

COMICS' BRONZE AGE AND BEYOND!

BACK ISSUE!

December 2014

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**"WHEN COMICS
WERE FUN" ISSUE**
WITH A HEMBECK
COVER ART GALLERY!

BLUE DEVIL

PLASTIC MAN

STAR COMICS

JIM VALENTINO

NORMALMAN INTERVIEW

**THE BRONZE AGE'S GOOFIEST
SUPERMAN STORIES**

MARVEL FUN & GAMES MAGAZINE

AND LOTS MORE FUN STUFF!

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**Celebrating the
Best Comics of
the '70s, '80s,
'90s, and Beyond!**

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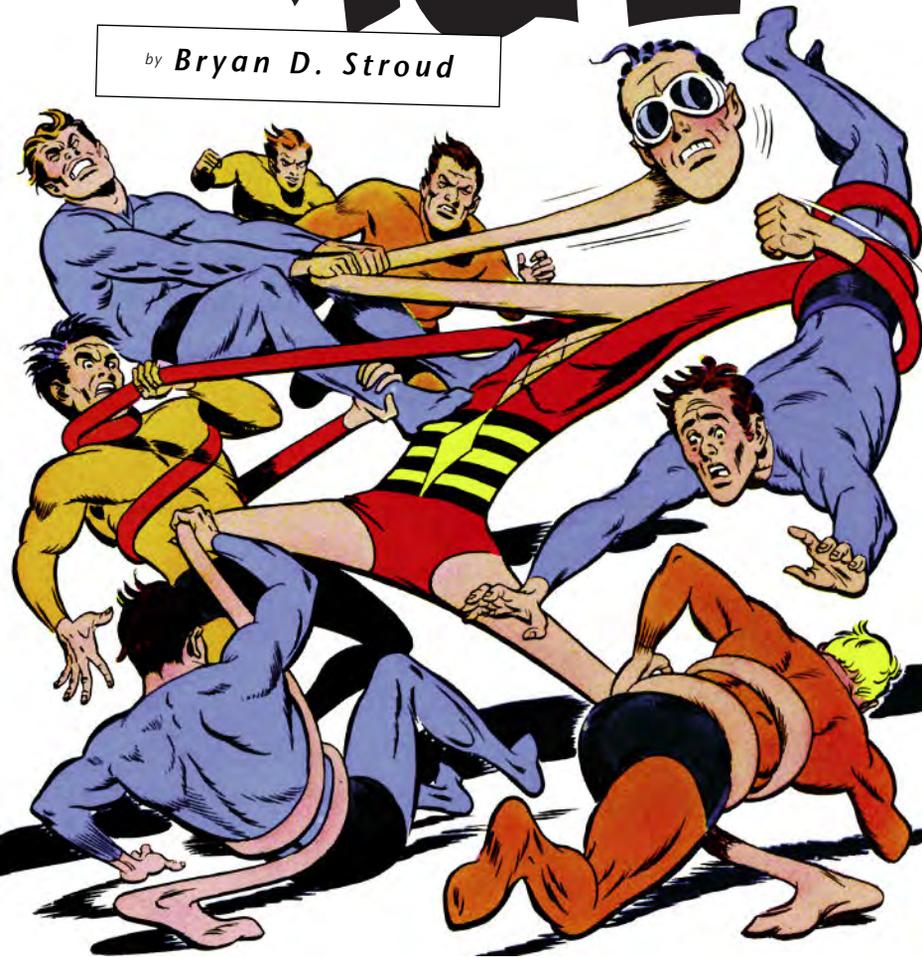


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PLASTIC MANTM IN THE BRONZE AGE

by Bryan D. Stroud



In 1941, superhero comic books were very much in their infancy. Following the breakout successes of Superman and Batman, publishers sprang up like daisies with their own offerings to cash in on the newfound popularity of the union-suiters. Quality Comics was one of the more successful contenders, and in *Police Comics* #1 (Aug. 1941) a number of new heroes were rolled out in the anthology. While the featured character was Reed Crandall's Firebrand, another member of the roster would soon dominate the title, pushing his way to the cover beginning with issue #5, never again relegated to the sidelines. Enter Jack Cole's immortal and perfectly pliable Plastic Man!

THE ORIGIN OF PLASTIC MAN

Right from the start, "Plas" was different. Not only did he gain his incredible abilities by accident, he had no notions of becoming a superhero at all, because Patrick "Eel" O'Brien was a criminal. In that debut story, he is in the midst of cracking a safe at the Crawford Chemical Works with other thugs when a night watchman discovers the caper. As Eel and the gang make a break for it, O'Brien suffers a gunshot wound and slams into a vat of acid, spilling some onto himself. Proving that there is no honor among thieves, his fellow partners in crime ditch him when he doesn't make it to the getaway car in time.

Staggering through a swamp and up a mountainside to make his escape, O'Brien grows weaker and weaker, ultimately losing consciousness. The next morning he finds himself being administered to by a kindly monk, who explains that he found Eel on the trail and later turned away the police who were searching for him. When queried, the monk continues that he sensed that, if given a chance, O'Brien could become a valuable citizen. Eel explains that he'd been orphaned and pushed around and decided to begin pushing back, but this act of kindness is changing his outlook.

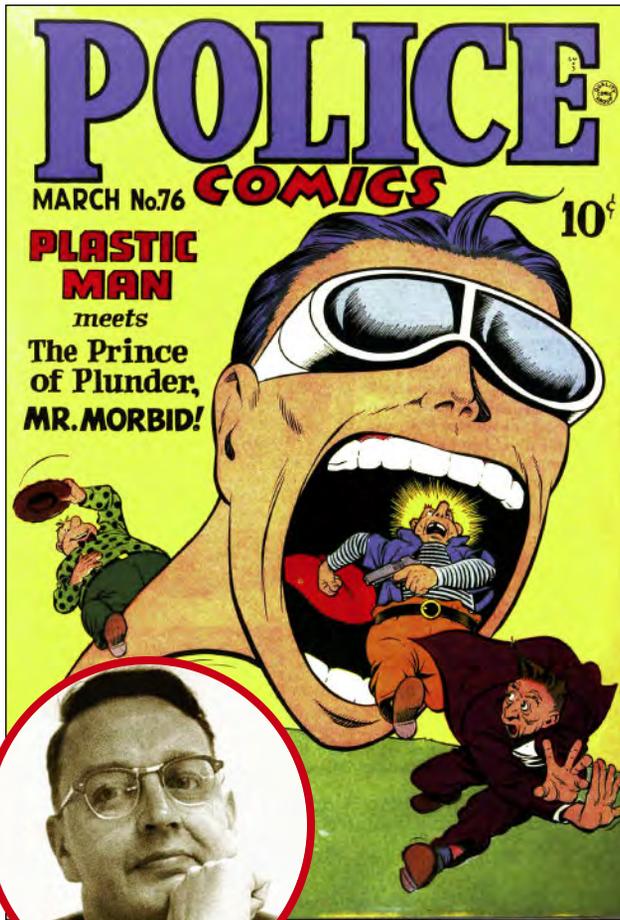
Eel's outlook isn't all that's changed, however, and he soon discovers his body has become incredibly malleable with a nearly limitless ability to stretch. He deduces that the acid entered his bloodstream through the gunshot wound and effected this change. An epiphany strikes O'Brien as he concludes that this new ability would afford him the opportunity to atone and to become a crimefighter.

Getting straight to work, he rejoins his gang for their next caper, but only after getting a "suit of rubber." Biding his time as driver of the getaway car, O'Brien changes into costume, complete with dark-lensed, white-framed goggles, and the thieves soon see a pair of massive hands on elongated arms reaching for them from an upper-level elevator entrance. Using

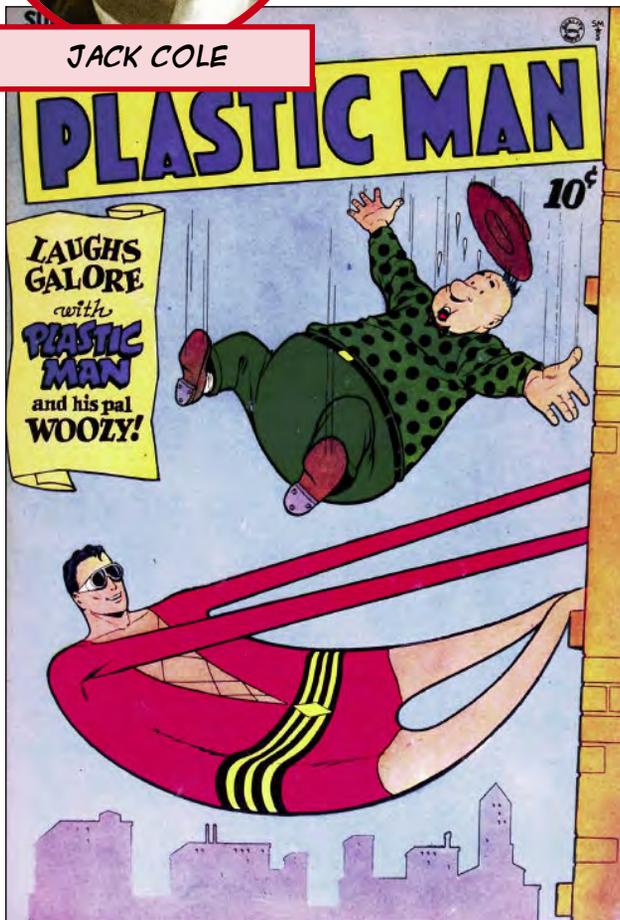
Stretching Out

Detail from the cover of *Plastic Man* #11 (Feb.–Mar. 1976), the Pliable Pretzel's Bronze Age premiere issue. Cover art by Ramona Fradon and Tenny [Teny] Henson.

TM & © DC Comics.



JACK COLE



WOOLZY WINKS

TM & © DC Comics.

covering gunfire they temporarily escape the clutches of Plastic Man, only to be ambushed by a red rug (actually Plastic Man) at the foot of the stairwell. Two members make it to the rooftop and push the pursuing hero over the edge—but, of course, Plastic Man bounces harmlessly against the pavement and swiftly switches back to his Eel persona. The remaining members of the gang pile into the sedan and O'Brian mashes on the accelerator, while his left arm snakes out the window and around the back of the car into the other side, grabbing the henchmen and depositing them at police HQ without the realization that it was their fellow crook acting as "the long arm of the law."

A GOLDEN AGE HIT

Plastic Man's concept was in enough demand by readers that his own self-titled book hit the stands with a first issue cover-dated Summer 1943 while he continued to appear in the pages of *Police Comics*. While *Plastic Man* began as a quarterly, it added up to four new stories per issue to supplement the demand.

Initially, Plas' abilities seemed to be limited primarily to stretching, flattening himself out, and using the gimmick of altering his facial features to become a true master of disguise. It didn't take long, however, for the imagination of Jack Cole to exploit the endless possibilities available. Soon, Plastic Man was emerging from keyholes and under doors and assaulting criminals from their own gun barrels. His shape-shifting began to become more sophisticated and his body would become hoops or drag chutes as the criminal element grew more and more to be walking caricatures.

Plas led a double life for a time, using his Eel O'Brian identity to keep his finger on the pulse of the crime world, but ultimately he retired his alter ego to become a full-time crimefighter. In *Police Comics* #13 (Nov. 1942), he gained a partner: Woozy Winks. In that same issue, Plas' abilities evolved further when he changed himself into a chair to do some surveillance and to get the drop on the bad guys. From there, it was no turning back, and any time you saw a lamp, piece of furniture, or other object in a brilliant red color, odds were that Plastic Man was doing some detective work and would soon spring into action. Cole eventually left his creation, with other writers and artists producing Plas stories but never quite capturing the magic the character's creator had established.

Quality Comics was a going concern for over two decades, but as sales began to decline the company decided to throw in the towel. The last comics to bear the Quality logo had a publication date of Dec. 1956. National (DC) Comics then purchased a number of characters from Quality's inventory and initially continued publication of *Blackhawk*, *G.I. Combat*, *Heart Throbs*, and *Robin Hood Tales*, but strangely enough, Plastic Man was left in limbo.

A SILVER AGE REVIVAL

The first viable stretchable superhero would not lie in wait for long, though, and his first "trial run" was in the pages of the *House of Mystery*, specifically issue #160 (July 1966), in the "Dial H for Hero" lead feature. Robby Reed uses his strange dial to become a random hero and the

Madcap Master
 Cover to *Police Comics* #76 (Mar. 1948), by Plastic Man creator Jack Cole (inset). Cole was a remarkable, yet tragic, figure. We heartily recommend the biographies *Jack Cole and Plastic Man: Forms Stretched to Their Limits* (2001), by Art Spiegelman and Chip Kidd, and *Focus on Jack Cole* (1986), by Ron Goulart. (bottom) Woozy drops in on Plas on Cole's cover to *Plastic Man* #4 (Summer 1946).

TM & © DC Comics.

Neck and Neck

A Ramona Fradon Plas sketch in pencil form, and inked by Bob Smith. Courtesy of Bob Smith.

Plastic Man TM & © DC Comics.

"At first, I thought he was just going to dismiss us and send us on our way, but he started looking closer at our artwork, and he told us that we reminded him of he and Frank Giacoia when they used to go around in the '40s from place to place trying to find work. I don't know exactly what happened. Looking back on our stuff at the time I can't imagine he'd been that impressed, but suddenly he started calling Sol Harrison and Jack Adler and Joe into look at our stuff, and he hired us on the spot, Bob as an inker and me for the production department."

Bob Smith recalls a little of this part of his early career as well: "That was actually my first job at DC. If it's more memorable, that's why. I remember taking the first pages home and it took me at least 24 hours before I could set the first line down on it because it was just so intimidating. My first professional inking job. Inking John's stuff or my stuff was different, but a real penciler? That was scary. [chuckle]"

"A REAWAKENING OF JACK COLE'S SPIRIT"

Artist Ramona Fradon shares with *BACK ISSUE* how she came to be involved in the world of Plastic Man: "I had been doing mysteries for Joe Orlando and he gave me the *Plastic Man* assignment. I guess he thought it would match my drawing style. I had never seen Plastic Man but understood that it was a character they were hoping to revive. The editors were always jumping from one thing to another, trying to catch a new wave.

"While I was sorry not to be doing mysteries any more, I liked Plastic Man from the beginning. I got a lot of old Jack Cole stories to study and felt very comfortable drawing the character. Steve Skeates' scripts were satirical and I enjoyed making fun of the bumbling bureaucrats in the stories.

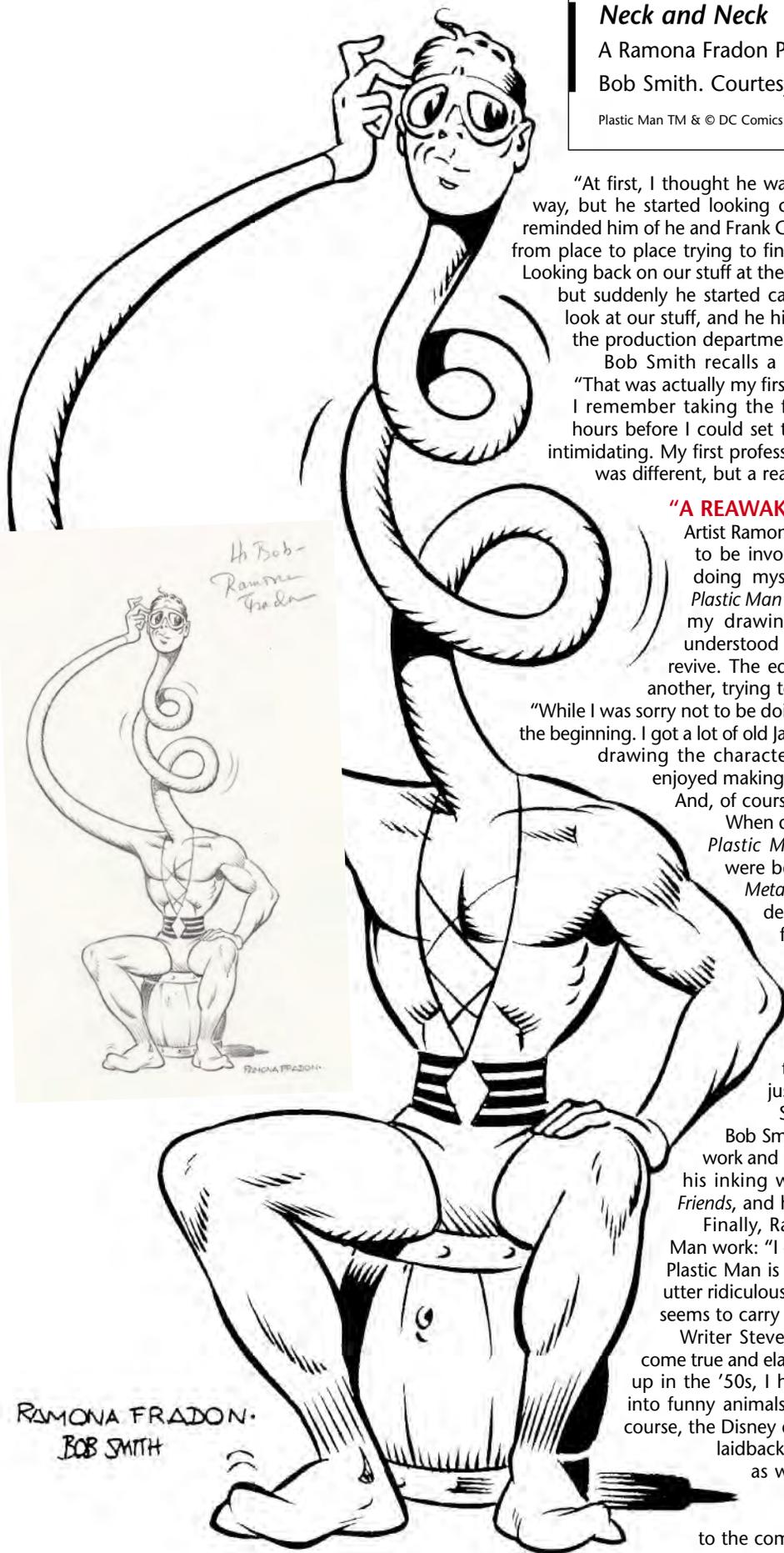
And, of course, Plas was wonderful to draw."

When queried about the possible similarities in drawing *Plastic Man* and *Metamorpho*, Ramona offers: "They were both fun to draw but for different reasons. With *Metamorpho*, it was the interaction of characters I had designed that I enjoyed so much and the wacky flavor of Bob Haney's scripts. It was as if we had pulled out all of the plugs on that feature. It was a true collaboration where we influenced each other profoundly, if I can use that word in relation to comics. Steve and I worked separately on *Plastic Man*, but I enjoyed it for the reasons I mentioned earlier. It was fun to just let loose and draw that wacky character."

She further shares her appreciation for the inking of Bob Smith: "I did know that it was Bob's first professional work and I remember being amazed at how accomplished his inking was. Later on, we worked together on *Super Friends*, and his clean inking gave it a distinctive look."

Finally, Ramona offers her take on what makes Plastic Man work: "I can't speak for the public, but what I like about Plastic Man is how he bumbles into catching crooks and the utter ridiculousness of the things he can do. His very goofiness seems to carry the day."

Writer Steve Skeates saw his new assignment as a dream come true and elaborates about his enthusiasm: "As a kid growing up in the '50s, I had collected comic books, yet I was primarily into funny animals like *Marmaduke Mouse*, *Felix the Cat*, and, of course, the Disney ducks. Yes, that particular genre plus the rather laidback pseudo-horror stuff that ACG was producing, as well as all those early rumblings of satire and parody that *MAD* and its numerous imitators were churning out; I even had a subscription to the comic-book version of *MAD*!



RAMONA FRADON
BOB SMITH

"But, as for superheroes, back then the only one I had any sort of affection for was Jack Cole's fabulous comedic creation, Plastic Man! And, it was Plas himself whom some 20 years later I had just been offered a working relationship with!"

Given his reverence of Cole's work, did Skeates find the *Plastic Man* assignment intimidating? "Pressure? Yes, indeed, you better believe I felt pressure!" he admits. "Whether or not anyone else felt that I had been born to follow in Jack Cole's fantastic footsteps, that is indeed the way I felt! This immediately became a responsibility that was making me nervous as all get-out! I very much wanted this, but could I do it? Could I pull it off? To calm myself down a bit, I quickly decided that for my first Plastic outing I'd employ what I still like to refer to as my mathematical formula for a superhero story, something I developed while writing for the character Lightning up at Tower Comics—or, more specifically, *not* writing for that character—something (that is to say) that I used to extricate myself from a particularly maddening six-month writer's block I was suffering through way back then!

"I used this formula for three Lightning episodes in a row, whereupon I finally felt relaxed enough to get back into stuff that wasn't so dad-blasted formulaic! Of course, for Plas, seeing as the stories here were gonna be approximately twice as long as my Lightning pieces, I had to multiply everything by two—no big deal there! And having something to fall back on plot-wise allowed me to pull out all the stops humor-wise!

"But, back-tracking just a bit here—this second attempt to revive Plastic Man (an earlier attempt, back

in the '60s, had pretty much fallen on its face, lasting only ten issues), along with an attempted revival of *Blackhawk*—both of those were being handled by newly hired editor Gerry Conway and his assistant, someone named Paul Levitz. In any event, the two of them saw the two of us (Ramona and myself) as being the perfect duo to handle the resuscitation of this preposterous pliable protagonist, seeing as, unlike many of the other total egomaniacs who comprised the comic-book industry, we two seemed to actually possess a sense of humor! In my case, though I wanted like anything to cop an Academy of Comic Book Arts statuette for my more 'serious' endeavors, all four of my ACBA writing awards wound up being for my work in humor, more specifically for 'The Poster Plague,' 'The Gourmet,' and just generally for *PLOP!*

"The long history of Plastic Man may have been downright daunting to someone else, but since I had been a fan of this character pretty much from the get-go I already knew (or, at least, thought I knew) how he should be approached, and therefore I hardly had to do any research at all! Furthermore, the mere choice of Ramona and myself vis-a-vis



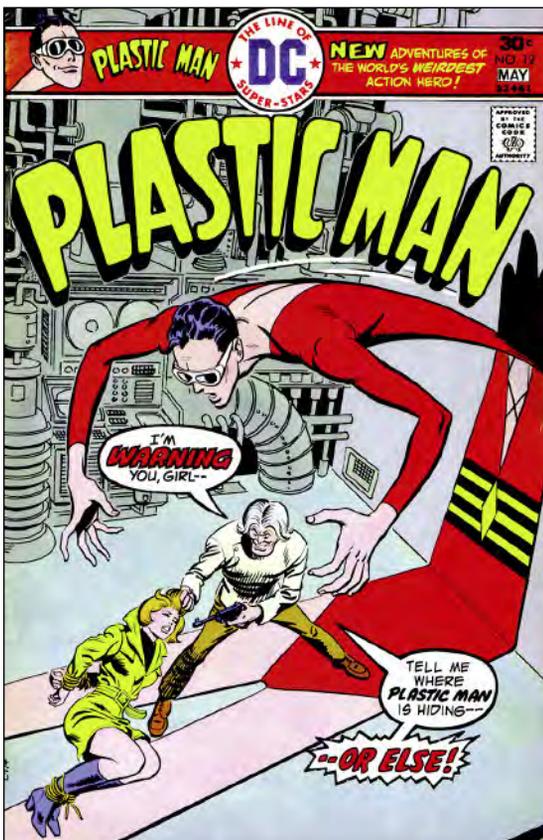
RAMONA FRADON

Courtesy of Luigi Novi.

Peek-A-Boo Plas

(left) José Luis García-López's rendition of the Stretchable Superhero, on the cover of *Plastic Man* #12. (right) That issue's interior page. Note that at this time our hero's nickname was "Plaz" instead of the traditional "Plas."

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THE GOOFY BRONZE AGE SUPERMAN: HIS PALS AND VILLAINS, TOO

by Eddy Zeno



A COUPLE NOTES OF EXPLANATION

Thanks to Superman sporting a lion's head, an ant's head, or Newman's head (Alfred E. Newman, not Seinfeld's neighbor), the word "goofy" has a long-standing tradition in the Man of Steel's history. There were many silly foils, as well—including frequent flyers Mr. Mxyzptlk, Bizarro, and Ambush Bug. Mxy, Jerry Siegel's derby-wearing, World War II comic-relief jokester; Bizarro, borne from Alvin Schwartz's existential, "Beat"-writer mind; and Ambush Bug, Keith Giffen's satirical, postmodernist villain-turned-crimefighter: each fit his original era's zeitgeist and all three continued through, and beyond, the years of *BACK ISSUE's* purview.



JULIUS SCHWARTZ

But instead of rehashing those long-running goobers' appearances, this article instead chooses to explore the tales of characters and situations less likely to be skewered in the future.

One more thing: a Silver Age comic-book story, titled "The Goofy Superman," is certainly an inspiration for the many shenanigans rehashed herein. It appeared in *Superman* #163 (Aug. 1963): Clark winds up in an insane asylum after a loony spree caused by red kryptonite. That form of K itself was a harbinger of some of the looniest ideas ever and was rightfully banned from the Bronze Age. In spite of that, many Bronze-era tales share a crazy, if more nuanced, climate.

That form of K itself was a harbinger of some of the looniest ideas ever and was rightfully banned from the Bronze Age. In spite of that, many Bronze-era tales share a crazy, if more nuanced, climate.

NEW PATHS, NEW NUTTINESS

Scarfig burgers long before the Wally West Flash had to feed his raging metabolism; depriving a Popeye wannabe from his spinach-like sustenance; flying around with Super Perry White; and bursting onto the television set of Johnny Carson ... er, Johnny Nevada: these were hints of the goofier things taking place in the main Superman titles during Julius "Julie" Schwartz's editorial reign. But the quest for chuckles was often only part of what Julie wanted in a story. The same was true for most of his writers, as well. Cary Bates, for instance, liked a good mystery and the occasional science-fiction hook, and he definitely enjoyed throwing some pop-culture references into the mix. Cary also relished a little wackiness.

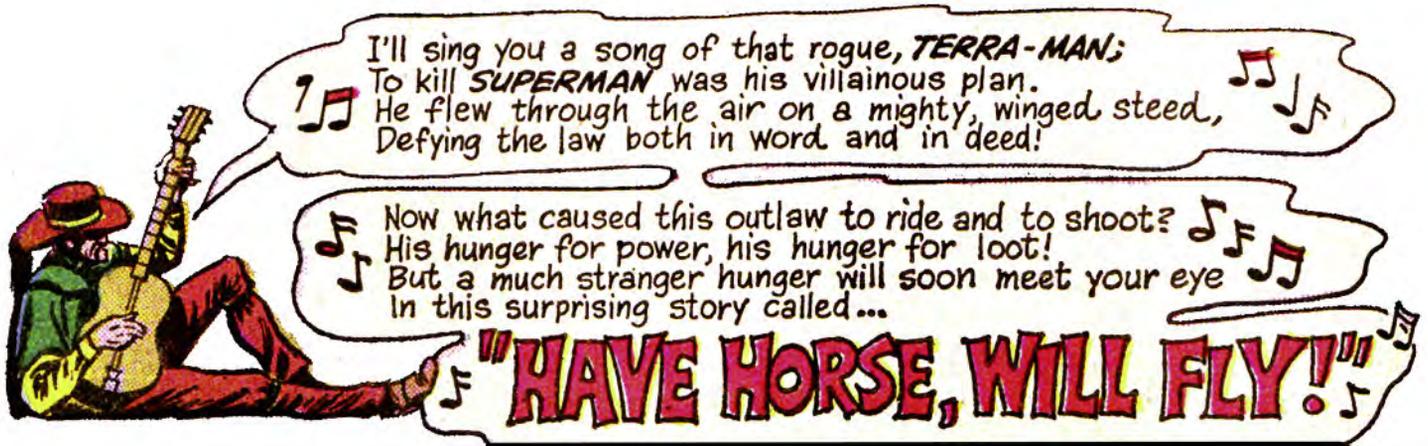
Perhaps the most ludicrous recurring villain created by Bates was Terra-Man, born from the Spaghetti Westerns of 1960s cinema. Possessing 19th-Century-looking gadgets like six-shooters and branding irons



You Want Fries with That?

Superman's burger binge (and a bevy of cute carhops) as seen in this detail from Bob Oksner's cover to *Action Comics* #454 (Dec. 1975).

TM & © DC Comics.



which housed ultra-scientific innards, he was one tough hombre. He was also a goofy desperado out-of-time with his Old West lingo, magical chewin' tobacco, and flying steed. In his first appearance (*Superman* #249, Mar. 1972), the Man of Steel had to defeat him while flying upside-down and spitting a bullet back into T-M's gun barrel. The story even had an appearance by Archie and Edith (named Eydie in her cameo) Bunker from TV's hit show of the time, *All in the Family*. Of his many showings, the gunslinger's finest moment of absurdity occurred in *Action Comics* #469 (Mar. 1977), whose cover pictured Terra-Man riding a certain costumed hero while super bronco-

busting. Terra-Man was reincarnated with jetpacks and armor in the Modern Age. Now, that's less fun!

In an October 1980 interview that appeared in *Comics Feature* #8 (New Media Publishing), Bates related the need for humor to highlight the differences between Superman and his alter ego: "I remember the Clark/Superman distinction started to be concentrated on again as early as 1973 or 1974. We decided to pay more attention to it. We brought in Steve Lombard to focus attention on Clark's klutziness..."

Recurring character Lombard was a retired NFL quarterback-turned-sportscaster. Always the popular jock, this Metropolis flirt was modeled after "Broadway Joe" Namath. Steve strived to show he was the bigger man via the practical jokes he played on news co-anchor Clark Kent.



CARY BATES

SUPER-CIGARS AND PUFFS OF PERIL

When conniving an offbeat focus, writer Elliot S! Maggin used humorous elements for scene-stealing plot drivers. For instance, his super-cigars exploded onto the scene twice as cover props. The first time was in *Action Comics* #436 (June 1974). In "The Super-Cigars of Perry White," Superman's *Daily Planet* boss was gifted special smokes by mutants. And while one of Marvel Comics' X-Men, Wolverine, enjoyed a good cigar as much as anyone, this was no crossover event between companies. Instead, Perry's mutant benefactors were four-thumbed kids from outer space. Switching their power-granting cheroots for the ones sitting in his office, when White inhaled, he could have any ability he wished. Having no idea why he was suddenly super but taking it all in stride, Perry was down to one final stogie by the time he discovered the source of his power. So he locked it in his safe for some future emergency.

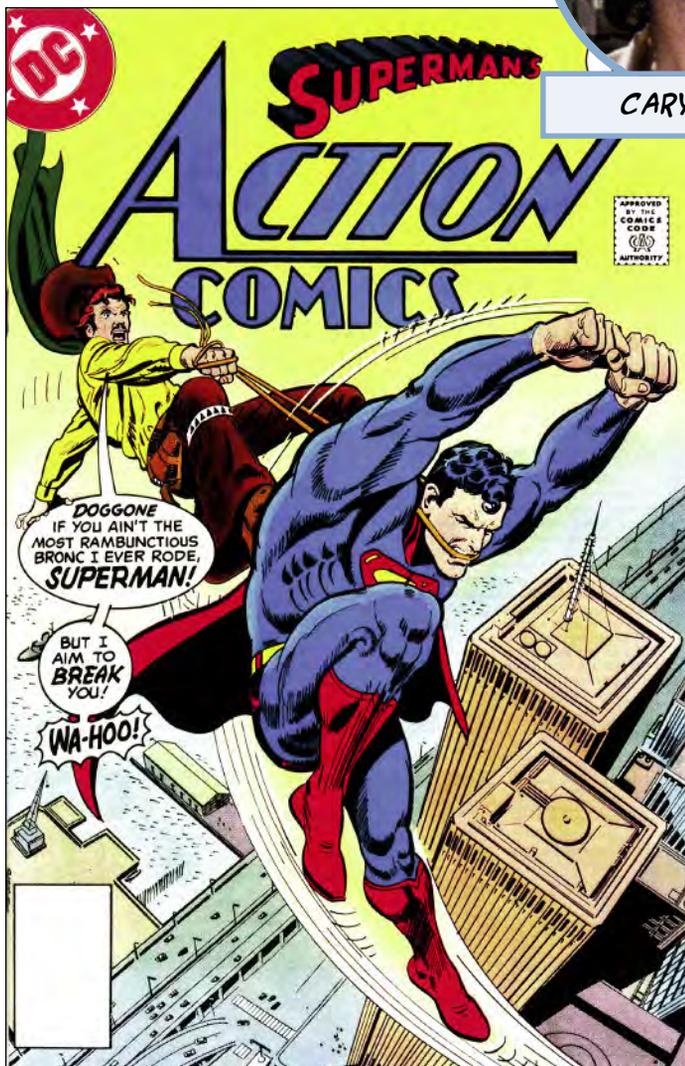
A sequel of sorts occurred eight years later, in *Superman* #376 (Oct. 1982). Maggin's writer-caused crisis began when a so-called supervillain shot an electrical discharge of tri-oxygen molecules from his hand into Perry White's chest. The critically wounded *Daily Planet* editor was lying in a Metro General infirmary bed till the last of his super-smokes restored his vim and vigor. If flying skyward, hospital gown flapping in the wind, wasn't embarrassing enough, the hyper-baddie that Perry and Superman defeated was named ... Ozone-Master. Hey, at least it was ozone and not methane gas emanating from the guy's fingertips.

Buckin' Bronco of Steel

(top) And y'all thought that the Vigilante was DC's only singing cowboy! Terra-Man carries a tune in this detail from the splash page of *Superman* #250 (Apr. 1972).

(left) José Luis García-López's absurd (but nicely drawn) cover to *Action* #469 (Mar. 1977).

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FUN and GAMES

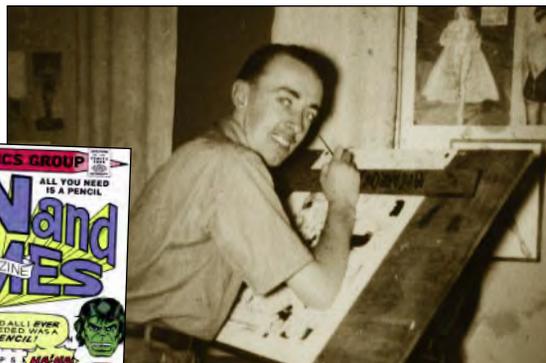
by Jarrod Buttery

Marvel's Puzzle-Master

Owen McCarron (1929–2005), the man behind *Marvel Fun and Games Magazine*.

Photos courtesy of John Bell, from his book *Invaders from the North*, and an anonymous member of the McCarron family.

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 Y T H E V M A R V E L O U S J
 C S P J B D P E Q A P R E C S
 D C R P V S E D K C Z L S P V
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 O W E N J M C C A R R O N G C
 P R V E O C U B S R A F T E C

Marvel's comic-sized Fun and Games Magazine premiered with a cover date of September 1979. Issue #1 advertised "Word Games, Puzzles, Riddles, Surprises" and proclaimed, "All you need is a pencil." The comic was packed with puzzles—all based on Marvel characters. There were mazes, spot-the-difference tests, word finds, trivia questions, coded messages, character identifications, and more—although for this first issue, the only riddle was, "Why does Iron Man want to be on Broadway?" (He thinks he can win a Tony Award.)

The first issue naturally featured heavyweights like Spider-Man, Iron Man, Dr. Strange, Storm, and the Thing, but lesser-known characters were also featured prominently. We had to navigate a maze through Stingray's wings, decipher character names partially rubbed out by the Living Eraser, and match secret identities to Torpedo, Blackout, and Thunderbolt, among others. The Hulk asked us to circle the issue number (multiple choice) in which listed characters—such as Jarella, Wendigo, Captain Omen, and Klaatu—made their debut. Fortunately, all the answers were provided at the back of the book.

A much-wrinkled Stan Lee greeted us on the first interior page—wrinkled because his face had been turned into a maze. Underneath, we were told that "Our talented titan of trickery, good ol' Owen McCarron, has created some of the most dynamite brainteasers you've ever tackled—so what are you waiting for? Grab yourself a pencil and go! You're gonna flip over every far-out page!" Indeed, the only credits for the comic were: "Written, drawn, and edited by Owen 'Puzzle-Master' McCarron."

THE PUZZLE-MASTER

Owen McCarron was born in 1929 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Straight out of school he entered the newspaper industry, where he worked for many years, and which allowed him to pursue his love of

comics and drawing. Owen passed away at home on June 27, 2005, at age 76.

Providing an insight into his early life, and the profound effect that supportive educators can have on young minds, Owen McCarron bid farewell to his favorite teacher in *The Chronicle-Herald* newspaper on January 31st, 1995: "On January 16, Eileen Burns passed away. She had been one of my many teachers in high school—with a major difference. While she was a great teacher, I certainly wasn't much of a student. I was killing time and I lived to draw. The two of us would be drawn together because of this.

"She ran the school library—she WAS the school library. It was her passion. Because she was aware of my love of drawing, she invited me to do a number of posters for her library to promote reading. She liked what I did and rewarded me with a book entitled *Comics and Their Creators*. This was back in 1946. The book has never left my sight. It was my bible—my inspiration. One day, if only my name might be in such a book.

"As fate would have it, that summer I left school and was lucky enough to land a high-paying job (\$15 per week) in the display advertising department of *The Halifax Herald Limited*. The die was cast." (*The Herald* later merged with *The Chronicle*, becoming *The Chronicle-Herald*.)

"In 1978, I thought I would call Miss Burns. I said to her, 'I had to call you. You are always in my thoughts. I know you won't remember me. My name is Owen McCarron.' But she did remember; she had seen a lot of my work over the years and was very proud of me. We talked for a half-hour. She wanted to know everything; I told her everything.

"In her obituary, dozens of things were outlined that were close to her heart, and many of her achievements, too. One achievement was absent: 'She inspired Owen McCarron to do what he was born to do.' Goodbye, Miss Burns."

COMIC BOOK WORLD

Alter Ego #36 (May 2004) featured the fascinating article, "The Golden Age of Canadian Comic Books and Its Aftermath." Therein, John Bell described the rise and fall of the 1940s–1950s Canadian comic industry. From the late 1950s through the '60s, the only original Canadian comic books were giveaways, often commissioned by corporations and government agencies. Both Ganes Productions and Comic Book World produced dozens of these educational giveaways.

Bell stated: "Comic Book World was the brainchild of Owen McCarron. Unlike Ganes' comic books, which were often smaller than regular comics and generally devoid of word balloons, McCarron's giveaways more closely resembled conventional newsstand comics. Comic Book World produced mostly full-color comics that were distinguished by bold, engaging artwork and reasonably solid storylines. This professionalism would eventually bring McCarron to the attention of Marvel Comics and Whitman Publishing in the US."

John Bell is the author of the books *Canuck Comics: A Guide to Comic Books Published in Canada* (Matrix Books, 1986) and *Invaders from the North: How Canada Conquered the Comic Book Universe* (Dundurn Press, 2006). He spoke with McCarron a few times on the phone, and met him once, and kindly shared his recollections with *BACK ISSUE*: "Owen worked for more than 30 years in the advertising department of Halifax's leading newspaper, *The Chronicle-Herald*, where he developed considerable expertise in the area of production, including design, layout, and coloring techniques.

"In 1965, McCarron, together with a friend, the writer Robin Edmiston, launched a studio, Comic Page Features (later renamed Comic Book World), that was designed to produce promotional and educational materials aimed primarily at children. One of their first publications was a giveaway comic for the Australian-Canadian magician, Reveen. Dozens of giveaways for businesses and various levels of government soon followed. In addition to more than 30 comics, they produced numerous coloring books and fun books, as well as newspaper supplements that combined puzzles, games, comics, and coloring pages."

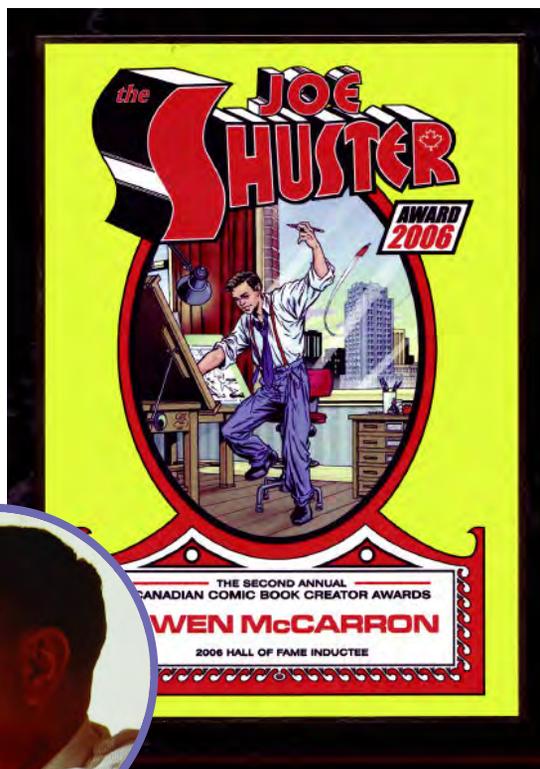
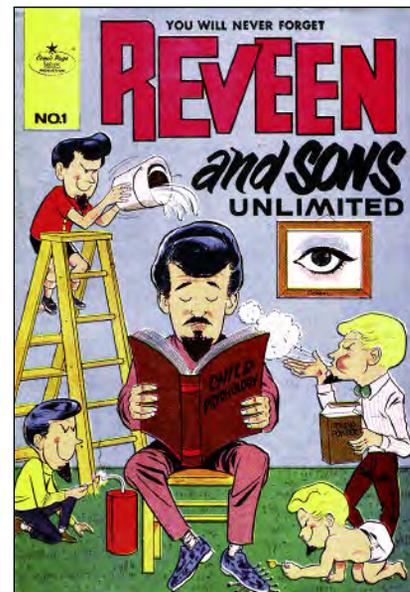
Robin Edmiston elaborates: "Owen McCarron and I worked together at *The Halifax Herald Ltd.* I joined the firm in 1953. Besides our work in the advertising department, we collaborated (on our own time) on a number of comic books—me writing and roughing out the pages, Owen doing the art and production—for clients such as KFC, Gulf Oil, Ski-Doo, and Wayne and Shuster. Owen retired from *The Herald* in 1978 and I in 1991."



OWEN McCARRON

MIGHTY MARVEL SUPERHERO FUN BOOKS

With his dual loves of comic books and entertainment for children, McCarron had big plans. In 1975, he travelled to New York to sell his idea to Stan Lee. The meeting was obviously a success. 1976 saw the publication of the first black-and-white *Mighty Marvel Superheroes Fun Book*—written and illustrated by Owen McCarron. Stan Lee's preface stated: "On each of the following pages you'll find Marvel's greatest costumed characters, the most famous superheroes of all, waiting to help you sharpen your wits with some of the cleverest puzzles, riddles, and games you've ever seen!"



Stan also wrote: "I just can't sign off without first thanking our titanically talented Canadian cousin, Owen McCarron, for the brilliant job

he did in formulating and illustrating the material for this book. His clever concepts and delightful drawings make me wish I were a kid again."

The first *Fun Book* was filled with mazes, word games, riddles, and puzzles; a Rhyming Romp with Dr. Doom (how many words can you rhyme with DOOM?); and the eyebrow-raising "Change Stan Lee to Lady Sif" (in 7 easy steps)! *Fun Book* #2 followed in 1977, and #3 in 1978. In a *Chronicle-Herald* article from September 3, 1977, McCarron explained, "The *Fun Books* are written, designed, and illustrated by me. I have to produce some kind of concept for a puzzle page, research it through back-issues of their magazines to see if it is workable,

You Probably Missed These Two...

(top left) Cover of Comic Book World's *Auntie Litter*, with art by Robin Edmiston and Owen McCarron. (top right) McCarron's *Reveen and Sons Unlimited* comic book. Who's this magic man, you ask? Jarrod Buttery provides this info: "Peter Reveen was born in South Australia in 1935. In 1961, he traveled to Canada, soon finding fame as an illusionist and stage hypnotist. His website proudly proclaims: 'He was immortalized in a 1960s comic book, *Reveen & Sons Unlimited*.'" (bottom) McCarron's 2006 Joe Shuster Award.

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BEYOND Capes!

It all started in Eclipse Comics' *Eclipse, the Magazine* #1 (May 1981) ... a 19-page black-and-white story entitled "The Slab" ... written by Steve Englehart, drawn and inked by Marshall Rogers, and lettered by Tom Orzechowski. That's how the readers were first introduced to the characters, but the story actually started before that.

Steve Englehart gives us the origin:

"Well, let's see ... I wrote a story for *DC Comics Presents* starring Superman and the Creeper. I had written one before, and this was a new one. But before I turned it into Julie Schwartz, a good editor, I discovered that the editor of another title had offered me more money than he was supposed to, and management wouldn't come through even though I'd done the job, so I took all my stories and walked.

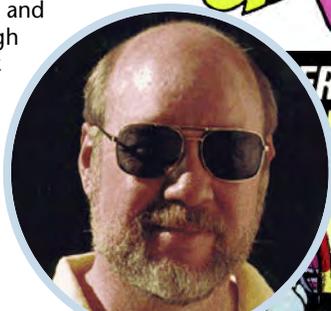
"I had no plan—What was I going to do with DC-specific stories if I didn't sell them to DC?—but that very afternoon, Jan and Dean Mullaney bought them for the price DC had promised to start their new [Eclipse] magazine line.

"So Marshall Rogers, who was going to draw the Superman/Creeper story, sat down and riffed on it. He turned Superman into a little girl and the Creeper into the Foozle, and I rewrote dialogue as needed. Marshall later spun the Foozle into his own series, which he wrote himself, and since it was pretty much his creation, I renounced my rights to him ... er, it..." (Excerpt from www.steveenglehart.com, reprinted with permission.)

Steve further elaborates for *BACK ISSUE*:

"Well, I'd been out of the country when [Marshall] and Terry [Austin] drew the Batman [in *Detective Comics*], and I returned from Europe to California, while Marshall was in New York, so I'd only known him briefly at this time. But I was in New York for some reason when I turned down DC's offer to pay me less than they'd agreed to for the scripts I'd written, so I called Marshall to tell him what DC had done (DC being the source of our connection, obviously). And I'm pretty sure he said something like, 'I know the Mullaney brothers and Eclipse. Let's see if they want to buy them and I'll draw them.' I met up with him and we went to the Mullaney's apartment, where they agreed on the spot to buy the scripts, the same day DC tried its bait and switch.

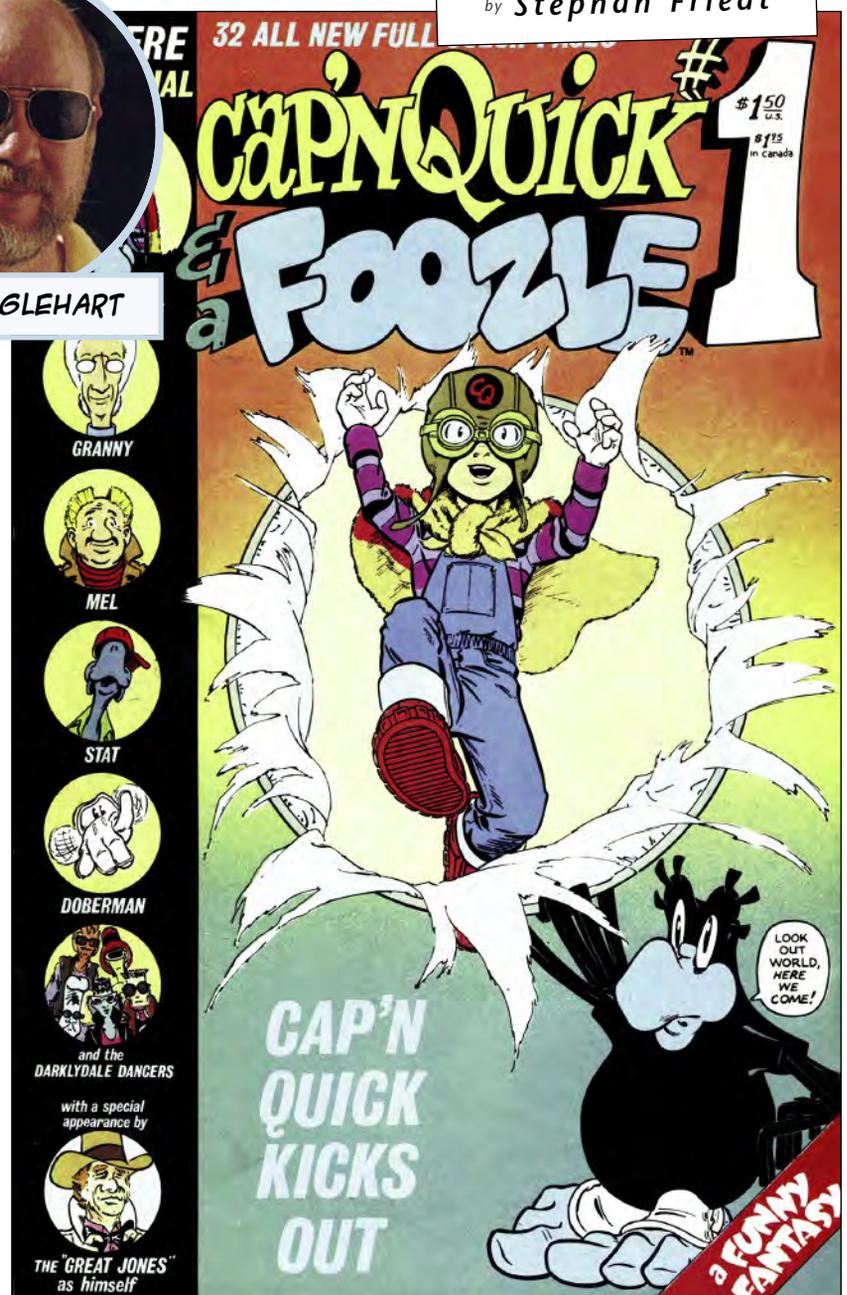
"Since the scripts involved DC characters, they had to be reworked. I was more committed to [our] mystic character (Madame Xanadu, who became Scorpio Rose) than the Superman/Creeper one-shot, so I reworked Rose, while I gave the team-up script to Marshall and told him to do whatever he wanted with



STEVE ENGLEHART

Marshall Rogers, CAP'N QUICK, & a FOOZLE™

by Stephan Friedt



"A Funny Fantasy"

Cover to Marshall Rogers' *Cap'n Quick and a Foozle* #1 (July 1984), from Eclipse Comics. All scans in the article are courtesy of Stephan Friedt.

© Marshall Rogers Estate.

HEMBECK



Best of the Bronze Age Cover and Art Gallery

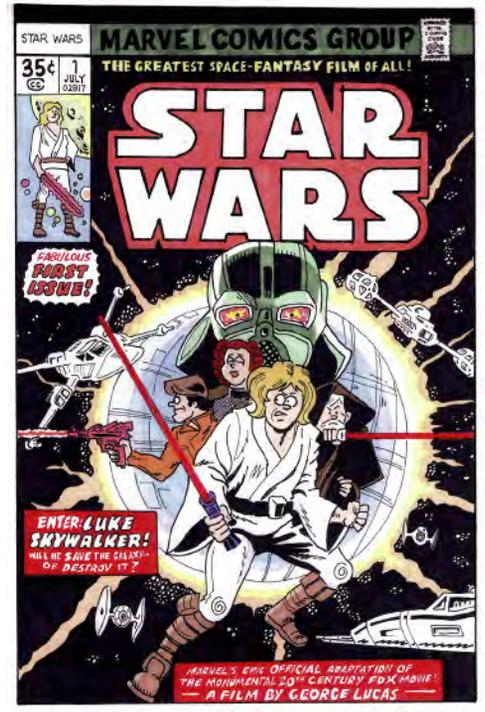
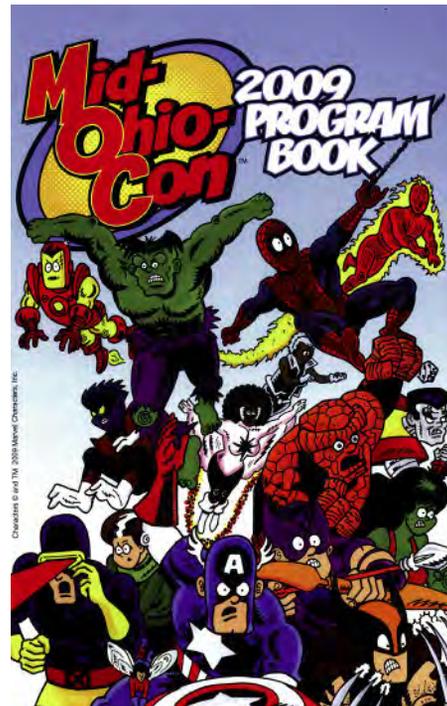
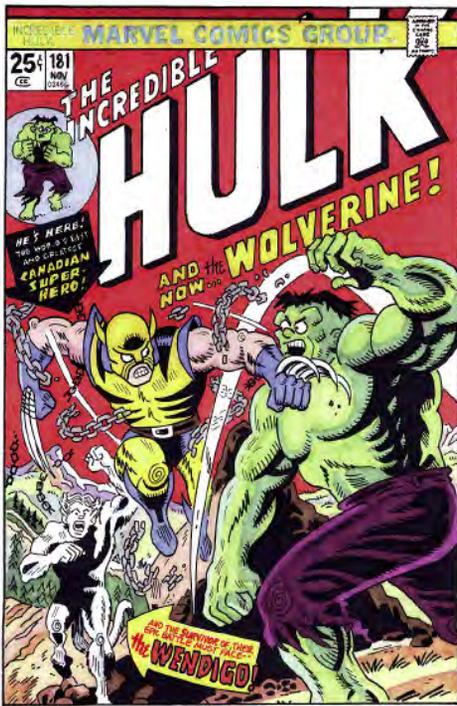
by Fred Hembeck

X-MEN #141 (Jan. 1981)
after John Byrne and Terry Austin

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. Art © Fred Hembeck.

It's ALWAYS been my policy to credit the original artists [for my cover recreations] at the bottom of the page after my signature, but for a while there, for reasons I no longer recall, I thought it a good idea to photocopy 'em BEFORE I signed 'em. Which is why some have signatures, but a lot don't. [But, for the record, we've cited *all* of the original covers' artists—and the issues' cover dates, too.—*ed.*] The Warlock cover was a gift to Jim Starlin on the occasion of his 50th birthday, which would explain the note at the bottom. And on a few of the covers—mostly in the UPC box—you'll find Cartoon Fred. He ONLY appears on these covers when my [art commission] patrons explicitly request him. And as far the UPC box goes, I give folks a choice, with my preferred one being none whatsoever. You'll see a few Spidey heads and even a few with the set of lines mimicked.

— Fred Hembeck



INCREDIBLE HULK #181 (Nov. 1974)
after Herb Trimpe and John Romita, Sr.
MARVEL SUPER HEROES SECRET WARS #1 (May 1984)
after Mike Zeck and John Beatty
 TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. Art © Fred Hembeck.

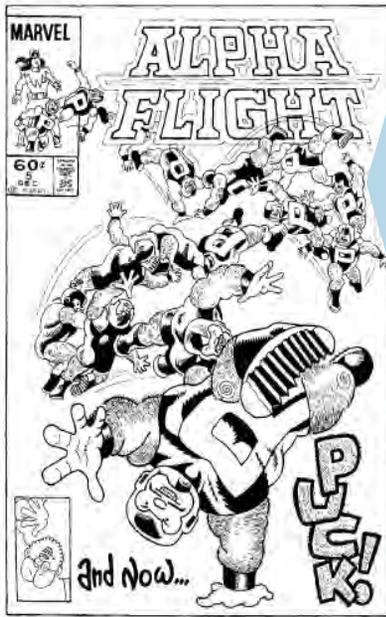
STAR WARS #1 (July 1977)
after Howard Chaykin and Tom Palmer
 TM & © Lucasfilm, Ltd. Art © Fred Hembeck.



THE FLASH'S ROGUES' GALLERY
Hembeck 2008 original, courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions.
 TM & © DC Comics.
 Art © Fred Hembeck.



ALPHA FLIGHT #1 (Aug. 1983)
after John Byrne and Terry Austin
ALPHA FLIGHT #5 (Dec. 1983)
after John Byrne
TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.
Art © Fred Hembeck.



AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #121 (June 1973)
after John Romita, Sr.
TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.
Art © Fred Hembeck.



AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #122 (July 1973)
after John Romita, Sr.
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #129 (Feb. 1974)
after Gil Kane and John Romita, Sr.
ASTONISHING TALES #25 (Aug. 1974)
after Rick Buckler and Klaus Janson
TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.
Art © Fred Hembeck.



AVENGERS #97 (Mar. 1972)
after Gil Kane and Bill Everett
TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.
Art © Fred Hembeck.

AVENGERS #100 (June 1972)
after Barry Windsor-Smith
AVENGERS #181 (Mar. 1979)
after George Pérez and Terry Austin
TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.
Art © Fred Hembeck.



BEING normal

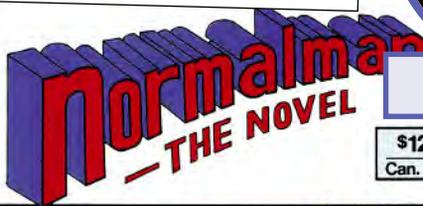
An interview with Jim Valentino

by **Michael Eury**
conducted by email in January 2014



JIM VALENTINO

Photo by Luigi Novi.



\$1295
Can. \$1895



In late 1983, a really funny superhero parody from a brand-new creative talent premiered as a backup in a couple issues of Dave Sim's *Cerebus the Aardvark* (which we covered two issues ago)—not necessarily as much of a stretch for the long-running indie title as you might think since *Cerebus* itself, in its earliest days, was known for its take-offs of sword-and-sorcery and superhero comics (with characters like Red Sophia and Wolveroach). It wasn't long before this backup—**Jim Valentino's normalman** (yes, with lower-case "n")—took on a life of its own, spinning off into its own series, with *normalman* #1 being released in January 1984 (the same month the creator's first son, Aaron Valentino, was born).

normalman's titular star was a CPA's son who was rocketed from the planet Arnold before it exploded ... only it didn't explode, ticking off the now-childless Mom in a big way. Two decades pass and the alien, now grown, lands on a world where his abilities make him unique among its populace—although in an inspired twist on Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's *Superman* origin, Valentino's *normalman* is the only person on his new world—Levram (read it backwards, *Zatanna*)—who does not have superpowers.

normalman ran for 12 issues plus a 3-D annual in 1984 and 1985, and the hero resurfaced a few other times for team-ups and specials. The series wasn't merely a parody of comics and pop culture—it provided a narrative that included struggles for identity and love. "norm" was accompanied by a large and fluid cast including mainstays *Captain Everything*, *Sophisticated Lady*, the *Ultra-Conservative*, and *Sgt. Fluffy*, *Agent of S.C.H.M.U.C.K.* And it had a lot of running gags (the *Legion of Superfluous Heroes'* never-ending roll call, for example). It was a delightful romp from a writer/artist who would later achieve acclaim on *Marvel's Guardians of the Galaxy* and his own creation, *Image's ShadowHawk*, and it was collected in 2007 in the meaty (436 pages!) *Image/Shadowline* trade paperback, *The Complete normalman*.

Jim Valentino was kind enough to clear away the cobwebs of 30 years of living and producing funnybooks to revisit his breakthrough series with *BACK ISSUE* and shed light on questions that have plagued readers for decades—like, "What does S.C.H.M.U.C.K. stand for??"

— Michael Eury

MICHAEL EURY: *What's the origin of normalman, the concept? How and when did you come up with the idea?*

JIM VALENTINO: There was this guy I knew in San Diego named David Clark. David was a frequent collaborator of John Pound's, their most infamous creation being a funny-animal character named Flip, the Bird (gotta love that name!). At any rate, David told me of this idea he had for a series of vignettes called "Tales of the Innocent Bystander." This series would be about a nebbish of a guy who was always in the wrong place at the wrong time.

When Deni asked if I had any ideas for a series I recalled David's idea and asked him if I could appropriate it. I placed it in a world full of super-beings and named it after the part of San Diego I used to live in, Normal Heights.

EURY: *Were you published before your first normalman story?*

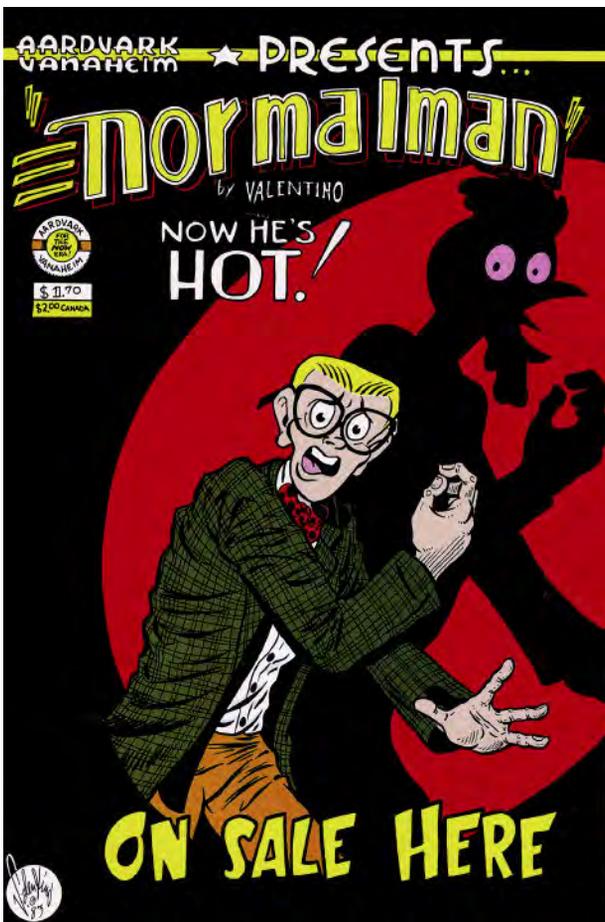
VALENTINO: Yes, I'd been published for a few years—both self-published in what's now called small press, then called mini or new-wave comix, some undergrounds, and various and sundry other places. I'd also been published in *Cerebus* prior to it.

EURY: *How did you hook up with the folks at Aardvark-Vanaheim, normalman's original publisher? Describe how you sold A-V on your series.*

The normalman Family

Our harried hero and his supporting cast, as seen on the Jim Valentino cover to Slave Labor Graphics' 1987 *normalman - The Novel*, the first collection, featuring everything up to the *normalman Annual*.

normalman TM & © Jim Valentino.



VALENTINO: Dave and Deni Sim were on a tour of the US in 1983. One of their stops was Berkeley, where they met up with Clay Geerdes, among many other folks. Clay was a champion of underground and small-press comics, having published a bunch of them himself. He turned them on to his books and pointed out several creators he thought they might be interested in. At the same time, he urged me to send them a piece I'd done about the assassination of John Lennon and what he and the Beatles had meant to me growing up, called "In My Life." As it turned out, Dave marked the story for Deni and told her to get in touch with me. He put it on her desk the same morning that an envelope arrived from me with photocopies of the story. They published it in *Cerebus* #50.

In a phone conversation, Deni said that if I ever had an idea for a series I should think about publishing it through them. She also told me that Dave was a little concerned that I might get them into trouble with customs because my work at the time was rather salacious. So, I tried to think of the most commercial and safest thing I could do, and that's when I remembered the conversation with David Clark and started filing up notebooks with mock covers and notes for this normalman concept.

EURY: *The first normalman story was a four-page backup in Cerebus #56 (Nov. 1983). Dave Sim's Cerebus was a hot and prestigious indie title then—that prime spot must've added some jitters to a newbie's series launch...*

VALENTINO: Well, I knew going in that the two backup stories were just a prelude to the series and, as noted, I had already been published in *Cerebus*. It's hard to remember how I was feeling 30 years ago, but my guess would be a mixture of cockiness that I could do this and abject terror that I'd screw it up ... knowing me, the latter was probably more prevalent.

EURY: *Let's talk about normalman's origin: norm is a baby rocketed from the planet Arnold to the planet Levram. It doesn't take a mirror to help identify where the name "Levram" comes from, but what about "Arnold"?*

VALENTINO: My first thought was to name the planet after an element, because Krypton is an element, so I was thinking Argon, Neon, something like that. But then I thought that was too obvious, so I figured why not call it the stupidest name for a planet I could think of, so I called it Arnold.

EURY: *One of the joys of reading normalman is its duality: You've stated that it started as a "fan's view into the comics industry," but with each passing story its narrative expanded, with significant character growth and character arcs. Was that a byproduct of your growth as a creator during your production of normalman, or from the get-go, did you imagine this as something more than just a parody?*

VALENTINO: I always saw it as a coming-of-age story within a parody. I saw it as a romance story—how love could not only save him, but make him a



Poster Child

(left) Says Jim Valentino of this image, "This was the piece (based on *Pacific Presents* #2 by Dave Stevens) that convinced Deni Loubert Sim to publish the series. It was used as the promotional poster for the series, prior to the release of issue #1 and as the back cover for issue #12." Above, it's seen in layout form. (center) Valentino inked by half of the "Swanderson" team of Bronze Age Superman fame, Murphy Anderson. This was the back cover of *normalman* #10. (inset) Captain Everything's costume inspiration.

normalman TM & © Jim Valentino. Mighty Mouse TM & © CBS/Paramount Home Entertainment.

CIRCUITS AND SORCERY

FlashBack!

THE HONEST-TO-GOODNESS STORY OF

BLUE DEVIL



by Daniel DeAngelo

When Comics Were Fun

The 1984 poster promoting the lighthearted new DC series, *Blue Devil*. Art by Paris Cullins and Gary Martin.

TM and © DC Comics.

We've made comics fun again!
The new DC. There's no stopping us now!



In 1984, DC Comics boasted, "We've Made Comics Fun Again!" in advertising for a new title called *Blue Devil*, created by the writing team of Gary Cohn and Dan Mishkin, along with artist Paris Cullins. Stuntman and special-effects artist Daniel Cassidy creates a special costume and trident for a horror movie called "Blue Devil." Both have a variety of special effects built into them, and the costume's exo-skeleton increases Dan's strength and agility to superhuman levels.

BD debuted in a 16-page preview in *Fury of Firestorm* #24 (June 1984), in which the Flash's old foe, the Trickster—himself a former stuntman and associate of Dan Cassidy—reads about the costume and decides to steal it. The Trickster's appearance in the preview had one significant impact on our hero: "I did imagine [BD] a darker blue and was surprised when the preview came out," Cohn says. "I've always assumed he got colored that way because Trickster's costume already had dark blue."

In the first issue (June 1984), producer Marla Bloom takes her crew—including has-been actor Wayne Tarrant, actress Sharon Scott, cinematographer Norm Paxton, and Marla's young nephew, Edward "Gopher" Bloomberg—to the Caribbean island called Ile du Diable ("The Devil's Island") for filming. While exploring an ancient temple, Sharon finds a key and inadvertently uses it to open a doorway, releasing a demon called Nebiros from his

imprisonment in another dimension. When Nebiros tries to eat Sharon, Cassidy dons the Blue Devil costume and attempts to save her, but Nebiros zaps him with a mystic blast. BD is stunned but soon recovers and manages to force Nebiros back through the doorway in the temple with his trident. Later, a weary Cassidy returns to his trailer, only to discover that he cannot remove his costume. He is now and forever after a ... Blue Devil!



DAN MISHKIN

Photo by Luigi Novi.

DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

Before they became writers, Cohn and Mishkin had been friends since eighth grade. "To say that Gary and I shared a lot of the same interests would be an understatement," Mishkin recalls. "Comics and science fiction were a big part of the connection, and we both had fertile imaginations. Gary was the one who was bold enough to say, however, that he was going to make a career of writing. I didn't have the self-confidence to make a declaration like that, but once he did, I could entertain the possibility." Despite the fact that Cohn was in New York while Mishkin lived in Michigan, the two were able to maintain a steady partnership. "Sometimes, one person would be mostly plotting and one person mostly dialoguing," Mishkin says. "It's all over the map." The duo went on to co-create *Amethyst*, but they started out writing short stories for DC's mystery comics such as *House of Mystery*, which led editor Dave

THE CONCEPT:

A film crew works on location on the Caribbean island Ile du Diable, there under the direction of Marla Bloom, foremost among the new breed of whiz-kid filmmakers specializing in movies that are bizarre, fantastic, horrific and wonderous.

Among the ruins of a temple whose purpose, origins and makers have been lost to antiquity, Marla and her people are creating THE BLUE DEVIL, a horror-fantasy based on legends surrounding the island and its time-lost edifice.

One of Marla's crew is Dan Cassidy, at twenty-five another prodigy. Cassidy is responsible for the film's stunts and special effects. Clad in his mechanical BLUE DEVIL costume--designed to contain and display a host of "demonic" powers and abilities--Cassidy is the real star of the film.

One afternoon, as an action sequence is filmed, Sharon Scott, the film's heroine, and Wayne Tarrant, the romantic lead, wander off to explore the ruins. Within the temple they find a strangely carved block that correlates to a niche in the wall. Against Wayne's protests, Sharon places the carving in the indentation...and unleashes true horror!

For the legends are real, and now, after six thousand years, the key that opens a gateway between this world and another dimension, a weird and terrible alien realm, has been used. Now the lord of that realm, Nebiros, an awesome demon, is free once again to ravage the Earth!



A Winning Proposal

Sample copy and images from the Mishkin/Cohn/Cullins Blue Devil proposal.

Blue Devil TM & © DC Comics.



Manak to suggest they try developing something in *The Unexpected* for artist Steve Ditko. "In a long-distance marathon phone call, we talked about everything we loved about Marvel Comics in the mid-'60s," Cohn says, "and gradually a character emerged who was part Ben Grimm/Thing, part Peter Parker/Spider-Man, part Tony Stark/Iron Man ... with some Green Goblin thrown in. Dan had gone to school in North Carolina for a bit ... and so Blue seemed to naturally fit with Devil for him. Hence ... Blue Devil."

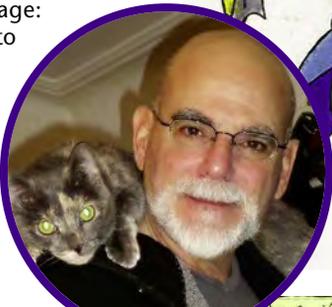
However, Ditko was not interested in Blue Devil. "Ditko felt it wasn't his kinda thing," says Cohn, "which absolutely baffled us." Having been conceived for a horror/mystery comic, BD was originally intended to be a darker character. The series proposal described Dan as having "a brooding understanding of the grimmer side of life" and even mentions his attempting to commit *suicide* after becoming trapped in the costume! "I'd say we did have more of a sense of Dan Cassidy as a brooding character trapped in a monstrous body," Mishkin recalls. "But give huge credit to [DC president] Jenette Kahn, who said that the bouncy fun part and Cassidy's ongoing skepticism about what superpowered people took for granted were what made the concept tick. In fact, we took pages out of the original version of the first issue, reshuffled some of what remained, and added new scenes to reflect Jenette's insight and come up with the *Blue Devil* #1 that you know." Cohn adds, "We probably were wavering about how much 'fun' the series was going to have and if there was going to be a 'grim' element. When Paris Cullins came aboard, there was no doubt ... so *BD's* direction was pretty much set from there."

Cullins' own direction "was kind of set" from an early age: "My mom was interested in comics and used to read them to me all the time. I made up my mind around the third grade to be a comic-book artist, and the idea never left my mind." Cullins had been submitting artwork to DC for a while before getting a call from executive editor Dick Giordano. "He asked me to come in," Cullins recalls, "and he handed me a *House of Mystery* story. From [there] I went to the 'GL Corps' backup stories in *Green Lantern*, so I was mostly doing short filler stories. One day, he said, 'Ditko was supposed to do this, but he turned it down, and I think this would be good for you.' Cullins' approach to BD was, "I couldn't get the idea that this guy stuck in a costume was an *unhappy* guy. Spider-Man always used to make quips, so I thought why couldn't this guy have *fun* fighting monsters? That was how I interpreted it." Cullins cites BD as "one of my favorites. I always liked characters with a lot of kinetic energy—a lot of movement—like Captain America or Spider-Man."

The first drawing of Blue Devil actually came from Cohn, which Cullins referred to when redesigning the character. "I really didn't change much from Gary's original design," Cullins notes, or as Cohn told the *Once Upon a Geek* website in June 2009, "Enough to make it look good [laughs]!"

The last member of the team was editor Alan Gold, although he had no involvement in the creation of the character. "Len Wein developed *Blue Devil* with Dan, Gary, and Paris," Gold recalls. "I don't know why [Len] decided not to stick with the title. Everyone agreed that Paris' art was spectacular and the book would likely be a hit." According to Gold, "Dan and Gary worked together without much input from me. They plotted off the premises, and Dan sent his letter-perfect scripts by mail. We did stories Marvel-style. Each script was a collaboration. Dan did the ballooning [lettering placement] over Paris' pencils. Every panel was chock-full of action and interesting props."

One of Gold's biggest contributions to the book was his letters pages, where he would print the names of every reader who wrote in—even briefly responding to questions. "I figured that anyone who wrote a letter to *Blue Devil* deserved a reply, or at least recognition. I guess I was projecting, putting myself in the letter writers' shoes. Some writers showed up month after month, and I felt a personal relation to them."



GARY COHN



Rough Stuff

Gary Cohn's original rendition of Blue Devil, and some of Gary's script breakdowns.

Blue Devil TM & © DC Comics.

MARVEL FOR KIDS: STAR Comics



by Mark Ciemcioch



The Romper Room of Ideas
 Legendary cartoonist Warren Kremer illustrated this 1985 promotional poster showcasing some of Star Comics' earliest stars, including Royal Roy, Wally the Wizard, Top Dog, and Spider-Ham. Star's licensed characters weren't depicted in this promo.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

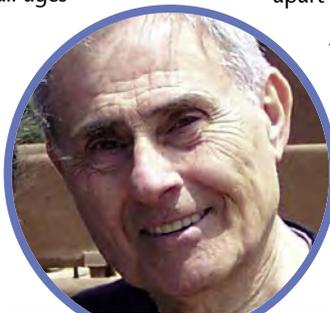
When the Marvel Age of Comics was unleashed in the early '60s, the adventures of Spider-Man, the X-Men, Iron Man, and other superheroes captivated a readership that included teenagers, college students, and even adults. But it wasn't until the '80s before Marvel made a major bid to appeal to its youngest audience with the all-ages Star Comics imprint.

STARS OUT OF HARVEY

Times were tough for children's comic books in the early '80s. Sure, Archie Comics was still going strong, but Harvey's line of *Casper the Ghost*, *Richie Rich*, *Sad Sack*, and others ceased publication in 1982. Gold Key's comic stable of Walt Disney, Looney Tunes, and other popular cartoon characters followed with cancellations in 1983.

Around that time period, Marvel Comics was negotiating with Harvey Comics to publish comics with Harvey's well-established line of characters. During the process, Marvel talked with longtime Harvey creative talents like writer and editor Sid Jacobson, artist Warren Kremer, and writer Lennie Herman.

Jacobson recalls his interview with Marvel publisher Michael Hobson: "We interviewed and spoke about how Marvel never had a successful children's program. They tried many times over the years. He asked me to come up with a few characters with my people and see what we thought. We created about four or five characters. We went back to see Michael and he loved it. He said, 'I'll hire you, immediately.' That's how we started."



SID JACOBSON

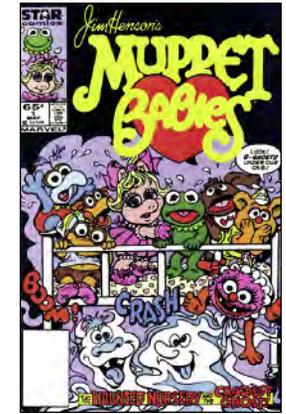
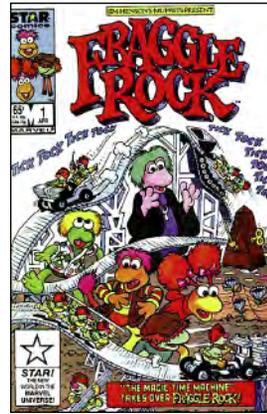
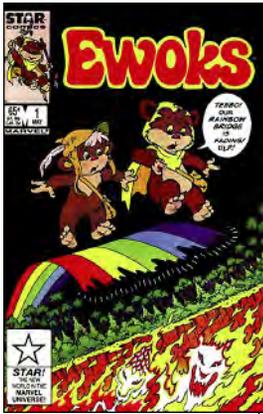
Photo by Shure Jacobson.

Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter appointed Tom DeFalco as the executive editor charged with overseeing the editorial with Harvey Comics. However, the surviving Harvey brothers, Alfred and Leon, disagreed about the agreement with Marvel and the deal fell apart suddenly.

"We worked out our publishing plan, we were going to publish right away with lots of stuff," DeFalco says. "I know it included *Richie Rich* and *Casper*. On a Friday, we got together, and Monday morning [Sid and I] were supposed to start working at Harvey. I don't know if it was Friday night, or over the weekend, [we were told] to meet at Marvel and go over to Harvey. Fine, who cares? Monday morning comes and they said, 'There seems to be a little problem with the deal.' Ultimately, there was no deal with Harvey."

With no deal for Harvey characters but a number of Harvey staffers now employed, Marvel editors began to reevaluate their plans.

"I don't want to take credit for this idea, but there used to be a stepladder in which you read comic books," DeFalco says. "You started with the Harvey comic books, and as you got older you read Archie comic books. Then as you got older, you read DC comic books, Marvel comic books, and then eventually you moved to the independents. The Disney and Gold Key comic books had gone away, the Harvey comic books had gone away, and a lot of us felt that we were missing part of our stepladder. We needed comic books for young readers. Harvey went away, and I don't even know if we had a discussion, but we said we should still



Cute and Cuddly

(top and bottom)

First issues of ten early Star Comics titles. The top row's series are all licensed books, as is the bottom row's *Strawberry Shortcake*.

The others are Marvel properties.

Ewoks © Lucasfilm Ltd. Fraggle Rock and Muppet Babies © Disney. Get Along Gang and Strawberry Shortcake © American Greetings. Heathcliff © Creators Syndicate. Spider-Ham, Planet Terry, Royal Roy, and Top Dog © Marvel.

do this anyway. From that point on, we decided we were going to do kids comics.”

Sid Jacobson recalls, “I remember our first day [at Marvel]. Warren [Kremer] came down to draw the characters. I was in my office. Marie Severin came into my office and looked up at the [pages]. She said, ‘Holy cow! Listen, Sid, I’m going to tell you something no one else will tell you except me. This is the greatest artist who has ever walked through these doors. No one will tell you, but please know it.’ I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard that afterwards from Marvel people. Warren was an incredible artist, but basically an unknown one because Harvey never put the names on the stories, except for their true friends. Warren was their prime artist by far. He did all the covers to the whole kiddie line and more. Finally, for the first time, Warren became known in the field.”

Early in the process, it was decided that the new books Jacobson and his team were working on would not be published under the regular Marvel line. Instead, the new all-ages books would be branded as Star Comics.

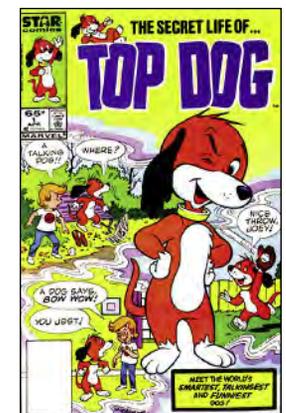
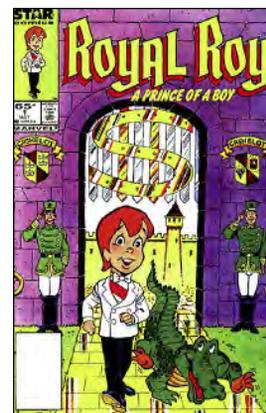
“We wanted to differentiate it and be in our own world,” Jacobson says. “As we were starting, it might have had a bigger effect with stores and with kids if we had a different name. It had an awful lot of promotion for it. It was also for parents, parents who wanted their very own Marvel line for children. It was hugely successful, especially abroad.”

A STAR LINE IS BORN

The first book released under the Star Comics brand was *The Muppets Take Manhattan* #1 (Nov. 1984), a three-issue miniseries adaptation of the hit 1984 movie, but the regular line wasn’t launched for another five months.

The initial Star Comics lineup came out over a two-month period:

- **Ewoks #1 (May 1985)**
The further adventures of the controversial cute and furry creatures of *Return of the Jedi*.
- **Fraggle Rock #1 (Apr. 1985)**
The comics adaptation of Jim Henson’s popular HBO live-action series featuring a group of subterranean Muppets.
- **Get Along Gang #1 (May 1985)**
Based on the American Greetings characters, the Get Along Gang were anthropomorphic animals partially inspired by the old *Little Rascals* shorts.
- **Heathcliff #1 (Apr. 1985)**
Based on George Gately’s newspaper comic strip, the stories of this mischievous house cat were significantly longer than the traditional one panel.
- **Muppet Babies #1 (May 1985)**
Introduced in the *Muppets Take Manhattan* movie, the toddler versions of Kermit and company also had a popular cartoon series.
- **Peter Porker, the Spectacular Spider-Ham #1 (May 1985)**
Finally, Marvel’s most popular character is adapted into his own funny-animal universe, battling the likes of “Ducktor Doom.”
- **Planet Terry #1 (Apr. 1985)**
An original series about a young space adventurers searching the universe for his missing parents.
- **Royal Roy #1 (May 1985)**
Centered around a fabulously rich kid, who’s also royalty, *Royal Roy* only lasted six issues before getting pulled due to similarities to *Richie Rich*.
- **Strawberry Shortcake #1 (Apr. 1985)**
Another set of characters spawned from American Greetings cards that had expanded into a merchandising juggernaut for girls with dolls, cartoons, and posters.



BATMANTM and DICK TRACYTM

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BACK ISSUE #77

"When Comics Were Fun!" HEMBECK cover and gallery, Plastic Man, Blue Devil, Marvel's Star Comics imprint, VALENTINO's normalman, Bronze Age's goofiest Superman stories, and the Batman/Dick Tracy team-up you didn't see! Featuring MAX ALLAN COLLINS, PARIS CULLINS, RAMONA FRADON, ALAN KUPPERBERG, MISHKIN & COHN, STEVE SKEATES, JOE STATON, CURT SWAN, and more!

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He's a square-jawed, distinctly garbed master detective who—sometimes with a young sidekick under his wing—plies his deductive skills and crimefighting arsenal to protect the urban jungle from the most fearsomely freakish felons imaginable.

Am I describing Batman? Or Dick Tracy?

Both, of course!

Bob Kane and Bill Finger's Darknight Detective and Chester Gould's top cop share more similarities than you might realize.

Both debuted in the untouchable decade of the 1930s, when mobsters ruled the Earth (or at least several major American cities). Both *Batman* comics and the *Tracy* syndicated strip have pulled few punches in their depictions of violent crime, yet have also featured outlandish sci-fi storylines. Both crimebusters have a supporting cast of young (and sometimes bizarre) allies, uniformed and plainclothes police officers, and romantic interests (although Tracy is the clear winner in the love category). Both use forensic science and high-tech gadgets, from Batman's utility belt to Tracy's 2-way wrist radio. Both are plagued by rogues' galleries of grotesque gangsters and fetching femme fatales that, once you think about it, could easily be interchangeable. Both have transcended their comics roots into cinema, at roughly the same time: There were *Dick Tracy* and *Batman* movie serials in the 1940s and animated cartoons in the 1960s and 1970s; TV producer William Dozier produced a *Dick Tracy* live-action pilot shortly after his *Batman* show struck gold; and Tim Burton's 1989 blockbuster *Batman* was quickly followed by Warren Beatty's 1990 *Dick Tracy* film. Both detectives have been published by DC Comics (surely you haven't forgotten DC's *Limited Collector's Edition* #C-40, from 1975, which we covered in *BACK ISSUE* #71). And both have been written by Max Allan Collins and drawn by Joe Staton.

A Batman/Dick Tracy crossover has been the dream of many a fan who's fantasized about such a team-up, rendered in a sprang style, DC's perfect complement to Chester Gould's. And really, could you imagine an artist better at such a team-up than Joe Staton? During the Bronze Age, on occasions Staton proved his fluency in drawing a Golden Age Batman, not only in Justice Society titles but most notably in the celebrated "The Origin of Bruce Wayne," writer Alan Brennert's Earth-Two Batman team-up in *The Brave and the Bold* #197 as well as in writer Mike W. Barr's 1993 *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* #197 as well as in writer Mike W. Barr's 1993 *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* #197 as well as in writer Mike W. Barr's 1993 *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* #197. As the artist of *The Huntress*—in both its Modern Age incarnations—Joe has flexed his muscles in contemporary crime sagas and superhero fables underpinnings. And since March of 2011, he has been flexing his muscles in Tribune Media Services' *Dick Tracy* comic strip. He'll more appropriately fill the shoes of the late Dick Tracy than Chester Gould on a Batman/Dick Tracy team-up! He'll more appropriately fill the shoes of the late Dick Tracy than Chester Gould on a Batman/Dick Tracy team-up! He'll more appropriately fill the shoes of the late Dick Tracy than Chester Gould on a Batman/Dick Tracy team-up!

Dick Tracy! Batman and Robin, Too!

A Dick Sprang illustration of the Dynamic Duo from 1992. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.heritagecomics.com). The Dick Tracy headshot in the Bat-signal is by Chester Gould and is from *Limited Collectors' Edition* #C-40, DC's single Dick Tracy comic book.

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