comic book CREATOR™

A TwoMorrows Publication

No. 13, Fall 2016

ALSO IN THIS ISH:

THE WACKY PACK MEN

$8.95 in the USA

THE ART OF MICHAEL W. KALUTA

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also: THE AMAZING RAMONA FRADON: A CAREER-SPANNING INTERVIEW and more!

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AQUA-WOODY
CBC mascot by **J.D. KING**
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About Our Covers

Art by **M. W. KALUTA**
Colors by **L. KINDZIESKI**

The Shadow TM & © Condé Nast

Above: MWK's cover for *The Private Files of the Shadow* [1989]. Colors by Lavern Kindzieski.
Below: Please see page 18 for the story behind our flip cover!

Characters TM & © DC Comics.

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comic book CREATOR™

Fall 2016 • Voice of the Comics Medium • Number 13

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Comic Book Creator™ is published quarterly by TwoMorrows Publishing, 10407 Bedfordtown Dr., Raleigh, NC 27614 USA. Phone: (919) 449-0344. Jon B. Cooke, editor. John Morrow, publisher. *Comic Book Creator* editorial offices: P.O. Box 204, West Kingston, RI 02892 USA. E-mail: jonbcooke@aol.com. ***Send subscription funds to TwoMorrows, NOT to the editorial offices.*** Four-issue subscriptions: $40 US, $60 International, $15.80 Digital. *Comic Book Creator* is a TM of Jon B. Cooke/TwoMorrows. ISSN 2330-2437. Printed in China. FIRST PRINTING.

The Wacky Pack Men

Underground comix legend Jay Lynch remembers the "Titanic Topps Think-Tank"!

by JAY LYNCH

Back in the 1960s, it is said, Marvel Comics had its legendary "Mighty Marvel Bullpen," where the publisher's artists and writers ping ponged their ideas back and forth off one another in their fancy midtown Manhattan offices. The comic fans were very much into who wrote or drew what in the comic books of the so-called "House of Ideas." For bubble gum card collectors, however, it was a totally different story. It was characteristic of collectors of gum cards back then to not really care about who was behind the uncredited art and gags on the cards that came with their bubble gum. Yes, they were meticulous at collecting the trading cards, but they really had no interest at all in the folks who wrote and drew them. Yet I don't think most of the people who worked on the gum cards felt slighted in any way about working in anonymity in those days either. It was a good-paying gig at the time, and, for us, that was the main thing that mattered.

In an old factory by the Brooklyn Navy Yards, upstairs from the long abandoned Uneeda Doll factory, was the executive headquarters of the Topps Chewing Gum Company, where a small group of anonymous artists and gag writers labored, unknown and unsung, on various novelty bubble gum trading cards. The work was unsigned. Our identities were kept secret by the outfit, lest competitors should steal us away. Decades later, with the advent of the Internet, that all has now changed. The activities of the retroactively dubbed (by me, just now) "Titanic Topps Think-Tank" has since been chronicled and exposed to the new breed of trading card collectors.

Following along the same path as comic book fans, the card collectors are now very interested in the history of the creative forces behind their favorite trading card sets of yesteryear. Now we, the writers and artists who worked on this stuff, have all become household words to these collectors… especially in households where they can't figure out how to remove the old gum card stickers from their fifty-year-old refrigerators.

Wacky Packages was the official name of one of Topps' most popular products of the 1970s. To this day, Topps continues to churn out new "Wacky Packs," as the collectors nicknamed them in their childhood days. The official name of the product though is—and always has been—*Wacky Packages*. "Wackys," as was our inter-office term for them back then, were product-packaging parodies of popular consumer products. Devised in 1967 by Art Spiegelman, Len Brown, and Woody Gelman, these subversive sticker cards are reprinted today in book form (sans adhesive) by Abrams Comic Arts… in two volumes, yet! The first is called, appropriately enough, *Wacky Packages* and has a red cover with an introduction by Spiegelman. The second, with a blue cover, is called *Wacky Packages New, New, New,* with an introduction by yours truly.

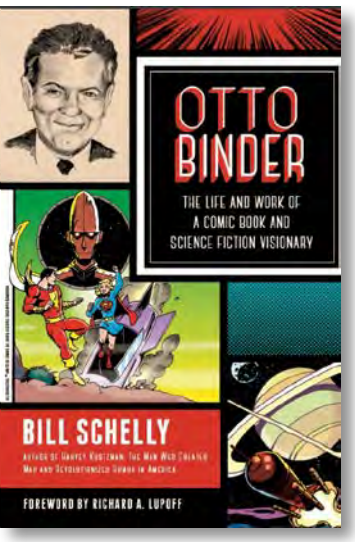
In the first collection, Art explains the method he devised for naming the parodied product: You go through the alphabet, substituting each letter for the first letter of the real product. If that doesn't work, you go through the alphabet on the second letter of the real product. If the second letter is a vowel, you just restrict your choices to vowels…and so on until you eventually come up with a name. So if the product is, for example, TIDE,

"Tied and Toad Wait For No Man" by Jay Lynch

At right is a typical day at the Titanic Topps Think-Tank, circa 1973, where the Toppsters devise a Wacky Package *parody. See next page for a guide to the luminaries immortalized by Mr. Lynch.*

Otto on the Outside

After an unimaginable family tragedy, writer Otto Binder leaves the comics "rat race"



Above: *Cover for* Otto Binder: The Life and Work of a Comic Book and Science Fiction Visionary *by Bill Schelly. Published by North Atlantic Books, the biography features a forward by Richard A. Lupoff.*

Excerpt from *Otto Binder* by Bill Schelly, published by North Atlantic Books, ©2016 Bill Schelly. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

by BILL SCHELLY

[*Born in 1911 and brother of ambitious Golden Age artist Jack Binder, Otto Binder (rhymes with cinder) was a noted writer of science fiction classics as well as clever and revered comic book stories, with almost 1,000 Captain Marvel and Marvel family tales to his credit. Equally celebrated were his engaging scripts for DC's Superman family titles, where he co-created Supergirl and the Legion of Super-Heroes, and wrote what many consider the first "imaginary tale." After some three decades in the business, the writer suddenly vanished from the field. In the following book excerpt (which combines two chapters) from* Otto Binder: The Life and Work of a Comic Book and Science Fiction Visionary *(just published by North Atlantic Books), author Bill Schelly shares the story behind that disappearance.*—**Y.E.**]

Ione Binder's niece Patricia, daughter of her brother Frank and his wife Alice, was a regular guest at the Binder home in the mid-1960s, since her father and Ione were especially close. One of her most vivid memories is baking cakes with her aunt. Patricia recalled, "We lived in the New York area, so I celebrated quite a few birthdays with Uncle Otto and Aunt Ione. I was very close to their daughter Mary. They were excellent parents."[1]

Mary Binder, born in September 1952, had outgrown the baby fat of her early years. "She was beautiful," Patricia said. "She had long, straight blonde hair. She was angelic, almost." With regard to Mary's personality, Patricia added, "She had a beautiful personality. I always remember thinking I'd like to be like her. She was caring, sensitive, she loved animals…. She was just very attuned to what people needed, an all-around nice person. Very bright."

Though Mary was seven years Patricia's senior, Otto's daughter loved spending time with her young cousin. "We used to play games a lot, and play with Barbie dolls. We used to swim a lot in a neighbor's outdoor pool. It was one of those that was above ground, you know? Everyone in our family swam very young so I was swimming by the time I was five. It wasn't a problem with me going swimming but Mary, she was very attentive. You know, like she'd hold my hand when I was in the water, just to make sure I was okay."

The Binders had been no strangers to death in the family. In March of 1965, Otto's mother Marie died. She was ninety-one years old, and had been in a nursing home for several years. More shocking was the news in October of the following year that Otto's brother Earl, his writing partner in the 1930s, had passed away. The only known cause, which doesn't fully explain what took him, was that he succumbed of deteriorating health due to chronic alcoholism.

But nothing could have prepared them for the news they were to receive at 4:00 p.m. on March 27, 1967. Otto was on the telephone with publisher Calvin Beck (publisher of *Castle of Frankenstein*) when an operator broke in on the call with the news that Mary had been in a car accident. It isn't known whether the Binders were informed by telephone that their daughter was dead. More likely they were summoned to Englewood Hospital where Mary was taken, or given the news by a minion of the law at their door.

The accident took place at Dwight Morrow Junior High, just three blocks from the Binder home. Mary was kneeling to pick up some books in a school driveway when she was struck and instantly killed. The *Bergen County Evening Record* on the following day conveyed all the important details in the article headlined, "Car Kills Teen-Age Girl In Sight Of Classmates."

Patricia Turek added, "The boy [twenty-year-old Brian

Otto Binder: The Life and Work of a Comic Book and Science Fiction Visionary ©2016 Bill Schelly.

Below: *From left, spouses Ione and Otto Binder and spouses Olga and Jack Binder, circa 1950. Otto and Jack were, of course, brothers. Photo is courtesy of Michael Turek.*

TWO MORROWS PUBLICATIONS

FALL 2016
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COMIC BOOK CREATOR Presents

RAMONA FRADON

The ECLECTIC WOMAN

Printed in China

RAMONA FRADON

metamorphosis of an eclectic woman

interview conducted by jon b. cooke

A chance encounter results in a deep appreciation for the rich life of the talented cartoonist and author, who can boast over 65 years in the biz!

I always knew I've had a passion for Ramona Fradon.

That passion, of course, is for her endlessly buoyant and engaging artwork, whether her great "Metamorpho" run, those endearing "Aquaman" stories from the 1950s and early '60s, or her mid-'70s Plastic Man *stint. Even that rare Marvel job knocked me out—the one-shot issue of* Fantastic Four *from '73, which featured chain-wielding Thundra. Because, you see, as much as I was enthralled with the Neal Adams school of hyper-realistic super-hero stories, I also could never get enough of cartoonists who infused their art with broad humor and remarkably original stylings, a select group of which Ramona was unquestionably a true queen among fellow pros.*

What I didn't *know about the woman—which turned out to be* volumes*—I caught wind of during a serendipitous, impromptu conversation aboard a Boeing 737 last summer when, upon realizing we were sharing a flight back east from Comic-Con International, I seized the opportunity to sit beside her during the four-hour jaunt between San Diego and a Chicago layover. (Astonishingly, the recording of our in-depth chat, which happened amid the constant roar of the Southwest plane's jet engines, was unfathomably deciphered by CBC's intrepid transcriber, Steve "Flash" Thompson, who deserves a medal of valor!)*

I followed up the transcontinental talk in late February with a visit to the artist's Hudson Valley abode, where she now lives with her daughter, and the entire two-session interview, which was subsequently corrected and clarified by the subject, has been integrated into this final piece. Here you will be regaled about her illustrious pedigree, brush with broadcasting giants, presence in the most coveted cartoonist community of all time, participation in the seismic political scene of the '60s, and her exemplary achievement in academia… and maybe a word or two on her 65 years in comics. Prepare to learn about the fascinating, eclectic life and career of the amazing Ramona Fradon. But, first, a few biographical details:

Ramona's father, noted advertising "lettering man" Peter Dom (the last name a truncation of Dombrezian—a name also spelled in various documents as Domborrajian, Dombooriјean, and Domboorajian) was born in Tehran, Persia, to his Armenian parents, mother Shushan and father Mehran. Peter was the middle son in a brood of seven. At 12, Peter immigrated to the United States, and the family, according to the 1920 U.S. Census, settled in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In 1923, already working in the Chicago advertising scene creating logos and headline letter-forms, he married Irma Haefeli, Illinois native and daughter of immigrant Swiss-German parents,

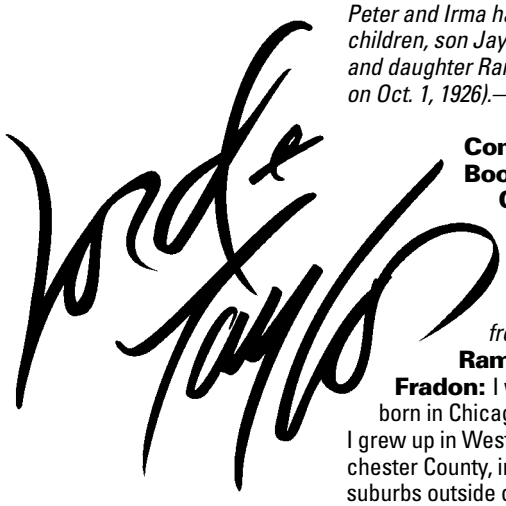
Previous page: *A portrait of Ramona Fradon by Drew Friedman, which originally appeared in Drew's lovely 2014 book,* Heroes of the Comics: Portraits of the Pioneering Legends of Comic Books. *A sequel,* More Heroes, *will be featured in our next ish.*

Portrait by Drew Friedman • Transcribed by Steve "Flash" Thompson

ABOUT OUR RAMONA FRADON TRIBUTE COVER

Natch, our special "flip cover" tribute is a loving pastiche of the *Brave and the Bold* #57 [Jan. 1965] cover penciled by the amazing Ramona with inks by Charles Paris, the same issue that introduced Metamorpho, the Element Man, that unforgettably charismatic and downright weird hero created by our featured artist and writer Bob Haney.

Your humble editor came up with the concept of aping the classic Silver Age cover, sporting vignettes of Ramona's eclectic career and, with the able consultation of pal and *SpongeBob SquarePants* editor **Chris Duffy**, we enlisted the artistry of the great cartoonist — and *brilliant* art mimic — **Robert Sikoryak** (*Masterpiece Comics*), who penciled and colored our cover (as well as adding clever touches, such as including the *New Yorker* cartoon characters, each drawn in the style of their respective artists). The piece was graced with the inks of *CBC* chum **Stephen DeStefano**, the extraordinary cartoonist perhaps best remembered by comic book fans as artist and creator (with writer Bob Rozakis) of the charming '80s DC Comics series *'Mazing Man*. Topping off our *B&B* homage, logo king **David Coulson** was recruited to approximate the logos and lettering of the source. What a superb team effort from these huge fans of fantastic Fradon!



Above: *Besides perennial font favorite Dom Casual, perhaps the most memorable creation of Ramona's father, Peter Dom, is the logo for the New York City luxury department store Lord & Taylor. Attesting to its durability, the logo is still used by the company today, 70 or so years after being introduced.*
Inset right: *Peter Dom graces the cover of the Oct.–Nov. 1951 issue of typographer industry journal* Good News! *Below inset is an excerpt from the article therein (titled "Dom Casual Hits the Jackpot!"), giving some biographical information and making mention of his talented children. The piece discusses the development of Dom Casual, a typeface that has a hand-drawn appearance and one that remains quite popular with designers today.*
Below: *Peter Dom's logo for the cosmetic company.*

barber John Haefeli and housewife Louise (Thut). Peter and Irma had two children, son Jay (born 1925) and daughter Ramona (born on Oct. 1, 1926).—**JBC**.

Comic Book Creator: *Where are you originally from?*

Ramona Fradon: I was born in Chicago, but I grew up in Westchester County, in the suburbs outside of New York City. We lived in Larchmont and Mamaroneck, but most of the time in Bronxville, where I went to a wonderful high school.

CBC: *Did you have creative people in your family?*

Ramona: My father was a commercial lettering man. He designed the Elizabeth Arden and Camel logos—some of the things that you still see around. I think Elizabeth Arden has a new one now, but they used my father's version for years. He also lettered the Lord & Taylor logo… you know, the one that's beautiful but you can't read. [*laughs*]

CBC: *Wow! Did he win awards for his work?*

Ramona: I don't know. He never felt he got as much recognition as he deserved—as much as a top illustrator would have—but he was recognized as top among lettering men back in those days.

A little more about Peter Dom, whose picture appears on the front cover. He was born of Armenian parentage in Tehran, Iran (Persia). He attended American missionary schools until the age of twelve, when he came to the United States. After graduating from the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, Mr. Dom became a cartoonist and a commercial artist. Later he served an apprenticeship in lettering under Will Ransom, type designer.

Mr. Dom has been free-lancing since 1925. He has been located in New York since 1932. He lives in Manhattan. His hobbies are golf, fishing and bridge.

He served with the Tank Corps of the United States Army in World War I. He is married and has a son and a daughter, both of whom are artists.

CBC: *So he commuted from Westchester into the city?*

Ramona: He commuted for a few years, but then he and my mother got divorced.

CBC: *How old were you when you moved from Chicago?*

Ramona: Five.

CBC: *Do you remember Chicago at all?*

Ramona: Well, we used to go back a lot. My mother loved it and she didn't like the East. I guess Chicagoans felt competitive with New York. I notice they do in L.A., too. At any rate, we used to go back, so I remember it quite well. It was a lovely city, at least around the lakefront. I don't know about the South Side, though. It's a horribly divided city and doesn't seem to be getting better.

CBC: *Did you have siblings?*

Ramona: An older brother. He did lettering, too. My uncle was also a lettering man.

CBC: *Is that what they called them?*

Ramona: Yes, "lettering men."

CBC: *And they were predominantly doing advertising and logo work?*

Ramona: Yes. By hand. But then lettering men like my father began to design fonts that were made into typefaces. So, instead of hiring a lettering man, they'd use these fonts, as they do today. My father designed the Dom Casual and other typefaces and everybody told him not to do it because it would put them all out of business. And it did.

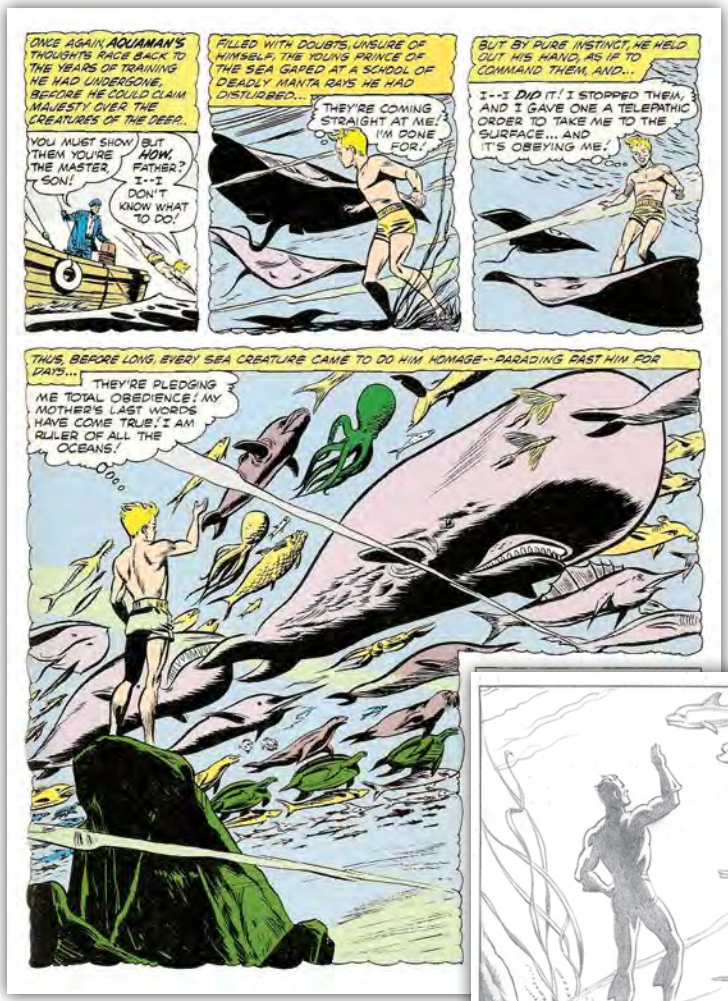
CBC: *Any other fonts?*

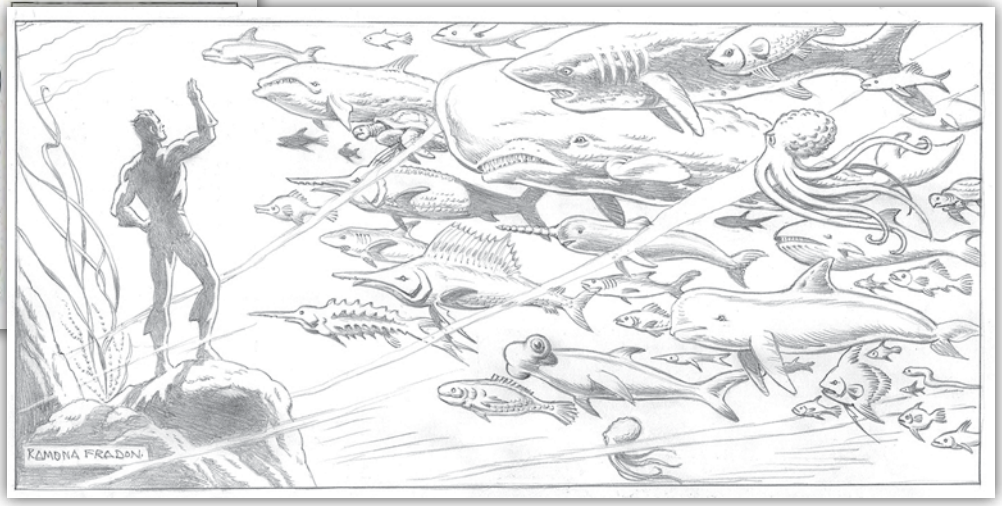
Ramona: Well, Dom Bold… and I think there were a couple of others, but I don't remember their names.

CBC: *What did you like about him?*
Ramona: I had great confidence in him. I mean, I had some really horrible boyfriends…. unstable… They were smart and attractive , but I knew I should really not be with them for too long. [*laughs*] They were not wholesome guys. They drank a lot, but Dana seemed really solid.
CBC: *Did you ever think for a time maybe that you were attracted to somebody like your father?*
Ramona: I don't know. I was irresponsible, I suppose.
CBC: *Bad boys.*
Ramona: And I knew that Dana would be good for me.
CBC: *Was he nice?*
Ramona: Yes. And he was very steady and he's a good person.
CBC: *Did he love you?*
Ramona: I tend to think so. He married me, didn't he? [*laughter*] When I met Dana he was going from class to class looking for girls.
CBC: *To date or to draw?*
Ramona: No, no. To date. The first time I went out with him, he needed a date to go to a party that some other girl he was interested in was going to. [*Jon laughs*] And then we got to know each other after that. So, finally, we got married.
CBC: *Was the plan to have children?*
Ramona: No, it was not to have children until I decided finally I wanted to have them.
CBC: *So what did you wanna do?*
Ramona: I had no ambition to do anything.
CBC: *You were looking to be a housewife or… what?*
Ramona: No. Nothing. When I got out of art school, it was like a big blank hole. I had *no* idea about what to do. It was, I think, 1947. I was what would you call a very confused, disturbed kid!
CBC: *Disturbed?*
Ramona: Yes. I didn't know what I was doing and I didn't know what the rules were. I had no direction. It was really awful.
CBC: *And your brother?*
Ramona: My brother was a big drinker, but he did become a lettering man and had a successful business, though not a successful life, I would say.
CBC: *Is he still around?*
Ramona: No, he died about 10 years ago.
CBC: *Did you ever bond with your brother?*
Ramona: He wasn't very nice to me when I was a kid, so I never really got over not liking him. He tried to be friendly with me, but I just didn't care for him that much.
CBC: *So you were really isolated.*
Ramona: Yes, I was. When I met Dana, he seemed so safe to me and I really needed that. [*laughs*] I would say Dana has been a rock in my life. Sometimes a *hard* rock, but nevertheless… [*laughter*] He's the one that talked me into being a cartoonist. Back before I submitted to the comics, Dana and I did a couple newspaper strips together. We never submitted 'em, but you know, they were damn good! The drawing was quite good. Some of them, I think, are in that book by Howard Chaykin [*see previous page*]. One was about a detective and one was sort of an Ali Baba. You know, a little guy.
CBC: *But it was comical?*
Ramona: Yeah, it was comic and the other one was an adventure strip. We tried… Dana and Bob Kraus, another *New Yorker* cartoonist, wrote a strip that was called *Jonathan Bond* or something, about a broker. But I finally rebelled because I was doing all the work! [*laughs*] They would sit there having fun thinking of ideas and I would have to spend hours drawing 'em, so I said I'm not doing this anymore. But I just drifted. That's all. I've never really pursued any goal except to get my house fixed when I had it. Everything just drops in my lap and if it looks all right I take it. [*laughs*]
CBC: *But you had a work ethic.*

Ramona: Yes, I did.
CBC: *What was the primary thing? Was it to make money? Was it to please the editors? Just keep the money steady?*
Ramona: I don't know. It was just something that I always thought I should do—that I should really work, that I should have some kind of a job or career. And I think that's because of my father. I mean, he seriously expected me to be an artist! So it never occurred to me to go to college. I was heading for art school. I had no idea why.
CBC: *Was there* any *notion? A fashion artist or…?*
Ramona: He did want me to be a fashion artist. You know, do the Lord & Taylor ads and that kind of stuff.
CBC: *Under his logo.*
Ramona: Right! [*laughs*] And, you know, I dutifully went to Parsons and just had no interest in it whatsoever, because they weren't teaching me how to draw. I thought it was fun but I wasn't learning anything. Then a friend of mine was going to the Art Students League and suggested I do that. So I switched over and it was a good move.
CBC: *Now, were you influenced by any other artists?*
Ramona: Not at that time.

Top: *DC's amphibious super-hero, Aquaman, was Ramona's longest-running assignment in the comics field, lasting between 1951–63.* **Left inset:** *Now and again, she would contribute a random job for the publisher's mystery books, including this for* House of Mystery *#48 [Mar. 1956].*





Above: *In 1961, Ramona's signature character was given a four-issue solo tryout in* Showcase *[#30–33, Jan.–Aug.], which included an origin story highlighting the hero's command over sea life.* **Right:** *The artist recently re-imagined the spectacle in pencil.*

the '30s and '40s.

I just always knew that I could do it. That's all. It didn't seem too difficult. I just had to learn to use brushes and learn inking and get faster. And I had to learn about making faces look alike. That's a trick, I think, that you develop. You have to absorb the face so that you'd know that it's recognizable when it's a side-view or front-view or even back-view. You have to know that person. At first it was hard for me because I was trying to do it literally, but that's not the way you do it. You have to do it by "feeling" that person's face. Is that clear to you or not?

CBC: *Not really, because you know and I don't.* [laughter] *You're an artist. I mean, how do you* feel *a face?*

Ramona: [*Laughs*] That's how I draw, Jon! I have to feel it. I have to feel the action. That is hard. I draw from the inside out. That's all I can say.

CBC: *You know, the Beats were starting to come up and Greenwich Village was starting to be a center of culture. Did you and Dana go with that crowd at all?*

Ramona: Yes. We hung out at Julius's, Minetta Tavern, and what's that other one…? The San Remo, the place we hung out most. We were down there every night, drinking with the Village crowd. Joe Gould, a guy who was writing the oral history of the world, hung out at Minetta Tavern. Maxwell Bodenheim, a very odd character who wrote an off-color book called *Replenishing Jessica,* used to peer in the windows at the San Remo, disappear and appear again in another window. Nobody paid any attention to him. And Carson McCuller's brother, Tom, used to hang out there. I knew his wife—she was a page at CBS when I was there—and for some reason I lent him $300, which he never paid back. In those days, the Village was still the Village. It wasn't owned by the rich.

CBC: *How did you develop your style? Is it totally you?*

Ramona: I used to read the newspapers a lot, and I loved the drawing that this one fellow did. I think he was a sports cartoonist for *The Daily News* (but it could have been another paper). It was wonderfully loose drawing. And I found that's that how I'm inclined to draw, a kind of exaggerated, loose sort of drawing. When I was in a sketch class and somebody was looking at my drawings, they said, "You should be a cartoonist." And I guess I *was* a cartoonist without realizing it.

I grew up on book illustrations, too. There were some wonderful book illustrations! *Grimm's Fairy Tales* and *Moby Dick*… I know we had an edition of *Moby Dick* with the most beautiful drawings in it. I don't think I was exposed to much fine art at that point, before I went to art school, but I was *very* much exposed to commercial, popular art. And I loved it! I really did.

CBC: *You have a natural storytelling ability. Where did you get that?*

Ramona: It was just natural. I didn't pick it up; I just had it.

CBC: *You weren't even looking at comic books?*

Ramona: No. I never looked at comic books.

CBC: *While you were in the business, you never looked at other people's comic books?*

Ramona: Not much, no. Well, I mean I ran out and got 'em when I made samples. That's when I first became acquainted with them. As far as storytelling ability, I think you either have it or you don't.

CBC: *Well, it's one thing to be an illustrator. It's another thing to be a storyteller.*

Ramona: That's true. I knew right off the bat, even when Dana and I were doing those strips, I knew this one should be a close-up, that one should be a long shot and I just knew it. I think it was by osmosis, by looking at Caniff's drawing. That was such masterful storytelling I just absorbed that all during

CBC: *So your father was an alcoholic. Were you able to drink and then put the glass down?*

Ramona: I drank lot. We all did.

CBC: *Did it get out of hand?*

Ramona: Well, I think I drank too much, but I wasn't an alcoholic. I was just a really heavy social drinker. We'd start drinking at five o'clock and we'd drink through the evening. It was ridiculous. When you're young, I guess you can do that.

CBC: *You weren't an angry drinker?*

Ramona: Oh, no. It was just a bad habit.

CBC: *Well, amongst the creative community, you really started seeing a shift… Basically, pot came in and there was heroin in the jazz clubs. Stuff like that. Was that ever a part of your scene?*

Ramona: No, we never did drugs. To this day, I've never done anything—marijuana, nothing—because I really thought that if I started, I would have become addicted.

CBC: *Were you obsessed with other things?*

Ramona: Basically eating. I'll happily overeat if I don't watch myself. So I thought if I started doing drugs, it would be the end of me.

CBC: *Did you see cautionary tales around you?*

Ramona: Yes, my father for one, and I liked to be healthy. I didn't want to be a slave to drugs. Being a slave to cigarettes was bad enough.

CBC: *So you had just enough self-esteem…*

Ramona: That's right, and I can't stand being unhealthy. I did smoke, though. I smoked… Oh, my god.

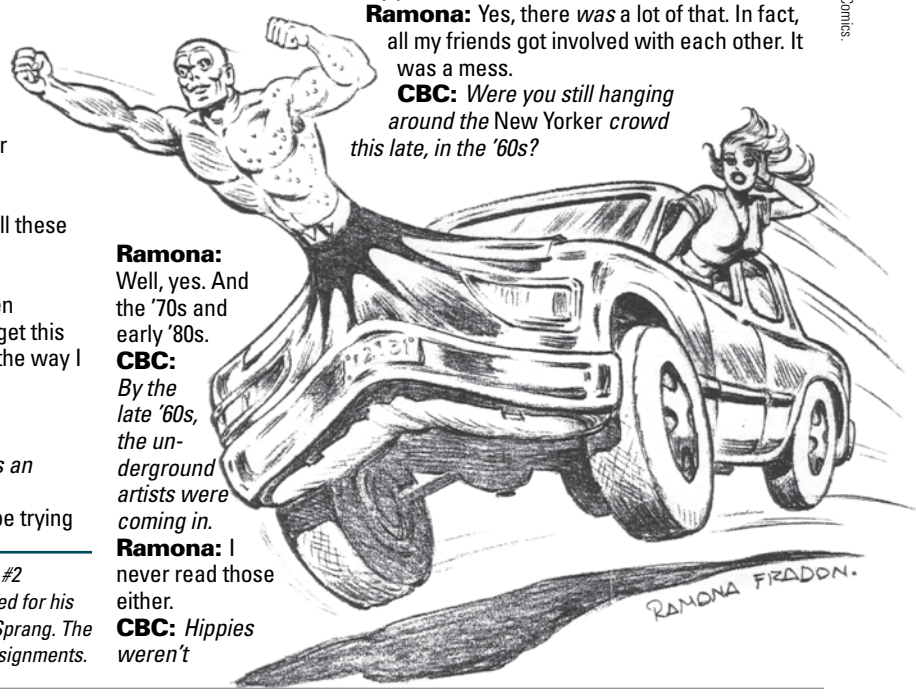
Must have been a relief for your brother.
Ramona: Yes, he went overseas. He was a technician in the Air Corps, keeping the planes flying. He was there during the whole thing, but never saw any combat.
CBC: *Was he in England?*
Ramona: I think he was in France because he learned to say, "Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir?" ["Do you want to sleep with me tonight?"] [*laughs*]
CBC: *When did your mother pass away?*
Ramona: In '52. And she was *so* interested in the election campaign where Adlai Stevenson was running [against Dwight Eisenhower]. But she died right before the election and didn't get a chance to find out who won. She'd been sick for years and years, her health going down and down. It was so sad.
CBC: *Did you have any feelings about Civil Rights?*
Ramona: Oh, yes. When I was 19, I thought, "Now I'm going to be voting pretty soon," and I started reading all the newspapers and immediately got radicalized, y'know? [*laughs*] I mean, I wanted to go over and fight in Israel… Everything! I was very radical! I thought I might be a communist then and work to alleviate the plight of the starving masses, but one day I was walking down the street looking around and I thought, "Gee, everybody looks pretty well fed here. It can't be as bad as they say!" I mean, we voted for Truman even though we preferred [1948 Progressive Party candidate for President Henry] Wallace. We were pretty reasonable Democrats, I think. But I'm a progressive Democrat. I wanted to see some big changes, and still do
CBC: *Abortions were actually illegal, right?*
Ramona: Right. I had a couple of friends who got illegal abortions. It wasn't pretty. Wasn't at all.

CBC: *Because birth control wasn't available. Was there a sense of frustration about that?*
Ramona: Well, birth control *was* available. But some girls got pregnant by mistake and a friend of mine who got an abortion was put right out on the street after she had it. That's the way it was. There was no lying around in a bed getting waited on. It was illegal. And that's what's happening again in the United States. People just don't remember how dangerous illegal abortions were.
CBC: *Was feminism becoming part of your outlook?*
Ramona: Not at that time. That didn't affect me 'til the '70s. I mean, I was already working and I was already out in the world. Many of my friends became radicalized though. They were housewives and a lot of them were frustrated just doing housework and they wished that they'd been out doing something else. So it just sort of passed me by until maybe the late '70s or early '80s, and then the ideas began to filter down to me.
CBC: *By your description, you were passive. In retrospect you were fine with that?*
Ramona: Yes. I mean, it's the way I have to operate. I can't function any other way. Some people decide they want something and go out and get it. I'm not like that. I have to wait for the wave to come along.
CBC: *You can't control circumstances. Your father left you and your mother passed away at a young age.*
Ramona: Maybe that's it. But I think it's just the way I am, you know? I'm just content to wait 'til it's time.
CBC: *Were you equal partners?*
Ramona: Dana and I? Yes. I mean, he made most of the money so, of course, he was paying most of the bills. We had a farm and we boarded horses out in Connecticut when we moved out there. And I took care of the horses and did the housework, took care of the baby, you know? I did a *lot*. But we were equal, yes.
CBC: *So you didn't have your separate bank account?*
Ramona: No, no. We were good about that. Money was no problem for us.
CBC: *That's awesome to have a comfortable existence after your respective childhoods growing up.*
Ramona: Yes, it was. But the way Dana grew up in Chicago… being so frightened and on welfare…he never got over that, whereas I had that initial comfortable upbringing, so I never felt poor.
CBC: *Oh, so you didn't feel like your peers were richer?*
Ramona: No. [*laughs*] But it was annoying to me.
CBC: *Because you couldn't do what they did?*
Ramona: Yes! Mostly because I couldn't buy cigarettes… but I never felt *poor!* I just felt we're living in this place and it wasn't a bad place. In Bronxville, nothing's bad. But, to this day, I think Dana feels poor and he's 93 now.
CBC: *The Depression really...*
Ramona: The one we had in 2008 was nothing compared to that. If the next one is worse, really worse, maybe they'll finally break up the banks.
CBC: *Maybe.* [laughs] *Then Korea comes along.*
Ramona: Yes, I thought that was a misguided war. Later on, I heard [U.S. Secretary of State John Foster] Dulles say that they were mistaken. They were convinced Stalin had put the North up to invading the South, but then

Aquaman and Aqualad TM & © DC Comics.

This page and next: *And so was born, to Ramona and Dana Fradon, on Nov. 29, 1959, daughter Amy. Courtesy of her mother, here are various snapshots of Amy as a baby and youngster with her parents. Included are Ramona's commission work, depictions of her most celebrated assignment of the 1950s — Aquaman and (her co-creation) Aqualad—and her unforgettable '60s co-invention, Metamorpho, the Element Man!*

CBC: *I guess that was around the time that Batmania started, 1965-66? My memory has it that Metamorpho started off in* The Brave and the Bold. *But you had an understanding, as far as you recall, of a planned four issues? They had already decided they were gonna give him his own title?*
Ramona: I guess they had! I think the first two were in *B&B*. It must have taken off right away because they gave him a title pretty soon. But I didn't know then. Nobody told me.
CBC: *What was Metamorpho's real name?*
Ramona: Rex Mason.
CBC: *And what was he?*
Ramona: He was an adventurer.
CBC: *It was a job at the time.* [Ramona laughs] *"What's your job?" "Adventurer." And he had a girlfriend.*
Ramona: Sapphire Stagg, a beautiful, spoiled heiress. Her father was a billionaire, a nasty scientist.
CBC: *He's the money that the motivated the plot…*
Ramona: Yes. [*laughs*] That's what I loved about it: there were all these stereotypes! They were so deliciously awful.
CBC: *"Deliciously awful"!* [laughs]
Ramona: It was just fun, you know? I mean, up until then I'd been drawing these boring faceless super-heroes, and now suddenly I get this script that was *so* bizarre! I decided that now I could finally draw the way I wanted to and I really loved that.
CBC: *So "Aquaman" was just boring?*
Ramona: Well, yes. I hate to say it.
CBC: *Did you hate it so much that you used raising a daughter as an excuse to quit or you really had to?*
Ramona: Well, she was two then, hanging on my knee, and I'd be trying to meet deadlines. It was ridiculous. I couldn't continue to do that.
CBC: *Did you have to stay up late often? What did you do?*
Ramona: I would, of course, wait 'til the deadline was looming. What did I do? I went crazy. And the poor little thing. We used to drop pencils and crayons—Dana, too—on the floor and she'd be down there coloring, you know? [laughs]
CBC: *That's what mommy's doing, right?*
Ramona: She has told me she liked that! But it wasn't fair to her. I couldn't keep doing it. If I had been faster it would have been one thing, but I wasn't.
CBC: *Did you really need the money?*
Ramona: No, but my mother used to say, "Don't do what I did." She gave up her work. She wanted to be an artist, too. So I had it stuck in my mind that because we got left high and dry I figured somehow I had to keep working no matter what, even though I wasn't making any real money. But it was something, you know.
CBC: *So did your husband have a studio in the house?*
Ramona: Yes.
CBC: *So you were both there during weekdays? Did you interact with each other at all?*
Ramona: Oh, sure. We weren't in the same space—I had a little studio and he was up in the attic studio—but, yes, we were both there and we'd eat lunch together and we'd work around the place.
CBC: *Were you friends?*
Ramona: Yes, we were.
CBC: *It's probably about a year, year-and-a-half that you just worked raising Amy, right?*
Ramona: No, it was seven years! I waited 'til she was in school. I hadn't planned to go back, but I was getting a little restless just being a housewife. And then one day Roy Thomas called me and asked me if I wanted to do a story.
CBC: *So the* Metamorpho *thing was just an anomaly?*
Ramona: Yes. I just did that to help George out, to get it started.
CBC: *Right. So then you went back to child-rearing. Were you just planning, "That was the last thing I will do in comics"? Was that the thought?*
Ramona: I didn't have any plan. I never do.
CBC: *Just day by day?*
Ramona: [*Laughs*] So this wave came along and I got on it when Roy called me.
CBC: *There was a lot going on at the time. A lot of the changes were from 1960–70.*
Ramona: It didn't hit suburbia, I can tell you.
CBC: *It hit Westchester.*
Ramona: Did it really?
CBC: *Well, yeah. People were getting divorced, the whole counterculture came in.*
Ramona: Oh, that's when everybody was having affairs…
CBC: *John Cheever and key parties and…*
Ramona: Yes, there *was* a lot of that. In fact, all my friends got involved with each other. It was a mess.
CBC: *Were you still hanging around the* New Yorker *crowd this late, in the '60s?*
Ramona: Well, yes. And the '70s and early '80s.
CBC: *By the late '60s, the underground artists were coming in.*
Ramona: I never read those either.
CBC: *Hippies weren't*



Metamorpho TM & © DC Comics.

This page: *At top left is the original art for the splash page of* Metamorpho *#2 [Sept.–Oct. '65], with inks by the renowned inker Charles Paris, best recalled for his delineation on the Batman stories of pencilers Sheldon Moldoff and Dick Sprang. The Element Man is frequently requested by fans for Ramona's commission assignments.*


Michael W.
Portrait Photography by
Seth Kusher

Kaluta

The Shadow, The Studio, and The Startling Artistry

Michael William Kaluta, who first made an impact in the fertile climes of 1960s' fandom, struggled when he initially broke into the field of mainstream American comic books. But, inspired by art nouveau, deco, and classic illustrators — and motivated by the swift progress of his peers' abilities — very soon the convivial young man established himself as a formidable talent in the comics scene of the early 1970s. With his definitive version of '30s pulp hero The Shadow, his cachet skyrocketed and the Virginia-raised artist has since never looked back. Today, MWK resides in the same Upper West Side Manhattan apartment where he has lived for decades, surrounded by a museum-quality hoard of pop cultural ephemera, from ray-guns to aviator helmets, as well as in-progress commission artwork. *Comic Book Creator* visited the artist on a cloudy spring weekend for the following interview conducted between May 18–19, 2013.

Interview Conducted by Jon B. Cooke
Transcribed by Brian K. Morris

Comic Book Creator: *I've been very much looking forward to doing this interview for a long time. We really do go back, whether you know it or not. I'm pulling out* The Shadow *#1 and* [reading inscription] *"To Jon and Andy, M.W. Kaluta," on July 4th, 1973.*

Michael W. Kaluta: That's right when that first issue came out. *The Shadow* had a very, very weird effect on me, having been invisible at all the Seuling conventions since 1967-ish, to also be in a room with a line of kids around and out the door with the comic book, I wasn't ready for it. It really was something.

CBC: *You always used to be at the table with Barry Windsor-Smith, right?*

Michael: That was later, after all this. Barry and I started hanging out during the Studio days, which had been between '76 and '78.

CBC: *I remember Bernie at the table.*

Michael: Bernie definitely. We were roommates right over here at 79th Street and we were pals, you know? And Jeff Jones, as well. Jeff lived at 79th Street originally and, when Bernie moved up to New York, he wanted to get a place near him because they had met back in '67, like I said. So, in the Summer of '68, Bernie got an apartment on West 77th Street, just two blocks south of where Jeff lived. I moved in with Wrightson about six months later, in January, '69, and we'd visit Jeff on 79th Street. Then, about a year later, I came back from a trip and a place had opened up in Jeff's building and we had already started to move without me even knowing it. So I ended up in there for a couple, three years, and I went up to West 92nd Street. Speaking of West 92nd Street, I found out from Will Eisner that he lived just around the corner on, let's see, on 90th and Riverside Drive back in the Fifties. So that was cool.

CBC: *You guys were exceedingly friendly. I don't know why my mother allowed us to do it, but my little brother and I came down from Rhode Island on the bus. We'd stay at my sister's apartment downtown. You were very friendly and you put my little brother to work getting coffee and, in return, doing sketches for him. And there was one night where there was one year, probably '74, where I was grounded and I wasn't allowed to come because I'd gotten in a little trouble, so he came down alone and there was, on a Saturday night of the July 4th weekend, there was a torrential downpour that took place and he couldn't get out to walk the 20 blocks to get to my sister's, you stayed up with him all night. He was probably thirteen years old and you spent the entire night with him.*

Michael: In the lobby, probably. Doing drawings and such.

CBC: *Yeah, until dawn broke and the rain subsided.*

Michael: I could do that back then. [*laughs*]

CBC: *And what a profound act of kindness it was.*

Michael: Well, yeah, I'm sure that I just wasn't sleepy. [*Jon chuckles*] But that's great. Like I don't remember the downpour, of course, because I was staying inside. Convention time, there's always a pumped-upness that, as years went by, I'd get more and more tired and not realize it because I was in convention mode and then just afterwards, you know, just be exhausted or in later years, get ill because you fly out, spend a week at the San Diego, and running around to do this, that, and the other thing, and then come back with having had, what, four hours of sleep a night … *slam…* collapse. [*Jon chuckles*] But anyway, back then, it was different. I was twenty-ish, twenty-one.

CBC: *Those are heady days and there was a great deal of creativity that was coming out of you group of guys, the young Turks who came into the field. But if we can start at the start, where are you from?*

Michael: I'm from a military family, so I'm not quite sure. But I was born in Guatemala, and I was eventually a naturalized citizen. I was immediately naturalized because my parents were both Americans and it was the Panama Zone or whatever you call it. But when I was probably eighteen, I got to legally choose whether I'd be an American or a Guatemalan. I said, "I'll be an American, thank you very much." My dad put it more succinctly, he said, "Oh, son, you could become a Guatemalan. Hell, you could even become President of Guatemala for half an hour," and he makes a gun with his finger and went "pow!" [*laughter*]

After I was born, we then moved, I think, to Texas, Louisiana, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts… Pennsylvania, did I say? And then Alabama and Virginia, and then pretty much stayed in Virginia. My father was at the Pentagon at the time. He was in the Air Force. He had been, of course, in the Army Air Force during the war. So had my mother, as a matter of fact. They met in Russia at the Allied bomber bases that we had finally convinced Stalin to give us.

CBC: *Was your father a pilot?*

Michael: No, he was an engineer. He was born in America, but his dad was from Russia, so my dad spoke Russian, which, for a while, was something they didn't let anyone know. So, technically, he was a spy. Everybody was a spy in those days. Because the Soviet Union was so paranoid (probably for good reasons on some level or another), but they just didn't trust anybody. There were things that they wouldn't allow their people to do around the Americans and that was act like an American. You weren't allowed to act like an American [*chuckles*] or be friendly with an American or talk to them about anything. Of course, the G.I.s got around that. Everybody got around that. Anyway, my mother was an Army nurse and when they first met, she outranked him, which is something that she had a point of pride about. [*chuckles*]

CBC: *What was her name?*

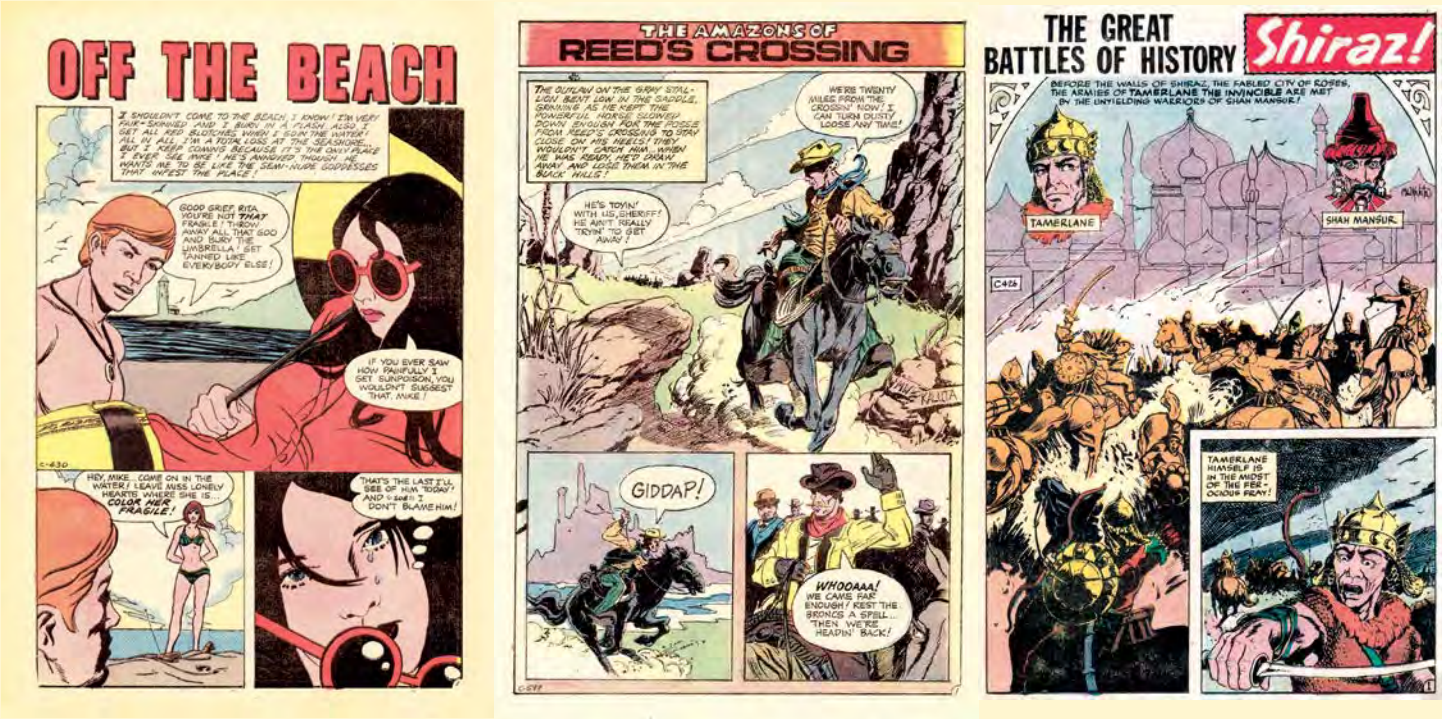
Michael: Coltilde Gavony. She was of Italian extraction, born in America, though her parents both came from Italy. So my father was a first generation American with Russian heritage and my mom was first generation American with Italian parentage, and she lived in New England, my father lived in New York, and of course they'd never would have bumped into each other, completely different circles in America. But he went to Russia because they needed Russian-speaking Americans and they needed engineers to help build these bases and she went. There were twelve nurses sent, four for each of the three bases. There were two basically fighter bases and one bomber base and each had four nurses, their little M.A.S.H. units. I don't know if they weren't called "M.A.S.H." at the time, of course, but that's what they were. They met and were married in '44 or '45. His name is William.

CBC: *Is your father Slavic? What's the ethnic background?*

Michael: Russian, from Belarus, near Minsk, a little town on the Polish border called Dubicze, where his father came from.

CBC: *And the family, what like social strata — were they peasants?*

Michael: I guess it'd be somewhat Russian middle class. [*chuckles*] I don't really know. I'll have to ask my older sister. She did a little more studying on it. I know that both my grandfather and grandmother, who didn't know each other then — they were very young at the time of the Russian Revolution/World War I. When they left, they both basically snuck out. It turned out that my grandmother didn't have to. Her way had been paid, but they just didn't get to her to tell her that he was had been paid and that people had been bribed all



ing a part of it or watching the workings of this mind, or like that, as clever as it might be." It just didn't interest me … or it interested me too much. I didn't want to go there, one of the two. [*laughs*]

CBC: *The comics of the '50s: horror was a big deal at E.C.*

Michael: Yeah, I read all those things. I didn't buy them; I read them. We had cousins and/or relatives of some sort — that'd be "Dutch relatives," as they say — but friends of the family up here in New York. There were two girls and they bought every comic that ever was. Read them and read them, read them. Then their parents would pack them up, and send them to us. So we'd get these CARE packages, big bags of comic books that my mother eventually threw away, because we didn't clean them up. "Mom, they were our comic books!" And, in later years, she said, "Sweetheart, if I'd had any idea how much they'd be worth, I wouldn't have done it." I said, "Well, the only reason they're worth so much, is because moms everywhere have been throwing them away." [*laughter*]

There were two or three stories that really frightened me to death. One I found since and it's fairly well-drawn … colored badly, but that didn't matter. None of that mattered when I was a kid. It was like a movie when I was a kid, it really was CinemaScope. And when I became a comic book artist, I recalled, "Oh, I remember what it was like to read a comic book." It didn't matter what it looked like, it didn't matter if it had big, sweeping double-page spreads and such. It could be this funky, almost thumb prints with word balloons, and my mind took it and ran with it. So I began to understand that sometimes overdrawing the comic book may not have been even worth it because it's just having enough information in there for the child reading it to use what they've got, their native stuff in their brain. That's all it really took.

That's what my mom and dad used to say about the radio: the listener was an active participant. Yeah, there were sound effects and there were voices and there's spooky music sometimes, but the pictures were all in your head. No two people saw the same scene in their brain when they were listening to that stuff. It's interesting.

Top: *The splash pages of MWK's earliest mainstream work, for Charlton Comics. From left,* Teen Confessions *#59 [Dec. '69],* Billy the Kid *#85 [July '71], and* Flash Gordon *#18 [Jan. '70].* **Right inset:** *One glance at this breathtaking splash page for the prozine* Heritage *#1 ['72], proves Michael's abilities were developing at an astonishing rate.* CBC *kudos* must *be made to Todd Adams for sharing an amazing array of images in this issue and for his definitive Kaluta checklist at* glimmergraphicsprints.com.

CBC: *So you didn't select the comics to read; they were just a big pile to pick from?*

Michael: Right, and I liked all the comics I read. I was a big fan of *Chilly Willy*, and *Betty and Veronica, Jughead* — I didn't care for Reggie so much, but there he was — *Baby Huey, Little Lotta*… and I guess there was some *Superman* and *Batman* or things like that were in there, but they never impressed me as a genre. They were all just comic books.

When I started buying comic books, it was war comics that I bought, particularly anything to do with flying because I love the whole idea. "Sgt. Rock" was a lot of fun, but if there was a "but" involved, it was the stories were so similar that you had to chew through a bunch of them before, all of a sudden, there was something that was very different. Some of the stories seemed very silly to me as a kid. Like, "Hi, I'm Ice Cream Soldier's M-1 rifle," or whatever…

CBC: [Laughs] *Bob Kanigher's talking weapons.*

Michael: I'd be going, "I don't care about a talking gun." But it still was interesting because, you know, it did catch my imagination. But I liked best Lt. Johnny Cloud, the American Indian who flew the Mustang in *All-American Men at War*. Although the one war

exquisite control. Talking with Al Williamson, I've gotten more of an insight to that, yes, it was all fun and yes, it was all beautiful, but that it had to be done because the wheels of industry demanded it be done in a certain time. If you didn't do it, then stuff happened to the point of where you'd just be thrown away and they'd use anybody else. It wasn't because it was so good because you did it; it was because it was filling this slot on the newspaper page and if they'd found some way of putting something else in there, like a crossword puzzle or something like that, you could have been just as easily been gone because there are some people who preferred that stuff, but they weren't necessarily the newspaper publishers. It didn't matter how much we loved doing it, it didn't matter how great it was, how good the anatomy was or any of that.

In comic books, certain editors like Joe Orlando, specifically, and Dick Giordano, as well, liked looking at the good stuff, work that was drawn really, really well. It reminded them of when they were kids, trying to do it themselves. Other editors, not so much. But the bottom line really was it doesn't matter how good it is, it's just gotta be in on time.

Not having worked for Marvel during those years, I never was involved in the "assembly line" process, with someone else is waiting on what you're doing to do their part. With rare exception, I always ink my own work, which is one of the reasons it was so scratchy and goofy. Luckily, I had Orlando who didn't want a polished look necessarily. He liked the fact that all the work looked different and that it was enthusiastic. He liked the imprint of youth in the work.

CBC: *What was your takeaway from Krenkel?*

Michael: Everything. He was just a great guy. I was never, ever disappointed with him. He was (what's that expression?) worth the price of admission — a lot of bang for the buck. He was so full of energy, so full of insight, very, very well read in the places that he wanted to be. There were certain areas of science that he had studied up on and was learning more about during the early '70s. He was very interested in paleontology, and specifically the dentation of marsupials. You know, that kind of stuff.

CBC: *First Fridays — how did it become a continuing social thing?*

Michael: It had been before I ever came into town. I think that Jeff Jones was involved with them at John Benson's apartment. John still lives somewhere right in this neighborhood and he was a longtime comics and adventure pulp guy, and still is. But he's very quiet, very quiet about it. And apparently the First Fridays, or whatever they were called, were at his place for quite some time and then at Jeff's. Jeff had moved up into a bigger apartment in the building, so they started going over there. Weezie was always a terrific hostess and loved it and is very much involved because she knew all the stuff that everyone was talking about.

CBC: *Who would also attend?*

Michael: Wrightson, myself, Alan Weiss, Mary Skrenes, Rick Bryant, Mark Hanerfeld, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman. At one point, Larry Hama came in with Ralph Reese. Archie Goodwin, definitely. Bill Stillwell. Krenkel would generally be there.

CBC: *Did Wallace Wood show up?*

Michael: No, though he was just on the corner in an apartment at 74th Street. No Larry Ivie, though he was right in the neighborhood, too. It was hard to get any of the gals there. Every once in a while, there'd be some of the women. It all seems like one night when I run it through my mind.

CBC: *The first Fridays of the month, right?*

Michael: Well, who knows? You know, it'd be changed. Sometimes on Tuesdays, sometimes it was on Thursdays, it depended on when people were available being freelance.

CBC: *Did it go on into the wee hours or…?*

Michael: Eventually, they did. Once Al Weiss started bringing booze, he inspired everybody. He was a party guy. He was a cheerleader. [*chuckles*] And there's a quote that I attribute to Larry Hama and, on occasion, he has attributed it to me. Either of us would have wished we were definitely the ones that had said it, but it was one or the other. I like to think it was Larry because it just sounds like Larry. I would love for it to be me because I wish I were that witty. [*chuckles*] Do you know Alan Weiss at all?

CBC: *Of course. Yes.*

Michael: [*Imitates Larry Hama*] "Yeah, you know, Kaluta, about that Alan Weiss," he says, "Somewhere in a closet, there's going to be a painting of him getting hipper and hipper." [*laughter*]

This page and next: *At top left is 1987 print rendered by MWK. At right are MWK's cover art for Russ Maheras's fanzines. On next page are the poster for* The Studio *1979 book signing at Forbidden Planet;* The Studio *book cover; The Studio-mates (from left, Bernie Wrightson, Jeffrey Jones, MWK, and Barry Windsor-Smith); and photos taken this summer of the building that was home to the artist collective, located at 37 W. 26th Street, between Sixth Avenue and Broadway. Photos by Andrew D. Cooke.*

and I'll ink it, I'll give you $75," or something. So I did. So I don't remember precisely which ad it is, but it's one from this time period.

CBC: [Laughs] *The Sea Monkey/Orlando-Kaluta team-up! Mystery solved!* [Indicating MWK's detail in the *Weird Worlds* #4 Pellucidar story]

Michael: Where the hell did I find the time? Oh, good lord. I mean I didn't go as crazy as I normally would do on a background so it's obvious that I felt somewhat of a time constraint. But eventually, I started to go a little more crazy.

CBC: *Did you need any pharmaceutical help to make your deadlines?*

Michael: I probably did, I just couldn't find it.

CBC: [Indicating *The Shadow* house ad by Bernie Wrightson] *"The Shadow knows"!*

Michael: That's so brilliant. The only thing I chided Bernie on was the light switch. I said, "Bernie, it should have been push buttons. They didn't have those light switches back then." They probably did, but in New York, all the switches were push-button.

[*Indicating restaurant sign on the cover of* The Shadow *#1*] My dad said, "My friend Frank Oliver has a kid who is a big comics fan, so you put his name in there somewhere?" So I put Oliver in backwards, "Revilo's." And then, some friend from Canada told me, "Oh, there are some guys who are big fans of yours called The Revillos and they've got a little New Wave rock song out," [*laughs*] which they got off of this. I said, "Do they know that it's 'Oliver' backwards?" He went, "No, they haven't the slightest idea." I said, "Well, maybe you should tell them just for the hell of it."

CBC: *And here I always thought it was a famous New York restaurant from the '30s!* [laughter] *The color scheme on this cover really works. Was that the old* [DC production manager] *Jack Adler graytone process?*

Michael: Yes. I did the Shadow figure in a black ink wash, so it's just tonal, and then Jack just laid the colors on it. I was out of town when I did this. I was in down there in Virginia and I wrote him a letter, which I was given. [*chuckles*] And it's similar to the letter that I sent to Rich Hauser about how awful the artwork in *Spa Fon*. I included a little color photo of a *Shadow* cover by either Graves Gladney or George Rozen, that showed the colors I wanted and, of course, to pay homage to those cover painters. Then I yapped for two pages and I wrote, "Just put the colors on, don't drop any black into color because they're doing that a lot…" I went on and on and I said, "I want all the windows yellow. I don't want them pink and blue and green… I want this, I want that, I want that." I heard back that Jack was stomping around the production room, saying, "Who does this kid think he is? Does he think I haven't ever done a cover before?" But later, Jack said, "We did a great cover, didn't we?" I said, "Yes, we did, didn't we? Thank you for not f*cking it up by trying to be clever because there's enough cleverness." I just knew what I didn't want, and he did great.

CBC: *What a beautifully designed cover. Did you know that DC was seeking the Shadow license from Condé Nast?*

Michael: No, I'd had no idea what and I've asked around about how DC ended up with this. There's no reason for it. It's so odd for that and they didn't license anything else at the time that I remember anyway.

CBC: *Well, Marvel had* Doc Savage.

Michael: Yeah, well, maybe they did.

CBC: *So maybe the timing was as such as, "Let's us grab this before the competition." It was an Archie comic book in the '60s, which was not anything to trumpet about.*

Michael: The one in the 1940s was pretty good. I liked that one.

CBC: *Did you like Edd Cartier's illustrations?*

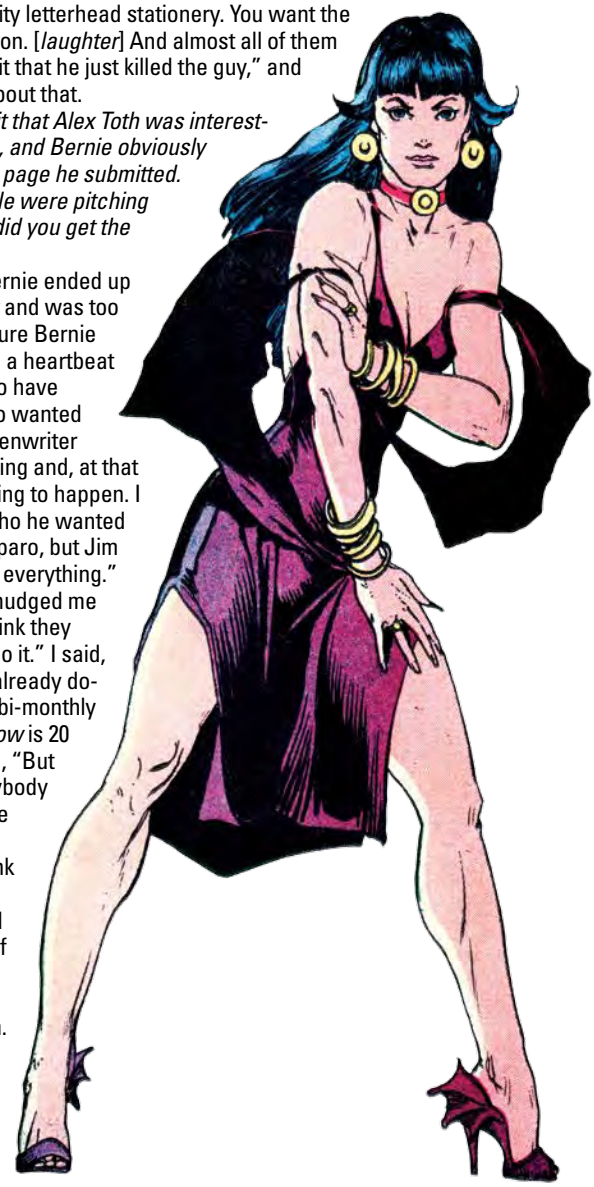
Michael: Edd Cartier? Oh, yes. I didn't see enough of them. When I started seeing some, it was in one of Steranko's *Comixscene*. There was one where you couldn't tell it was a human being; it was just a hat and cloak. And I went, "That is *so* brilliant!" I had previously thought, "Well, you've got to show his face," but, of course, I didn't have to. Eventually, I learned to do it different ways so it wasn't always tipping his head back.

CBC: *Was* The Shadow *well received?*

Michael: It *was* well received. There were a number of people who wrote in. As Denny has said, you don't want the professors writing to you on their university letterhead stationery. You want the ones written in crayon. [*laughter*] And almost all of them were saying, "I like it that he just killed the guy," and we were nervous about that.

CBC: *Legend has it that Alex Toth was interested in getting the job, and Bernie obviously wanted it, given the page he submitted. So, if all these people were pitching to get the job, how did you get the assignment?*

Michael: Well, Bernie ended up doing *Swamp Thing* and was too busy. I thought for sure Bernie would have had it in a heartbeat and I'd have loved to have seen it too. Steranko wanted it, but he had a screenwriter to help with the writing and, at that time, that wasn't going to happen. I had asked Denny who he wanted and he said, "Jim Aparo, but Jim Aparo was drawing everything." It was Harper who nudged me and said, "Look, I think they want you to ask to do it." I said, "Don't be nuts. I'm already doing five pages for a bi-monthly book and *The Shadow* is 20 pages." Harper said, "But they haven't got anybody and they wouldn't be still hesitating." I thought, "I don't think he's right," but I went and asked and Denny jumped out of the chair and said, "Hold on!" [*laughs*] He just left the room. And I don't know how long that he was gone, but he came back and said, "Okay, you



got it." It was as simple as that. Now apparently, I don't recall this, but apparently Ronn Sutton was there as well and had some key part in getting some people together on it. I don't know because I don't remember him being there. I remember myself, Harper, and then Denny, and Steve Skeates sitting at a table, complaining that they couldn't find anybody to draw it or didn't have anybody to draw it. That's all I remember.

CBC: *Really? I would think that would have been absolutely a no-brainer. You seemed perfect for the job.*

Michael: Why? Nobody had seen me draw this stuff. I was just drawing Carson of Venus at the time, right?

CBC: *But there's a pulpish quality to your work that was evident in the mystery work and with those* Batman *covers. Your work is more illustrative.* The Shadow *stories, really, are crime stories. They're different than super-heroes. At the time, I thought this was a perfect combination of artist and property.*

Michael: It all worked out and I have no reason to apologize for anything.

CBC: *No, you don't!* [laughter]

Michael: Except for not doing more.

CBC: *Well, you did quite a bit. Were you happy with what you did?*

Michael: To a point. There's things that are in these comics that I'd change ever so slightly for when *The Private Files of the Shadow* [collection] came out. And I still, in my mind, see the things that I should have changed. They're not big changes. Every once in a while, I drew a woman's face that was too long and horsey… things like that.

CBC: *Did you talk with Dennis about what kind of stories you wanted to do?*

Michael: No. [*Indicating* The Shadow *#1*] This one was taken from a pulp story and I asked to be able to read it. He said no, but I wish I had because I didn't know what I was doing when I was drawing this. I didn't feel like I had anything to stand on. I carried it off, but had I been able to read the story — which I have since –I could have added more feeling. It wasn't that I wanted to compare his script against the pulp story or something. [*Pointing to his depiction of the character*] I liked this because it looked so weird, but a couple of my friends said, "That nose, it's Jimmy Durante." I'd say, "Well, he's weird. It's not his real nose."

CBC: [Indicating *The Shadow* #1–4] *Look at all these covers you did with the special Adler process. Were aware of Adler's covers from the late '50s and early '60s?*

Michael: No, I don't. I remember Neal doing stuff. All of these were done on two pieces of paper, a line drawing and a tonal page, which you combine.

CBC: [Indicating *The Shadow* #3] *Bernie and you were quite the team.*

Michael: Now this is almost all Wrightson inking on this one, almost all. [*Points to page two, panel one*] "A B C DEE GOLDFISH"? [*points to page four, panel one*] "L M N OH GOLDFISH." "C S N A R N." I had a friend, she thought it was cute. "Baby, see de goldfish?" "El am no goldfish." "See, yes'n are!"

CBC: [Groans, then laughs] *I wasn't paying attention.*

Michael: Yeah, that's all Wrightson's inks too. We penciled and inked, and handed it back and forth. I know we had a ball with that.

CBC: *Were you familiar with the character?*

Michael: Not so much, no, when I first got it. [*Indicates page 19, panel one*] Wrightson said, "Let me ink that one just without you touching it." I said, "Sure, go ahead." Look at the Thompson submachine gun. It's the "rat-tat," the space gun. It's not really a Thompson, whereas the Thompson in all the other ones — because I changed them. I said, "Wrightson, that's a toy gun you're doing." But in this one, he wanted to ink it just as it was. I said, "Okay, go ahead." It's a brilliant pose.

CBC: *Everything built up to this crescendo with this great collaboration… just perfection. This is really the apex.* [Indicates final panel] *"The Shadow* never *fails."* [chuckles] *Wow, just great stuff.*

Michael: [Indicates The Shadow *#4*] And this one's got *everybody* working on it. [*Indicates license plates on splash page truck*] You can see which pages Howard, Steve Hickman, Bernie, and Chaykin worked on: "S.F.H. 1-2-3-4," "WRIGHTS. 1–15," "CHAYKIN 8–9–10."

CBC: *Well, look at that!*

Michael: [*Indicates page seven, panel one*] I showed this to my dad and he says, "Bowery, huh?" And I said, "Yeah, look at the Fatima Cigarettes poster." He said, "But where's the elevated train?" I went, "Oh, sh*t." [*Indicates page eight*] This is Chaykin and he pretty much did the whole page.

CBC: *Do you get any of the original art pages back?*

Michael: This was right at the very beginning, when they started returning original art. The first issue didn't come back come back to me, and, in an interview, I took a shot in the dark as to who I thought had the pages and then, after the interview was published, all the pages came back to me. So I did get all the *Shadow* pages and I eventually sold them all.

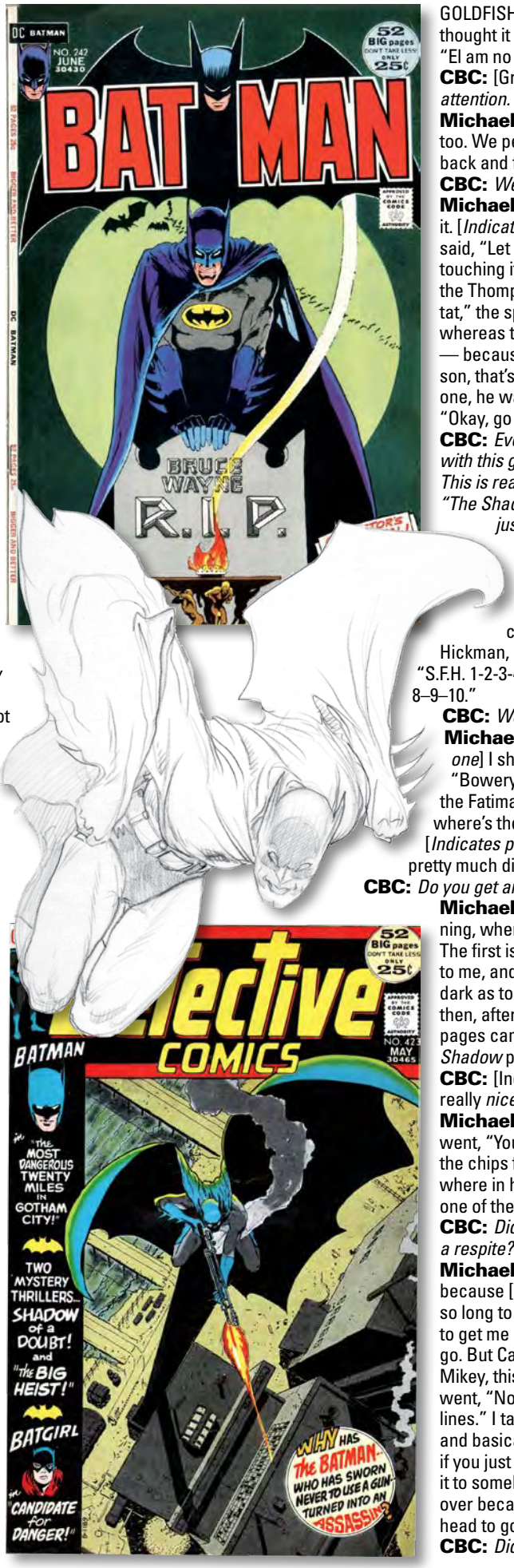
CBC: [Indicates pages 16–17 spread] *That's* really *nice.*

Michael: I got to this point, I was very late. I went, "You know, I'm just going to do it and let the chips fall where they may." This is, somewhere in here, I also made a tip of the hat to one of the girls in a sign there, "Maggie's."

CBC: *Did Frank Robbins come on to give you a respite?*

Michael: Well, he filled in between that because [*indicates* The Shadow *#6*] this took so long to do it and his fill-in was supposed to get me back on track and I was ready to go. But Carmine called me in and said, "Look, Mikey, this isn't really your kind of stuff." I went, "No, it is. I'm just not meeting my deadlines." I talked about all the stuff I was doing, and basically he said, "It'd probably be better if you just didn't do it anymore and we'll give it to somebody else." I said, "Okay." I rolled over because I wasn't in the right place in my head to go for it.

CBC: *Did you feel defeated… or sad?*



This page and next: *For a stint in the early '70s, MWK produced a pile of covers for DC editor Julius Schwartz. Here, with a novel Batman sketch, are two examples. On the next page is a 1978 promotional poster for Elektra Records.*

CBC: *Was the production nice on the European editions of your work?*
Michael: Yeah, it wasn't like the big publishing houses. It was paperback, black-&-white interiors, and there was no art book. It was comics and sketchbook work and stuff like that.
CBC: *Did you have any input with* The Studio *book? In as far as the layout and the presentation and the choices of the art?*
Michael: Yes, all that. We almost didn't. I mean we had done a bunch of set-up stuff and gave it to Martyn Dean and, for the longest time, we didn't hear back. So Jeff and I got on an airplane and went over to England, walked up to his front door, knocked on the door, scared the hell out of him. "What? What are you guys doing here?" he says. "We want to see our book." So he showed us the layouts and he'd just changed everything. We went, "It's not what you promised us." So we reported back to Barry. Barry needed to know everything so he could work it out so it came out more like we wanted. So although each person may have some reservations about what it looks like, I'm perfectly happy with the way it looks. I like the book a lot. There's so much stuff in it and the artwork gets a big prese really nice-sized book.
CBC: *And the text is good?*
Michael: I did the text so it'd better be good. We were going low in and he was a professional writer. He worked for *Time* m he interviewed all four of us at length and the section he wrote basically a question/answer, with a few snarky comments that were hip. I thought, "This is embarrassing." With both Jeff and had taken some of the personal stuff that they talked about tha publication and put that in because it was more interesting. W liked the guy, but had to tell him, "Look, this is not how we wan represented." "Yes, but you hired *me* to do it. I mean if I hired y a picture of a girl, I'd have to take whatever you painted for me some kind of theory about that. We said, "Well, we're sorry, bu
CBC: *So did you each do your own text?*
Michael: Yeah. Yes, we did.
CBC: [Looking through *The Studio*] *You're a photographer?*
Michael: No. Well, we just had cameras. Barry and Jeff wer the photographers. Jeff had four or five cameras.
CBC: *Did you produce work specifically for the book?*
Michael: No, nothing specific. Somewhere in the world, I ha of the book that has doped-in, rough drawings by each of us o going to be there. So you got all these Barry Windsor-Smith sk all these Jeff Jones sketches and all these Kaluta sketches an Wrightson sketches. I don't know where it is. I used to know w but then the last time I looked there, it wasn't. But I know I hav *les*] I just don't quite know where I put it.
CBC: *Wow! By the time this book was published…*
Michael: That was basically the end of the Studio. The publisher's people kept saying, "We need to know who you are so we can have something to hang this on. Our marketing people need to know where we are going to put it in bookstores. What is it about? What's the theme behind this?" And there just wasn't a unifying theme that we could figure out. So trying to figure out who we were kind of took a lot of the energy out of the Studio. It became a lot about us trying to find out who we were as opposed to just being… I was happy with the book except for the fact that the spine breaks so easily, because it wasn't perfect-bound; it was glued.
CBC: *Did you share in the profits of it?*
Michael: There were no profits. Never saw another dime. We got, I think, $4,000 each; $16,000 in total. That's what we were given and then that was it. There may have been money, but we didn't know about it.
CBC: *Has there ever been talk of reprinting it?*
Michael: Always. Tons of talk. It's talk. There was a moment where it might have happened, but it won't happen now.
CBC: *What were your prospects when the Studio ended?*
Michael: I had nothing to do. I had just my regular old stuff. I was home, I had a roommate, Charlie Vess, who by then had already broken into the ree years.
ome to play in the '70s?
accounting book] There's some commis- *Dante's Inferno*, $275; kill fees from Portal to do a bunch of posters and I did the rse-legged woman leaning against the big *ng Home*, a little girl on the carpet, flying for the fellow who ran Portal Press, and he them to the secretaries and they said they ng to do those." I replied, "Well, you hired nd you just can't say you're not going to do [*Reading*] *Batman Family* #17… *Doorway* to be for inking or something because was still doing posters for Portal Press in nt, $1,000; second payment, $1,000. Seems these *Doorway To Nightmare* covers. That's as big money at the time. *Heavy Metal* m *Swords of Shahrazar* in one of their ver, $200. Dragon's Dream, final advance, to use *Behind Neptune Throne* for dou- s from Dragon's Dream, $1,500 (that's not oster royalties, *Metropolis*, $1,500. It's all

ncome coming in?
s any freelance.
e Stevens?
hen we first, but probably by '77, when *Star Wars* first came out, right? I showed up for the San Diego Comic-Con and got my own room in the Travelator, which is a little place right next to the El Cortez hotel, which was where the convention used to be. You know, when it was very quaint and very fun little convention, sitting around the pool and

This page and previous: *Left inset is MWK's cover illustration for* Vampirella Master Series *#5 [Aug. 2011]. Above are two MWK illos from the* Lord of the Rings *calendar ['94].*