better,' certainly applies. Happy birthday, Gene! Enjoy the festivities, and then back to work. It keeps you young. All the best to you from an ardent fan – Tom Palmer."

[Mark reads another note] "One of the great thrills of being an inker is being even an infinitesimal part of an artist's career. I've been thrilled, honored, and challenged with Gene's work, and I would be glad to do it until my dying day. Gene is so good. Most people aren't even good enough to swipe it. – Joe Rubenstein."

Put the microphone in front of Gene. Now we're going to make you talk a little bit here because people [came for you]: Gene, all the time you've been drawing comics – and you've drawn as many pages as anybody in the world except maybe, maybe John Buscema! – did you realize you had this many fans, and you had fans all over, where people who felt in touch with your work, people who you've never

SVENSSON NOTES: *Sea Devils* #13, on sale July 25, '63, with a cover date of Oct. '63, featured a "Unique Reader's Poll," that was announced on the cover and splash page. The reader could write in and state his or her favorite artist or team of artists who drew this issue. Joe Kubert drew the first chapter; Gene Colan, the second; and Ross Andru and Mike Esposito, the final chapter. The artists drew themselves into their respective chapters.

Marv Wolfman wrote the seven-page story, "One Little Indian," that was illustrated by Gene and published in *Tower of Shadows* #4. This issue had an on-sale date of Dec. 23, '69, and a cover date of Mar. '70. ("One Little Indian" was just reprinted in the Fantagraphics book, *Lost Marvels No. 1: Tower of Shadows*.)



met? They just looked at that comic and they are like; "God, I like that guy's work!"

Gene: No, I did not.
Mark: Are you aware of that now? Are you aware of how? [laughter] Because of this party [laughter]... but when you started going to conventions, you have people lining up to meet you. How many times do people look at you and they say, "Mr. Colan, I always wanted to tell you I love your work." And then they mention either *Daredevil* or *Dracula*, or *Doctor Strange*, or something you wish you could forget. That's got to be a very amazing bonus to you, to come late in your career.
Gene: It is. It's like a dream to have reached this level in my career, never thinking that comics, whatever turned into what it turned into... it was kind of like show business. I find it hard to believe, but here it is and I'm so grateful to it. It's been a long time. I enjoyed every minute of it. It was some

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hard stuff, difficult moments, but there isn't anything in the world that's easy. Anything worthwhile has its problems, but it's been great to be in the industry. It's been a struggle for all of the writers and all of the artists, and still is a struggle.

Mark: I'm sorry...

Gene: But I can't think of another industry that would be different. Actors struggle all the time... they're in and they're out and they're in. Anyone [that] has a business is struggling... put it on a map, but you have to love what you're doing. If you love it, you're going to be successful at it, but that's the main ingredient to care enough about it and love it no matter what. There are many artists today; actors would rather do what they do and do it almost for nothing, so long as they can either be before the camera or sitting at the drawing board. And that's the truth. [applause]

Mark: At your most, how many hours a day did you spend at the board? What's the most you've ever spent on the board?

Gene: Well, I would start maybe at nine or 10 in the morning. I think the longest I stayed up was three or four the following morning – but those would [be the] very early years – I was struggling, so struggling to establish myself in the business. I don't think I was working on the style. I was just trying to get good at what I was doing. I was highly influenced by

film... still am... and whatever picture I would see on the screen in the early years, I pretend it was a comic book panel, how it was composed and that was the formula that I used for telling my stories.

I'm a film educated [person], so to speak. I paid attention to all of that stuff and that's what I tried to emulate. When I would do a story, all the shadow work that I put in came to me from the screen, and I've enjoyed it all. I still do. Something happens when you sit down and do a story. The story, I get so absorbed, but I immediately tried to get an image right off the back of what I have to do to get going and I try not to read too far into the script. I like surprises. I can usually figure out what's going to take place next. Not all the time I've made mistakes but, in the early years, when I worked with Stan, I wouldn't read his script or anyone's; I would just simply do it and find myself jammed up in the end because, in those years, Stan would give the artist basically the [plot] to illustrate and he would write around it.

Whatever they would illustrate on the page, he would write around. The only problem with me was that I would get jammed up at the end. I would have maybe five or six more pages to go actually with pages of art and I didn't leave enough room for what [I needed] to wind up the story, so I'd have to wind it up maybe in two pages or three pages at the most – and





Above: *The Mirthful One*, Marie Severin. **Inset right:** The much discussed "backside page" from *Tales of Suspense* #73 [Jan. '66], a rearview of Ol' Shellhead by Gene (pencils) and Jack Abel (inks). **Previous page:** Top is Gene's commission featuring the Count and Blade, with inks by Dave Gutierrez. Below is Gene and Adrienne, who were married on Valentine's Day, 1963. **Below:** Lovely newlywed Adrienne Colan poses for a candid photograph in the year 1963.



I get into trouble with that. But I still like the idea of not reading too much into it and try to get first impressions and get a feeling of the story. It's very difficult to explain what I mean. It's something that comes from the heart and you just feel it.

Mark: [Addressing Adrienne Colan in audience] You want to say something?

Adrienne Colan: Yeah. I wanted to ask Gene about... [to Gene] I know you always talk about film, but... [inaudible] since I have been with you, it seems like music – very dramatic and weird music – and did that really influence you? Does that help you?

Gene: Oh, yes! Really...

Mark: [To audience] Adrienne was asking if music was influencing Gene more than film.

Gene: I would collect mostly classical stuff, modern music, to get into whatever I was doing and it always seemed to fit. I grew up in the days of radio and so it was nothing to me to sit down and listen to a *Shadow* or *Boston Blackie* or any of the dramatized radio programs and do my work, but gradually I got into music and some of the classics – and the music seemed to always fit the story that I was doing. It was a high for me.

Adrienne: Especially true with Marv Wolfman's *Dracula*... that seemed to me the most fun you had with music.

Gene: That's right, on everything that Marv has written, on all of this stuff, I would select some of the classical pieces.

Marv: That was probably to drown out the script! [laughter]

Gene: No! The scripts were very well done. All of them and it was a pleasure doing every one of them. I got into it, I just fell into it. We had a routine together, Marv and I.

Mark: I am going to ask Gene... [Don grabs the mic in front of Gene]

Don: Gene said to me recently, he said, "Don, you listen into those older radio shows while you're writing the stories and everything?" And, once again, another advantage of being an artist in the comics... and Tom Sutton does the same thing! They listen to old radio stories. Other stories! [to Gene] If you're a writer, you cannot be listening to somebody else's story! Yeah, It just doesn't work, Gene!

Mark: I've done it a few times! [laughter, Mark addresses Don] Okay, if you're going to be original, you're going to spoil the curve for us all! I want to ask the panel here, and also people out there, to tell us about their favorite of Gene's... their favorite story of Gene's. First I'm going to ask, are we going to cut the cake now or are we going pass it around? I think we should all have cake. Kevin's going to take charge of... [refers to Kevin Hall] This is Kevin Hall, who was one of the main co-conspirators in making this all happen. [applause]

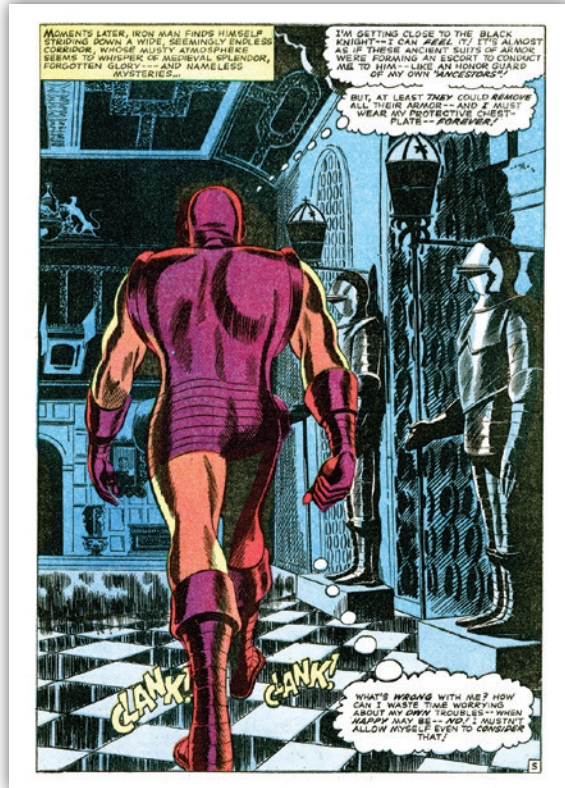
Marie: I just want to say it was very mean to kick John Buscema off the panel just to save cake! [laughter]

Marv: Okay, someone bring a slice over to Stan's panel! One slice! [laughter]

Mark: They can serve it on my stock options. [laughter] All right, thank you!

Audience Member: You're going to jail for that one.*

Mark: My favorite work that Gene did, of all the things... obviously, there's a lot of things to choose from. There are two things that stand out in my mind. The very first "Iron Man" story he did. Remember that? He had done a story for "Sub-Mariner" the month or two before, but it was inked by Vince Colletta, so we don't count that. (This is dump on Colletta day, did you notice that? He's going to come back tonight and haunt us all!) Anyway... [muddled side-talking] No, he's not. But he had enough ghosts, as it was... All-right... That first story that Jack Abel inked was, at that time, revolutionary for Marvel Comics. Gene did so much work for



Marvel over the years that you kind of take for granted that his look was part of the Marvel look... that, each month, two or three comics would look like his style. At that time, there was nobody working for Marvel, really, whoever didn't do the three-tier page. Jack Kirby did a six-panel page. It was six panels the same size. Or a five-panel page would be two of the panels would be put together. Gene was the first one to divide the page up differently, to take non-curve angles or non-Ditko angles, different angle shots, and there was a certain realism in his work that I just found so amazing. There was that full-page panel, Iron Man walking down the

* **Svensson Notes:** This audience member did not understand that the stock options were "under water" after the crash of Marvel stock. You don't go to jail for possessing valueless stock options! You might get convicted for manipulating a stock price to create value in an option that should be valueless, but let's give Mark Evanier credit for *not* hawking stocks in his column!

Video screenshot © and courtesy of Marc Svensson. Iron Man TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. Adrienne Colan photo courtesy of Tom Field.

SVENSSON NOTES: Mark refers to Gene's first "Iron Man" work, in *Tales of Suspense* #73. It went on sale on Oct. 10, '65, with a cover date of Jan. '66. I must admit that I am a bit amused that Mark Evanier has historically important Gene Colan original art featuring Iron Man's ass!

hallway. I bet some people remember it. I have the original art to it, but it was really out of perspective, yet it was so dramatic... looking at a guy's back walking down the hall.

[Gene cuts the cake] Take some pictures of cake... Thank you... The other thing that Gene did, that I just thought was amazing, was those jobs you did for Warren because absolutely nobody ever inked Gene's work better than Gene himself and... [applause] and if I... In the history of comics, about four or five guys, whoever, weren't their own best inkers, but when Gene his worked himself with Warren and did those great tones, you saw a level of humanity in the faces. The people were so real. I've never seen comic art that really jumped off the page like that and just made... even with the rotten printing of those Warren magazines, I always thought those were some of the greatest stories ever illustrated. And, Archie Goodwin, I remember telling me that was one of the proudest moments of his career was just seeing what Gene did in some of his scripts and those things... Don, Marv...? What other Gene Colan work...?

Don: And what can I say? You were talking about Gene's pencils and, for years, when I began, and I was working at Marvel on staff, you see the outlook come through, so you see Gene's before they were inked and I always thought it was a shame that you'd never... not that you want some good inkers that didn't do great jobs on Gene but, in many ways, a lot of the subtleties were lost because Gene does so much shading with pencils. There's something so imbued into those pencils and something Mark also was saying earlier – you know, I heard people talk about Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, and certainly they should be, and they were two of the mainstays. They helped change the Marvel comics, but the third one was this man right here. His work was every bit as unique and individual. At any rate, having seen that artwork that way for years, I thought, "Oh, they should print Gene Cohen's pencils." But the problem was nobody really know *how* to print pencils with color, and I wanted to do a script called *Ragamuffins* about little kids growing up in the 1950s, and the only artist I could see doing it and doing it justice was Gene, because this script was just going to be the little kids' expressions, how they reacted to everything and it would be a time period that Gene was very intimate with and I held onto it for years. Then Eclipse kept offering me artists for it. I said, "No, no, no. Gene [has] to do it. I really can see him doing this strip at this point in time. I don't... He's got to be the one that's doing it."

When time finally came, Gene was under contract and he couldn't! [But] DC made an exception in this contract that he could do *Ragamuffins* because it wasn't a super-hero strip, and it wasn't a competition with them. So they let him do the strip on the side... It's... to my knowledge... the first book that was [printed] with [just] pencils and color. I kept saying, "Gene!" to [Eclipse co-publisher] Dean Mullaney,

"I want to [have] Gene pencils!, I want to [have] Gene pencils! How can we do it?" And they worked out something with [colorist] Steve Oliff, I believe [colorist] Sam Parsons and a couple other people I didn't even know. Sometimes you don't know the people involved in those technical things behind the scenes, but they found a way to print Gene's pencils and everything that I hoped for in those little kids' faces were there.

There's a moment where the little kid is going off to kindergarten, his mother's going to send them off – as she's crossing across the main street, she doesn't want... she gives him all these instructions of what he has to do and not do, and, as soon as the mother turns around, I said to Gene in the script that I wanted just to show at this kid's face – and, when he turns around and he's away from his mother and away from his family, anything is now possible, any dream, any fantasy is now possible. In one panel, he caught it! And Adrienne said to me, one time, we were driving along, she said, "Gene and I [were] driving around and Gene saw this little kid, he said, "that's Don's [Ragamuffin character] Bobby!" [Don shakes Gene's hand] Gene, thank you for bringing all those stories to life! I love you, man. [they hug]

Marv: Gene is actually... The quality of his artwork is pretty much what almost led me to be fired from Marvel the first week I was there. We had done, I think it was the third issue – our *Tomb of Dracula* – could be the fourth. Somebody else will remember. It was a story set in a seaside shanty village and Gene's art... [Mark distracts Marv] Whatever.

Mark: I'm laughing because I know this story.

Marv: Gene's art was just astounding. I mean you'd have these incredible roof shots that led way into the distance. Beautiful backgrounds, gorgeous backgrounds. I mean, you could not believe how beautiful this was. It was, I was so proud of this story and... an inker (who has been mentioned several times here before tonight) inked the book and I was on staff at Marvel as an assistant editor when this one came in, and it didn't quite resemble the work that I had seen before. For instance, it didn't have backgrounds [Gene originally penciled]. Every single panel of the original art was magnificent in backgrounds, and, I mean, I just cannot tell you how beautiful they were. Anyway, I flipped out. As I said, I had been there for one week.

This was a book that was becoming very, very important to me. The artwork had been so beautiful and this thing came out and I just went ballistic, absolutely ballistic! [I was] demanding that the entire job be re-inked. Anyway,



This page: One of the more charming series of the 1980s was writer Don McGregor and artist Gene Colan's "Ragamuffins" short stories that appeared in Eclipse, the Magazine. Those yarns were reproduced directly from Gene's pencils and, when collected for a Ragamuffins one-shot [Jan. '85], colorist Steve Oliff worked his technical magic on the reprints. The Slings and Arrows Comic Guide cited the third tale, "The Other Side of the Street," as the best of the lot. "What makes these more than nostalgia-fests," reviewer Frank Plowright opined, "is the ending to each, contrasting the childhood experience with an event in the lead character's adult life."





Above: Though Marvel editor-in-chief Stan Lee was poised to fire nascent bullpen writer Marv Wolfman, who criticized Vince Colletta's inks on Tomb of Dracula #9 [June '73], the writer implored Lee to compare a Xerox of this page of Gene's effort with Colletta's work, which obliterated a swath of the pencils, best seen – reinked by Vinnie – in the top panel. **Inset right:** Gene drew the pencils on this John Severin-inked page for Two-Fisted Tales #39 [Oct. '54].

SVENSSON NOTES: This Marv Wolfman anecdote is about his script for *Tomb of Dracula* #9, his third printed *TOD* script, titled "Death from the Sea." Perhaps the most dramatic example of Gene's backgrounds being erased and added back can be seen on page 11 of the original art. I believe Marv is specifically citing this panel at the beginning of his story: the top panel has Dracula and "Dave" strolling in the grass with what looks like a bunch of row houses stretching off into the distance. Inker Vince Colletta had removed the entire row of houses, so the two figures were wandering in a vast empty area. The "inked on vellum" background was carefully razored around the figures and added back in to the panel with glue, tape and white correction fluid. As Marv states, it may not be as good as what Gene had originally drawn, but it does improve the page immensely. Thank you, Marv Wolfman!

I go home that night and I get a phone call from Stan. Well, you have to understand Stan didn't call people for things like this. He said, "I want to see you first thing in the morning." Well, I knew that meant I was on the way out. I go inside, I go in the next morning and Stan says, "How dare you impugn this..." artist, inker, whatever person... "How dare you. You put him down. He's been in this business 3,000 years and he swears that he didn't leave out a single line," and he was about to... At that point say, you've been here a week. That's five days too long. And I said, "Well, hold on one second, Stan." And fortunately, I brought with me... because I'm not an idiot; I may be arrogant but I'm not an idiot... the Xeroxes of the pencils. Stan

looked at the pencils, looked at the ink job, looked back at the pencils, looked at me, and says, "Just don't say anything nasty about him again." [Stan] had the job re-inked in the office, that's how good his work is. It was worth every moment of that because the job was improved by about 50%. Never as good as what Gene had drawn, but it was so beautiful and I was so happy. At least, the backgrounds, which were inked on vellum over the Xeroxes, came out again and just his art was not damaged by bad inking, at least not on that particular job. That's how much I like his work and that's the thrill of seeing something beautiful actually continue to be beautiful. [applause]

Marie: I just want to add one thing. I don't believe I ever inked Gene, and I vaguely remember coloring just *Howard the Duck*... Nobody mentioned *Howard*... Anyway, I must say about Gene: his stuff is so dramatic, and so emotional, and so [much] beautiful technique. Even though this panel was supposed to be about technique, anyway, I must say... [crosstalking] **Marv:** Erasers! **Marie:** Erasers! What I noticed about Gene pencils would, number one: they really didn't need color... that's my exact thing. They didn't even need inking.

Gene could be all by himself. And had we had the printing facilities in the '60s, where books could have come out on good paper, and if the powers that be would give us the budget, wouldn't these pencils had been wonderful not to have been lost with inks...? Although some great inkers did it, but you should have seen the [penciled pages], as Marv talked about it. He does beautiful work, and I think there's a beautiful mind in there, too. Happy birthday, Gene! [applause]

Mark: Gene did two stories for E.C. One was for one of Harvey Kurtzman's... *Two-Fisted Tales* or *Frontline Combat*... and then, later, he did one that Marie's brother, Johnny, which, if you look at the... it was not signed... it was signed Severin, but it's Gene Colan ghost penciling, inked by John Severin, and it is one of the most amazing *Two-Fisted Tales*. [to Gene] You remember that story that you [penciled] for



SVENSSON NOTES: Gene penciled the six-pager "Wake," written by Harvey Kurtzman, printed in *Two-Fisted Tales* #30, cover-dated Nov.-Dec., '52. Mark is referring to the story, "The Secret," a six-page story in *Two-Fisted Tales* #39, cover-dated Oct. '54. This story has uncredited Colan pencils with John Severin inks.

John? John was the editor at the time, I believe of *Two-Fisted Tales*... You remember...? That you did one for Harvey...? And then you did one later for John Severin...? [Gene's expression looks like he can neither confirm nor deny] Well, you did. Anybody else remember that story? Okay. **Gene:** I have to say something about John Severin: I wanted to work for Harvey Kurtzman very badly. This must have been in the '50s somewhere, and I couldn't make a dent. But I'll tell you where... I admire John Severin's work, and I would carefully follow it and watch it and try to figure out his approach. Everything was accurate, all the buttons, he did a lot of war stories and all the buttons and

Tomb of Dracula TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. "The Secret" TM & © William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc.



every nut and bolt was on the armor, in the battle scenes. He was terrific. Well, I had a meeting. I had to get to... I don't remember exactly how it came about. It might've been through Marie, but I got to meet him and he came up to... I was living in New Rochelle at the time, and he came up to my house. And he told me, "The first thing you have to do is, if you have a book on American... firearms, rifles, pistols, machine weapons..." Because John was extremely accurate, and I admired that there was a certain reality to that work because of every little detail that he put in his work. So I learned a lot from John, an awful lot. I haven't seen him in years, but I guess I'm not... I would love to have the opportunity to again, but I just wanted to tell you that John really got me rolling on detail and accuracy and then I began to work up a filing system where if I had any kind of a story dealing with... authentic things, I was... I would be accurate about it.

Mark: Instead of having you ask questions, while you are eating your cake, I'm going to ask the audience to now... [to audience] If anybody would like to speak about their favorite Gene Colan work, story that they remember... You can stick to a question, if you want to. We have a microphone over here. Let's start down here with these two gentlemen, and then tell us what of Gene's work impressed you.

Audience Member: Well, I wish I had prepared this. The one that still left a strong impression was Daredevil, early '80s' run. There was scene where Daredevil wants to go to the bad guys... to beat them up, but I believe Stan Lee just wrote on top of the page, "Okay we can't add any words to make this better, but we're just going to let the picture speak for themselves," and it went on like that for about two pages. My question was, "Why didn't Stan Lee do that more often?" [laughter]

Mark: Let's put the mic in front of Gene to comment on what people say.

Gene: I think, what comes to mind, what we were saying may have nothing to do with what you are saying. This is how my mind works, though. I had seen a film called Bullitt. Anyone here see that? [applause] I was working on a story. It might've been... I don't think it was Daredevil, I think it was Captain America... [background talk] Was it...? Okay, it was Daredevil... and there was a car chase scene, and this was my chance to imitate what had seen on the screen. If you've seen the film, there must've been about 10 minutes of car chase, which is a lot to be filmed. And I've never seen the likes of it ever before. The film came out somewhere in the

'60s... Anyway, so that was my opportunity to do that with comics. So I did. I think the location might have... location was... [background talk] San Francisco... or, at least, I made it that way. Yes, and I did everything I could. I ate up a book, about five or six pages, something like that, of his car chase scene... and Stan gave me hell.

He said, "Geez." He says, "My God, you could have told that in two pages, two panels." He said, "You ate up five pages of this script." And I said, "Well, I wanted to bring the readers on a ride, my way." And I just had a good time doing it. And Stan couldn't see it at that time, but we got a lot of good mail on it. I just had a good time. Sometimes, you know, artistically, you had to take the bull by the horns and do what you think is right. I know I ate up five or six important pages. There's just so many pages in a comic book, of what happens to the rest of it and I didn't much care. I just did the chase and that's what I wanted to do.

Mark: [Addressing audience member] Sam...? Sam.

Sam: It's really bad when they know your name... [to Gene] But I share Mark's appraisal of the very first "Iron Man" story that you did... not so much the backside of the drawing that you did for Iron Man walking... the backside... I just love the way you drew Pepper. [laughter] Seriously, I mean... I'm talking about the neck up. I'm talking about... well...

Don: You don't have to apologize.

SVENSSON NOTES: I believe Gene remembered correctly that this was an issue of *Captain America*. *Bullitt* was released on Oct. 17, '68, and Gene drew a five-page car chase scene involving Cap in the Red Skull's body in *Captain America* #116, released in May '69, and cover-dated Aug. '69. Certainly, this was not the only car chase scene Gene drew. I believe whoever corrected he might have been thinking of the car chase he drew in *Daredevil* #88, but this issue was released later, in Mar. '72, and it is only two-and-a-half pages, involving the Black Widow. The Cap-as-Skull chase does have a *Bullitt* feel to it. Then again, most Gene Colan car chases from then on had a *Bullitt* feel to them! This movie was really important to the man.

This page: All five pages of the Bullitt-inspired car chase in *Captain America* #116 [Aug. '69]. Pencils by Gene, inks by Joe Sinnott, who also drew that issue's cover, below.



SVENSSON NOTES: Both Pepper and Happy changed dramatically after Don Heck left the "Iron Man" feature. Pepper was originally bookish with her horn-rimmed glasses and freckled face, and Happy looked like a worn-out boxer with cauliflower ears. Gene, under orders from Stan, drew them so they could have been professional models. On the next page, you can see a quick contrast of the changes, scanned from original art pages. The first two panels are Pepper and Happy drawn by Don Heck and inked by Dick Ayers from *Tales of Suspense* #58, page 4, panels 4 and 5. You can see Pepper in her horn-rimmed glasses, but her freckles seen in earlier issues are not drawn in. Happy looks like quite the lug in his suit. The next panel is from *Tales of Suspense* #83, page 10 of the story, panel 3. With pencils by Gene and inks by Jack Abel, Happy and Pepper have been transformed.



Above and inset right: Shown big – and reproduced from the original art – to compare the bland with the subsequent glamour, here's the "Iron Man" supporting characters, Pepper Potts and Happy Hogan, makeover received in Tales of Suspense. Above is penciler Don Heck and inker Dick Ayers rendition, from TOS #58 [Oct. '64] and, right, TOS #83 [Nov. '66], with Gene pencils and Jack Abel inks. **Below:** Lest we forget, Gene did superb work with writer Steve Gerber on Howard the Duck. Here's his and inker Tom Palmer's cover for Marvel Treasury Edition #12 [Oct. '76].

Sam: No... [cross-talking] I'm not going... I think that you really, for the first time, I saw what a woman could really look like... [cross-talking, laughter]
Mark: [To Gene] He's saying you did a lot of horny drawings, Gene. [laughter]
Sam: My question, I don't know, what was your appraisal of Syd Shores inking?
Gene: I love Syd Shores' work. Oh, did I love his work! He was great. He taught me just about everything I knew when I was starting out. It got me out of a lot of jams and he was just a wonderful person besides that. Syd was great. I think of him all the time. I haven't forgotten him for a moment. I often think about what's become of his wife, his daughter. I hope all is well with them. Syd was just wonderful fellow and a very talented man. He never used [reference?] for anything. He could draw a horse; he could draw Western stuff [and] all the paraphernalia that



ould go with a Western. He just knew this stuff. He was wonderful. He did a lot of Captain America [Comics], too.
Sam: Thanks.
Audience Member: You know I don't really have a question, but I just wanted to say I remember the stories that have always stood out to me, because you are my very favorite comic artist, really. I mean, we have been through all this because [applause obscures comment] the ones that always stand out for me are the ones that you make come alive, that seem like they're just going to be talking. I mean, I remember on Howard the Duck, but especially there's a Tomb of Dracula where Dracula meets Satan* and it's just they're talking in Hell and... [laughter] there's no fist fights or anything like that, but it's powerful and evocative, of course, because of great dialogue, but also because things you did with it. It's amazing. Thank you.

Gene: Thanks very much.
Mark: [Pointing] This gentlemen, then that gentleman.
Audience Member: I would like to take a moment to mention Gene's first work on Howard the Duck. The first issue, at least it stood out in my mind is because, with all due respect to all of the other talented artists who worked on the character, Gene is the only one who ever made me believe in the reality of Howard the Duck. [applause]
Mark: By the way, [Howard the Duck writer] Steve Gerber was supposed to be with us, and he sends his regrets. He had a deadline problem that he could not get out of. That he would've been up here and saying all sorts nice things about you, but who cares about that because he is not here, we will ignore him! [laughter, points to audience member] Yes, sir.
Audience Member: I just want to echo... before I get to my statement that I, too, enjoy your Pepper... of Gene

*It's in Tomb of Dracula #64, "Life After Underneath," where Dracula and Satan meet! Released Feb. 2, '78, it has a cover date of May '78. – M.S.



Colan... for quite a number of reasons... [laughter]

Marv: You're a Pepper, too?

Audience Member: I was in sixth grade and I was part of this little comic-book contingent and I don't know if you guys remember when [the TV shows] Green Hornet and Batman had a crossover...? The next day, everybody wanted to be Kato. They didn't want to be Green Hornet, they didn't want to be Batman, everybody wanted to be Kato and to this day, I'm still Asian... [laughter] But somebody brought in a Gene Colan comic book, and all of a sudden it was like you all. Black people love you man! [laughter, applause]

Audience Member: As much stuff as I've loved over the years... much stuff I loved over the years: the Ragamuffins, The Night Force, the Howard the Duck... The thing that really caught me off guard was seeing your work on Jughead with some of the standard Archie inkers, so it looked like the regular characters, but suddenly they're moving in dimensions that had never existed before. And the way you could bring yourself to any work, whether it was something like that or whether it was something that didn't deserve good artwork like the Jaws II movie adaptation [Marvel Super Special #6, on sale Sept. 26, '78]. There's some gorgeous stuff on that, and probably nobody has ever read. It just always blows me away.

Gene: Thank you very much. Thank you.

Don: Isn't it amazing that Gene can go from Westerns to horror to mainstream stuff...? It doesn't matter. He could do it all. Incredible, Gene! [applause]

Audience Member: I truly love the mood of Dracula and the power, and I recall the simonized look of Gene's Iron Man. Tony Stark had somebody polish that armor every day. [laughter] The thing I particularly wanted to recall is, on Gene's Daredevil, I think [he] captured, more than anybody else who's ever done the character, the exuberance of the character in motion, even the best work... folks had done on Spider-Man, never quite got the sense that here's a character who is expressing sheer joy in swinging through the streets of New York.

Gene: Thank you.

Audience member: Gorgeous, gorgeous stuff.

Gene: Thank you so much.

Mark: Who's got the mic now...? Yeah, get that gentleman over there.

Audience Member: I just want to say one word about what people refer to as Gene as being not only a great artist, but a great individual. I was starting up a Bill Everett, Alex Schomberg, Syd Shores [web] site. Out of nowhere, I got Gene's email address. I emailed him, I said, "Would you care to write a piece on Syd Shores?" Because I knew how important he was to him and, within 48 hours, he had a very heartfelt piece sent back to me. I didn't know him, he didn't know me. But again, that proves that comics have the great men and the great individuals... and yourself. Thank you. [applause]

Audience Member: It's an honor to be speaking to you, Gene. The one that I remember is Avengers. *Actually, it

*It was extremely difficult to make out what this audience member said on the tape. Gene drew Avengers #63-65, with cover dates of Apr.- June '69. They were reprinted in Marvel Super Action #24-26, cover-dated Oct.-Dec. 1980. We can conclude reference is to Avengers #63. - M.S.

was an Avengers reprint for me. It was a Marvel Super Action, but the issue was when Hawkeye turns into Goliath. You just had that amazing dynamics to your art that I can still remember it to this day... and something a little more current; I think it was mid-'80s. Anyway, I think the book was from Comico. It was called Bloodscent. It was much... not as popular as your Tomb of Dracula. And...

Gene: That's my favorite.

Audience Member: Tomb of Dracula...? [It is evident Gene is referring to Bloodscent.-M.S.]

Gene: ...that I did...

One of the best ones that I've done.

Audience Member: And, if I recall, it was just your pencils, too, was it not?

Gene: It was pencils. Yeah.

Audience Member: It was just pencils...

Gene: My son posed for me for that lead character!

He said, "Is that what you think of me?" [laughter]

Audience Member: Anyway, amazing stuff.

[Adrienne says something to Gene, but it is inaudible]

Gene: My wife [remembers that]...? [laughter]

Audience Member: Thank you. Amazing stuff.

Gene: Thank you. You're very welcome.

Mark: This gentleman in green has had his hand up since... [inaudible]

Audience Member: Thank you... Gene: I also wanted to say that first "Iron Man" was - besides the hallway shot and everything - that was one of my favorite covers of all time. That the castle in the distance with the Black Knight, Iron Man fighting up above was incredible and although I love all your... I love the Tomb of Draculas and the Doctor Stranges, and everything going all over the place. One thing, besides Syd Shores, I never knew what happened to... I really liked the early Daredevils we had, too... with John Tartaglione?

Mark: [Corrects pronunciation] Tartaglione.

Audience member: Whatever became of him?

Marie: [He became] an art teacher.

Audience member: Oh, really?

Mark: He's still around. I think he just couldn't get any work for a while, so he got out of comics.

Audience Member: You started really doing those



SVENSSON NOTES: The audience member specifically cites Jughead, and may be referring to the miniseries, *Jughead's Time Police*. This was a fun six-issue run where Gene took over the penciling with the third issue, cover-dated Nov '90. He really loosens up the Archie characters, and his art enhances this sci-fi romp. People familiar with his art should get a kick out of how he naturally slips in some of his telling panels. Look how Jughead's head movement is depicted here on page one of the final issue. Gene loves to draw movement or transformation this way. We see three images of Jughead's head flowing together as it moves left to right.

Top: Jumping Jehoshaphat! Gene was an Archie Comics artist for a period. Here's his splash for Jughead's Time Police #6 [May '91], with Pat Kennedy inks. **Below:** Gene's cover (with George Klein inks), The Avengers #63 [Apr. '69].





splash pages like big time with those issues with Daredevil, really fantastic. Thank you.

Gene: Thank you.

Marie: Tar-Tag did some baseball. He's a great sports fan and he did some baseball comic books with Joe Sinnott, and I don't know who the publisher was. But I went to high school with Tar-Tag's wife, so I know him. And then I worked in Marvel, in the same studio with him, for a year. He's a delightful man. He, too, loves music while he works, and it does set a lovely pace. He loves the fine stuff. Very high tone. Anyway, music is wonderful, Gene, and it's really... it's so soothing. I think coloring is the music for comics! You know?

Marv: For those of you who think they've seen all of Gene's work or a lot of it: if

you can find (and God knows if you can) the animated *Tomb of Dracula* movie that was made in Japan. It's an adaptation of the last two-year storyline Gene and I did in *Tomb of Dracula*, and it's absolutely authentic. All the art in there was definitely taken from Gene. They didn't just take the storyline... the angles, the shots, the visual look of the entire movie is the same as if Gene had storyboarded it himself, because they really were dedicated to following what he had done and it's a very different looking animated film because of that. It's very dark, very moody, very spooky, and, if you can find it, there are some videotapes available in different places. Take a look because it's a beautiful, beautiful job.

Audience Member: [Possibly Adrienne] Did they copy your scripts, Marv?

Marv: It's identical. The only character they removed from the last two-year story was Blade and, otherwise, it's exactly the story Gene and I did. No changes. The entire marriage of Dracula to the death of Dracula in the very last issue.

Audience Member: Just a follow-up, actually, on what Marv was saying about filmmaking. I'm a filmmaker to this day and I owe it to Gene, basically, [who] inspired me from being a youngster. I have one anecdote and that's when

SVENSSON NOTES: The anime Marv is referring to is the 1980 Japanese feature-length film *Dracula: Sovereign of the Damned*. It is now available to watch for free online. Reviews of this movie are not as favorable as Marv Wolfman's praise, but there are a few sections where Gene's wonderful art is channeled well. Having watched parts of it, perhaps the movie would be better in Japanese with English subtitles!

my mom brought me some comics when I was about four and I was sick in bed. And she bought me a pile of DCs and then a couple of Marvels, and I guess I was reading a little bit about that point, but she said, "Why aren't you looking at all the colorful ones?" She was showing me all the DC ones. She said; "These are so dark." I said one word: "Yeah!" [laughter, applause]

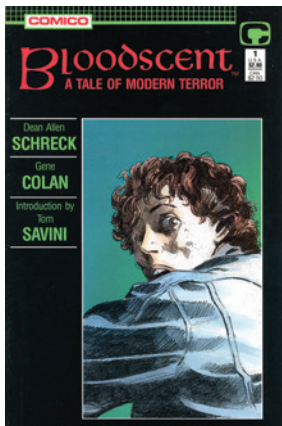
Mark: I guess two more [questions]. Over there...

Audience Member: I'd like to thank you for your work on Doctor Strange. My favorite issue is Doctor Strange #10, where you are depicting Eternity and the shadows in those pages suck the light out the room. They are amazing pages. Thank you very much. Thank you.

SVENSSON NOTES: Doctor Strange [V.2] #10, cover date Oct. '75, released July 8, '75, was not the first time Gene had drawn Stephen Strange and Eternity together. He also rendered them both in Doctor Strange [V.1] #180, cover-dated May '69, released Feb. 4, '69. In these issues, Gene, with wonderful inks by Tom Palmer, produced some truly stunning and innovative art. Steve Ditko had developed a startlingly original way to depict interacting spells and other worldly dimensions during his creation of these characters, and perhaps this precedent allowed Gene the freedom he needed to see this work in print. Doctor Strange #180 starts off with a customary splash page, but the next two pages look very much like splash pages as well. Gene has removed the gutters from the page. There would "normally" be two panels on page 2 and three panels on page 3. Gene's creative approach, one that he would continue to develop, enhanced what turns out to be a dreamscape created by Nightmare. (These are all Ditko characters, but Gene does not try and imitate Ditko's brilliant art. Gene makes his own brilliant art.)

Audience Member: Good afternoon. The issues I remember best that impressed me most were two issues of Son of Satan that had to do what a young girl that had been possessed and that her family was all involved, and it was just so dark and creepy that it was like... please! The shivers could get going. Thank you very much for all your wonderful work and more to come, I hope!

Mark: One of the things that I just wanted... I find it interesting... is when Gene would take over a Marvel book that had been draw by someone else. He would suddenly be drawing these characters in angles they'd never been in before. Because, you know, Mr. Kirby drew characters pretty much straight on, three-quarters... He didn't do a lot of down shots or up shots as Gene has done. And I was wondering, it struck me, like, when you did Doctor Strange, that you were taking these design that Ditko had made. It looked very fine from one angle and doing Strange... since then... It was... I was... I'm not sure if I liked it completely, but I just thought it fascinating. I said, "My God, this skill that must be necessary to interpret... You know... The animation"... We have these dumb model sheets with the characters front view and side view, and there are artists who can't do anything with that. I guess I was just impressed with



Above: Page and cover, Bloodscent [Oct. '88], reproduced from Gene's pencils, with colors by Steve Oliff. **Below:** Ye Ed. is not sure if this is an authentic Blu-ray cover purportedly containing Dracula: Sovereign of the Damned anime.



Bloodscent TM & © Dean Allen Schreck & Gene Colan. Dracula: Sovereign of the Damned TM & © the respective copyright holder.

SVENSSON NOTES: Those two "Son of Satan" issues were lead features in *Marvel Spotlight* #18 (released July 16, '74, cover-dated Oct. '74) and #19 (released Sept. 17, '74, cover-dated Dec., 1974). It was the demon Allatou who first possessed Mellissa Manners in these issues. Mellissa was not the only person possessed by Allou in the second part of this story, as she could switch bodies quickly in mid-battle.

the ability to take these characters and give them a three-dimensional feel in shading and density, and a lot of times, things they had not had before.

Audience Member: *Three-D Cleo!*

Mark: The three-dimensional Cleo. It's another horny drawing you did. [laughter] That's right. Anybody else? Microphone's on this side? Alright, this gentleman, let's have the gentleman in the far back go to the way back. In the back. He has had his hand out in the last row for a long time. And we'll wrap this up in a minute with a few closing comments from various people here.

Audience Member: *Sir, Gene, besides "Brother, Take My Hand," one of the most powerful images you ever did was that Iron Man #1 cover. Maybe it was because it was 1968. I don't know if you did it by design, but it just seemed to capture the whole movement of when I was growing up. What we were going through, that we would... it's like the gentleman said earlier, it's, like, black people love you. It's like we were all going to break free and move forward. I love that cover and thank you very much!*

Gene: Thank you. [applause]

Mark: Anyone on the dais have anything they want to add to all this?

Marie: I do.

Mark: Okay, Marie's going to add something.

Marie: I think you didn't know that so many people owe you, Gene Colan, money. [laughter] I paid him back.

Mark: Right? Don, you want to add anything just before we adjourn?

Don: God, I'm looking at Marie. She's looking at me. Yikes.

Mark: She's planning three more caricatures. (laughter)

Don: I'll take 'em. Just one thing. Gene, it's been one of the great privileges of my life to know you, to work with you. There are a lot of downsides in this business, but one of the upsides is having the chance to work with an artist like Gene Colan... And I hear writers talk about, "Oh... I did this, and I did this, and I did that." But if you don't have an artist to bring it to

*"Brother, Take My Hand" is the title to the story in *Daredevil* #47, released on Oct. 10, '68, and cover-dated Dec. '68. – M.S.

life, you can bleed onto that paper. You can care all you want. You can give it everything you've got. It's going to lie there. And when you get the chance to work with a Gene Colan and you first see that artwork, and you first hold it in your hands and you see that he's not just taking what you've done, but he's gone beyond it. He's captured the humanity of those characters. Just the individual little body language, just the expression of those faces, the backgrounds – all of it – the place, the feeling, the ambiance that you wanted from there. Gene, I just thank you for all of those years. I thank you for your friendship over those years and I'm just glad we had a chance to do those books we've done together. Thanks, Gene. Fabulous.

Mark: By the way of closing, let me just say that one of the things that always impresses me about certain people from this business is that, artists, up until fairly recently, were paid by the page, and it generally didn't matter that much how wonderful the page was. You got the same page rate. And an awful lot of artists – and Gene is a perfect example – could have done a lot less than that and still made the same income. In fact, he probably could've done a lot less and made more money. We've been bad mouthing Vince Coletta here off and on.

Don: Sorry, we're all dying in the next season of *The Sopranos*. [laughter]

Mark: Anyway, but Vince was a guy who felt he was giving comics [back] what they paid him for and he was not necessarily wrong about that. I think that people like Gene and, of course, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko and John [Buscema? Romita?], and all these artists, and Marie... I think they gave the industry an awful lot more than they were paid for... but what they were doing was that they were giving it to us.

They may not have been conscious of the fact that there was... I believe that, in their hearts, all these terrific artists always knew that there was somebody someplace out there whose life would be a little different if they spent an extra half-hour on that page, or erased that bad panel and did a better job. I don't believe, as Mr. Buscema was saying on our talk earlier today, that you're

always trying to keep your job. I think there's always something a little higher cost. Nobody really got into comics because they thought there was a lot of money in it. Nobody ever really got into comics until Todd McFarlane came along, you could be wealthy doing this type thing. God knows, because there was a certain pride in craft and a certain satisfaction. And, God knows, Gene, over the years, through some of the rottenness comics in the world, not because of him, but because they were lousy premises or weak, weak scripts. They were given the bad inkers. They were put in... colored in differently and put on the cheapest possible printing. And yet, still, that

magic came through. And I would like to, at this point, thank Gene, not only just for sitting here and putting up with this little fan, and for being a good sport about it, but also for a lifetime of enormously wonderful work. [to audience] You join me and thank Mr. Gene Colan! [standing ovation]

Gene: Thank you! I want to say just one word on behalf of my wife. I swear to you, I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for her. I really would not.

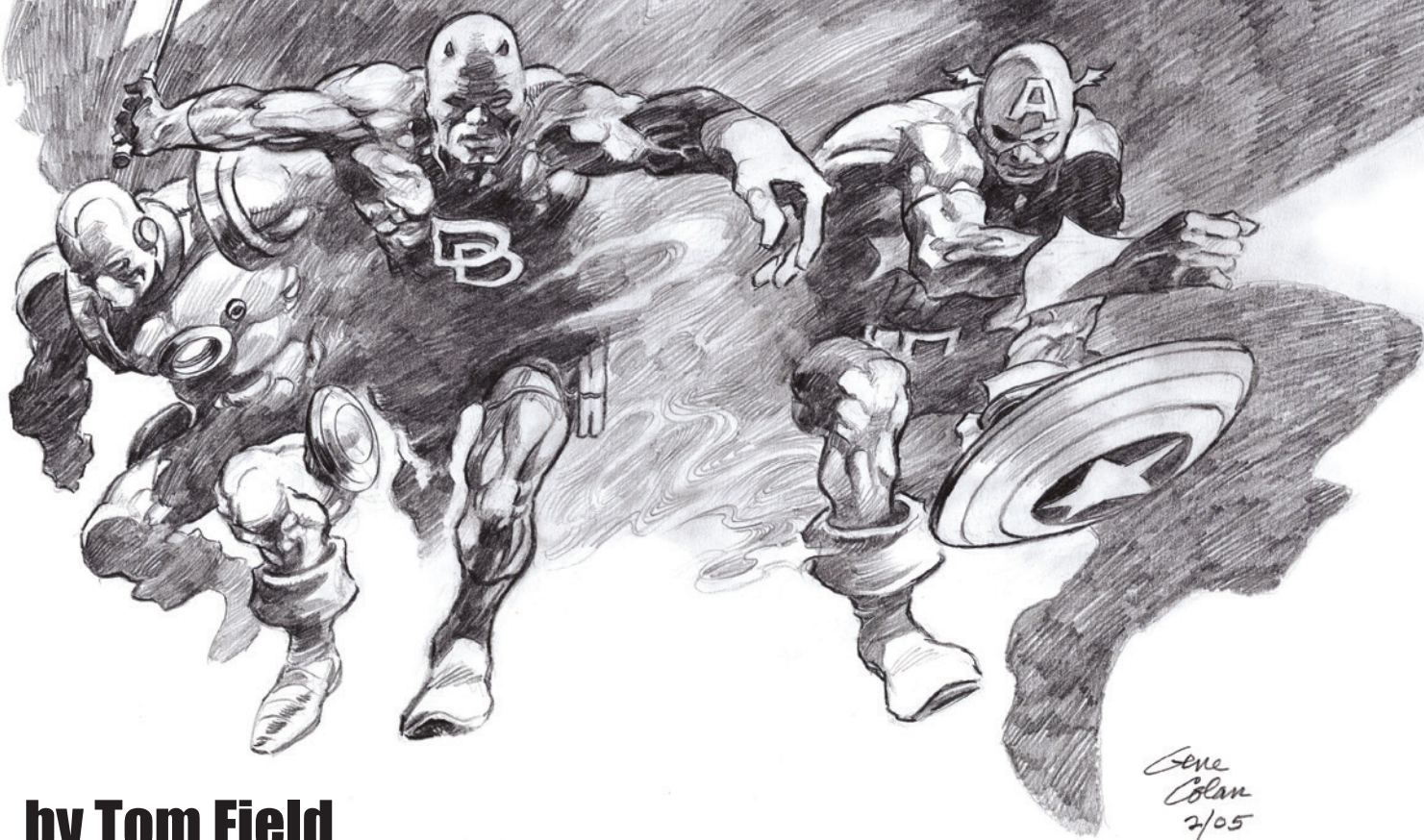
Mark: In a week, we'll do this again. [laughter]



Above: *Splash*, Doctor Strange #180 [May '69] by Gene (pencils), and Tom Palmer (inks). **Below:** Don, Gene, and Mark, all smiles on the panel.



II. I Dream of Gene



by Tom Field

I miss the phone calls.

Gene Colan loved to talk on the phone and, after we met in 1998 and became friends over the course of '99, he would call me frequently over the next decade-plus. And, every time I picked up, it'd be the same opening line. "Hi, it's Gene. Hey, what movies have you seen?"

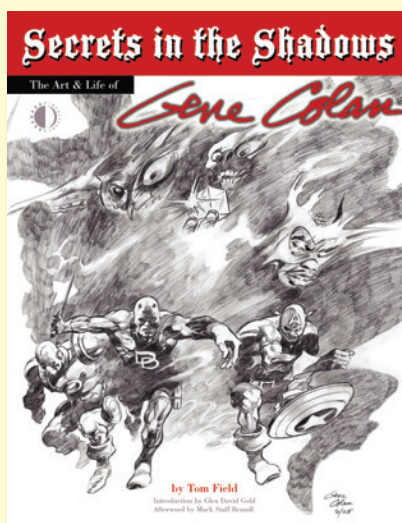
No surprise, Gene loved film. From the time he was terrified at age five, seeing the original *Frankenstein* on the big screen, in 1931, to the last decade of his life, when he was able to see his characters, Blade, Daredevil, and Iron Man, brought to cinematic life, Gene couldn't get enough of movies. Horror, war, Westerns – especially Westerns – Gene was purely in love with the medium. As a kid, he'd walk around his parents' home with a box camera, framing scenes like he was a movie director. As a key Marvel artist in the 1960s and '70s, he would pace his stories like he was storyboarding a movie. In his semi-retirement, he collected films. Studied them. And talked about them with everyone in his circle.

What was Gene's favorite film? It's like asking who was his favorite inker. The answer sometimes varied. (Mostly, he started with "Tom Palmer," by the way, but in his final years he was delighted with the work of young artist and friend Dave Gutierrez.) You can't deny the influence of the original *Frankenstein*, which inspired him to be one of the all-time greatest horror comics artists. He was big on Gary Cooper and High

Noon. He loved *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and often quoted the famous line about "steinking badges." It's a *Wonderful Life* was on his short list, and he frequently told me "You're my Clarence" – a reference to the angel who guided Jimmy Stewart's spiritual journey. But I only ever knew of one film that moved him to get a vanity license plate: Gregory Peck's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. If you saw MKNGBRD on the road in the 1990s, you knew it was the Colans. The attorney Atticus Finch stood for a lot that Gene admired in the best of people.

So, we'd start those phone calls with movies, and then we'd go on to talk about family, comics, the news – everything. Well, except sports. Gene didn't much follow sports. But everything else, he watched, studied the nuance and looked for ways to express it in his art. This, to me, is why Gene was such a master of capturing human expression. Because he studied it endlessly. Same with objects. If he wanted to draw a gun, he didn't just look up a photo of a gun – he went down to the local police station and asked to see one.

Let's stop, too, and acknowledge what an honor it was to receive these calls. Comics journalist, author, historian – call me what you will, but foremost I'm a comics fan. I was born about the time *The Avengers* and *X-Men* debuted in 1963, and, by the time I learned to read, in 1968, Marvel was my favorite brand of comics, and Gene Colan's was one of the distinct art



All characters TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. Art ©the estate of Gene Colan.

styles that impressed me most. The shadows and expression in his work, the cinematic storytelling, his ability to capture nuance. I was introduced to Gene's work through *Doctor Strange* in the late '60s. Coming of age in the '70s, I grew up with his *Daredevil*, *Howard the Duck*, and especially *Tomb of Dracula*, which to me is the single best comics series of the decade. I followed Gene to DC when he broke away from Marvel in 1981, and I loved his five-year run drawing *Batman*, *Wonder Woman*, *Night Force*, and *Nathaniel Dusk*. Loved his work on *Stewart the Rat*, *Ragamuffins*, and *Detectives, Inc.* for Eclipse. I mean, if Gene drew it, I read it. Period.

Little known: comics artist Lee Weeks (who did a stint of his own on *Daredevil*) and I grew up in neighboring cities in Maine. We met as teenagers and plotted to break into comics together. He was a huge fan of Gene's work and helped me understand some of the techniques Gene employed. When we were dreaming up ideas for comics submissions in 1982, we devised a three-page *Batman* story. In it, the Caped Crusader battles through a series of criminals and obstacles, all to get to one house. He enters, greets the homeowner – who turns out to be Gene Colan – and says "I just wanted to thank you for your work drawing my adventures!"

So, to be getting calls from one of my comics heroes, and him just wanting to know how I was and which movies I'd seen...? Pretty damned cool.

And then to be given the honor of writing his biography, *Secrets in the Shadows: The Art and Life of Gene Colan*? A highlight not just of my career, but of my life. I spent the better part of a year researching and writing that book. That meant countless visits and phone calls with the Colans, Gene's collaborators, and other industry professionals. Hours going through art archives and selecting appropriate pieces. Networking with fans and collectors who had their own contributions to offer. In the end, when the book debuted at the 2005 Comic-Con, it represented a true labor of love.

Gene's been gone almost 15 years now, and it's been just over 20 since *Secrets* was published. It's long out of print now, alas, but still available in a digital edition. I was blessed to meet Gene at a wonderful time of his life. He was in decent health, drawing better than ever, getting work again from the major comics companies and, through the internet, he connected directly with his fans and found a whole new career in crafting commissioned illustrations. He felt appreciated more than he ever had in his life – which isn't a bad way to celebrate one's 75th birthday (2001). And the honors continued after our book, when he was inducted into the Eisner Hall of Fame, in 2005; given a major exhibit at the Cartoon Art Museum, in 2008; and he even won an Eisner "Best Single Issue" award in the last year of his life for a *Captain America* one-shot reproduced directly from his stunning penciled pages.

I wish I could say Gene's life had a happy ending, but his final year was tough. He lost his beloved wife Adrienne almost one year to the day before he succumbed to cancer and liver disease in June of 2011, and he mourned her until his last breath. That's what I remember most about the last time we spoke - our final phone conversation. He cried - sobbed, actually, because he missed Adrienne so, so much. I'm not saying he didn't have happy times in his final days.

But the loss of Adrienne was huge.

I miss the Colans, too. From the day we met at a comic book store signing at That's Entertainment, in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1998, until I attended Gene's memorial service in New Jersey, in the summer of 2011, Adrienne and Gene Colan were a huge part of my life. I visited them at their home in Vermont, and we traveled together to Massachusetts, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and San Diego. We hung out in a biker bar in Chicago, and I introduced them to authentic Chinese food in San Francisco's Chinatown. I even got to drive Gene up and down some of the amazing hills he drew years earlier when *Daredevil* was based in San Francisco. The Colans were bonus parents to me and bonus grandparents to my two older children. They sent a lavish food basket to my dad after my mom died, and, every year for my birthday and for Christmas, Adrienne would slip me a special piece of Gene's original artwork. Before the Colans succumbed to tragedy and illness, we spoke of taking two additional trips together. One to the Montana horse ranch owned by E.C. Comics editor Al Feldstein, the other to Romania to see the remains of Castle Dracula. Surprise, huh?

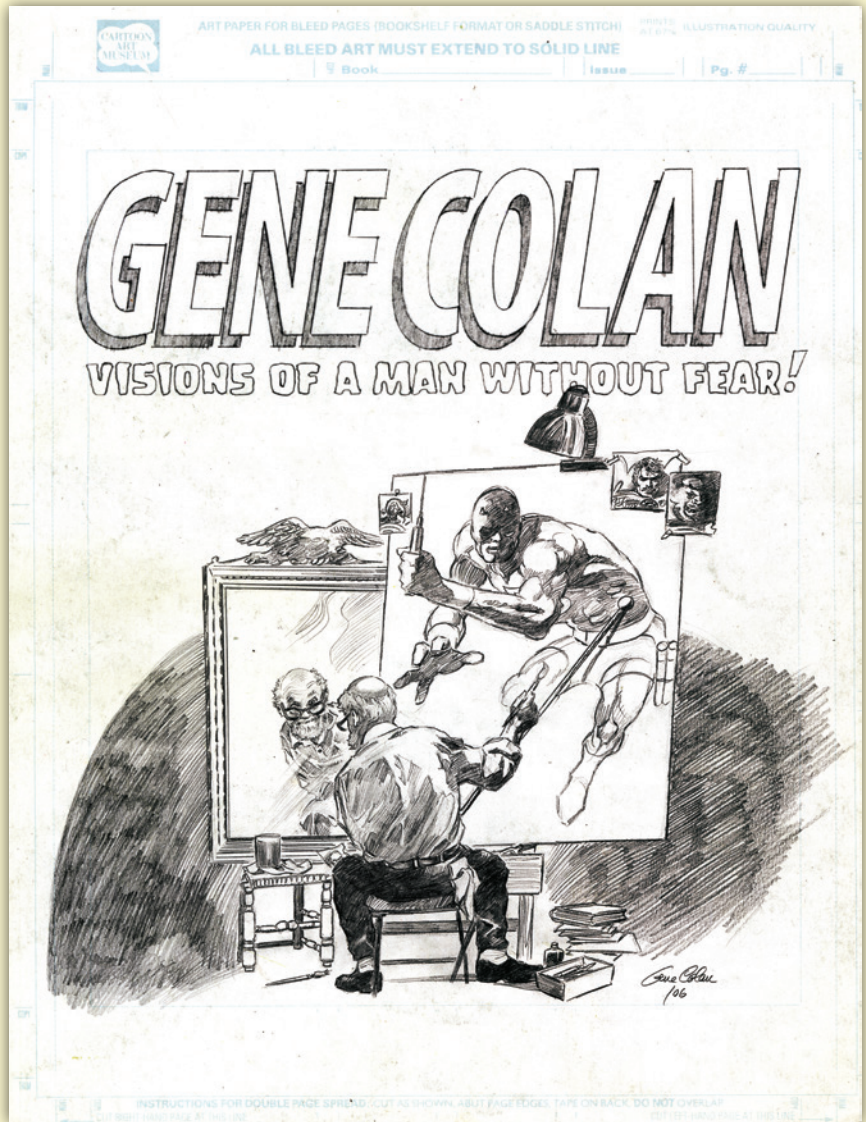
What would I say if I could talk to Gene Colan today? Lord, so much to catch up on, including all of the *Avengers*



Above: Tom Field in recent years.

Opposite page: At top is a portion of the cover art Gene Colan produced for his biography. Below inset is that same book, published by TwoMorrows, in 2005.

Below: Not long after *Secrets in the Shadows* saw print, San Francisco's Cartoon Art Museum held a Colan exhibition, which ran between 2008-09. This is Gene's cover for the show catalog.



VERY SPECIAL THANKS!

To all who helped with this Gene Colan celebration, heroes all! Mark Staff Brandl, Shaun Clancy, Andrew Farago/Cartoon Art Museum, Tom Field, Ed Fields, Glen David Gold, Jeffrey Harnett, Greg Huneryager, Chris Lambert, Steve Leialoha, Chris Ryall, Jon Yon, Mike Zaloudek, and especially MARC SVENSSON, who made a herculean effort to make this ish what it is!

Below: Commission piece by Gene depicts the Man without Fear capturing lightning in a bottle!

movies that feature characters he drew. I'd start by sharing that I just watched *Blair Witch Project* with my 13-year-old daughter. I know I discussed that film with Gene when it debuted in 1999, and he'd love to hear how much it impressed my young teen.

Then I'd tell him stories of my current Maine house, which I bought in 2020. It's 240 years old and was built by a Revolutionary War soldier – who's buried on a hill out back. In the 1800s, it was part of the Underground Railroad and home to a Civil War soldier – who's also buried out back. In 1926, the year Gene was born, author Erskine Caldwell moved here with his first wife Helen, and he wrote his two most famous books – *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre* – in the room I now use as an office. It's a three-story house with an attached barn, and there are 20-something rooms total. I'm vague on the count because I'm still discovering hidden spaces. It's a house rich in stories, spirits, secrets, shadows – all of Gene's major food groups.

But since I can't talk to Gene... well, let me talk a bit about him and share some stories you may have forgotten or never knew.

THE BOOK COVER... THAT WASN'T

Here's the story behind *Secrets in the Shadows*: it started with author Glen David Gold. He and I became friends when the Colans went online in late '98/early '99, participating in a Yahoo groups forum initiated by *Daredevil* über fan Kevin Hall. At a time when there was little-to-none of Gene's work in print (*Marvel's Essentials* and *Masterworks* hadn't yet touched his biggest bodies of work on *DD*, *Captain America*, *Doctor Strange*, and *Dracula*), the group was the place to enjoy and discuss Gene's work. Fans were blessed to interact directly with Adrienne and Gene, and get answers to every question they ever had. *Who was your best inker? Which writer did you enjoy working with most? What's your single favorite character/series?* Gene even would ask the group for new commission ideas. When you see images of old drawings of the Demon, Shazam and the original X-Men...? Those all were suggested by Gene's fans.

And, at that same time, whenever a new magazine or book would be published about Gene and his art, Glen and I would compare notes. "Well, it's good except it left out this ..." Or "I kinda liked it, but if I were writing the ultimate Colan book, I'd focus here."

Finally, one day in the fall of 2004, Glen called me at work and said "You're about to get a call from [TwoMorrows publisher] John Morrow. He and I were talking, and the conversation turned to Gene. He wants to publish a book, and I told him you were the man to write it. Hope you don't mind."

Within the next hour, John called and I was committed to putting my fingers where my mouth was and writing the ultimate Gene Colan biography.

I can't say the Colans were the easiest sell for this book. I'd need access to their memories, archives, insights to be able to produce the tome. Gene was game – he'd discuss any topic. But Adrienne – ever protective of Gene – was reluctant to say yes for fear of scratching old wounds. Like Gene's battles with DC editor Bob Kanigher and Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter. She didn't mind so much having Gene tell his story, but she wasn't crazy about opening him up to what others would say about him and his work. Especially Shooter. But we got over that hurdle by me committing to allowing the Colans to review each chapter as it was completed. That worked. Ultimately, they never really dictated any changes to what I wrote, but they appreciated the heads-up on the contents.

Then came the cover. I had the name of the book instantly – *Secrets in the Shadows* – because it described perfectly the mood and intent of Gene's nuanced work. I explained the concept to Gene and asked him to visualize a *Secrets in the Shadows* cover. What he came back with was breathtaking: a monstrous, antique chair come to life, ready to devour unsuspecting souls. This was based on one of Gene's childhood experiences. He often stayed with his grandparents, who collected antiques. They had this ornate chair in Gene's bedroom – it even had a face carved into it – and each night he would lay his clothes upon it. Then, when the lights went out, the clothes and chair – in Gene's imaginative eyes – morphed into this monster that leered over him terrifyingly all night. Perfect, right?

Until John Morrow saw the original and said, "Nice,



The Secret Origin of Gene Colan

Eugene Jules Colan was born on Sept. 1, 1926, in the Bronx, New York, the only child of Harold and Winifred Levy Colan. An introvert from an early age, he immersed himself in comic strips like *Terry and the Pirates* and *Dickie Dare*, and spent countless hours drawing. "I was always drawing," he recalled, often relishing sick days simply to stay home and create.

Film proved equally influential. One film in particular left a lasting impression: *Frankenstein*. Terrified by Boris Karloff's monster at age five, Colan responded by creating his own on multiple sheets of paper – an early sign of his lifelong affinity for atmospheric, horror-tinged art.

By 14, Colan was already pursuing a career, visiting DC Comics with samples that impressed editors enough to arrange a meeting with Batman creator Bob Kane. After graduating high school, in 1944, he landed a summer job at Fiction House, where he learned from established artists, such as Murphy Anderson and Lee Elias.

Colan enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force, in 1945, and was stationed in Manila. There, illustrator Steven Kidd became a key mentor, teaching him patience and discipline. One lesson stuck: after Colan quickly sketched a tree, Kidd reminded him, "It took God 100 years to make a tree – you can't do it in 10 minutes."

After the war, Colan studied at the Art Students League of New York before joining Timely Comics – Marvel's predecessor – in 1947. There he met editor Stan Lee and worked alongside artists like Syd Shores, Mike Sekowsky, and John Buscema.

That success was short-lived. A 1950 market crash forced Colan into freelancing, where he encountered difficult editors who nearly drove him from comics. At E.C. Comics, Harvey Kurtzman rejected his work and dismissed him bluntly. At DC, writer-editor Bob Kanigher subjected him to relentless criticism. Their contentious relationship ended in 1957, when Colan finally pushed back – and was fired, leaving his comics career in jeopardy.

The early 1960s marked a low point. Recently divorced, estranged from his two daughters, Valerie and Jill, and unable to find steady comics work, Colan took a job drawing educational filmstrips. His fortunes changed when he met Adrienne Brickman, who became his wife, in 1963, and his strongest advocate. She urged him to leave unfulfilling work and return to comics.

Her encouragement coincided with a resurgence in the industry. Colan resumed freelancing across multiple publishers, including DC, Dell, and Marvel. By 1965, Marvel's growth prompted Stan Lee to offer him steady work. Initially cautious, Colan used the pseudonym "Adam Austin" for early assignments on "Iron Man" and "Sub-Mariner." But his distinctive style was unmistakable, and he soon committed fully to Marvel.

When Colan took over *Daredevil* with #20, he entered one of the most productive and fulfilling periods of his career – firmly establishing himself as one of comics' most unique and influential artists.

From there...? Comics history was made.

but... um, how am I supposed to sell this book?" He needed recognizable characters from Gene's career – Iron Man, Daredevil, Cap – that would attract casual readers. I explained this to Adrienne and Gene, who bristled at first. But then Gene sat down and crafted an absolute masterpiece of a cover featuring those heroes, as well as the villains Red Skull, Owl, and Mandarin. Instant classic. The framed original graced my walls for 20 years.

THE STEPHEN KING ADAPTATION... THAT WASN'T

No secret: Gene was a huge horror fan. And he especially liked the works of Stephen King. Gene once said he'd love to have the opportunity to adapt King's Maine vampire saga, *Salem's Lot*. At that point, the only real comics adaptation of King's work was Walt Simonson's *Lawnmower Man* in black-&-white *Marvel Preview* magazine, circa 1980, and then kinda/sorta the *Creepshow* graphic novel by King and Bernie Wrightson, in 1982. Marvel's long involvement with *The Stand* hadn't happened yet. So, on Gene's behalf, I wrote to King's office to inquire about the rights to a *Salem's Lot* adaptation by the guy who made *Dracula* cool. Nada. Zero interest in comics adaptations. Shot down from minute one. Gene's version of Stephen King's vampires were never to be. But can you imagine...?

SENSITIVE GENE

I used to say that Gene Colan was the Brian Wilson of comic books. Like the Beach Boys founder, he had a genius style that made him a generational stylist among his peers. You had Jack Kirby imitators, Neal Adams clones, John Buscema disciples. But who ever drew like Gene? The joke was: if you

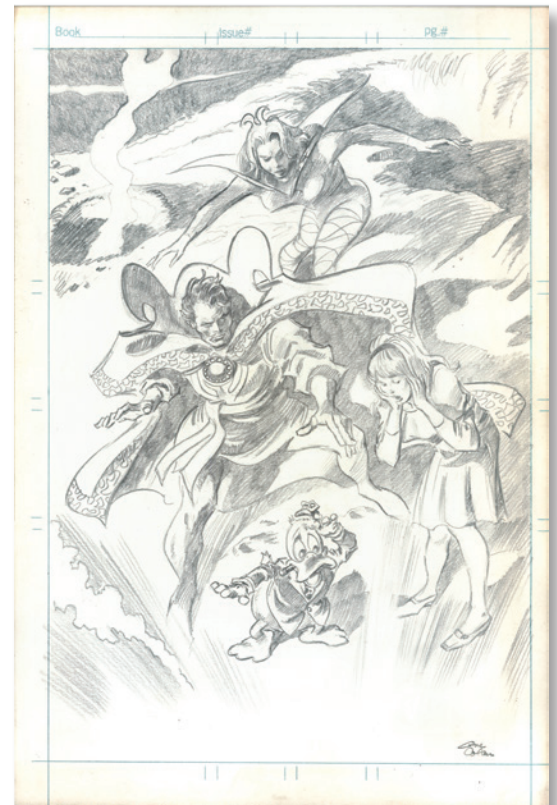
were good enough to imitate him, you were good enough not to have to. *Pet Sounds* and *SMiLE* were Brian Wilson's masterpieces. *Tomb of Dracula* and *Ragamuffins* may have been Gene's.

But, also like Wilson, Gene had a fragile ego and a deep sensitivity. He could walk into any room and instantly sense the one negative feeling that might be circulating in the room. And it was enough to make him want to hide away in his own bedroom, like Brian Wilson did. This is when Adrienne supported him best. Nothing – no one – pushed her out of a room easily.

Over the course of his career, there were three comics editors who terrified Gene (he would say "terrorized"):

E.C. Comics editor Harvey Kurtzman – Gene loved the E.C. Comics of the 1950s, and he desperately wanted to draw for Kurtzman's adventure books, *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*. But like peer genius Joe Kubert, he barely got the chance at even one story, "Wake!" in *Two-Fisted Tales* #30. Unable to understand

Below: Cover? Splash? Full-page panel? We're not precisely certain, but we know this is Cleo, Doc, Howard, and Beverly all penciled by Gene Colan, for sure!



Gene Colan's Unpublished Story

Throughout his career, Gene Colan probably had his most fun when he was working with writers such as Stan Lee, Marv Wolfman, and Don McGregor – who appreciated his talents and gave him the freedom to pace and plot stories between points A and B.

But as much as he enjoyed figuring out the details of a story, Gene never had much interest in creating stories of his own whole-cloth.

Except one...

In his retirement years, Gene told of a story he wanted to write and draw. It was about an older man in a small town who walks into the public library, approaches the front desk and asks, "Can you teach me how to whistle?"

This question sparks a flurry of discussion. Most people in the library – staff and patrons alike – know how to whistle. But can they teach someone?

There's nothing in the card catalog about "how to whistle." No one can lay hands on books or periodicals. It's the simplest of questions, but hardest of answers to provide.

Until one female patron is able to provide the best possible answer.

Gene never finished telling the story, so it's left to your imagination how he might have resolved it. But, knowing his passion for classic film, perhaps he drew inspiration from Lauren Bacall's famous scene in *To Have and To Have Not*. "You don't have to act with me, Steve. You don't have to say anything and you don't have to do anything. Not a thing. Oh, maybe just whistle." Then: "You know how to whistle, don't you, Steve? You just put your lips together, and blow."

what Kurtzman wanted from him as an artist, young Gene went so far as to visit an ailing Kurtzman in the hospital. Despite his frailty, Kurtzman looked straight at Gene and said "You are the perfect dupe!" That was it for Gene – he was so insulted. They never worked together again.

DC Comics editor Bob Kanigher – Later in the 1950s, Gene was drawing for DC Comics. And while they wouldn't let him near the Superman/Batman superhero titles, he had steady work on the Westerns, war stories, and romance books edited by Kanigher. Except it was a brutally painful experience. "He was impossible," Gene told me. "Kanigher was very abusive. I think he was depressed – he was a lunatic, in plain English." The late John Romita recalled a scene he witnessed between Colan and Kanigher over a romance story: "Kanigher was telling him that his girls did not look trim and stylish. He used to say things like 'You call that a good-looking girl? Look at the fat waist! The stupid hair comb!' Right in the middle of the bullpen, where everybody

was listening. It was a terrible moment." Ultimately, Gene got the last word. "One day I told him 'Y'know, you're crazy!' Julius Schwartz, his desk was back-to-back with Kanigher, and he heard me. Kanigher said, 'Julie, did you hear what he said? I'm crazy!' I said, 'Yeah, you're crazy!' Oh, I wanted to throw him out the window." That was the end of the Colan/Kanigher relationship.

Marvel E-I-C Jim Shooter – By 1980, Gene had worked almost exclusively for Marvel for nearly 15 years. Daredevil, Sub-Mariner, Iron Man, Captain America, Dr. Strange, Dracula, Howard the Duck. He'd drawn memorable issues of *The Avengers*, the debuts of *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Captain Marvel*. He was one of the giants of the field. But there was a new sheriff in town in Shooter, and he wanted things done differently. Look at it this way: Marvel in the 1960s was run by the artists. Stan Lee might have suggested plot elements or villains, but artists such as Kirby, Steve Ditko, Don Heck, Romita, Colan, etc., they were the ones who were really plotting and pacing the stories. By the 1970s, Kirby, Ditko, and Lee all were done producing new Marvel Comics, and the Artists Era gave way to the writers.



Young Turks such as Steve Englehart, Steve Gerber, Don McGregor, Doug Moench, and Jim Starlin were asserting their creative vision, and the decade became known as the Writers Era (another book begging to be written, by the way). But, with the ascension of Shooter in 1978, his desire to bring order to chaos paved way for the Editors Era of the 1980s. This is when the editors clearly were in charge of the comics, and the writers/artists were pawns on the game board. Suddenly, it wasn't cute that Gene didn't read his scripts before he drew his pages. It wasn't amazing that he'd drop full-page splashes into his stories. It wasn't quirky that he'd run out of pages before he ran out of story, so he'd cram a ton of concluding panels into the final page. Shooter wanted Gene to draw comics not necessarily the Marvel Way, but the Shooter Way. And it failed miserably. Gene felt boxed in by the constraints and was overwhelmed by the constant re-direction and orders to re-draw. He took it personally, and the Shooter relationship ate at him. Roy Thomas, a former Marvel E-I-C who also left Marvel over a clash with Shooter, told me "It's not a matter of whether Jim Shooter was right or wrong. It's a matter of a different approach. He was editor-in-chief and had right to impose what he wanted to. I thought it was kind of dumb, but I don't think Jim was dumb. I think the approach was wrong, and I don't think it really helped anything." For his part, Gene appealed to Stan Lee, who was far removed from day-to-day comics. "He told me, 'There are going to be Jim Shooters everywhere in your life,'" Gene said. "But as far as I'm concerned, I've dealt with all the Jim Shooters I'm going to see!" Gene walked away from Marvel in 1981 and never looked back until Shooter himself was ousted several years later.

By the way, Gene was not only psychologically sensitive.

This page: *Lest it be forgot, Gene was co-creator of the Guardians of the Galaxy, which debuted in Marvel Super-Heroes #18 [Jan. '69]. Inks on splash page and cover by Mike Esposito.*



He had great physical sensitivity, too. He told me once about a wool suit he wore as a young man when he went out courting women. The material scratched so badly against his skin that he would wear his pajamas under his suit pants. One time, when he was out on a date with his girlfriend, Toni, his PJs slipped into view under his pant legs. "I saw it, but she didn't – at least I think she didn't," he said. "I said, 'You have to excuse me,' and I ducked into a doorway to roll up my pajamas as fast as I could!"

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL GENE

One of my first observations from studying Gene's work: Although he frequently drew himself, family and friends into his comics, he never drew any scenes from his own life. And yet who was better equipped to draw real-life scenes? So, for the limited-edition hardcover of *Secrets in the Shadows*, I had Gene draw six unique images from his life. Among them:

The Chair – Remember the chair that terrified him? "It was unusual and frightening – like some kind of Satanic monster coming alive out of the chair. I'd put my clothes on it to hide the face, but sometimes my clothes themselves would look like they were alive."

Frankenstein – Gene's dad took him to see this land-

mark horror film when Gene was five years old. And he subsequently spent the next year sleeping with a light on and an attendant at his side until he got to sleep. "I just couldn't imagine a human being could look like that," he told me. "I was never the same after that. Never the same."

The Body – When Gene was eight, he and a cousin snuck out of an uncle's house one night to go peer in the window of a neighbor's house, where a newly deceased family friend lay in state. "Let's go see the body!" Gene said. "We got right up to the window, and the minute we saw the body – that did it!... After that, I was afraid to close my eyes and go to sleep."

What's in a Name?

A frequent question in Gene's career: "How do you pronounce 'Colan'?" And where did the name originate?"

Well, it seems Gene's original family surname was "Cohen," but it evolved to "Colan" when his grandparents emigrated from Germany.

Gene always pronounced his last name as "CO-lin" – like the punctuation mark. But even some of his closest colleagues – Stan Lee and John Romita among them – consistently pronounced it "co-LAN."

Further muddying the waters: when former Harvey Comics artist Ernie Colon ("col-OWN") migrated to Marvel and DC in the 1980s, when Gene worked for both companies. Not only did Gene sometimes get his name pronounced like Ernie's – sometimes he was mailed his paycheck, too.

So, what's in a name? In Gene's case, far more than he ever expected or wanted.

Below: *Dynamic Batman* commission piece by Gene.



Meeting Stan – The first time Gene met eventual Marvel editor Stan Lee, it was 1947, in the Timely Comics offices. “[He] was playing cards and wearing this beanie cap with a propeller on it,” Gene recalled. “He says to me, ‘So, you want to be in comics, eh? Sit down!’ A big, stiff wind was blowing through the window and would take that propeller on his gap and give it a twirl. He was certainly a departure from what I thought he’d be like. But I enjoyed him.”

WHAT GENE’S PEERS SAID OF HIM

Social media weren’t nearly so pervasive – or invasive – when I wrote *Secrets in the Shadows*. Today, so many pundits (who weren’t present when the comics were created) have strong opinions on how Gene Colan worked with Stan Lee or which writers and inkers were most/least compatible. There are blogs, podcasts, and postings aplenty about who did what in the comics – especially about anyone who worked with Stan Lee. I have my opinions, too – but they are formed from having spoken personally to each of the principals.

In researching the book, I was blessed to connect directly with Stan Lee, John Romita, Dick Ayers, Dick Giordano, Tom Palmer, Steve Gerber, Jim Shooter, Adrienne, and Gene themselves – all of whom are gone today. I even had the foresight to record Gene in conversations with Stan, Gerber, Palmer, and Adrienne. I’m grateful to have captured their insights when I did. Here is some of what Gene’s peers said about him:

Stan Lee – When John Buscema, John Romita, George Tuska, Jim Steranko joined Marvel, Stan had them debut with pencils over Jack Kirby’s layouts, so they could understand better the Marvel Style created by Kirby. Not so with Gene. He is the one exception of a Silver Age artist who was allowed to debut at Marvel in his own style. Stan explained why: “Gene’s style was too unique, too different. It would have handicapped Gene. He shouldn’t have to draw over anyone else’s layouts because then it wouldn’t look like Gene Colan.”

Roy Thomas – Stan’s editorial heir wrote scripts for a lot of Gene’s earliest work on “Iron Man,” *Daredevil*, and *Doctor Strange*. And, as an avid comics historian, he has a sense of Gene’s place in history. “What he brought to comics was his realism, which brought people back a bit from the true dynamism of Kirby, which was good, but it was good to get back to the realism. Gene could do both. He had the dynamics of Kirby, but the realism of some of the comic strip artists – the things that people liked later in Neal Adams and other artists. Maybe Gene was kind of a transitional figure between Kirby and Neal Adams – two of the great influences. Mainly, he just told a lot of good stories.”

Marv Wolfman – From 1972 to ’79, Wolfman and Colan were inextricably linked by *Tomb of Dracula* – the best comic either ever produced. Then, in 1982, they took their show on the road to DC and produced *Night Force*, which should be remembered as a precursor to the Vertigo Comics that debuted later in the decade. Marv spoke to me about what it was like to write for Gene: “I tended to avoid super-science stories, as Gene didn’t seem to enjoy those. He liked the moody horror stuff, which, with *Dracula*, worked the best. Other than that, all I had to do was focus my stories on the characters and their emotions, and Gene could do everything else. *Dracula* was a character-driven series, and I can’t imagine anyone better.”

Steve Gerber – Pretty remarkable that Gerber and Colan were best known in the 1970s for crafting stories around the irreverent Howard the Duck, but, by 1982, they were doing a Superman *Phantom Zone* mini-series for DC. Gerber said this about Gene: “If you want to tell a story that is mostly about human beings, there are very few other artists you can turn to. Gene is an absolute master at telling stories about real people. Howard the Duck, paradoxically, was mainly about real people. The fact that one of them was a duck was just incidental.”

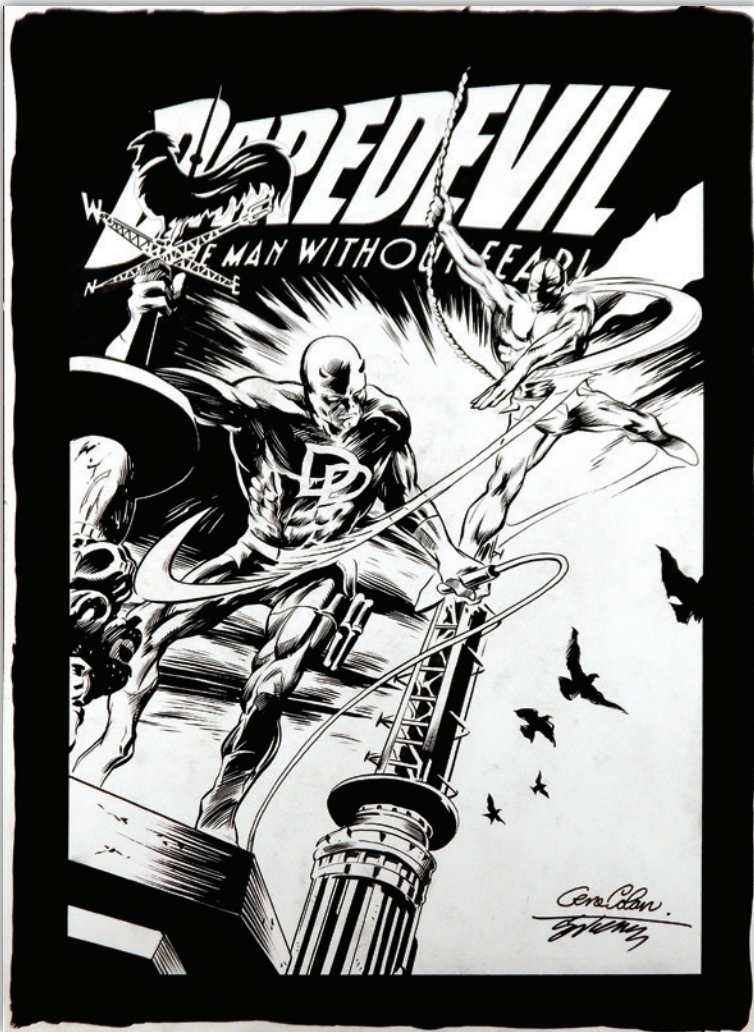
John Romita – Gene’s contemporary and friend. I once had the privilege of helping the two of them reunite at the 2005 Comic-Con. It was a treat to see the old friends embrace. A sea of fans just parted to let these two legends chat with one another. Romita occasionally inked Gene’s work in the 1960s and ’70s. Asked how he approached these jobs, he said, “I left a suicide note! If I had to ink Gene on a cover, a splash or a story, it was terrifying – it was hard to do. I felt like a failure at it because I couldn’t keep all of Gene’s identity on it. I used to think, ‘Oh, my God, people are going to think I’m an ego maniac!’ I wasn’t changing his work, but I couldn’t keep the flow and the movement that he had on his stuff. I always felt like I failed.”

Tom Palmer – The artist most associated with Gene boiled his embellishment down to a science: “His pencils are subtle. They may not look that way – they may look very powerful – but if you look at his penciled pages, you see there’s a very light rendering, a gray. Now, you typically have three distinct values in these pencils: light, medium, and dark. Some [inkers] ignore the light and make the medium as black as the dark, but I saw all three values. That was the difference.”



Auditioning for Dracula

Hard to imagine today – Gene is so associated with his solid body of work on *Tomb of Dracula*. But he actually had to audition to secure this assignment. The back story: when he first got wind of Marvel producing a *Dracula* magazine/comic when the Comics Code loosened, in 1971, Gene begged Stan Lee for the assignment and was told, “Yes.” But Lee soon forgot his pledge and gave the *Dracula* assignment to Sub-Mariner creator Bill Everett. When Gene found out, he was devastated – and resigned to his fate. But then, Adrienne talked him into something he’d never done: an audition. Emboldened by stories of Marlon Brando stuffing cotton in his cheeks to show he could play the lead in 1972’s *The Godfather*, Adrienne told Gene to draw a *Dracula* try-out page and send it to Stan. So he did. Basing his version on actor Jack Palance (who later played *Dracula* in a Dan Curtis-produced TV movie), Gene drew a gorgeous portrait and action montage of *Dracula*, mailed it off to Marvel, and the next day he got a quick call from Stan Lee. “You got it!” Stan actually held onto the montage for decades, until it was auctioned off from his archives, at the turn of the century. Guess who bought the piece at auction? Gene.



This page: The original Daredevil, from the '40s/'50s Biro comics shows what he thinks of the so-named Marvel character in this commission by Gene. Above is the piece inked by the incredible Dave Gutierrez.

POST-SECRETS

I'll say it again: I was blessed.

I was able to meet Gene at a time when his late career was resurging, and I was with him when he saw the recognition he'd earned.

Remember: when I first met Gene, in the late '90s, virtually none of his work was in print. It was easier to get a reprint of the one E.C. story he drew (thank you, Russ Cochran) than it was to find stories from his long runs on *Daredevil*, *Doctor Strange*, or *Tomb of Dracula*. In fact, I used to always visit comics stores, buy old Colan comics cheap and then send them as gifts to fans around the world who didn't have such easy access. I had a great experience in London, in 2022, meeting a comics store clerk to whom I had sent a batch of these comics when he lived in Australia 20 years earlier.

But, by the time *Secrets* debuted, in 2005, the seal had been broken. Gene's work suddenly was back in print – everywhere. Marvel ultimately released nearly all of Gene's classic work in *Essentials*, *Masterworks*, *Epic Collections* and *Omnibus* volumes. I even got to write the intro to *Tomb of Dracula Omnibus* #1, which was just printed again. DC published two hardcovers of Gene's 1980s Batman comics, and they even collected the Gerber/Colan *Phantom Zone* mini-series, as well as the short-lived Wolfman/Colan *Night Force*. Image collected the 1980s *Detectives, Inc.* mini-series. For today's Colan fan, there is an entire library of his work in print, and I'd like to think we fans had a bit to do with that.

I also enjoyed some amazing moments with Gene:

Like, when I first visited him at his home in Manchester, Vermont. He was watching an old Western movie on TV, and it happened to feature ex-third Stogie curly Joe DeRita as a bad guy. I pointed out "Hey, there's curly Joe from the Three Stooges!" Gene immediately went into his curly Howard impression. "Woo, woo, woo, woo . . .!" I don't think many of us saw that!

Or when I inventoried his original art, in 2002 or so, and came across a bunch of pages from the Batman story he crafted with writer Harlan Ellison, in 1986. "Oh, let's send those to Harlan!" he said. And we did.

Then there was the time we were in Chicago for a show, in 2006, and Gene decided he wanted to visit a local comics shop. He loved checking out all the comics-related merchandise. As he was looking around, I walked over to the manager on duty and whispered "Hey, do you know who that guy is?" As soon as it became clear that Gene Colan was in the house, the house itself felt very cool indeed.

Speaking of cool house, when we were in San Francisco for the 2007 WonderCon, the day before the show started I took the Colans and my kids to tour the Winchester Mystery House, in San Jose. How cool do you think it was to walk through America's most famous haunted house with the world's premier horror comics artist? If you see online any video that was shot of Gene during the subsequent WonderCon, he's wearing a Winchester cap that he bought in the gift shop after our tour.

My favorite moment might have been during that same 2007 convention, when Gene approached me one morning and said, "You'll never guess



This page: Among the most consistently excellent comics of the 1970s, certainly by a single creative team, was Tomb of Dracula by Wolfman, Colan, and Palmer. Below is splash of #1 [Apr. '72].

who we had dinner with last night! Sara Karloff – Boris Karloff's daughter! She wants me to draw a biography of her dad!" The project never came to be, but Gene was honored to meet the daughter of the man whose monster inspired his career.

Gene stayed as busy as he wanted to in his final 20 years of life. He drew the occasional piece for Marvel and DC – I recall a *DD* anniversary story, as well as a Wonder Woman back-up for DC's *Stan Lee's Just Imagine* line. He also drew a Spider adventure with Don McGregor, a *Tales of the Slayer* story for Dark Horse's *Buffy* comics, and even a horror tale for the Bongo *Simpsons* line. He kept a steady stream of commissions on his drawing board as well. In Gene's own words, "I'm busier today than on my best day in comics."

With that business came acclaim. In 2005, at the same Comic-Con where *Secrets* debuted (alongside the film, *Borat*, by the way), Gene was inducted into the Will Eisner Comic Book Hall of Fame. He was blown away.

In 2008, at the start of an art exhibition organized by Glen David Gold and Andrew Farago of the Cartoon Art



Museum, in San Francisco, the Colans traveled west and were honored to see Gene awarded a Sparky Award (named after *Peanuts* creator Charles Schulz). Writer Steve Englehart and artist Steve Leialoha were present to participate in the ceremony, and Stan Lee sent along a special video tribute. A bunch of us fans were privileged to join Adrienne and Gene for an Asian dinner nearby the museum that night. I'm not sure I ever saw the Colans beam so brightly.

At the time of the 2008 honor, Gene was at work on a one-shot *Captain America* story that he believed was going to be a *Marvel Annual*. Instead, it got held for a year or so, then included amidst the *Civil War* crossover as a single issue of *Cap* – #601. It was a beautiful *Captain America* tale set in WW II and featuring a vampire villain. How could it go wrong? The story was reproduced entirely from Gene's pencils, published in two editions – one color, the other black-&-white – and ended up winning a 2010 Eisner Award for "Best Single Issue." Given that Gene first drew *Cap* for Timely in the 1940s, I believe he has the distinction of being the only artist to draw the character across a span of seven decades – 1940s to 2000s.

Sadly, Gene's career and life ended soon after.

By 2010, the Colans had moved from Vermont to Florida and then back to New York, and their health declined. So, frankly, did their close relationship with fans. Facebook and other social media had exploded, making Yahoo Groups messages boards seem like such a yesterday thing. Members came and went, and the tone of discussion in 2010 was nothing like that of 2000. The congeniality and familiarity diminished. The fans posted less frequently, and the Colans'

ALL TM & ©Marvel Characters, Inc. Tomb of Dracula #70 page courtesy of Jon Yon.



walked up to the house and peeked in the window. He even broke federal laws by rifling through Cooper's mailbox and noting his specific address. When he got home, he penned a fan letter to Cooper and promptly got a response: "To Gene Colan, best wishes, Gary Cooper." Later, when Gene drew *Captain America*, he was inspired by Gary Cooper. "He summed up what a man should be like. Everything he appeared to stand for on the surface sent a clear message about integrity." You absolutely could say the same for Gene.

Being the Fan – As a young film fan, Gene was enamored of character actor Mark Lawrence, who played the heavy in films such as *I am the Law* and *This Gun for Hire*. "He played one part: Always the gangster," Gene said. Late in his own career, collecting old movies at a Comic-Con, Gene stumbled upon a dealer who not only knew of Lawrence, but had his phone number. The dealer shared it with Gene, who subsequently called Lawrence and had a great fanboy experience, expressing his admiration for the actor's work and hearing about Lawrence's retirement



This spread: Three final pages from the last issue of *Tomb of Dracula*, #70 [Aug. '79], with words by Marv Wolfman, pencils by Gene, and inks by Tom Palmer.

presence matched the pace. Ultimately, as Adrienne and Gene each succumbed increasingly to their ailments, their participation was limited, and then after their personal business was made public online – to no one's benefit – it led to the collapse of the once mighty fan base behind the Yahoo Group.

Then came the unexpected news that Adrienne had died suddenly at her home, on June 21, 2010.

Almost exactly one year later, Gene followed her.

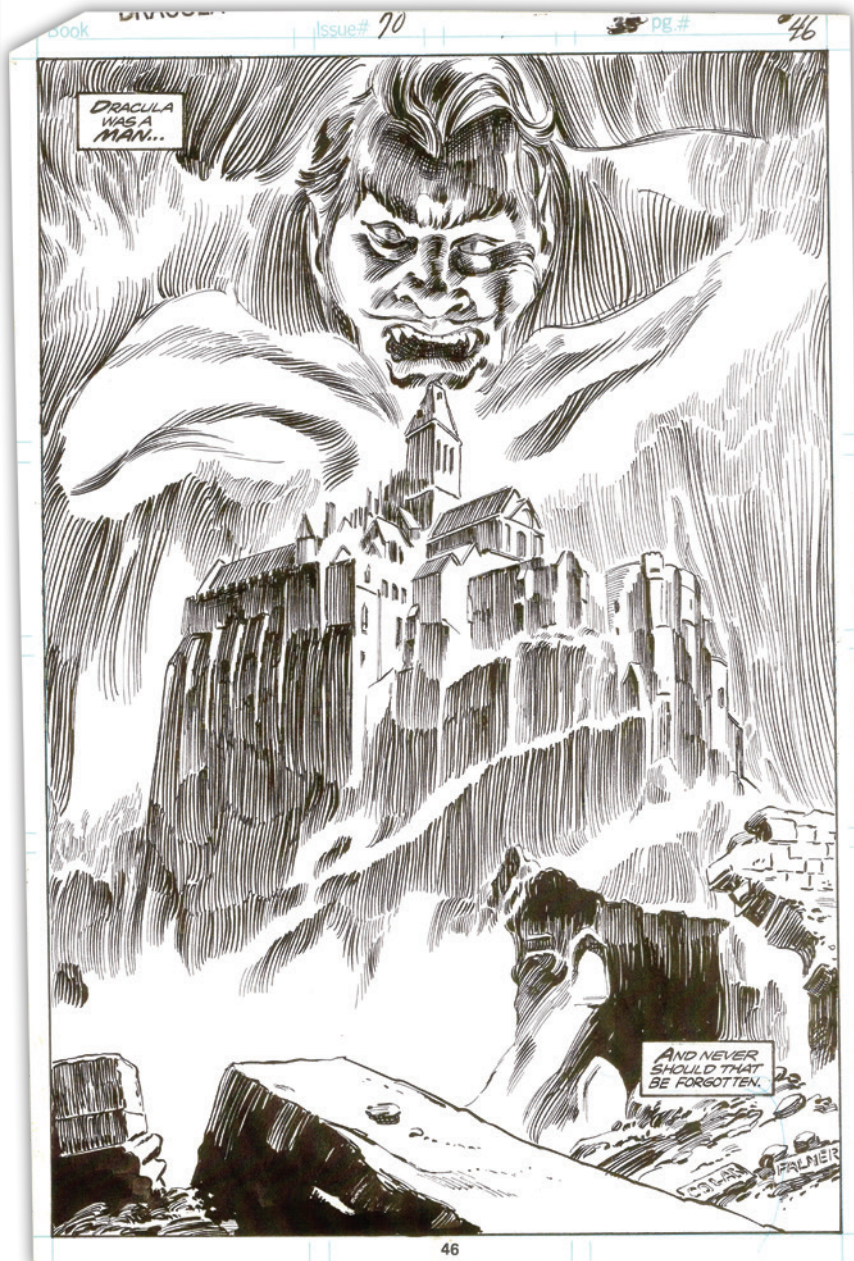
I attended Gene's memorial service in New Jersey, alongside some stalwart fans and some of Gene's peers and collaborators, including Don McGregor, Walt Simonson, Lee Weeks, and Tom Palmer.

Because of my work on *Secrets*, I was interviewed by the *New York Times* when they covered Gene's passing. I also was asked to write an obituary for *The Comics Journal*. In it, I quoted a reflection Gene once shared with me:

"I still find it almost impossible to believe that there are people who are so interested in comics, and in what I've done," Colan said, in 2005. "There are so many artists out there that are just as good – some even better. For me, it's a ride that didn't enter my mind would ever happen. I just got into the business as a way of entertaining."

When I think about Gene – when I dream about him – three stories come to mind:

Stalking Gary Cooper – In 1939, when Gene was 13, he accompanied his parents on a trip to California, and somehow he'd learned generally where his favorite actor, Gary Cooper, lived. He begged his parents to drive through Beverly Hills to find the home and park outside. Gene



III. My Friendship with Gene by Chris Lambert

To begin, I have always been a fan of Gene Colan's artwork, which grew exponentially as did his evolving style. In the past, back in the mid- to late '90s, I had tried to arrange a long-distance telephone interview with the artist for one of my pop-culture radio programs, but the two of us could never work out time in our busy schedules to get the deed done.

But flash forward into the new century, and the most pleasant thing happened to me. I did nothing more than answer an ad by the Colan family, stating that they had some artwork for sale as well as Gene's availability for personal art commissions.

I could not make the phone call fast enough!

A pleasant-sounding voice, who I discovered was that of Gene's wife, Adrienne, answered the phone and I asked about the availability of old art pages and new commissions. She explained the process and the financial charges, and I began to give her an order of two or three pieces of art before I began prattling on about the importance of her husband's work to me.

Then came the words that shocked me: "Gene's right here. Would you like to talk to him?" I must have stumbled to get the word out: "Yes!" For, very quickly, Mr. Colan was on the other end of the phone line, with what I sounded like a slightly higher pitched voice than I would have thought.

Needless to say, Mr. Colan was very generous with his time towards a fan he had never met before, and we wound up talking about his art, and both of our lives and upbringing before he had to beg off with the words – as a long-time professional writer and lover of words myself – "I've got to go now Chris. If I don't spend a certain amount of time at the drawing board each day, I just don't feel right."

He turned me over to Adrienne, where I completed my art order and made the statement, "Maybe I'll order some more pages from your husband, so I can talk to him again."

"No, you won't, Chris," she insisted. "You call anytime you want, *without* ordering anything, and that would be fine with Gene and I."

I didn't want to bother the wonderful couple unduly, so Adrienne and I settled on Gene and I speaking to each other once or twice a month. And believe me, *that* was something I looked forward to every two to four weeks!

Eventually, I got to ask him about some of the statements that he had made about art in general and his art specifically. He laughed when I reminded him that he stated a while back, that he would like to one day be able to make "sound" erupt from the comic book page.

He remembered that statement of his and he chuckled, admitting to me that he was "kind of" boasting a little and thought that might be some impossible art achievement to strive for.

I also asked him why do many people try to emulate the art and style of Jack Kirby, Neal Adams, and others, while no one attempted a try at Gene's newer shading and painting-with-pencil-style? On this point, he did not try to make a joke. He waited a mere second before seriously stating what I thought was the obvious:

"Because they can't!"

On other phone calls between us, he once had his children come in the door, visiting from out-of-state while we were in mid-sentence with one another. He had to beg off, wanting to end the conversation, to see his kids,

while telling me that he would call back in a few days.

That was fine with me, only...

Before he hung up, he took another 15 minutes to ask me how my dog, Ripley, was (we both talked a lot about our dogs) and how my father was getting along! I actually tried to remind him that his children had just arrived and that he should start his visit with them, but that just made him want to check up on my family members even more!

What a kind man!

Another time, he called me out of turn, to tell me that his liver function was extremely low and wanted to say goodbye, just in case. I was on the road, coming back from a doctor appointment myself when I took his call, and, after he hung up, I cried all the way home, since this had been a couple of years of chatting with him and getting to know him more intimately.

Once, he complimented my own talents as he must have looked up my career and the dozens of books and thousands of articles I had written since I was young.

"You're an artist as well," he finally blurted out during one conversation with me.

"I can't draw to save my life, Mr. Colan." (Right then, he demanded that I start calling him, "Gene.")

"But I just paint pictures with a pen, pencil and ink, whereas you paint your pictures with words. You *are* an artiste." He even suggested working together some day in the future. Yep, that's another time he made my eyes well up.

But the final time I teared up over a conversation with him was when it was his turn to call me, and it would have been on my birthday, June 22, 2011. I waited all

day to hear from him, only to find out soon that he had just got out of the hospital and died the next day, on the 23rd, at home.

Sadly, I wished that I could have gotten that last call from him to talk and chat one last time (like I did when he warned me of his bad liver numbers, before recovering well enough for another few years).

Flash forward – I don't know how many months – I had the highest bid on a Gene Colan piece of art that featured light, unfinished sketches of Dracula on one side and the Frankenstein monster on the other. It was not costly, as I remember, but I was very pleased to get more Gene pencil art so soon after his passing.

When the piece arrived in the mail, there was a note from Heritage, stating that this might have been the last thing that Gene drew, since, when his body was found, this was the art on his easel.

I teared up again as I thought that, in a way, *this* was my last birthday phone call from my friend, Gene Colan.

I tell this story when I'm a guest at comic conventions around the country and, to a person, everyone agrees what a touching story it is, and with the other tales of mine concerning Gene and myself, I feel that it was his kindness that earned him the nickname of "Gentleman Gene."

But it was his huge talent that earned him the other moniker: Gene "the Dean" Colan.


CHRIS LAMBERT has written for major newspapers on the history of rock 'n' roll before turning exclusively to comic-book history and pop culture. He has written for Project Literacy for the White House and VH1: Behind the Music, as well as Comic Book Marketplace and The Jack Kirby Collector. He has also written thousands of articles on comics, as well as over 40 novels.



years. Gene was telling me this story at a N.Y.C. comics show and, mid-story, he was approached by a fan who wanted an autograph and a chat about Gene's *Daredevil* comics. When they were done, I turned to Gene and said, "That fan meeting you is a lot like you talking to Mark Lawrence. Can you appreciate that now?" He thought and responded, "Oh... I sure do." Postscript: After Gene told me this story, he decided to call Lawrence again. When he got on the line, Gene asked him "What do you do with your days?" He was a little taken back to hear, "Not a f*cking thing!" I don't believe Gene ever called him again.

Adrienne's devotion – They met at a resort in the Poconos, in 1962, and they got married, on Valentine's Day, 1963. They had two children together – Nanci and Erik – and they were devoted to one another absolutely to the bitter end. Accent on "bitter" and "end." Adrienne was fiercely protective of Gene. She was a strong personality who negotiated rates, terms, conditions, and not everybody liked that. She was part of the reason why Gene was banned from visiting the DC offices when he drew DC comics in the mid-'80s. Editorial director Dick Giordano didn't want to face Adrienne. As a fan, if you wanted to reach Gene, you went through Adrienne. She even read and wrote his emails for him (Gene was scared of the internet. "I'm afraid I'll get lost



in cyberspace and never get back," he once said). She was his biggest fan, advocate and defender. But the one story that sums them up best for me occurred during a storm in New Jersey, in the 2000's. The Colans were out driving, Gene pulled over and some drunk started in with him, "He was really giving me a hard time, and I thought I was going to have to hit him," Gene said. Next thing you know, Adrienne is standing next to Gene, has a baseball bat in her hand and says, "What's going on here?" She defused the situation. "I didn't raise the bat," she said. "It was an implied threat." Gene said, "She wasn't going to stand there and let anyone push me around." It's been like that ever since? I asked. "It's been like that from the beginning." I suspect it's like that still. With love and respect for: Eugene Jules Colan Sept. 1, 1926–June 23, 2011. 

TOM FIELD's biography of Gene Colan, *Secrets in the Shadows*, was his first book, published in 2005. A professional writer since 1983, "Literally, I've written for everything from Beavis & Butt-Head comics to Yankee Magazine!" The senior VP of editorial at Information Security Media Group, he lives in Mt. Vernon, Maine. Tom describes himself as, "Editor by day, writer by night, Dad 24/7."

Inset left: Ken Meyer, Jr.'s portrait of Gentleman Gene Colan. **Previous page:** Frankenstein monster sketch by Gene and photo of Chris Lambert. **Below:** Adrienne and Gene Colan.

Portrait © Ken Meyer, Jr. Used with permission.

IV. On Gene Colan's Artistry by Adrienne Colan

Back in the fall of 2003, Colan fan Mark Staff Brandl suddenly had the impulse to ask Gene's wife, Adrienne, her opinion on the Yahoo groups Gen Colan forum. "While staring delightedly at my two original Colan artworks, a question struck me," he wrote. "What is your favorite work of art by Gene? *Ragamuffins*? A super-hero comic? A sketch? A painting...?"

"Hi, Mark," she replied. "Thanks for your interest. I'd honestly have to say the genius in the individual panels and composition over the body of his work these past 59 years. More often than not, I'm dumbstruck by the singular, powerful vision of executing what might have been the simplest of elements: a hand, a face, fierce and powerful or sad and poignant, or sexy and beautiful... Someone running; something leaping; a monster beyond your worst nightmare envisioned in the most extraordinary way.

"I've recently asked him to begin doing fine arts by having him take some of the exquisite panels he has done and let them inform his painting. A panel, larger than life. A feast for the eyes.

"I truly consider Gene a true artistic genius. I believe his work stands alone. He is an 'island.'

"There are panels and sequences from his super-hero work that are simply amazing and beautiful. But I'd have to say, the work he has done on *Buffy the Vampire* and the two *Spider* projects are, to date, his most visually stunning and powerful work. Not only for their content, but for the mastery of the use of graphite as a medium.

"This has been such a joy for me to respond to your question.

Thank you so much for asking. My heart swells when I think of Gene, the artist and the man.

– Adrienne."

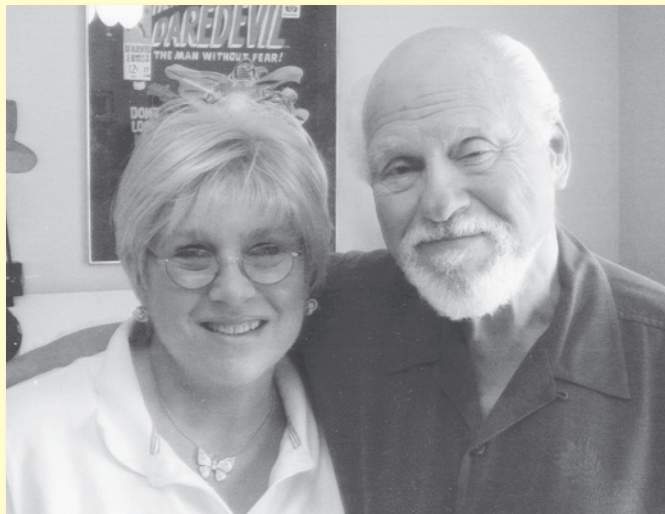


Photo courtesy of Tom Field. Adrienne Colan comments courtesy of Mark Staff Brandl.

TwoMorrrows Ad

TwoMorrrows Ad

creators at the con

Con Flashback: New York Comic Con 2010

Photography by Kendall Whitehouse

Gold and Silver era writers and artists joined newer comics creators in the Javits Center back in 2010.



John Romita, Jr.



Two generations signing side-by-side: John Romita, Sr. and John Romita, Jr.



John Romita, Sr.



Comics aficionado and Batman film producer Michael Uslan.



Captain America co-creator Joe Simon.



Dondi comic strip creator Irwin Hasen.



Cartoonist, playwright, and author Jules Feiffer.



Stan Lee and rock drummer, pianist, and songwriter Yoshiki announce their plans to collaborate on a new comic, Blood Red Dragon.



The stars of the Silver Age/Golden Age panel: Al Jaffee, John Romita, Sr., and Jerry Robinson.

All photos © Kendall Whitehouse.

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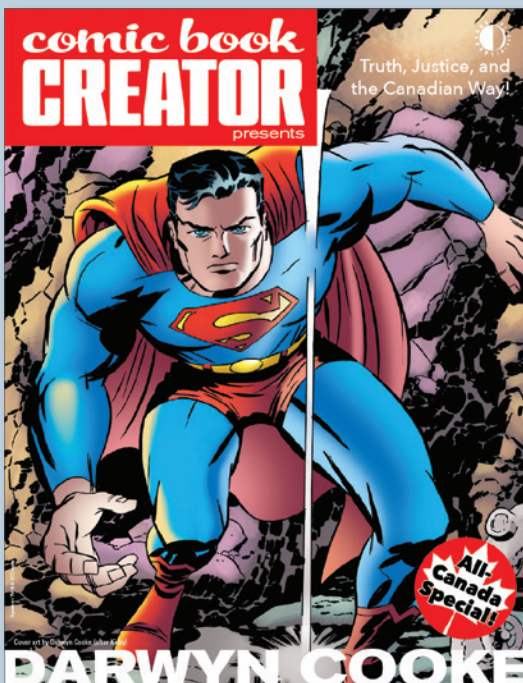


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coming attractions: take off with *cbc* #46 in Nov.

Darwyn Cooke and the Canadians



Commemorating the 10th anniversary of his passing, the short but brilliant life and art of **DARWYN COOKE** is celebrated in the double-size "All-Canadian" *CBC* #46, which features two comprehensive interviews with the artist, one from 2004 conducted by **JON B. COOKE** and another from 2010 by **TUCKER STONE**. We also feature numerous testimonials and tributes from many of Dar's friends and fans. Behind Darwyn's cover of Canuck Joe Shuster co-creation Superman, our theme for the issue is "Truth, Justice, and the Canadian Way," as we look at fascinating subjects exclusively from the Great White North. These include a definitive look at the history of **CAPTAIN CANUCK**, courtesy of **RICHARD COMELY**; the life journey of **ARN SABA**, creator of *Neil the Horse* and today known as **KATHERINE COLLINS**; and we feature an appreciation of **DAVID BOSWELL** of *Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman* infamy. Plus, we gaze deeply into *ORB* magazine with founder **JAMES WALEY**, behold **ANDROMEDA** with editor **DEAN MOTTER**, and get vexed by **VORTEX COMICS** with publisher **BILL MARKS**; and **JANET HETHERINGTON** shares a look at the **JOE SHUSTER AWARDS** and the **CANADIAN COMIC BOOK HALL OF FAME!** **HEMBECK**, too!

Full-color, double-size 168 pages, \$24.95

a picture is worth a thousand words



Gene Colan's pencil art is often described as painting with a pencil – and there is always a little something lost when someone else inks his art. So the challenge was to shoot and publish his pencils without inks.

This was my test page to see what I would be able to do with the coloring – if I were to hand color and airbrush copies of the pencils and what they would look like.

Everyone was really impressed with the results – but *not* the cost. At the time, printing in comics was essentially done two different ways. The first, and cheapest, is for the separator to translate color guides into flat coloring – 99% of all published comics. Or, alternately, to do what was called “full process coloring,” where the artwork is hand painted, photographed, and printed directly from.

Hand coloring comic book art takes a lot more work than providing simple color guides, and, therefore, pays a higher page rate. It was decided that the first *Nathaniel Dusk* series would be too expensive to hand color – and so the decision was made to print flat colors over Gene's pencil art.

Needless to say, the results were atrocious. All agreed the flat coloring looked terrible, and I was permitted to hand color the second series, with results more like this.

Needless to say, I was much happier with the sequel series printing. In a perfect world, I would get the opportunity to re-color the first mini-series for reprinting.

Ah, well, I can dream, can't I...?

–TZ

from the archives of Tom Ziuko

Nathaniel Dusk TM & © DC Comics.