DON NEWTON
Drawing with Power

by Jay Wilson
with Christopher Irving

design by
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Don Newton: Drawing With Power
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Introduction
by Christopher Irving

Comic book fans love comics people like the rockstars they really are. If Kirby was like Elvis, then Don Newton would be like Buddy Holly—legendary in the short amount of time he was producing work, and taken from us all too soon.

Jay Willson was lucky to get to know Don as a rockstar creator and personally. Because of that, this book serves as a tribute to Don as an artist and a human being. I was truly lucky to come in as an editor on this book, sent Jay's early manuscript by our publisher, John Morrow. I saw Jay's love for his late friend and knew of his years-long determination to see a tribute book come into being.

Along the way of helping Jay whip his rough early draft into the polished publication you now hold, I dived into researching Don's work like the historian I am. It's a bittersweet experience: had I been born a few years earlier, or if Don had lived just a few years more, I'd have been blessed with finding new Newton art every month in *Batman* or *Detective Comics*. Don Newton deserves further study, appreciation, and awareness from the comics world, and *Don Newton: Drawing with Power*, is the first step towards that.

I'm proud of all Jay's hard work and his commitment to his dear friend Don.

I am also very proud to call him a colleague and a friend.

Dr. Christopher Irving

November, 2026



Chapter 1: Don's Early Days

Don Newton was not particularly verbose, especially when it came to talking about his childhood. I would often ask him about his favorite comics as a child or a question about the artwork he produced in college, but he rarely offered anything other than a direct answer. This made Don a bit of a mystery to me as a person, but not in a negative way: at the time, it was more important to discover who his favorite comics character was as a child versus learning details about his parents or where he grew up. This was just Don's preference as an individual – he would rather talk about comics or other artists than to discuss his own life.

I was a young man during our time as friends and more enamored with the man's talent than needing to learn personal details from him. But when Don did discuss his youth, he tended to focus on his years in college or his early interests in comics. He never really mentioned stories about his father, his childhood, his ex-wives, and other details about his life that might have helped us to better understand the person that we knew then and remember today.

Having learned more about Don's upbringing, I now see why he might have felt less inclined to speak of his past.

Don's beginnings were humble and his life proved tumultuous--even from day one.

His parents, Hazel Maxine Kirk and Marion Newton, presumably met in his mother's Appalachian town of St. Charles, Virginia in Lee County.

His father, Marion, was born in the southern Virginia town of Clarksville on March 12, 1903. According to his Selective Service card, he was 5'9", weighed 190 pounds, and had brown hair and eyes. There was a scar on his right cheek.

They married on August 26, 1934 in Hancock County, Tennessee. Marion's address is listed as 2408 Hanover Avenue NW in Roanoke, Virginia, while Hazel's was still in St. Charles. The ceremony was forty miles from St. Charles and, given their son Donald L. Newton was born just over a

month later on November 6, it is highly likely the pair eloped away from the prying eyes of Hazel's young railroad town home.

Don was born a day after St. Charles celebrated its own birthday: Incorporated on November 5, 1913, St. Charles in Lee County was founded by a population of about 300. The building of the Knoxville Louisville Cumberland Railroad in 1886 connected Lee County to the region and led to the eventual formation of this coal mining town located close to the Kentucky border. By the 1930s, St. Charles was a thriving coal town with camps built by the coal companies; it had its own coalfield baseball team, The Mountaineers, a movie theater, police force and fire department. By 1950, it almost doubled to a population of 550. One anecdote is the town would become so crowded on weekends it was like wading through a thriving metropolis.

St. Charles was dissolved as a town in 2022 and, as of 2025, only boasts a population of about 84. But the St. Charles of about 90 years ago was the scene of Marion's alleged hi-jinx.

Marion was noted as being a "traveling salesman" and not around to help raise his own son. According to Don's son, Tony, calling Marion a salesman was probably an exaggeration, as Don's mother Hazel told stories that included colorful tales of Don's father and his barely "legal" positions of employment. Marion worked as a creator and runner of moonshine during the Prohibition era, and a gunrunner at other times, both hidden behind phony stories of his activities as a salesman.

Moonshining was so named for distillers making their illegal whiskey at night, so as to conceal the smoke coming out of the still. It flourished in Appalacchia, becoming its own illicit business to skirt government taxes on liquor. The advent of Prohibition in the 1920s, making alcohol illegal, was great for business and led moonshiners to travel state lines with their hooch. By the time of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, moonshine was the only method of earning a living for many. Marion was allegedly part of this world. It was either work or pleasure that kept him away from his young family more than he was at home, and his long periods of absence eventually led to him leaving the family altogether.

The truth of Marion's shenanigans wouldn't come out for decades, as stated by Don's own son, Tony:

> **"I had my DNA checked and it popped up that I had two first cousins that I never heard of. Marion had a second son in Ohio and quickly left that family."**

Much to Hazel's chagrin, Marion would still pop in from time to time, either between misadventures or when he needed something. In the meantime, Hazel would bounce around and leave Don with her own parents, Harvey and Kellen Kirk, as she struggled to figure herself out as a single mother during the Great Depression.

Marion's last visit--per family legend--had almost fatal consequences.

The story goes that Don entered the family's apartment to find that his father had shot Hazel, the bullet striking her in the face and leaving her needing a glass eye. The experience left her with more than that, though: She apparently became such a liability that her parents took Don in once more until she got it together. The story did not show up in the local newspaper the *Powell Valley News*, which leaves the possibility it was kept quiet amongst Hazel and her family. The 1940 Census has her and Don living in the Rocky Station section of Lee, Virginia with her parents, as an "unpaid family worker."

It's unclear where this happened: Did Marion visit Hazel at her parents' home in Lee or did Hazel have her own apartment? In 1940, Marion was himself listed as a "Lodger" in what appears to have been a boarding house in Fayette, West Virginia (over 200 miles from St. Charles), as a wholesale grocery salesman. His income, in line with Tony's story, is listed as "0" dollars.

The shock of seeing such an arresting scene--and being separated from his mother-- must have

affected Don throughout his entire life, and led to a somewhat cynical attitude towards others at times. It also led to a devotion by Don to his mother. As the incident became family legend, those unfortunate family memories made Don feel like his mother's caretaker and led him to watch over her throughout his life.

By 1942, Marion had relocated to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where he worked as a salesman for the Duquesne Mine Supply Company. Wanda Byrd Newton in Oak Hill, West Virginia, was his noted next of kin on his selective service registration card. She was his second wife and, together, they'd have a daughter. Marion died in Beckley, West Virginia on November 24, 1971.

Don was around 12 when he drew this charcoal illustration.



Don was diagnosed with asthma when very young, so Hazel felt moving to the southwest, where the air was warm and the climate was dry could only help with his health issues. They tried New Mexico and a couple of other southwest locales before finally selecting Mesa, Arizona, which they liked for its desert sunshine and warmth. It was a growing state with a good community, which often attracted people to stay once they had the chance to experience its exceptional climate and more relaxed lifestyle. Arizona's warm and dry climate was seen as advantageous in clearing up health issues. Ironically, In later years, the expansion of plant life from cultures all over the country brought allergies to Arizona's resident, negating many of those benefits.

After living in Arizona for a few years, however, Don succumbed to developing allergies and had to go receive a monthly allergy shot from his doctor.

Don tended to feel as though he were a "native" of Arizona during his life, primarily because most of his foundational years occurred within the state. In many ways, Arizona was the only real home he ever knew, or at the very least, his primary memories were of living in the state. For his entire life in Arizona, Don lived in the "valley of the sun," which is the large metropolitan area that includes Phoenix (Arizona's capital city), and a number of surrounding cities and communities.

Phoenix was thriving at that time, in part from the advent of World War II, as it became a seat of industry for the war effort after serving as an agricultural center. It also brought thousands of men into the Army training center Camp Hyder and the surrounding air fields.

Hazel eventually met and married an Army captain by the name of Patrick Henry Watts, who soon after their marriage served in World War II. Born in Waurika, Oklahoma on March 17, 1916, Patrick was living in Gila, Arizona by his 24th birthday in 1940, and working for the Inspiration Copper Company in the small mining town of Inspiration. Prior, from 1936 to 1939, he studied geological engineering at the University of Oklahoma.

Standing at 6' and weighing 160 pounds, Patrick was a slender man with a dark complexion and brown hair and eyes. The thumb on his right hand was missing. The next year, he was amongst the first class of cadets from the Air Corps Replacement Center at Kelly Field, Texas. After undergoing a five-week intensive course, Patrick became an Army officer and then off to an advanced flying school. He officially enlisted on

November 11, 1941. At some point, Hazel and Don (possibly with Patrick) moved to Mesa.

Captain Watts survived the war to become a stable father figure for Don, but was unfortunately diagnosed with bone cancer, and passed away on July 25, 1949 while in Waurika, Oklahoma. Watts was only 43 and still serving in the Army as Captain of the Air Corp at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, Colorado--presumably away from Don and Hazel.

During World War II, Lowry not only held aerial operations, but was primarily a technical training ground for aerial photography and armaments and boasted a population of up to 20,000 during this period. One of which would have been Captain Watts.

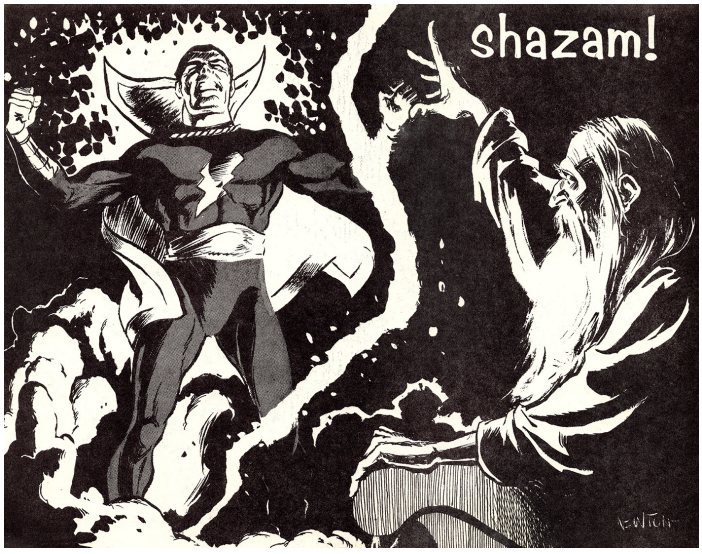
Don never really held a regular male influence in his life, so his ever-present connection to his mother was his only relative stability. Hazel (and presumably Don) were living at 28 North Belleview in Mesa. Patrick and Hazel were separated by the time of his death - Don's son, Tony, noted Watts divorced his grandmother before he passed away from cancer. I often felt that Hazel saw herself as Don's protector and primarily focused on him, even to the detriment of her own marriages. This was potentially a factor that Don inherited in his own relationships.

Regardless, at only 16 years old, Don had already lost two father figures.

His new hometown of Mesa was as up-and-coming as Don's own burgeoning creative skills. Just recently paved, through the Works Projects Administration of the Great Depression, Mesa boasted two new airfields during wartime, Falcon Field and Williams Field.

Don started drawing as a boy by copying the exciting heroes appearing on the newsprint pages of his favorite comic books, and would trace the art until he was good enough to draw comics on his own. Even at a young age, he possessed a mastery of drawing the human figure and the work ethic to keep developing that skill. Eventually, Don even dabbled in creating his own superheroes and comics characters in his drawings.

One of many Captain Marvel fanzine illustrations from Don.



Hazel worked during the day and left Don with a friend in Mesa, Arizona. Struggling as a single mother, Hazel bought Don comics to pass the time while being taken care of by others, like the family of his friend Ken Toney. It's likely she tempered a sense of guilt by buying him whatever comics he wanted to make up for her absence.

Still, Don had great taste in comics, mostly towards the superhero, and specifically *Captain Marvel* and *Batman*.

"I was getting Golden Age comics even before I could read and by the time I was nine or ten, I had a fabulous collection," Don told Bill G. Wilson in 1969. "I read most all of them, but *Captain Marvel* was my favorite, with *Batman* and *Daredevil* in a tie for second place. I did not care for *Superman* then...nor do I now."

The top of his read pile would have *Captain Marvel Adventures* and *Whiz Comics* from Fawcett Publications; clad in red with a lightning bolt emblem and shoulder cape, the good Captain was young Billy Batson, who spoke the magic word "Shazam!" and turned into his beefy alter ego. Captain Marvel never took himself too seriously,

as he fought the mad scientist Dr. Sivana (a wiry and short bald man with buck teeth and Coke bottle glasses), and a virtual army of wacky monsters and robots. Drawn by C.C. Beck in a slick, clean, and expressive style, Captain Marvel's sidekick, Captain Marvel, Jr. was realistically drawn by Mac Raboy in his own book. Where the Captain was aloof, Junior's stories took a darker tone, as the newsboy with a crippled leg gained superpowers to take on Nazis and criminals.

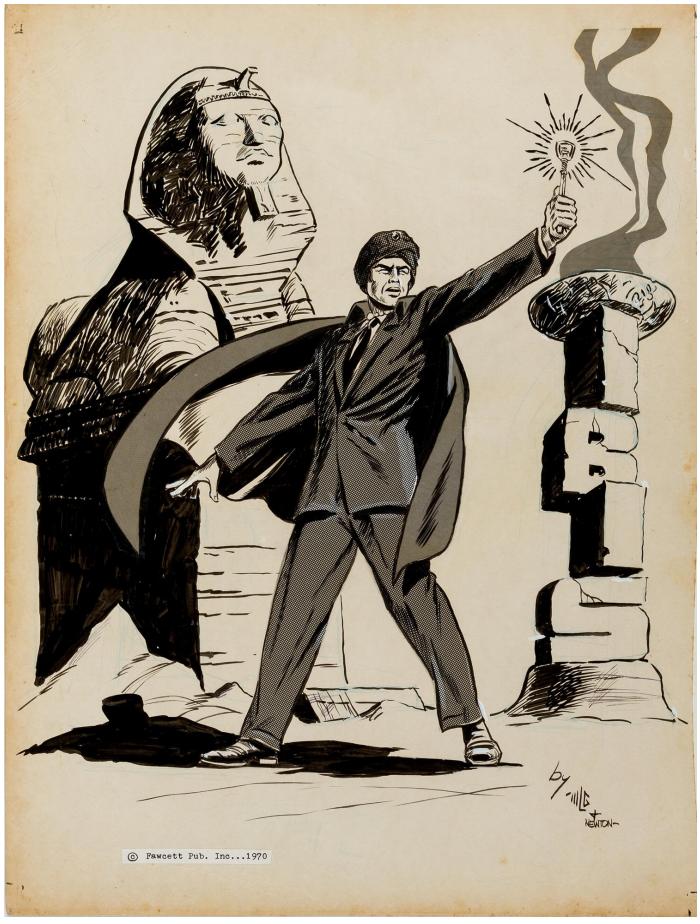
Fawcett Publications Comics' Circulation Director, Roscoe "Kent" Fawcett, requested that a new character be developed that fit the following specifications: "Give me Superman, only have his other identity be a 10- or 12-year-old boy rather than a man." Many have speculated over the years that Fawcett Publications was trying to combine two forms of male interests into a single character--one superhero power fantasy (Captain Marvel), and the other in giving kid readers a relatable alter ego in young Billy. The name "Billy" came from the founder of Fawcett Publications, Wilford Fawcett, who was nicknamed, "Captain Billy" by his staff. It is also interesting to note that the Fawcett Publications creators literally copied the powers of Superman in developing Captain Marvel by using super-strength, speed, and a mild-mannered reporter (or in this case, radio reporter) as primary concepts for the new character. This situation would later create major legal challenges for Fawcett Publications when DC Comics relentlessly pursued them in court throughout the 1940s and into the early '50s.

Don had admired the artwork of C.C. Beck since his early days of reading *Captain Marvel*. Charles Clarence, or "C.C." as he was known, was the most famous in comics circles for creating the costume and look of Captain Marvel. Even though Bill Parker created the Captain Marvel name and concept, C. C. Beck developed the look of Captain Marvel and was seen as the "good artist" by readers. Beck noted at times that he used character actor Fred MacMurray as the primary model for Marvel's face. Undoubtedly, the "squint" that MacMurray possessed in his facial features influenced the look of the eyes of Captain Marvel.

Beck also helped to create and design more Fawcett heroes, including such Beck creations as *Spy Smasher* and *Ibis the Invincible*. He was a powerhouse during his time at Fawcett.

The atmospheric *Batman* stories in both his own title and *Detective Comics* (from National, now known as DC) also made the top of Don's pile: With art by Bob Kane (sometimes) and Jerry Robinson or Dick Sprang (most of the time), Batman and his sidekick Robin fought a rogues' gallery on par with (and a little too similar to) that of Dick Tracy. Always deformed or freakish in ways that reflected their schtick and personality, the Batman villains often came from sympathetic and tragic origins.

All-American was the sister company of Batman's publisher, National, and published *All-Star Comics*, the home of the first major

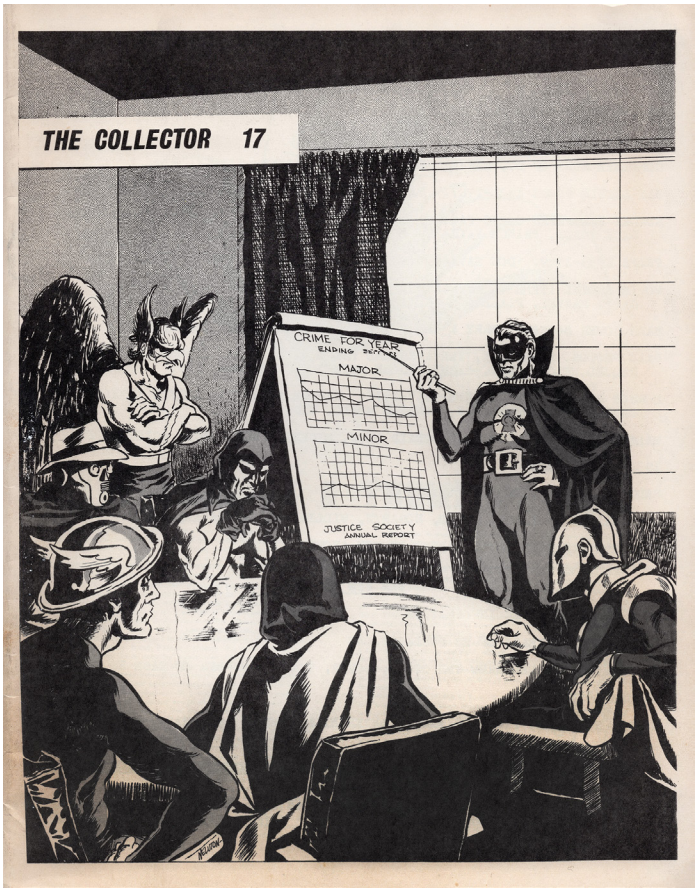


Don inked Marty Greim's drawing of Ibis the Invincible, for *Comic Crusader*.

superhero team, the Justice Society of America. Written by Gardner Fox, with art by artists like Irwin Hasen, Alex Toth, E.E. Hibbard, and Sheldon Moldoff, *All-Star* gave more bang for the buck (or, in this case, dime), as it featured several heroes at once, with Green Lantern, Wonder Woman, Flash, Doctor Mid-Nite, Dr. Fate, Wildcat, and The Atom.

Daredevil, published by Lev Gleason, was a two-tone hero in a striking red-and-black split costume that covered him from head to toe. A social crusader, Daredevil fought social injustice just as much as stock villains with the help of his twin boomerangs, alongside his kid gang the Lil' Wise Guys. As the book progressed, Daredevil took a back seat as his kid gang took the book over from him.

Don also read space fantasy with bug-eyed monsters and scantily-clad women in the pages of Fiction House's *Planet Comics*. It was sometimes trashy pulp done as a lush comic book, and the covers and interiors of Fiction House books would later inform Don's own work.



The Collector #17 cover of the Justice Society.

He read these at the house of his sitter who lived near the town's Main Street, close to a restaurant at 255 East Main, where Don met his childhood friend Ken Toney (whose family owned the restaurant). The boys became fast friends, killing time in sleepy Mesa by hanging out and reading comics.

In those days before comic book stores, the two would trek out to the local drugstore spinner racks to find new comic books to read. All the time spent poring over four-color adventures made a lifelong fan out of Don and nurtured a sense of independence that would never leave him.

"The downtown area was composed primarily of businesses along Main St., a rural area that was slowly growing into a city," Ken Toney recalled. "Mesa's Main Street contained a variety of small-town stores: A pharmacy, grocery store, music store, bookstore, [and a] theater."

That theater was where Don spent much of his time and it was undoubtedly formative towards his future work as storyteller and cartoonist.

The Nile opened in 1924 and was the largest movie palace in the area, boasting a large marquee in front and becoming a haven for young Don. Saturday morning matinees were for kids like Don, and he developed a love of the movie serials. Shown alongside cartoons and short double features, these serialized stories featured around 13 chapters of thrills and chills, with each episode ending on a cliff-hanger, where a hero faces certain death. Kids would have to come back the next weekend to see how the hero escaped everything from a fatal fall to death machines to car crashes to explosions...and more!

The movie serials were cheaply-produced kiddie fare, a genre dominated by two studios: Republic, known for their Western films and crack stunt teams, and Columbia, whose serial division skimped on everything from sets to

stunts. For all their cinematic faults, however, serials produced the first live-action superheroes from radio, pulps, and comic books. The best of them pioneered fight choreography and editing, as well as special effects (particularly through the Lydecker Brothers at Republic).

Comic strip characters like *Flash Gordon* from Universal films (starring Olympic swimmer Buster Crabbe) in 1936 and *Dick Tracy* at Republic in 1937 set the stage for the comic book superhero to take to the screens. The juvenile serial proved a testing ground for bringing the fantastic to film, even if the dialogue was stiff and the acting was usually not much better.

The first comic book superhero serial, Republic's *The Adventures of Captain Marvel,* came out in 1941, and proved the perfect medium for this new genre. Boyish actor Frank Coghlan was 24 when he played Billy Batson who called out his magic word "Shazam!" before a puff of smoke exploded out before him, concealing him to reveal bodybuilder Tom Tyler as Captain Marvel. The serial had little to do with the comic book itself, not tonally (it was much more serious), or story-wise (as Billy met the wizard Shazam in an Egyptian tomb instead of a subway), but it defined the live-action superhero. Tyler's Captain Marvel was doubled by stuntman Davy Sharpe, whose acrobatic skill was on display through somersaults and take-offs. As for the flying, there were shots of Tyler on wires and in front of a rear projection as well as the ingenious solution of sending a lightweight mannequin in the costume down a wire backwards for ascension (reversing the film to give the effect of taking off), and descending in a shot that would cut to Sharpe or Tyler landing.

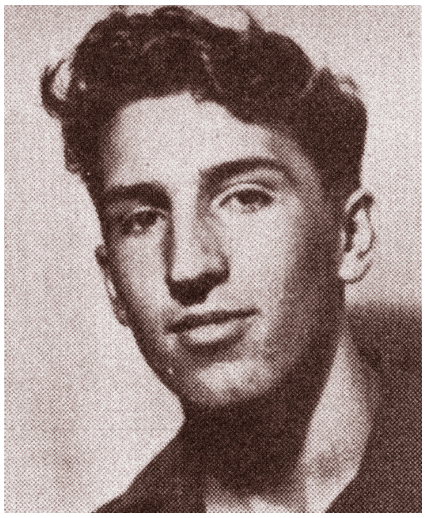


Tom Tyler, actor who starred in 1941's movie serial *The Adventures of Captain Marvel.*

A less impressive *Batman* serial followed in 1943, *Captain America* in 1944, and several more superheroes until culminating with two *Superman* serials in 1948 and 1950 that both starred Kirk Alyn as the Man of Steel. The serials set the stage for the George Reeves-starring *Adventures of Superman* TV show of the 1950s and all live-action superheroes to follow.

It's not unrealistic to think of Don as a young boy, looking past the flying popcorn from the other kids in the audience and focusing on big screen superheroes to fill the vacuum left behind by an absent father and then a dead stepfather.

Once Don was old enough to attend Mesa High School, his interests changed: he was very thin at the beginning of his time there but developed an interest in weightlifting, adding mass to his lean frame. Don's training eventually added enough new strength that it allowed him to try out for the shot put at school, where he lettered in track & field. On the track team, Don was known for his strength, despite his 5' 9" stature.



Young Don Newton from around 1953.

In later years, Don would often pose in front of a mirror or flex his hands in a certain way in order to draw a character correctly. By the same token, his knowledge of human anatomy was outstanding due to years of studying the figure and lifting weights.

Unfortunately, during his four years of high school, Don also threw away many of his comic books, later admitting how he "dumped out a huge collection for the garbage man. Almost

complete runs of *Captain Marvel*, *Whiz*, *Batman*, *Daredevil*, *Planet*, and *All-Star*!" He felt the comics were kid's stuff and no longer relevant to his life. Don was more interested in sports, girls and working out with weights than reading comics. He even set a record for the shot put and had plans to become a coach.

I can attest that Don would rue the loss of those old comics for the rest of his life, as he would often see a cover that reminded him of a comic book that he once owned.

Don was considered a good artist during his youth and was known for his drawing ability. According to friend Ken Toney, Don produced artwork for his high school, drawing for the Yearbook and painting signs for events and other activities. Don attended art classes but often felt as though he knew more than the instructor, which was probably not an uncommon feeling for an artist beginning to receive positive feedback from his peers.

It was not until Don attended Arizona State University that he became serious about becoming a professional artist. Don really took a dedicated interest in painting and began to study many of the art masters and masterpieces. He pushed his skills further into painting and found that he possessed an exceptional skill. Through his studies of various painters, Don even painted recreations of famous paintings by Peter Paul Rubens and others on large canvases. One particular artistic copy was of the Rubens painting, "The Calydonian Boar Hunt", which Don hung in his townhouse in later years because the work was so exceptional. At the time, Don casually mentioned that he "might as well hang up some of the artwork he had saved," but the work was exceptionally good for a college student. Don was also fond of the paintings of Titian, Rembrandt, and others during his years of artistic development. He would often paint small, detailed studies of their artwork in an attempt to learn specific painting techniques. Don's knowledge of the human figure was something that he utilized effectively throughout his career. He excelled at life drawing and painting, which helped to further develop those artistic skills to a higher level.

Don graduated from Arizona State with a Bachelor of Art degree in Painting. He had learned to delineate the human figure very effectively, taking painstaking amounts of time to study the anatomy and the unique proportions of the body. Don's college years provided a good learning foundation for his artistic skills, especially for his paintings, which he completed in both oils and acrylics.

In his first effort to make a living with his newly developed skills, Don produced a series of paintings to sell at local art shows. He also painted art commissions with the assistance of local art representatives. One of his largest commissions was for a series of six biblical paintings that were completed for the Hattie Kleinbrook Memorial Collection. These paintings of biblical imagery were each 3'x5' in size but still really impressive. The full collection was displayed inside a local Mesa church for many years. The images from the paintings were also used by the church as Christmas cards sold through their store.

Don desired to develop his skills for possible advertising and comics work, so he worked on his cartooning skills, as well. He accepted numerous freelance art jobs after finishing college. One such project was a cartoon feature for *The Mesa Tribune* newspaper entitled, "The Sports Star of the Week."



One of Don's biblical paintings for the Hattie Kleinbrook Collection.

The feature displayed caricatures drawn by Don of various sports celebrities and local athletes that had accomplished something of note in sports. Don worked as a freelancer and took on other assignments from the paper, further developing his ability with pen and ink.

He soon grew tired of having to continually find new art assignments while also working on side projects that he had already signed on to produce. The whole process was exhausting, and the work was inconsistent at best, frustrating the perfectionist side of Don. According to Don in an interview with the *Worlds Collide* fanzine, "After several 'dead end' low-paying jobs, I was ready to chuck it all."

College graduates with painting degrees usually went on to jobs in one of three areas of employment during the late 1950s and early 1960s: Teaching art to students at a school, creating art for advertising studios, or developing general freelance illustrations for magazines or newspapers. Don decided to pursue becoming a teacher in Arizona, preferably in art. He was anxious to earn health insurance and retirement benefits, so the job of becoming a schoolteacher seemed the best option for providing the job security that Don was looking for at the time and, as far as he was concerned, it was a temporary fix while he found his "real niche in life."

Don took the required Arizona Constitution teaching certificate exam and interviewed for an elementary school teacher position in Mesa. In the early 1960s, Don began teaching at Mesa Public Schools, at first the 5th grade teacher at Longfellow Elementary School, but soon realized he wasn't very fond of being a general classroom teacher. Being responsible for teaching reading, writing and math to elementary school children was not the image that he had for his future. He desired to use his art skills more in his job. In the 1960s, teachers could move easily in jobs from school district to district because all school systems were on the same recruitment and retirement programs.

A few years later, Don finally landed a job teaching at the Washington School District, where he taught art to students in 7th and 8th grade.

Don stands with his sixth grade class at Mesa's Longfellow school – 1962.



Don's new position finally allowed him to utilize the art training that he had received in college. Teaching art to children was frankly more interesting to Don than teaching English or math. He began this period of his career by looking for ways to energize his students into producing quality artwork assignments. One of the assignments that Don gave his students at that time was to draw a comic book story. Don often drew comics artwork in front of his students, so the inspiration to draw a comic book was right in front of them.

Once, when I asked Don about the quality of the students that he taught, Don remarked how some of the kids "were better artists than I was at that age."

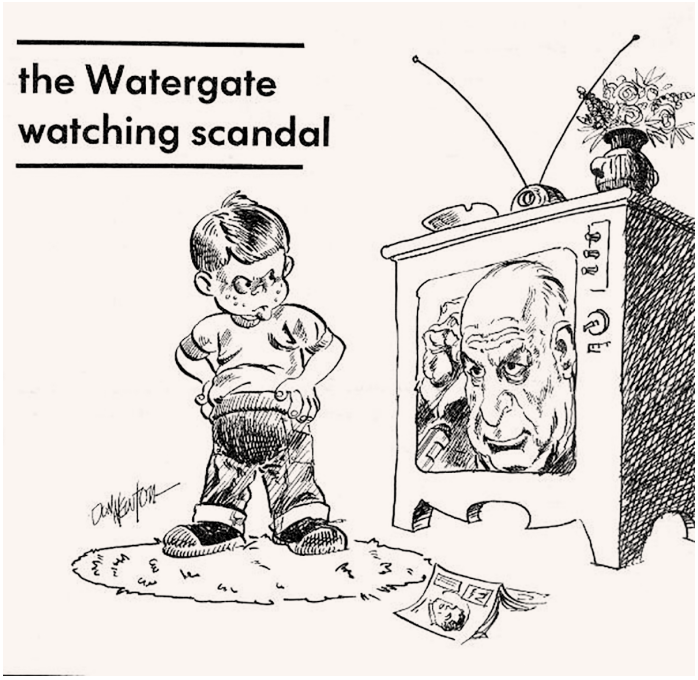
Around the time that Don turned 30 in the mid-'60s, he wanted something that let him use his artistic talents more than toiling away as a schoolteacher. Something that would also make him some money. He also really wanted to produce comic book artwork.

The idea of becoming a comic strip artist occurred to him, and it gave him a new direction and focus. His newly rekindled interest in comics started Don down the path of buying the comic books he owned in childhood. When he

found himself with free time during the summers that he had off from teaching, he began to work on ideas for comic strips to sell to one of the newspaper syndicates.

Don probably considered the idea of creating a comics strip for a newspaper syndicate to be a better option for an artist living in Arizona. He felt that cracking into the comics industry through a comic book company in New York City (like DC or Marvel) was basically an impossibility for a man who lived so far away from the action, but Don knew of cartoonists that lived all over the country who were producing weekly comics strips. Bil Keane, the creator of *Family Circus*, lived in Arizona and was known as a local celebrity. Nick Dallis, who wrote under pseudonym "Dal Curtis" for the comic strip *Rex Morgan, M.D.* and under "Paul Nichols" for the *Judge Parker* comic strip, was a resident of Arizona as well, having retired there to write his daily comic strips.

Comic strips also seemed to have more potential for side employment to Don because they were easier to complete on an ongoing basis. Drawing a strip was a reasonable second occupation, should he desire to keep his teaching job. Don had previously worked for the *Mesa Tribune* and understood newspaper syndication to some degree, and just how extensive the comic strip sections were.



Don has a word on the Watergate scandal in this cartoon for a local paper.

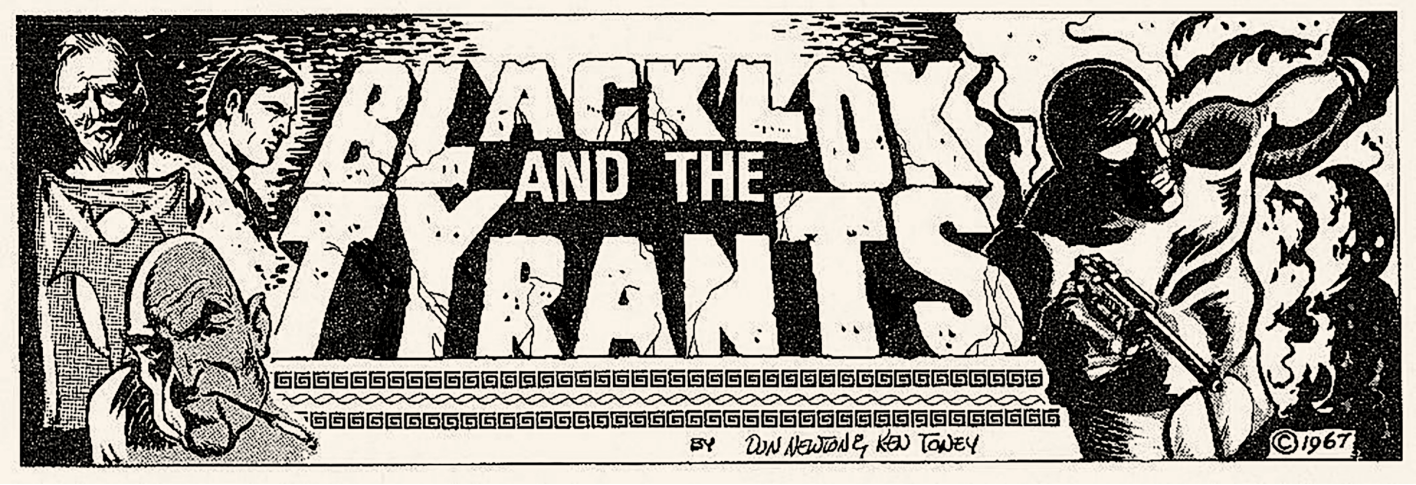
Don was not prone to drawing humor material, although his cartooning was excellent. His real love was the adventure strips of his day, especially *Flash Gordon, The Phantom, Dick Tracy,* and *Buck Rogers*. That really was where he wanted to focus at the time so those strips formed the direction that he decided to pursue in creating his own comic strip.

1966 saw Don take the first step with *Captain Galaxy*, his own strip that combined the ideas behind radio's heroic aviator Captain Midnight, and another favorite with the origin of the 1950s Green Lantern, who was a superhero/galactic cop granted the source of his powers from a crashed alien. Don's efforts on this strip did not go too far, as it was primarily some written material by Don and eight panels of possible comic strip material, but it was a start. The artwork was exceptional for someone who had not worked in comic strips, but in many ways, it might also have been difficult to keep that level of quality up on a daily strip. The basic plot Don developed for the story was dramatic:

Arriving in Citnala to cover the political crisis, Reed Corbet is compiling some of his notes for a story. Suddenly, a great ball of light suddenly falls to earth, several hundred yards from his house! As he gets close to it, he realizes that it is a space craft! Suddenly a door swings open and a figure stumbles out, but as he does so, a beam of light appears out of the sky and hits the figure.

Much like the origin of Green Lantern, Corbet attempts to help the figure but the alien tells him to go inside and to get a chest in the ship.

After being rescued, the figure tells Corbett: "I am Thrun, Captain of the Galactic Police Force, from the planet Eixom. Across



The banner image for *Blacklok and the Tyrants*.

four light years my deputies and I have pursued Strokuss and his crew of space villains."

And then he tells him of his gift:

"And for your brave attempt to help me here is one last gift; a drug used by all law enforcement officers on our planet. It will alter your entire mental and physical makeup allowing you to lift the psychological limits your mind places upon your strength. Under stress or in a hypnotic trance a man is capable of doubling his strength many times."

Corbet gains powers from the alien and becomes Captain Galaxy! He uses the belt that he found in the container and fights off a villain called "Frighthead," the leader of the evil organization SCAR.

Don paced with the daily format in mind, slowly and methodically advancing the story for readers of all ages. Small moments become cliffhanger endings to the daily strips, in hopes of bringing readers back to the strip the next day--to read more about Captain Galaxy! But we never learned where those adventures would put the good Captain, as the pitch never went any further.

I always wondered where Don would have taken the strip after this storyline was completed.

Unfortunately, Don failed to even get an offer (or even a rejection letter) to produce the strip from any of the syndicates he mailed the proposal to. Adventure strips were a dying genre, so it may have been that the syndicates just did not even give Don's strip a chance because they were looking for more gag-a-day strips.

For his second attempt, *Blacklok and The Tyrants*, Don invested more time into it than he had with *Captain Galaxy.* Having grown more confident, Don was able to step back and review his work more critically. Don redeveloped some of the *Captain Galaxy* characters into this new strip that featured more action and was more dynamic.

Don's childhood friend, Ken Toney, assisted Don on developing some of the ideas for the strip, and was given credit by Don. When I asked Ken about his work on *Blacklok* years later, he was stunned that Don had actually credited him. He had never seen the finished strips and was very excited to see them, but also amazed that Don thought enough of his input. Most of the work, Ken felt, was completed by Don himself.

Again, the syndicates did not respond to Don's submissions for *Blacklok*, so he began to tweak the concepts further. He considered renaming the strip to *The Sign of Blacklok***.** At one point, he sent copies of these to various friends and noted in some of the correspondence that he felt the *Blacklok* strip was too verbose and needed a rewrite to take out excessive dialogue.

I think comic strips were seen by Don as simply another possible option for drawing comics stories, but not his ultimate creative goal. In many ways, Don's interest in developing an adventure strip came after the comic strip syndicates made more money from humor strips like *Peanuts* and *Family Circus*, and were unfortunately just interested in that genre. Humor strips also had huge licensing potential for greeting cards, cartoons, and other mediums by the syndicate, so they made more additional profit from humor than from adventure.

Around this time, Don began dating a fellow teacher, Evelyn Evans, and they decided to get married in 1966. In many ways Don was searching to develop the family that he lacked as a child. Unfortunately, both Evelyn and Don were young, and the marriage did not last very long--only a few months, as both were either not ready to be married, or not meant to marry one another. Don had also moved to a new job at a new school further away from their apartment.

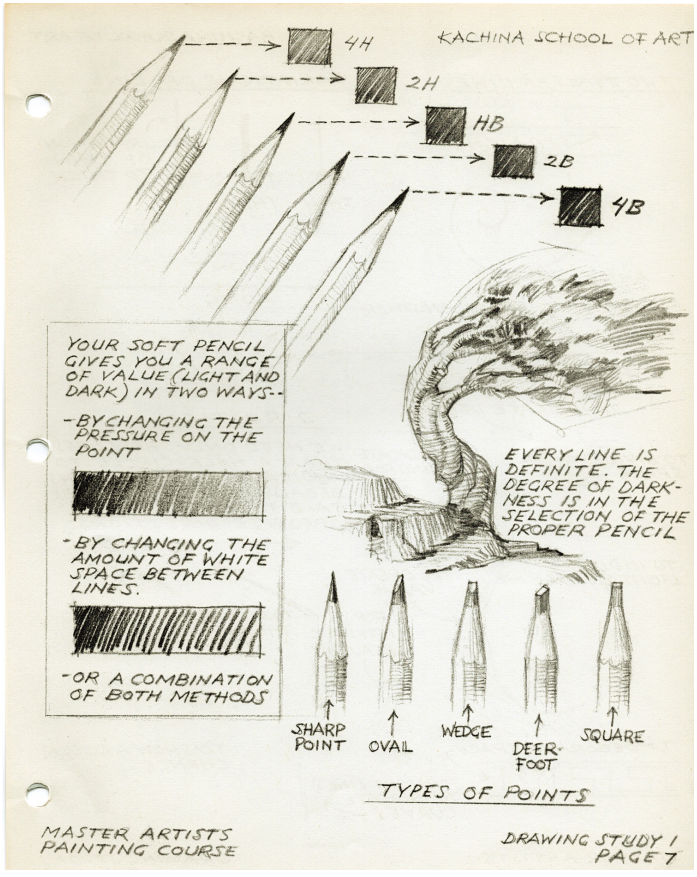


Illustration from the *Kachina School of Art*, where Don was an instructor.

Hazel may have become the real problem with their relationship. As was the case for his entire life, Don's close relationship with his mother provided a litany of difficult challenges for anyone who wanted to seriously date and have a relationship with him.

While teaching, Don also worked on the side as a part-time instructor for the Kachina School of Art correspondence course, where he edited, reviewed, and graded assignments mailed in by students. Kachina featured the *Famous Artists Master Artist's Painting Course*, well known in the comics industry as one that would provide students with excellent training for comic book artists, primarily through its extensive figure studies. Students who purchased the course would get mailed a series of large books that contained all the lessons, pages of art paper, and canvas to use in completing the assignments.

Don would draw, paint and note suggestions for changes on tracing paper overlays on top of the student artwork. He would instruct the artist on technique and figure drawing, among other areas, and would actually display to the student the mistakes they were making in their work. Maybe without realizing it, he was preparing himself for his future career as a groundbreaking artist by honing the craft of other aspiring illustrators.

In 1967, Don's new friendship with Geraldine "Gerri" Conrad quickly blossomed into a romantic relationship. Eventually, Don asked Gerri to be his second wife, even though he was concerned that he might be moving too quickly on the relationship. There is a good possibility that, like Don's own parents, it may have been a pregnancy that forced them to get married.

When Anthony Newton, or Tony, was born in 1968, both Gerri and Don excitedly moved into their new roles as parents.

Illustration of Native American family from the 1960s.



Unfortunately, as was the case with his first wife, Gerri found that Don's bond with his mother was too invasive into their relationship. Hazel was always around the two of them, as she lived nearby and was at their house every day to help out or to ask Don for assistance with something. Don was very focused on Hazel's needs while also trying to take care of his new family. Hazel was used to having a lot of involvement in her son's life, and now that Don had a new child, she wanted to assist with raising Tony and often inserted herself a bit too strongly into the relationship. This situation frustrated Gerri and eventually, those frustrations became too frequent and too strong. Gerri was a confident woman who did not feel that Hazel's involvement was necessary.

"I personally can understand the problems that any wife of one of Hazel's boys could be quite brutal," Tony reflected. "I loved my grandmother and do not wish to disparage her name in any way, shape or form. However, when she passed, it was discovered that she had kept journals from her teens to her elderly years. Her writings told me that her protests and protections were more about her own behavior in her own youth, than anything else. She was sometimes correct, but the bottom line was that nobody was good enough for her boys, as she referred to Don and me as regularly."

Something, evidently, needed to change.

That change came when Gerri decided to suddenly move out one day, literally leaving Tony for Don to raise on his own. This was undoubtedly a difficult choice for Gerri, but at the time, she just felt that she could not continue in a relationship of three adults. Hazel was very protective of her son and also very opinionated, and it reached a point where Hazel's input was too much for the new wife and mother. She tucked Tony into his crib, waited for him to fall asleep, and then quietly exited both out the door and their lives.

"My Mom has told me that it was because of Hazel," Tony said in 2017. "My mother just couldn't take any more of it. According to what Hazel told me years ago, I was left with a babysitter [while wearing] a dirty diaper and [Geri] just disappeared. When Don was notified, the fact that I recognized him and reached out with my arms to him, is the reason why he became a single father. I honestly haven't pressed my mother for more details about the situation during her visits. I have heard from her that he had a really special attachment to me. Apparently, I was 'his little man.'

"My own opinion is that [Geri] knew that Don was in a better position to give me a good life. She was correct: If you look at the totality of his career, from the time of my birth until he found his way into the comics industry, he went from adult fanboy to Charlton comic book artist by the time that I was five years old. Being a father was the proverbial 'fire under his ass' that led him to submit comic book artwork to any and all companies that he knew of at the time."


NEWTON

Chapter 2: Fanzine Days

Suddenly facing life as a single father, Don settled down in life and began to look with interest at comic books again. He might also have started to look at books and comics for children, or they may have been a welcome distraction; either way, they must have triggered memories of his own childhood reading comics.

Even though Don's childhood favorite character was Batman, Don found himself with a rejuvenated interest in Fawcett's Captain Marvel, making "The Big Red Cheese" the focus of his new comic book collecting interest. Don started to research ways to locate old issues by visiting bookstores and talking to sellers advertising old comics in newspapers.

Don's goal was to find as many of the *Captain Marvel Adventures* and *Whiz Comics* that he may have seen or owned in his youth. Those issues were now considered the "Golden Age" of comics by that first generation of comics readers who, still fans, had also become collectors. They organized into the early days of comics fandom by the 1960s, spearheaded by Dr. Jerry Bails, whose love of comics led him to correspond with major comics creators in the earliest comics journalism and history. Bails debuted the first issue of his fanzine *Alter Ego* in 1961 and helped usher in a comics fandom that not only rivalled, but eclipsed, that of the science fiction fans of the 1930s and '40s. Bails worked tirelessly with Howard Keltner to issue indexes of Golden Age comics, which became guideposts for young collectors to fill their collections with.

(opposite page)
Don's painting of the 1940s *Daredevil*, painted in the '60s.

What's more, Bails inspired fans like Roy Thomas to become comics pros, even after Roy, fittingly, took over *Alter Ego* from his friend and mentor in the early '60s. Thanks to collectors and fans like Bails (and then Thomas), comics fandom was growing and now organizing into larger groups of fans. By the mid-1960s, these fans were holding the first conventions of comics fandom.

News about the comics industry could be hard to come by, leaving the average comics reader hungering for information about their favorite comics and the creators who produced the stories and artwork that kept them reading each issue. The fanzines grew as not only a way to celebrate the medium, but also to report industry news and promote upcoming comics.

Eventually, the companies got in on the game, with DC, Marvel and Charlton Comics all producing professional level "fanzines" in hopes of getting details out to fandom that would promote their comics and increase sales.

Other fanzines during this time that also carried information about comics (as well as selling back issue comics, original artwork, and other fanzines) included *MediaScene* and *ComicScene* (both from dynamite comics creator Jim Steranko's Supergraphics); *Rocket's Blast Comic-Collector* (which carried ads selling comics and some articles on comics); *The Buyers Guide for Comics Fandom* (a tabloid-sized news and ad zine that was somewhat the "heart" of fandom at the time, and later known as *Comics Buyer's Guide*); and *The Comic Reader* (a comics newszine), which stood above many of the others because of its excellent industry news coverage.

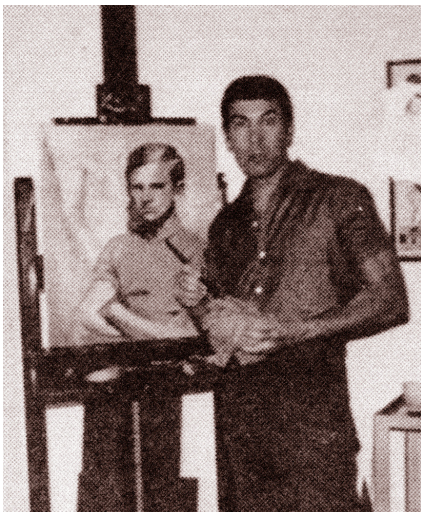


Photo of Don at the easel. From *The Collector* #17

The fanzine editors and publishers were a mixed bag. Bill G. Wilson, for instance, was only 12 years old when he started *The Collector*, inspired by another fanzine.

"I grew up loving comics, and when I discovered Biljo White's *Batmania* fanzine I was hooked on amateur publishing," Bill said. "I started out contributing oddities and anomalies in Batman comics to Biljo, getting letters published in the comic books, and picking the brains of anyone who would listen about what it would take to do a fanzine. I had a 'little' experience with my school newspaper, so it did not seem to me to be too big a leap to start publishing my own stuff. Cocky as I was, I had no interest in producing a 'zine with a ditto machine – those lovely machines with handmade masters and sloppy imaging fluid I'd struggled with in school – I wanted to jump right in and do it via 'photo offset' right out of the gate. Offset offered the best reproduction, and I was fascinated that it was the same process used to produce the very comics I loved and were my inspiration for creating a fanzine in the first place. So why not use the best to try to produce the best?"

Bill eventually had *The Collector* printed for free from the owner of his local print shop, in exchange for his working as an apprentice.

"He'd print *TC* for free, in exchange for my time spent after school and on Saturdays as a jack-of-all-trades 'printer's devil,' doing everything from stacking boxes to bundling print jobs," Bill recalled. "And eventually learning every aspect of the business from paste-up to darkroom to plating to printing and everything in-between. (Oh yes, and the occasional illustration work for those promo pieces.) I handled everything right up until press time and then supervised the pressmen while copies rolled out, which delighted them to no end! Then when I was old enough, I was given the reins to print the issues myself, so, for better or for worse, *TC*'s quality (or lack thereof, at times) can be laid entirely at my feet.

"A look at those early digest-size issues shows it to be just what it was: an amateur publication produced by a 12-year-old kid," Bill admitted. "But with each issue I was able to attract more and better contributors, and as I became painfully aware of just how much better they were at writing and drawing than I was, my own contributions shrunk drastically and I made peace with the fact that perhaps my talent was in assembling the best talent around, which I am convinced I did."

The ever-growing community of fans and amateur publishers like Bill came at the right time, just as Don was getting back into comics. He eventually found the world of comics fandom and fanzines through their classifieds sections and advertisements featuring comics for sale, and also by writing comics dealers and asking questions. He soon realized that a whole universe of comic

book fans and artists existed out there to communicate with and to use for finding the comics that he desired to collect.

It was through one of these ads that Don discovered a local Arizona comic book dealer by the name of Bruce Hamilton.

Hamilton was a regular fixture of comics fandom at the time, a comic book and art dealer known for being able to get his hands on exclusive comic books and unusual original artwork. Bruce had amassed a large collection of comics and artwork himself, and often bought and sold exclusive items from his own collection to keep his business thriving. In later years, Bruce outfitted his Scottsdale, Arizona home with a room-sized security vault to house his amazing collection.

Don wrote to Bruce about his interest in *Captain Marvel* and the two of them eventually met, starting a friendship that lasted for years. Bruce was a knowledgeable resource for Don's ever-increasing interest in Golden Age comics collecting, and was able to help Don locate some of the Fawcett comics he was on the lookout for. Bruce also turned Don on to other facets of comics fandom, including comics conventions.

After reading through some of the fanzines, Don eventually learned of the S.F.C.A., the Science Fiction and Comics Association. The S.F.C.A. was started by a comics fan named G.B. Love, who lived in Miami, Florida and featured a collective of fanzine publishers that rallied together to support and promote one another. By reading one of the S.F.C.A. 'zines, a reader would also get exposed to the other fanzines, as all periodicals in the group listed the current issues by all members of the organization. Love had formed the S.F.C.A. after publishing his own fanzine, *The Rocket's Blast*, in 1961, and worked with his assistant, John Ellis, to assemble the syndicate and fanzines. By 1964, another fanzine, *The ComiCollector*, and Love's own *The Rocket's Blast* merged to form *The Rocket's Blast and the ComiCollector*. The fanzine eventually shortened its title to *Rocket's Blast ComiCollector,* and later, just referred to itself as the *RBCC*.

Don learned of the *RBCC* and promptly sent Love money for a subscription. After all, it would grow into one of the "go-to" publications for comic book collectors in the late 1960s through mid-1970s. Don was able to use the *RBCC* to advertise his interest in collecting *Captain Marvel* comics. Comics fan and Arizona native John Clark had also placed an ad in the *RBCC* at one point, selling some books and soliciting an interest in buying others that he needed. Don contacted John after he noticed John's ad and saw he lived in nearby Phoenix.

"I became aware of comics fandom around 1966 or 1967, when I saw a letter from Roy Thomas in an issue of, I think, *Justice League of America*," John recalled. "The letter was plugging his fanzine, *Alter Ego,* so I ordered it and through it became aware of other fanzines, including G.B. Love's *Rocket's Blast and ComiCollector*, the go-to publication for collectors of its day. Through the



"The Great Comic in the Sky", which Don made into prints to sell at conventions.

RBCC, I started collecting Golden Age comics and became particularly interested in *Captain Marvel*. Circa 1968, I placed an ad in the *RBCC*, selling some books and soliciting purchases of *Captain Marvel* books. Don, who also subscribed to the *RBCC* and was also an arch *Captain Marvel* fan, contacted me after he saw my ad, and we became fast friends... At that time I was 15 and Don would have been about 33. It wouldn't seem likely that we would become friends, but we did."

John also has his theory behind why Don fell back into the Golden Age of comics:

"When I met Don he was already well into collecting, so I'm not sure why he took an interest," John recalled. "[But] I was always of the impression it was nostalgic to reread the *Captain Marvel* comics from his youth."

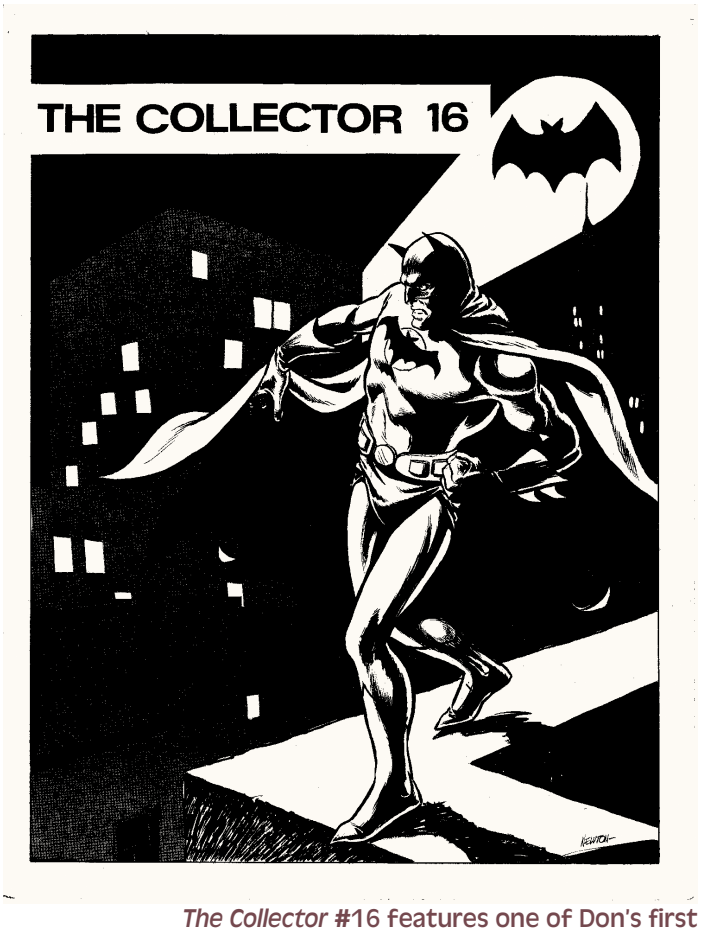
Once they got to know each other better, John and Don regularly met for food at a local Mexican restaurant or just to hang out. Don would show John what he was working on for the fanzines at the time. Around 1971 or 1972, John's parents managed a small apartment complex in Phoenix. Don moved into the complex for a year and it further cemented their friendship, as John even pitched in to babysit Tony.

Noting the terrific artwork that appeared in the *RBCC* by creators such as Robert Kline and John Fantucchio, Don decided to draw some artwork to send to G.B. Love. One of the pieces was pen & ink drawing entitled "The Great Comic in the Sky", featuring Golden Age comic book characters Skyman, Airboy, Bulletman, Target, Spy Smasher, Cat Man, the original Daredevil, and the Black Terror, all sitting and listening to Captain Marvel read a story to the group. At this point, Don's art style was still developing early on, but had already gained its illustrative polish.

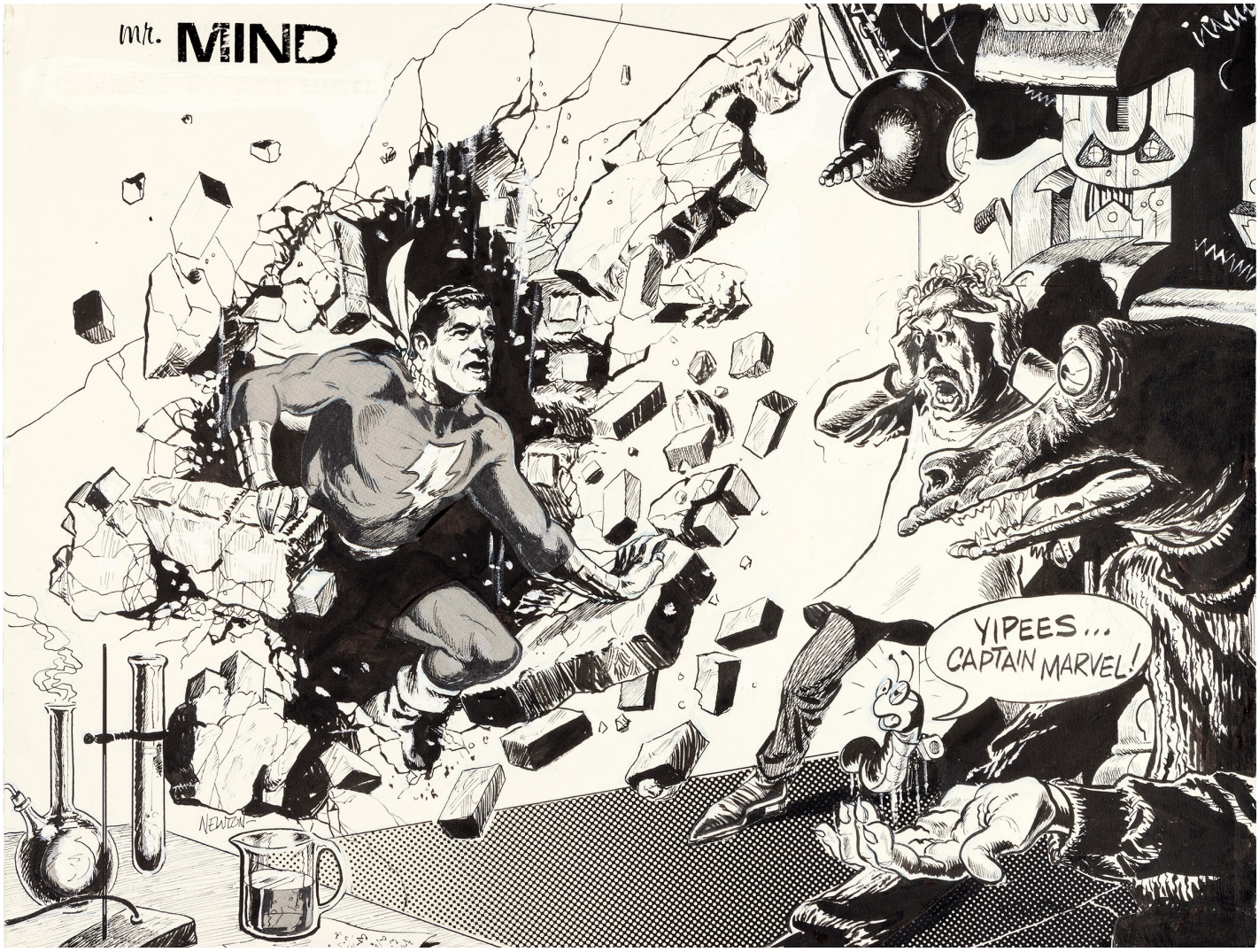
When Don asked Love if he would like more of his artwork for the *RBCC*, Love ecstatically proclaimed, "yes!" Love was so impressed with Don's artwork that he asked him to draw for the *RBCC* on a regular basis. Between 1968 and 1973, Don Newton produced almost 30 covers for the *RBCC* and became a "known" artist to much of comics fandom, a large group that would develop into an even larger and more expansive collection in the 1970s and 1980s. Don also drew a number of interior illustrations for the magazine and was seen as a regular member of the *RBCC* staff. There were even articles written by or about Don, which caused his notoriety in comics fandom to grow even further.

"After [*RBCC*], fanzines pretty much published whatever he sent in," John observed. "He was one of two or three of the most sought-after fanzine cover artists at the time."

"I immediately became a Don Newton fan when I first saw his art in G.B. Love's *RBCC,*" Bill G. Wilson exclaimed. "I reached out to Don in August of 1969 and asked about his ability to do some work for *TC*. He generously obliged, producing the now-iconic Batman cover for issue #16 because, as he said, 'I've been wanting to do



The Collector #16 features one of Don's first renderings of Batman.



RBCC Special #8 illustration of Captain Marvel busting into Sivana's lair. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

something on Batman.' Who knew years later he would become the Masked Manhunter's artist 'for real'? (And, incidentally, Don took great delight in informing me years later that the Batman cover was the one most mentioned by fans as their favorite of all his work.)"

In 1971, Don was asked to produce some artwork for *The Rocket's Blast Special* #8, the all-Captain Marvel issue, and Don jumped at the chance to produce the cover. The fanzine was intended and designed to capture the energy around the growing Captain Marvel fandom. The cover illustration was a beautiful full-color wrap-around image by Don, as well as three highly-detailed full-page illustrations and a two-page comic retelling Captain Marvel's origin from his debut in *Whiz Comics* #2. This was Don's first published sequential work of Captain Marvel, even if it was for the fan press.

Don also employed a drawing style that was partially derivative of the simpler lines of the Fawcett Publications comics of the 1940s. During his fanzine illustration years, Don completed Captain Marvel illustrations for numerous issues of various fanzines and established himself in fan circles as a great Captain Marvel artist.

Don often used the likenesses of the stars of the 1941 *Adventures of Captain Marvel* movie serial, Frank Coghlan as Billy Batson

and Tom Tyler as Captain Marvel. Don's artistic vision of Captain Marvel was one of a more realistic take, so he was heavily influenced by the visuals within these films. Don was such a fan that he often spoke in detail from both the comics and movie serials of his childhood. Now he was making them real in the pages of the fan community.

RBCC wasn't enough, as Don also accepted work from other comics fanzine publishers, who desired to have his terrific artwork grace the pages of their publications. One of the amazing things about Don's artwork during these years of fanzine work, is that no other artist's work looked like Don's. Once you saw one of Don's ink drawings or paintings, you knew it was a Newton illustration right off the bat.

These early comic book fanzine illustrations displayed Don's experimentation and ever-growing range: he often used stippling, acrylic ink wash, dry brush effects and other techniques in his artwork style that were unusual for comic book artwork. By the same token, Don was still developing his more linear and cartoonish style of rendering that he would later use for penciling comic book artwork.

Don took another swing at an adventure strip with *The Savage Earth*, which he submitted to Love to run over ten issues of the *RBCC* from 1968 to 1970. It proved extremely popular with the *RBCC* readers and gave him a proving ground for drawing sequentials. The professional look of the strip later enabled Don to be able to show the strip to comics publishers when looking to establish his first professional work in comics.

Running from *RBCC* from #60 through #70, Love claimed to have suggested the *Savage Earth* idea to Don, but his input may

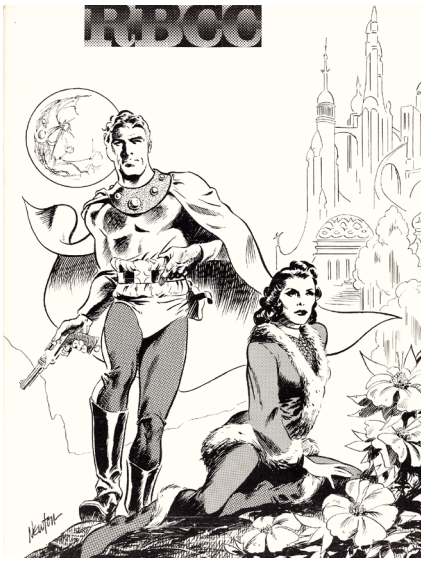
Don's retelling of the Captain Marvel origin—from *Rocket's Blast Special* # 6.





have been a suggestion for an ongoing strip in the *RBCC* versus any details on the concept of the strip. According to Don's interview in *The Collector* #17, he asked G.B. Love if he could produce a comic strip for the *RBCC* and G.B. gave Don the green light.

Don drew up a set of sample strips, which featured a *Flash Gordon* inspired adventure storyline with a nod to the work of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Don told me a few years later that he had a desire to draw something analogous to a strip that iconic comics artist Al Williamson would draw, as he was always a fan of his realistic work and liked the exotic locales and environments that Williamson drew in many of his 1950s stories for EC Comics. As a lot of artists have noted over the years, it is much easier to draw jungle scenes than city exteriors, so that was appealing to Don as well.

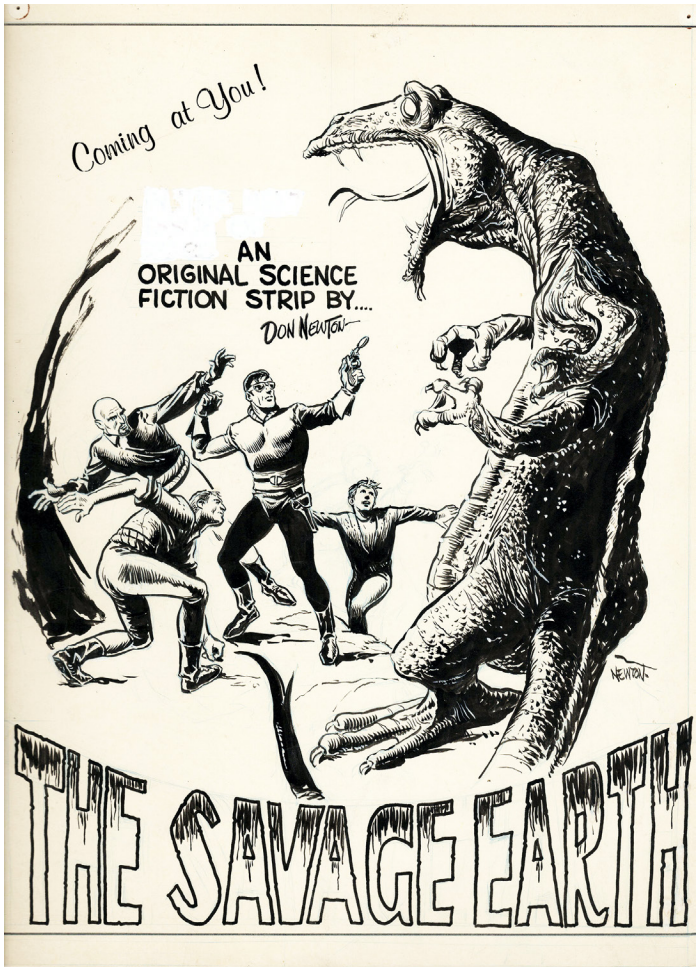


RBCC #112 cover by Don of his favorite serial star: Buster Crabbe, as Flash Gordon.

In its totality, the strip ran for 11 issues, for a full 18 pages of material. *The Savage Earth* had a very professional look to it and would have made for a very solid action strip for any newspaper at the time, were its approach not out of vogue with the then-popular humor strips.

The Savage Earth focused on Dr. Dexter Argon, his son Paul, their lab assistant Kirk and the dashing "Sky Ranger" who went by the name of "Freeze." The four heroes faced off against a large dinosaur in a 1968 ad announcing the strip as "Coming at you! An original science fiction strip by...Don Newton". The hand-drawn logo at the foot of the ad was slightly rougher than the slick inks of Don's figural work above. The composition may have lacked in dynamism but more than made up for in the slick rendering of Don's brush and pen.

Ad for Don's strip, *The Savage Earth*, from *RBCC* #60.



From the initial strip, it was a throwback to the space fantasy of Alex Raymond's 1930s Sunday strip *Flash Gordon*, with the same style of narrative captions. The opening panel features two nameless representatives shaking hands with their entourages in the background, and a caption that tells how:

In 2032, the nuclear treaty between the United States and New Eurasia, outlawed not only nuclear weapons but also many others designed for mass destruction. Thus any war that might come would be on a limited basis. And in 2047 the war came, yet for a year both observed the treaty.

But as death and destruction mounted it was only a matter of time till one or the other violated the agreement and resorted to the dread "Cosmic Missile".

As nuclear war lays waste to the world, Dr. Argon perfects his suspended animation capsules and, with no time to waste, sends his assistant Kirk off to procure his son so they can wait out the inevitable armageddon. The young Paul calls back on the last panel to alert Kirk to something "coming at us over the mountain!"

The second installment reveals what was coming: a rocket with an unconscious Sky Ranger, brought in by Kirk and placed in suspension by Dr. Argon, claiming the choices are to either leave him to die from the nuclear fallout, or give him a chance at life with the rest of them. The hand lettering opens the art up and sets the stage for *The Savage Earth* to continue blowing up in quality, with the group waking up 500 years later to a world overgrown with vegetation. They encounter mutants and a ghost from Argon's past: the aptly named Lars Destruction.

The Savage Earth also proved to be an excellent indicator of Don's growing abilities as a storyteller. Later on in his career, the professional look of the strip enabled Don to show comics publishers that he knew how to handle storytelling, continuity and to tell a story effectively in comics form.

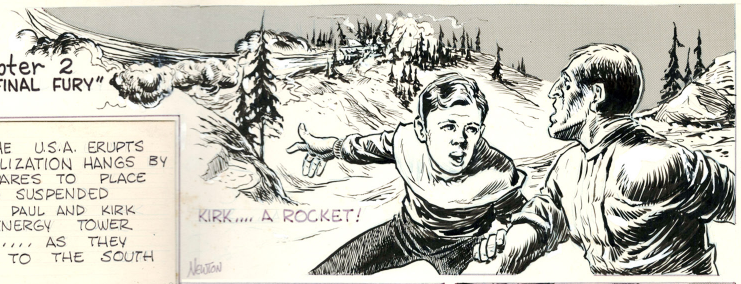
We're proud to present, for the first time collected ever, the entirety of Don's The Savage Earth. These scans were from the original art, courtesy of our friend Steven Kloepfer.



the Savage Earth

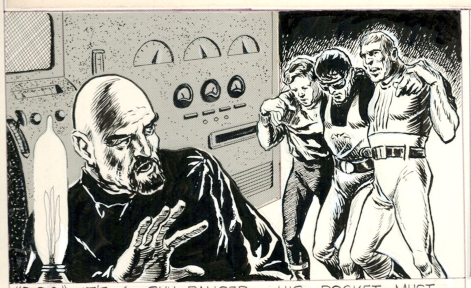
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@hapter 2 "THE FINAL FURY"

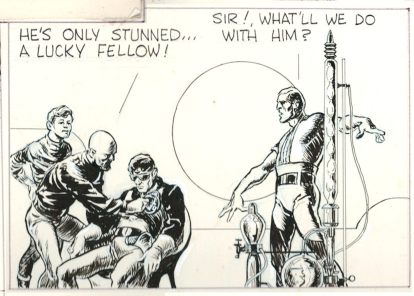


THE STORY

THE "LIMITED" WAR BETWEEN EURASIA AND THE U.S.A. ERUPTS INTO NUCLEAR FURY AND THE FATE OF CIVILIZATION HANGS BY A THREAD. QUICKLY DR. DEXTER ARGON PREPARES TO PLACE HIMSELF, HIS SON AND LAB ASSISTANT INTO SUSPENDED ANIMATION UNTIL THE RADIATION HAS ABATED. PAUL AND KIRK HURRY OUTSIDE TO LOWER THE SOLAR ENERGY TOWER SO THAT VIBRATION WILL NOT SHATTER IT..... AS THEY ASCEND THE MOUNTAIN PAUL GLANCES TO THE SOUTH AND IS STARTLED TO SEE .....



"DOC," IT'S A SKY RANGER.... HIS ROCKET MUST HAVE BEEN HIT BY A EURASIAN RAY.... HE'S ALIVE!









THERE IS NO CHOICE! WE CAN PUT HIM OUTSIDE TO DIE OF RADIATION... LET HIM SIT HERE TO SUFFOCATE WITH THE AIR LOCKED OFF; OR GAMBLE WITH US!.... HE **GOES**... WE ALL GO.... **NOW!**



AND MEANWHILE THE OUTSIDE WORLD IS RENT ASUNDER!

NEXT: "TOMBS OF SURVIVAL"

The SAVAGE EARTH

Cha.3 "TOMBS OF SURVIVAL"

WITHIN MINUTES THE COSMIC WAR ENDED AND A RAVISHED EARTH FELL SILENT, STRANGLED BY A SHROUD OF RADIATION. A YEAR, TEN, A HUNDRED, FIVE HUNDRED AND FINALLY A TIMER SETS TO LIFE THE CRYPT WHERE 4 HUMANS SLEEP.

NEWTON ©1968



THROUGH THE HAUNTING EMERALD GLOW A LONE FIGURE TUMBLES FROM HIS CAPSULE. GASPING FOR BREATH, HE CLUTCHES THE AIR LOCK AND WRESTS IT OPEN.



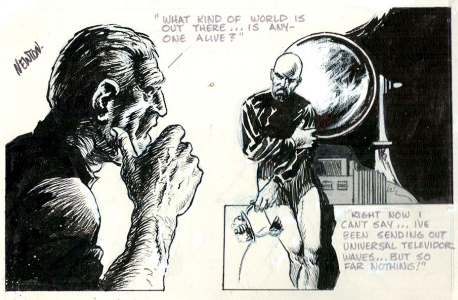
MOMENTS LATER DR. ARGON FORCES OPEN A RUSTED TRAP DOOR AND STEPS INTO THE BLAZING SUNLIGHT.

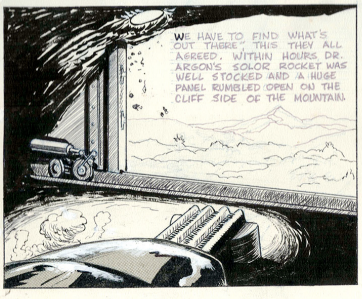
HURRYING BACK TO THE LAB, DR. ARGON OPENS THE OTHER CHAMBERS. QUESTIONS FILL THE AIR AS KIRK, PAUL AND ALAN FREEZE, THE SKY RANGER MERGE AND REGAIN THEIR COMPOSURE.

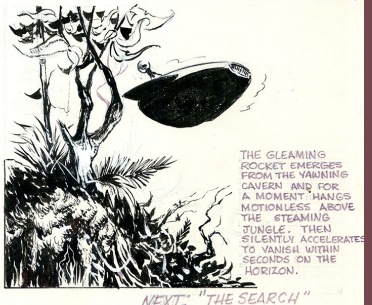




FREEZE LISTENS IN STUNNED SILENCE. HIS LAST RECOLLECTIONS WERE OF THE EURASIAN AERIAL ATTACK. "BUT YOU DID WHAT YOU THOUGHT WAS BEST," HE SAYS. "IM GRATEFUL TO YOU ALL!"





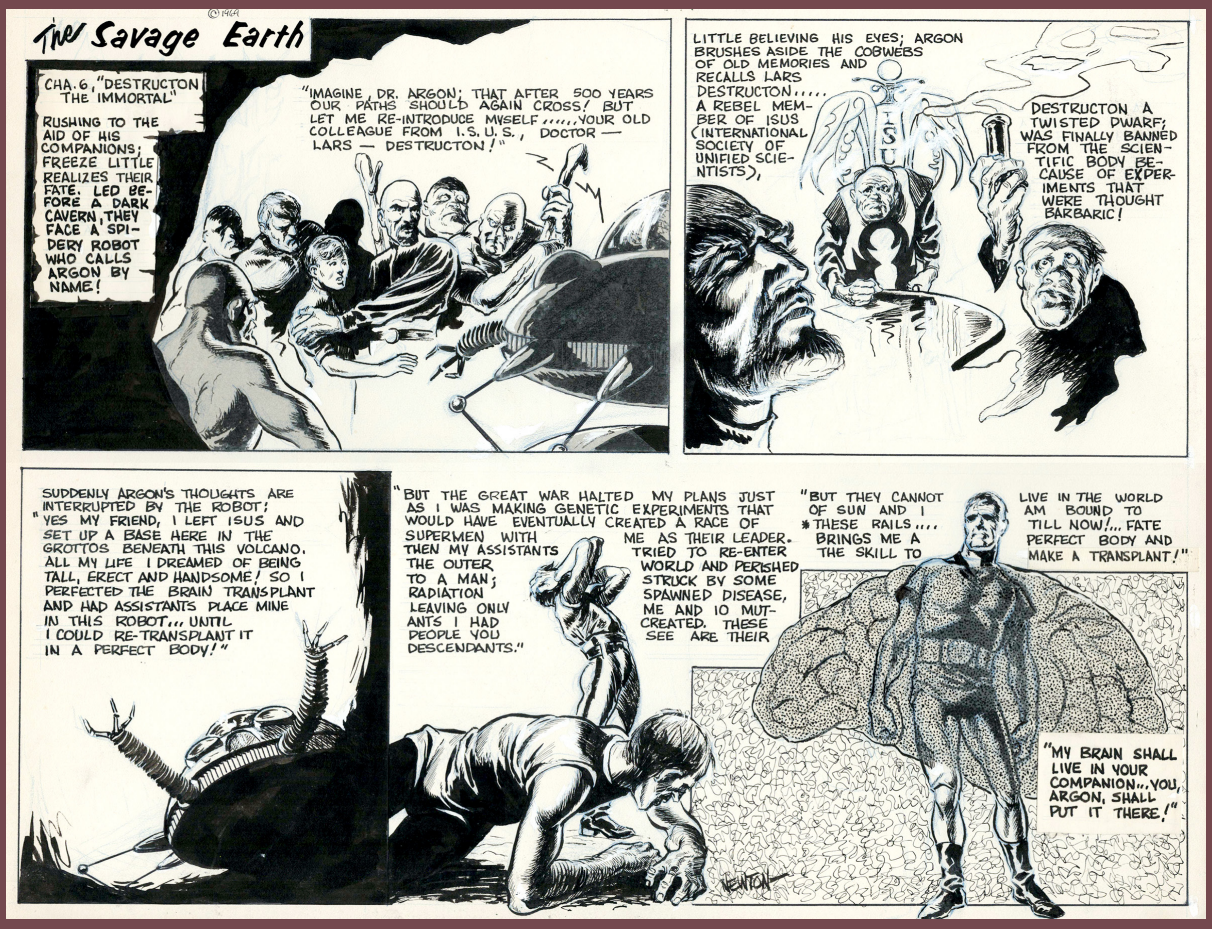


NEXT: "THE SEARCH"

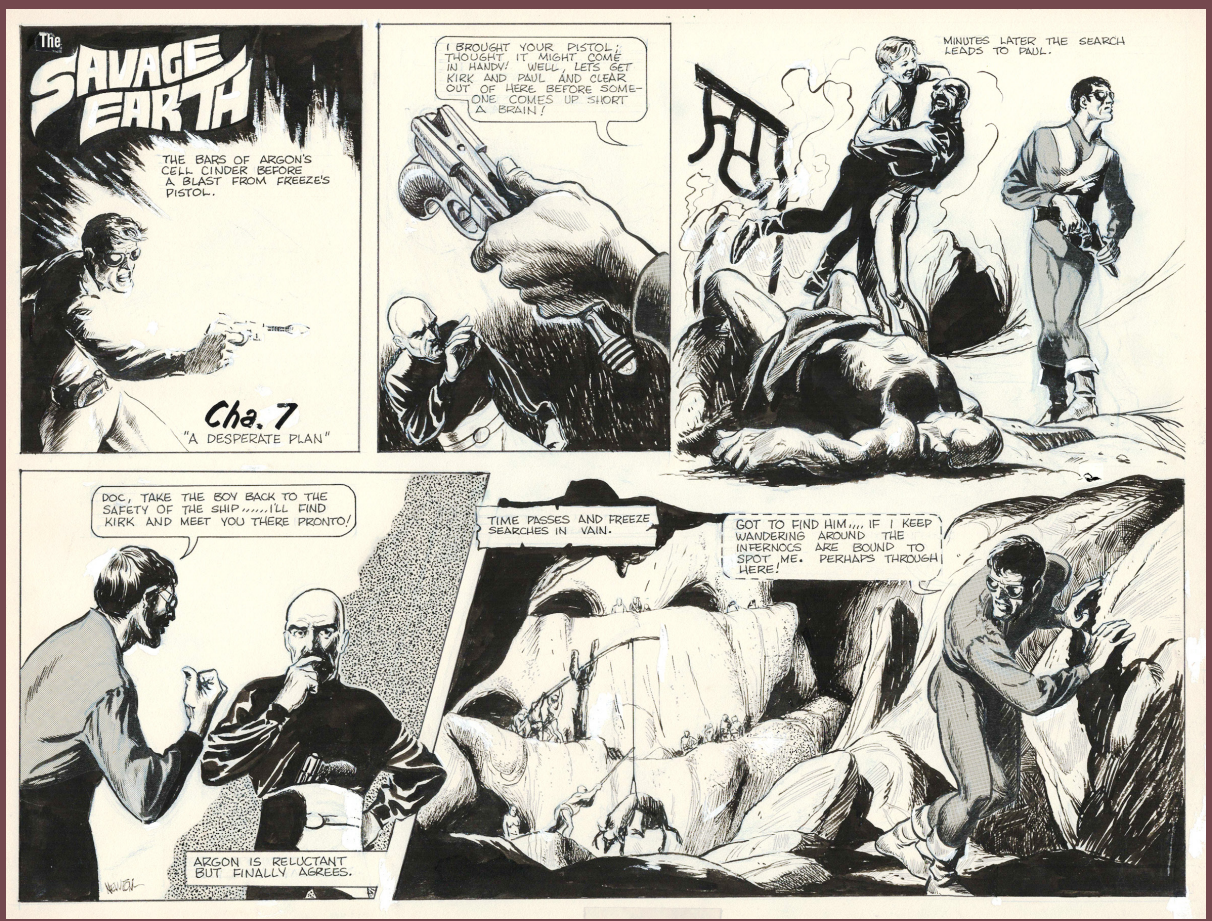

the
Chapter 4
"THE SEARCH" LEAVING DR. ARGON'S LAB, THE SMALL BAND FLOATS ACROSS ENDLESS MILES OF LONG DECAYED CITIES. WITH FREEZE AT THE CONTROLS, THEY SWING THEIR COURSE TO THE SOUTH.....
"ALAN.... NOW THAT WE'RE FRIENDS, I WANTED TO ASK YOU ABOUT THOSE FUNNY GOGGLES YOU WEAR... DON'T YOU EVER TAKE 'EM OFF?"
"HA! HA! WELL IT'S NO BIG SECRET... IN TRADE SCHOOL AN X-RAY EXPLODED NEAR ME, IT BURNED MY EYES. I HAD AN OPERATION BUT STILL COULDN'T SEE IN NORMAL LIGHT... IT'S BLINDING! SO I WEAR THESE SPECIAL GLASSES, WITHOUT THEM I'D BE HELPLESS!"
NEWTON
ARGON COMES FORWARD.... "ALAN, IT'S NEAR DARK, LETS LAND UP AHEAD FOR THE NIGHT!"
LANDING, A NEARBY CAVE OFFERED A WELCOME SPOT TO SPEND THE NIGHT.
AFTER DINNER THE GROUP GATHERS AROUND THE FIRE TO TALK ABOUT THE "OLD DAYS"... 600 YEARS AGO! LITTLE KNOWING THAT THEY ARE NOT ALONE... DEEP IN THE INKY DARKNESS, EYES GLISTEN... WATCHING..... WAITING.
NEXT: CAVERNS OF THE INFERNOS


The SAVAGE EARTH
© 1969
CHAP. 5 "CAVERNS OF THE INFERNOCS"
HARDLY HAD ARGON'S PARTY CLOSED THEIR EYES THAN OUT OF THE DEPTHS OF THE CAVE CAME VICIOUS ATTACK!
NO USE TO STRUGGLE ..... TOO MANY OF THEM!
THROUGH A LABYRINTH OF TORCH LIT CAVERNS THE CAPTIVES ARE LED; DEEP INTO THE EARTH ALONG NARROW CAT-WALKS THAT SPAN BOILING WATERS BELOW.
"ALAN!" WHISPERS ARGON, "HE ISN'T WITH US!"..... "WHEN THEY JUMPED US HE WAS THERE.... THEN?" RETURNS KIRK.
FINALLY THEY HALT. "DESTRUCTION!," SHOUTS THE LEADER OF THE CAPTORS.
THE GUARD STROKES THE GONG AND ITS VIBRATIONS MESH WITH THE HUMMING OF THE STRANGE RAILING .....
LOUDER AND LOUDER .... THEN "IT" EMERGES FROM THE CAVERN!
ARGON, KIRK & PAUL STAND TRANSFIXED .... UNBELIEVING!
IS IT TRULY YOU DR. ARGON? SO YOUR RESEARCH WAS A SUCCESS; AS YOU CAN SEE, SO WAS MINE!.... BUT PERHAPS YOU DO NOT RECOGNIZE YOUR OLD COLLEAGUE I HAVE CHANGED A BIT... HA, HA!
NEWTON

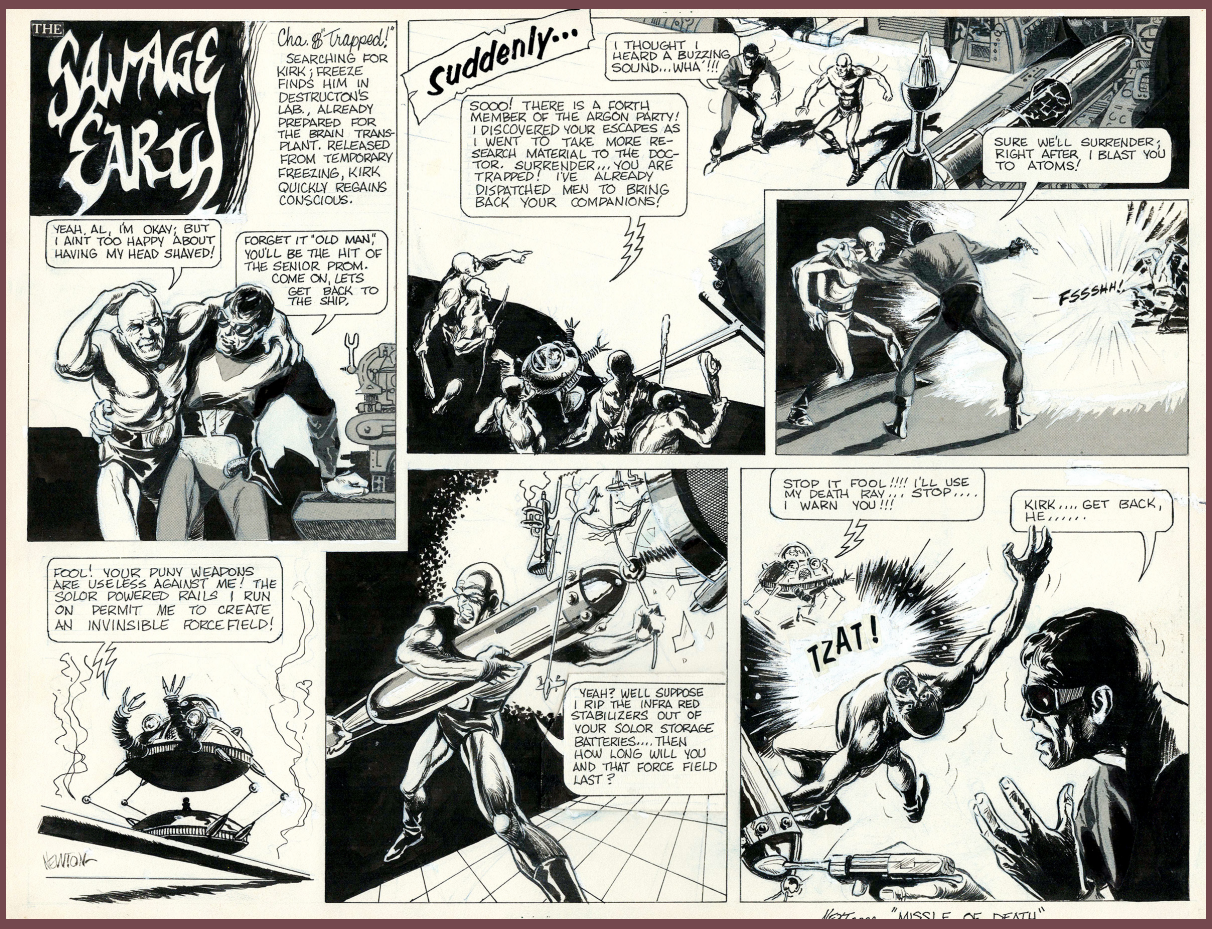

But...
WHERE IS FREEZE? DURING THE WILD FRACAS HE HAD MANAGED TO SLIP INTO A DARK CREVICE IN THE ROCKS. NOW HE STEALS BACK TO CAMP FOR HIS PISTOL.
ONLY MINUTES BEHIND..... NOW TO 'EVEN THIS BALL GAME!"
SUDDENLY, A WATCHFUL SENTRY STEPS FROM THE SHADOWS!
ONE MORE BLOW COULD SEND FREEZE PLUNGING INTO THE STEAMING POOLS BELOW.... BUT IN AN INSTANT, HIS PISTOL FLASHES DEATH!
GOT TO BE MORE CAREFUL..... I MAY BE THE ONLY HOPE THE OTHERS HAVE!
NEWTON
NEXT: "DESTRUCTON; THE IMMORTAL BRAIN!"


The Savage Earth
© NAEA
CHA.6, "DESTRUCTON THE IMMORTAL"
RUSHING TO THE AID OF HIS COMPANIONS; FREEZE LITTLE REALIZES THEIR FATE. LED BEFORE A DARK CAVERN, THEY FACE A SPIDERY ROBOT WHO CALLS ARGON BY NAME!
"IMAGINE, DR. ARGON; THAT AFTER 500 YEARS OUR PATHS SHOULD AGAIN CROSS! BUT LET ME RE-INTRODUCE MYSELF....., YOUR OLD COLLEAGUE FROM I.S.U.S., DOCTOR — LARS — DESTRUCTON!"
LITTLE BELIEVING HIS EYES; ARGON BRUSHES ASIDE THE COBWEBS OF OLD MEMORIES AND RECALLS LARS DESTRUCTON..... A REBEL MEMBER OF ISUS (INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF UNIFIED SCIENTISTS),
DESTRUCTON A TWISTED DWARF; WAS FINALLY BANNED FROM THE SCIENTIFIC BODY BECAUSE OF EXPERIMENTS THAT WERE THOUGHT BARBARIC!
SUDDENLY ARGON'S THOUGHTS ARE INTERRUPTED BY THE ROBOT;
"YES MY FRIEND, I LEFT ISUS AND SET UP A BASE HERE IN THE GROTTOS BENEATH THIS VOLCANO. ALL MY LIFE I DREAMED OF BEING TALL, ERECT AND HANDSOME! SO I PERFECTED THE BRAIN TRANSPLANT AND HAD ASSISTANTS PLACE MINE IN THIS ROBOT... UNTIL I COULD RE-TRANSPLANT IT IN A PERFECT BODY!"
"BUT THE GREAT WAR HALTED MY PLANS JUST AS I WAS MAKING GENETIC EXPERIMENTS THAT WOULD HAVE EVENTUALLY CREATED A RACE OF SUPERMEN WITH THE OUTER TO A MAN; RADIATION LEAVING ONLY ANTS I HAD PEOPLE YOU DESCENDANTS."
THEN MY ASSISTANTS
ME AS THEIR LEADER. TRIED TO RE-ENTER WORLD AND PERISHED STRUCK BY SOME SPAWNED DISEASE, ME AND 10 MUT-CREATED. THESE SEE ARE THEIR
"BUT THEY CANNOT OF SUN AND I *THESE RAILS..., BRINGS ME A THE SKILL TO
LIVE IN THE WORLD AM BOUND TO TILL NOW!... FATE PERFECT BODY AND MAKE A TRANSPLANT!"
"MY BRAIN SHALL LIVE IN YOUR COMPANION... YOU, ARGON, SHALL PUT IT THERE!"
NEWTON


"YOU DEVIL! I'D NEVER AGREE TO SUCH AN OPERATION!"
"YOU WILL DO IT, ARGON..... OR YOUR SON'S LIFE IS FORFEIT! TAKE THEM AWAY TO SEPARATE AREAS AND CAGE THEM! DOCTOR, YOU WILL BE GIVEN MY NOTES ON BRAIN TRANSPLANT TO STUDY.....TOMORROW WE OPERATE!"
BUT FROM THE DARKNESS, FREEZE WATCHES. AS ARGON IS LED AWAY, HE CAUTIOUSLY FOLLOWS.
LIKE A COBRA, HE STRIKES DOWN THE LONE GUARD!
"ALAN!"
NEXT....."A DESPERATE PLAN"
* NOTE: DESTRUCTON "RUNS" ON RAILS POWERED BY SOLAR ENERGY.


The SAVAGE EARTH
THE BARS OF ARGON'S CELL CINDER BEFORE A BLAST FROM FREEZE'S PISTOL.
Cha. 7
"A DESPERATE PLAN"
I BROUGHT YOUR PISTOL; THOUGHT IT MIGHT COME IN HANDY! WELL, LETS GET KIRK AND PAUL AND CLEAR OUT OF HERE BEFORE SOMEONE COMES UP SHORT A BRAIN!
MINUTES LATER THE SEARCH LEADS TO PAUL.
DOC, TAKE THE BOY BACK TO THE SAFETY OF THE SHIP.....I'LL FIND KIRK AND MEET YOU THERE PRONTO!
ARGON IS RELUCTANT BUT FINALLY AGREES.
TIME PASSES AND FREEZE SEARCHES IN VAIN.
GOT TO FIND HIM.... IF I KEEP WANDERING AROUND THE INFERNOCS ARE BOUND TO SPOT ME. PERHAPS THROUGH HERE!


THE SOLAR LAB... I WONDER IF ????
KIRK! DESTRUCTON ALREADY HAS HIM IN A FREEZING CHAMBER!!! HE WAS PRETTY SURE HE COULD FORCE THE "DOC" TO OPERATE TOMORROW! TOO BAD HE DIDN'T FIGURE ON "OLD FREEZE" TO GUM UP THE WORKS!
LETS SEE; "THAW" TAKES TEN MINUTES, I'LL JUST RESET THE CONTROLS AND WE'LL BE OUT OF HERE IN NO TIME!
NEXT.... Trapped!


THE SAVAGE EARTH
Cha. 8 "Trapped!"
SEARCHING FOR KIRK; FREEZE FINDS HIM IN DESTRUCTONS LAB., ALREADY PREPARED FOR THE BRAIN TRANSPLANT. RELEASED FROM TEMPORARY FREEZING, KIRK QUICKLY REGAINS CONSCIOUS.
YEAH, AL, I'M OKAY; BUT I AINT TOO HAPPY ABOUT HAVING MY HEAD SHAVED!
FORGET IT 'OLD MAN,' YOU'LL BE THE HIT OF THE SENIOR PROM. COME ON, LETS GET BACK TO THE SHIP.
Suddenly...
I THOUGHT I HEARD A BUZZING SOUND...WHA'!!!
SOOO! THERE IS A FORTH MEMBER OF THE ARGON PARTY! I DISCOVERED YOUR ESCAPES AS I WENT TO TAKE MORE RESEARCH MATERIAL TO THE DOCTOR. SURRENDER... YOU ARE TRAPPED! I'VE ALREADY DISPATCHED MEN TO BRING BACK YOUR COMPANIONS!
SURE WE'LL SURRENDER; RIGHT AFTER I BLAST YOU TO ATOMS!
FSSSHH!
FOOL! YOUR PUNY WEAPONS ARE USELESS AGAINST ME! THE SOLOR POWERED RAILS I RUN ON PERMIT ME TO CREATE AN INVINSIBLE FORCE FIELD!
YEAH? WELL SUPPOSE I RIP THE INFRA RED STABILIZERS OUT OF YOUR SOLOR STORAGE BATTERIES.... THEN HOW LONG WILL YOU AND THAT FORCE FIELD LAST?
STOP IT FOOL!!!! I'LL USE MY DEATH RAY... STOP.... I WARN YOU!!!
KIRK.... GET BACK, HE.....
TZAT!
"MISSLE OF DEATH"


©1970
THE SAVAGE EARTH
"MISSLE OF DEATH"
IN A MOMENT OF UNCONTROLED RAGE; DESTRUCTON FIRES HIS DEATH RAY AT KIRK CONRAD.
AT THE SAME INSTANT, DR. ARGON, WHO MANAGED TO ELUDE THE INFERNOCS, IS IN FLIGHT ABOARD HIS SOLOR ROCKET.
WONDERING WHY HIS FRIENDS HAVE NOT EXITED THE CAVE, HE TUNES IN FREEZES COMMUNICATION LOCKET TO HEAR....
DEAD! YOU KILLED HIM!
TAKE THAT MAN PRISONER, YOU DOGS!
THE DEATH OF YOUR FRIEND LEAVES ME WITHOUT A TRANSPLANT SUBJECT. MOST UNFORTUNATE! LETS SEE; ABOUT 5'11", 175 LBS, OBVIOUS EYE DEFECT, NOT AS FORMIDABLE A PHYSICAL SPECIMEN AS YOUR COMPANION, BUT YOU'LL DO. WHEN MY MEN RETURN DR. ARGON, IT IS YOU WHO SHALL HOUSE THE BRAIN OF DESTRUCTON!
DAD!.... NOT KIRK! IT CAN'T HAVE HAPPENED!
SAVE THE TEARS BOY! LETS JUST THINK OF ONE THING RIGHT NOW; HELPING ALAN. WE CAN'T RISK RE-ENTERING THE CAVES,.. BUT THERE'S A WAY... A LONG SHOT...!
GET TO THE TARGET FINDER SCREEN, DESTRUCTON'S SOLOR TOWER IS IN THE MOUTH OF THE VOLCANO. "LOCK ON" FOR A MAGNETIC MISSLE AT 1000 YARDS
I JUST HOPE ALAN KEEPS HIS HEAD IN THESE NEXT FEW SECONDS!
FASHAW
BARUM
NEWTON


THE ROOM
UUHHH! MY GLASSES!!!
NEXT... "DESTRUCTONS WORLD CRUMBLES"


© 1970 DON NEWTON
Cha. 10
"DESTRUCTON'S WORLD CRUMBLES"
ARGON'S MISSLE DESTROYS THE SOLOR TOWER AND THE UNLEASHED ENERGY CREATES A CHAIN REACTION OF HAVOC IN THE DEPTHS BELOW.
FREEZE; STANDING TOO CLOSE TO THE INITIAL EXPLOSION IS HURLED ACROSS THE LAB. INTO A CEILING BUTTRESS. THE IMPACT SNAPS OFF HIS GLASSES.
THE Savage Earth
MY EYES!
BLINDED BY NORMAL LIGHT, FREEZE GROPES DESPERATELY FOR HIS GOGGLES.
NEWTON
A-A-ALAN,,, I GOT UM,,, OVER HERE!
KIRK! I THOUGHT YOU WERE DONE FOR!
NOT YET, BUT MY TIMES RUNNING OUT,,, SOS YOURS IF YOU DON'T SCRAM!
NO! I'LL GET US BOTH OUT!
CAN'T! LEAVE ME!!! LEAVE ME WITH HIM!!! TRAPPED BY THE DEVICE THAT GAVE HIM ARTIFICAL LIFE,,, L-LEAVE ME!
GET IT OFF!!! IT'S CUT MY ENERGY RAIL,,, I'M BEING STRANGLED!!! HELP ME,,,I COMMAND YOU!
I-ZUT ZUT
HELP MEE·····
YOU'RE IN NO SHAPE TO ARGUE "BIG MAN!" HANG ON FOR A ROUGH RIDE!
NEWTON
THE DOOR,,, BLOCKED BY FLAMES,,, WE'RE TRAPPED!
NEXT,,, "CLIMAX!"


© 1970
The Savage Earth
CHA. II
"CLIMAX"
ALAN! ALAN! ARE YOU OKAY? I'M TUNED IN ON YOU...
I HEAR YOU! KIRK'S DYING,,, I'VE GOT TO GET US OUT OF HERE BUT THE ENTRANCE IS BLOCKED BY FIRE. THIS WHOLE LAB IS GOING TO "GO" ANY MINUTE,,, CAN YOU HELP US???
LISTEN ALAN! HIS LAB IS LIKE MINE; SOMEWHERE THERE'S GOT TO BE AN AIR SUPPLY UNIT,,, FIND IT,,, CLOSE OFF THE BLOWERS AND YOU COULD PASS THROUGH IT TO THE OUTSIDE!
YES!!! I SEE IT! WE'LL TRY TO GET THROUGH, KEEP A RADIO BERING ON US!
CLICK!
NEWTON


HOURS LATER...
ARGON! HOW DID I GET ABOARD? I REMEMBER FIRING MY PISTOL,,, AND THEN???
I KEPT A "FIX" ON YOU SO I COULD DETERMINE YOUR EXIT POINT. WE FOUND YOU OUTSIDE THE FANS IN A STATE OF EXHAUSTION! LITTLE WONDER; YOU DRUG A 220 LB. DEAD MAN THROUGH NEARLY A MILE OF THAT TUBING!
THEN KIRK DIDN'T MAKE IT!
I'M AFRAID NOT! HE WAS STRUCK BY A DEATH RAY AND THERE WAS NO CHANCE,,, IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME!
WHAT ABOUT THE MUTANTS, THEIR CAVERNS?
SOME PROBABLY SURVIVED. I REGRET HAVING TO SET MY HAND AGAINST THOSE MINDLESS BRUTES,,, A NEEDLESS SLAUGHTER IN ORDER TO SAVE OURSELVES. PERHAPS THOSE WHO DID ESCAPE THE HOLOCAUST CAN NOW EVOLVE BEYOND THE PRIMITIVE STAGE DESTRUCTION KEPT THEM IN THROUGH HIS GENETIC EXPERIMENTS!
THEN ISN'T IT AXIOMATIC THAT SCIENCE, LIKEWISE DELIVERED US OUT OF THAT WAR AND NOW LEAVES US AT THE MERCY OF UNTOLD TERRORS ON THIS,,, SAVAGE EARTH!
YET I WONDER; WAS IT BY CHANCE THAT WE STUMBLED INTO DESTRUCTON'S "WORLD" OR IS IT BUT ONE OF A MULTITUDE OF HORRORS VISITED UPON THIS PLANET BY THE RADIATION OF THE COSMIC BOMB? MANKIND MASTERED THE LAND, THE SEA AND FINALLY THE HEAVENS,,, ONLY TO BE DESTROYED BY HIS OWN SCIENCE!
NEWTON

Years after Don's work at the *RBCC*, G.B. Love would often proclaim to have "discovered" Don Newton. Considering Don's output for *RBCC*, his statement is probably not far from the truth. Love certainly provided the primary vehicle that brought attention to Don's terrific artwork and likely boosted Don's own confidence in his work.

Don contributed a Superman cover and convention report on Multicon '70 to Alan Light's *All Dynamic* #7 fanzine, mailed out to subscribers on September 28, 1970 and limited to just 600 copies. Don details flying out to Oklahoma City with John Clark to attend the show, and staying in the old Skirvin Hotel downtown.

The first thing Don talks about from the dealers room, of course, is Captain Marvel:

> **One collector in particular, Wilt Conine, showed me his beautiful collection of Golden Age number ones. He also said that he had completed the entire set of "Captain Marvel" adventures...forty seven more issues and I'll catch up to you, Wilt!**

While there, Don also met up with Russ Cochran (then a college professor about to make the venture into publishing) and Gordon Love himself. Don also sold five paintings within his first hour there and swore "Next year I'll come loaded". That undoubtedly allowed him the $100 to spend on comics, and he reveals how he's mostly in it for the art, with the exception of one book:

> **Even though I bought so many comics at the con, I actually read very few of them! *Captain Marvel* is the only one I can stomach (because of the satire). I just "look" at the rest. But then, a stamp collector doesn't mail letters with all his stamps!**

In 1972, through the excitement of the comics community, Don was struck a blow when much of his work and comic book collection were destroyed in a flood that struck the home he worked hard to buy for himself and Tony.

"That house was near a canal which flooded when there was a huge rain and the canal breached, and all of the low-lying houses (like ours) flooded with water," Tony recalled years later. "Don's studio was in the back half of the house. As a result, he lost most of his comic book collection and lots of furniture. It was quite a bizarre experience. Half of the street flooded with a good portion of the houses on the street only experiencing soggy yards while our house flooded. Don was trying to save as much as he could while I was basically watching where the water level was. When it was under the carpet in the living room, he scooped me up and put me in the car, which was staged up the road out of the flooded area."

Don would never again own a house, instead opting to rent various townhomes or apartments.

Don's popularity as an artist in comics fandom grew from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s. In many ways, he was viewed as a professional artist, because his artwork was already of a professional caliber. He was an artist that many fanzine editors sought to produce artwork for their productions, and Don usually did what he could to fill those requests.

In many ways, [Don] was viewed as a professional artist, because his artwork was already of a professional caliber.

In 1972, Don's friend Bruce Hamilton was the chairman of one of the first comic book conventions ever to be held in the Phoenix, Arizona area, PhoenixCon '70 and '72. Drawing on his friendship with Bruce, Don became involved in helping with the convention. He created drawings for the convention booklet (many in collaboration with John Clark), and ran the art show.

Don continued to lift weights and had been a "body builder" for most of his life. Noting his similarity to the heroes of his youth, Don created two Captain Marvel costumes in the early 1970s. He talked his girlfriend at the time, Pat Long, or his mother, Hazel, into sewing the costumes

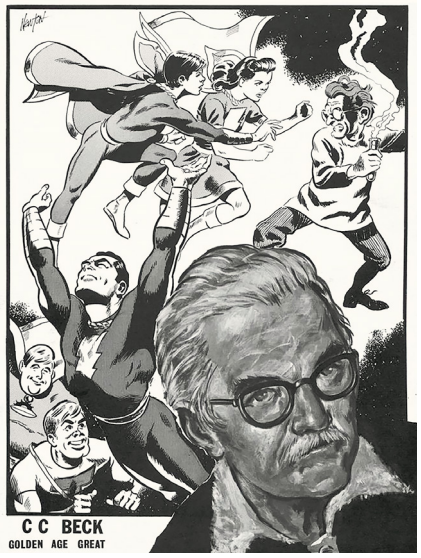
and wore them to comic book conventions such as PhoenixCon, Multicon and HoustonCon, and entered the costume contests at each of the events. While today's cosplay culture involves fans wearing costumes throughout the convention hall, costumes were generally saved for costume contests and masquerade balls.

In 1972, after PhoenixCon, a producer of the local KPHO, Channel 5 (non-affiliated at the time, now CBS) television station saw Don in the Captain Marvel costume, along with his girlfriend Pat Long in her Mary Marvel one. This producer worked on the popular kids' television show, *Wallace and Ladmo*, starring Wallace Thompson, Ladmo Kwiatkowski, and Pat McMahon, which began airing back in 1954. The show was a popular Phoenix institution, performing skits for kids that were packaged between cartoons and launching an entire local franchise. By 1959, Wallace and Ladmo owned two drive-in movie theaters (it boasted a Ladmo Burger, as large as a 45 record), and by 1966 owned five restaurants.



Don looked the part when he dressed as Captain Marvel!

Don appeared on the television show along with his friends who also appeared in costume: John Clark appeared as The Shadow and David Lee as Captain Tootsie. There was a regular superhero character on the show named Captain Super, who usually complained about his lack of press and how people were taking advantage of him. He was sort of a has-been superhero. Don and company appeared in a little feature with Captain Super that ended up with Don showing up Super in contests of strength. Basically, they just posed flexing their biceps and other goofy superhero poses.



RBCC #91 cover, when Don drew C.C. Beck

The Captain Marvel costume did more than get Don on television, but helped make him an even bigger part of fandom and con culture. His love of both Captain Marvel and being active with cons brought him in contact with C.C. Beck, the co-creator and original artist of Captain Marvel. Bruce Hamilton was a friend of Beck's, as Bruce had sold some consignment artwork and comics for him over the years, and was able to talk Beck into attending the convention as a guest. Beck was a working professional at DC comics at the time, drawing DC's new *Shazam*! comic book.

In 1972, DC Comics acquired the rights to bring Captain Marvel back to comics, and Editor-

in-Chief Carmine Infantino even brought The Big Red Cheese's original artist, C.C. Beck, back with him. There was one problem, though: Marvel Comics recently established the trademark (or the right to sell a comic with the words "Captain Marvel" in the title) for their new character named Captain Marvel, so DC used the magic word as the basis, giving the full title of *Shazam! The Original Captain Marvel*. That still garnered a cease-and-desist letter from Marvel, and then changed the subtitle to read *The World's Mightiest Mortal* soon after.

Written by Dennis O'Neil (most known for hard-hitting crime and socially relevant stories, in both *Batman* and the popular *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*) with art from Beck, the new title was a major launch for DC. Captain Marvel's notoriety in fan circles led to his appeal, according to comics writer Mark Waid, who was ten at the time (in an interview with Zack Smith):

"I think the reason why I and a lot of other kids were intrigued was because he was a forbidden character. You know, 'the character that dare not speak its name.' You couldn't talk about him because of all the legal ramifications and he'd been sued out of existence and so forth.

"Aside from the character himself, people wanted to see this character who had all this legal stuff behind him and know what all the hype was about. It was a big launch!"

The first issue featured O'Neil and Beck's story reintroducing both the Marvel and Sivana families, who had been held in stasis for 20 years in a globe of Suspendium, only to emerge and adjust to modern time. Denny left shortly after, recognizing himself an ill fit for the book, and was succeeded by Elliot S. Maggin.

Don was on a trajectory to cross paths with Captain Marvel, starting with meeting the hero's co-creator.

At PhoenixCon, Don, the fanzine artist best known for drawing Captain Marvel, finally met the actual artist who defined Captain Marvel. At their meeting, Don explained that he had drawn Captain Marvel in several fanzines, and

Don horsing around with C.C. Beck while at PhoenixCon in 197X.



also asked C. C. if he wouldn't mind looking over some of his artwork.

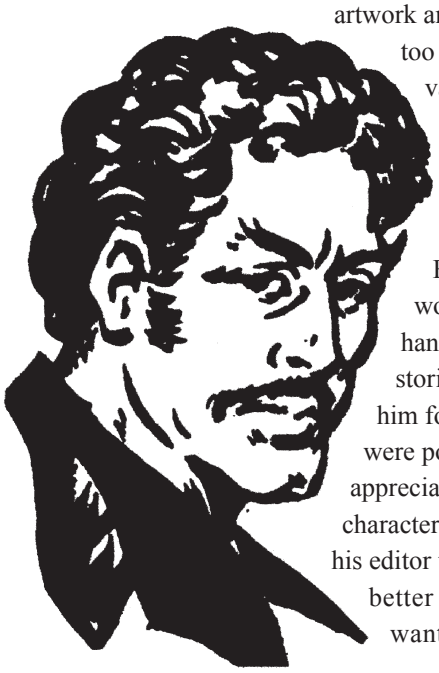
Beck agreed to do so, and at one point, they sat down at a table in the snack bar area of the convention, where Don showed a mixture of images he prepared for the meeting along with some of his published fanzine work. Don had even drawn Captain Marvel in a series of small images derivative of Beck's own style of drawing. Beck was impressed with the artwork, especially those that resembled his own style, but was somewhat skeptical that Don had actually drawn the artwork.

He questioned Don and wondered if he had actually drawn the illustrations without just "swiping" the art directly from another artist.

Don confidently took out a pencil and drew a Captain Marvel figure and face on paper right in front of C.C. Beck.

Beck could see immediately that Don understood how to draw a dynamic, heroic figure drawing and relaxed his concerns that he might be speaking to some sort of artistic wannabe and began to speak to him as more of a peer. At the time, Beck was notorious for being critical of many of the newer comics artists of the day, feeling that they were not the skilled cartoonists that existed in the comics field when Beck worked regularly at Fawcett Publications. In Don's case, Beck was pleased that Don seemed to really appreciate Beck's artwork and the more cartoonist style of drawing he was known for illustrating.

Beck had also been experiencing some feedback from the editors of DC Comics that his artwork and story ideas might be too dated and lacked relevance. They had hoped for a more "1970s" version of Beck's work, and not just a continuation of his old Fawcett Publications work. Beck, on the other hand, rejected many of the stories DC was sending him for *Shazam!,* feeling they were poorly written and did not appreciate Captain Marvel as a character. Beck continually told his editor that he could write much better stories himself, and wanted more control over the comic book.



C.C. Beck rendering of Don Newton.

As the convention was winding down, Don hoped to be able to talk more with Beck about breaking in as a comic book artist and invited him to stay at his apartment for a few days. Beck accepted, and during his stay the two men discussed a few options for possible collaborations that never really materialized into anything more than plans.

Ironically, in the months following, the two artists *did* eventually collaborate on a project,

The PhoenixCon costume contest, with Don as Captain Marvel, and comics dealer Bruce Hamilton as Ibis.



albeit one that probably was not exactly what Don envisioned at the time. Editor Michel Choquette was developing a contemporary tribute to the comic strips of his youth at the time. Choquette edited and wrote for the *Harvard Lampoon* earlier in his career, and later worked for the *National Lampoon* magazine, where he was a Contributing Editor in 1970–71 and 1973-74, and an Associate Editor during 1972.

Choquette called the project: *The Someday Funnies.*

The Someday Funnies was to be a large collection of original comics that addressed the issues of the 1960s and '70s, featuring comics characters that were published during the previous 30 years. His intention was to take the innocence of the comics strip characters and the simple lives that they led, and to have them reflect on the actual social and political issues that impacted contemporary Americans. He commissioned comics stories and artwork from 169 writers and artists, most of whom were known for their humor, cartooning and comics work.

At the time of Beck and Newton's collaboration, however, Choquette was soliciting work from a large group of creators, and happened to speak to C. C. Beck about drawing a Captain Marvel story.

Choquette was fascinated by the historical story behind DC Comics and their takeover of Captain Marvel, and asked Denny O'Neil to write the script for Beck to draw. O'Neil's strip, which was titled, "The Silencing of the Shazam Sayer," defined the ramifications of the famous National Comics vs. Fawcett Publications lawsuit, which established that Captain Marvel was a violation of DC's Superman copyright because of his similarity in look, actions, cast, and stories. O'Neil contrasted Fawcett Publications' loss to the difficult times that the United States was experiencing, trivializing the situation behind the battle of the two superheroes.



Don apes the style of C.C. Beck for *The Someday Funnies*.

In the comic strip, Billy Batson is told by the judge in the National/Fawcett Publications case that Billy must never pronounce the word "Shazam!" again. Batson appears, years later, having developed into a sad and frustrated person, because he was no longer able to help the country that he loved. He witnessed actual events of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, such as cross burnings in the south, the Watts riots in California, Vietnam war protests, and fighting in the streets at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, but was unable to use his powers to assist the people in their plight and was helpless to do anything. In each situation, a tearful Billy bemoans the fact that he was legally barred from uttering the magic word that could help him save the day.

C.C. Beck was already busy drawing the monthly *Shazam!*, so he asked Don to work on the Choquette strip with him. In conversations, Beck was somewhat confused about the project, as he referred to it as "the *Lampoon* job," referencing that he knew that Choquette worked at *The National Lampoon* magazine. The plan was basically to have Don illustrate the strip in Beck's style, leaving the heads of the figures to be inked by Beck himself. Don drew everything else. Don prided himself on being able to draw the artwork for the strip in his "Beck style," so he jumped into the project. Once completed, C.C. was quite happy with the results.

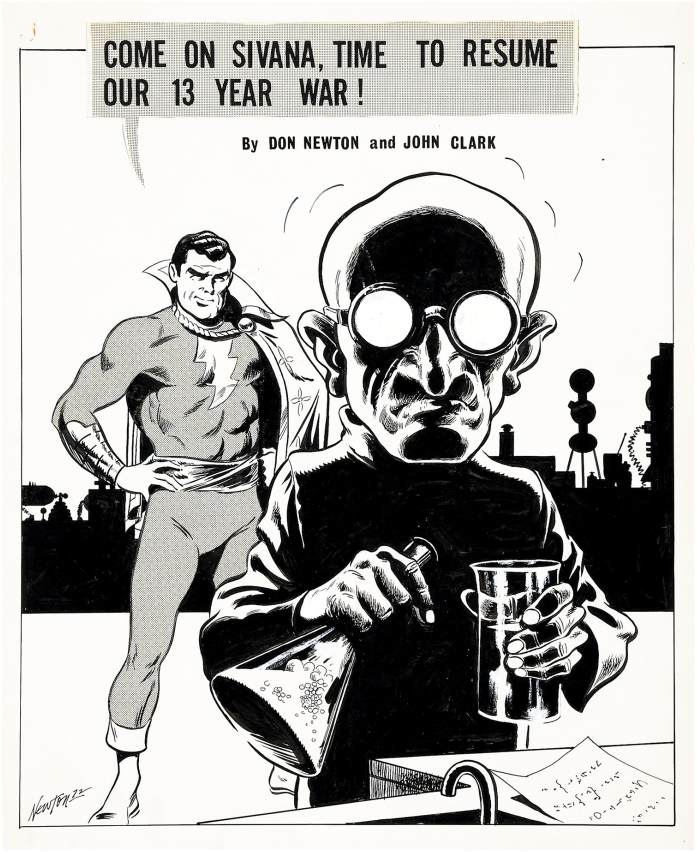
Beck sent a letter to Don in August 1972, telling Don that he had yet to be paid for the strip:

> **Many thanks for taking care of the *Lampoon* job for me. It looked good to me, but the final proof will be when Choquette sends me the check. As long as I'm training you to be my partner in the commercial art field, here's another priceless gem of wisdom from the Old Master's lips: Never say nuttin' till the check clears at your bank.**

I don't think Beck was particularly interested in this project, especially with his upcoming work at DC, so having Don complete most of it pleased him. Unfortunately, the unstructured methods behind the production of the artwork also led to some issues with Don getting paid.

Michel Choquette has stated in the past that C.C. Beck was paid for the story, but was unsure as to whether Don was ever paid from the money sent to Beck. Choquette signed to work with Beck directly and really did not know anything about Don's involvement. Nonetheless, Don was happy enough to work on a project with Beck so he did not concern himself much about the lack of payment.

Newton and Beck's odd Billy Batson strip did not see print for years. The book was to be released in the 1970s but it was never completely finished during that period. Amazingly enough, *The Someday Funnies* was finally completed in 2010 and published by Abrams the next year.



Don Newton, with friend John Clark, illustrate the CM/Sivana "13-year War!" for *Comic Crusader* #15.

After their *Sunday Funnies* project, Beck began to see Don as a potential art assistant on future comics work. Unfortunately, at the same time he discussed involving Don on *Shazam!*, C.C. Beck began to disagree with the editors at DC over their handling of Captain Marvel. He felt the direction of the stories used in the comic were wrong, and that DC did not understand how Captain Marvel and Marvel Family characters should be handled. When the first issue failed to sell at the level that DC was hoping for, Beck immediately blamed the scripts and editorial direction of the comic for the lackluster sales. Beck's complaints were well-publicized by the comics fan press at the time, with articles appearing in Joe Brancatelli's *Inside Comics* and other comics fanzines, with Brancatelli observing how:

[Beck] had only illustrated three comic stories in the last 20 years, and the field had changed significantly since he had left it. To make matters more difficult he was coming back to the strip out of love and not need. And in his absence, he had appointed himself keeper of the Captain Marvel legend.

A major focus of Beck's complaints was with the scripts that he was receiving from DC by writer Denny O'Neil and others. O'Neil himself has admitted in other interviews that he didn't think he was the right choice, having never been a fan of the Big Red Cheese himself. Elliot S! Maggin was also brought in by Julie Schwartz to write a few scripts, because of the "lighter" touch that Maggin brought to his *Superman* stories and felt his style would fit *Captain Marvel*.

Even with the addition of Maggin, Beck was still unhappy. What he really wanted was a return to what he remembered producing during his time at Fawcett Publications. Beck felt that the only way to repair the situation was to take over more control of *Shazam*!. Behind all of the friction, at the heart of Beck's complaints was that he desired more control over his co-creation.

Beck felt that taking more control of *Shazam!* would involve him moving into more of an editorial role, much like what DC had set up in giving Jack Kirby free rein on his Fourth World books in 1970, where Kirby handled the writing, art, and lettering from his California studio. Beck wanted to oversee and fully produce *Shazam!* without DC, and his plan was to have Don draw the comic book with him every issue, much like they had done with *The Someday Funnies* project.

Beck also suggested to Don that he locate others who might be able to assist with the writing, as he intended to expand the Marvel Family line of comics to include Captain Marvel, Jr. and others, as well. Don mentioned this to friends Bruce Hamilton and John Clark and began working with John to send plot ideas for *Shazam!* stories to Beck, who forwarded them on to E. Nelson Bridwell at DC for possible consideration.

At the same time, Bruce Hamilton had arranged a separate agreement with DC Editor-in-Chief Carmine Infantino to submit some stories for *Shazam!*. Bruce had a previous relationship with DC because he had been one of the operators of DC's ill-fated ComicsMobile, an attempt to broaden the sales and fanbase of DC Comics by sending out vans set up much like ice cream trucks but sold a full slate of new and recent DC Comics instead. Hamilton drove the ComicsMobile in the southwest and experienced problems such as the van breaking down and kids running up hoping to get ice cream. The project was inevitably a failure, but resulted in a lot of interesting stories from the drivers that have been shared through comics fandom.

After Beck organized his plan of action to gain more control over *Shazam!,* Don happened to mention his involvement in a letter to comics fan Howard Siegel, saying "The only thing that can shoot me down is DC…and after all, it's their money!"

Unfortunately for Don, that comment completely defined the reality of the situation. Beck made a trip to DC to meet with Julie Schwartz about his plans and the results of the meeting were not good. Beck wrote Don a letter about using Newton as his assistant:

Newton painting of Captain Marvel from the early 1970s.



I casually mentioned using you as my assistant on Captain Marvel and they turned various shades of green. "Absolutely Not! We'll decide things like that," Schwartz declared!

Beck went on to say that Schwartz had never heard of an artist by the name of Don Newton, and noted that DC was not about to approve the use of an unknown artist to draw anything, let alone a comic book that DC had great plans for. *Shazam!* was planned to be one of DC's new comic book success stories, but ended up not selling as well as DC had hoped.

Julie Schwartz may have also seen Beck's proposal as a way for him to place the artwork demands for the comic on Newton instead, a

Don and his painting of Superman, from the early 1970s.



situation that Schwartz was especially sensitive to after years of dealing with Bob Kane, who had co-created Batman with writer Bill Finger. Kane used numerous hired artists to produce the stories and artwork for *Batman* and *Detective Comics,* but held all of the credit to himself, even well into the 1960s. DC felt that since they were paying Beck for his name and to produce the artwork, that Beck should be the one to draw the comic book.

The story ideas from Don Newton, John Clark, and Bruce Hamilton, made their way to the desk of Schwartz's Assistant Editor, E. Nelson Bridwell. Beck had spoken to Bridwell previously about Don Newton and John Clark assisting him with the plot ideas for his stories, so in correspondence with Beck, Bridwell would often refer to them as "the boys" and how Beck was "not an idea man" who had "never come up with a creative idea," which was an odd way to sell the concept of using other creators. He explained to Bridwell, "give [me] an idea and I can flesh it out and run with it," and his intention was to use Newton and Clark in that manner, to create ideas that he would develop into stories. Beck explained that the production of the comic necessitated his use of Newton and company in order to keep to the schedule that DC placed on the book, as well as to assemble a comic book team that reflected the way that Beck felt that it should be produced.

Bridwell was optimistic and noted how a couple of Don and John's plots could be possibly developed into decent *Shazam!* stories. However, Schwartz was satisfied with what the DC writers were producing, so the attempts from "Team Beck" went nowhere. Beck's goal never materialized, and in the end, the whole situation did nothing but further deteriorate the relationship between C.C. Beck and DC Comics.

Beck came to New York on July 4th, 1973 for the Comic Art Convention, where he was a guest of honor. He also used the occasion to return the scripts for *Shazam!* #10 and #11 to DC through Vice President and Production Manager Sol Harrison.

Beck expressed his frustrations more frequently to those who would listen, noting that his work lacked much passion because of DC's constraints on him. Schwartz was tired of fighting with Beck and looked for new options. For one, Schwartz realized that artist Kurt Schaffenberger had also worked for Fawcett early in his comics career, producing over 23 Fawcett Publications comics (including *Captain Marvel Adventures*) from 1946 to 1954. Another established DC professional, Bob Oskner, was also able produce artwork in a style similar to C.C. Beck, so both creators became the new ongoing artists for *Shazam!* Schwartz did not mince words in responding to Inside Comics: "C.C.'s a nice guy, but opinionated, and his complaints are just that, opinions. I value my opinion 100 times more than C.C. Beck's in regards to stories.

Months after parting ways with DC and returning to his commercial art business, C.C. Beck talked to Don about working with him on a book that would show comics fans "how to draw" comics. Unfortunately, the project was just an idea in Beck's head that never fully developed into anything, so the project never got off the ground.

In the years following his time with Beck, Don felt that the reason why DC failed to gain much interest or sales in the *Shazam!* comic book was because the series treated the presentation of Captain Marvel in a fashion that was outdated. Comic book writer and film producer Michael Uslan boiled it down succinctly:

"It was an anachronism. At that time, comics were still in an age of relevancy. The audiences were in a process of getting older quicker. The more successful comic books were beginning to adapt to that, to cater to that college-age audience and older.

"And I think Captain Marvel got caught in the wrong age at the wrong time, and it was not working for the people who were buying comic books. The comic shops were getting underway, distribution was in flux. It was hard to get comics in the hands of kids who could appreciate a cartoony Billy Batson."

In other words, it was time for a new take on Captain Marvel that was more realistic and less cartoonish.

Hotels were the destination for early comic conventions, not the sprawling concrete floors of today's convention centers. A group of fans in Houston--Roy Bonario, Mark Schooley, Jerry Poscovsky, Earl Blair, Jr., and Glenn Kessler--transitioned their collector's group into the first HoustonCon, held in a Ramada Inn. That first show, which had all-night movies, auctions, and dealer tables, cost a single dollar for all 124 who attended that summer day in 1967.

In 1971, HoustonCon decided to invite a special celebrity guest:Kirk Alyn, who played Superman in two serials from 1948 and 1950. At that point, Kirk was a youthful 62 years old, enjoying his role as one of the "Kings of the Movie Serials" (alongside Flash Gordon star Buster Crabbe) and having just released his memoir, *A Job for Superman*, which discussed his time as the first actor to play the Man of Steel on film screens.

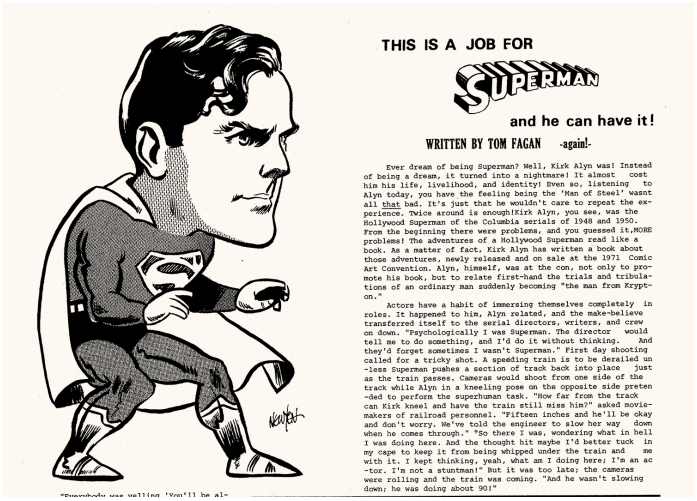
Don also took this chance to dress as the good Captain's blue-suited rival, as he went to meet the actor he watched on the big screen of the Mesa theater all those years ago.

"When he heard that Kirk Alyn was coming, the great artist and huge comics fan Don Newton decided to honor his film hero," Clayton Thorp noted. "He created a painting of him in a striking pose on top of the Daily Planet but changed the name on the globe to Houston to commemorate the show."

"He wore a Superman outfit to HoustonCon, because Kirk Alyn was guest of honor and Don did a Superman painting for the costume contest winner," John Clark remembered. "Don wound up winning his own painting, so he gave it to Alyn. One wonders what happened to it."

Thorp, who is a historian of HoustonCon, has a different take:

"When Kirk saw the painting that Don created to honor him, he fell in love with it. Unfortunately,


THIS IS A JOB FOR SUPERMAN

and he can have it!

WRITTEN BY TOM FAGAN -again!-

Ever dream of being Superman? Well, Kirk Alyn was! Instead of being a dream, it turned into a nightmare! It almost cost him his life, livelihood, and identity! Even so, listening to Alyn today, you have the feeling being the 'Man of Steel' wasn't all that bad. It's just that he wouldn't care to repeat the experience. Twice around is enough!Kirk Alyn, you see, was the Hollywood Superman of the Columbia serials of 1948 and 1950. From the beginning there were problems, and you guessed it,MORE problems! The adventures of a Hollywood Superman read like a book. As a matter of fact, Kirk Alyn has written a book about those adventures, newly released and on sale at the 1971 Comic Art Convention. Alyn, himself, was at the con, not only to promote his book, but to relate first-hand the trials and tribulations of an ordinary man suddenly becoming "the man from Krypton."

Actors have a habit of immersing themselves completely in roles. It happened to him, Alyn related, and the make-believe transferred itself to the serial directors, writers, and crew on down. "Psychologically I was Superman. The director would tell me to do something, and I'd do it without thinking. And they'd forget sometimes I wasn't Superman." First day shooting called for a tricky shot. A speeding train is to be derailed un-less Superman pushes a section of track back into place just as the train passes. Cameras would shoot from one side of the track while Alyn in a kneeling pose on the opposite side pretended to perform the superhuman task. "How far from the track can Kirk kneel and have the train still miss him?" asked movie-makers of railroad personnel. "Fifteen inches and he'll be okay and don't worry. We've told the engineer to slow her way down when he comes through." "So there I was, wondering what in hell I was doing here. And the thought hit maybe I'd better tuck in my cape to keep it from being whipped under the train and me with it. I kept thinking, yeah, what am I doing here; I'm an ac-tor. I'm not a stuntman!" But it was too late; the cameras were rolling and the train was coming. "And he wasn't slowing down; he was doing about 90!"

Don drew Superman star Kirk Alyn for *The Collector* #24.


NEWTON

Don had already promised that it would be given away as the first place door prize at the convention. The lucky fan that won it saw how much it meant to Kirk and gave it to him as a gift to thank him for coming to Houston."

Don, incidentally, beat out Terry Hanks, who was there in his homemade Alan Scott Green Lantern costume.

"Don was a huge fan of Captain Marvel, and he had an awesome costume professionally made that he wore to enter the contest (he really looked amazing in the costume as Captain Marvel)," Terry recalled. "I also entered the contest as the GA Green Lantern with a costume that my Mom had made for me. In all modesty, she really did an amazing job on it, and Don raved about how much he liked it and what a great job she did. So, we both entered the contest and, as you might expect, Don won and I came in second. The problem now was that he won his own painting!

"Now, Don certainly didn't want his painting back, so what to do? The judges decided to give the painting to Kirk Alyn (I never really understood that thinking at all, and "no" he wasn't in the contest too). Don came up to me afterwards and told me that he felt horrible about how this turned out because he knew how badly I wanted the painting and that he thought that even if he won, the painting would have gone to the second place winner--which was me. He said that if he had known how it was going to turn out, he never would have entered the contest at all. I tried to explain to him that it was OK and that I was fine with it, but he obviously saw that I was disappointed. He said that he wanted to do another painting for me as a way to make up for how things had turned out. So, we talked about it for a while, and he said that he really wanted to do an Alan Scott Green Lantern for me instead of Superman since that would be a sort of remembrance of my time as the GA Green Lantern."

(opposite page) Don's Superman painting, as seen on page 42. Courtesy of Terry Hanks.

Painting of Golden Age Green Lantern by Don from the late '60s, a gift to Terry Hanks. Courtesy Terry Hanks.



A few months went by until an original oil painting of Alan Scott showed up in Terry's mail delivery. He still has it to this day.

"Don wore the Capt. Marvel outfit one more time at HoustonCon 1974, but not for the costume contest: He and comics fan David Lee and I put on a skit before the contest with Don as Captain Marvel, David Lee as Shazam, and me as Sivana. David Lee was an amateur magician so it was a magic act," John Clark remembers.

"The premise was that Captain Marvel and Shazam have decided to put on a magic show for the kids and Shazam introduces Sivana as his new apprentice. Marvel strenuously objects, but Shazam assures him that Sivana has turned

over a new leaf. Of course, Sivana hasn't and is as bad as ever. He keeps trying to blow up Captain Marvel and Shazam with a bomb (a big round black one with 'bomb' written on it), but his schemes keep backfiring and Sivana himself keeps getting blown up. Finally, Marvel convinces Shazam that Sivana is still a bad egg and Sivana is spirited away to prison. Then Marvel and Shazam say they will perform their big finale for the audience.

"For the finale, we called Bruce Hamilton out of the audience. Bruce had a phony copy of *Action Comics* #1, which Captain Marvel saw and tore to pieces.

"Bruce faints," John Clark remembers. "They revive Bruce, telling him it'll be okay. Then Shazam puts the pieces of the comic in a tray and burns them. Bruce faints. They revive Bruce, telling him it'll be okay. Shazam puts a cloth over the tray, taps it with his wand and produces an intact *Action* #1. Much relieved, Bruce takes his comic and heads back for his seat, but after he gets halfway there, he shouts, 'Wait! This isn't my *Action* #1! Look! It's a *Jimmy Olsen* with an *Action* #1 cover on it!' Marvel and Shazam shrug. Magic doesn't always turn out the way you expect."

"Then we announced that a copy of *Action Comics* #1 had just become available at Shazam's Comic Shop. Al Williamson was in the audience and we had him rolling in the aisles. That was the last time Don wore the Marvel costume, I think."

Creating the costumes out of dancer leotards, Don put in the effort to nail the details, particularly the emblems. The cons brought him to do the same for custom toys, inspired by a fellow fan to create superhero figures using action figure dolls.

Don was really intrigued by this and using his own skills as a sculptor, he began purchasing *G.I. Joe* dolls and using them as the underlying structure for creating comic superhero statues. Don added modeling clay around the figure,





Don's sculpted figures of Superman and Captain Marvel from the '70s. Note the sculpting clay has melted a bit over time. Courtesy Shane Shellenbarger.

fixing and modeling the figure into a dynamic "arms-akimbo" pose for his first one, a dynamic Captain Marvel. He formed the clay beautifully around the figure, and then fixed the figure to a base so that it could stand like a statue. Don would even sculpt the facial features, giving the faces a friendly and confident smile, for instance. The figures were painted by Don and some of them stood on a shelf near his drawing area for most of his life. He produced a figure of a dynamic Captain Marvel, cape blowing lightly in the wind for one, as well as a figure of The Phantom. I believe he created a Batman figure at one point as well. I know that he also produced some that he gave away to friends in comics fandom:

"I had approached Don about creating one of my character, Hyperman, but I paid him for his work because I did not have any of the golden agers he was interested in," Bill G. Wilson revealed. "Sadly, his work of art got lost in the mail just prior to the 1970 postal strike. I was very disappointed and Don was as well, chalking it up to 'I've had run-ins with the Post Office before' – he sent me an Associated Press article titled, 'Rising





Two pages from Bill G. Wilson's *Hyperman*, inked by Don.

rate of mail thefts cited as need for reforms' with a note in the margin that read 'I wonder???' He also speculated that maybe the mailing label had just fallen off. 'I never use mailing labels, but we did this time. Guess that's why, eh?' Because these statues were so intricate and took so much time to produce, Don offered to do a painting of my character instead. This brilliant 'replacement' example of his work hangs over the desk in my office to this very day, and is one of my most prized possessions."

In 1974, Don Newton won the Comic Fan Art Award in the category "Favorite Fan Artist" at the New York Comic Art Convention. The award featured an American series of comic book awards for comic book fandom and comics professionals. Don was sent his award by the convention staff, as he was unable to attend the ceremony.

Don's period as a well-known fan artist, drawing for fanzines that made him a pseudo-celebrity in the world of comics fandom. Comics conventions would often request his attendance, which increased when he turned professional. Don told some great stories that he often shared about some of the crazy events that happened at those conventions and some of the unique people that he and John Clark met there. That year, G.B. Love would leave RBCC in the hands of his assistant, James Van Hise. Change was in the air for more than just Don's favorite fanzine.

It was Don's happily drawing illustrations and covers for comic book fanzines that led him to begin to even consider the possibility of drawing comics as a profession.

In the years ahead, that would become a reality.

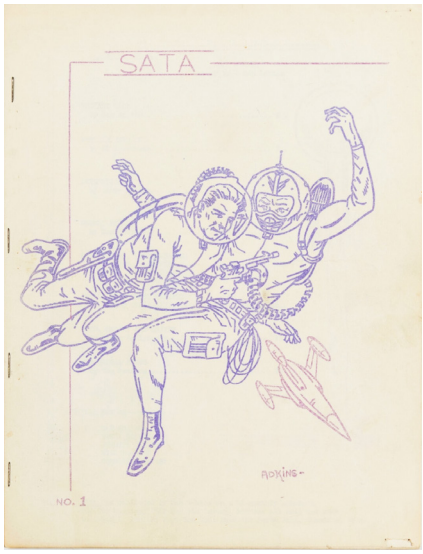

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Chapter 3: Paying His Dues

(opposite page)
Don's frightening rendition of Dracula graced the inside front cover of Bill Pearson's magazine, *Grave Tales*.

It was hard for Don to network in the comic book industry, especially since the offices and talent were mostly based in far-off New York City. When comics artist Dan Adkins moved to the Phoenix area, Don gained not only an industry insider, but also a good friend who would help him out for years after. It was not Dan Adkins' first time moving to Phoenix, though, having lived there during his stint in the Air Force around 1956, where he met nearby science fiction fan Bill Pearson.

"I met Bill Pearson, who had a letter printed in *Amazing Stories*, and I happened to be stationed with the Air Force in Phoenix when I was 19," Adkins told Jon B. Cooke. "I saw his letter and noticed he lived near the base, so I gave him a call and said I wanted to meet him. Of course, we had similar interests (and he had no interest in meeting anybody!)," he laughed.



Dan Adkins's mimeographed fanzine *Sata*, with cover art by him.

"I went out there that night, and we met. Later on, we put out *Sata* together."

Sata was the pair's new science fiction fanzine, put together with the Air Force base's equipment. Adkins left *Sata* to Pearson with #6 as he moved to New York City for an advertising job and became further enmeshed in the fanzine world.

"Later in New York, after I got married, I wanted to put together a better fanzine—because by then I'd met Archie Goodwin, Al Williamson, Frazetta, and Steve Ditko, and I was working for the [science fiction] magazines—the professional ones—in my spare time (I had a steady job). I was also working for the fanzines like crazy then—I was art editor of *Amra*, which George Scithers put out, and it had Krenkel and George Barr artwork."





An encounter with EC Comics artist Wally Wood led to Dan working as an assistant by 1964, their collaboration resulting in the creator-owned fanzine *witzend*. Adkins also worked with Wood on the superhero spy comic *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents* for Tower, and also found work with Jim Warren's line of black and white horror magazines that included *Eerie* and *Creepy*.

"I was a big EC fan, and Wally was my favorite artist," Dan told Cooke. "So I was a fan who ended up working for Wally, which was a wish come true, so I had one of my most creative periods that time working for Wally, and working for *Creepy*. The stuff I did for Wally was my best work! I didn't get credit for the most part, so it was just a strange thing. I think it was because I wasn't getting credit that I could afford to do whatever I wanted and take chances."

Adkins made the move to work at Marvel as an artist and, after being mugged once in 1968 and experiencing a break-in shortly after, moved back home to the relative safety of Ohio. After his father's death, he made the move to Phoenix around 1974, since his wife had family nearby and she had landed a good job in the area. Adkins was also still good friends with Bill Pearson, who had lived back there for years and made the suggestion for him to move there.

"Don had been a high school teacher for several years, and a big superhero fan," Pearson said. "He was one of the first who dressed in full superhero costumes when attending the small comic book conventions of the time. I thought he was doing professional quality artwork, and wrote a script specifically for him, to be published in a one-shot fanzine (like *witzend*) which I was working on. It was called *Grave Tales*...I believe Bruce Hamilton put up the money for the printer. It was his first project in the publishing business."

It wasn't long after that Don crossed paths with the returning Dan Adkins, whose mastery with ink would benefit Don.

"Dan Adkins was living out here [Arizona] in 1974 and we became well-acquainted and began to collaborate

Covers by Wallace Wood for both (top) Tower Comics' *Thunder Agents* #1 and his own (bottom) *Witzend* #1, both drawn by Wood. *Witzend* was Wood's attempt at self-publishing, which was handed over to Bill Pearson with issue #4.





Atmospheric pages from Pearson's *Grave Tales* story, "Blood Island," drawn by Don.

on some artwork for Charlton and Marvel," Don told the *Worlds Collide* fanzine. "Our early efforts were not so hot, but over the years our styles have meshed pretty well.

"I don't like to ink; it's difficult for me due to arthritis in my first finger, right hand. This came about due to my days as a high school shot-putter. The arthritis does not bother my penciling or painting. Out of all of the inkers who have worked on my stuff with varied degrees of success, there have been only three (no names, please!) that I just downright hated. In fairness I should mention that a large percentage of inkers cannot work well on a '3-D style' like mine. I think much of this is because although they know their craft, they lack training in the basics of drawing. I guess what I am saying is that you should learn to draw before you go to work for comics, not only by looking at comics. The best inkers can also draw well."

Since the comics industry of the 1970s was mostly based out of New York City, where both Marvel and DC Comics were headquartered, Dan Adkins proved Don's best chance of breaking in from Phoenix. For those moments Adkins struggled with deadlines, it was Don who came to the rescue.

Don also inked "several pages of backgrounds for *Giant-Size Master of Kung Fu #1* (June 1974), pages 16 and 17," Dan revealed to Howard Siegel in a note. For the September 1974 story, "Game of Death", which was written by Doug Moench and penciled by Paul Gulacy, Don assisted Dan on the inking. Don

noted to Howard at the time that, "the rats are the only giveaway to my style though," and stated that he "also redrew the face of [Shang-Chi] in "panel 2 on page 22." Don's work ran uncredited on this job, primarily because his contributions were more like an assistant's work than full pages of comics inking. I am not sure that Adkins even asked for a credit for Don.

Don also inked backgrounds and some figures on the *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu Special* (July 1974), over penciller Mike Vosburg. Don was not credited on this job, as well. Don's friend John Clark also assisted with some background inking.



Don assisted Dan Adkins on pencils for this page from *Giant-Size Defenders* #3.Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

Newton penciled over Jim Starlin layouts on an issue of *Giant-Size Defenders* #3 (Jan 1975) that Dan Adkins was assigned to ink. Originally, Adkins asked Don for assistance in completing the pencils on the story, as Starlin had rushed out his pencils and they were very rough. Having Don complete the pencils allowed Dan to just concentrate on inking what Don had drawn. However, the deadline grew so close that Don ended up inking full pages and panels of the story as well. Don did so much work on the book that at one point, Adkins exclaimed, "Don's inking looks better than mine!" Don requested a credit on this job because he had done so much work on the project and Dan Adkins insisted to his Marvel editors that Don's contribution was worthy of such a mention. Don was noted in the credits.

Don also completed the frontispiece artwork for the *Savage Sword of Conan* #6 (June 1975), which was solicited by writer/editor Roy Thomas, quite possibly because of Howard Siegal's previous efforts of sending Roy some of Don's artwork. Supposedly, Roy had seen Don's version of Conan in a fanzine and thought that he would be a good choice for producing a frontispiece illustration.

Don also did small uncredited inking on a few other Adkins inking jobs, often offering to help Dan when he visited the inker's apartment. Don enjoyed keeping busy and was only too happy to help his friend. It was a common occurrence for him to sit down at Dan's drafting tablet and to draw on any free paper or board that Dan had pinned to the table.

In most of the cases where Don assisted with inking or backgrounds, he would sit at Dan's apartment and ink panels until it grew late and he needed to return home to get ready for his teaching job the next day. Adkins would spread the pages out over the floor and the artists would pick up pages and ink whatever looked interesting. In a few cases such as the *Giant-Size Defenders* job, Don actually took the pages home and worked on them, returning them to Dan to send into Marvel Comics.

Unfortunately, Dan Adkins was unable to find consistent comic book inking work as effectively

in Arizona. He was completely on his own and that required great discipline and being a good self-starter, both of which Dan struggled with. He was losing work and money because of the location and the distance from New York City.

Dan attempted to increase his pay rate by agreeing to draw *The Cougar* for new comics company Atlas/Seaboard in the mid 1970's, but only managed to complete half of the first issue. *The Cougar* was reassigned to artist Frank Springer to complete the first issue and any subsequent issues. Atlas/Seaboard was started by Marvel's founder Martin Goodman as revenge against his former company when the new owners refused to let his son Chip inherit the publisher role. Atlas folded after most of the comics in their line reached only to the third or fourth issue.

In the fall of 1975, the Marvel black and white magazine line was growing in titles and popularity. It had developed its own share of problems and art direction needs: Art Director John Romita was overwhelmed with having a magazine line of comics to support along with the growing comics line. Romita was just too busy to continue to support both, so he told Marvel management that he could not continue to handle everything--he needed help.

Romita suggested to Marvel that they create a dedicated art director position for the black and white magazines who would work with Romita and the bullpen. Dan Adkins was at one time a well-known fixture around the Marvel offices, having been an inker at Marvel for over 10 years and a frequent visitor to the offices when he would drop off his artwork to editors. Adkins also possessed strong artistic skills in correcting artwork, inking and even painting, something that he had not utilized fully at Marvel up until that period.

John Romita suggested Adkins and, upon approval, called Dan in Phoenix to offer him the art director job. I believe Adkins' friend Jim Steranko also offered praise to Marvel on Dan's behalf.

Dan Adkins jumped at the opportunity to gain steady employment and health insurance through

Don put together a montage of comics strips that he drew of his own characters to show comics publishers.



the new job. Adkins had lost a number of teeth due to his continual snacking on Necco wafers and greatly required dentistry work at the time (he literally kept a bowl full of them around), so the changes were most welcome to him.

Don Newton had developed a great friendship with Adkins during Dan's time in Arizona. Dan was a terrific guy to hang out with, and Don visited Dan almost every day during the summer months when Don was not teaching school. Don relied heavily upon Adkins' knowledge and connections in New York to better understand the people that he needed to contact in order to locate potential assignments from comics companies. The work he assisted with helped him land his first break in the industry proper, and the two men would prove reliable artistic partners, regardless of the distance between them.



Chapter 4: Breakthrough: Don at Charlton

(opposite page)
Charlton Bullseye issue #5 did an interview with Don entitled, "A Discussion with Don Newton." Don drew this self-portrait of himself and the Phantom for that article, perfectly capturing his own features.

As Don grew more "known" in the circles of comics fandom, he was raising a baby still in diapers while working full-time as a teacher and also holding down an evening job drawing comics. The work he "dashed" off was only during whatever free minutes he could scrounge up. Wherever Don lived, he set up an amazingly simple "studio" area, which was basically a swivel chair that sat next to a desk where he would produce his artwork. He rarely used the desk, however, except when he was inking, to hold the ink bottle and his pens. In most cases, he curled up in the chair with a portable Masonite art board, pencils, eraser, and a ruler in his lap. He usually leaned back in the chair and often tucked his feet onto the chair, sitting in a very relaxed state. I never saw him sit at the desk and rule out guiding lines or anything--he just sat back and penciled some amazing comic book artwork.

Don likely underestimated himself in deciding to start at the bottom of the comics industry. By the same token, attempting to enter the comic book industry was a tough situation for a guy who lived in Phoenix, Arizona instead of New York City.

Back in the 1970s, "the bottom" was Charlton Comics in Derby, Connecticut. Don may have chosen Charlton out of frustration with getting DC to look at his work.

"He started with Charlton because DC was difficult to deal with at first," RBCC editor James Van Hise said. "He complained that he'd submit art to DC which had a clear plastic cover to protect the art and he could tell that when the art was returned that they hadn't even lifted the plastic cover to look at it."

Founded by two prisonmates, Italian immigrant John Santangelo and disbarred attorney Ed Levy, Charlton began publishing the song lyric magazine *Hit Parader* in 1942. Their new company, named in honor of their sons both being Charlies, featured everything from editorial to printing (and even distribution) under the roof of one large warehouse complex. Charlton published several magazines and an ever-growing comic book line that featured funny animals, war books, romance, and superheroes.

The output may have been high, but the bar was definitely low.

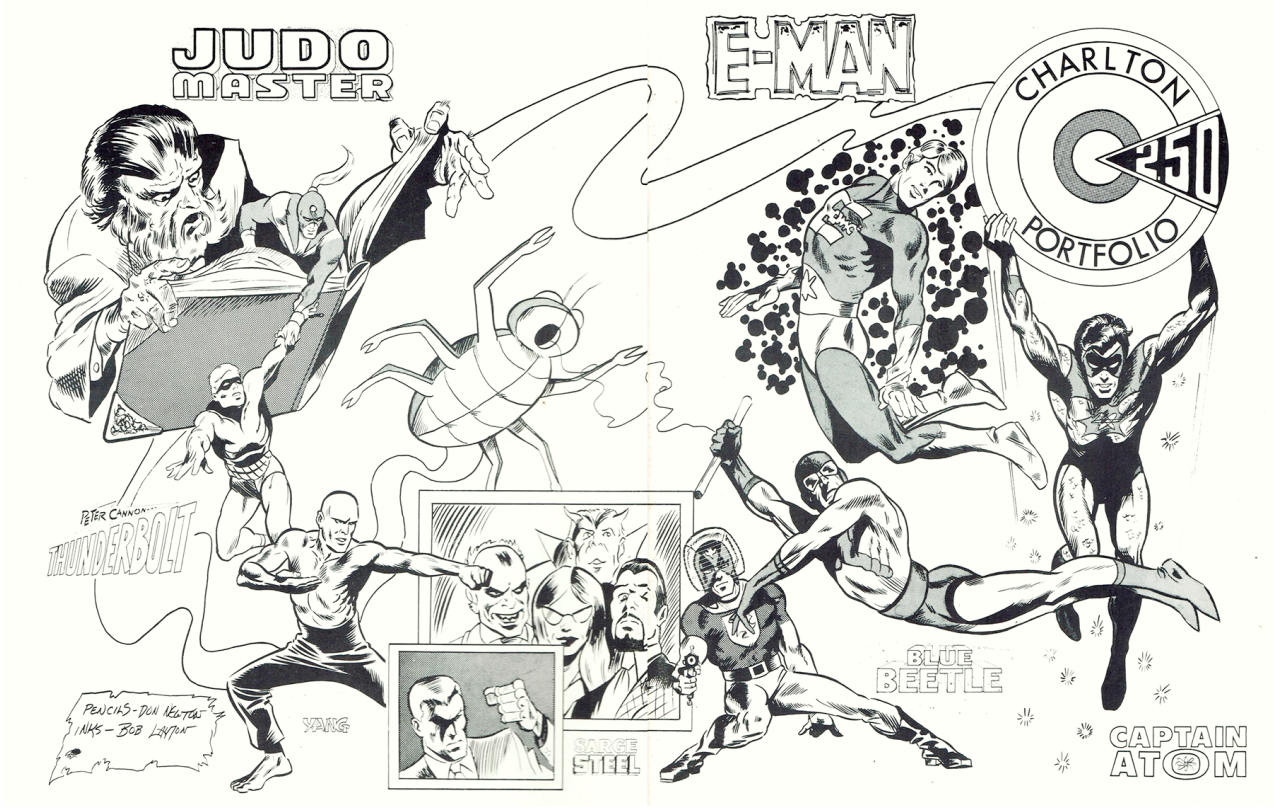
"In Charlton, John was underpaying artists and writers, and practically anything that artists and writers did was acceptable" Charlton's head writer Joe Gill said. "There was very little criticism. The idea was to get the books out, and nobody at Charlton seemed to give a damn how good they were. When I say I wrote between 100 and 150 pages a week, you've got to realize that there was no one I had to please."

Charlton was the cheapest in the business, and not only in page rates: their printing presses were far from the best and they used pulpy paper stock. The utter glut of comics coming out during their heyday created opportunities for new talent and, coupled with dynamite editor-in-chief Dick Giordano, led to the discovery of new talent like writers Denny O'Neil and Steve Skeates, and artists such as Jim Aparo.

Giordano took much of this talent with him when he left in 1968 to become a DC Comics editor, just as his "Action Heroes" line of costumed adventurers (Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, and Peacemaker) were cancelled in lieu of licensed comics for comic strip syndicate King Features. Sal Gentile stepped in as Managing Editor of the new comics line.

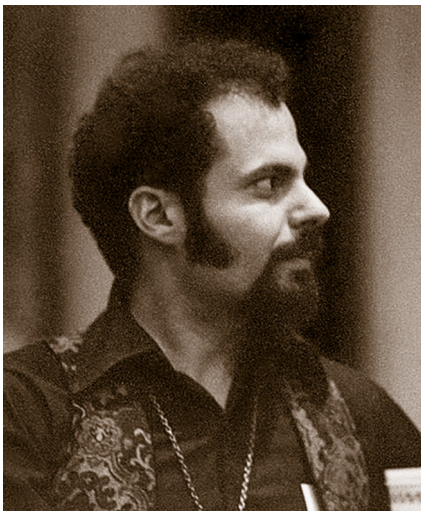
This included comic strip hero The Phantom. Dressed in a purple bodysuit with black domino mask, "The Ghost Who Walks" was actually Kit Walker, the latest in a family legacy of Phantoms. Living in the fictitious African jungle of Bangalla, The Phantom is arguably the first superhero, as he travels the world to fight evil and piracy. The native tribe thinks he is an immortal, not realizing the mantle is passed from father to son. Charlton's *Phantom* comic book picked up the numbering of his former one, starting with #30 in February of 1969, and featured the art of Giordano discovery Jim Aparo. Artists Frank McLaughlin and Pat Boyette also took a swing at *The Phantom* in future issues.

Don Newton's cover for the CPL Gang *Charlton Portfolio*, inked by Bob Layton.



The Ghost Who Walks would figure more heavily in launching Don's career as a comics professional.

By the 1970s, Charlton was a shadow of its former self. Cartoonist George Wildman succeeded Gentile and brought in young freelance writer Nick Cuti as Assistant Editor. During his time on the editorial staff, Cuti began to instigate a greater focus towards developing new characters for the company, while also searching for new talent to grace their poorly-printed pages. Cuti also desired to generate more fan interest in their comics, in hopes of bringing Charlton out of their rather staid and boring profile in the industry. George Wildman decided to launch a supernatural comics in 1975 that featured a new cast of hosts and reenergized the whole line.



Writer Nicola Cuti.

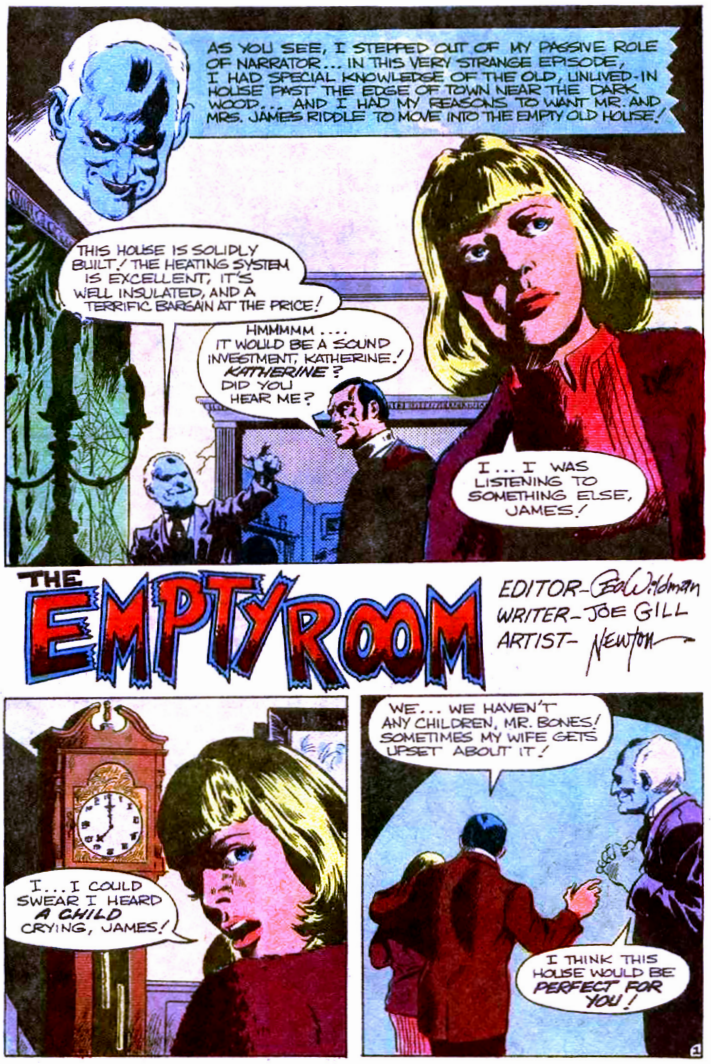
Part of this was in focusing on a star fan artist to help bolster their comics: Nick called Don up and suggested he send in some art samples to Charlton. The art he sent to Nick included pages of *The Savage Earth*; uncredited inking on figures and backgrounds Don did for Dan Adkins on Marvel's *Master of Kung Fu*; pages from 1975's *The Defenders Annual* #3, which featured Don's finished pencils and inks over Jim Starlin's layouts (a job he shared with Adkins and artist Jim Mooney); and two pages of an *Iron Man Annual* Don took it on his own to redraw in his style. By the time Don was handed his first professional assignment from Charlton comics, he had also produced artwork for well over 100 issues of various comics fanzines.

Wildman was impressed enough to go straight to sending Don his first comics script (seven pages by head writer and Charlton stalwart Joe Gill), for horror comic *Ghost Manor* #18. The March, 1974 story, "The Empty Room," features a couple moving into a new house, only to find it's already occupied by ghostly tenants!

Cuti called Don with compliments, but Don privately felt the work was horrible, admitting to friends how "the way I rushed through the job, I thought they'd hate it!"

The printed version defines a looser style, indicative of Don's inking of his own work at the time. Don developed his penciled artwork into a more defined style in later years, but in the case of this first story, he was also not helped by Charlton's poor production quality. Bad coloring (not

Page 1 of "The Empty Room," horror story from *Ghost Manor* #18 by Cuti and Newton.



necessarily the fault of the colorist) throughout was a hallmark of Charlton, who were known for a more limited color choices in color palette and poor printing. All of this certainly added to the "rougher" look of Don's artwork on this story. I think Don was nervous while working on the job, most likely because it was a first solo credit for him in a printed comic book.

Don followed this with another Gill story, "The Treasure Seekers" in *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves* #45. At the time, Don said this story was "500% better" than the "Empty Room" artwork. Don's art on "Treasure" has a fairly "twisted" edge to it in the artwork that really adds to the creepiness of the story.

Page 1 of "The Treasure Seekers," Don's story with prolific writer, Joe Gill. From *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves* #45.



Assistant Editor Nicola Cuti even wrote a note to Don at the time, congratulating him on his artwork in the story:

Joe Gill and myself have been looking over your story: "The Treasure Seekers" and we felt compelled to write you a note. The craftsmanship of the art is superb. Each character is unique and interesting, not a department store manikin and the dreariness of the swamp is unmistakable.

Please continue to turn out your art on this level of quality and there is no doubt in our minds that you will soon be rising to the top of the profession.

I look forward to when you will illustrate one of my stories.

Cuti proved a constant champion for Don and his artwork, and would also become a great collaborator. The two teamed up for *Ghost Manor* #19, where Don helped Cuti create a new host. Baron Weirwulf, a man with a mysterious library full of stories about all sorts of horrific things such as "vampires, werewolves, monsters, UFO's and magic." It was a sign of Cuti and Wildman's hopes for their revitalized line--and perhaps a hint of the hopes they had for Don. Don's initial one-page strip announcing Weirwulf ran in most of the Charlton comic books for a month or two. The Weirwulf stories were one-page mystery tales usually related to some real life story of the supernatural; they were page fillers designed to bring a comic to a full page count, and gave a showcase for Don's art to start to come into its own through. The Baron quickly took over the *Haunted* comic book, Charlton changing the title to *Baron Weirwulf's Haunted Library*. This new host received some buzz in the comics industry, as Nick Cuti sent advance announcements to comics fan newszines and press about the new host.

Weirwulf also proved the harbinger of Don's newfound professional success, appearing on

(opposite page) Don drew the Charlton horror comic hosts welcoming Baron Weirwulf. This was used as both a house ad and the cover to The Comics Reader fanzine. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).


GOLD
MARBLE 28AD/29TEXT /31-32 ADS /30
CONGRATULATIONS, BARON, ON BEING GIVEN YOUR OWN BOOK. WHAT'S IT CALLED?
NICE OF YOU TO ASK, DR. GRAVES. IT'S CALLED
BARON WEIRWULF'S HAUNTED LIBRARY
AND IT'S ON SALE AT YOUR NEWSSTAND RIGHT NOW!
THE WORKS OF CUTI
Vol. 1
NEWTON
NEWTON
NEWTON
© HAUNTED LOVE



Baron Weirwulf's Haunted Library #21, featuring a beautiful cover painting of the host by Don.

the cover of fanzine *The Comics Reader* as Don's way of letting his fellow fans know he's broken in.

Don painted some covers for the series as well. Weirwulf was a nice assignment for Don, as it did not amount to a lot of assigned pages to draw, so he could produce the pencils and inks while working as a teacher during the day.

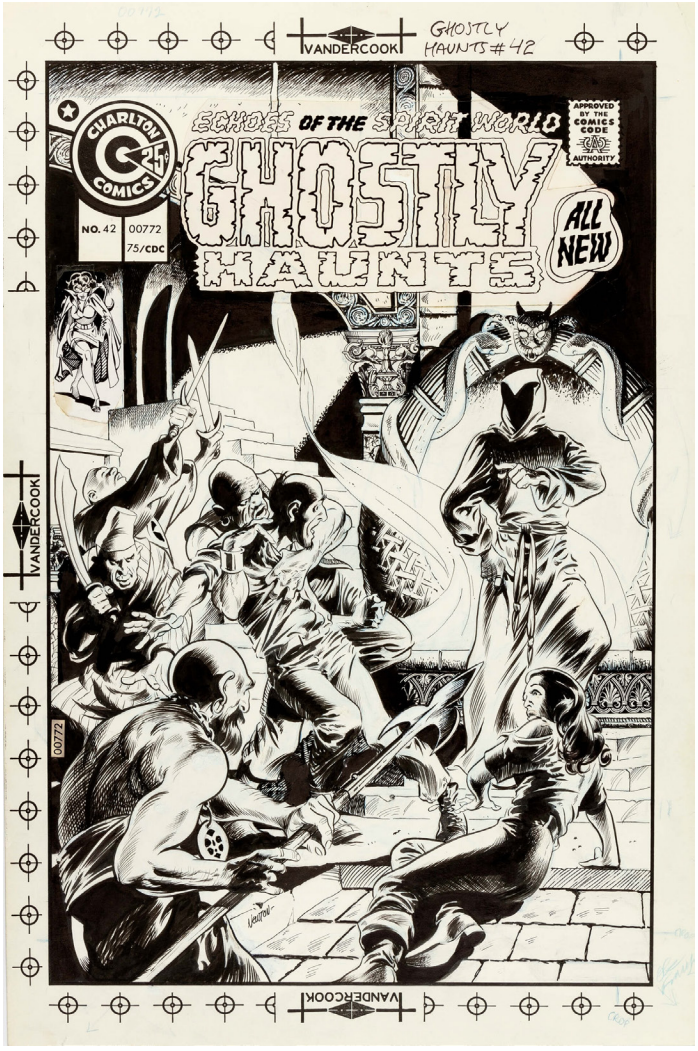
"When I was in the first grade, Don had gone from being a homeroom school-teacher to a seventh and eighth grade art teacher, which allowed him to illustrate and work on his comics artwork while he was 'on the clock,'" Tony remembered. "The school that Don taught at was Mountain View Elementary in Sunnyslope [a neighborhood north of Phoenix, Arizona]. I would get out of class and would spend the last hour of the day sitting and watching him draw in his classroom."

Don's forays into inking for Marvel were often done while in his classroom. The students enjoyed seeing him work and Don was freed up while they were working on their projects, something less likely to have accomplished during his time as a homeroom teacher.

"Only a few of my fellow teachers and one or two students know about my extra-curricular activities," Don revealed to Howard Siegel in the *Charlton Bullseye*. "I don't publicize it too much. Of course, I can't account for my son, Tony. For all I know he may be trading issues of *Ghostly Tales* for a six pack of bubble gum."

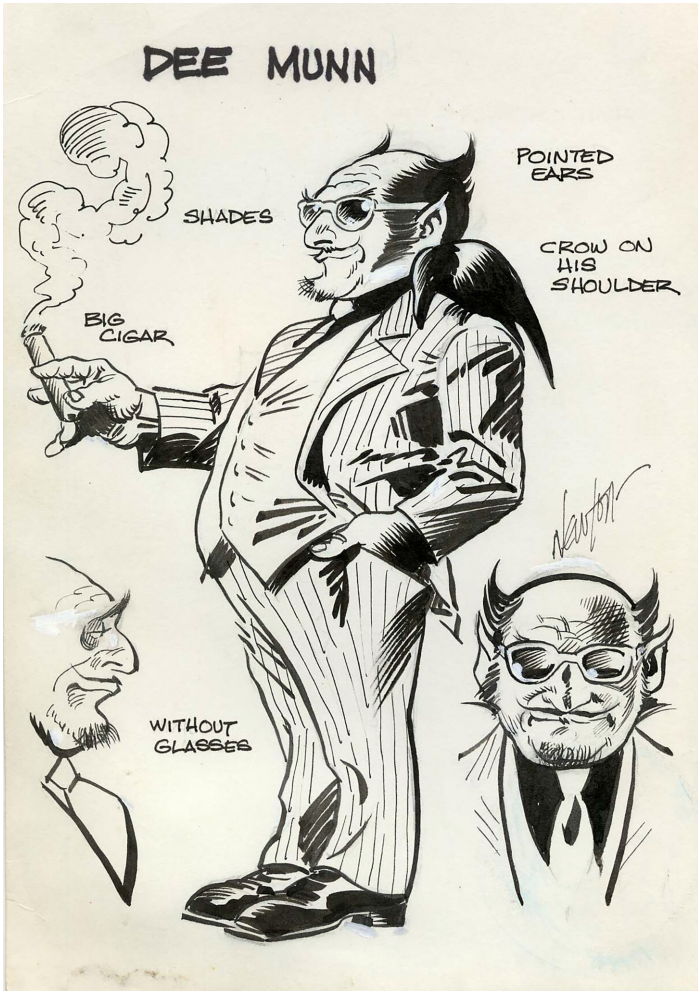
Don's nine page story in *Ghostly Haunts* #42, "The Man Who Hunted Satan," was written by Cuti and featured bespectacled hostess Winnie the Witch introducing the story of a man tracking the devil down in Turkey. This also marked the debut of Don on Charlton covers (at the urging of Nick Cuti), as he delivered a dynamic and chilling cover image of a couple being led towards a robed figure, likely for human sacrifice. This was the January, 1975 issue and would get outdone by his venture into a new art medium two months later.

After a few months of drawing interior pages, Don sent in a sample cover to show Charlton what he could do with acrylic paint, and they were impressed. Because of the sample that Don sent in, he began painting covers for



Ghostly Haunts #42 cover, a pen and ink drawing by Newton. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

Don created the look for Dee Munn, another new horror host for Charlton comics. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).



their horror and romance comics on a regular basis, with the first was for March's *Haunted Love* #8. A ghostly woman stands under a tree, her gown fluttering in either the wind or through supernatural means, as her "haunted love" suitor reaches out, pleading. A manor sits on a cliff behind them. The whole scene is cast in the light of the moon. Pure gothic romance and a promising start to Don's cover work.

Painted covers were becoming more prevalent at Charlton at the time, as they made their comics stick out on the newsstands next to the colored line-art covers of Marvel and DC Comics. Don's ability to turn out masterpieces on a deadline furthered his value to Charlton.

"I am still in awe of his painting skills," his son, Tony, remembered years later. "Watching him crank out his painted Charlton covers in an evening was incredible to me growing up. To see him take an idea that was required/suggested by the editors, and then to see the 'gearbox' in his mind plugging away, was nothing short of awesome. He had the ability to do a few thumbnail sketches at about 1/10th the scale, and then he would 'find' the final product in his head. With little or no preliminary drawing on the canvas, he would take off, guns blazing. His ability to make an acrylic piece rivaling an oil painting still impresses me to this day. I used to see him in the kitchen of every apartment that we lived in, painting with wild abandon until finished. It was a great thing to see and to be exposed to. He was the Bob Ross of comic book covers."



Don painted the "haunted" cover for *Haunted Love* #8.

"He was taking on anything that they would give him," Tony later added. "It was really as though he was building up a substantial portfolio in such a short time, but it looked like a few years of work. I honestly think that he felt that he needed to do it. He had a wonderful work ethic. That seemed to serve him well."

Don's enthusiasm was only a reflection of his professionalism, as seen in his cover for *Ghost Manor* #22, featuring a butler serving dinner to a skeleton.

There is an atmospheric Baron Weirwulf one-page strip in this issue, involving Charles Dickens' unfinished final novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and whether the author's ghost

intervened in its posthumous completion by another writer. I remember Don searching frantically for a reference of Charles Dickens' face for that story. He finally had to settle for an image in an encyclopedia in those pre-Internet days. That issue is followed by a haunted house tale as only Joe Gill could write and Don could draw; "Mr. Beazely's Ghosts" is what happens when a demented butler refuses to give up the property left for him to serve as caretaker of, even decades after the owners' disappearance.

Don enjoyed "full control" over the artwork that he produced at Charlton Comics, which was unusual compared to DC and Marvel creators who were producing with more editorial oversight. Charlton would send artists a script and most of them would pencil, ink, and letter the artwork completely on their own. Artists such as Jim Aparo, Steve Ditko, and Alex Toth were able to achieve that level of personal control over their pages of artwork as well, which made working for Charlton a plus, despite the low per-page rate of pay. Don received around $75 for each of the covers that he painted, a low rate, even for back then.



Don illustrated a pen and ink masterpiece for the cover for *Ghost Manor* #22. This cover was used multiple times by Charlton when they reprinted some of their comics in later years.

Charlton gave that level of control so they could get more work completed for the single rate per artist, versus splitting up all of the various assignments required to complete a page. It also saved them in mailing costs, as most of the work was done by one person. In such a situation, a story sent into the editor by the artist was basically ready for coloring by the time it arrived in the Charlton offices.

Don inked most of the Charlton mystery and horror stories himself, but turned his friendship with Dan Adkins into a collaboration of Don's work, starting with March, 1975's "Death in the Storm" in *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves* #49. "Death" also marks the first time Dan Adkins inked over Don's pencils for a comic book. The results are a little heavy-handed and certainly not as deft as Adkins became in inking Don's work in the future. Don drew the cover to this issue in pen and ink, of the college kids from "Storm" scared as lightning strikes around them from a rainstorm.

Perhaps Don's finest moment in Charlton horror was the five-page "Orion," written by Cuti in March, 1975's *Midnight Tales* #11. One of the more celebrated stories produced by Don during his Charlton run, "Orion" would get reprinted several times. Pencilled and inked by Don, Orion tames a weredeer. Cuti liked Don's artwork and would often assign Don to stories that he had written. This one was particularly well received and was reprinted at least five other times due to the extensive artwork provided by Don.





Two stories illustrated by Don Newton: (left) "Death in the Storm" (from *Dr. Graves*) featuring inks by Dan Adkins, and (right) "Orion," (from *Midnight Tales*), fully illustrated by Don. "Orion" was considered a masterpiece by Charlton editorial and was reprinted many times.

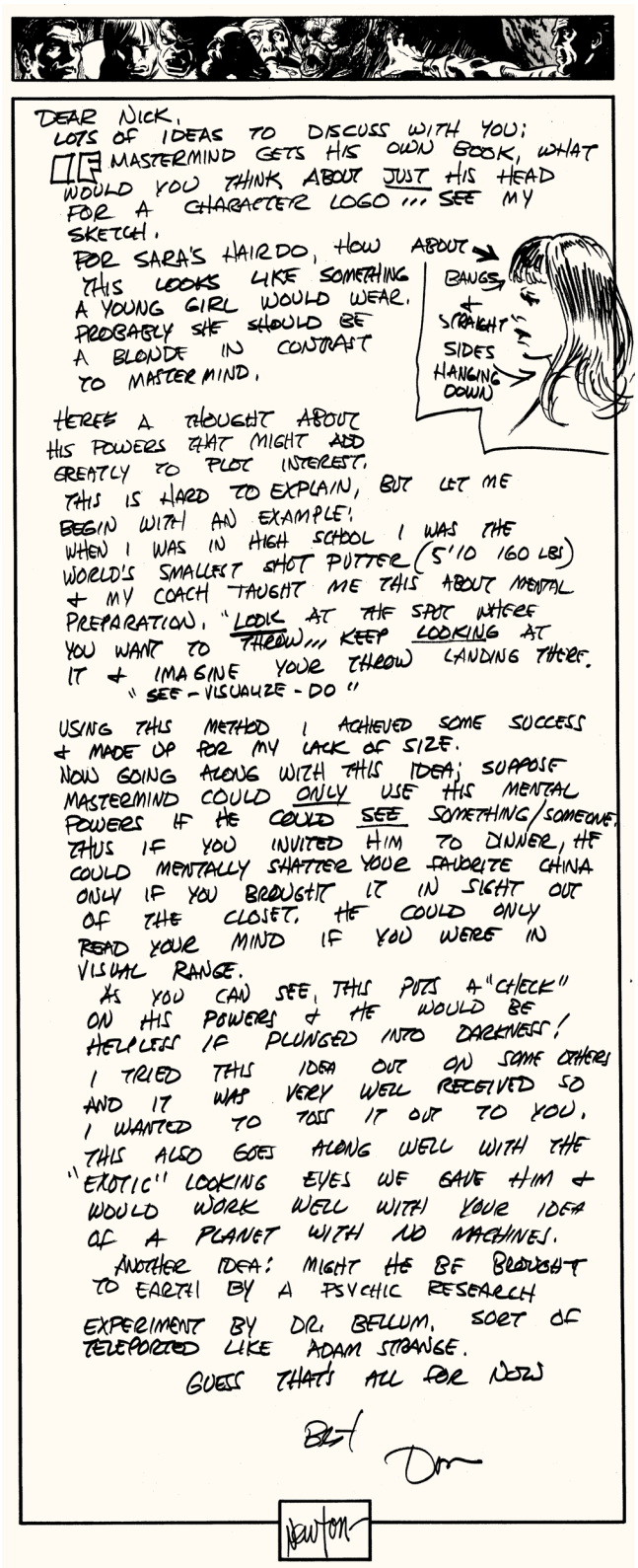
The next issue saw Don draw abominable snowmen in a story inked by Adkins. A relatively uneventful story, it showcases Don's panel design with the Himalayan environment, his powerful snowbeasts, and Adkin's ability to convey the lightness of snowfall amidst a temple setting and the beasts themselves. Don proved his ability to work with reference in a story about a man cursed with eternal life in *Midnight Tales* #13, with the story starting in the late 1700s and ending in the 1970s.

As great as Don was in drawing horror and the supernatural, he truly wanted to draw a superhero on a regular basis. Charlton's success with Cuti and artist Joe Staton's quirky super-hero E-Man led Nick and Don to discuss creating a new superhero for Charlton.

The new character was called Mastermind.

Mastermind was to be scripted by Cuti, with Don assisting in the design and development of the character and drawing the book. Don sat down to draw some preliminary story pages and character designs for their new comic series. Discussions were made about the character receiving its own comic, as well as possibly being used as a backup feature in another comic, such as *E-Man*.

"I even created a superhero that I wanted to do with Don," Cuti told Jon B. Cooke. "Mastermind, which he did some rough sketches for, and it



DEAR NICK,
LOTS OF IDEAS TO DISCUSS WITH YOU; IF MASTERMIND GETS HIS OWN BOOK, WHAT WOULD YOU THINK ABOUT JUST HIS HEAD FOR A CHARACTER LOGO ... SEE MY SKETCH.
FOR SARA'S HAIRDO, HOW ABOUT THIS LOOKS LIKE SOMETHING A YOUNG GIRL WOULD WEAR. PROBABLY SHE SHOULD BE A BLONDE IN CONTRAST TO MASTER MIND.
BANGS & STRAIGHT SIDES HANGING DOWN
HERE'S A THOUGHT ABOUT HIS POWERS THAT MIGHT ADD GREATLY TO PLOT INTEREST. THIS IS HARD TO EXPLAIN, BUT LET ME BEGIN WITH AN EXAMPLE:
WHEN I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL I WAS THE WORLD'S SMALLEST SHOT PUTTER (5'10 160 LBS) & MY COACH TAUGHT ME THIS ABOUT MENTAL PREPARATION. "LOOK AT THE SPOT WHERE YOU WANT TO THROW ... KEEP LOOKING AT IT & IMAGINE YOUR THROW LANDING THERE. "SEE - VISUALIZE - DO"
USING THIS METHOD I ACHIEVED SOME SUCCESS & MADE UP FOR MY LACK OF SIZE.
NOW GOING ALONG WITH THIS IDEA; SUPPOSE MASTERMIND COULD ONLY USE HIS MENTAL POWERS IF HE COULD SEE SOMETHING/SOMEONE. THUS IF YOU INVITED HIM TO DINNER, HE COULD MENTALLY SHATTER YOUR FAVORITE CHINA ONLY IF YOU BROUGHT IT IN SIGHT OUT OF THE CLOSET. HE COULD ONLY READ YOUR MIND IF YOU WERE IN VISUAL RANGE.
AS YOU CAN SEE, THIS PUTS A "CHECK" ON HIS POWERS & HE WOULD BE HELPLESS IF PLUNGED INTO DARKNESS!
I TRIED THIS IDEA OUT ON SOME OTHERS AND IT WAS VERY WELL RECEIVED SO I WANTED TO TOSS IT OUT TO YOU.
THIS ALSO GOES ALONG WELL WITH THE "EXOTIC" LOOKING EYES WE GAVE HIM & WOULD WORK WELL WITH YOUR IDEA OF A PLANET WITH NO MACHINES.
ANOTHER IDEA: MIGHT HE BE BROUGHT TO EARTH BY A PSYCHIC RESEARCH EXPERIMENT BY DR. BELLUM, SORT OF TELEPORTED LIKE ADAM STRANGE.
GUESS THAT'S ALL FOR NOW
Best
Don
NEWTON

Nick Cuti and Don Newton worked on a Charlton super-hero character, entitled Mastermind. This is a letter from Don to Nick about potential story concepts.

never came about. His power was that he could use his mind, sort of like Mandrake the Magician without hypnotism. He could use his mind to sort of create all kinds of strange things, and was from another dimension where mental powers were very common, and now he's trapped in our dimension in which no one had developed mental powers, but he did."

Unfortunately, nothing ever moved past early development and Mastermind never moved into production. In 2015, Joe Staton took the artistic reins to illustrate Cuti's script for fan magazine *The Charlton Arrow*, giving a glimpse of what could have been.

In 1975, Don was finally offered his first full-length comic series, as Wildman and Cuti determined that Don's style would work nicely on *The Phantom*, a comic that Charlton was experiencing some problems with at the time. Unconfirmed stories indicated that creator Lee Falk was unhappy with the art and asked Charlton to assign another artist to the title. Artist Jim Aparo had taken the comic book to great heights during his earlier run on the title, but he was now working regularly at DC and left *The Phantom* to eventually become a series of reprints of German *Phantom* comics. Frank Bolle was the most recent artist, but nowhere near as dynamic as Aparo or Pat Boyette.

Don was the best solution.

"They needed an artist on *The Phantom* because Lee Falk was unhappy with the [then-current] artist," Don told George Huneryager. "So Lee wanted me to try it, even though I knew it would be difficult because of my teaching. But I decided it was a chance to get some recognition, so I took a shot at it, and I ended up doing it."

Charlton published *The Phantom* under the approval and guidance of Falk, who had to approve each change to *The Phantom* comic, which usually involved reviewing art samples from the artist assigned to the comic book. He also approved the story and content of each issue and even had the option of pulling the license from Charlton, so his happiness was always important to the company. One hurdle was in Falk's overestimating The Phantom's success

in America, according to George Wildman in an interview with Donnie Pitchford.

"Lee Falk used to get down my tail every once and a while, because he expected we should run... our run on that book, let's say, hypothetically, was 50,000. He wanted it to be half-a-million! I said 'We couldn't sell...we can't give 'em away.' And that got him all upset! But I was being honest!"

"He was satisfied with the work we were doing and everything else," he added. "But he just couldn't understand why we didn't sell ten times as many as we were...But you could not satisfy him."

When Cuti called and offered the chance to draw *The Phantom*, Don was extremely pleased, as drawing an action-oriented character was truly his goal all along in becoming a professional comics artist. For Wildman and Cuti, it must have been a relief to have his work gracing the book from their toughest licensor. Don's only concern was moving into a full-length comic book story, versus the seven-to-nine page mystery tales, as he was still teaching full-time.

Don also suggested that he paint the covers to each issue of *The Phantom*, which would visually elevate the book. Don was not earning much for these covers, so painting them was basically done out of a sheer love of the work. During his run on the title, Don was so prolific that his painted covers even graced issues where Charlton unexpectedly changed the content (for one reason or another), pushing Don's interior artwork off to the next issue.

In October 1975, Don Newton's first issue, #67, of *The Phantom* came off the presses and onto spinner racks. Don penciled and inked all of the artwork, which became the normal output for all his issues of *The Phantom*. He kicked the series off with one of his amazing cover paintings featuring the Phantom, arms-akimbo, while his wolf, Devil, walks behind him. The orange background reveals an aged skull over Phantom's right shoulder.

When Nick Cuti received the penciled and inked pages, he called Don at home to tell him

The iconic cover for Don's first issue of *The Phantom*, with the Ghost Who Walks and Devil standing strong.



how much he loved the artwork. This was Don's first chance to draw a full-length comic book story, and he transitioned easily, having built a good training ground on the short mystery stories first. It was also where Don began to develop some of the techniques he would use in his *Batman* artwork years later, along with his affinity for drawing mysterious, dark characters.

Written by Charlton workhorse Joe Gill, Don's first issue recounted The Phantom's origin, as The Ghost Who Walks recalls the Nazi refugees who tried to take over the Bengali village and mine it for Uranium. Kit Walker reveals they murdered his father (The Phantom before him) and how he

suited up in the purple bodysuit and black domino mask to continue his mission. The entire issue was rewritten from Gill's original script, which apparently had The Phantom contemplating carrying on the lineage with Diana.

"Don, being the straight-laced kind of guy he was, couldn't stand for that so he significantly rewrote it, but not with my help," John Clark recalls. "I believe Pearson helped him with that one."

From that first issue alone, it was obvious Don was the only choice to draw *The Phantom* comic book.

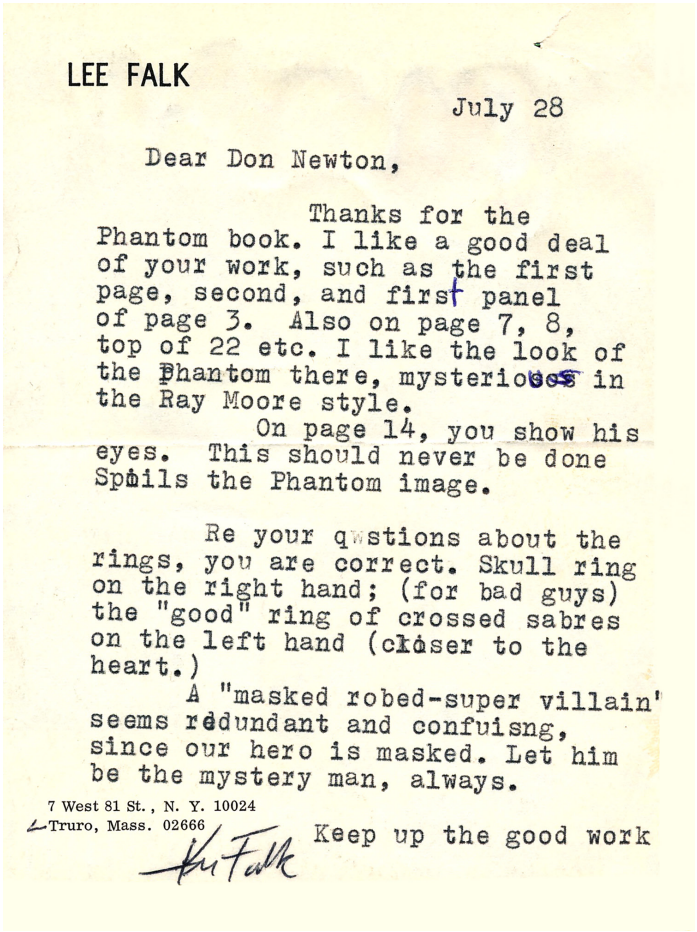
David A. Roach noted that Newton's "*Phantom* was no throw-back to the 1930s, instead the character was a rather menacing, almost brutish figure that seemingly owed more to Frazetta's *Conan* than the more genteel drawings of Sy Barry or Ray Moore." Rather than drawn in a thick bodysuit, Don's Phantom wore a costume that accentuated a heroic musculature, combining the classic look with something more modern.

Even Lee Falk loved the look of the issue, and Don was finally feeling appreciated for his artwork after years of hard work. Falk wrote Don on July 28th, complimenting how:

"I like a good deal of your work...I like the look of the Phantom there, mysterious in the Ray Moore style." He also cautioned how Don used one panel to "show his eyes. This should never be done. Spoils the Phantom image."

After answering Don's question about which hand for a respective ring ("Skull ring on the right hand; (for bad guys) the 'good' ring of crossed sabres on the left hand (closer to the heart.)", Falk signs off with an encouraging "Keep up the good work."

Don's work on *The Phantom* also brought him appreciation from a legendary artist associated with another classic character.



LEE FALK

July 28

Dear Don Newton,

Thanks for the Phantom book. I like a good deal of your work, such as the first page, second, and first panel of page 3. Also on page 7, 8, top of 22 etc. I like the look of the Phantom there, mysterious in the Ray Moore style.

On page 14, you show his eyes. This should never be done Spoils the Phantom image.

Re your questions about the rings, you are correct. Skull ring on the right hand; (for bad guys) the "good" ring of crossed sabres on the left hand (closer to the heart.)

A "masked robed-super villain' seems redundant and confuisng, since our hero is masked. Let him be the mystery man, always.

7 West 81 St., N. Y. 10024
Truro, Mass. 02666

Keep up the good work

Lee Falk

The letter Lee Falk sent to Don, complimenting him on *The Phantom*. Courtesy of Howard Gesbeck.

At the San Diego Comic-Con during the summer of 1975, Don met *Tarzan* comic strip artist Russ Manning through comic book dealer Bruce Hamilton. Bruce was notorious for knowing many people within the comics industry.

At one point, Manning talked to Don about comic strips and the state of the comic book industry as Don told the older artist of his own aspirations to draw the traditional strip. The two men found a kinship in their interests, as Don knew of Manning's work and liked it, and was appreciative that Russ thought highly of his work on *The Phantom*.

Eventually, Manning came around to asking Don if he had ever drawn the character Tarzan, a strip so popular that Manning was producing strips for the overseas market as well as America. He had been asked by the syndicate to try to produce original content for foreign markets, versus simply





(top) Newton painting of Tarzan from the cover of The *Golden Age* #7. (bottom) Newton painting for the cover of *The Phantom* #68. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

reprinting/translating the American strips. Russ felt that Don's work would be perfect for *Tarzan* and asked Don if he would be interested in drawing the strip, if Russ could put the package together. John Clark revealed that, even though it would have been an enormous opportunity, Don had other ideas:

"Don thought about it, but later declined, saying he didn't really feel that Tarzan was a good character for him to draw."

For *The Phantom* #68, Jan. 1976, Nick wrote "The Beasts of Madame Khan," for Don to draw. The Phantom comes into conflict against a lion-tamer who uses her anthropomorphic beastly creatures to commit crimes, culminating in a powerful double-page spread battle scene.

Early on in his run, Don apparently ran into failures from Charlton's production department. What should have been Don's third issue on interiors only featured his iconic painted cover of The Phantom holding a torch and reaching for his gun in the dark. This issue instead featured a story drawn by Don Sherwood and written by Joe Gill; it may have even been an inventory story that Charlton had already commissioned. I remember Don always meeting his deadlines, and rumor was that Charlton got behind on the lettering and coloring required to meet the production deadline, resulting in the odd substitution. This was a situation that frustrated Don throughout his entire career: changes made on the publishing end that were out of his control. I don't think they ever

Cover by Don of *The Phantom* #69. Inside this cover was an unexpected reprint story.



informed him why his work was not used in this issue, as he had completed the artwork on time for every issue that he drew.

Nick Cuti left Charlton Comics in 1976 when he was approached by Jim Warren to return to editorial work for Warren Publishing's magazine line. Cuti had previously freelanced as a writer for the company, but Warren was now interested in having him come back as both writer *and* editor. The money was better and the position had more responsibility, so Cuti announced his exit from Charlton and told George Wildman that he had a possible replacement for his position.

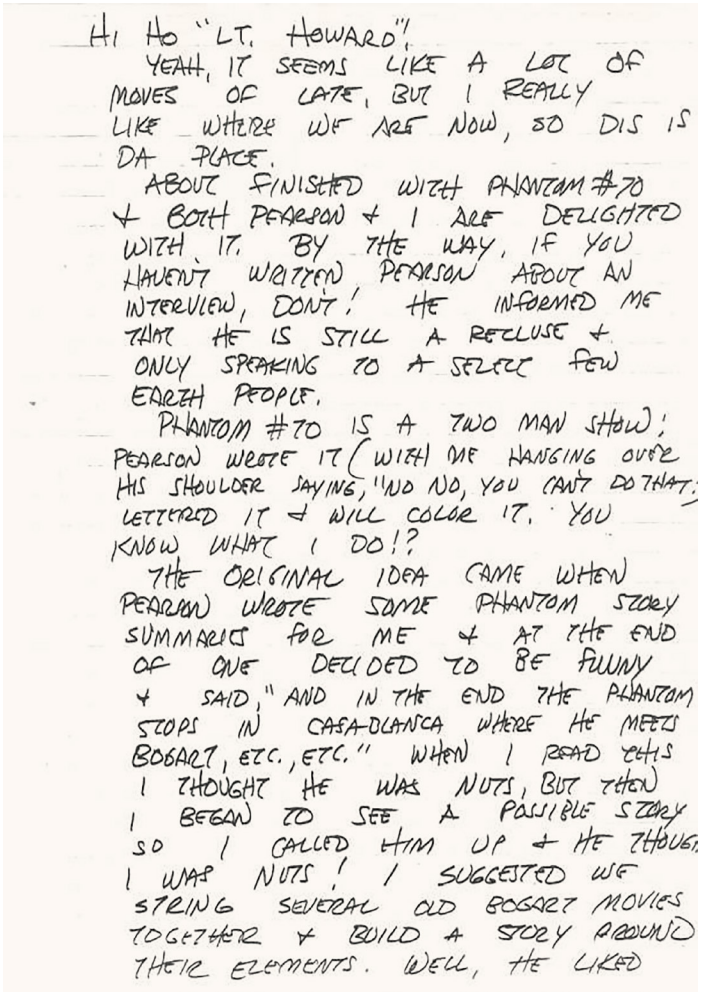
Cuti and artist/writer/publisher Bill Pearson had been friends for years, so Cuti thought of him for the job. "I sent a copy of *Grave Tales* (a Pearson magazine) to an old friend, Nick Cuti, who was the assistant editor at Charlton Comics" Pearson said. "Nick was thinking about quitting the job to freelance as a writer because there were so many new titles coming out at Charlton that he could make much more money that way. He showed *Grave Tales* to George Wildman, the editor, recommending me as his replacement and Don as an artist worthy of hiring. So Don and I started on *The Phantom* at the same time."

With Pearson on board at Charlton, the various strands of Don's early work began to come together, as Bill came on to write *The Phantom*. Issue #70 truly was Don's breakout issue, and he really pulled out all the stops on the artwork. Don had discussed with Pearson the possibility of using more of the various Phantoms throughout history, so as to expand their options for stories. This particular story took place in the 1940s, during World War II.

Basically, Pearson and Newton put The Phantom in the middle of some of Don's favorite movies. In the story, "Mystery of the Mali Ibex," a museum in Cairo, Egypt contacts The Phantom for help, resulting in him running into characters based on actors such as Humphrey Bogart (a Newton favorite), Lauren Bacall, Sydney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre, and Claude Rains. Don illustrated the story with atmospheric lighting and expert pacing, really enjoying the challenge of creating all of the likenesses of the actors involved. Characters and scenes from Bogie classics *Casablanca*, *The African Queen*, *The Maltese Falcon*, and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* all appeared; it was as if Warner Brothers made a *Phantom* film in the late 1930s.

The issue also had an internal effect on Charlton, according to Bill Pearson:

"I assigned the script writing of *The Phantom* to myself, and had plans to write a whole series. I wrote that Ibex story, lettered it and colored it. I submitted my freelance invoices to the company,



Hi Ho "Lt. Howard"!
YEAH, IT SEEMS LIKE A LOT OF MOVES OF LATE, BUT I REALLY LIKE WHERE WE ARE NOW, SO DIS IS DA PLACE.
ABOUT FINISHED WITH PHANTOM #70 & BOTH PEARSON & I ARE DELIGHTED WITH IT. BY THE WAY, IF YOU HAVEN'T WRITTEN PEARSON ABOUT AN INTERVIEW, DON'T! HE INFORMED ME THAT HE IS STILL A RECLUSE & ONLY SPEAKING TO A SELECT FEW EARTH PEOPLE.
PHANTOM #70 IS A TWO MAN SHOW! PEARSON WROTE IT (WITH ME HANGING OVER HIS SHOULDER SAYING, "NO NO, YOU CAN'T DO THAT!" LETTERED IT & WILL COLOR IT. YOU KNOW WHAT I DO!?
THE ORIGINAL IDEA CAME WHEN PEARSON WROTE SOME PHANTOM STORY SUMMARIES FOR ME & AT THE END OF ONE DECIDED TO BE FUNNY & SAID, "AND IN THE END THE PHANTOM STOPS IN CASA-BLANCA WHERE HE MEETS BOGART, ETC., ETC." WHEN I READ THIS I THOUGHT HE WAS NUTS, BUT THEN I BEGAN TO SEE A POSSIBLE STORY SO I CALLED HIM UP & HE THOUGHT I WAS NUTS! I SUGGESTED WE STRING SEVERAL OLD BOGART MOVIES TOGETHER & BUILD A STORY AROUND THEIR ELEMENTS. WELL, HE LIKED THAT IDEA & WENT TO WORK ON A SCRIPT.
HE'D BRING THE STORY OVER & WE'D TEAR IT APART & HE'D GO & WRITE IT AGAIN,,, & AGAIN & AGAIN! THE FINAL RESULT WAS CALLED A "CLASSIC" BY SEVERAL PEOPLE AT CHARLTON & I HOPE PEARSON GETS HIS JUST RECOGNITION FOR THIS REALLY ORIGINAL JOB. HE WILL HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME TOPPING THIS ONE.
ANYWAY, DON'T SAY TOO MUCH ABOUT THIS IN YOU COLUMN AS WE WANT THE READERS TO HAVE A FEW SURPRISES.
I HEAR FROM ADKINS NOW & THEN & HE'S STILL WANTING ME TO MOVE EAST,,, EVEN HAS A NICE JEWISH GIRL FROM THE BRONX LINED UP FOR ME.* GUESS SHE WORKS IN THE MARVEL BLACK & WHITES. I SUGGESTED HE TRY AND GET STAN LEE TO PAY MY PLANE FARE OUT AT XMAS SO I COULD MEET HER. THINK HE WILL
SO CAPT. CRYNOVAC IS A PHONEY! IS NOTHING SACRED,,,
I STILL HAVEN'T HEARD FROM BOB CLAYTON, SO YOU AIN'T THE LONE RANGER!
Best Don
P.S. YOU APPEAR ON PAGE 10 OF #70... YES, I MADE YOU
* HONEST!

Letter to Newton fan Howard Siegel from Don.

but when the person who made out the checks that month added the freelance fees with my salary, it added up to more than that person made, and he just couldn't stand that. A company memo was distributed which said salaried employees were not allowed to freelance for the company."

Due to Pearson's issues with the company, starting with issue #71, Don exerted more control over *The Phantom*, as he would assemble the ideas and start writing the stories for the book with assistance from his friend John Clark. Part of the reason this worked was that Pearson was already remarkably busy editing the comics. Don was very enthusiastic about the book and just wanted to keep things moving forward, so he worked with John and also from scripts from Bill that featured pseudonym credits for the writing.

John Clark had the principal idea for issue #71 and wrote the script with input from Don. The story was a wonderful tale of a giant arachnid spider that lived within the caves of a very remote mountain area of Africa. Don captured the mysteries of the lush jungle with his detailed artwork.

Don's enthusiasm for The Phantom even showed through to other creators, as writer Roger Stern attested to in an interview with Jon B. Cooke:

"I'd been corresponding with Don Newton, and he'd encouraged me to submit ideas for *The Phantom*," Stern revealed. "I sent in three or four plot ideas, and Charlton accepted the one that I thought was the least original… all about the Phantom discovering a lost Atlantean colony in a hidden corner of the Deep Woods. The real shame was that Don was just bubbling

over with great ideas for *The Phantom*—ideas that the readers never got to see. He wanted to develop a regular antagonist for the Phantom, a real opposite number that Don had tentatively called the Red Spectre. As I recall, that particular idea was shot down as being 'too much like Marvel.' Since Marvel was—at the time—beating the pants off everyone in sales, I could never figure out why Charlton was so reluctant. Maybe they were getting flak from King Features. Like I said, it was a shame, because Don's *Phantom* was so good, but it could have been really great."

The backup story, "Witchman's Revenge," used cropped panels from Don's previous *Phantom* stories to illustrate the text story, another instance of Charlton resorting to more production practices to save money. It also signaled some concerns regarding the health of the company.

Pearson was back as writer for *The Phantom* #73 to contribute a new villain, although he had to use his "Ben S. Parillo" pseudonym in the writer credits, due to his issue with freelance pay. The present-day Phantom went up against the new villain The Raven, an assassin named The Torch, and some intense moments of suspense. This is probably the most "superhero" issue of Don's entire *Phantom* run, as The Phantom rescues The Torch from elderly criminal mastermind The Raven in his ancient castle, complete with deathtraps and an army of mindless henchmen. The final story is atmospheric, action-packed and tightly-paced.

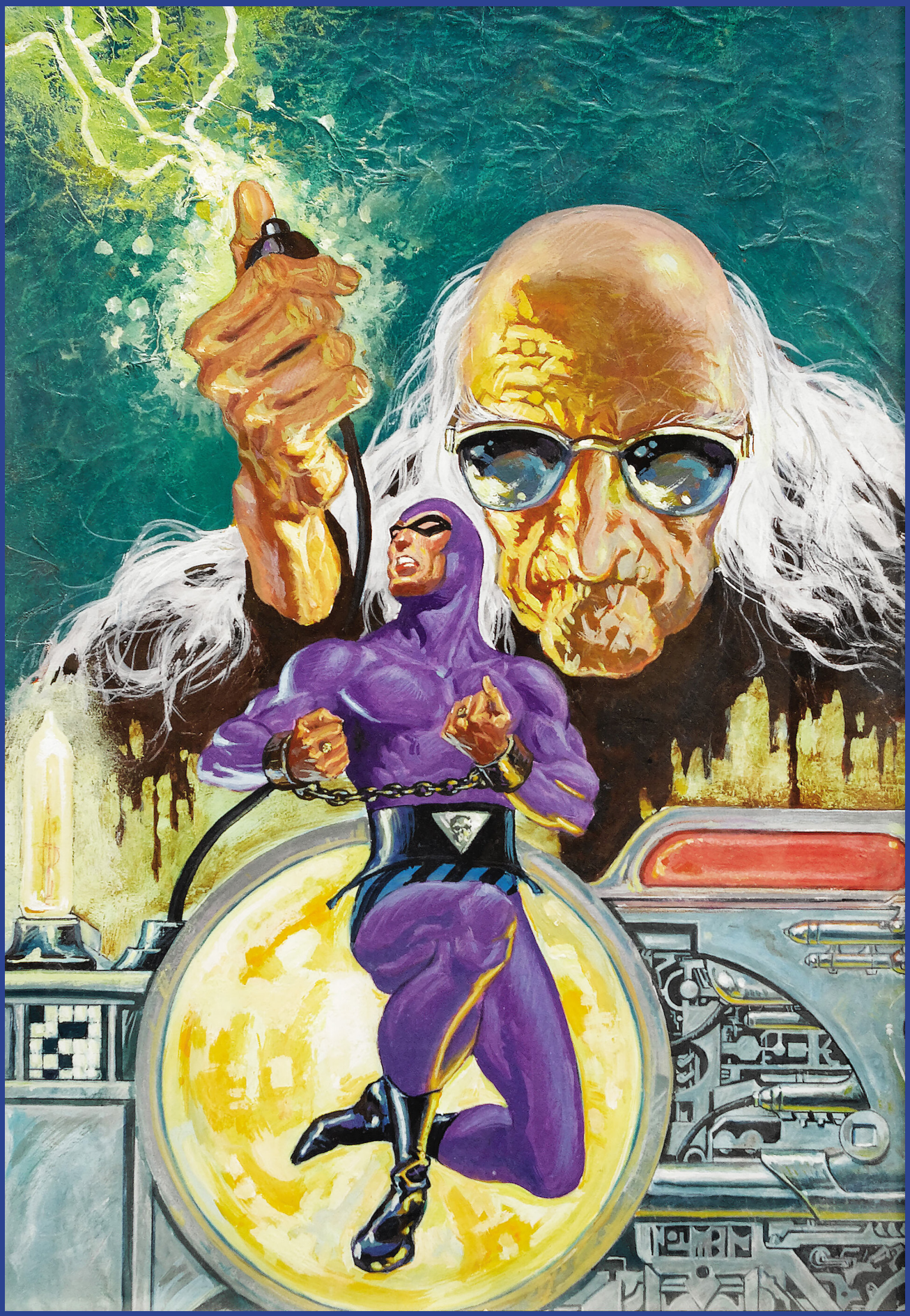
However, once Don got his hands on the script, he made some changes to what Bill had written. Unfortunately, Bill thought Don made too many alterations to the story, so there were some frustrating exchanges between them as Bill felt that the story was no longer what he wrote. For instance, in Bill's script, the original name for the villain was "Dr. Nevar," or "raven" spelled backwards. More than anything, I think Don felt some control over the series at this point and simply asserted changes that he felt were necessary.

The cover to this issue is one of the better covers of the series, and when I saw the original, I was just completely stunned at the quality of the painting. The Phantom, manacled and rising off his knee, still appears powerful despite his circumstances. Don's artwork inside is amazing as well, with scenes and character designs worthy of a James Bond film.

The Phantom #74 continues Don's exploration of the heroic lineage with "The Phantom of 1776," with Revolutionary War era Phantom meeting Benjamin Franklin. The Newton cover, featuring the 1776 Phantom, a sword in one hand and a flintlock pistol in the other, really stood out on the



Unfinished painting by Don of The Phantom that I literally rescued out of his trashcan. The final version of the painting (opposite page) was for issue #73. In my opinion, one of the best paintings that Don ever created. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).



comics newsstands through craftsmanship and sheer drama. It also featured a smoky background of the Declaration of Independence and a tattered 13-star American flag, making it decidedly "American." This cover by Don is considered by many to be one of the finest painted covers ever to appear on a comic book--it would sadly prove his last for The Ghost Who Walks.

Issue 74 was not only Don's last issue of *The Phantom*, but also one of the last comics published by Charlton with all-new material. Don went out with a major bang with the last issue. Don made use of The Phantom's long line of Phantom historical personalities and told the tale of the Phantom that appeared in 1776, around the creation of the United States of America. John Clark assisted Don on the story but was uncredited. A truly memorable story and, I doubt, one that has probably never been topped in the archives of *The Phantom*.



Cover to the last issue of *The Phantom*, #74. Don took a copy of the Declaration of Independence and pasted pieces of the document into the background of the painting. What a cover to cease publication on!

Charlton was not a comic book publisher so much as a magazine publisher that had a comics division. That almost came to a full stop in 1976 when Charlton cancelled their comics line and laid all their employees off, except for George Wildman. According to Bill Pearson in Bhob Stewart's *Against the Grain: Mad Artist Wallace Wood*:

> **John Santangelo, Sr., who had turned over most of the administration of the company to others, discovered the over-extended comics department was losing a lot of money. His order: 'Stop comics!' No review, no adjustment, no maneuvering to minimize losses. Just 'Stop comics!' The entire staff (except George [Wildman]) was terminated that day. The presses were stopped mid-run, the bindery closed down, trucks unloaded, titles abandoned at whatever stage of production there were at, without exception.**

Don lost his primary source of work as a professional comic book artist.

"I remember that he really enjoyed the volume of work that he was doing at Charlton and he was beginning to build up an awesome body of diverse work there," Tony said. "It seems like he was using it as a springboard to better work, whether he knew it or not. When they shut down the company, it was time for him to try and to take the leap to the 'big time.' It had to be scary for him, leaving his job as an educator and trying to do illustrations full time while raising a kid.

"If he was worried, he played it pretty close to the vest, because I don't remember any real freak out moments on his part."

Luckily, Don was still employed as an art teacher at a school in Phoenix. The money earned

from Charlton was basically just side income, as it was not enough for Don to use as a full-time job. At the point when Charlton Comics stopped printing new material, they were paying Don around $35 a page for pencils and inks combined. Don's final issues marked the end of *The Phantom* as an ongoing comic book series in the United States (between Gold Key and then Charlton).

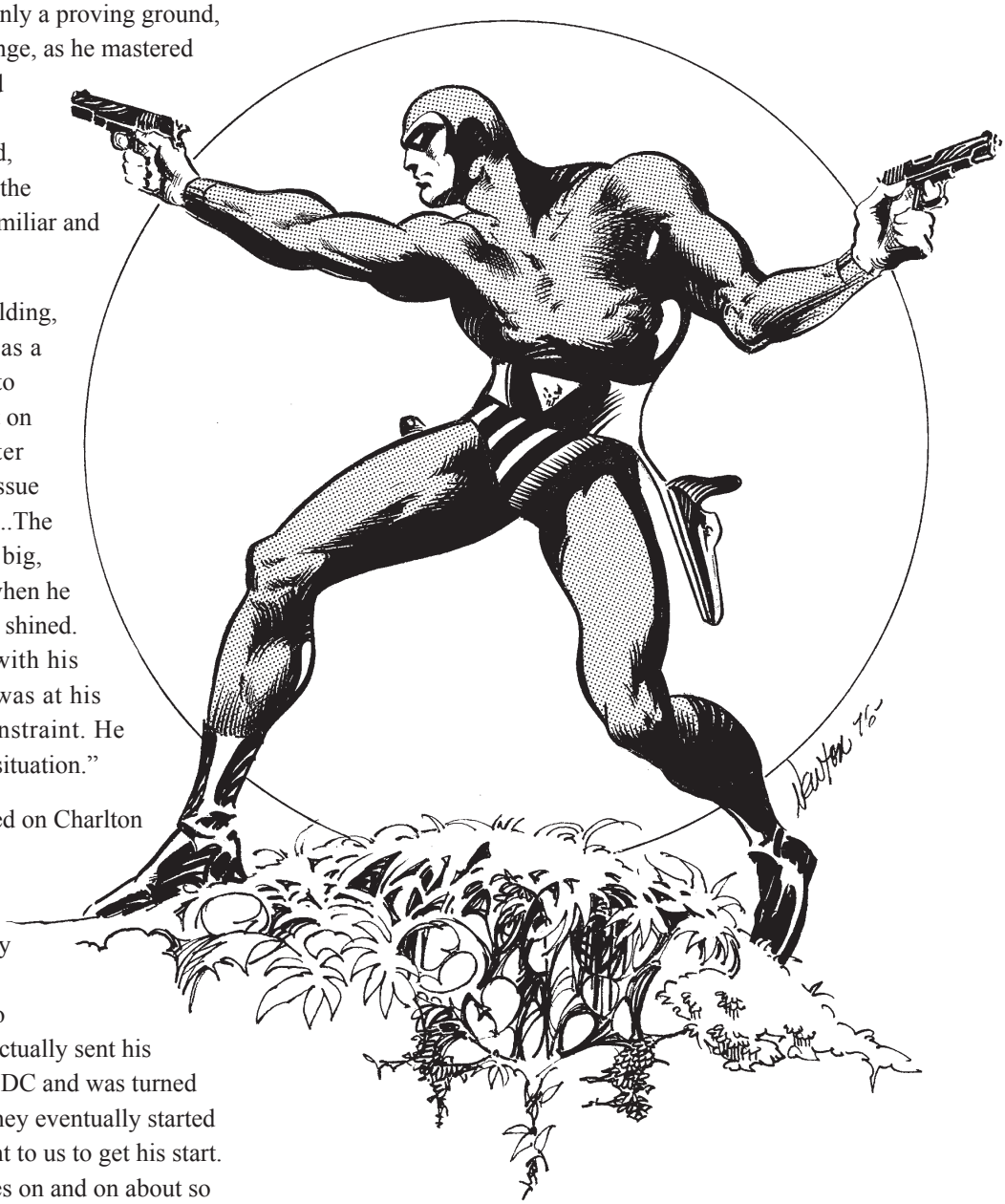
Don returned to his original goal of working for the big two publishers, Marvel and DC. His tenure at Charlton was not only a proving ground, but also showed his wide range, as he mastered telling both supernatural and superhero stories. While his *Phantom* run was short-lived, it left an indelible mark and the comics industry was now familiar and impressed with Don's work.

"When Charlton was folding, he had established himself as a talented artist that was able to do it all, do it well, and do it on time," Tony said. "The latter seemed to be an enormous issue within the publishing world...The workload was really just as big, but I honestly think that is when he really showed his chops and shined. He was critical and strict with his time management, but he was at his best when under a time constraint. He seemed to love that type of situation."

Years later, Cuti reflected on Charlton to Jon B. Cooke:

"The money was really low but it was an opportunity for young artists who were just starting out to break into the field. Don Newton had actually sent his samples to both Marvel and DC and was turned down. So did Mike Zeck. They eventually started at Charlton. John Byrne went to us to get his start. And so many of them, it goes on and on about so many artists. Steve Ditko was always a regular at Charlton in spite of his other work. Because of the freedom, because of the fact that they could, pretty much, do what they wanted and Charlton was very forgiving. [laughs] So, yeah, we were a schlock outfit but we loved what we did. We weren't a schlock outfit in the way we turned out crap for the sake of making money. We turned out second-rate work because we were trying and we were beginners and we were just starting out."

Don, as history would show, was also only starting out, with even further to go.



Phantom pen and ink illustration by Don for *The Charlton Bullseye*.



Chapter 4.5: Don Knocks on Marvel's Door

(opposite page) Fanzine illustration of Captain America by Don for *The Collector* fanzine. Cap was Don's favorite Marvel character.

Like most artists coming up through fandom in the 1970s, Don Newton's greatest desire was to work for Marvel or DC Comics. In 1973, while continuing to draw for fanzines, Don put together some sample pages featuring one of his favorite Marvel characters, Captain America. Don had been a fan of the Star-Spangled Avenger since watching him in the 1944 movie serial by Republic Pictures. The serial, Republic's most expensive, had little to do with the super soldier named Steve Rogers from the comic books. This Cap was District Attorney Grant Gardner, played to fast-talking delight by stock actor Dick Purcell, whose rushed acting couldn't cover his Jersey-sounding accent.

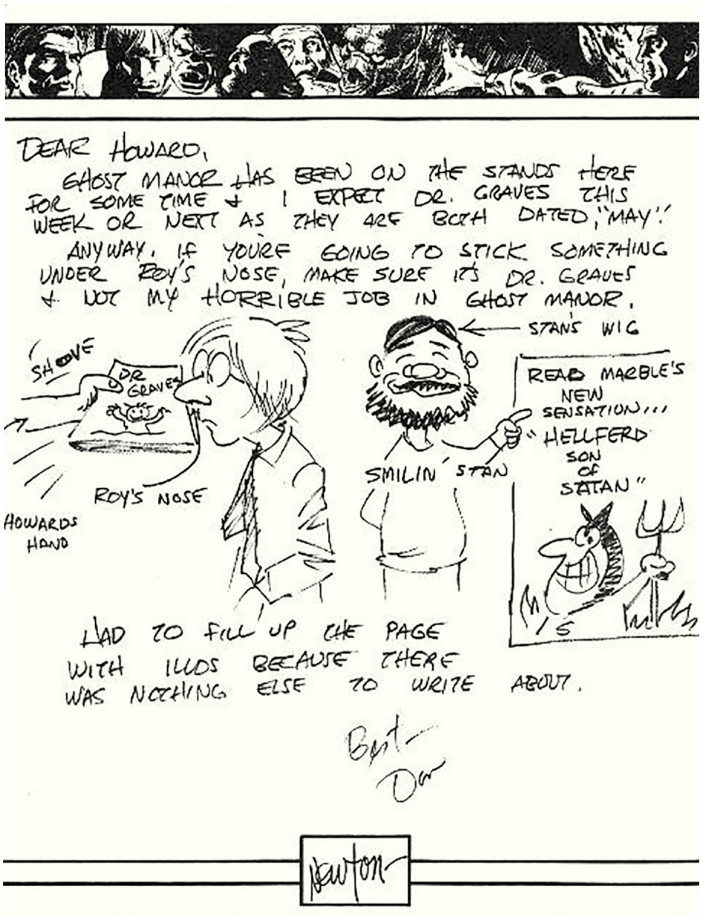
But the fight scenes: Those were a delight and featured some of the best stunts, led by stuntman Dale Van Sickel. This Cap may not have had a shield, but Van Sickel's stunts had him bounding off walls and launching himself into his opponents. The impression it left on Don was so great that whenever I asked him which Marvel character he'd like to draw the most, the answer was always "Captain America."

Don's connections with other fans in the fan press would bring him closer to that dream.

Don's art for fanzines in the early '70s (particularly RBCC, but also others) brought him in touch with comics fan Howard Siegel. One of Howard's friends was Roy Thomas, who became the Editor-in-Chief of Marvel Comics following Stan Lee's move to publisher in 1972. It occurred to Howard that he could offer to send some artwork samples of Don's artwork to Roy Thomas on Don's behalf. The next step would be Don getting a try-out art assignment, which was usually Marvel's first step in potentially hiring a new artist. The company had a specific group of scripts they would send to artists to see what the artist could do with a Marvel story.

Don sent in some pencil-only sample pages after being informed by Bruce Hamilton and John Clark that comics editors would want to see his pencil work without inks. He produced four pages of Captain America pencils, along with some copies of his fanzine artwork. Don drew the pencilled pages on 14 x 20" Bristol art boards.

Another note to Howard Siegel, telling Don that he knew Roy Thomas and would suggest to Roy that Marvel should hire Don. Caricatures of Roy and Stan Lee by Don. Don drew his little cartoon images like this on everything: Other artist's comics, letters, notes, etc.



Unfortunately, nothing ever came of the submission, and Don never heard back from Marvel.

However, in March of 1975, Don was hard at work drawing *The Phantom* when he received a phone call from Roy Thomas, asking if he would be interested in penciling a new comic book at Marvel, *The Liberty Legion*. Roy had solicited artwork from fanzine artists in the past, especially for the *What If?* comic book that Roy edited and often scripted. All of Don's drawings of Golden Age characters in the years of fanzines made Roy think Don would be perfect to draw *The Liberty Legion*, a team composed of many Golden Age characters.

Unfortunately, Don's available time was very limited, as he was teaching during the day and drawing *The Phantom* at night. Don had to turn Roy's offer down, feeling that he was already committed to current work and just could not figure out a way to give it the time and attention it deserved. He did, however, tell Roy that he hoped Marvel might consider him for another project in the future.

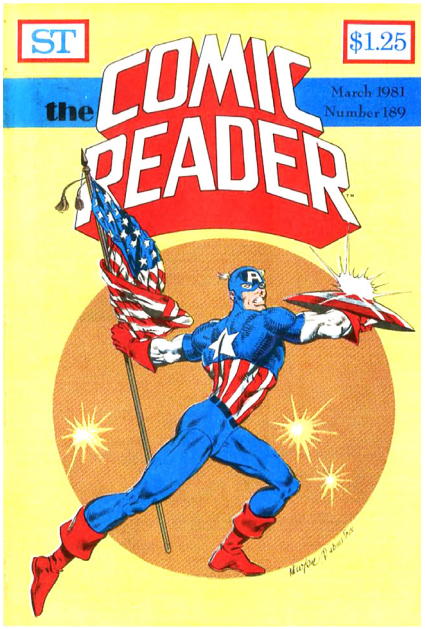
As was usually the case with Don when situations didn't go his way, he made light of the unfortunate timing of the Marvel project offer to Howard Siegel in a note:

Rascally Roy wanted me to draw the Liberty Legion...characters like: Red Raven, Thin Man, Blue Diamond. Funny; when they want me, I don't want them. Remember when it was the other way?

In 1976, Don struggled to find work in the wake of Charlton's demise. He had expected *The Phantom* to run for years, and also hoped it would lead to eventual comics projects from DC or Marvel. Don's *Phantom* generated a fair amount of interest throughout comics fandom, which also reverberated into the professional community, but that didn't necessarily lead to new assignments. With Don living in Arizona and possessing few friends in the industry, his options remained limited.

The Comics Reader, a comic news fanzine or "newszine," was regarded as a key source of comics industry news, read by most comics professionals, and many publishers regularly took phone calls from *TCR* editors searching for news updates. The comics companies liked the publicity, especially in terms of announcing new comics, while professionals in the industry liked being able to keep up on what the other companies were publishing. Comics fans just loved knowing what was being released in the upcoming months. Unlike the Internet news sites of today, where any activity within the comics industry is reported almost immediately, the comics companies of the 1970s struggled with getting details about their comics out to their fans. They either did it through house ads in the comics, noting it in a letters column, or by getting comics fandom to spread the word for them.

In the case of *The Comics Reader,* previous editor Paul Levitz (who was later an Assistant Editor at DC Comics in the '70s) had established contacts at DC and Marvel, and once Street Enterprises (Jerry Sinkovec and Mike Tiefenbacher) took over the publication, they continued those relationships. This made *TCR* a fairly accurate and consistent source of comics information.



Don and Joe Rubinstein agreed to work together on a *Comics Reader* fanzine cover, and this was the result.

Based upon feedback that he received from his friend Dan Adkins, comic editors knew of Don's work and most liked what they saw. However, that did not necessarily translate into new assignments.

Don took on other art assignments during this time period, just to keep in practice and to be seen as available. He painted the cover for the first edition of the *Official Price Guide for Record Collectors* for friend Jerry Osborne. Don also produced a few small freelance art jobs, such as illustrating Bruce Hamilton's ads selling comics (the ads appeared in fanzines and the *Overstreet Price Guide*), drawing funny postcards for tourism shops in Arizona, and contributing artwork to a few fanzines and illustrations for comics conventions. Don just wanted to continue to find opportunities to draw and to keep his artwork in the eyes of the industry.

Don's earlier work was less polished and more expressionistic in style. He really had not had to deal with the Marvel and DC style of penciling comics, in which a single artist would pencil the artwork and another artist would then ink the work, applying black ink over the penciled lines and establishing depth and form through linework. Don soon found himself learning this approach to comic art, courtesy of his friend Dan Adkins, who had left Phoenix in the summer of 1975 to take an art director position at Marvel's black and white magazine line.

Once back working at the Marvel offices, Adkins succeeded in locating some possible work for Don. Art Director John Romita gave Don a chance to ink some pages that were penciled by well-known Marvel artists, which was a common practice by Marvel at the time in trying out new artists. Pencillers such as Dave Cockrum, Joe Staton and others also started at Marvel in the same manner--inking some pages for other pencillers first and then gradually moving over to penciling comics.

Romita liked Don's inking and felt he would be a great fit for many of Marvel's artists. Romita also hoped that the inking work might help Don better understand how to produce the type of explosive artwork that was Marvel's trademark.

Don noted to friends that when he asked for some penciling work, Romita mentioned that he did not feel that Newton's style of drawing was one that "fit" the look of Marvel Comics. Don had inked most of the work he submitted to Marvel, along with a few story pages inked by Dan Adkins. Marvel's overall look at the time was one of dynamic Jack Kirby figures and slick Joe Sinnott finishes. Don utilized a more expressionistic ink line at the time and some of the editors may have felt that Don's work was more sufficient for adventure comic strips than Marvel Comics. At that point, many likely hadn't seen Don's pencil-only artwork.

Don's first assignment was to ink penciller Don Heck on *Ghost Rider* #23 (April, 1977). Even though it was an inking job, Don was happy just to get in the door at Marvel and land some new comics artwork assignments. Heck's pencils were rather incomplete as well, so it gave Don a lot to work with in terms of finishing. Don dived into the inking work with a good attitude and mailed them into Marvel ahead of deadline. Don's inking did exactly what Romita had wanted, which was to add more form to penciller Heck's loose style, and to make the book look and feel more "superheroic."

A few weeks later, he was sent some more penciled pages, this time inking the pencils of Jeff Aclin, an artist Marvel used on their comics for the British comics market. Aclin drew a story featuring Midnight, a Marvel supporting character from the *Master of Kung Fu* series. Don's stylized inking was once more meant to shape up the pencils of an artist whose work lacked some necessary dynamics. In this case, the artist was a young man who had little experience in the American comics industry. The Midnight story was printed in *Iron Man Annual* #4 as a backup tale. As was the case before, Don did his best, finished the work ahead of time, and hoped that the job would open more doors for him at Marvel.

Dan Adkins also did his best to get Don some work on the Marvel magazine line. Dan talked with Don almost daily, courtesy of a phone line at Marvel that allowed for unlimited long-distance calls. Dan often sent Don artist proofs with tracing paper overlays on them that showed the kind of work he was doing for the magazines: touching up the painted covers, re-inking figures on a page, correcting a costume, and any aspect of art direction. He would label the overlays with details so that Don could see the type of work Dan was doing.

"They were putting out titles, and needed somebody to talk to artists on the phone, and make sure the production stuff went through," Adkins told Jon B. Cooke in 1999. "Anything that needed fixing up, I would do; any talks with the artists about how to correct something, I'd do; and I'd help with designing. After two years, these books stopped selling and they started bringing work from upstairs—on the ninth floor, they put out the men's magazines, the gossip magazines, and so forth. They started bringing down advertisements that would appear for Simon & Schuster for their books. They were always making changes, and were always so critical about things. That wasn't a thing I wanted to do...This is the stuff I used to do in the studios, what they'd call paste-ups. I wasn't an illustrator so much as I was a mechanicals man."

Don's ability to paint was known because of his covers for *The Phantom*, along with some he produced for the *RBCC* and Charlton. They were iconic, stunning, and made noteworthy by the comics fan press at the time because they stood out on the newsstand. Adkins was no stranger to this, and wanted to get Don's work on the cover of a Marvel magazine. The covers used on the magazine line featured painted images from such well-known artists as Ken Barr, Earl Norem, Frank Brunner, Neal Adams, and others. Don sent in copies of *The Phantom* into Dan to use as samples of his painting abilities for Adkins to show Marvel editorial. He also produced a painting on spec of a striking image of the Hulk for consideration as a cover to the *Rampaging Hulk* magazine. That particular Hulk piece worked and led to Don receiving a cover assignment to paint a cover for *The Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction* black and white magazine.

As the door was starting to open wider at Marvel, Don was surprised with a sudden offer to pencil comics at DC Comics.



This image is Don's attempt to paint a cover for the black-and-white *Rampaging Hulk* magazine. This painting got Don the job of painting (opposite page) thecover of *Unknown Worlds* #79.


NEWTON

THE COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE

No. 13

$10.95



Chapter 5: Don at DC

When Don's phone rang one fateful evening in 1976, the unexpected call came from an artistic hero of his, artist Neal Adams. Neal expressed his condolences to Don for his loss of work at Charlton, and suggested he contact editor Joe Orlando about working for DC. Adams was well-known at DC as sort of an unofficial Art Director, operating out of the DC "coffee room" and holding court with freelancers who came there looking for work. Adams regularly set up in the room to work on his comics, and often spent most of his time also talking to the many artists who frequented the offices.

Neal came into comics in the 1960s from an advertising background that then led him to drawing the *Ben Casey* daily comic strip (based on a TV medical drama). His style brought an expressiveness and realism not often seen in comics; his emergence as star cover artist at DC in the late '60s, and then on his iconic *Batman* run with writer Dennis O'Neil, elevated him to comics stardom. Neal's advertising experience gave him a knowledge that, combined with his penchant for creator advocacy, made him a force to be reckoned with. He also owned and ran his agency Continuity and Associates, which would become the training ground for a generation of developing artists.

(opposite page) *Overstreet Price Guide* #13 cover: I designed this cover and drew the *Price Guide* logo for Don. As usual, Joe Rubinstein was requested to ink it, and he did a fantastic job. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

Neal had also been impacted by Charlton's closing of production of their comics line. Continuity had a contract with Charlton to produce the covers and comics artwork for an ill-fated line of black and white magazines featuring television properties such as *Six Million Dollar Man, Emergency!*, and *Space: 1999*. When Charlton stopped publishing new comics, those comics and magazine art jobs went away. Seeing the number of artists go without work caused Neal to spring into action and use his industry contacts to try and find new comics work for the creators. He seemed to feel that he should assist the artists with gaining work.

Neal also was in a personal relationship with DC Publisher Jeanette Kahn at the time, and undoubtedly felt that he could assist her in locating some great new talent for DC. Neal's relationship with Kahn might also have provided Neal with some insider knowledge about the availability of work at DC. Most likely, Kahn also told

Neal to bring anyone new in through Joe Orlando, who was an artist, editor, and a close business confidant of Jeanette's at the time.

Neal had complimentary things to say about Don's work, and even encouraged him to purchase an Art-O-Graph machine, a projector positioned over a drawing table to project opaque images right on the drawing board for artists to follow or trace. Don eventually did exactly that,

"There were only a few things that Don couldn't draw and those things he could B.S. his way through,"

years later, to assist in drawing ships, cars, buildings, and other items requiring reference. The ironic thing is that even though he had purchased that expensive device, he rarely ended up using it in his work. I think the main reason why he purchased it was because of Neal's recommendation.

In many ways, owning the device signified to Don that he was now a professional comic book artist, even if it did prove impractical.

"It was rarely used and I may have been the only witness to this: There were only a few things that Don couldn't draw and those things he could B.S. his way through," Tony noted. "However, he had a longing to draw some things exactly as they were. I know that he had little to no idea how a motorcycle was constructed, so some references helped him muddle through that sort of thing. He needed that in some of the work that he did on the *Ghost Rider* issue that he inked. Every blue moon he would break out the Art-O-Graph which to me at the time seemed like a great big pain in the arse."

"The art machine was much more proficient but was a bugbear to move from apartment to apartment. I am sure that you realized that Don's superpower was to be able to change his street address at the blink of an eye, second only to dating 50 women in a years' time," Tony laughed about later.

Don reached out to Joe Orlando the very next day. Orlando remembered speaking to Neal about Don and was willing to give him a try-out on some comics work. He knew of Don's work on *The Phantom*, so he was confident that Don was able to complete drawing a full issue of comics. However, since Don had never worked for DC, Orlando wanted to start with a single assignment first, just to get a sense of the work that Don would produce for the company. Orlando was particularly concerned about Don's ability to pencil pages effectively for others to ink, since Don had previously just inked his own work.

Don expressed his excitement at hearing from Adams and finally connecting with DC in this note to comics fan Howard Siegel:

My second career seems to be going better than ever now. I just inked a Don Heck 'Ghost Rider' for Marvel and last night got a call from none other than Neal Adams! He suggested I contact DC as they had been trying to reach me. A call to Joe Orlando today, netted me a penciling job on Aquaman!

Adams told me that he thought I might be able to get The Batman and that he had suggested me for this assignment. That would be quite a giant step if I could get on Batman!

So, the death of Charlton has actually opened up new and bigger doors for me. Maybe I'll make the "big time" yet.

I'm delighted about the breakthrough at DC because I feel they have a superior product. You may recall that I've never been too enchanted by the Marvel storylines or the majority of their characters. At DC there are probably 12-15* good to superior superheroes.

For now, I'll take the work anywhere, but eventually I hope to establish myself at DC.

Keep your fingers crossed and shine your bat signal on the moon.

Best, Don

* Maybe closer to two dozen

It is interesting to note Don's use of the phrase, "second comics career," in reference to this period of his life. It establishes in one sense the fear that he had at the time of possibly never breaking through to draw comics again. At the same time, it is also evidence of the excitement that he felt at the good fortune that came his way.

Once Don started working for DC Comics, his artistic "wheels" were rolling again and he would never look back at the possibility of being unemployed. It started with a story for *Aquaman*.

Don worked on cleaning up and streamlining his art style to make it more legible for an inker. Don was also fairly protective over his penciled work and hoped to be assigned a good inker. He contacted his old friend, Dan Adkins, who had just left his production role at Marvel, and suggested he should ask for the inking assignment. Dan was already working at DC, so they were happy to have an experienced inker on Don. From what I remember, Adkins had also suggested himself to the editor as an inker for Don's pencils.

Once Don received the script, he focused on really bringing his "A" game to the assignment. Aquaman was not a character that caused him great excitement (not like Batman would), but Don realized the importance of doing a good job. He located some marine life photos and really attempted to give the story an undersea look by having the characters' hair move with the motion of the water, among other illustrative effects. On some panels, Don was so pleased with his work that he actually inked the panel as well, just to complete the panel as he wanted it to look.

Don had worked hard on drawing the book in a smoother, tighter penciling style, and found that his decisions were sound and conveyed his artistic intent more easily to the inker than his earlier work would have. Once Adkins received the pencils to ink, he called Don to tell him that the pages were "beautiful," and looked forward to inking more. The improvement in Don's work was evident to everyone involved. Since Don was no longer having to ink his work, a part of the process that he usually found unappealing, he also found over time that his speed grew with each assignment.



Pg. 5 of the Aquaman story in *DC Special* #28, Don's first pencilling work for DC Comics. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

Don's first *Aquaman* story ran a few months later (July 1977) in *DC Special* #28, a special featuring "*Earth Shattering Disasters*." Since the 1960s, DC had used the *DC Special* branding to print collections of stories dedicated to a specific theme or DC artist. For Don, the project was anything but a "disaster," as it meant he was finally reaching his goal of becoming a full-time comics artist.

Joe Orlando called Don to tell him DC was very happy with that first project and offered him a contract to pencil. In many ways, *Aquaman* became Don's "lucky" comic book strip at DC because it was the first character that his artwork became associated with at the company and also part of his new contract. Don was also happy because



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the scripts were by writer David Michelinie, who was producing some exceptional work for DC like *Unknown Soldier*, a war comic drawn by Newton favorite Gerry Talaoc. Michelinie also gave Don his first chance to draw Batman in *Aquaman* #61. In the story, *Aquaman* teamed up with Batman in an attempt to retrieve cargo that the villainous Kobra had stolen. The story was inked by Bob McLeod and featured a couple of nice panels of Newton's take on Batman. I think Michelinie had asked Don what he would like to draw when Don was assigned the *Aquaman* title, and as you can guess, Don replied:

"Batman."

Don spent a fair amount of his early DC days penciling figures under the sea. For Don, the easier backgrounds of the undersea expedited his penciling speed and meant that he finished drawing the comics even faster than he (or DC) had expected.

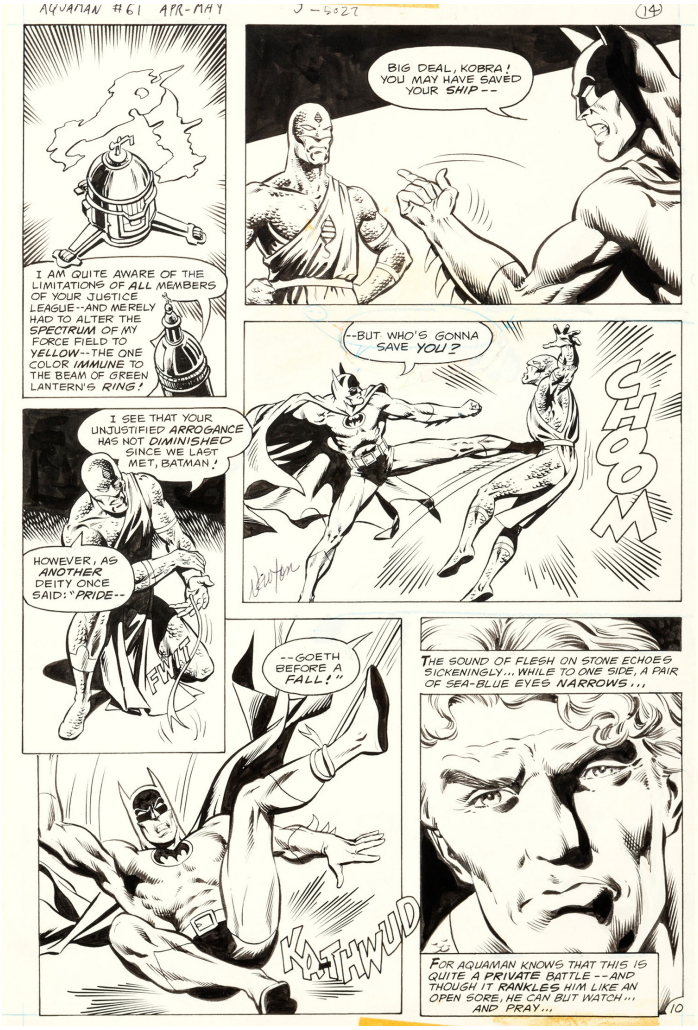
Unfortunately, *Aquaman* only lasted four issues with Don as penciller before it was cancelled with #63. Don's *Aquaman* stories were then reduced to eight-page backup stories that ran in *Adventure Comics* and *World's Finest Comics* from that point forward. Don did remain as the penciller, however, even as the writers changed every few stories.

Don's contract with DC allowed him to step away from teaching, a job that he would never return to, to draw comics full-time. He was obligated to draw 30 pages a month, or basically a page of pencils each day. Don kept this production rate for the rest of his career, even though his page rate changed almost yearly because of contract negotiations.

He was, however, often able to complete 1 ½ to 2 pages a day, meaning that he could also take a day off now and then, usually on the weekends. On days where Don had only a splash page to produce, he often was able to complete that work by lunchtime, and then take the afternoon off or start another page to get ahead.

(opposite page) *Aquaman* #60 splash page by Don and inker John Celardo. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

On a typical day, Don got up in the morning in time to get Tony ready for the day. He would drive Tony to school and then return to his apartment to begin work on his latest assignment.



Page of *Aquaman* #61, featuring Don's first chance to draw Batman. Writer David Michelinie made sure to write Batman in for Don, and inker Bob McLeod did a nice job of inking the *book*. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

He would usually take the new script that he had received and would make small thumbnail sketches of the page layouts on the back side of the script pages. In some cases, he would also sketch out a small panel to remind himself how to solve a problem or to emphasize an important part of the story.

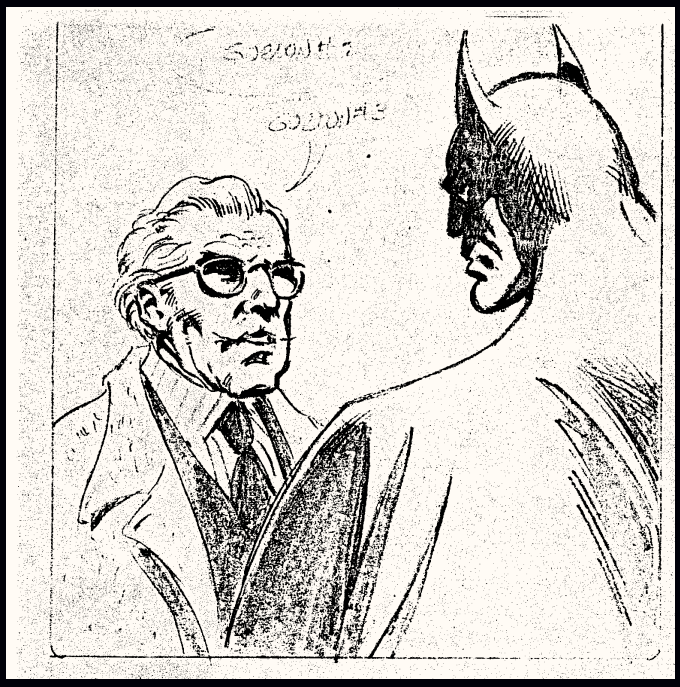
SIDEBAR: THE BOB KANE POSE

In just about every Batman story he drew, Don featured a shot of Batman usually in the left side of the panel and looking over his shoulder. I noticed that Don used this shot a lot, and so I asked him about it.

His answer was that it was "his tribute to Bob Kane." Don told me that he always liked that pose when Kane, Dick Sprang, Sheldon Moldoff and other Batman artists used it, so drawing it in a story was his way of continuing that legacy.

I don't think that Don liked Bob Kane's work all that much, and as a matter of fact, as we now know, Bob Kane drew little of the artwork that was credited to his name. It's entirely possible the pose was developed by Jerry Robinson or Sheldon Moldoff. My guess is that Don noticed this pose used a lot while reading the *Batman* comics of his youth, and decided to provide a nod to his childhood in drawing this pose.

It is a stunning image every time that Don drew it into a story, so Don's decision to use it became sort of his "stamp" on the character.



Don would usually work through the day, breaking for a small lunch. He would often receive phone calls from DC editors or from friends such as Dan Adkins, and would cradle the phone on his shoulder as he continued to work. Later, he bought a speakerphone and was able to work without holding the phone. This was Don's primary social outlet during the day, outside of driving to the art store for supplies, going to lunch if one of his friends stopped by and talked him into it, or leaving later in the day to pick up Tony from school. Don was a fit person his entire life, having been a weightlifter in his younger years. He would also stop to lift weights or to take a small jog during the day. At night, Don continued to work on his pages while sometimes talking to industry friends on the phone while Tony played or worked on homework. If there was still work to be done on a page, he would always finish that before he turned in for the night. I don't remember Don ever leaving a page unfinished before stopping work.

This was his usual schedule, Monday through Friday.

DC Publisher Jenette Khan phoned Don personally a few months after he started to welcome him to the DC Comics staff. She was very warm and inviting and suggested to Don that he make the trip to New York City sometime to meet the DC editorial staff in person. Don always remembered that and actually made the trek a few years later.

Dan Adkins quickly became the "go-to" inker for Don's work, and was assigned to ink many of Don's comic stories early in his career. However, Adkins was also known for being challenged with meeting deadlines, so that situation did not last past those first few months. He always requested a Newton penciling job when asking for work from DC, but those assignments didn't always pan out because he was also working on other projects at times.

Adkins often acted as Don's "support network" at DC, and would take feedback from Don and attempt to assist Don in getting things changed or assignments resolved.

Sometimes Dan took things further than Don had intended, however, and spread information to DC that Don had intended to keep private between the two artists. This would sometimes result in phone calls from editors asking about a specific problem or some other question. In most cases these were just trivial matters that Don had remarked to Dan. Don often wished Adkins wouldn't speak to the editorial staff about anything that he heard from Don, as those situations could lead to uncomfortable moments.

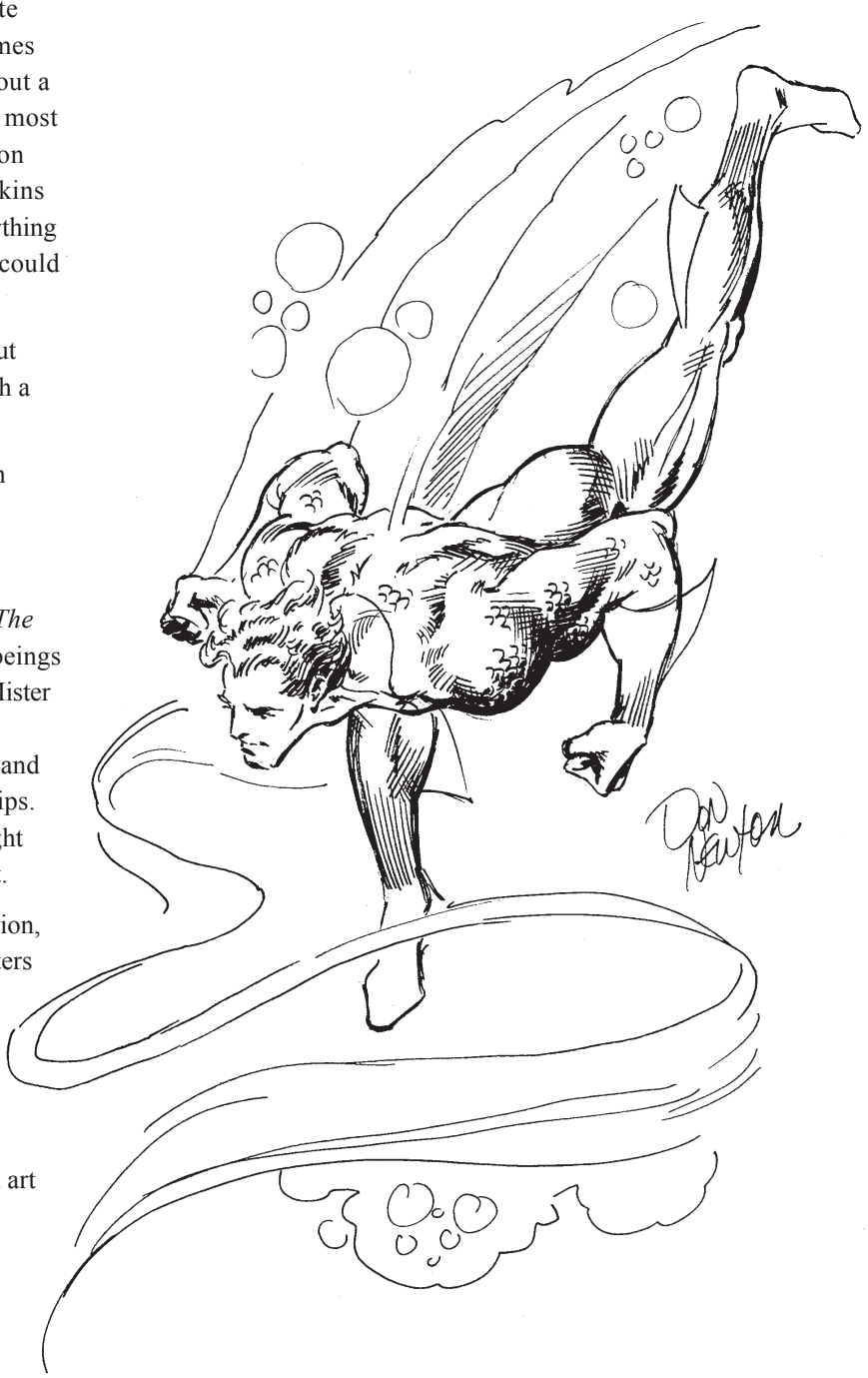
By the same token, Dan always looked out for Don and that undoubtedly helped Don with a number of issues that occurred.

Jack Kirby moved to DC from Marvel in 1970, eventually launching his powerhouse "Fourth World" series of connected comics, which were concept-heavy and grandiose in nature. *The New Gods*, *Mister Miracle*, and *The Forever People* introduced a group of superbeings that included the warrior Orion, escape artist Mister Miracle, the hippy-like Forever People; they faced the villainous cosmic despot Darkseid and his Parademon army from the planet Apokolips. The Fourth World was brilliant but, like a light bulb, became blinding right before going out.

Just a few years after the series' cancellation, DC wanted to mine The Fourth World characters and start bringing them into the main DC universe; The New Gods would return, but with a more contemporary superhero look. This transition was started in *1St Issue Special* #13, a comic that introduced the new super-heroic look to Kirby's epic heroes, with art by Mike Vosburg.

The New Gods returned in a new series starting in July of 1977, with Don taking over the art chores. Although the comic title remained "The New Gods" in the indicia and retained its original numbering, it continued the original numbering, starting with #12 and a logo that read *The Return of the New Gods*.

Don's very nuanced human figures provided a different look for characters that were created in a bombastic and heavy style by Jack Kirby.



A sketch of Aquaman running that Don drew while working on an issue of Aquaman, while trying to work out the pose. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

"Don's take felt very natural to me," Gerry Conway reflected. "He didn't try to be Kirby, which was a very smart decision on his part. I certainly encouraged it, you know, to the extent that I could and thought it was a good idea. I think it made that mythology feel more grounded and real so that readers buy into it, a way that they might not have been able to with Kirby--even with all his strengths.



Return of the New Gods #12 cover by Al Milgrom.

"One can certainly argue the Kirby approach was grandiose and appropriate to that thematic universe that he created. If you're doing an ongoing series, you have to have a feeling of interconnection with the characters. They have to be grounded, you know, I don't know if that's the right word within the context of comics. But you have to be able to suspend your disbelief and care about the characters. I think it was really obvious that Jack was more interested in the mythology and the epic aspects of the New Gods.

"Don was a great storyteller. and kept true to the nature of them being epic. You know, his stuff looked great."

Assigning Don makes sense when you consider how DC wanted to try a new direction for the characters. While drawing *Return*, Don continually looked at the work of Jack Kirby and tried to bring a "Newton-version" to the Kirby designs to the comic book. Don quickly found that he enjoyed drawing all of the dynamic, armored characters, with the regal settings and the science fiction imagery. Newton seemed to enjoy combining Kirby's runaway abstract ideas with his own more real and life-like character designs. This became an ongoing joke for our fan group, as whenever Don drew a background or image with a lot of machinery or technology, someone would eventually remark that Don was now "The Master of Machinery," a moniker once quoted in fanzines for artist Jack Kirby. The series used a variety of inkers in hopes of finding someone that worked well with Don's pencil artwork. In Don's eyes, however, only two inkers succeeded: Dan Adkins and Newton-favorite Joe Rubinstein, who was brought in to ink *The New Gods* #16.

"I might have been aware of Don's work at the time, happy to do it," Rubinstein told Barry Keller. "I do remember that I had to stay up all night to finish it, so either it was a short deadline, or I was taking too long to do it. I was pretty exhausted when I handed it in.

"But, I loved Don's stuff right from the beginning. You could see he was a real draftsman and that he understood how to spot blacks, unlike a lot of people whose work we had to fix. It was just my job not to hurt the work. Also, if I remember right…I can't remember the sequence, but I would look at Adkins's work, and think it was just kind of dull, and not doing justice to the work. And then I would look at Alcala's stuff and think that it was beautiful, but smothering him. My philosophy was always just to try and keep it as true to the pencils as possible. I'm pretty sure I got a hand-written note from Don--there was no email in those days--just telling me how much he liked what I did. I was very pleased and complimented by it."

Gerry Conway felt Don's pencils were perfect for an inker of any caliber.

"Don was such a distinctive penciler that it almost didn't matter who inked his work, as long as they didn't mess it up. You know, there was no way to improve it and there is no way to put your own distinctive style on it."

The Return of The New Gods generated some buzz in the industry and seemed like it might take off, but in the end, it only lasted until issue #19. DC finished the last *New Gods*

story in two issues of *Adventure Comics*, both drawn by Don.

DC gave Don a very exciting challenge early on in his career at the company, by having him work with writer David Michelinie on the development of a new science fiction comic book. Don was ecstatic and Michelinie felt he would also be a great choice for the new title, *Star Hunters*. Don suggested modeling the main character, Donovan Flint, on a favorite actor of his, Errol Flynn, and crafted the spaceship and supporting character designs influenced the work of artists Wally Wood and Al Williamson. DC paid for Don for his initial development artwork, something he truly enjoyed doing.

The Star Hunters debuted in 1977, in *DC Super Stars* #16, with pencils by Don and inks by Bob Layton, a relatively new inker at DC at the time who had worked at Charlton and Marvel. Don became concerned when he was told that his work would be inked by Layton, since up to this point, Don had most of his work inked by Dan Adkins or by himself.

Dan Adkins was an inker who basically inked the lines drawn by the penciller, while Bob Layton added his own style and flourishes into the inking, meshing the penciller's style with his own. Both were valid methods of inking, but at this early period in his career, Don felt that no line should be changed in his penciling work. Like many comics artists, learning to collaborate with others on their collective artwork was challenging for Don.

Layton was making a splash as the inker of *All-Star Comics* and *Secret Society of Super-Villains* at DC at the time, and was also a personal friend of writer David Michelinie. They enjoyed working together and bounced ideas off of each other often. Unfortunately, upon viewing the promotional poster that DC had Don draw, which Layton also inked, Don felt his concerns about the collaboration with Layton were founded.

After he saw the pages from the inked story, Don asked DC to assign another inker to the book, preferring Dan Adkins as his regular inker.



Return of the New Gods #16 page inked by Joe Rubinstein. Don LOVED this inking job. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

I remember talking to Don about this, as the group of us all felt that the Layton work looked fine.

For some reason, Don did not agree.

DC declined to make the change and his editor was incredibly surprised by Don's reaction and felt he and Layton formed a successful collaboration. They had already assigned Layton and didn't wish to take work away from him. The editor, Joe Orlando's assistant at the time, asked Don to give it a chance and to see if things improved with future issues. Unfortunately, Don didn't agree with that decision. In what many felt was too bold a move for such a young comics career,

Don asked to be removed from the bi-monthly *Star Hunters* after the first issue

I think that if Don had given Layton more of a chance, the results might have been genuinely nice. The irony here is that in the years to follow, as Bob Layton's work developed and Don's penciling improved, Don would have eventually loved the finish that Layton would have placed over his pencils. Don loved Dick Giordano's inks, and Bob Layton has noted many times that he was a disciple of Giordano, having worked with Dick over the years.

The sudden change left the book without a consistent penciller, with the unfortunate result being that Don's leaving created a problem for DC in supporting *Star Hunters*. The book rolled through a list of pencillers that probably confused readers and resulted in poorer sales than expected. None of them matched the level of interest that Don put into the comic and it showed in their work. To their credit, they probably received the assignments late and might not have had good lead time to get the pencil art finished, a common occurrence in the comic book industry.



DC SuperStars #15 splash page of *The Starhunters*, inked by Bob Layton. (opposite page) Ad for the new *Starhunters* comic book by Don and Bob Layton. Unfortunately, the book was cursed from the beginning by problems brought by Don and David Michelinie.

The artist who took over the series debuted a new spaceship for the team. When Michelinie discovered the design was swiped from a cartoon called *Space Sentinels*, he was not happy.

"After the first issue using that design had gone to print, it was discovered that the xerox [of the design] had been of an animation cell from a Saturday morning cartoon show!" Michelinie told interviewer Alex Dueben. "So basically the series that I had worked so hard to create and make original was using a line-for-line theft from a TV show.

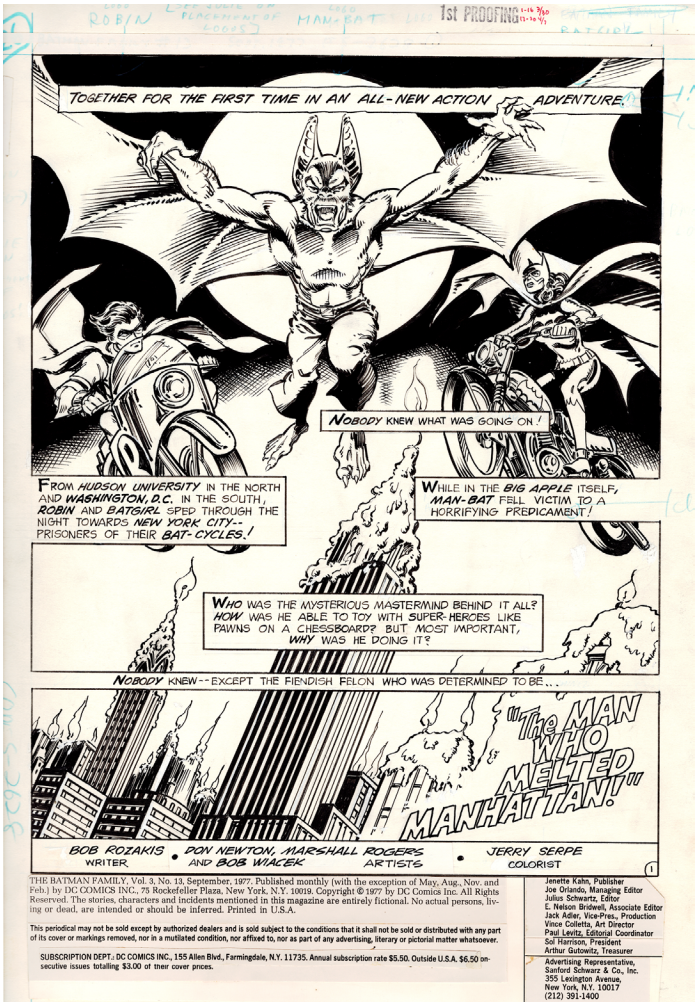
"I made my anger known to DC and was told that the artist would be replaced. But I was asked not to tell anyone until the art for the current issue was finished. When the last page of art came in, I asked my editor who the new artist would be, and he told me they had decided to keep the current guy, knowing that if that happened I would quit. This showed me that DC, at least at that time, valued a dishonest (and lazy) artist over a writer who had given them unquestioned loyalty for five years."

Michelinie went over to Marvel that day, and *Star Hunters* was cancelled with issue #7, itself a victim of a situation greater than the book's own editorial in-fighting.

After Jenette Kahn was hired as publisher in 1976, DC tried to further compete with Marvel by adding more titles with a higher page count, but that strategy--the "DC Explosion"--backfired as the newsstand distribution began to show signs of weakness from what it was a decade earlier. This was arguably compounded from a combination of rising paper and printing costs (thanks to the economy of the 1970s), and then a devastating winter. Blizzards and ice storms







made it practically impossible for the trucks that carried the comics from the printers in Sparta, Illinois to deliver to newsstands that, quite frankly, people weren't able to travel out to.

The reaction from the Warner Brothers execs upstairs of DC was swift: 17 titles were cancelled, four new titles were stillborn before publication, and five staffers were let go. The fan press came up with their own name for it:

The DC Implosion.

Two books Don was working on, *Aquaman* and *The New Gods*, along with the book he co-created, *Star Hunters*, were all axed. The remaining *Aquaman* story for #64 went to *Adventure Comics*, while *The New Gods* #20 found its 25 pages split between *Adventure Comics* #459 and #460.

After leaving *Star Hunters*, Don was assigned to draw *Batman Family* #13, alternating chapters with penciler Marshall Rogers. The issue featured Batman supporting characters, Robin, Batgirl and Man-Bat, but no Dark Knight. Still, Don was pleased with the assignment, and enjoyed drawing Batgirl and Man-Bat in particular--but he was never a big fan of the classic "short-pants" version of Robin (the Robin costume with the bare legs), so was less interested in drawing the Teen Wonder.

Batman Family # 13 was inked by Bob Wiacek, a young inker who worked at the Neal Adams Continuity Studios and was known for background inking for a number of seasoned inkers such as Tex Blaisdell. Don was relatively happy with the inking and noted at the time, commenting in a way only another artist could, that Wiacek "inks human hair really well."

At the end of Don's first two years of penciling comics for DC, the company came to Don expecting him to sign a new contract. In his review of the new agreement, Don felt that DC was not as concerned about him as he hoped. It

(top) DC Explosion ad that ran in the fan press at the time. The "explosion" was later changed to the "Implosion" by fans. (bottom) Splash page to *The Batman Family* #13, featuring Don inked by Bob Wiacek.

was difficult to live in Scottsdale, Arizona and still feel a valued part of DC, and some of that separation began to wear on him. He expressed concerns to friends over not receiving enough communication from editors, as well as not having any sort of say over the work he was being assigned during that time.

In 1979, shortly after his working at DC, Don also began to feel isolated in Arizona. He felt that he was possibly losing comics work because he did not have anyone to represent his personal needs or goals at the DC offices in New York City. On phone calls, Dan Adkins noted many times that Don should consider moving to the east to be closer to his employer. Dan pointed out how Don would be able to just "stroll into the office and get work at any time, by speaking to the editors and getting to know everyone." Don realized that Dan was right, as most of his work was gained simply by an editor deciding to send him work. After his back-and-forth negotiations (over the phone) with both DC and Marvel, Don decided that he needed to do something.

Dan Adkins noted many times that Don should consider moving to the east to be closer to his employer.

His first thought was to arrange for a trip to New York to meet the DC staff. In the weeks following that decision, Don told DC of his plans and purchased tickets to fly to New York with Tony. He arranged to have his friend Howard Siegel pick them up at the airport.

Tony Newton was only about eight or nine years old at the time of the trip, with a father who had rarely ever traveled.

"I had never seen my Dad scared, but between the storm-filled flight [into NYC] and the hotel room once we arrived, Dad showed me that he was a mortal just like the rest of us," Tony remembered. "The storms that we flew into had him "white-knuckling" the seat the whole way into the airport. I remember that a couple of DC10's fell out of the sky as a result of some of the same issues and some sort of flaw in the aircraft, and there we were…flying in one, in bad weather."

"It was my father's first trip to [New York City], doing a face-to-face with the editors and other folks at the DC offices," he recalled. "Howard was so nice and picked us up at the airport, and helped us to find a hotel room. The thought of making a reservation was alien to Dad, so the only accommodations that he was able to arrange literally scared the heck out of him when he arrived at the hotel. He managed to get a hold of Dan Adkins that night (who was a night owl) and Dan arranged for us to stay with him in New Jersey. The only problem was that Dan had never learned to drive a car.

"Howard was gracious enough to come back into the city and to pick us up, and to



Don in his living room at his Scottsdale townhouse. This picture was taken for an article on Don in one of the local Arizona newspapers.

drive us to Dan's house. Mr. Siegel was like a guardian angel. On the next day, Don and Tony took the train into DC Comics with Dan Adkins. As Tony further notes about the trip: "We went to DC and I was able to pick any comic from that month that I wanted. I was in heaven. There were a few months of *Sgt. Rock, G.I. Combat* and *Weird War Tales*. I was set. We also went to Marvel Comics and I was allowed to sit in the lobby area."

"Don didn't like New York City. So many people that you can't help but bump into constantly was really alien to him. Times Square was awesome and we enjoyed seeing that part of the city during the visit."

Despite Don's concerns during the trip, the idea of moving closer to his employer continued to plague his thoughts upon his return to Scottsdale. He started to speak to a real estate agent that Dan Adkins set him up with, and began showing us photographs of houses when we visited for our dinners. I could tell that he was serious about moving east, but it made sense, considering how he often was frustrated at the lack of communication that he would get from the comics companies in New York.

This awkward period after the DC Implosion only added to Don's concerns, as many in the comics fan press were reporting that DC was a failing company with low sales. Considering that Charlton had ceased publishing only two years prior, one can imagine the concerns that filtered among the community of comics creators at such information. As one of those ex-Charlton artists and a single father, Don was often concerned about his future.

Editor Paul Levitz had promised Don that he would not be affected, but Levitz was often busy and unable to speak to Don when he called. This left him to deal with assistants and others who didn't always have a good answer for his concerns.

In particular, at every chance of negotiation with DC, Don focused on one thing: *He wanted to draw Batman.* Usually, those requests fell on deaf ears and, at times, Don expressed thoughts about possibly making a change to Marvel because of that situation.



Marvel EIC Jim Shooter, who tried twice to get Don to work for Marvel.

Knowing that Don's contract was coming up for renewal at DC, Marvel Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter started trying to coax Don into working for them. Shooter appreciated Don's strong storytelling abilities, something that Don was recognized for by a number of industry professionals. Telling a good comics story in a clear way was a goal that Shooter placed on all Marvel artists, requesting that they focus on clear-cut visual storytelling instead of attempting overly-dynamic panel designs. Shooter wanted the artists to move away from the experimental and creative panel layouts used by artists such as Gene Colan, Neal Adams, or Jim Steranko. and others, as he felt that some of the new artists were focusing on style over substance in their storytelling. Shooter felt that some Marvel stories being published might have seemed confusing to younger readers and sought to right the ship for those new and younger readers.

Because of DC's sales, Shooter knew that he was in a good place when speaking to creators working for DC. Marvel had experienced growing sales for years, and even with the paper shortage, was in better financial shape than DC. He knew

that a personal call to DC professionals would have a positive impact towards getting new creators for Marvel. At the time, Don was more flattered by the call than interested, but the idea stuck in his head. Shooter indicated that Don could make more money per page at Marvel and have access to better inkers.

In the months prior to Don's discussions with DC about renewal, Jim Shooter called Don at home on a couple of occasions. He was interested in Don's plans and whether Don had ever considered working for Marvel Comics. Don was pleased by the attention, and the situation was heightened due to frustrations growing out of his place at DC. Among other things, Don had made it well-known that he wanted to draw Batman from his first day, and he was also concerned that other artists had more lucrative contracts with DC than his current contract.

Shooter may also have had some creators at Marvel contact Don to generate some excitement about the possibility of getting him to join the team at Marvel. During the six months before his contract expired at DC, Don was contacted by Joe Rubenstein, an inker that Don considered the best inker in comics. Marvel artist Val Mayerik also called to recommend that Don make the move to Marvel. Don enjoyed talking to Mayerik in particular because Val also had an interest in bodybuilding. Don remarked after the phone call that Mayerik was a "really nice guy" and also took a little more interest in Mayerik's artwork at the time. Don enjoyed the attention that he was getting from these industry veterans and especially liked the new connections that he was making to industry veterans that he had never spoken to before. It made him feel like he had a future in the industry after all, and that his penciling skills were very much desired.

At DC, another area that frustrated Don continuously was in not getting assigned to draw more "name" characters. This was partially because of DC's royalty program, which basically paid the artist residuals when a comic book sold over 100,000 copies, and also because Don would like to have drawn other characters. For books that sold less than 100,000, creators did not receive a royalty, and Don felt he was losing the chance to make more money because of what he was assigned.

Don expressed his concerns and interest to his editor, Paul Levitz, and again noted his desire to draw Batman and Captain Marvel. Levitz didn't have any control over the Marvel Family, so he could only suggest Don's involvement to the editor at the time, who had Captain Marvel being drawn in a more "cartoonish" style than Don's more "realistic" art style.

Before the issues with DC occurred, Don's assignment of *The Batman Family* story was originally supposed to lead to Don drawing additional issues of that title, but that never happened because Don took a left turn instead.

He left to work at Marvel Comics.



Don was asked to draw some of the introduction pages that ran in the *Worlds Finest Comics* dollar books. This one is from issue #255 and is inked by Kurt Schaffenberger.

SIDEBAR: KING OF THE BACKUPS

DC usually assigned Don the lead story in an ongoing monthly comic book (22 pages), along with a backup story of 8 pages to round out his penciling assignments for any given month. The term "backup stories" was an industry-defined term used to define stories of a shorter length that were basically published "in the back" of a comic, to fill out the full 22 pages of the book.

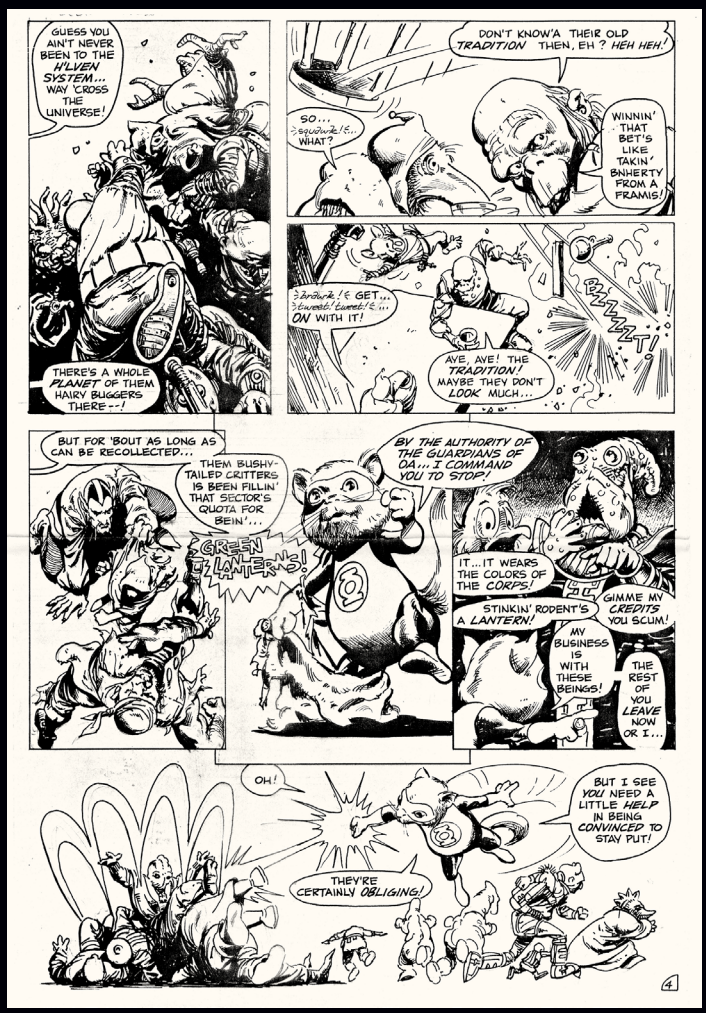
DC Comics was known at the time for publishing comics that collected groups of stories into a larger format, such as the oversized Dollar Comics or annuals. This was also because the company then had over forty years of comics stories that could be reprinted in these larger formats, so the situation provided them with a lot of material to work with in assembling comics collections.

Sales were down for DC, and the lessening interest in the reprinted material might have been because DC had printed so many of them. Fans also may have simply desired all-new material to be printed for the comics that they purchased with their hard-earned dollars. Much of the better reprint stories and characters had already been thoroughly covered by reprinted material by the late 1970s.

This led to DC commissioning more stories of a shorter length because they had the space to fill on their comics. Editors began to assign these short stories to creators which could then be used at any time in the future to fill out the remaining pages of a comic book. The assignments for these short stories came from a variety of editors and for any number of comic books, and were usually assigned depending upon need or to build up some inventory for use in the future. They also became a showcase for emerging talent.

Don Newton's assigned backup stories amounted to anything from his early Batman stories ("Unsolved Cases of The Batman") to the *Shazam!* stories that shifted to *World's Finest* after *Shazam!* was cancelled as a monthly title. As Don moved to drawing *Detective* and then *Batman*, his 8-page backup assignments expanded to include stories involving a multitude of DC characters. Don really enjoyed drawing some of these stories because they gave him a chance to draw something different and he appreciated the variety of work and applied his professionalism to execute the assignment to the best of his ability.

I would often drop by Don's apartment and be rather surprised at the new script sitting on his table at the time. Don would usually read through the script in advance and make notes and small layout sketches on the backs of the papers, as DC usually sent scripts that were copied single-sided and stapled together.



A page from one of the *Green Lantern* Ch'p backup stories – pencils AND inks by Don Newton!

When Don went back to draw each page, this meant his initial ideas were already somewhat planned out for him.

These stories also resulted in Don being inked by a whole variety of new inkers. On the lead stories, Don's inkers stayed somewhat consistent depending upon the assignment: Dan Adkins, Frank Chiaramonte, Alfredo Alcala, Kurt Schaffenberger, Dave Hunt, and others were frequent Newton inkers. For these smaller stories, the assignments usually went to an inker that was available or that worked often for the specific editor.

These weren't always jobs that mattered to him as much because they were not part of an ongoing series. They were often non-descript mystery stories or something for an anthology comic book. Exceptions to that were the Ch'p Green Lantern tales, which Don enjoyed drawing, to the point that he inked one of the stories! He also really liked being offered the Mark Evanier *Blackhawk* backup story, as Evanier had many top-flight artists and writers working on those and Don was proud to be a part of that effort. He also really liked Evanier's stories.

Many of these assignments were often given with little advance warning: In other words, Don would be told that he would be drawing *Shazam!* regularly, and then an editor would call a day later to say that he was sending him a script for a new comic book entitled, *Time Warp*, a new anthology series from DC. In some cases, he wasn't even informed of what was arriving, and a script just arrived in the mail. After Don called the editor and reviewed the reference details to use in drawing the story, he usually just got started on the work.

Don was a resourceful artist, so most of the time, he just rolled with the punches and took on the assignment without any complaint. Don was never temperamental and was simply happy to have the consistent work. The odd schedules and changes just made the work more interesting. I cannot remember Don complaining about much other than the work of a specific inker, having to draw a character that he didn't like or griping about an editor not sending him something that he needed.

Many of these odd assignments led to some terrific artwork and a "freshening of the palette" for Don, who was often stuck drawing *Batman*, *Aquaman* or *Shazam* regularly for long periods. He often just needed to draw something else. I remember him being excited about the first issue of *Time Warp* because he got to draw a science fiction tale.

Heavy Metal magazine was generating a lot of buzz in the late 1970's, and the comics companies were starting to take notice of the situation. While Don was working at home one day, editor Jack Harris called him and told Don about DC's plans to design a new science fiction anthology series. Harris mentioned that DC was looking to do something closer to *Heavy Metal*, and noted a designed plan to include well-drawn, illustrative artwork and EC-science fiction-like stories. DC's goal was to have unusual science fiction stories that were well-illustrated by some of DC's best artists. Michael Kaluta was selected as the cover artist to give each issue a unique look on the stands, and letterer Todd Klein designed a very cool logo for the anthology comic.



Cover to *Time Warp* #5 by Mike Kaluta.

As Don described it at the time when I asked him about the new comic, "It will be a mixture of the old EC science fiction comics crossed with *Heavy Metal* magazine, without the sex and violence." *Time Warp* debuted in 1979 as a 64-page dollar comic. The high concept book would only last five issues.


YOU AND ARSENAL ARE ANACHRONISMS, MISTRESS! YOU'VE OUTLIVED YOUR FUNCTIONS -- COME ALIVE BY ACCIDENT IN A WORLD THAT HAS NO USE FOR YOU!
YOU LIE! THE WAR...
IT WAS WON BY THE ALLIES! YOU WERE NEVER REPROGRAMMED WITH THAT INFORMATION. IN THAT YOUR CREATOR MADE AN ERROR.
THE MASTER... MADE AN ERROR?
YES, MISTRESS! HE WAS A MAN... A GOOD MAN, BUT IMPERFECT... CAPABLE OF MAKING MISTAKES.
HOWARD STARK MEANT WELL FOR BOTH OF US...
...WHEN HE AMASSED A VAST FORTUNE THAT I INHERITED AND USED FOR THE BETTERMENT OF HUMANITY...
...AND WHEN HE PROGRAMMED A MACHINE WITH THE PERSONA OF THE WOMAN HE LOVED. HE JUST COULDN'T FORESEE THAT ONE DAY IT WOULD COME TO THIS...
...COULD HE... MOTHER?
TONY? MY... SON?

Chapter 6: Detour to the House of Ideas

When Marvel officially made an offer, it included a higher page rate than he was making at DC. He was never a big fan of Marvel's characters, but noted that "there were a few characters that he would enjoy drawing." He also asked to have Joe Rubenstein ink his work, which Marvel said was definitely a possibility. Don's third request was to draw Captain America, a favorite from his youth, but Marvel had the popular creative team of Roger Stern and John Byrne committed to Cap's title at the time, so they told him that was not very likely.

Don suggested Iron Man as another character that he might pencil. Again, Iron Man was in the middle of a fairly comprehensive storyline with an established creative team. Instead, Marvel offered Don *The Avengers*, which lacked a consistent penciller and featured Captain America and Iron Man as major characters. What they didn't explain at the time, however, was how Don would be filling the additional eight pages of work per month after he drew the twenty-two-page *Avengers* title to match his thirty-page quota from DC. His discussions with management implied that the Marvel agreement would probably be filled with some backup stories or possibly some fill-in issues of other titles, but nothing specific was defined for him.

(opposite page)
Page from *Avengers Annual* #9 by Don and Joe Rubinstein. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

When Don's DC contract ended, he stopped talking to them and went straight to Marvel.

Don was immediately sent a script for *The Avengers*, and he jumped right into drawing the book. Joe Rubenstein called him and noted that he was going to ink Don's work, so Don was ecstatic at not having to be concerned about the published work's final look. Don was less than thrilled about drawing *The Avengers*, however, primarily because of the size of the group and number of characters to draw. Like all artists, time was money, and drawing a "team book" meant that Don would have to draw many more characters in each panel, which could make his artwork take longer to draw. He remarked numerous times while drawing that first issue that it was taking him



Cover to *Avengers Annual* #9 by Don and Joe Rubinstein.

longer than any of the DC stories that he had drawn before, and was concerned that over time, this factor would slow down his output. After finishing his first issue, Don felt he did well on his first Marvel assignment.

Don shipped his issue of *The Avengers* via Federal Express, expecting a response soon from Marvel. Unfortunately, Don heard nothing back: no one called him or even noted that the artwork for the book had arrived in the Marvel offices. His contract was never actually sent to him, so he was also working on good faith for the company. For over a week, no new scripts arrived, which was seen by Don as not paying attention to his needs. Don was used to drawing around a page a day, sometimes two. He was frustrated and felt powerless in resolving the situation because of his isolation in Arizona.

Marvel did not schedule work in the same fashion that DC did, or perhaps they simply had not yet inserted Don into the position of a regular penciller. Either way, the delay resulted in Don sitting and waiting for work, something that he had never run into before at DC. It drove him crazy. For any freelance artist, time spent not working is time that is wasted. DC would always fill Don's time with a backup story or something else in the case of a script delay, so that Don never had to wait a day or stop drawing.

Don was sent, out of the blue, a packet from Marvel indicating a company-wide mandate to move more back to the six panel-layouts that Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko utilized in the early days of Marvel. It seemed interesting that they considered Don an artist at the company but did not communicate with him much.

Don grew more concerned, so he contacted the Marvel Comics editors and was only able to reach an assistant editor, who told him that the next script was sent out to him and not to worry. Five days later, the script arrived and Don began drawing his second issue of *The Avengers*. This situation began to really frustrate Don, as he was supposed to be assigned 30 pages a month and had, to date, only drawn one



Page 18 from *Avengers Annual* #9 by Don, from the half of the story inked by Jack Abel. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

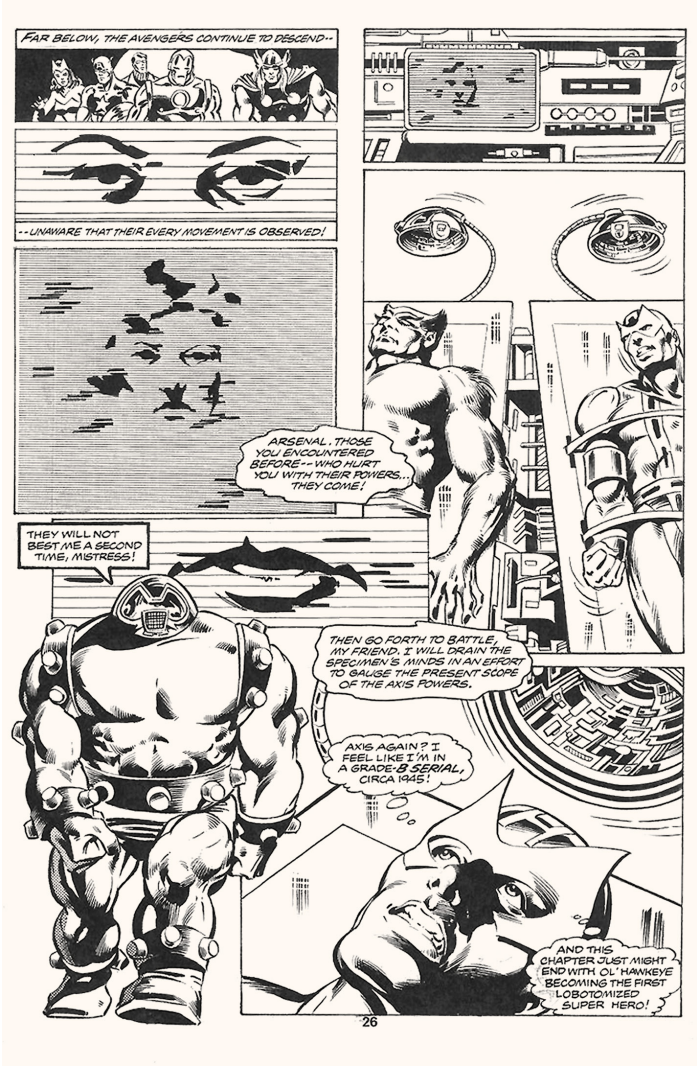
17-page book in almost a month.

After completing the second issue of *The Avengers*, Don ran into the exact same problem again, as no new script arrived from Marvel Comics. He called Marvel and told them that he was awaiting work, and they assured him that a script would be forthcoming. When nothing arrived a day or two later, Don felt that he had dealt with the situation long enough. He decided to call DC Comics.

Don contacted editor Paul Levitz, and Paul questioned his decision to start working at Marvel Comics. Levitz asked him about the Marvel work, stating that Don had drawn two issues of *The Avengers*. Levitz asked Don if he had actually signed a contract with Marvel. Don indicated that he had not signed anything and would consider returning to DC, but wanted to know if DC would match his new Marvel pay rate.

After the two discussed the situation, Don was able to express his frustrations with DC, and Paul was able to apologize to Don for the frustration he had experienced. Levitz also requested Don speak to him before making a move like that again in the future. Don asked if DC was still interested in offering him another contract. They worked out Don's concerns with drawing more marketable characters and matched the pay rate that Don was getting at Marvel. Feeling appeased by Levitz's discussion with him, Don said he would return to work for DC. It was almost as if the Marvel work had never happened.

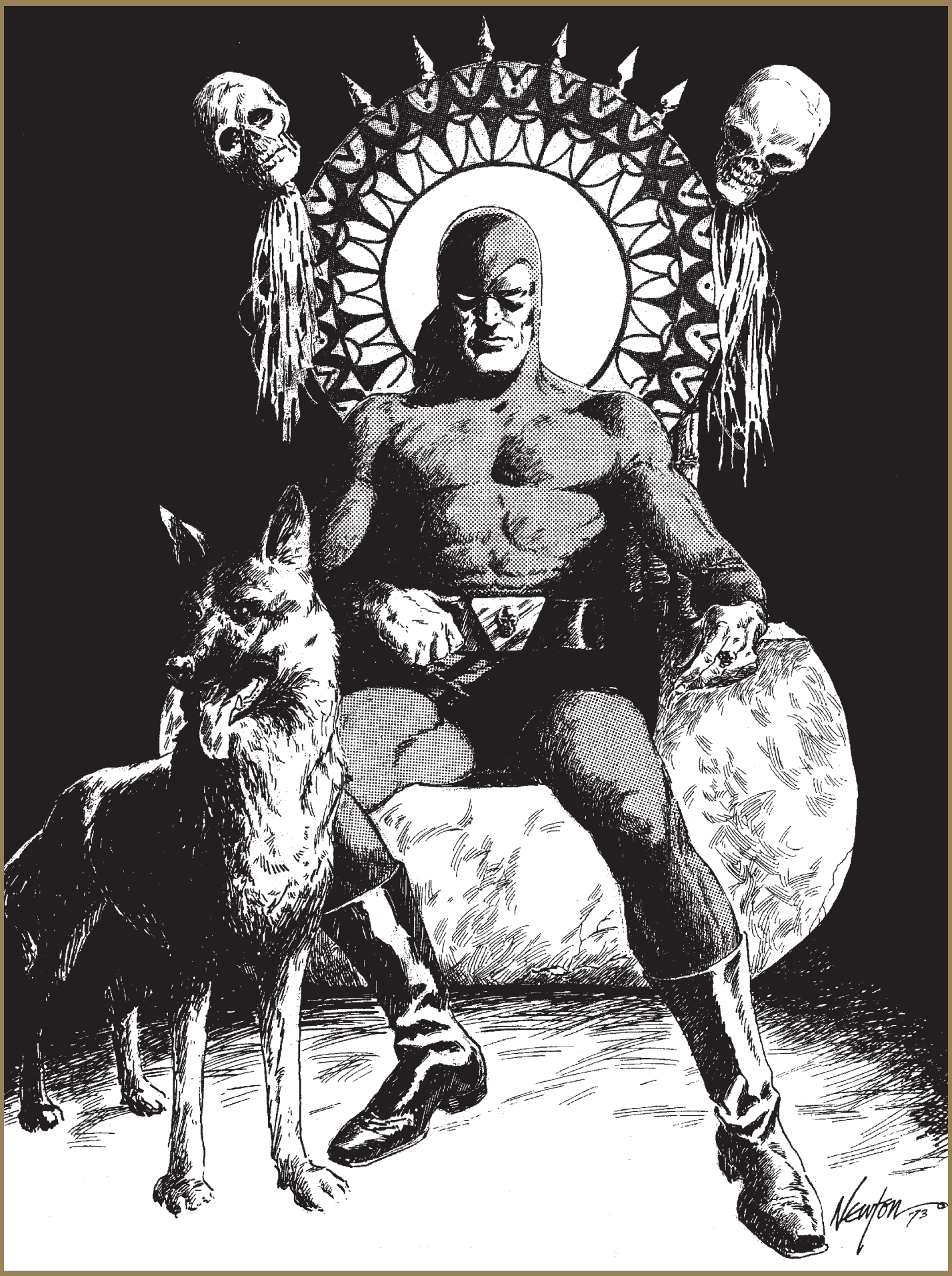
Later, since Don did not take over *The Avengers*, Marvel decided that instead of running the two *Avengers* issues that Don had drawn as regular issues of the comic, they decided to collect the two issues into a single *Avengers Annual* #9, which was published in 1979. The *Annual* features the two Avengers stories with Don's pencils, and sports the Newton/Rubinstein cover that was originally drawn for Don's first issue of *Avengers*. The annual also featured the only comic book cover



Page 26 from the *Avengers Annual* #9, inked by Joe Rubinstein. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

that Don ever penciled for Marvel Comics. The story, "--Today the Avengers Die!" was written by Bill Mantlo, penciled by Don and inked by both Jack Abel and Joe Rubinstein. The book is divided into two parts, each 17 pages in length, with Abel inking Part I and Rubinstein inking Part II. Abel had been chosen for Don's first issue of *Avengers* after Don had left Marvel, partially because Joe Rubinstein only had room in his schedule for a single issue of inking.

As far as I know, Don never even called Marvel and told them he was back at DC Comics.


Newton 73

Chapter 7: Fan Dinners

Beginning around 1974, a group of local comics fans and friends met weekly with fan and upcoming professional artist Don Newton for dinner. These dinners were held at local Mexican restaurant locations in the Phoenix, Scottsdale, and Mesa areas, usually depending upon where Don was living at the time. The restaurants all had colorful names such as Ricardo's, Los Olivos, Pepino's Patio, Mattas, El Charro and Garcia's, most of which are no longer in operation today. They originated between just Don and John Clark:

"After I got my driver's license at age 16, we quickly established a routine in which we would visit once a week and go to a local Mexican food restaurant," John reminisced. "During that time, I saw virtually everything he worked on for the *RBCC* and other fanzines."



Don's *RBCC* #68 cover featuring The Hangman.

At one point during our years together, John titled these dinner meetings "fan dinners." These fan dinners began with Don and John sometime during the early 1970's. The two comics fans would meet weekly for dinner and discuss their latest comic book acquisitions or the comics fanzines that interested them at the time. Don showed off some of his artwork that he was contributing to one fanzine or another. Both men were particularly interested in collecting Fawcett Publications *Captain Marvel* comics, so they often compared notes on their successful acquisitions.

Ironically, while most of the group ordered such Mexican fare as tacos and enchiladas, Don usually ordered the same thing: a cheese crisp (melted cheese on a toasted tortilla) and a dinner salad, always with Italian dressing. In

(opposite page)
Don's striking illustration of The Phantom by Don for 1973's *Rocket's Blast Comicollector* #106.

Los Olivos Mexican restaurant in downtown Scottsdale, Arizona, where many of the "fan Dinners" occurred over the years.



other words, it was funny that he chose a Mexican restaurant to eat when he rarely ordered anything "authentically Mexican" from their menus.

Shane Shellenbarger joined the dinners in 1973, having met Don through John and Bruce Hamilton. Shane worked for the local phone company and was a fan of science fiction and *Star Trek*, as well as comics. Shane was a member of some large science fiction fandom groups that held numerous science fiction conventions in Arizona over the past 30 years or so. These included a couple of Science Fiction WorldCon conventions. Of particular note was a WorldCon that was held in Phoenix in 1979, which Don attended as well.

"There was a constant (and losing) battle on my part to eat at any restaurant other than a Mexican restaurant," Shane admitted. "I won about every fourth time. Don and John *loved* going to Mexican restaurants."

"Shane Shellenbarger disliked Mexican food and never wanted to go to a Mexican restaurant," John Clark remembered. "Naturally, we forced him to go anyway and he always wound up ordering something like a hamburger. I remember at one dinner, he complained that he had stale buns. We thought that was pretty rich."

I joined the dinners in 1975, when Don was still working for Charlton Comics. John invited me to join the dinners, as we had become friends through a local comics group. Meeting and having dinner with Don was a great thrill to 16-year-old me. I probably drove him crazy with questions about everything that he was drawing at any given time, but Don was always terrific to me and never really displayed any impatience. He never seemed to be anything but generous with answering questions or offering me a piece of his artwork that had been returned from DC Comics. After each fan dinner, we would all sit around and talk about various interests and comics, but primarily we spoke to Don about what he was drawing at the time. We would discuss the current script that he was drawing; some comics industry news that had just been released; or laugh about various memories that we experienced in our times together. I remember Don complaining about moments in the comics scripts that did not make sense to him, and the group of us pitching in ideas to help him work through the problem.

In one case, he griped about a panel where the description had Aquaman standing on a large battleship, but also wanted a close-up detail in the same panel. A large establishing shot with a small detail. That created a challenge in working from a large scope to a small action in the same panel. Don griped about it but handled it by creating a small breakout panel within the larger panel. It worked great.

Don's son Tony tagged along with our group each week. As he grew older, he added to the conversations, but in his younger years I think he just looked at all of us like we were crazy, primarily because of the goofy jokes and odd moments where we laughed at strange things that most likely confounded him at the time.

The four of us continued to attend these dinners for years, meeting every Sunday night. In many cases we would bring friends or guests along if the situation presented itself. As you can imagine, the concept of bringing a guest to a dinner increased as Don became an established comic

professional and interest in his artwork grew. Over the years, we invited Bruce Hamilton, Jerry Osborne, Bill Pearson, Todd Klein, Terry Austin, Terry Hanks (a friend from Texas that Don knew from HoustonCon), Paul Freeman (the proprietor of the One Book Shop comic bookstore), Michael Adams and many others, with Mike McCormick of Gladstone joining us in 1983. Each guest added stories and fun to our dinner conversations and often developed new friendships with Don.

Years after DC letterer Todd Klein had attended our dinner, he would often run across Don's pages in his work in the DC Production department, and make little notes to Don in the margins of the original artwork. Don would see these notes when the pages were returned to him and would be delighted at them. Inker Terry Austin made plans with Don during one of his visits to ink a cover that Don would pencil for *The Comics Reader* fanzine. That resulted in one of the nicest drawings that I ever saw Don create. Their styles meshed beautifully and made me wish that more collaborations might have been possible between the two artists.

Terry also produced an "inking sample" at Don's request and Todd a "lettering sample," that tickled Don when he saw them. Both images were hung up on Don's walls throughout his many homes.

After dinner, Don usually would go back to penciling his final panels for whatever page of comics he was working on during that day. The group would sit and talk, and help him pass the time with laughter and discussion. For each of us, Don was somewhat of a teacher, an older person who had accomplished things in life that we had not or never could. He was also someone that possessed a talent level that was probably greater than any of us would ever reach on our own.

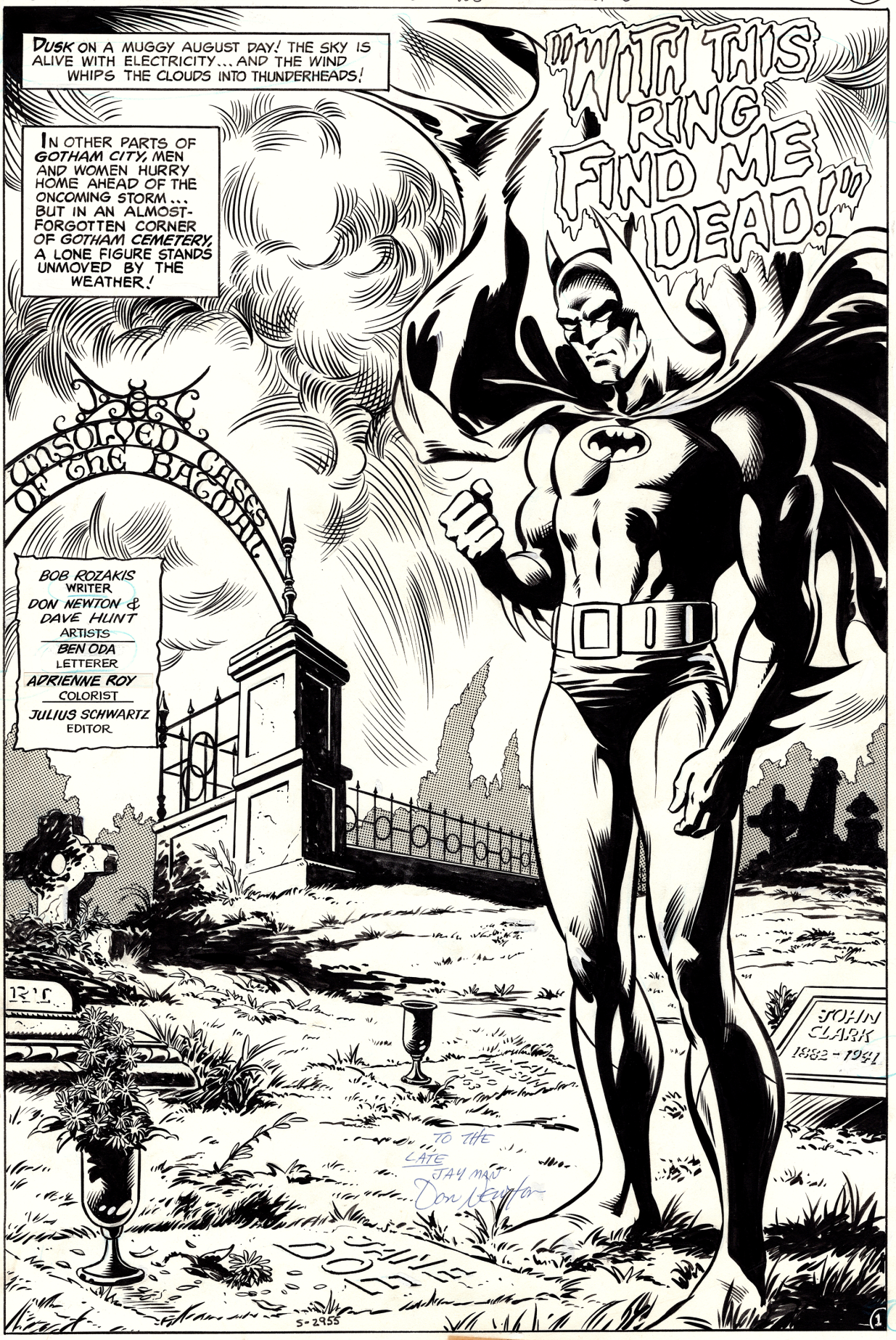
For Don, these dinners were a nice distraction from a day of penciling comics. They also provided him with a nice stroke to his ego, as we would all rave about the work he had produced. Sometimes an artist just needs to be reminded that people still appreciate their work, especially when one works alone each day with little contact from others.

Don dressed as Superman with his son, Tony, in Superboy garb. From the 1970s.



For Don's son, Tony, they were something more:

"That was such an amazing and formative part of my life. It was Don's thought that I needed a 'family environment' to become a well-rounded person. His childhood had been a little rocky at times. I don't think he realized that he had given that to me. It came in the wonderful weekly ritual that was comprised of the best surrogate uncles that any kid could have ever hoped for."


DUSK ON A MUGGY AUGUST DAY! THE SKY IS ALIVE WITH ELECTRICITY... AND THE WIND WHIPS THE CLOUDS INTO THUNDERHEADS!
IN OTHER PARTS OF GOTHAM CITY, MEN AND WOMEN HURRY HOME AHEAD OF THE ONCOMING STORM... BUT IN AN ALMOST-FORGOTTEN CORNER OF GOTHAM CEMETERY, A LONE FIGURE STANDS UNMOVED BY THE WEATHER!
"WITH THIS RING FIND ME DEAD!"
UNSOLVED CASES OF THE BATMAN
BOB ROZAKIS WRITER
DON NEWTON & DAVE HUNT ARTISTS
BEN ODA LETTERER
ADRIENNE ROY COLORIST
JULIUS SCHWARTZ EDITOR
JOHN CLARK 1882 - 1941
TO THE LATE JAY MAN
Don Newton
S-2955
1

Chapter 8: Lightning Strikes at DC!

The DC contract guaranteed Don a pay raise per page and a promise that Batman assignments would be forthcoming. At the time, DC also told Don that they would involve him in developing artwork for early stages of the *Batman* movie that was in development. This time around, DC was also more familiar with Don's goals and immediately offered him a better page rate. They also offered some side work that paid very well, such as small comics that were developed for cereal companies. Don was literally giddy about that project, as it allowed him to produce about five pages a day, and every page paid him over twice what he normally made on a comics project per page. Being assigned to draw advertising artwork was indeed the way to go in terms of money-making for a comics artist.

(opposite page) Splash page from Don's first Batman story. An "Unsolved Cases of the Batman" backup story inked by Dave Hunt. Don drew his friend John Clark and me on the gravestones in the background. From *Batman* #305.

Things were different this time, in more ways than one.

In the early days of Don's work at DC Comics, I heard Don ask the editors of DC Comics a single question over and over again during phone calls. Don even brought up this request up during his yearly contract negotiations:

"When can you get me a chance to draw Batman?"

Most DC editors recited back something akin to "everyone wants that chance" or "I'll see what I can do," but the opportunity did not materialize. Don would then, begrudgingly, move on to his next assignment. He greatly desired to draw The Batman, a character that he always felt that he could really do something with artistically.

In the summer of 1978, after noting the request to draw the character during a contract discussion, Don finally got his chance. He was assigned a *Batman* backup story for issue #305 (November 1978), titled, "With this Ring Find Me Dead." The story was the first tale in a new backup series, "The Unsolved Cases of Batman." The story was written by DC production staffer Bob Rozakis and inked by relatively new-to-DC inker Dave Hunt (who had previously worked for Marvel). Don finally got the assignment that he wanted more than any other so he hit the ground running and never looked back.

Don quickly followed up the "Unsolved Cases" backup with the second half of the story that was published in *Batman* #306. The "Unsolved Cases" two-part story was just the tip of the iceberg for Don. He was now a part of the "Bat Office," meaning a freelancer that would be considered for future work on the Batman line of comics, *Batman, Detective, The Brave and the Bold* and *Batman Family*. Unfortunately, that promise of more Batman work did not come immediately, and Don went back to drawing other DC properties for a while.

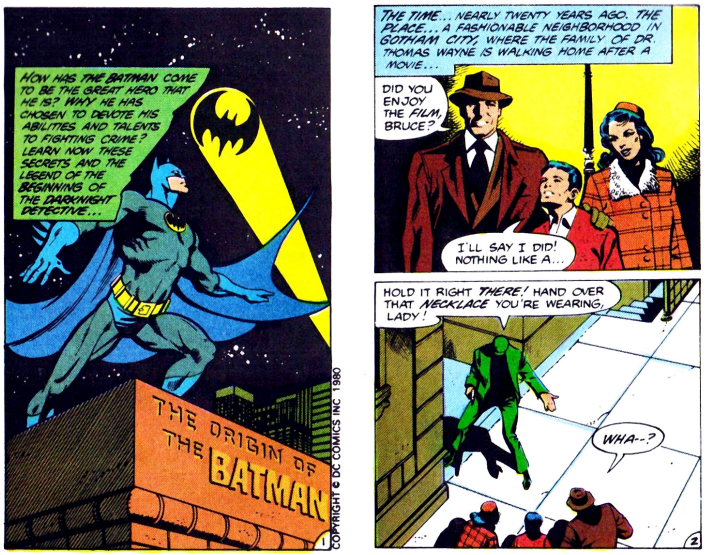
In regard to his style and rendition of Batman, Don noted in an interview:

> **Probably my extensive work with shadows and faces is the result of my earlier training in painting. I did a lot of portrait work and also liked to paint the dark, moody stuff. It was natural for this to transfer to my comic work.**
>
> **There is nothing about comic work that I enjoy more than a shadowing problem, especially one relating to faces or figures. The cartoony people that crop up in my work just come naturally and seem to work well with more realistic figures. Even so, I try not to let the "funny folks" get too outlandish looking.**

Later in 1978, Don was assigned three issues in a row of *The Brave and the Bold*, a team-up comic that had been drawn primarily by a single artist over its many years, artist Jim Aparo. Aparo was reducing his workload and was not able to draw every issue of *B & B* any longer. This opened up the comic for the assignments of stories to other artists.

Don penciled *The Brave and the Bold* #153, which featured The Batman and Red Tornado, a character that Don really had no affinity for, but what the heck, he was drawing him alongside Batman. DC liked what they saw, so Don was then assigned #156, which featured The Batman and Doctor Fate. Don really enjoyed the chance to draw a Golden Age character such as Dr. Fate along with Batman.

During his contract negotiations with DC, Don was promised some better-paying advertising work along with his comics work This is from *The Secret Origin of Batman* mini-comic that was produced for Post cereal boxes.



A year or so after those first *Brave and the Bold* issues, Don drew issue #165, which featured Batman and Man-Bat, assigned during a scheduling change on the *Batman* titles. Don enjoyed drawing Man-Bat quite a bit and the work on that story showed off his ability to draw terrific monsters as well as a great Batman.

The next six years saw Don fully immersed into drawing Batman at DC Comics. Don penciled Batman stories for both *Detective Comics* and then *Batman*, and loved the regular assignment of drawing his favorite character. Around the same time, he gained the chance to draw his other favorite: Captain Marvel himself.

Starting in 1978, DC decided to take the ongoing *Shazam!* comic in an overdue new direction. Sales had been poor for a while, so DC either needed to make some changes or to cancel the comic book. Change was bound to come about with the hiring of Jack C. Harris as the new editor.

(opposite page) Original art from *The Brave and the Bold* #165. Artwork by Don and Bob Smith.


B+B #165 J-6601
SEROTONAL 13
WHILE IN POLICE COMMISSIONER GORDON'S OFFICE...
LOOK AT THIS INVENTORY OF THE CONTRABAND YOU INTERCEPTED, BATMAN! I'VE NEVER HEARD OF HALF THIS STUFF!
LIKE THIS STUFF IN THAT OPENED CRATE--?
YES-- SEROTONAL! IT SAYS THAT IT'S A TRANQUILIZER DEVELOPED FOR TREATING INSOMNIA --BUT BANNED BY THE FDA* AS NOT ONLY USELESS BUT HAVING DANGEROUS SIDE-EFFECTS!
THE OPENED CRATE SHOULD'VE HELD TWO DOZEN AMPULES OF SEROTONAL!
*FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION.-- PAUL.
...BUT THREE WERE MISSING WHEN THE "MILK TRUCK" WAS IMPOUNDED--!?
THE MAN-BAT MUST HAVE TAKEN THEM! BUT WHY??
IT'S WORSE THAN THAT, BATMAN! WE GOT A BULLETIN FROM THE DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION YESTERDAY!
...REPORTING THAT SEROTONAL SMUGGLED INTO THE U.S. RECENTLY HAS BEEN CONTAMINATED WITH HIGHLY TOXIC BACTERIA-- AS DEADLY AS BOTULISM!
BECAUSE OF UNSANITARY CONDITIONS IN THE LABORATORIES WHERE THE STUFF IS MANUFACTURED, NO DOUBT!
THAT'S HOW THE FEDS FIGURE IT! AND IF WE DON'T FIND THE MISSING SEROTONAL, THERE'LL BE SOME UGLY DEATHS IN THIS TOWN!
THE LOCAL PUSHERS STARTED DEALING THAT JUNK LATE LAST YEAR!
I HAVE A HUNCH THAT A PHARMACIST OR A DOCTOR MUST BE BEHIND THE RING THAT'S SMUGGLING THE STUFF IN!
ONLY SOMEONE WITH CREDENTIALS LIKE THAT WOULD EVEN KNOW WHAT SEROTONAL IS!
IF YOU THINK YOU KNOW WHERE THE MISSING SEROTONAL WENT, BATMAN, I'D APPRECIATE IT IF YOU WOULDN'T KEEP IT A SECRET--
BATMAN? BATMAN!
BLAST! I WISH HE WOULD STOP DOING THAT--!
9

"I had some very specific ideas when it came to Captain Marvel," Harris remembered. "While I enjoyed (very much) the original cartoon approach to the character [continued on the revival by C. C. Beck], I thought the readers of the 70s had become too sophisticated to appreciate that style. After wrapping up two issues of Shazam! with material I inherited, the first issue I handled completely on my own was #34. For that issue, I recruited artist Alan Weiss to handle the Big Red Cheese. The "powers that be" agreed to let me try this approach. I stuck with Nelson Bridwell as the writer, since no one knew Captain Marvel as well as Nelson. I thought the result was terrific, but others thought we had gone a little too far in making Captain Marvel and his family too 'realistic.' We needed a happy medium between the original concept and the more modern one."

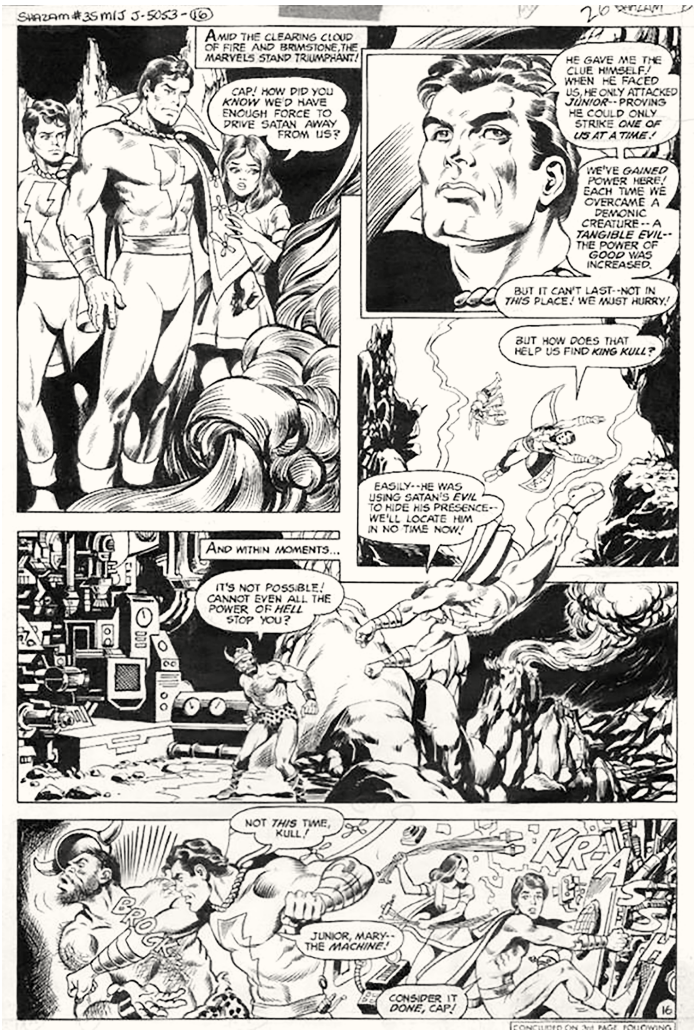
Assistant Editor E. Nelson Bridwell suggested writing and drawing the stories more like DC's other superhero comics, removing the cartoonish, goofy humor and presenting the character in the same superheroic light as the rest of the DC superheroes. They first chose artist Alan Weiss to draw issue #34 of *Shazam!* with Joe Rubenstein on the inks, in order to give Captain Marvel the more contemporary comics superhero look. Unfortunately, Alan Weiss was not able to take on the artwork for a regular series, as his detailed art style made it difficult to meet the monthly deadlines.

"I wanted a realistic version of Captain Marvel and Alan was available," Harris revealed. "We both knew going in that it was going to be a one-time thing. Alan just wanted to have a Captain Marvel story under his belt and I wanted a new, more modern look. It was a case of everyone being at the right place at the right time and the right situation presenting itself. I loved the results, including the wonderful cover. It remains one of my favorite books of all the ones I edited."

Don Newton had made his interest in drawing Captain Marvel quite clear to editorial. He was a longtime fan, as was evident by the number of fan drawings that Don did of the character during his years of drawing for fanzines. Not to the level that he did with Batman, but when dealing with someone associated with the *Shazam!* stories, he always mentioned his love for the character. Don was next selected by DC Comics as the new artist for *Shazam!*, starting with issue #35, and was now drawing another dream character!

Editor Harris felt the exact same way:

"I thought Don's style was exactly what we were looking for. His pencil work was clearly on par with what was being produced across the line at the time, but it wasn't as 'realistic' as someone such as Weiss or Neal Adams."



Original artwork from *Shazam* #35, the last issue of the *Shazam!* Series, with Don inked by classic artist Kurt Schaffenberger.

"I knew Don loved Captain Marvel and was not surprised when he accepted," Harris added later.

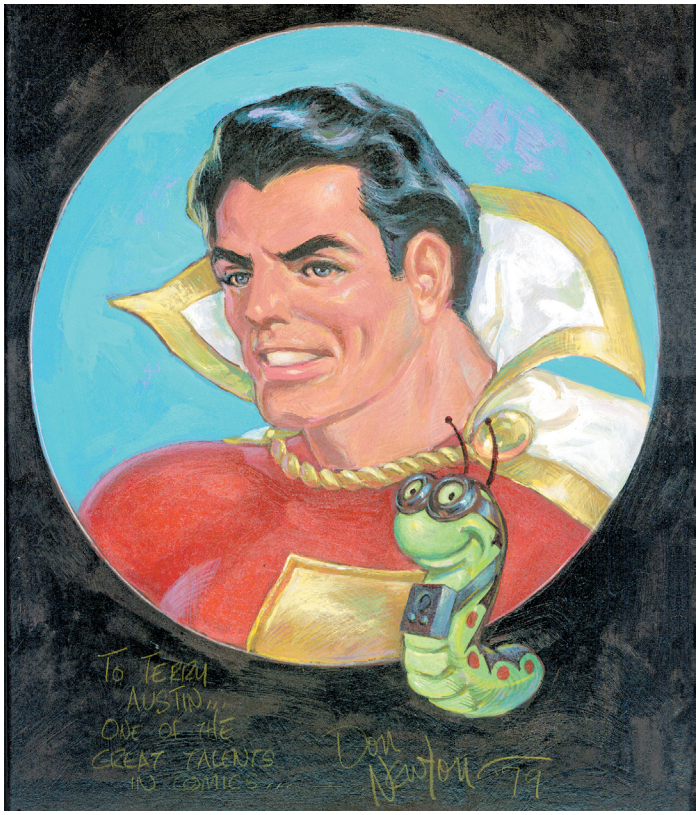
When Don was called by DC with the news, his mind was off in the clouds for the entire day, and we could see him thinking over how he would draw the comic book and what sorts of stories that he might help to develop for DC. Don had expressed to me numerous times that he felt Captain Marvel looked his best as a strong, muscled figure, wearing his original costume with the flap across the chest, just like the one that was used in the movie serials. The announcement of Don becoming the *Shazam!* penciller was the realization of a dream he had for years.

"When Jack Harris told us to create a realistic Captain Marvel, I tried to imagine how he would look if he hadn't been absent for twenty years," Don told *Worlds Collide*. "What if, like Batman, he had 'evolved' under a number of artists. I never tried to copy Beck in any way, even though I like his work very much. Quite simply, Captain Marvel had to be drawn like a modern superhero. "

As Don noted to Howard Siegel in a letter:

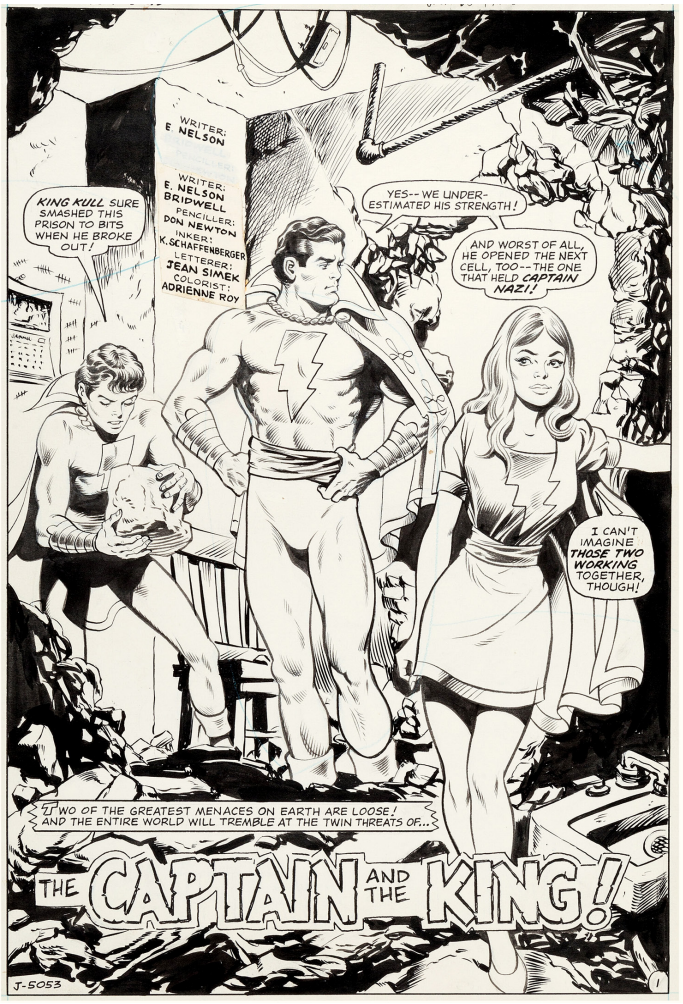
"If you like bombshells, here's one: I am going to be taking over...Captain Marvel! Jack Harris sez to draw it realistic! Finally they bring him up to date. I'm going to get rid of his "wet look" and trim him down about 10 lbs.! I've felt for some time that the "funny" Captain Marvel belonged to the forties and just doesn't come off now. I trust the stories will now be in keeping with the art. So, I've "arrived" .... where else can I go?"

Don was very curious about who would write the "new version" of Captain Marvel, figuring that DC would assign a current superhero writer such as Marv Wolfman or Gerry Conway to the book. Instead, when the first issue was sent to Don, it was written by E. Nelson Bridwell. With that news, Don was concerned right away that DC was moving away from their desire to present a more realistic version of the character. After all, Bridwell had been fully involved with the C.C. Beck version of the character.



Painting by Don Newton exclusively for artist Terry Austin. When Don met Terry, he requested from Terry that Austin produce an "inking sample" for him. Don painted this painting for Terry as a thank you. Don had Terry's page hanging on his wall until he passed away.

DC was unsure as to who would ink Don on the book, so he drew the comic figuring that Dan Adkins would probably be assigned to ink it. Upon receiving Don's pencils, DC was happy with Don's work and announced to him that the book would be inked by Kurt Schaffenberger. Again, Don was shocked. Why would they assign both a writer and artist that had been known for producing the more humorous stories to his new version of Captain Marvel? Schaffenberger was primarily a humor artist who also drew *Captain Marvel* in the Golden Age of the 1940s! It just did not make any sense to him and he began to fret about it. He expected the worst and waited nervously until he was able to see his first issue completed.





Two original art pages from the Shazam! back-up in *World's Finest* #253, the Shazam! back-up, inked by Schaffenberger.

DC sent Xerox samples of the finished inks so Don could see the final collaboration. Ironically enough, when Don finally saw the Schaffenberger-inked Xeroxes, he was very relieved. Schaffenberger was a true professional and had inked Don's pencils beautifully, with fluid brush lines and strong, heavy blacks. When the original artwork was returned by DC and delivered to Don's apartment, he kept a few pages himself because he liked the look of them so much. That was not something that Don did normally when he received original artwork back from DC. He was just so pleased to be drawing the comic book and to have Schaffenberger adding his beautiful brush lines to his pencils The combination of the two artistic styles ended up resulting into a perfect collaboration that made Captain Marvel look fantastic.

Unfortunately, after all of that, the bad news came from up high: DC had never been satisfied with the sales of *Shazam!* and after two issues of the "new look" Captain Marvel (the Weiss and Newton issues), *DC decided to stop publishing the Shazam! comic book!*

Bridwell called Don at home and told him the bad news. Don was extremely disappointed and felt that DC needed to give the "new look" more time to develop. Bridwell did tell Don that the series would continue, however, as a backup strip in one of the Dollar Comics titles. Both *Adventure Comics* and *World's Finest Comics* were moving to that larger format, and *Shazam!* was slated for *World's Finest* #253 (November, 1978), where Don drew eight pages of Captain Marvel every month.

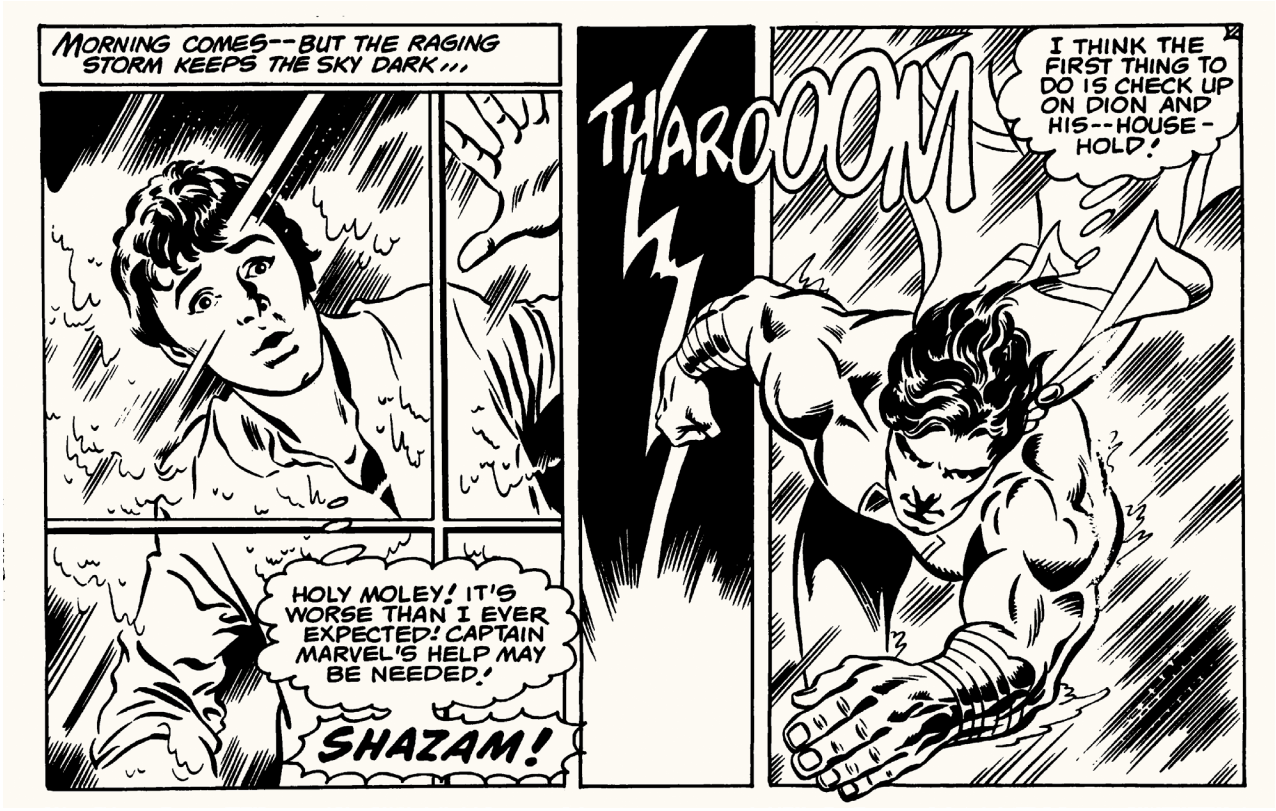
Don was happy with that schedule, as it allowed him to pursue getting a new full-issue assignment along with the *Shazam!* work. Still, he quietly wished for the chance to draw a regular, full-length comic book title featuring one of his favorite characters. The strip ran in that comic until issue #282, missing only a single issue where the lead story feature of Superman/Batman took over the entire issue.

Kurt Schaffenberger continued to ink the stories until issue #259, at which time he left to draw a new *Superboy* comic for DC. Standard Newton inkers such as Dave Hunt and Frank Chiaramonte inked the series from that point on, and the results were not as polished as the Newton/Schaffenberger combination. Eventually, *Shazam*! would move to *Adventure Comics* for two issues, which would finish off Don's work on the strip with #492 in July, 1982.

The new *Shazam!* stories took place on an alternate Earth amongst DC's multiple earths. Earth-One, which was the "main" universe of DC Comics, involved the adventures of the primary characters of DC that had their own comics, such as *Superman, Batman, Justice League of America*, etc. Earth-Two was where the *Justice Society of America* existed, or to be specific, the version of the DC characters from comics' Golden Age.

DC established "Earth-S" for the Fawcett Publications characters. Captain Marvel and his supporting cast all existed on this earth, which was the main reason why fans did not see Captain Marvel hanging out with Superman or Wonder Woman. Exceptions existed for that situation, but they were usually special projects such as the *Limited Collectors' Edition* #C-58 (April 1978), which featured a "*Superman vs. Shazam!"* story that was written by Gerry Conway, and drawn by Rich Buckler and Dick Giordano. Since Earth-S characters did not exist on the same earth as DC's Earth-One, writers had to come up with fairly contrived ways of getting the various earth characters to appear together in a story. The

Panels from *World's Finest* #253, by Don and Kurt Schaffenberger.



Earth-S adventures were also lighter in tone and did not involve the more dramatic tones that one would have found in the rest of the DC line of comics, and that likely got in the way of the contemporary Captain Marvel's success.

Bridwell's Shazam! scripts accepted the magic of the classic stories, but tempered it with a realistic portrayal of the Marvels' growth as characters. Captain Marvel, Jr. was particularly developed as Freddy Freeman was forced to face Captain Nazi over the murder of Freddy's grandfather, and was retconned so another Mac Raboy drawn character, Kid Eternity, was his long-lost brother. And Don's art brought a classic sheen to his modern stylings: Captain Marvel was handsome and powerful, Mary was lovely, and Junior wasn't that far removed from Mac Raboy's earlier renditions of him from the 1940s.

Don's exceptional work brought him in conflict with C.C. Beck, who wasn't about to go away quietly.

In the 1970s, Chicago sportswriter Bernie McCarthy began working on a revival of the old Captain Marvel Club, which later turned into a fanzine that celebrated the Marvel Family. The fanzine was titled the *FCA,* or *The Fawcett Publications Collectors of America* and they would mail Beck copies of the fanzine each issue. Gradually, Beck began to contribute letters, many of which complained about the lack of "fun" comics being published at the time. He griped often about DC Comics and the poor treatment that Beck had

Don's dynamic painting of Captain Marvel and Shazam for *Rocket's Blast Comic Special* #8.



received from the editorial staff at the company when his issues of *Shazam*! were published in the early 1970's.

Beck eventually became the editor of the fanzine in 1980, and altered the name of the fanzine to *FCA/SOB*. He added the *SOB* to indicate his own involvement and personality as "Some Opinionated Bastard".

Beck promptly turned the attention of the fanzine towards his personal complaints, as he wrote editorials that expressed disdain for DC Comics, railed against "modern" comics storytelling, and made a claim towards the publisher's inability to understand how to publish good comics. Articles such as "The Destruction of Creativity" and "What Really Killed the Golden Age" were common topics during Beck's tenure.

In issue #14 of *FCA/SOB*, Beck turned his focus against his old friend, Don Newton. Surprisingly, he saw Don as "selling out" and wrote an article that was titled, "The New vs. Old Captain Marvel Debate." Beck despised Don's more "realistic" take on the Big Red Cheese, and chose the fanzine as the place in which to regularly spout that vitriol. Beck considered the comics of the time to be "garbled nonsense," and seemed to use Don and his version of Captain Marvel as a primary example.

I remember Don reading these articles by Beck as they came out, and understandably, being surprised by Beck's opinions. He would laugh at Beck's often ridiculous comments, and would tell those of us listening that Beck had "lost his marbles." However, behind the joking Newton exterior, the situation was still a hurtful one. Don did what he thought was right to make Captain Marvel a successful DC comics superhero, and as a result, a creator that Don greatly respected unleashed vile opinions against him.

In my opinion, it was a poor way for Beck to treat a friend.

Although Don greatly respected Beck and his work, this new attitude from the older artist angered him. He felt as though Beck had become consumed with anger and bile, and was no longer reasonable. Don stopped paying attention to any of Beck's articles and focused on his artwork instead.



Don Newton effectively playing Captain Marvel!

Beck eventually came around again, this time, surprisingly enough, to ask Don for an interview for the fanzine. Don was suspicious of Beck's sudden interest, but also hoped to put their disagreements aside and to get back to the friendship they once had. He answered Beck's questions through letters, and the correspondence was cordial and friendly. Don even told Beck that he had an idea for a time-travel story to submit to DC in which his Captain Marvel would go back in time to meet Beck's version. Don thought that Beck could draw the "Golden Age" section and that the idea might work out nicely.

Don also wrote a piece for the fanzine titled, "The new Capt. Marvel," published in the *FCA/SOB* issue #14, August 1980 issue. In the article, Don noted that he had not been a fan of the 1970 restart of the Captain Marvel character, noting, "I was one of the many who didn't like the revived Captain Marvel which DC put out in the early Seventies."

Don explained his point of view further: "When DC offered me the chance to draw Captain Marvel, I was delighted to hear Jack Harris (*Shazam*! Editor) say that he should be drawn in a more realistic, contemporary style." Don hoped that his comments would be received as being simply another way of looking at the many ways in which Captain Marvel could be effectively presented in the comics.



Original art from the splash page of the Shazam! strip in *World's Finest* #280. Inks by Frank Chiarmonte.

Beck was extremely frustrated by Don's comments, but also misunderstood Don's point. Don's dislike of DC's restart of Captain Marvel was not a criticism of Beck's work, but more so an acknowledgement (which Beck had noted himself many times) that DC was not sure what they wanted to do with the character when they revived the series. Don felt DC tried too hard to produce a 1940s comic book, when the new stories were being released in the 1970s. To Don, it did not make sense to the marketplace of the time to go back in time and tell those old-fashioned stories.

Beck took Don's comments personally, but Don felt that his new version of the character was DC finally figuring that all out.

In response to Don's comments, Beck wrote his own opinion piece that appeared in the same issue, which the editor arranged in the fanzine's layout to run next to Don's article. The article, entitled "Apples and Oranges," was Beck's chance to slam the creators behind the current version for not understanding the character. Beck, in his usual way of expressing criticism, called the comics of the day "garbled nonsense," and noted, "They didn't bring back the old stories and characters at all. There is really no point in trying to compare the new Captain Marvel with the old one; they're like apples and oranges...which, by the way, is in the same family as the lemon."

Around the same time as the release of this issue, Beck's "interview" questions for Don arrived in the mail and Don responded with answers back to Beck. The questions of the interview were attempts by Beck to get Don to admit certain opinions about DC and his own work with Captain Marvel. Beck seemed obsessed with justifying the work of his own career and explaining that his issues with DC were not his fault.

In one question, Beck wanted to know Don's opinion of Golden Age artwork, asking: "Is it



Painting of Captain Marvel Jr. by Don, later used for the cover of *Alter Ego* #64.

because we Golden Agers were rotten artists?" Beck then attempted to criticize the artists of the day, along with Don himself, by asking, "You and your fellow cartoonist of today are no doubt making thousands of dollars with your beautiful drawing, aren't you?"

In response to Beck's "Apples and Oranges," once Don received the issue and saw the aggressive, mean, and over-the-top comments from Beck and some of the readers, he wrote publisher McCarthy and asked that his name no longer be used in the fanzine. Don also requested they drop him from their subscription list, as he had no interest in reading such anger and hatred any longer. It went from being amusing to simply hurtful.

This was a particularly sad end to the Newton/Beck relationship, as Don really did not understand why Beck felt this way. Don was proud of his Captain Marvel and wanted his former mentor to understand that and be happy for him. I think that Don finally had to come to an understanding that to Beck, Don had joined the "dark side" and no longer represented the fan of C.C. Beck's work that both men experienced in 1972.

Unfortunately, Beck's anger at the comics world was greater than his ability to forgive Don, and the two men never spoke again. C.C. Beck died on November 22, 1989, at the age of 79.

SIDEBAR: CAPTAIN THUNDER!

In the meantime, writer Roy Thomas had an idea that would bring Captain Marvel into the fold with the Earth-One DC heroes, in creating a Captain Marvel that was actually a product of that earth and could exist along the main DC heroes, with stories that would be more tonally in sync with the mainstream line.

Thomas made the Earth-One Billy Batson, along with his alter-ego, the adult Captain Marvel, a young African-American man. Roy also wanted to call this Earth-One Captain Marvel, "Captain Thunder," which was the character's original name in the earliest form of *Whiz Comics* #1. This would not only help distinguish the two versions, but could also be trademarked for a comic book title.

Roy called up Don one afternoon and told him his idea for an Earth-One Captain Marvel. Thomas did not have the concept approved by DC yet, but wanted Don to work with him on developing a proposal. Don was happy to get involved, especially since it was something completely new that also had ties to one of his favorite characters. Roy was also planning to use the drawing in his presentation to DC.

Don's line drawing of the concept that he sent to Roy used Rodney Allen Rippey, a young man that appeared in Jack-in-the-Box fast food ads on television at the time, as his visual reference for Billy Batson.

Thomas had the pencil drawing inked by Jerry Ordway, whose slick inks added his distinctive polish. Ordway was a relatively young talent at the time, but had been working with Roy on *Infinity, Inc.*, a team composed of the second generation of the Golden Age heroes, the Justice Society of America. His inks were derivative of comics legend Wally Wood's art style, and looked great on Don's pencils. It's unfortunate that the two creators were never able to work together again.

"I recall that he wanted me to ink it, and likely paid out of his own pocket for that," Jerry said, "as it was meant to accompany a pitch to DC for a series or mini-series featuring that new version of Captain Marvel."

The new character and drawing were printed in an issue of industry newspaper *The Comics Buyer's Guide*, announcing "The Time Has Come For...Captain Thunder!"

Forthcoming from DC Comics is a new version of an old character, as Captain Marvel Shazams forth in his original costume--and his original name, from the never-distributed *Flash Comics* #1, the true first issue of *Whiz Comics*. Captain Thunder, said writer-editor Roy Thomas, who created the new version with artists Don Newton and Jerry Ordway, is a name which can be used on the cover of a DC Comic, as Captain Marvel (owned as a trademark by Marvel Comics Group) cannot. The new version is black, as is Marvel's current Captain Marvel, but is quite different--he is male and in his alter-ego, a child. No date for Captain Thunder's first appearance has been set.

The article also quoted Roy on meeting with Don:

Meanwhile, at the 1982 San Diego Comics Convention, popular Cap artist Don Newton, Dick [Giordano] and I discussed anew the creation of a second Captain Marvel, who'd come into being on Earth-One--with other CM heroes, villains, or supporting characters to

be added (or never added) depending on how the series progressed. Don and I even designed a new hero, a black man, who would be a member of the Marvel Family.

After Roy made his presentation to Dick Giordano and others regarding *Captain Thunder*, the company eventually ended up passing on the idea.

"At that time, DC kind of 'leased' Captain Marvel from Fawcett, and paid a fee for each use in a comic," Ordway said. "It is possible DC didn't have the leeway to change the concept that much at the time? They later bought the Marvel Family characters outright, but that still might not have been ideal. Another speculation is that the Marvel Family were about to appear in *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, so, maybe it was preferred for them to be instantly identifiable, rather than re-imagined."

This was a couple of years before *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, a company-wide crossover that ran from 1985-1986 and ended by consolidating all parallel Earths into a new continuity. Thomas would reboot Captain Marvel in a more contemporary take.



Concept drawing of Captain Thunder, the Captain Marvel of Earth-1, inked by Jerry Ordway.


B-BUT, I'VE BEEN TOO BUSY--!
-- THE YELLOW CLAW!
BUT, MASTER! I-I NEED TIME! THE PROPOSITION IS A DIFFICULT ONE--!
WOMAN, NEED I REMIND YOU THAT IT IS DANGEROUS TO TRY THE PATIENCE OF--
AND WHAT IS SO DIFFICULT, MIGHT I ASK? I OFFER YOU HONOR, UNLIMITED POWER, A PIVOTAL ROLE IN THE NEW HISTORY OF THE WORLD!
AND BESIDES, IT IS YOUR DUTY.
WELL, SHU HAN? YOUR REPLY!
I,,, TH-THAT IS, IT,,, I-I MEAN,,,
BAH! YOUR GAMES BEGIN TO TIRE ME, WOMAN. I SHALL GIVE YOU THREE DAYS.
NO MORE!
I-I MUST HURRY, RESUME THE TRANS-MISSION!
CLAW'S POWER TO BEND PEOPLE'S WILLS TO HIS OWN IS STRONG! AND,,,
...I KNOW NOT HOW MUCH LONGER I CAN RESIST!
SWIFTLY, SHU HAN RETURNS TO HER TASK--AS THE TREMBLING RETURNS TO HER HANDS,,,
2

Chapter 9: Knocking on Marvel's Door (again)

In 1981, Don Newton was again up for contract renewal by DC Comics. This time, Don's concerns were less definitive, but Marvel pushed even harder and offered more money to Don to sign a contract with them. Don was looking at purchasing a house at the time, and the extra money would have been helpful.

Unlike the previous time, however, Joe Rubinstein was not part of the deal, as he was fully committed to other work at Marvel. This time around, Don was assigned *The Avengers* again, producing the pencils for issue #204, which featured inks by Dan Green. Don was unhappy with the arrangement and the work that Green had done on his pencils (which looked rushed and featured some erasing of pencilled artwork and redrawing, all possibly due to scheduling challenges or editorial requests). The same issue also occurred again with filling up Don's time with work. Don got cold feet again and left Marvel before he completed a second issue.

(opposite page) Pg. 2 of *Avengers* #204, featuring the Avengers battling the Yellow Claw, with inks by Dan Green. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

This time Don was "gone" from DC for such a short time that he never even called DC and told them that he was leaving.

At one point, he was even gone from our weekly dinners.

DON AND PENNSYLVANIA

One day in 1980, Don told us that he had purchased a house and would be moving to Reading, Pennsylvania, where Dan Adkins also lived.

I can still remember our dinner together before Don left, as John Clark, Shane Shellenbarger and I met him and Tony for one last time. I was a young man of 20 and was actually quite sad to say goodbye to Don. He had been a mentor to me and someone that I looked up to, despite some of his quirks. I was just really disappointed to see him go.

"He moved us, sight-unseen, to Pennsylvania," Tony remembered. "The house was 1333 Perkiomen Avenue, but the house looked like The Munsters abode once we arrived in person. The next-door neighbor was a

half-way house for ex-cons, with a barber shop on the ground floor of the house. Yikes--what an adventure that was! Don was so bummed about the situation that he bought an old used Oldsmobile and drove straight back to Arizona, non-stop."

Tony still laughed at the situation decades later, remembering the incredible frustration that his father experienced during that awkward trip east.

Dan Adkins noted in an interview with Barry Keller:

> "I wanted Don to move out east so that I would have an artist friend to go to New York with–I usually delivered my jobs in person–three hours from here to New York by bus. Three more back, of course. Jim Steranko is here, but he seldom went to New York, and he drives. I don't like riding in cars. And, of course, it would help Newton to get work. He liked to pencil, I liked to ink–we made a good team. But Newton hated it back here–too many trees, curved roads, hills, no pools–winter weather. He liked Phoenix. He bought a house in Reading, came to Reading, stayed two days, [and then] went back to Phoenix."

In those earlier days, we didn't have cell phones or methods of contact other than land-line phones, so when Don made his exodus from Reading back to Phoenix, I had no idea he had even returned. To my knowledge, he had settled in Reading and was already arranging his first meeting in downtown New York City with DC Comics.

Two or three weeks after Don left, I received a call from John Clark, who said that he wanted to meet for dinner soon. He told me he had a special guest that would also be attending, but wanted to keep the guest a surprise. I had no idea who it might be, but figured it was one of the numerous comics fans that I'd met through John previously or someone like that.

When I arrived at the restaurant, I saw John sitting at a table with two other people. Both of them had menus fully covering their faces, so I could not tell who they were. As I approached the table and said hello, the menus came down and--much to my surprise--it was Don and Tony! I was completely shocked. I thought Don was gone for good, and there he was sitting at the table.

I sat down and asked him what happened and why he was back, thinking he had returned to pick up something that he had forgotten. Instead, he immediately went into the full story of his trip to Reading, which was full of all sorts of commentary that utilized terms like "nightmarish," "scary" and "bizarre." He noted that once he got there that he hated it immediately, probably for many of the reasons that Dan Adkins noted. Don was a boy from the desert who did not like change very much, and the move east was just too much for him in the end. Like the time Don was a homeowner and walked away from a flooded house, he cut his losses and walked away from his new nightmare home in Reading.



A picture from an Arizona comics convention in 1979. (L to R) DC penciller (Dr. Thirteen) Mike Adams, Jay Willson, Tony Newton and Don.

During dinner that night, Don seemed very relieved and genuinely happy to be back. He provided an endless number of stories about how disappointed he was with the house, the neighborhood, and the whole situation. We all had the best time laughing about the whole situation.

I was incredibly happy that my friend had returned. To this day it is one of my fondest memories. It ranks up there with Don's third and final attempt at settling down and being married; one that was doomed from the start.

Don and Vera Finley had been friends in high school. They began dating after Don ran into her at a party in 1981 and seemed genuinely happy to connect with her. Don brought Vera into the One Book Shop one afternoon, and a number of us all met her for the first time. He seemed happy and she seemed to really enjoy being with him.

They determined that it was working out so well that they eventually decided to marry, much to the surprise of us all, as their courtship only lasted a few months.

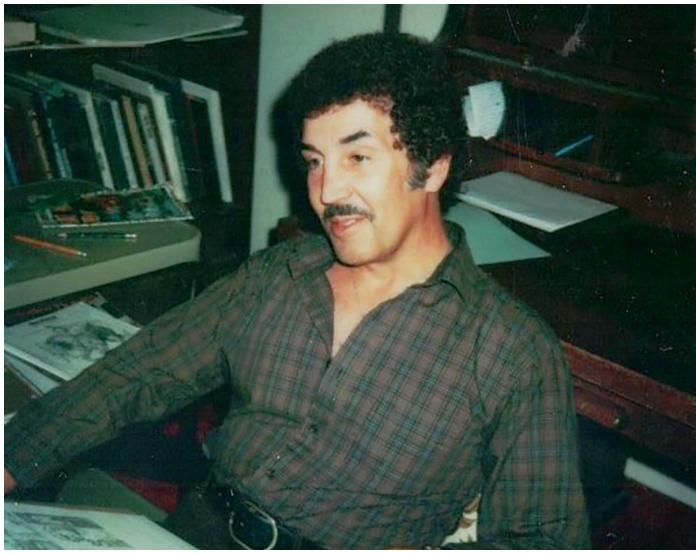
At the wedding, Don drew a large 18" x 24" color drawing on an illustration board of Batman dancing with his new bride. It sat behind the cake and was discussed by everyone.

Unfortunately, Don was, for better or worse, a true bachelor. Within a few days of the new marriage, it was obvious to both Don and Vera that they had moved into their new life too quickly.

Don called John and I up on the week following their marriage and said he needed to get out of the house. We drove over and it was obvious that Vera was not happy to see us. We took him to lunch to try to give him a break. Vera had a son and so did Don, and since Don had moved into her home to live, this created all sorts of pressures on both of them.

To an outsider, it seemed a classic case of two single people who had become too reliant upon themselves as singles to share their lives with another. Don and Vera filed for a divorce within a month, and Don moved out.

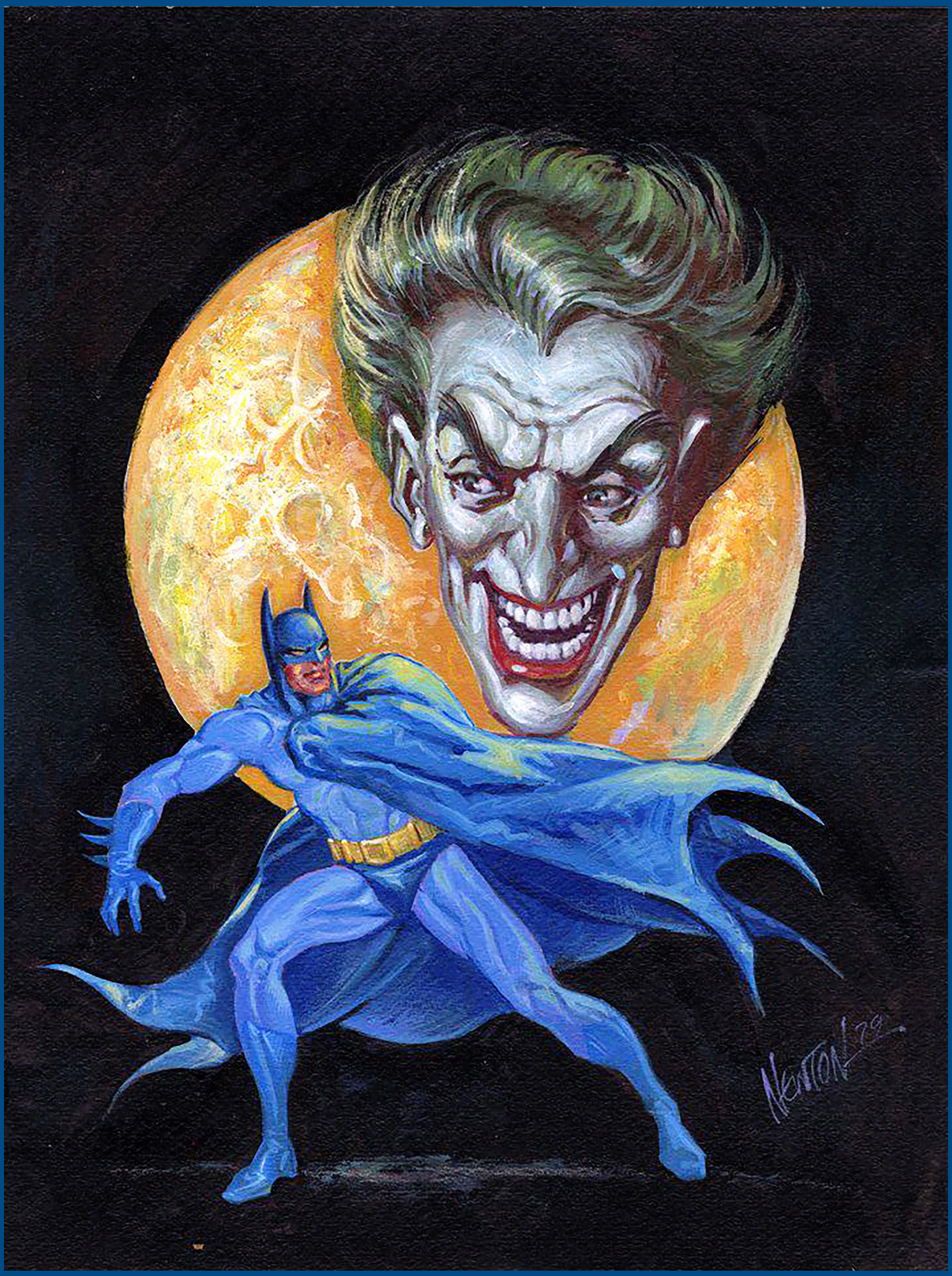
Don sitting at his drawing table at his townhouse in Mesa, Arizona, 1982.



Issues may have stemmed from Don's continued reliance on his mother, Hazel, as he grew older. She assisted Don throughout his entire life, offering parental support where needed and also where not needed. Their relationship created a mother/child conflict that made it difficult for Don to hold onto relationships with others. Don often felt that his mother was too much a part of his existence, but he also appreciated that she was there when he needed her. It was an unusual relationship that also seemed to work for the two of them most of the time.

Hazel was always there for the entire time that I knew him and followed Don as he moved around the "Valley of the Sun." When he lived in Phoenix and Scottsdale, Hazel continued to live in her original home in Mesa. When Don moved to Pennsylvania, she purchased the townhouse next to him on 10th and Date Street in Mesa upon their return. Hazel was always within a fairly short distance to Don during his adulthood.

Hazel was important to Don because she had influence over many of his decisions, even though he did not always agree with her. She provided Don with some freedom because Hazel would watch his son Tony when Don went out on dates or attended social activities.



Chapter 10: Moving to Gotham City

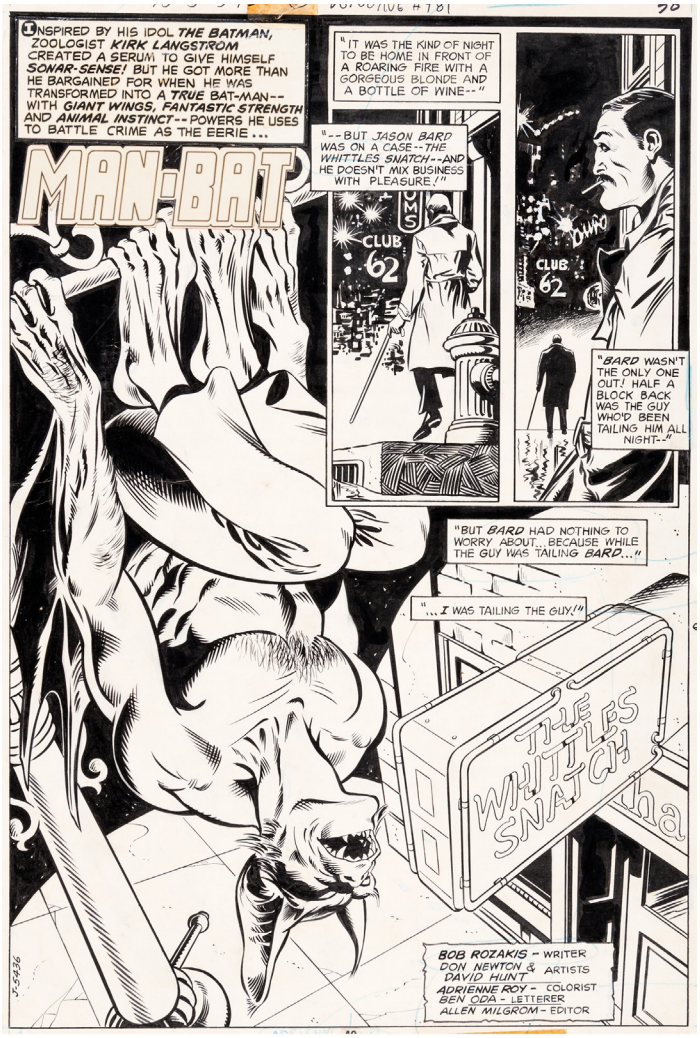
Given the more realistic approach to the Caped Crusader, Don's grounded style came at the right time. Don started drawing Batman as a backup in the *Batman* comic, but moved quickly over to *Detective Comics* after the initial run in *Batman*. Don did not return to the *Batman* comic until late in 1980. During his last year on *Batman*, it was not uncommon for Don to draw a single story that stretched from *Batman* to *Detective*.

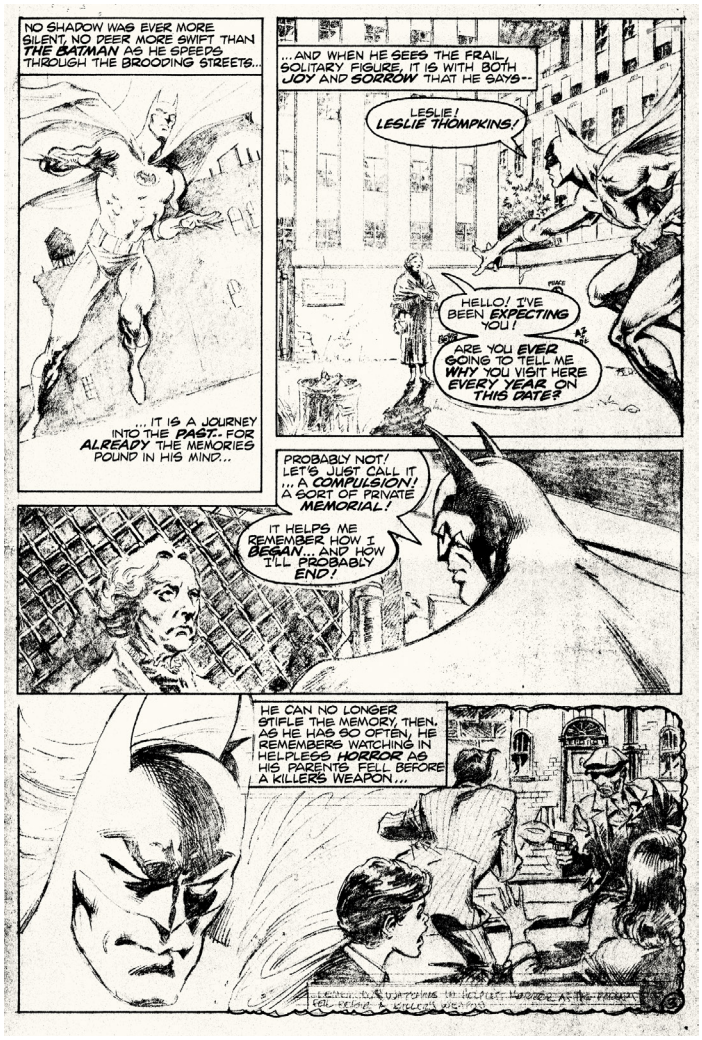
Don's run on the Batman titles lasted from 1978 to 1985, providing the visual tone that served Batman with an artistic foundation that DC was searching for. It should be noted that for most of the *Batman* issues that he drew, Adrienne Roy colored the comics, and Ben Oda or Todd Klein usually lettered them. Adrienne Roy once had the chance to meet Don and remarked to him how much fun his artwork was to color, because he utilized shadows so well in his design.

(opposite page) A 1979 commission of the Batman for a local Arizona fan.

During much of Don's run, artist Gene Colan penciled the other Batman issue of that month, or the issue following the previous issue that Don drew. For example, Don would draw an issue of *Batman*, and Colan would draw the issue of *Detective* for that month. At times, it would be the other way around. Paul Levitz and Dick Giordano, the editors during Don's run, also tended to have the writers draft two-part stories, and those would either run in both *Batman* and *Detective* for that month, or two issues in a row of the same title. Giordano seemed to like to keep the fans guessing as to which artist would draw *Batman* or *Detective* on any given month and often alternated which book the artists appeared within.

Don rarely complained about the *Batman* scripts. Part of the reason for that was simply his love of drawing the character, and part of it was that he got to draw some pretty decent stories. I would say that he enjoyed the earlier stories more, especially those written by Denny O'Neil and Gerry Conway. This is based on comments that Don made to me when those scripts came in from DC. O'Neil wrote in characters that Don loved from the writer's work with Neal Adams, such as The League of Assassins.





(left) Splash page from the Man-Bat backup story in *Detective Comics* #480, with inks by Dave Hunt. (right) A penciled page by Don from "The Curse of the Crime Alley" story in *Detective Comics* #483. Note the "Bob Kane" over-the-shoulder shot of Batman in panel three, a Newton favorite. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

Among Don's Batman stories was an iconic one with writer Denny O'Neil and Dan Adkins on inks for the character's fortieth anniversary: *Detective Comics* #483 featured "The Curse of Crime Alley," where The Batman returns to the scene of the Wayne murders in Crime Alley. He encounters Leslie Thompkins and must face the type of anger and fury that only comes with grief over family loss. On the flip side of that, Don had trouble understanding the Denny-created villain Maxie Zeus, a crime boss who fashioned himself the incarnation of the Greek God. Don just didn't see Maxie as much of a threat to Batman, and therefore, felt the villain was silly and unremarkable.

"Over the years, DC has finally gotten Batman to the point where he's operating a little closer to reality," Don said in a 1983 interview. "Now he yells at his underlings, has personal problems and he might even take a drink occasionally."

Much of that complexity came from the scripts of Gerry Conway's scripts. Conway's Batman was fallible, fighting his own anger and inner demons, while pushing himself to become the best crimefighter possible.

Conway wrote one of Don's favorite scripts, "Bad Night in Baja," for *Detective Comics* #497

(December, 1980), a story that evoked Will Eisner's *The Spirit* comic. It came out of a phone call between the two--another example of the writer's regard for his artist. I remember Don reading the script when it came in and being excited about drawing it. It was their first Batman story together.

The *Spirit* stories regularly focused on the people around the titular crimefighter's orbit. "Baja" does much of the same, as a wayward hotel in Mexico gets roped into Batman's fight with criminal spy The Squid, when he wanders into the hotel lobby out of costume and suffering from a bullet wound. This story embraces all the tenets of a classic *Spirit* story: sheets of rain pouring outside (robbing the hotel owner of his chance to burn the fleabag down and collect his insurance money), a colorful villain with the rotund Squid and his lisp (also named, presumably, in honor of Spirit's foe The Octopus), and a hero who soldiers on in spite of his injuries.



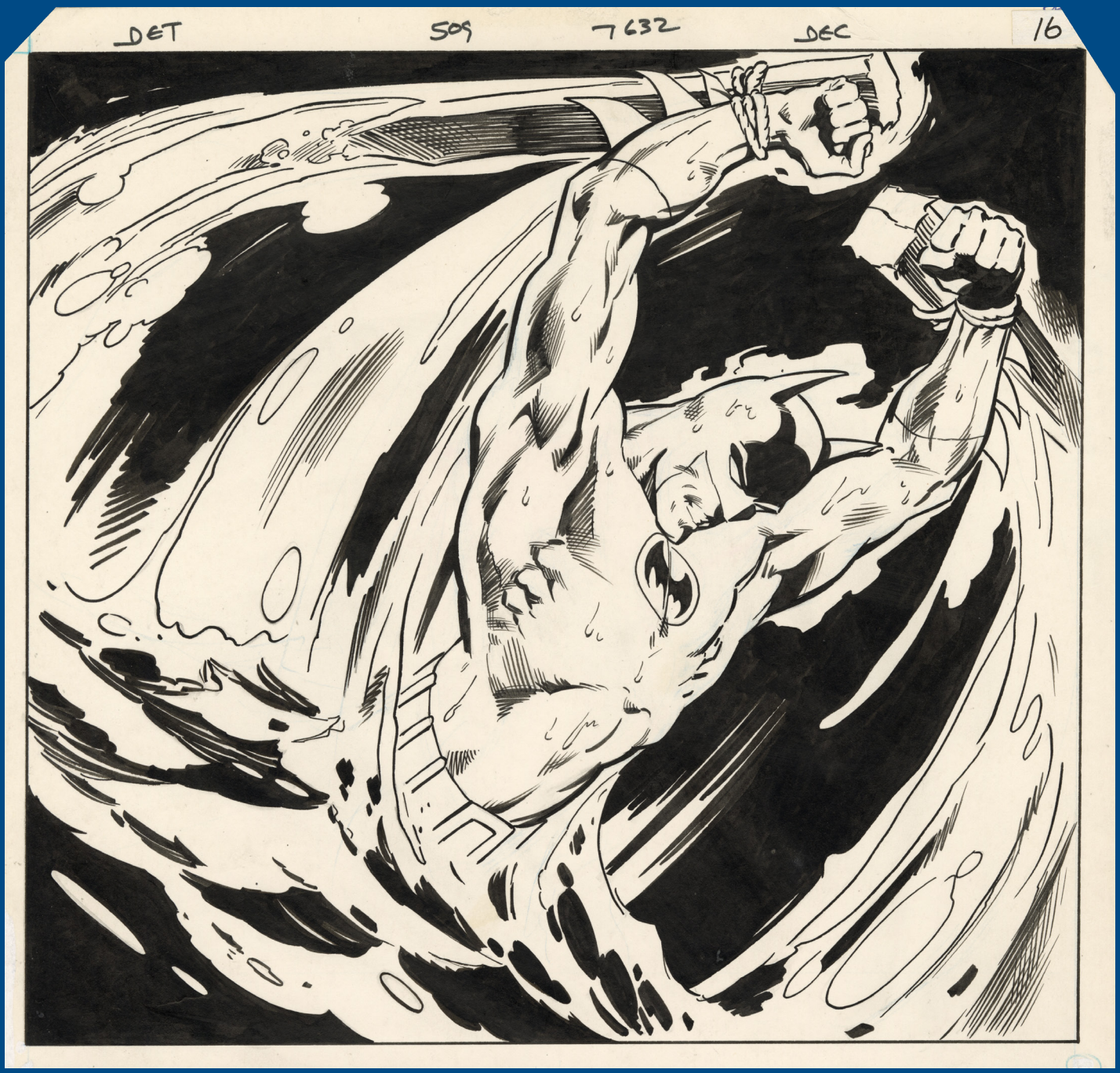
Detective #524, pg. 7 original art page of Batman battling The Squid by Newton and Dan Adkins.

When Bruce Wayne smiles in the final panel, as Alfred drives them back to the United States in a convertible, he looks less like a Bob Kane creation and more like he was drawn by Will Eisner.

"Batman worked really well with Eisener-esque and Chester Gould characters that were slightly over-the-top but grounded visually, which Don excels at," Gerry said. "That was the Batman that I wanted to write, because it reflected the Batman of the late '40s and early '50s. Dick Sprang had this look that was both fantastical and very grounded. You know, it seemed like these ridiculous situations could actually happen, like a fight that takes place on a giant turntable that *feels* like it's a giant turntable: it seems like gravity would act that way. Obviously not, but to a kid, that's totally acceptable.

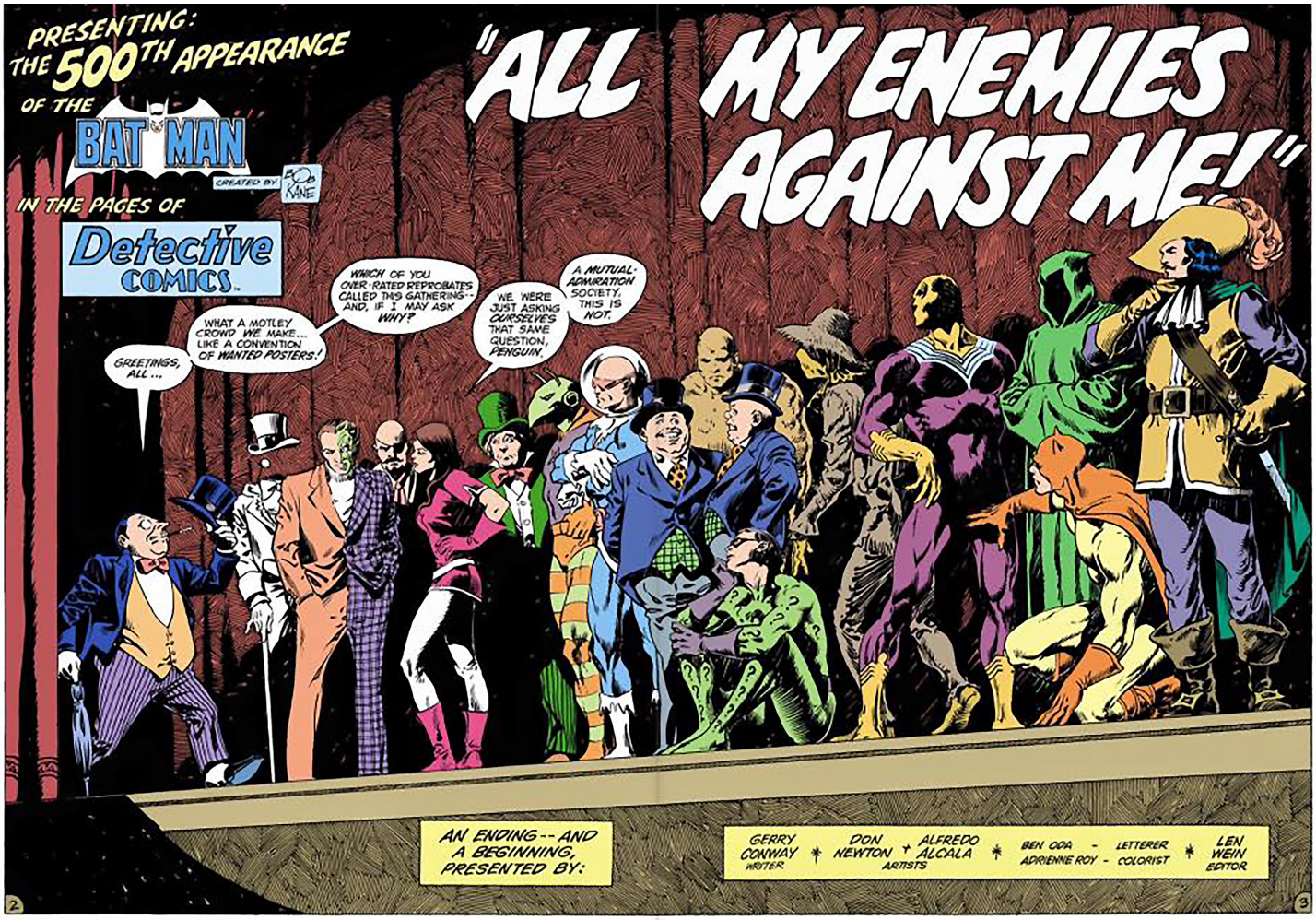
"Don was able to bring that kind of Dick Sprang/Jerry Robinson attitude to the book and that liberated me to go in directions that I would not have had the opportunity to do with other artists. If Irv Novick had been drawing. those stories, it would have been very professional and quite good, but you wouldn't be that next level that Don brought to it."

It's also ironic that Don, who always thought Robin looked ridiculous in his short pants, would go on to co-create the second Robin, Jason Todd, in 1983. The next generation of acrobats with Haley's Circus (where Dick Grayson grew up and saw his own parents murdered), Jason was the redheaded son of two acrobats viciously killed by the new villain on the block, Killer Croc. Wearing Dick's original circus costume, Jason debuted as a sidekick in *Detective Comics* #526, celebrating 500 issues of Batman. The story featured Batman facing off against all his major (and some minor) villains, with help from Talia and Catwoman, while Batgirl and Robin were hot on the heels of Croc. Conway remembers the extra-sized issue fondly:



"I discovered an old beat up copy of *Detective Comics* #509 at my local library, Beltsville Library in Maryland, when I was a kid. I've never seen such beautiful and dynamic art before. I remember just staring at his artwork and mentally absorbing his figure work over and over again. His art in that Batman book made me a life long fan."

—Frank Cho



The opening two-page spread for *Detective Comics* #526, featuring several of the Rogues' Gallery. These are two of the most famous pages that Don ever drew, with inks by Alfredo Alcala.

"It's got an amazing cover. I looked forward to writing that story and I was delighted with Don's rendering of it. That's a masterpiece from him. You know, I was just happy with my writing on it. We get opportunities to celebrate what you personally think was the great era of comics that you're then currently writing."

Gerry admits the coincidence between Dick and Jason's origins, and what his thought process was.

"In the original Batman, when Robin was introduced [in 1940's *Detective Comics* #38], the effect of his parents' death was not really part of his story," Gerry elaborated. "It was the '40s, so they didn't want to dwell on it, but with Jason Todd, I had an opportunity to basically replay that series of events. In context, it would actually be a major element of his life and I wanted it to be close enough to Dick Grayson's backstory. You didn't have to do a lot of thinking to actually appreciate, you know, what he was going through. It's a natural sequence, if you buy into the idea of a new Robin and having him go through the same stuff. I probably could have been more creative and I could have taken them from a different direction, but my feeling was that it was an opportunity to get some emotion into that character."

(opposite page) *Detective Comics* #509, pg. 14, Batman aggressively breaks free of The Catman's trap, inks by Dan Adkins. Courtesy of Frank Cho.

Conway went out with a bang, leaving the writing to Doug Moench, who wrote Jason Todd's ascension to the new Robin.

Don told Dewey Webb with *The Phoenix New Times* about the new Robin:

> **"Jason is another circus orphan. Yes, just like Robin, but the problem was that no one was quite sure what to do with him. For a long time he just sort of hung around. Then they realized that Batman and Robin were too deeply ingrained in the American consciousness to team him up with another partner. People would accept Batman and Robin, or just Batman, but it wasn't going to work with Batman and anyone else. So pretty soon you're going to see Dick Grayson give his outfit to Jason and make him the new Robin. Then Robin will become someone else," Don laughed.**



Detective Comics #526 – Selina and Talia argue over Bruce's inability to commit to a woman. Inks by Alfredo Alcala.

I remember that Don complained of drawing those characters during that storyline, having grown tired of them, as well as Moench's overly romantic and melodramatic scripts of the Nocturna storyline, featuring an astronomer with bleached skin, who briefly adopts Jason away from Bruce. Again, he seemed to feel that these characters would not be a threat to Batman and were therefore not worthy of the number of stories written about them. By the same token, Don had been drawing *Batman* for years at that time, so some of the complaints might also have just been Don getting to a point where he wanted to draw other characters and stories.

Almost six years drawing any character is a long time, even if the main character is one of your favorites.

In most cases on the Batman titles, the inking was completed by Dan Adkins, Frank Chiaramonte, Dave Hunt, Bob Smith, or Alfredo Alcala, with a few others sprinkled in when those inkers were not available. Don greatly favored having Dan Adkins ink his stories at first, but later was pretty happy with Bob Smith and Dave Hunt. Hunt inked Don's first Batman story and nailed the job to perfection. Don's favorite Batman inking was undoubtedly any time the Dick Giordano inked his work, which was rare. Frank Chiaramonte started off strong but his work grew very loose and over time, was not as dependable in terms of inking what was drawn in Don's pencils.

Don was also happy with Alfredo Alcala's inking early in their collaboration, but later in their work together, Alcala tended to "noodle up" the artwork with extra inking and details that were not in the pencils. Working long-distance through the mail, Don rarely got to meet his collaborators; that changed for one in the summer of 1982 in Tempe.

The One Book Shop was a popular comic book/science fiction bookstore in Tempe, Arizona that many of us fans frequented with Don.

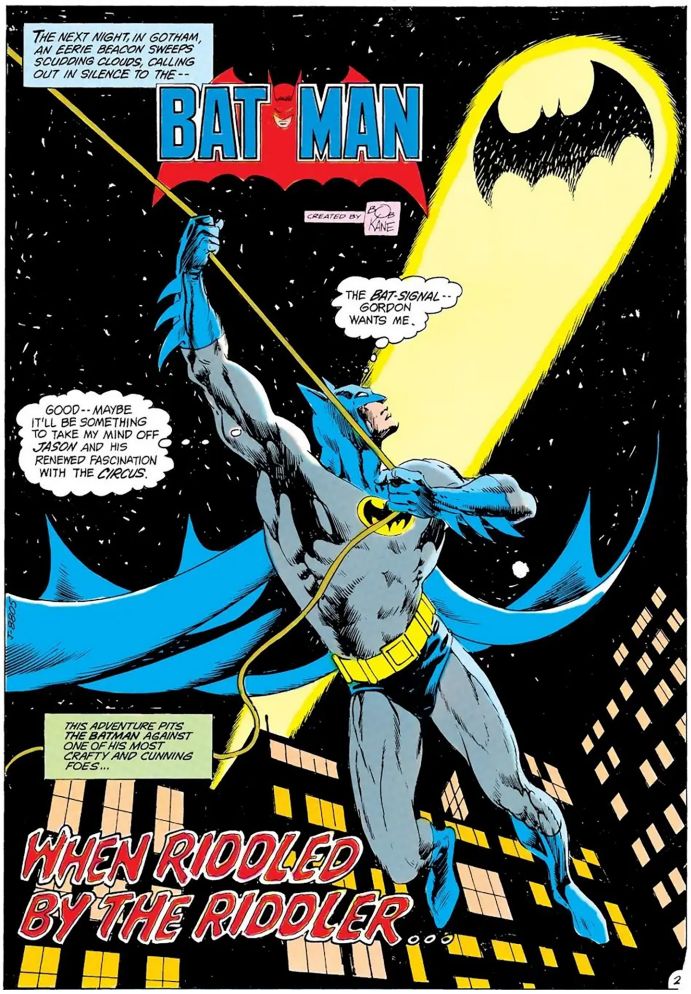
On a Wednesday in August of 1982, cartoonist Phil Yeh contacted the shop out of the blue to suggest a possible visit. Yeh was on a road trip to bookstores around the country promoting literacy and reading to kids, and desired to bring his "literacy roadshow" to The One Book Shop. Owner Paul Freeman was game and agreed to have Yeh come by the store later that week on Saturday, figuring the larger weekend crowd would enjoy meeting him. Before the phone call was over, however, Phil also mentioned that he was bringing guests, and that artist Alfredo Alcala was along for the tour along with a few other people.

Paul immediately decided to turn the visit into a mini comics convention, and to set up the store with signing tables and store discounts. A group of us assisted Paul with rearranging the store and getting everything ready. Paul asked me to call Don to see if he would come by the store as well, and when he heard that Alcala would be there, Don immediately agreed. Don was a regular at the store and was always willing to help out with special appearances and signings anyway.

On Friday of that week, another interesting addition was added to the list of guests: DC Comics production artist Anthony Tollin was in town for a tattoo show, along with his wife, DC colorist Adrienne Roy. Tollin called the shop and wanted to come by and visit, and we suggested that he come by the next day, and told him about the "mini-con" (as we started to refer to it) that was quickly coming together. Tony was game and said that Adrienne and he would attend.

On Saturday, it all came together. Phil Yeh arrived with his wife, along with Alfredo Alcala





(left) *Detective Comics* #485, inks by Dan Adkins.
(right) *Batman* #362. Splash page, inked by Alfredo Alcala.

and a few members of his family. Alcala was very quiet but also very friendly, and Phil was probably one of the most exuberant people that I've ever met. We set them all down at tables so that they could begin to sign comics and to talk to fans.

Adrienne and Tony arrived next, and were just terrific people, complementing Paul on his book shop and excited to say hi to Phil and Alfredo. We set them up at a table as well. Everyone got along great and as customers came in, they really enjoyed seeing the guests. As you can imagine, a lot of copies of *Detective* and other *Batman* and horror comics were sold on that day.

An hour or so later, Don walked in the store with John Clark and Tony. There were a fair number of customers in the store at that point, and people were in line to meet the various guests. Don took a look at everything and said to me: "Wait – don't let anyone know that I am here yet. I want to do something." I agreed and Don went over to the comics racks and pulled off a copy of his latest *Detective Comics*. He went over to the table where Alfredo was sitting and got in line, which was around six people deep at that point. Alfredo was busy signing and sketching and talking to the various fans.



Great photo of Don Newton, from a convention in 1982.

Once the line moved up to Don, he was standing in front of Alfredo. Alfredo had never met Don, so he had no idea who this person was in front of him. Don asked Alfredo how he liked inking Don Newton's pencils, and as if on cue, Alcala proclaimed that he loved inking Don's work. He noted that Don really knew how to draw the human figure, and Alcala really appreciated that in inking Don's work. Don agreed and asked Alfredo to sign his comic.

Alfredo said "Who should I make this out to?"

"Don Newton"

Alfredo scrunched his face in confusion, and said, "but this is…"

Don smiled.

Suddenly, the realization hit Alfredo. He was sitting in front of his regular collaborator. Alfredo jumped up and ran around the table to give Don a big hug, proclaiming, "Don Newton!" He pointed Don out to Phil as well, who nodded and shook Don's hand.

Everyone laughed and it was a terrific moment. Don and Alfredo began talking and then Adrienne came over to the table to introduce herself. This time it was Don who was surprised. He noted to Adrienne that he really liked the way that she had colored a recent issue, and Adrienne said it was a pleasure to color Don's artwork.

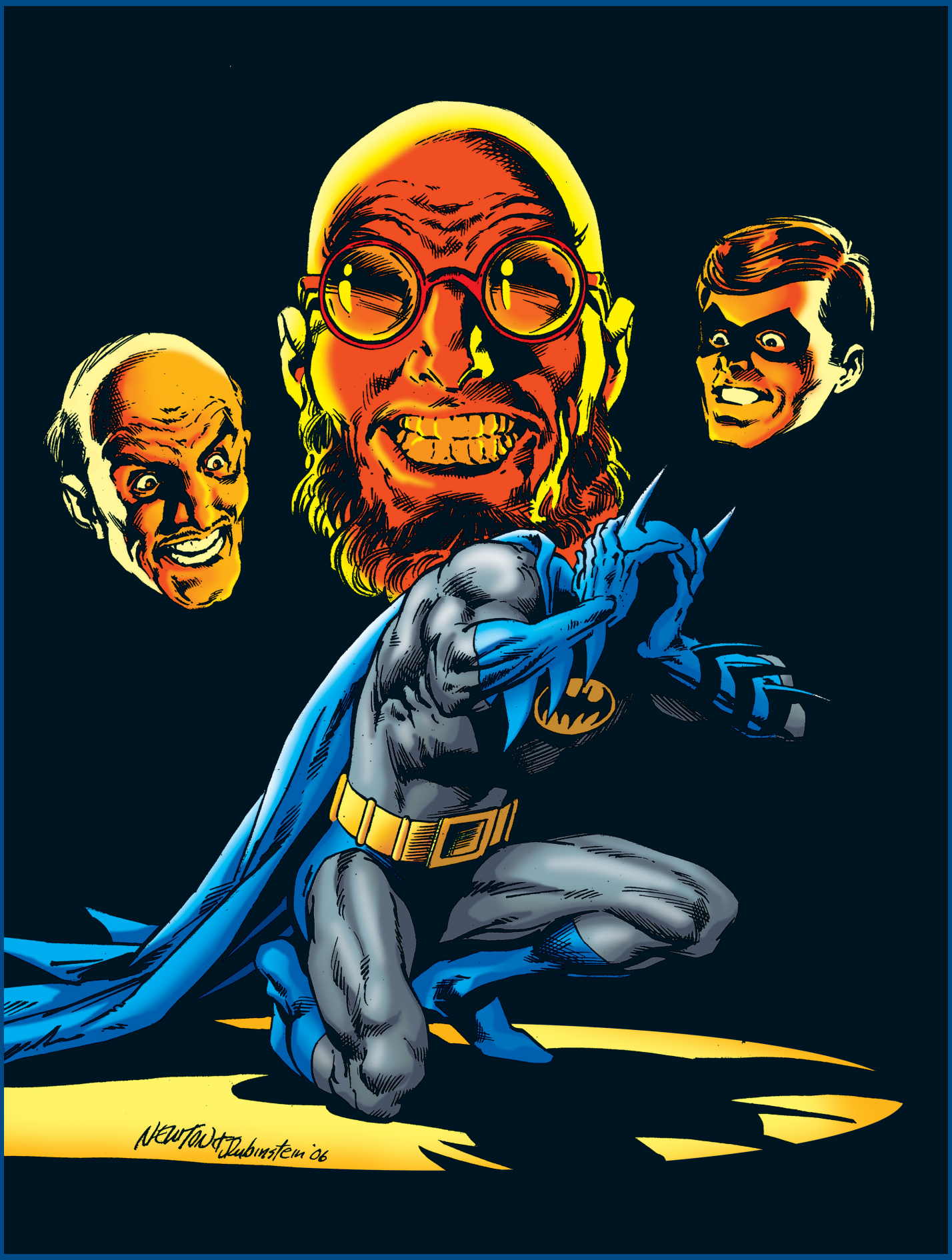
Don later joined the table of guests and the attendees that day for signings and the whole day was fun for everyone. My memories of all of the guests were that every one of them could not have been nicer.

The "meeting" was a terrific moment and the "mini-con" a wonderful day. We all went out to eat together later that day – Mexican food, of course - and good fellowship was had by all.

Once Don finished his last *Batman* story, he was done with the character for a while. He desired a new challenge. I think that Don thought that he might eventually return to drawing Batman but, at the time, moving over to drawing the Roy Thomas written and edited *Infinity, Inc.* series was a breath of fresh air. The characters were young and Don had never drawn a series like that before, which was obviously attractive to him at the time.

Unfortunately, that change in projects would not last long for Don.

Rejected cover of Batman drawn by Don in the 1980's for *Batman* #356, rejected for hiding Batman's face. It was later inked by Joe Rubinstein for the cover of 2006's *Back Issue* # 19.


NEWTON & Rubinstein '06



Chapter 11: Don's Final Days

Don's career at DC was undergoing some changes.

For one, Don was growing tired of drawing Batman. As much as he loved the character, he had drawn the Dark Knight for more than five years and needed a new challenge. Some of the Batman stories that he had to draw were not his cup of tea, particularly throughout the Nocturna saga was not interesting to draw.

Don was a Batman purest and that storyline was unusual for the character, at least in Don's eyes, as it did not feature any of Batman's famous villains, but instead edged into melodrama with the vampiric villainess.

In reality, he just wanted to draw something new and different.

Captain Marvel went into limbo at DC with the cancellation of the backup stories that ran in *World's Finest* and *Adventure Comics*, so Don was down to drawing a *Batman* story each month, along with a mix of backup stories in order to meet his contract. Every once in a while he would find something that he really liked, such as the Ch'p stories in *Green Lantern* that featured an alien chipmunk Green Lantern.

(opposite page) Penciled first page drawn for *Infinity Inc.* by Don.

Don needed to draw something new, well-written and something that would excite him to sit at the drawing board.

Soon, various ideas and projects started to come Don's way from editor and writer Roy Thomas. Roy had a fairly unique relationship with DC in that he both wrote and edited his comics, and therefore, was able to make decisions about his own work. Roy loved Don's artwork and fondly remembered Don from his fanzine years. Roy felt that Don was particularly good at drawing Golden Age characters as Don often chose to draw those characters in those fanzine drawings. Roy was a huge fan of the Golden Age period of comics himself, particularly *All-Star Comics* and carried those characters into *The All-Star Squadron*, set during World War II and featuring practically all of DC's Golden Age heroes.

Don had made it known how much he wanted to draw *All-Star Squadron*, especially since the Justice Society of America featured his favorite Golden Age heroes. Roy tapped into that interest by proposing

to Don that he draw *Infinity, Inc*, which featured the children of the original Justice Society heroes. Don figured that he would get the chance to draw some of the old JSA characters, since they often appeared in the book.

When Jerry Ordway announced his leaving as artist on *Infinity, Inc.*, Don was one of the first Roy Thomas considered to replace him on the title. Don had only seen a couple of issues of the comic, but was excited by the enthusiasm that Roy had for him taking over the penciling of the comic. Don even went so far to inform the editors of *Batman* that he would be moving on to draw *Infinity, Inc.*



One of the last pages of art drawn by Don Newton and inked by Joe Rubinstein. Published in *Infinity Inc.* #12.

"I was a huge fan of Newton's work as I followed it from his fanzine era, his *Phantom* work for Charlton, and of course his DC stuff," Ordway reflected. "When Roy passed on to me that Don wanted to draw *Infinity, Inc.*, I was excited as a fan."

To start their work together, Roy assigned Don three pages of *All-Star Squadron Annual* #3, feeling that the look of Don's artwork would be perfect for the Batman and Robin portion of that story.

After *All-Star*, Don was excited to finally start work on *Infinity, Inc.*. Upon receiving Roy's first script, Don sat down to look over the script as he also reviewed back issues of the comic (DC had sent him some comp copies) so that he could better understand the team. Don drew up a wonderful pin-up of the group which Roy was able to use to announce the change in artists for the book, which DC Comics ran in a couple of house ads. Don's frequent inker, Alfredo Alcala, inked the pin-up piece.

Don jumped into drawing the first issue, and seemed to really enjoy the costume designs that Jerry Ordway had designed with Mike Machlan. As is often the case with artists, Don also tweaked some of the designs with small changes, but was very faithful to their look for the most part. Don pencilled away and eventually turned in his first issue into DC. He received some very positive reactions to the work from Roy Thomas as well.

Everything seemed to be moving well professionally, but personally was sadly another matter.

Months before starting work on *All-Star Squadron Annual* #3 (in October of 1983), Don began to complain of a sore throat that grew to the point where it literally hurt him to swallow. We would mention that consistently at our weekly dinners, and noticed how Don was eating much less food and sometimes just drinking a shake or eating soup for dinner. Don eventually went to the doctor to try and figure out what was going on, but the doctor gave Don some medication that didn't seem to work.

Unfortunately, Don's determined personality may also have led to furthering the problems that he experienced with the illness. He had not been

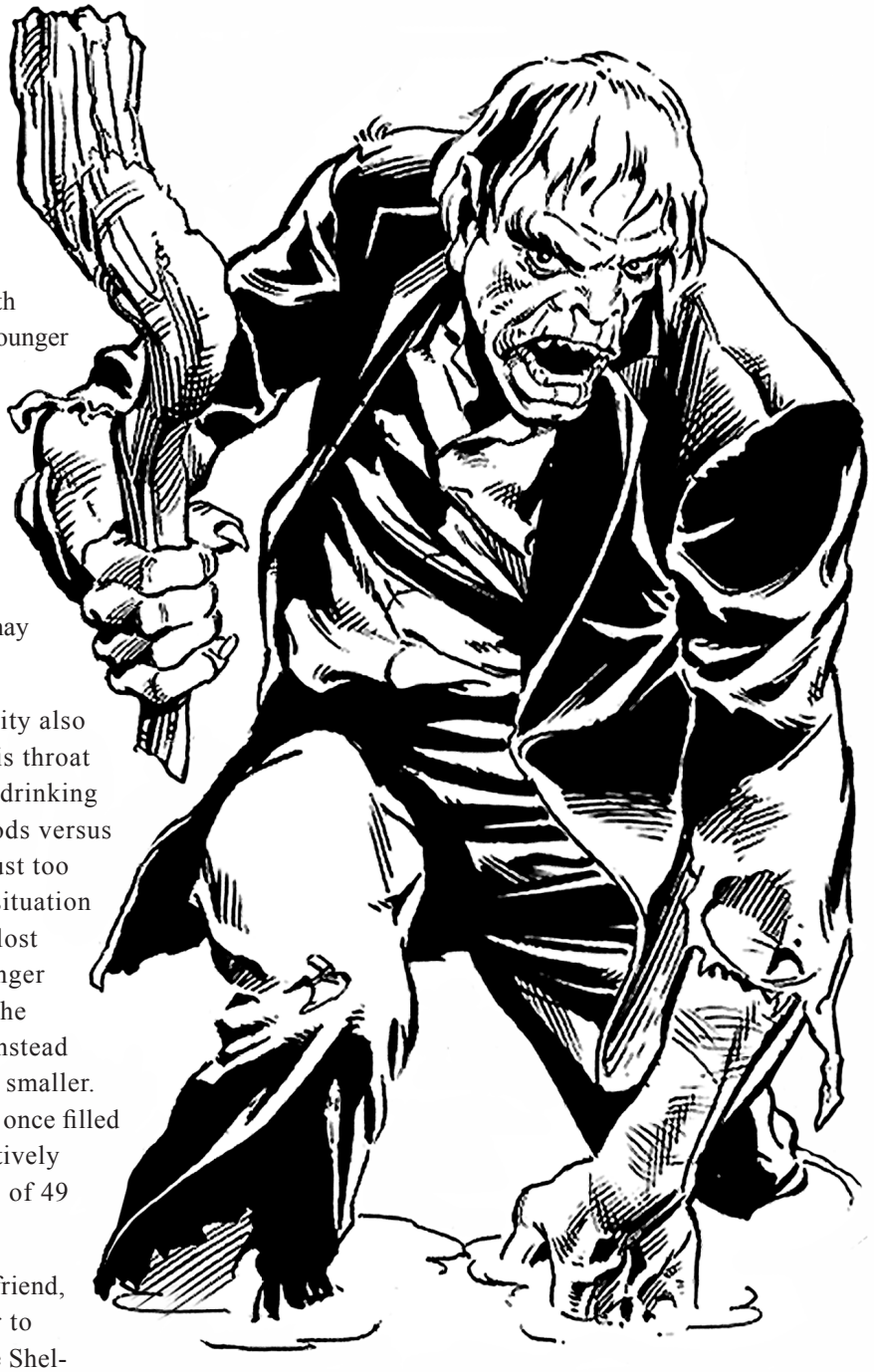
happy with his doctor's inability to diagnose his problem effectively, and that resulted in him visiting less with doctors and instead, taking on more of a "do it yourself" approach to the problem. Don seemed to feel that he would simply tackle the problem by himself.

Don presumed that he would have to live with it. Don was an infrequent drinker of goat's milk at the time, so it was thought that the unpasteurized goat's milk might have caused the problem for him. Don stopped drinking the milk, but the issue did not seem to get much better.

Don was eventually diagnosed with Oral Thrush, which normally affects younger children, but can severely affect adults with underlying conditions. When the immune system fails to repel invading bacteria, it results in a fungal infection taking root in the mouth. In Don's case, it's unclear if it went unchecked for far too long, or even if he'd had some condition that may have exacerbated it.

Unfortunately, Don's productivity also started to noticeably slow down. His throat issues increased and he resorted to drinking protein shakes and eating softer foods versus heartier, fuller meals. Eating was just too painful and difficult for him. This situation led to a lack of energy and he also lost around 35 to 40 pounds. Don no longer resembled the confident man with the strong physique from his past but instead looked gaunt, frail, and surprisingly smaller. He grew horribly thin. The man who once filled out a Captain Marvel costume effectively looked old and very tired for a man of 49 years of age.

"Don gave away a couch to my friend, John Fong, so John and I went over to Don's apartment to pick it up" Shane Shellenbarger recalled. "Don looked terrible. He was emaciated, his face was drawn, and his eyes looked sunken into his skull. Don had always been the living embodiment of the heroes he drew. The Don I had known for almost twelve years was gone. Don did not seem as if he were in any shape to hold a conversation, so John Fong and I removed the couch. That was the last time that I saw Don Newton alive."



Close-up panel of Solomon Grundy by Don, inked by Joe Rubinstein.

For those who had not seen Don in a while, the difference was startling and frightening. It actually caused some to avoid seeing him, feeling that Don was not well. Don's illness had reached a point where it was genuinely concerning to those around him.

Don's personality was such that he was not someone who would ever complain about his health. The only complaints that I ever heard from him were about landlord issues at his various apartments or perhaps about contract issues at DC Comics. He did not quit when problems developed but forged ahead. He was a man of great determination and rarely displayed fear about venturing into unchartered territories.



DC wanted to announce Don's new assignment to draw *Infinity Inc.*, so they requested that he draw a group shot which was sent out to the comics fan press.

We used to joke that Don had challenges with standard life issues such as buying a house or other common problems and events, but then there was this fearlessness in him when it came to venturing into unchartered artistic styles or pursuing creative ideas. These traits contributed mightily to his excellent artistic skills and consistent body of work, as he worked diligently on his craft for years and learned whatever he could to make himself a better artist. The work that he produced for DC Comics over the years is evidence of this, as Don's artwork just got better and better with each passing year.

Don's driving attitude, along with the limitations of medical science at the time, may have contributed greatly to his early exit from life.

Don penciled issue #11 of *Infinity, Inc.,* and his energy level really began to show a decline. It took him longer to pencil each page and points of exhaustion came often during the day. He would take breaks more frequently and grew tired much faster. One day when I visited him in the afternoon, I awoke him from a nap, which was unheard of for him.

In his prime, Don could draw up to two pages of a comic book on any given day if needed, depending upon the complexities in the script. He was a weightlifter for most of his life and always carried the look of a man in good shape. His focus was second to none.

At this point, however, Don found himself barely able to finish a page within a day, and sometimes took two days to complete one. It got worse when he started penciling issue #12. Once he finally finished the issue, Don mailed *Infinity, Inc.* #12 to DC.

It ended up being the last full issue of a comic book Don would ever draw.

In early August of 1984, DC sent Don the script to issue #13 of *Infinity, Inc.*. It took him a day or two just to get started on the book, because he felt so worn out. Don labored through penciling the first three pages, not really telling anyone that

he was feeling as badly as he looked, although those around him knew that things were bad. That Newton pride and unwillingness to share his personal concerns became a problem. He needed help and he needed it soon, but he was the only one who really understood that situation. Unfortunately, all that he had to caution him or to demand that he do something were his young son, fanboy friends, and a mother who was already being provided for by Don himself.

Upon reaching the fourth page, on August 15 of 1984, Don got up from drawing and suddenly struggled to stand. He suffered a total failing of his body and fell to the floor.

Don experienced an unexpected and sudden massive heart attack, due to his incredibly weakened condition and lack of solid food consumption. Hazel heard him fall and ran in to see what had happened. Upon seeing Don on the floor, Hazel called 911and the ambulance was dispatched from Mesa Lutheran hospital, ironically just five doors down the street from Don's townhouse.

By the time Don got to the emergency room, his body had gone into a coma and he was put on a respirator and life support. Don was admitted into intensive care, where he laid for three more days. Friends, like myself, that visited, were only able to look in on him from a distance in his small room. All of us felt helpless and unable to do anything for him.

There was really never any change from his point of arrival to the hospital.

He never woke up from his coma.

On the morning of Sunday, August 19, 1984, Don Newton passed away. The staff at the hospital was unable to bring him out of his coma, and the young, talented comic book artist of 49 left this world.

"I was in fact out of town for a lot of it," John Clark said. "My brother's wife had taken ill and passed away and I was visiting with him, trying to help out. I'd seen Don just before that and he'd complained of having a sore throat and not feeling good. While at my brother's, Don's mother, Hazel, called me and told me he had gotten worse. By the time I returned to Phoenix, he was just going into the hospital. He died soon after. That was a rough year."

It shocked and stunned Hazel and Don's son, Tony. Both relied on Don for everything and were unsure how they would go on. Tony was only 14 at the time and just could not understand what had happened. I can still remember him asking me what happened, even though, unfortunately, he knew the answer.

Hazel told me at the time that "a mother never expects to bury her son."

John Clark realized that someone needed to tell DC about Don's passing. John contacted Roy Thomas on the following Monday to tell Roy and sent Roy the pages that Don had completed penciling before his passing. Roy had worked far enough ahead on the *Infinity Inc.* comic to allow for some changes before the comic went into final production. Roy's touching tribute to Don appeared in *Infinity Inc.* #11, opening that it was not "an easy announcement to write" and broke the news of his passing to the comics world:

> **As I type these words, I'm looking at those first three pages of *INFINITY* #12, the last Don ever drew; they were sent to me by his mother during those fateful days when Don lay in a coma in the hospital.**
>
> **They're beautiful pages, but that's beside the point.**
>
> **What strikes me, looking at them, is that, even though they were penciled at a time when severe illness had strained his heart and caused him to lose an alarming amount of weight, they are full of life–as good in their own way as those of #13 or anything Don had ever drawn.**
>
> **The loss to comics is a grievous one, of course, even for those who knew him only by his work.**



SPECIAL NOTE: This issue's 23-page story is, alas, the only full-length story penciller *Don Newton* had completed by the time of his tragic death late last summer. Inker *Joe Rubinstein,* one of Don's favorites and a longtime correspondent and friend, volunteered to ink this special issue, and Marvel Comics was kind enough to release him from his Spider-Man-related tasks for a month to do so. Letterer *John Clark,* a close friend and fellow Phoenix(Arizona)-dweller, also wished to be involved. From start to finish, this has been a labor of love and tribute for all involved—in addition to being, perhaps, one of Don's finest art jobs and a harbinger of what he and I had in mind for the future of INFINITY, INC.

Now, however, it's time to look to the magazine's future — and, until we've settled on a regular penciller, we've asked relative newcomer, *Todd McFarlane,* to pencil a couple of issues. Todd's done beautiful work with Steve Englehart on back-up features in *Coyote* for Marvel/Epic, and we're proud to have him aboard. A pulsating preview of his work, as inked by embellisher-in-residence *Tony DeZuniga,* accompanies this letters page, just to show you what's in store for you next month.

Each of these artists, and I myself, want to do the kind of job on INFINITY, INC. which we feel Don would have done. He was one of the good guys.

—Roy Thomas.

Roy Thomas' note to the fans in the *Infinity Inc.* comic about the passing of Don Newton.

It is a far greater one for those of us who knew and liked him personally.

He will be missed.

Hell, he is already.

In a way that few comics professionals ever get to receive, Roy desired to provide Don with a tribute for his years in comics. Since Roy held Don's last artwork in his hands, he restructured his *Infinity, Inc.* storyline to best work as a tribute, by switching issues #12 and #13, so that Don's final three pages were now the first few of #12 (originally #13), and were finished by penciller Tim Burgard and inker Tony DeZuniga. Determined to make Don's final full issue of a comic book ever as perfect as Don would have wanted, he even spoke with Marvel Comics to allow Joe Rubenstein out of his contract temporarily in order to ink the issue over Don's pencils. Rubenstein had long been Don's favorite inker over his pencils, and Jim Shooter personally approved letting Rubenstein ink the issue without any concern or complaint. Don's contributions to the new #12, and all of #13, were fully graced by Rubinstein's inks.

"I was under a seven-year contract and when Don passed away, Jim Shooter gave me a dispensation, a waiver, whatever, I was going to make damn sure that since Don said I was his favorite inker," Rubinstein told Barry Keller. "I don't even know if I knew that, I guess I must have assumed that since he kept calling me up to do his work; that I was going to make sure that that thing was done right, so Shooter let me go over to DC to do that issue and a few pages...

"It was very melancholy because of course I knew that Don had passed and I'd be inking this beautiful little head and go, 'That is gorgeous…and it's never going to happen again.' And then I would ink something and I would go to grab the phone to call and go, 'Oh wait, I forgot he's dead.'

"So it was a very emotional job for me to do. "

John Clark was a freelance letterer at the time, taking on work here and there around his day job. John had lettered some Newton stories in the past and knowing this, Roy asked John if he would like to letter the final issue of his friend's artwork. John was honored to have been chosen for such an assignment and gladly accepted.

Infinity Inc. #13, written by Roy Thomas, lettered by John Clark, and inked by Joe Rubinstein, was assembled for production as Don's last new work drawn for the comics industry.

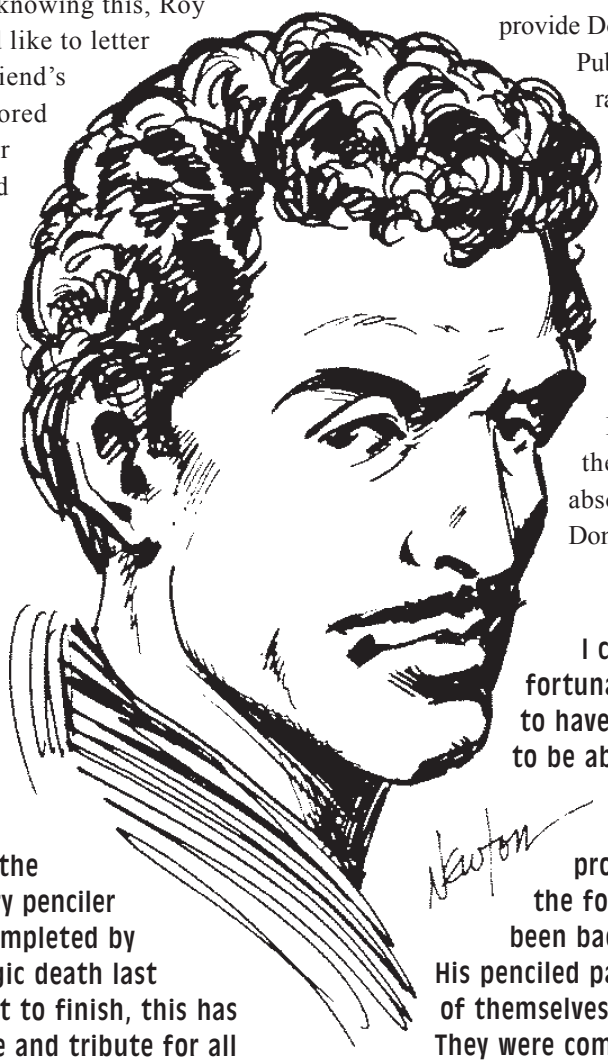
Roy made sure to note Don's passing again in his final issue of art, issue #13:

SPECIAL NOTE: This issue's 23-page story is, alas, the only full-length story penciler Don Newton had completed by the time of his tragic death last summer...From start to finish, this has been a labor of love and tribute for all involved--in addition to being, perhaps, one of Don's finest art jobs and a harbinger of what he and I had in mind for the future of *Infinity, Inc.*.

Roy's final thoughts in closing were direct, succinct, and heartfelt:

Each of these artists, and I myself, want to do the kind of job on *Infinity, Inc.* which we feel Don would have done. He was one of the good guys.

As one of Don's friends, I personally cannot thank Roy enough for helping Don to exit the comics industry in style.



Self-portrait by Don - used by DC for one of their *DC Profiles*.

DC Comics did their part as well to provide Don with a proper tribute. Publisher Dick Giordano ran a regular column in DC Comics entitled "…Meanwhile." In the column, Dick wrote a very touching tribute to Don and his contributions to DC Comics, acknowledging how he'd only met Don twice. Giordano then launched into an absolute appreciation of Don as an artist:

I consider myself fortunate and privileged to have been in a position to be able to work with this extremely talented and professional artist in the four years that I've been back at DC Comics. His penciled pages were, in and of themselves, works of art. They were complete with the left the drawing table. One did not have to visualize the finished inked page...everything you (and the inker) needed to know was there....

Giordano continues noting how special it was when Don's work arrived at DC, and his love of Captain Marvel. But, most importantly, it was Don's absolute love of the craft.

"All Don ever wanted was to be a cartoonist," Dick wrote. "He did it well. I wish he could have done it longer. Good-bye, Don. We'll ***all*** miss you,"

MASTER #1
COMICS ARTIST



DON NEWTON

INTRODUCTION

This issue we are devoting the entire fanzine to the artwork of Don Newton! Don developed a lot of his "comics" style of drawing by producing artwork for numerous comic book fanzines in the 1960s and 70s. It seemed appropriate to mimic Don's fanzine work by putting together a "tribute" fanzine for Don in this book.

Don was a great guy and someone who loved to talk about his work, as well as his opinions on the comics industry and his love of the creators who impressed him throughout his years of comics reading.

First, before we get started, a few details about Don Newton himself:

- Born: November 12, 1934
- Died: August 19, 1984 – he was 49 when he died, unexpectedly.
- Lived 90% of his life in Arizona, primarily in the Phoenix and Mesa areas.
- Loves: The comics artwork by Nestor Redondo, Garcia Lopez, Neal Adams, Al Williamson, Alex Raymond and of course, Frank Frazetta, among others. He also loved the inking of Joe Rubinstein and Dan Adkins.
- Don was a big fan of Mexican food but primarily ordered cheese crisps and a salad at the restaurants.
- He also loved the movie serials and old radio shows of his youth.
- He dated a lot on the weekends. He would usually go to clubs where he could dance and meet new women.
- Don was 5'- 9" and a shot-putter and weightlifter in high school, He was always in good shape.

Once Don learned of the fanzines that were starting to emerge frequently in comics fandom, Don started to send in drawings to the editors of those 'zines. Starting in the 1960s, Don first contacted G.B. Love about drawing for the Rocket's Blast Comic Collector. From there, he met Bill Wilson and started drawing for The Collector. Both of those fanzines were some of the most popular in print, so within time, Don became a very desired artist in comics fandom. He was also a nice person so anyone who contacted him usually received a drawing from him for their fanzine.

By 1973, Don had contributed to many fanzines and was becoming a comics fan artist of some note. He won the "Favorite Fan Artist" award at the New York Comicon that year. This eventually led to Don getting work from Charlton Comics and starting to turn "pro."

Don was a terrific guy, and he always made time for his group of friends. He had a great sense of humor and often drew little cartoons throughout his house and on his comics and magazines. He was an excellent cartoonist but rarely got the chance to show that side of his work.

This fanzine is a celebration of all things Newton – enjoy the pieces of art that we have selected here and take the time soon to go back and look at all the excellent artwork that Don produced during his short lifetime. He was one of the greats! He would be both humbled and touched by this fanzine and especially, about a book in his honor.

—Jay

Clip and save!

APPENDIX: COMPLETE DON NEWTON CHECKLIST

Get your scissors ready to cut this out and drop in your pocket for the next longbox hunt: the following is a list of all of the fanzines, comic books and comics stories where Don Newton's artwork appeared during his entire comic book art career: Comic Book Fanzines, Charlton Comics, DC Comics and Marvel Comics.

FANZINES AND FAN COMICS CHECKLIST:

All Dynamic Magazine #5 and #6 (Double issue)
Collage #1
The Collector #16, 17, 26, 28
Comic Crusader #8
Comic Reader #112, 134, 146, 175, 186, 189, 205, 211 (covers all)
Fantasy Soundtrack #1
Fandom Annual #2
Golden Age #3, 4, 5, 7
Golden Age Collector #1, 2, 3
Grave Tales #1
Illustrated Comic Collectors handbook #4
Paragon #5
Golden Age Greats Portfolio
Rocket's Blast Comicollector #60 – 70, 72 – 79, 82, 84, 86, 87, 89 – 91, 94, 95, 97, 99, 100, 101, 104, 106, 110
Rocket's Blast Special #8
Sense of Wonder #11
Sense of Wonder #12
Styx #2
Sword and Fantasy #1
Titan Comics #2, 4, 5
1971 HoustonCon convention booklet
1971 Miami Con 2 convention booklet

CHARLTON COMICS

Beyond the Grave #17
Ghost Manor #20, 22, 48, 64
Ghostly Haunts #42
Haunted #50, 59
Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves #45, 49
Midnight Tales #11-14
The Phantom #67-68, 70-71, 73-74
Scary Tales #31

DC COMICS

Adventure Comics (featuring New Gods) #459-460; (featuring Aquaman) #460-461, 464-466; (featuring Shazam!) #491-492
All-Star Squadron Annual #3 (three pages only)
Aquaman #60-63
Batman (from 1978-1985): #305-306, 328, 331, 346, 352-357, 360-372, 374-379; (Catwoman back-up) #332; (Robin back-up) #337-338
Batman Family (1977): (Robin, Batgirl, Man-Bat) #13
Blackhawk (1984): #266
The Brave and the Bold (1979–1980) (featuring Red Tornado) #153, (featuring Doctor Fate) #156, (featuring Man-Bat) #165
DC Comics Presents (1983 - featuring Superman and Green Arrow) #54
DC Special (featuring Aquaman) #28 (1977)
DC Special Series (featuring Lightray) #10 (1978)
DC Super Stars (featuring Star Hunters) #16 (1977)
Detective Comics (from 1978–1984) (Batman) #480, 483-499, 501-509, 511, 513-516, 518-520, 524, 526, 533, 539; (Robin) #481; (Man-Bat) #481, 485; (Batgirl) #492
Ghosts (1980): #92, 94
Green Lantern vol. 2 (featuring Green Lantern Corps 1982–1984): #148-149, 181
House of Mystery (from 1978–1979): #259, 272
Infinity, Inc. (1985): #11-13
Mystery in Space (1981): #117
New Gods (from 1977–1978): #12-14, 16-19
Shazam! (1978): #35
Secrets of Haunted House (1980): #30
Star Hunters (1977): #1
Time Warp (1979–1980): #1-5
The Unexpected (1980): #204
Vigilante (1984): #4
Weird War Tales (1979-1983): #82, 122
World's Finest Comics (1978–1982): (featuring Shazam!) #253-270, 272-281; (featuring Green Arrow and Hawkman) #259; (featuring Aquaman) #262

MARVEL COMICS

Avengers Annual (1979): #9
Avengers (1981): #204
Giant-Size Defenders (1975): #3
Ghost Rider (1977): #23
Iron Man Annual (1977): #4 (backup story featuring Midnight)

BOOK COVERS

1974 *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* cover
1983 *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* cover
1976 *Record Collector's Price Guide* cover

DON NEWTON FANZINE CHECKLIST:

All Dynamic Magazine #5 and #6 (Double issue)
All Dynamic was published by Alan Light of *The Buyer's Guide for Comic Fandom* fame, and this issue featured a centerspread by Don Newton of Tarzan.

Collage #1
Notes: *Collage* was another G.B. Love fanzine that was bi-weekly and featured news about the comics industry. Don drew a centerspread of Fawcett's magical hero Ibis the Invincible for this issue.

The Collector #16
Bill Wilson was a real advocate for Don and his artwork, and he always featured excellently-produced fanzines. For the cover of #16, Don drew one of his first Batman illustrations that I know of – a terrific shot of Batman standing with the bat signal in the background. Note the interesting design changes on Batman's costume.

The Collector #17
For this cover, Don drew a wonderful Justice Society drawing that is reminiscent of the old *All-Star* Comics covers. This issue also highlights Don as Bill Wilson interviews him, alongside photos of Dons working, and also runs much of his art. There are some panels of Don's *Blacklok* strip, a wonderful Fawcett Captain Marvel illustration, and a drawing of Captain America fighting the Red Skull. This issue features a fair amount of Newton artwork as well as personal photographs.

The Collector #26
This issue features a Tarzan portfolio and Don has a piece of artwork in that portfolio, alongside Joe Kubert and Stephen Fabian.

The Collector #28
Back cover of The Shadow by Don. This issue features a portfolio of work by Don titled "High Dawn", consisting of eight pieces of artwork centered around a Western theme.

Comic Crusader #8
Don's cover features the Yellowjacket fighting an evil scientist while a trapped Captain America looks on from the background.

The Comic Reader #112
Don used the Charlton house ad announcing Baron Weirwulf that he penciled and inked as the cover for this issue, which ran in advance of Charlton's use of the ad.

The Comic Reader #134
Don penciled and inked a Phantom cover that happened to appear right before the comic was cancelled by Charlton. It displays The Phantom in a dynamic pose in front of a collage of Phantom comics covers.

The Comic Reader #146
Don penciled and inked a dramatic shot of Superman standing on a rooftop with a highlight along his powerful left side. The green background fades towards the top of the cover and gives the sense of early evening.

The Comic Reader #175
Don met Terry Austin when the inker visited Phoenix, and they both agreed to work together on this *Comic Reader* cover. The Hal Jordan Green Lantern bursts forth, with a vengeful Sinestro in the background of this space scene. Terry's inks resulted in one of Don's favorite illustrations, as he was in love with how Terry interpreted his pencils.

The Comic Reader #186
Don penciled and had Dan Adkins ink a cover of the "new look" Captain Marvel startled by the classic C.C. Beck Captain Marvel reflected back at him in a hand mirror.

The Comic Reader #189
Don pencils one of his favorite Marvel Comics characters, Captain America, and gets Joe Rubenstein to ink the cover. The results are outstanding and a good example of why Don loved Joe's inking so much.

The Comic Reader #205
Don's rejected cover for *Batman* #356 was turned down for having Batman hiding his face. Don sent in the pencil artwork to the Reader and they had it colored for use as a back cover, but used only the pencils for the line art.

The Comic Reader #211
Don found an old cover that he had drawn for the *StarHunters* comic book that was never used (it was to be the cover of the second issue) and sent it in to the *Comic Reader* to use. The Editors had Sam DeLaRosa ink it as a back cover.

Fantasy Soundtrack #1
Soundtrack was another G.B. Love publication featuring audio cassettes he was selling. Don drew a pen and ink drawing of Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock of Star Trek on the back cover.

Fandom Annual #2
For this *Annual*, Don illustrated a portfolio of artwork, including a Captain Marvel pen and ink piece, a drawing of The Guardian and a Fighting Yank painting. It also featured an 18-page printing of Don's *The Savage Earth* comic strip.

Golden Age #3
The cover features The Crimson Kid and The Red Wrath, characters that Don created as a young man. In this fanzine, Don drew some pen and ink illustrations, including his iconic "Great Comic in the Sky"[, which featured [Golden Age characters Skyman, Airboy, Bulletman, Target, Spy Smasher, Cat Man, the original Daredevil and the Black Terror, all sitting and listening to Captain Marvel read a story. Don also contributed an illustration for an article titled, "The 41 Battles of Harvey Kurtzman."

Golden Age #4
The cover features Blacklok, a character that Don developed in 1967 into a comic strip with his friend Ken Toney, when both were young men. It was another adventure strip that Don was unable to sell to a syndicate. This issue also features Don's beautiful centerspread painting of Spy Smasher.

Golden Age #5
Don Newton draws a cover of a hero battling a dragon while a lovely woman looks on. Don also contributed an illustration of Firefly, a centerspread of Catman, and an image of Batman and Robin that accompanies an article by Howard Siegel.

Golden Age #7
This features a wrap-around, painted cover of Tarzan by Don, as well as a Black Terror pin-up, alongside illustrations of Blue Beetle, The Dart, U.S. Jones, The Flame and V-Man.

Golden Age Collector #1
Don's black and white cover features Steel Sterling launching himself into a nest of Nazis, providing the only new image for this volume of reprints.

Golden Age Collector #2
Don's cover features Blue Bolt hoisting a demonic green figure over his head while fighting others in a subterranean cavern.

Golden Age Collector #3
Don provides a gorgeous illustration of Quality Comics character Firebrand.

Grave Tales #1
Don illustrated the inside cover of a vampire rising from the grave for this fanzine, published and edited by Bill Pearson. Don also drew a mystery story titled "Blood Island" exclusively for this horror 'zine. The entire book was printed in black and white on very nice paper, and editor Pearson suggested to readers that they color the book themselves. This fanzine was often sent by Don to publishers for potential work, as it was professionally-produced and showed his artwork off well.

Illustrated Comic Collectors Handbook #4
Don drew a collection of 14 comic book character sketches for this fanzine. Featured among the sketches are drawings of The Hangman, The Hood, The Shadow, Johnny Rebel, Star-Spangled Kid, The Shield, Johnny Quick, The Moon-Man, Silver Scorpion, The Flash, Yank and Doodle, Yankee Boy, The Thunderer, Doctor Midnight, Fighting American and Plastic Man.

Paragon Publications:
Don drew a few illustrations that Bill Black inked and published in his magazines. In other cases, Bill drew a few drawings that were inked by Don as well.

Paragon #5
Illustration by Don of the Lieutenant Marvels.

Golden Age Greats Portfolio
Don provides illustrations of Dr. Mid-Nite, Captain Midnight and Spy Smasher (inked by Black), and Hawkman (inked by Don). Don and Bill also contributed an illustration of the Marvel Family.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #60
Don submitted his *Savage Earth* strips to Editor G.B. Love and the strip started running with this issue. *Rocket's Blast* was the fanzine where Don's artwork really took off and he began to develop a fan following.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #61
Savage Earth strip appearance number two. Don also submitted a drawing of The Owl for this issue.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #62
Savage Earth strip appearance number three.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #63
Savage Earth strip appearance number four.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #64
Savage Earth strip appearance number five, along with a centerfold illustration of Captain Marvel.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #65
This features Don Newton's first cover for the *RBCC*, a full-color cover illustration of Don's comic strip, *The Savage Earth. Savage Earth* strip appearance number five.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #66
Savage Earth strip appearance number six.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #67
Savage Earth strip appearance number seven.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #68
Don Newton cover of The Hangman, a Golden Age MLJ character. *Savage Earth* strip appearance number eight.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #69
Savage Earth strip appearance number nine. Don also submitted a centerfold illustration of Thor for this issue.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #70
Savage Earth strip appearance number ten.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #72
Captain America #14 cover recreation by Don.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #73
This issue contains a beautiful Iron Jaw illustration by Don.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #74
Features a Two-Face/Batman drawing by Newton

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #75
Don draws a very dynamic cover of Conan, which editor/writer Roy Thomas would later run in an issue of *Savage Sword of Conan*. Ads for PhoenixCon 1970, where Don thrived as a creator and cosplayer, appear in this issue.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #76
Don provides a beautiful painted cover of Flash Gordon. In most of the illustrations that Don drew of Flash Gordon, he follows the likeness of *Flash* actor Buster Crabbe. Don was a big fan of Crabbe's work and felt that his look was perfect for the Flash Gordon character.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #77
Photos of PhoenixCon 1970 appear in this issue, featuring Don and others from the convention.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #78
Don illustrates a very nice Catwoman piece for this issue.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #79
A Lex Luthor illustration by Don appears in this issue.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #82
Hawkman cover by Don Newton, featuring some detailed and classic pen inking techniques.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #84
Ka-Zar cover by Don Newton, featuring the jungle man and his sabretooth tiger, Zabu, printed in all green inks. A "Call of Cthulu" centerspread by Don is also featured in this issue, an unusual subject for him to draw.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #86
This issue features a Thor pinup by Don Newton on the inside back cover.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #87
A Green Hornet cover by Don Newton, featuring Kato and The Black Beauty alongside the Hornet.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #89
A beautifully painted Golden Age Green Lantern (Alan Scott) cover by Don Newton.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #90
Painted cover by Don Newton that features a John Carter-like character defending himself from a winged creature.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #91
One of Don's nicest cover paintings for the *RBCC*: a pen and ink drawing of Captain Marvel and Mary Marvel that frames a wonderful painting of Captain Marvel creator C.C. Beck. This issue also features a pinup of The Black Fury by Don.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #94
This issue features a pinup of Captain Marvel by Don.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #95
The cover of this issue features Zorro by Don Newton.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #97
A cover featuring a colored Silver Streak illustration by Don.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #99
Don draws a Spy Smasher cover for this issue.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #100
Beautifully painted cover of Superman standing next to Krypton illustration cover for the landmark 100th issue.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #101
Don draws a Frankenstein pinup in this issue.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #104
Excellent color cover illustration of Starman by Don, featuring the Golden Age hero's alter ego of Ted Knight hunched over a workbench with Starman flying in the background.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #106
Don's The Phantom! This black and white cover shows why Don was considered a great choice as the next Phantom artist at Charlton Comics.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #110
Painted cover of Dracula by Don Newton.

Rocket's Blast Comicollector #110
Pen and ink illustration of Newton favorite, Buster Crabbe's Flash Gordon.

Rocket's Blast Special #8
A wonderful wraparound cover by Don of Captain Marvel. This issue was really a showcase of Don's artwork: along with the cover, there were three detailed pen and ink drawings of Captain Marvel and a two-page comic strip retelling the origin of Captain Marvel from *Whiz Comics* #2.

Sense of Wonder #11
Don drew an illustration of Will Eisner's The Spirit for this issue.

Sense of Wonder #12
Don drew two pieces in this issue of "Yarnak," a character from Australia that was very similar to Burroughs's Tarzan.

Styx #2
This fanzine contains a centerfold painting by Don of Captain Marvel. From the looks of it, it was actually a color painting that Don did that was then published in black and white.

Sword and Fantasy #1
A reprint of Don's *Golden Age* #5 cover. This fanzine was primarily composed of reprints of fantasy artwork that was done for other G.B. Love fanzines. Don's various H.P. Lovecraft illustrations are reprinted, as are drawings by Frazetta, Wrightson and other top creators.

Titan Comics #2
Titan was a small publisher of fanzines that managed to talk Don into letting them print a comic book story that he had produced in the late 1960s. The story was titled *Vibra-Man*, and it was written and drawn by Don sometime during the mid to late 1960s when Don developed *The Savage Earth* and *Blacklok* comic strips.

Titan Comics #4
Titan # 4 reprints the very same *Vibra-Man* comic book story from issue #2.

Titan Comics #5
Titan #5 contains a new cover by Don Newton of a superhero chasing a falling bomb while flying in the air. This strange cover from Don seems almost whimsical in its layout and design.

DON NEWTON COMIC BOOK CONVENTION ARTWORK:

1971 HoustonCon
Don was Artist guest of honor at this convention and his artwork was run in the convention booklet.

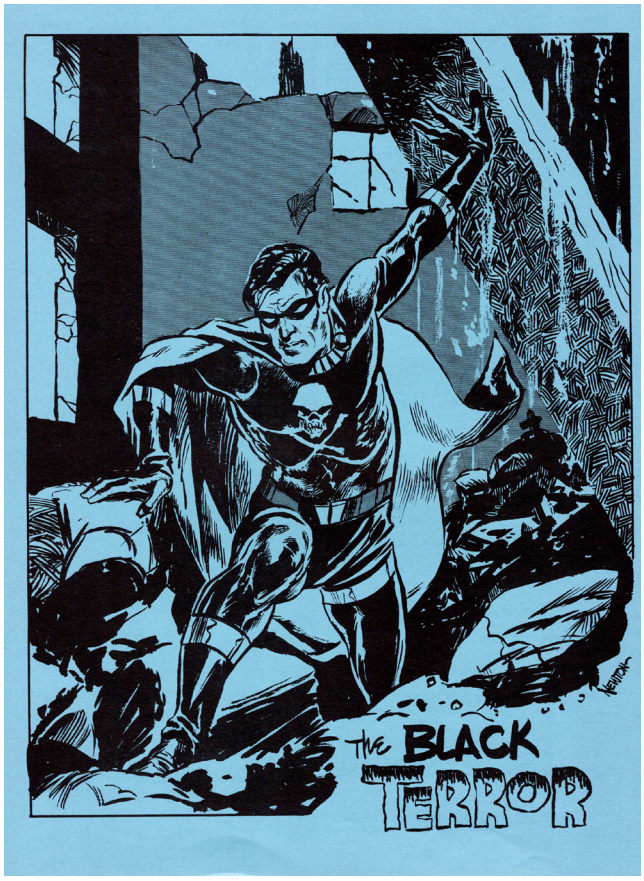
1971 Miami Con 2
Don contributed an illustration of Flash Gordon for this convention booklet.



Courtesy Clayton Thorp and Greg Huneryager.




DR. MID-NITE
NEWTON-BLACK

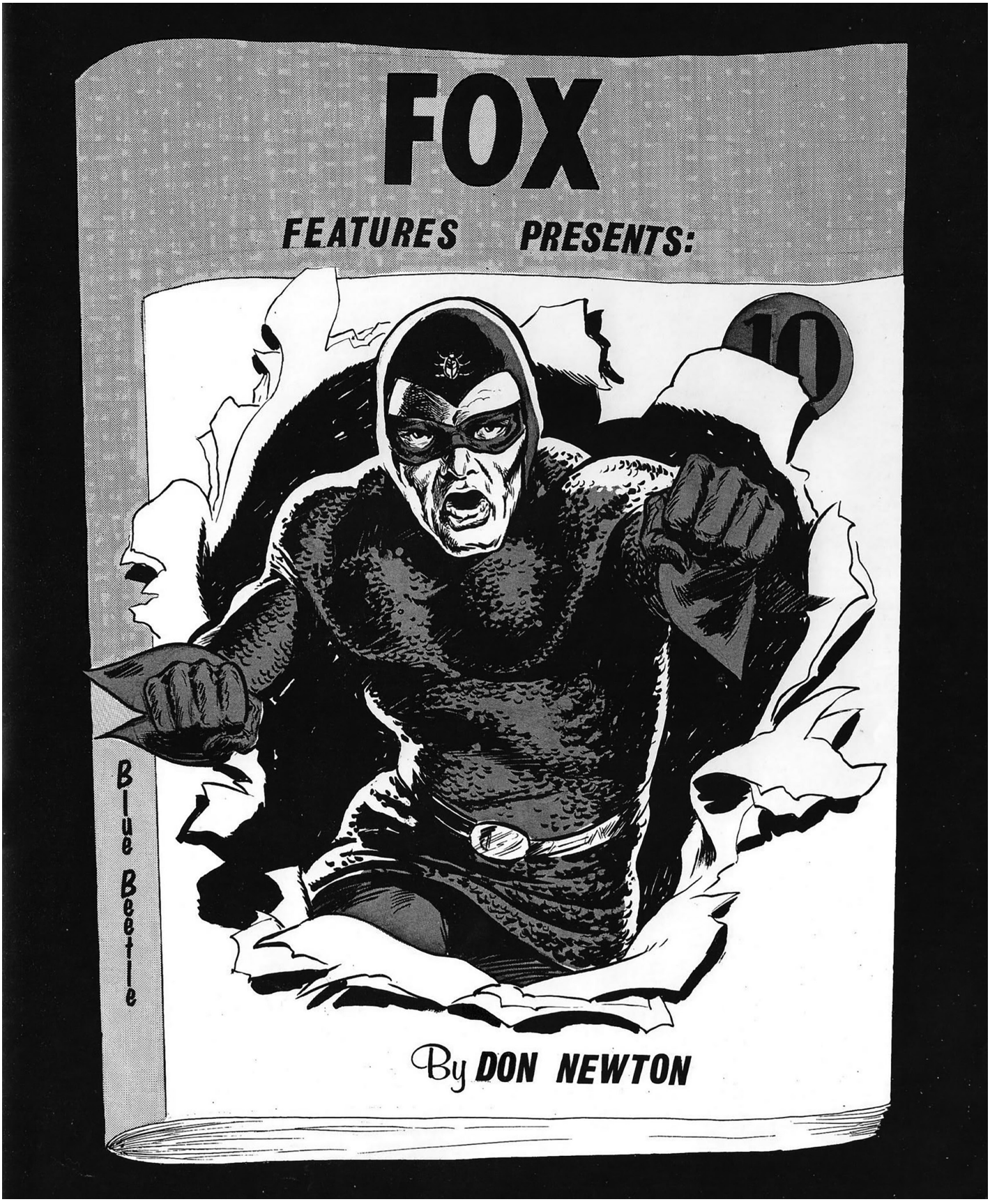

THE BLACK TERROR


GOLDEN
AGE #3


RB CC
68


THE GOLDEN AGE
COLLECTOR
NUMBER 1


GOLDEN AGE
3

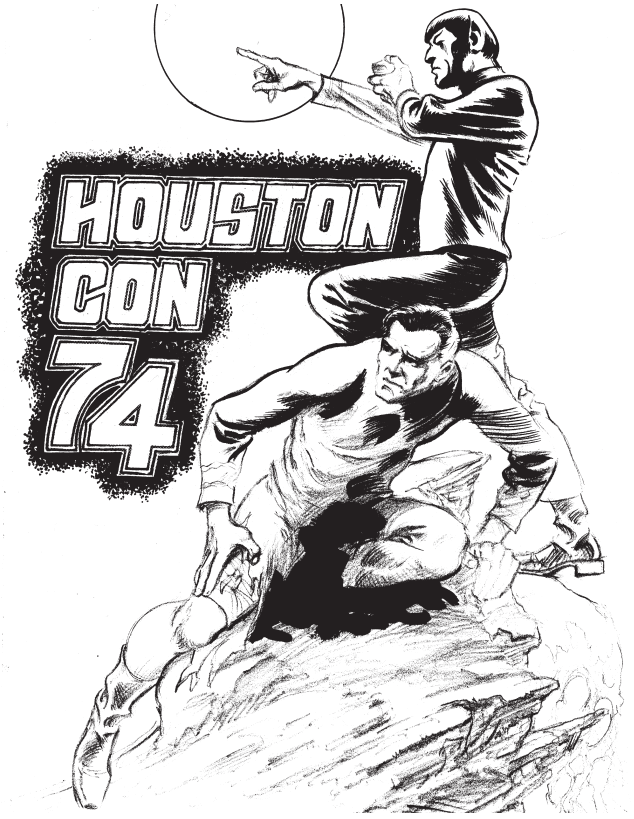

FOX
FEATURES PRESENTS:
10
Blue Beetle
By DON NEWTON

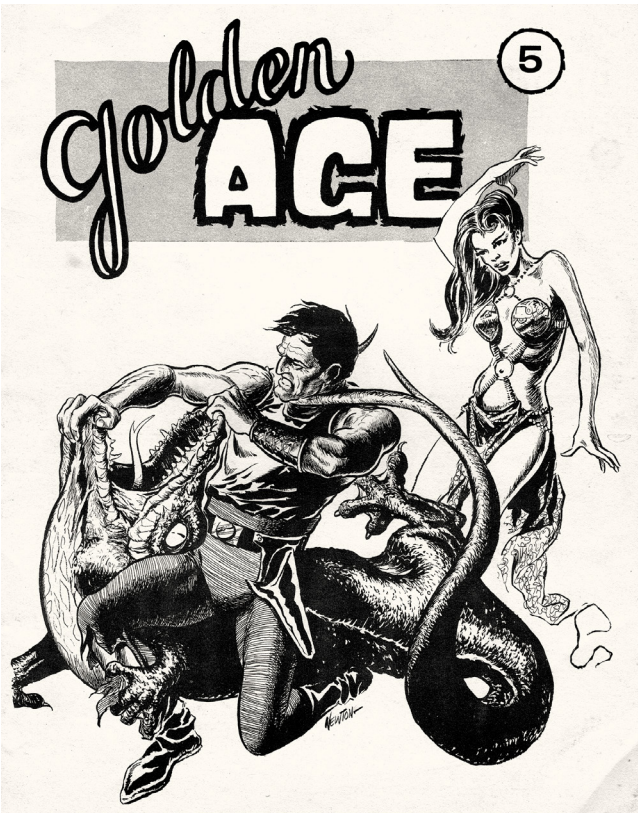

Newton 72


I'VE GOT ONE SHOT LEFT, CATMAN. THIS TIME I WON'T MISS!
NEWTON


NEWTON


AIR BOY
NEWTON


HOUSTON
CON
74

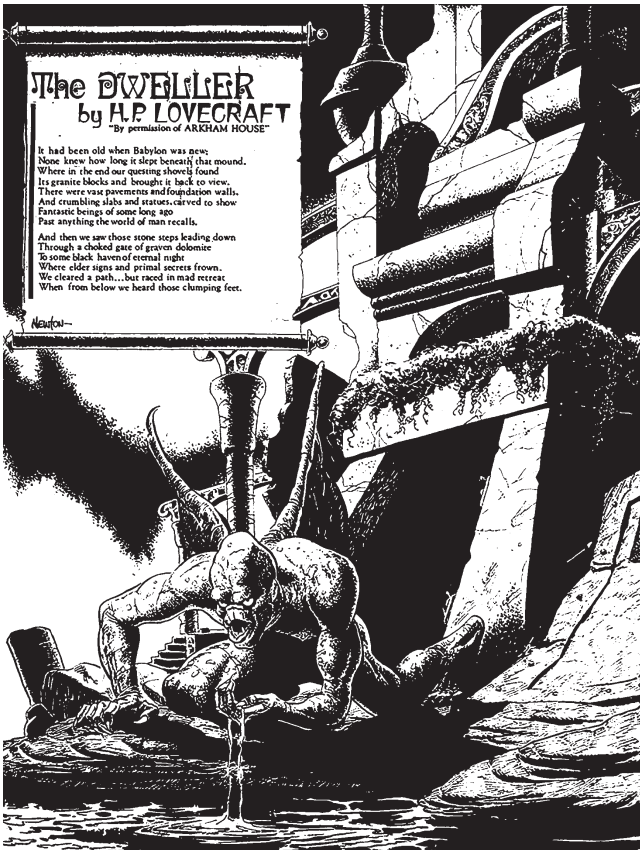

golden
AGE
5




TO HOWARD SIEGEL 1970
NEWTON






The DWELLER
by H.P. LOVECRAFT
"By permission of ARKHAM HOUSE"
It had been old when Babylon was new;
None knew how long it slept beneath that mound.
Where in the end our questing shovels found
Its granite blocks and brought it back to view.
There were vast pavements and foundation walls,
And crumbling slabs and statues carved to show
Fantastic beings of some long ago
Past anything the world of man recalls.
And then we saw those stone steps leading down
Through a choked gate of graven dolomite
To some black haven of eternal night
Where elder signs and primal secrets frown.
We cleared a path...but raced in mad retreat
When from below we heard those clumping feet.
NEWTON


75
NEWTON



THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN VEST






NEWTON
BLACK

Conclusion
by Jay Wilson

After Don's death in 1984, I remember just feeling numb. It was a completely unexpected situation. His recent health issues and weight loss had been very concerning, but Don was a powerhouse of a guy, so we never really thought that something this grave could occur.

I just remember thinking about the fact that I would never see Don again. I would never hear his deep voice say "hey-lo!" on the telephone when he answered it, and I would never again witness him penciling out a page of comics artwork.

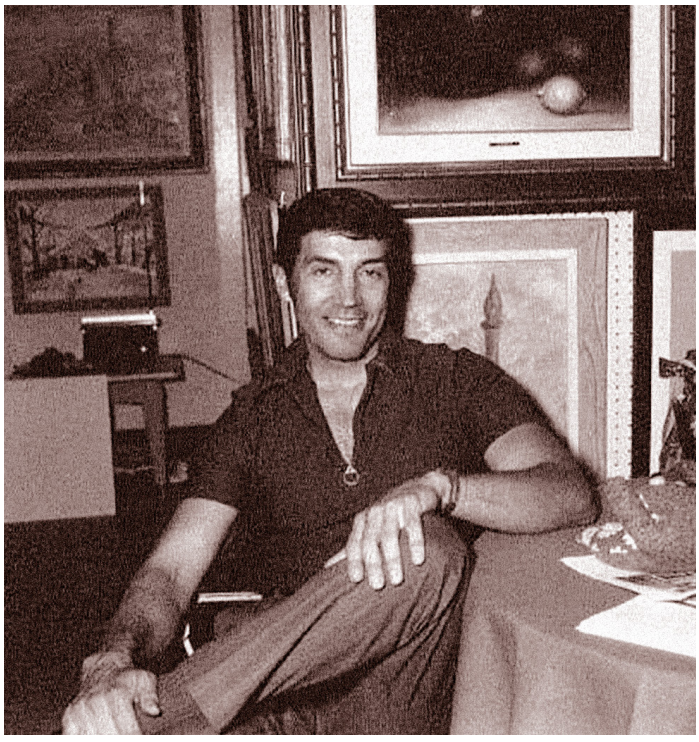
This book is being written many years after Don's death. Even with all of those years having passed now, I can still picture him drawing as clearly as yesterday.

One of the great things about comics fandom today is that they remember their creative heroes. Especially comic book artists. Comics publishers have listened to years of fan comments and have started to re-publish a lot of the great comics published during Don's 10 years in the industry. Here are some examples:

- *Tales of the Batman: Don Newton*.
- *Shazam! The World's Mightiest Mortal, Volume 2 and 3*: Don's first issue of Shazam! appears in Volume 2, and the 3rd volume is all Don Newton.
- *Tales of the Batman: Gerry Conway, Volume 1 and 2*. These volumes both contain many of the Batman and Detective stories that Gerry Conway wrote that Don penciled.
- *The Phantom - The Complete Series: The Charlton Years, Volume 5*.
- *Tales of the Green Lantern Corps, Volume 1*.
- *Aquaman: Death of a Prince*. Features the first Aquaman stories that Don drew for DC.
- *Vigilante by Marv Wolfman, Volume 1*: Features the Vigilante story that Don drew.

I could go on and on.

If I had one wish, it would be to go back and to be able to show Don what his artwork has meant to people since his passing. With finishing this book, I hope to further spread the word about his amazing artwork. Please help me do that by showing his work to a friend or by purchasing one of his comics collections.



Don relaxes in his living room, surrounded by many of his paintings.

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