

ROY THOMAS' HARD-CHARGING  
COMICS FANZINE

# Alter Ego™

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MORE

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THOMAS**  
IN THE '90s!



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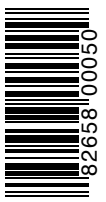
**No.139**

May  
2016

MARVEL'S  
**CONAN &  
EXCELSIOR**

*PLUS:*  
CROSS PLAINS,  
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& MORE!

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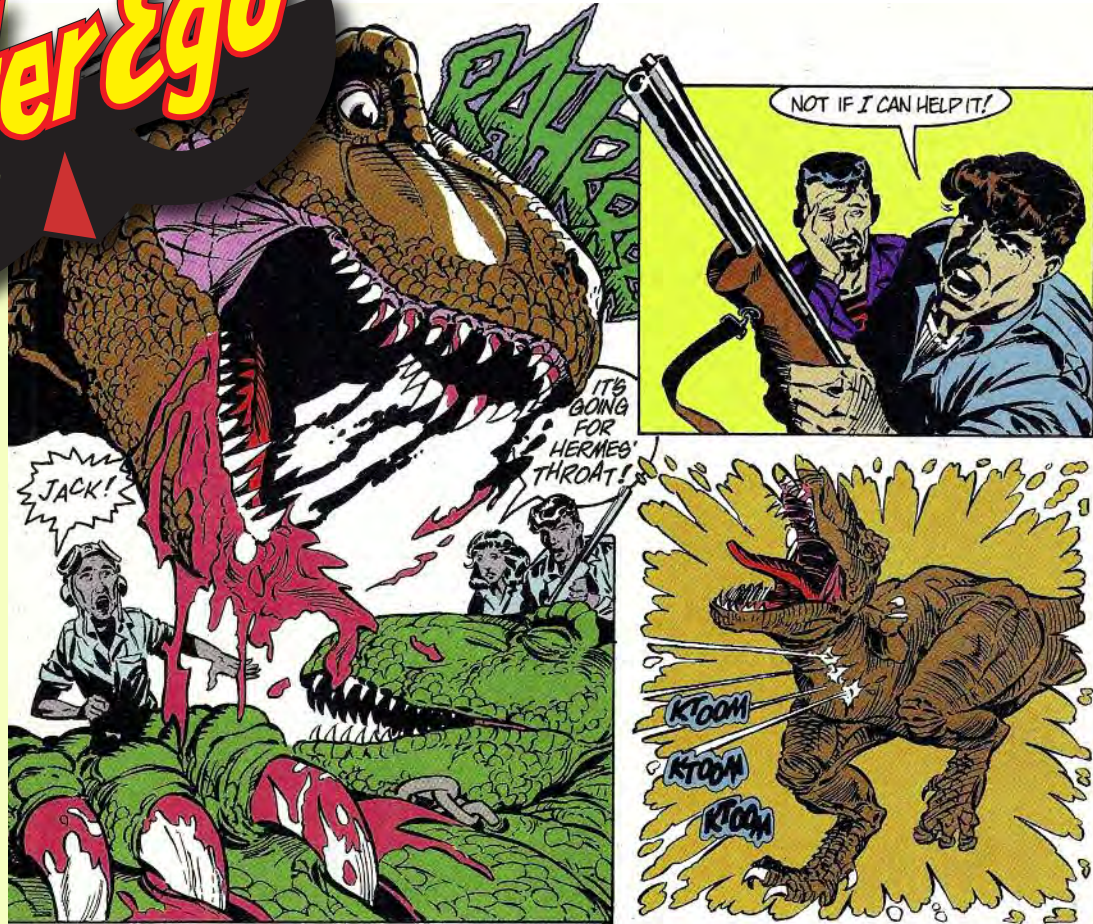
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# Alter Ego™



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**On Our Cover:** *Since some of the most significant artwork on display this time around was done by the incomparable Rafael Kayanan, artist of Marvel’s Conan the Adventurer and art director of the late-1990s Cross Plains Comics, we were doubly delighted that we were able to use a beautiful barbarian illustration by him as our cover. It wasn’t specifically drawn to represent Conan the Cimmerian, but it captures the essence of the sword-and-sorcery that is such a major part of this issue of Alter Ego. Thanks for sharing it with us, Raf! [Art © 2016 Rafael Kayanan.]*

**Above:** *Writer Roy Thomas was fortunate to work on some great projects, and with some excellent artists, during the several years he wrote for Topps Comics—but nothing was more sheer fun than Cadillacs and Dinosaurs, adding adventures to the Xenozoic Tales world created by Mark Schultz. And Roy was especially fond of the three-issue “Man-Eater!” series illustrated by Claude St. Aubin & Allen Nunis. These climactic panels are from C&D Vol. 2, #6 (Aug. 1994), as Jack Tenrec desperately tries to save his young pet allosaur, Hermes, from a mutant tyrannosaur. [TM & © Mark Schultz.]*



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FIRST PRINTING.





# Conan, Cthulhu, Cross Plains, Kryptonians, & Cadillacs (Or, “You’ve Got To Play All The Cards You’re Dealt!”)

## ROY THOMAS On Freelancing In The 1990s – Part 2

Interview Conducted by Jim Amash

Transcribed by Brian K. Morris & Sean Dulaney



### High Five

Roy Thomas and his 1990s muse, Gonzo the aracari (smaller kin to a toucan—photo by Dann Thomas)—floating above pages RT scripted for the five comics referred to in the title above. (Left to right, onto bottom row of facing page.)

Marvel Comics' *Conan the Adventurer* #13 (June 1995)—pencils by Rafael Kayanan; inks by John Floyd. This Robert E. Howard-based series took place before and during events chronicled in early-'70s issues of *Conan the Barbarian*. [© & © Conan Properties International LLC.]

Millennium Publications' *H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu: The Festival, Book One* (1993, no month)—art by Brian Bendis; co-scripting by Jean-Marc Lofficier as "R.J.M. Lofficier." This final page introduces an HPL protagonist made notorious by Stuart Gordon's 1985 cult film *Re-Animator*. [© Millennium Publications.]

Cross Plains Comics' *Red Sonja: A Death in Scarlet* (1999, no month or number)—art by Steve Lightle. Set early in the career of the swordswoman developed by Roy and others from a one-shot Howard heroine. [TM & © Red Sonja Properties, Inc.]

[continued on facing page]



## Marvel Comics (Conan)

**JIM AMASH:** In 1990, you finally got to come back to Conan the Barbarian, and you had an interesting experience with your first story....

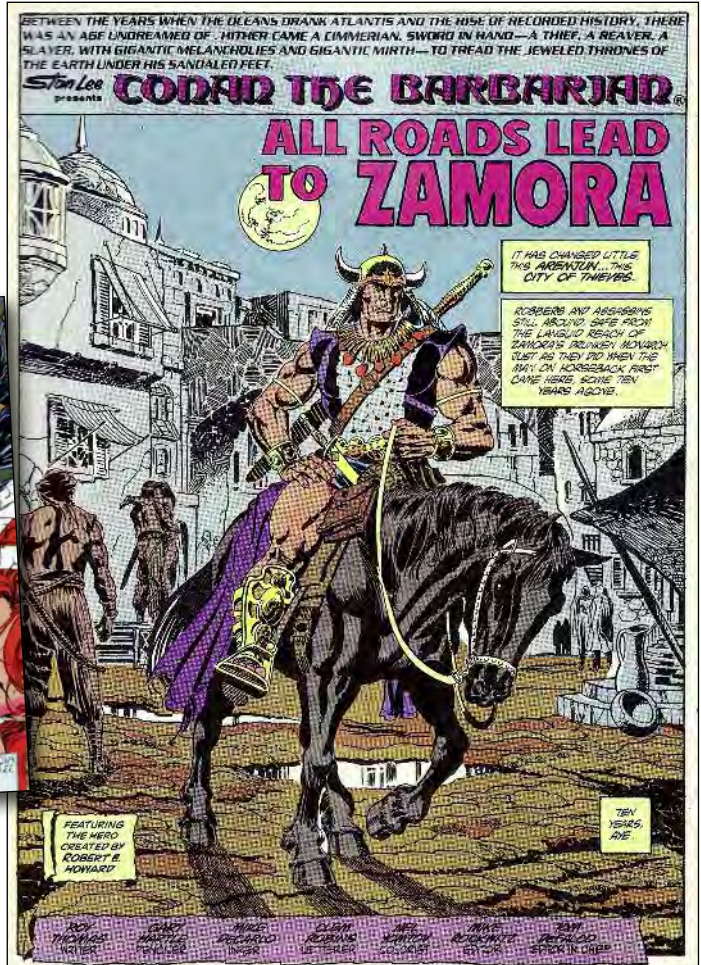
**ROY THOMAS:** Marvel had been running this “Young Conan” series for about a year. I never thought the stories squared either with what I’d done in the ‘70s, or, more importantly, with Robert E. Howard’s Conan. [Editor] Mike Rockwitz eventually realized it wasn’t working and asked me to return to *Conan the Barbarian*. By then, I’d been writing again for Marvel for two or three years.

Then, while I was still gearing up, he asked me to first write a final “Young Conan” issue, to wind it up. Why he didn’t have the other writer do it, he didn’t say. I said okay, but I wanted the first new story my name appeared on to be the one that returned to regular continuity. So I signed that one “Justin Arthur”... “Just an author.” It’s the only Marvel story—maybe the only story *period*—I ever wrote under a pen name. [EDITOR’S



### Just In Time: Justin Arthur

(Above:) Splash page of *Conan the Barbarian* #240 (Jan. 1991), probably the only comic Roy ever wrote under a pen name. Pencils by Gary Hartle, inks by Ricardo Villagran. Thanks to Steven C. Willis. [© & © Conan Properties International LLC.]



### Home Sweet Hyboria

(Above:) Splash panel of *Conan the Barbarian* #241 (Feb. 1991), the first official “Roy Thomas – round two” issue, as penciled by Gary Hartle and inked by Mike DeCarlo. Todd McFarlane and his cover for #241 were seen in *AE* #136.

(Above left:) Jim Lee drew the cover of *CTB* #242 (March '91). [*Conan* & covers © & © Conan Properties International LLC; Red Sonja TM & © Red Sonja Properties, Inc.]



Jim Lee.

**NOTE:** By coincidence, as this A/E issue was in preparation, Dark Horse reprinted the “Justin Arthur” yarn at the end of its trade paperback *Chronicles of Conan: Vol. 30*, with no indication it was a pseudonym. Serves me right for being so devious!]

Mike, Crom bless ‘im, went all out to welcome me back. He got Todd McFarlane to pencil the cover for the first *Conan the Barbarian* with my byline; in the 2000s, Todd would do the cover for the

prose *Conan* biography I wrote for DAK Publishing. Jim Lee drew the second new *Conan* cover. This wasn’t really “my” *Conan* the way the ‘70s one had been, because I wasn’t the editor; but, as with the super-heroes, I didn’t really have problems with the various editors, or them with me. Of course,



### Gary Hartle

Later, the artist became an animation producer.



### Mike Rockwitz

A recent pic of *Conan*’s 1990s editor. Courtesy of MR.



**THOMAS:** But you can't give that any real credence, because of course he paid attention to the plots. I was writing dialogue over his layouts, and the plots I gave him were always followed to the letter. *Always!* In fact, in the '90s, he didn't even have to add as much "in-between" details and choreography as in the '70s, because I was giving him more detail. That was the way Marvel insisted plots be written by then. Not every precise action and who stabbed who in which vital organ, but he was following the plots and never really deviating from them.

**JA:** When I asked him how he could not follow the plot, he said, "You know. You just stick a sword in Conan's hand and have him kill people." [mutual laughter]

**THOMAS:** He could say that, but it wasn't true. It was just gruff but good-natured posturing. John was too smart to really believe that. *Conan* was always a lot more than swordplay, whether in Howard's stories or in the comics. You can look at almost any *Savage Sword* story he ever drew and see how far off-target John's statement to you was.

**JA:** Did you feel John was more or less invested in *Conan* than he'd been when you worked together before?

**THOMAS:** Less. I felt he was very disconnected and, most of the

time, just giving the art minimal attention. But his "minimal attention" was better than most artists' rapt attention. I tried to give him stories he'd enjoy drawing, when I could. His job was just to illustrate that story and maybe flesh it out a bit. His storytelling was as good as ever—I could always tell what was going on and where the setting was, even in layouts. Sometimes he would just kind of phone it in, sure... but the guy was simply too good not to deliver a competent job, and usually a lot more than that.

**JA:** I take it your contact with him was minimal during this time.

**THOMAS:** Yeah, but we did talk from time to time. I was particularly happy with a few of the stories. One I especially liked was *Savage Sword* #200, a story that Mike Friedrich, as my comics agent, had tried to get Marvel to do as a graphic novel. It mixed events in the real Robert E. Howard's life with a fictitious adventure starring Robert E. Howard—plus an archetypal Conan adventure—three separate, interrelated plots in one tale. When we couldn't sell that as a graphic novel, I turned it into *Savage Sword* #200, which documented a number of events that had actually happened to Howard—or at least that Howard *said* had happened to him; he was known to embellish a bit—as to how and when and where he came up with Conan. He once wrote that he'd dreamed Conan up while traveling alone in a certain Texas town, so we showed him



**Colin MacNeil**  
Popular British  
comics artist.

#### Conan For The Ages

(Left:) A time-tossed Conan and Solomon Kane prepare to go into action together for the first time in any medium, in *Savage Sword* #220 (April 1994). Art by Colin MacNeil. [Solomon Kane is © & © Solomon Kane Inc.]

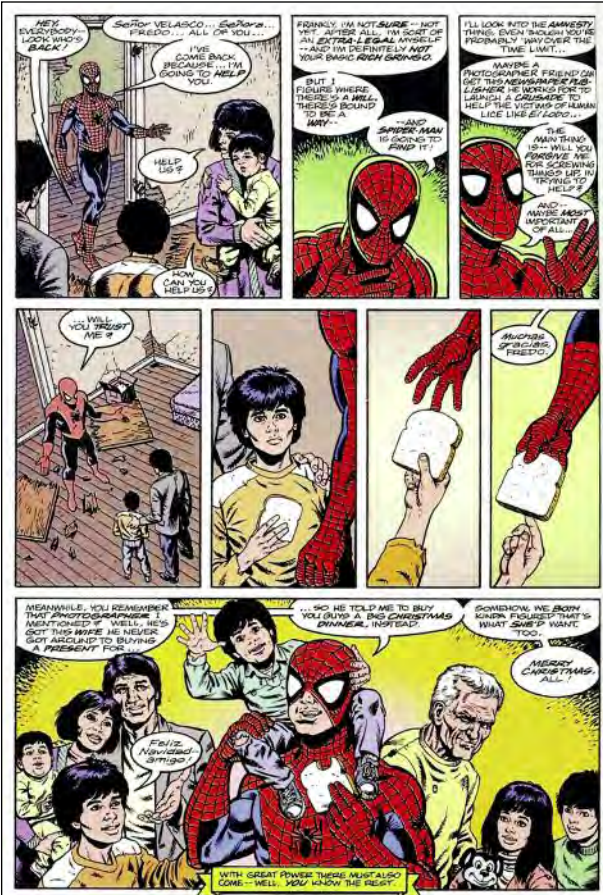
(Right:) In *Savage Sword* #228 (Dec. '94), Alex Niño did his own highly individualistic interpretation of the Hyborian Age, as he and RT adapted one of REH's so-called "Crusader" stories into a "Conan" exploit.

[© & © Conan Properties International LLC.]

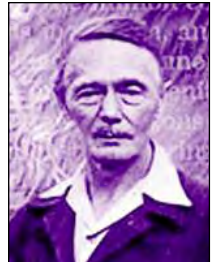


**Alex Niño**  
at the 2009 Super-  
Con in Florida.





Jeff Butler



Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961)

Not A Creature Was Stirring... Except For A Spider!

(Above:) *Alter Ego extra!*—The first and last pages of an 8-page “Spider-Man” story done for the Christmas 1991 one-shot *Within Our Reach*, published by Mike Friedrich’s Star\*Reach company. All proceeds were divided between an AIDS charity and a fund for the preservation of Redwoods; all creative personnel (as well as Marvel) gave their services gratis. Art by Jeff Butler; script by Roy & Dann Thomas (from a plot idea by David Ross). Thanks to Hoy Murphy, Barry Pearl, & Stephan Friedt. [TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.]

eventually end up in the Americas as they were during the Hyborian Age. I had adapted that de Camp book, *Conan of the Isles*, in what was eventually published as a Marvel graphic novel. So I wondered, “What’s the best way to carry on from there?”

The previous year, for [the comic] *Conan the Adventurer*, I’d hit on the idea of adapting stories by the *third* great writer from *Weird Tales*, after Howard and Lovecraft: Clark Ashton Smith. Smith had created his own ancient worlds in several different series. Strange worlds with names like Xothique, amid a kind of treacly prose that read a bit like slogging through molasses... but still interesting and inventive. But his stories never featured a hero of the Conan stripe. Smith’s “heroes” were little men who got overwhelmed by events and eaten by monsters. Rafael Kayanan and I adapted several of those for *Conan the Adventurer*. For *Savage*, I took a map of Xothique and transposed it to America with Conan plopped down into it—but for some technical reason I decided to create a mirror image of it: Smith’s east became west, and vice versa. I wrote a synopsis based on a Smith story for *Conan the Savage* #10. It wasn’t one of my most inspired efforts, and it wasn’t one of John’s best art jobs, but it would’ve been okay, and would’ve led to better things.

The World Is Na’at Enough

(Right:) John Buscema was officially both penciler and inker of this adaptation of Clark Ashton Smith’s *Weird Tales* story “The Necromancers of Naat” in *Conan the Savage* #10 (May 1996); but in actuality the page was inked by a family member. Roy added the apostrophe in the comics version of the name “Naat.” [© & © Conan Properties International LLC.]





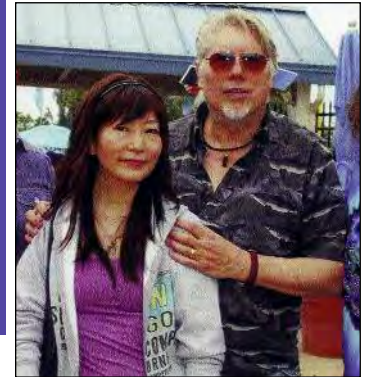


## It's In The Cards!

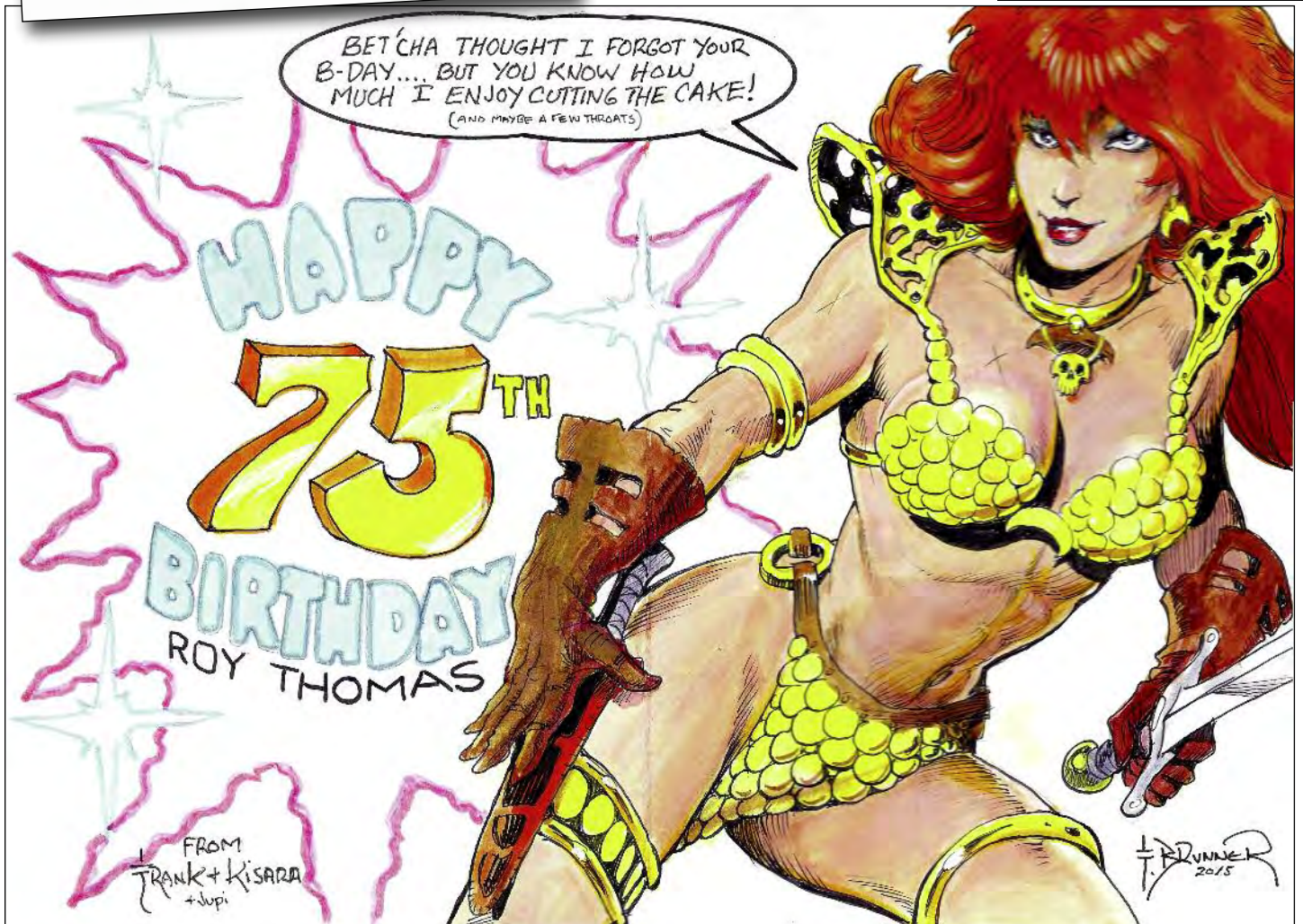
*Alter Ego* #136, in which the first half of this Amash/Thomas interview saw print, also dealt with Roy's first half-century in comics (1965-2015) and with his 75th birthday last November 22—so Ye Editor thought it not inappropriate to print a pair of hand-drawn birthday greetings he received from a couple of *A/E* regulars and friends.

(On this page:) Artist Frank Brunner and his lovely wife Kisara sent Roy a card emblazoned with original, colored cover art by Frank of Dr. Strange (whose exploits he chronicled with writer Steve Englehart under editor RT in the early '70s)—plus inside art of Red Sonja, whom Frank has drawn on covers. The photo was taken at Sea World in San Diego in 2013. [Dr. Strange TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.; Red Sonja TM & © Red Sonja Properties, Inc.]

Frank's now accepting art commission for covers, splash panels, or pin-up recreations; minimum order \$150. Visit his website at [www.frankbrunner.net](http://www.frankbrunner.net)



Kisara & Frank Brunner





Rafael's. It almost looked as if it had been put in the comic to be a *contrast* to Rafael's, though I'm sure that wasn't the case. Later, Richard told me that, when these fill-in issues came out, sales dipped, and, in retrospect, he felt they might've derailed the series. Still, Rafael came back after a few issues, and the series still didn't make it in the end... but the series may well have been canceled based on the sales of those middle issues, I don't know.

**JA:** I guess it was hard to find someone else who was doing what Rafael was doing.

**THOMAS:** Impossible, really. But maybe Conan in comics was an idea whose time had kind of gone away for a while. I mean, Dark Horse has certainly sold some comics with him over the past decade, but Conan's never again been the super-hit he was at Marvel from the mid-'70s through the early '80s, mostly before there was a movie to help sell books.

After *Conan the Adventurer* was discontinued in '95, Marvel started doing those three-issue mini-series, at first without me as the writer. After they got that out of their system, I guess, the editors came back to me to do what unfortunately became the final four series.

**JA:** How did you feel about writing those Conan mini-series, compared to having regular continuity?

**THOMAS:** Well, they were the best deal I could get, and at least I got to write three-issue arcs. One of them—*Scarlet Sword*—was just a story I came up with because I had to come up with something; but the other three I really enjoyed. One of those was *Flame and the Fiend*, drawn by Geoff Isherwood, whose work I've always admired.

The other two mini-series I had a special interest in, starting with the first of the four, *Lord of the Spiders*. A bit earlier in *Savage Sword*, E.R. Cruz and I had adapted a de Camp novel set in Yezud, the City of the Spider God; and, two decades before that, I'd had John Jakes plot for me the first story ever set in Yezud, a city mentioned in Howard's stories.

In the new mini-series, the villain was a Yezud priest from the de Camp novel, but I combined him with—you know I swipe everything from old comics anyway—the title character in a one-shot 1950 Victor Fox comic called *The Black Tarantula*. [mutual laughter] The Fox baddie was basically a Dracula type, somewhere in Europe centuries ago—only, instead of turning into a bat, he turned into a big spider to bite people in the neck. When I was a kid, horror comics gave me the creeps, and I only bought that one because it had a title character, as opposed to being an anthology like most horror comics were. Ever since I first wrote *Conan* in 1970, I'd wanted to do a story with a guy who turned into a spider. "Tower of the Elephant," my favorite Conan story, has a spider the size of a pig in it. So, finally, I concocted that *Lord of the Spiders* arc. I don't know why it took me so long.



**John Watkiss**  
has worked both in comics and in film, often as a storyboard artist.



### "Choosers Of The Slain"

(Top left:) To promote *Conan the Adventurer*, Kayanan had drawn a cover for *Marvel Age* #135 (April 1994)—and when time came for a fill-in issue (CTA #7, Dec. '94), Roy suggested using it there, as well, to keep a Kayanan presence in the comic. He made up a story to go with the cover, the way editor Julius Schwartz used to do at DC. Raf's illo had been an homage to 1971's *Conan the Barbarian* #3, and CTA #7 became that comic's sequel. In it, a Hyborian Age "valkyrie" wants to remain on Earth when the "grim grey god" Borri decides to cut all ties with mankind and to take all his shield-maidens with him, whether they want to go or not.

(Above:) A John Watkiss-drawn page from CTA #7. Though Watkiss' style was worlds distant from Kayanan's, it had its own validity. Script by RT.  
[© & © Conan Properties International LLC]

The other mini-series was the one I did with John Buscema, who even inked it, and inked it very well in this case. It was called *Death Covered in Gold*. I was looking to do a story in a different setting, so I set one in the Hyborian Age equivalent of the California gold rush. I even brought back Jenna, a character Barry [Smith] and I had created way back in *Conan the Barbarian* #6. John did a great job on it. His drawing abilities weren't at all diminished, right up to his death. I'm glad this story arc was our "Conan" swan song together, rather than *Conan the Savage* #10!

Actually, though, in my eyes, John's all-time greatest Conan work was the graphic novel *Conan the Rogue*, back in '91. He'd decided he wanted to write and draw and even color a *Conan* graphic novel... he may even have done the lettering, with its rectangular balloons. He was going to do it all! Then, at the last minute, he phoned and asked me to write the dialogue. I had a



[continued from p. 27]

## Marvel (Excelsior)

**JA:** Since there's a connection, why don't we go ahead and discuss the Excelsior line? That happens around this time.

**THOMAS:** And it's still Marvel.

**JA:** Right. How did you find out about Stan Lee wanting to do his own line?

**THOMAS:** "Find out about it"? Before Excelsior got started, I'd spent more than a decade urging Stan to start up his own comics line as a separate Marvel West Coast imprint! Back in the '80s, when I wasn't working for Marvel but he and I both lived in L.A., I'd bring it up when we talked on the phone or had lunch. But he was busy with animation, etc., then. I actually felt a bit frustrated that *finally*, in 1994, he decides to do a line of comics—years after I've moved to South Carolina! Maybe he was trying to tell me something. [mutual laughter] I couldn't be as intimately involved with the line anymore as we had discussed earlier. Now I became just one of the writers, but I'm glad he at least had me do that. I've got to admit, I'd have been very upset to be left out!

I don't recall offhand who the other writers were, except that I think Tom DeFalco was one. There were four writers and four mostly young artists—although Sal Buscema was the one I worked with. Stan's assistant at the time was Rob Tokar. Rob, I think, had moved out West to work with Stan on these things.

**JA:** He left Marvel right before all the firings started happening.

**THOMAS:** Sometimes you just get lucky, y'know? I don't recall if I ever met Rob in person, but I talked to him on the phone.

What happened was, Stan came up with the concept for the world of the Excelsior line. It would start out with four heroes, in four titles. Their powers and backstories would complement each other. I have copies of a lot of the material that was done for the line, and I've long planned to contact Marvel to see if they'd let me do an issue of *Alter Ego* about it. But Jon B. Cooke has recently talked to me about his own notion of doing a big study of the Excelsior line for *Comic Book Creator* [magazine], and I'd actually prefer to see him handle it rather than do it myself.

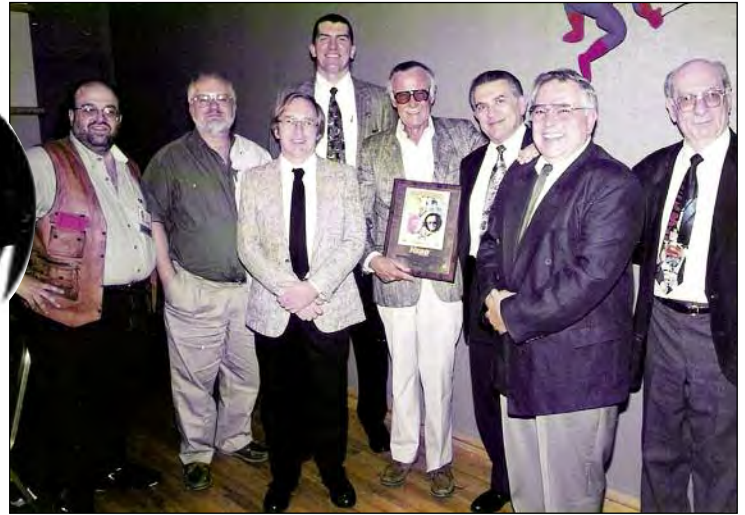
Like I said, Stan made up this world. The setting was originally going to be, like, ten years in the future. We writers were asked to help come up with ways that the future might be different ten years from then—in other words, in that far-future period around 2005. We probably weren't any better at prognosticating than anyone else, but the bad thing was that each of us was bound to suggest different things from what the others did, and there'd be inevitable contradictions. It would've been a coordination nightmare!



**Rob Tokar**

would later work with Crossgen, Tokyopop, et al.

Maybe that's why, before we really wrote any scripts, but after we'd all spent time coming up with our various ideas of what the world would be like ten years down the road—a little different but not terribly different—Stan suddenly abandoned the whole "future" angle and it just became another "New Universe" kind of thing, set in the present, with no particular connection to the rest of the Marvel Universe. Maybe it could've been integrated into it later; it wasn't necessarily set in its own separate universe.



### "Excelsior!"

(Left:) The symbol for Stan Lee's and Marvel's projected mid-'90s Excelsior line. [TM & © the respective trademark & copyright holders.]

(Right:) Stan with friends/admirers/roasters at the truly marvelous Stan Lee Roast at the 1995 Chicago Comics Convention. (L. to r.): Peter David, Chris Claremont, Roy Thomas, Jim Shooter, Stan Lee, Sal Buscema, John Romita, Julius Schwartz. If you've got to ask who any of these people are, you're probably reading the wrong magazine. A transcript of the entire Roast was printed in 1999 in *Alter Ego*, Vol. 3, #1.

I wrote the comic called *Zarlok*, about a guy from another planet. I don't know where Stan got the name, but I was happy to work with Sal on it. Some part of me was probably thinking, "Gee, the other guys are working with these young artists with new styles, and Sal's and my book will look like a 1970s Marvel comic"—but hey, Sal and I had both been *good* at that, so what the hell. I enjoyed working with Sal, and I hope he didn't feel stuck with *me*, either. He and I were the only team to finish two issues of our series—I've even got colored Photostats of the first issue. Everybody else was still finishing up their first issue. When Sal and I got rolling, we took no prisoners.

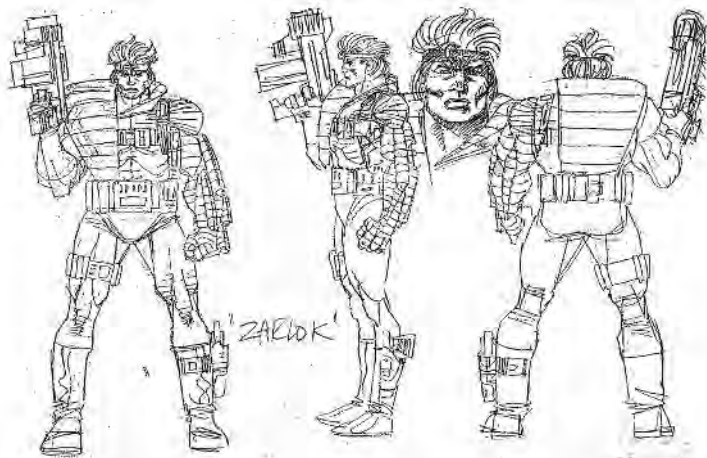
**JA:** I was in contact with Rob Tokar then. He had given me my first break at Marvel, and I was trying to get to ink one of those Excelsior books, but he said Stan really wanted to use people who were either on the West Coast or whom he'd worked with before. Apparently he wanted Herb Trimpe to draw a book. Rob was trying to get a pitch in for me to ink one of them. Of course, I wanted to ink either Sal Buscema or Herb Trimpe—who at one time was discussed as being one of the artists—because they were artists from my childhood. But that didn't happen.

**THOMAS:** Well, the whole Excelsior series didn't happen anyway. I don't quite know why. The official story was that Marvel felt it wasn't a good time to launch a new line. Was that not too long before the bankruptcy?

**JA:** That's right. 1994-95.

**THOMAS:** So Marvel may have been a bit shaky, and that may have had something to do with it. At the time I wondered, and I still wonder, if there was anything else in play—whether someone back East maybe felt that they didn't need Stan Lee, who wasn't under their thumb, editing his own separate comics line out on the West Coast. I know Stan was unhappy when it was suddenly canceled, because he'd invested time and energy into it. We all had. On the other hand, he quickly picked up the slack with something else, and now I wonder how much he'd even remember of what we did on it.



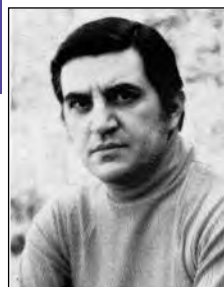


### A Couple Of Characters

Artist Sal Buscema's 1994 model sheets for the hero and the villainess Virull for the Excelsior title *Zarlok*. [TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.]

JA: How much contact did you have with Stan at the time?

THOMAS: Stan would call me up and go over everything I wrote. Actually, it didn't go as smoothly as probably either of us would've wished. While of course I'm tremendously influenced by Stan, one of the most important super-hero writers and editors ever, over the years my own style had naturally veered off a bit from what I'd written for Marvel under him in the '60s and '70s... first from working on the *Conan* books, which I had deliberately written a bit differently from the usual Marvel fare, then writing for DC in the '80s and elsewhere since then... so I kind of dreaded these phone calls, because I didn't like to have to defend my writing to Stan or to disagree with my mentor



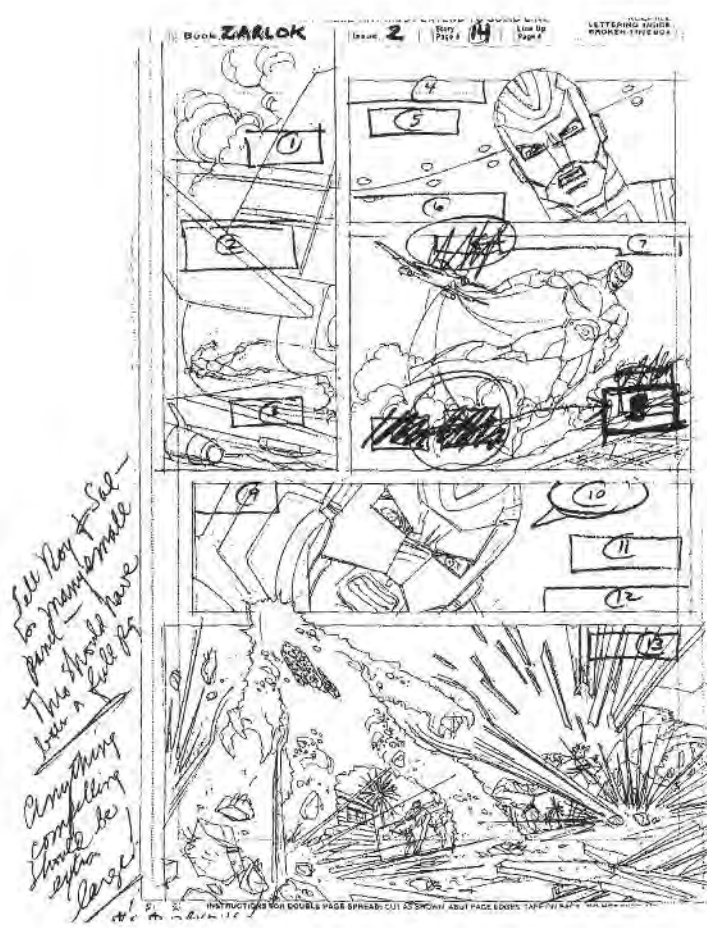
Sal Buscema

John B.'s "baby brother" had been drawing for Marvel since 1969. Photo from the 1975 Marvel Con program book.

### Stranger In A Stranger Land

(Below left:) Stan's margin notes on this Sal B. page-in-progress from *Zarlok* #2 show that he was a hands-on editor of this projected series. Incidentally, Stan's earlier names for Zarlok had been *Kinja: Trapped on Planet Earth* and *Zodiac*.

(Below right:) Two more characters—definitely *not* good-guys—were to have been piped aboard in #3, as per this penciled page. [TM & © 2016 Marvel Characters, Inc.]







**Mickey Spillane**  
Bestselling author of the Mike Hammer novels. Hammer was a permutation of "Mike Danger," who'd appeared in a post-WWII comics story or two, decades before the Tekno title. In the early '40s, Spillane had written comics for Timely, et al.

talked a little about Bill Everett and a couple of other people we both knew. It was the only time I ever met him, though I did interview him by phone once. Tekno was an interesting experiment that didn't seem ideally suited for comics, but who ever really knows in advance what's going to catch on?

### Topps Comics

**JA:** *It was the only chance I ever got to ink George Pérez, so I was happy to work for them. [mutual chuckling] Let's talk about Topps. How did your involvement start there?*

**THOMAS:** This was earlier, in late '91. Dann and I were still living in L.A., but that summer we'd already bought the place in South Carolina where we now live, after seeing it for maybe half an hour, and we'd arranged to move cross-country in early December. While our furniture was en route by truck, Dann and I would drive coast to coast in slightly under 48 hours, in her dad's mini-van, which was loaded up with two

dogs, a cat, two toco toucans, Gonzo the aracari, a bunch of guinea pigs and rabbits, four ducks in trashcans, and my PC so I could start working as soon as we arrived.

A few weeks before the move, I got a phone call from my good friend Len Brown. Len was one of the first people I'd met in New York in '65, though we'd exchanged a letter or two earlier. He's just a year or so younger than me, and we have several interests in common, like comics, movies, and Elvis. Len had been working for Topps as an executive since the early '60s and was a co-creator of the "Mars Attacks" and "Wacky Packs" trading-cards, among others. Back in '65, he'd also scripted the first two "Dynamo" stories in Tower's *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents*, and Wally Wood named Dynamo's civilian ID after him. In 1967-68, we'd shared an apartment in Brooklyn, where he's from. He and his wife Abby would move to Austin, Texas, when he retired, because he loves country music. Boy, does he love country music! I don't share that love; but he also has one of the largest collections around of vintage rockabilly records, and I do have a fondness for rockabilly. So you can see why we hit it off. In 1966 or so, he even produced and paid for the recording session Gary Friedrich and I did on our song "Look Out! Here Comes the Spider-Man!"

Anyway, Len had long been nudging Topps to get into the comic book business, and that day in '91 he called to tell me they were finally taking the plunge. He had too many other duties at Topps to become the day-to-day editor once it got started, but he'd be the official editor-in-chief. A gent named Ira Friedman would be the publisher. Len said they were looking for a line editor, and would I like to be interviewed? I figured I had a good shot at the job, but it would require moving back to New York. So I told him, "Actually, I *am* moving—to South Carolina." I couldn't see returning to New York to become the editor of a comics company that might or might not last—and I didn't want to move back there anyway. I was looking forward to moving to the South Carolina countryside, where Dann and I would own two furnished houses, plus "40 acres and a pool." Why give that up for an apartment in

Manhattan or a fraction of an acre in L.A.?

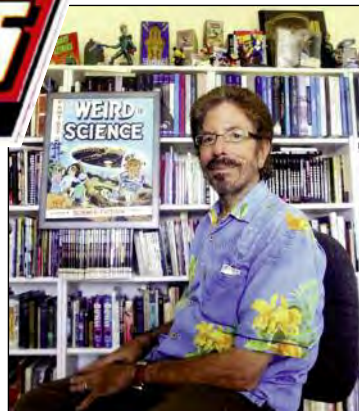
So then Len asked if I could suggest anyone else they should interview for the job. I gave him a couple of names. The first—and I don't know why, because I didn't really know him that well—was Jim Salicrup. Jim had been hired at Marvel back in '74 after he wrote a letter saying he loved Marvel so much he'd work for us for nothing. As editor-in-chief, I showed that letter to [executive] Sol Brodsky, who liked the idea. [mutual laughter] Anyway, Jim got hired—though of course not for nothing—and eventually became a major editor on *Spider-Man* and the like. To this day, I've no idea why I thought he might be ripe to make a move at that particular moment. But it turned out he was getting antsy and looking for a change. I also gave Len the name of one other Marvel editor, who I actually thought was far more likely to jump ship than Jim was. Topps interviewed both of them and hired Jim.

Naturally, I liked the idea of helping fellow pros, but I won't deny I also figured that either man, as editor, would probably give me work. As with Tekno later, all I really wanted to do was *write* for Topps. You've got to play all the cards you're dealt!

The first thing I was offered by Topps—I think, by Len, even before Jim was on board—was either *Bram Stoker's Dracula* or *Jack Kirby's Secret City Saga*—or maybe both. On the Kirby project, Topps had made arrangements with Jack to tie some concepts of his together. Jack had written this *Secret City* proposal that I wasn't all that wild about, nor did I care for the name. I thought they should title the comic after a



**Jim Salicrup**  
(on left) and Roy Thomas at a New York Comics Convention, probably sometime in the 2000s. Photo by Dann Thomas.



### You're The Topps!

The 1990s Topps Comics logo floats next to photos of:  
(Left:) Len Brown, enjoying his retirement in the Austin, Texas, area. He went to work for Topps Chewing Gum in the early 1960s. Pic by Roberto L. Brazziell for a newspaper article. [Photo © the respective copyright holders.]  
(Right:) Ira Friedman, Topps Comics publisher in the '90s, and still a Topps executive. [Logo TM & © Topps Comics, Inc.]





### The Starting Lineup

The cover art for *Captain Glory* #1, *Bombast* #1, and *Night Glider* #1 (all April 1993), the trio of lead-ins to Jack Kirby's *Secret City Saga* from Topps Comics, utilized the original concept drawings by Kirby—the only art of his that appeared in the series. But the eternal Kirby dynamism was at the heart of it all! [TM & © Estate of Jack Kirby.]

character or characters, like the “Ninth Men” name I made up for them. But still, Jack was Jack! I was glad to be working with his concepts again, and they certainly had possibilities.

When Jim became editor, he had this interesting idea of getting Silver Age Marvel people to write and draw the initial series. Since I was a “Silver Age Marvel People,” I was all for it! Gary Friedrich and Gerry Conway and I—Gerry just barely qualified as “Silver Age,” but Jim’s choices in that area were limited—dialogued the introductory single issues starring the three main heroes—*Bombast*, *Night Glider*, and *Captain Glory*—who finally came face to face in the final panel of each of their individual solo issues, each plotted by yours truly. Then I would write the main several-issue series, *Jack Kirby’s Secret City Saga*. The artists of the three solo issues were Dick Ayers, Don Heck, and Steve Ditko. To me, though, the one story that really came off looking right was the “#0” lead-in story I did with Walt Simonson, which preceded even the solo-hero issues.

**JA:** How could you go wrong with Walt Simonson?

**THOMAS:** Right... though of course Walt was only borderline Silver Age, at best. After Ditko, Ayers, and Heck had drawn the lead-in solo issues, Gil Kane was scheduled to draw the *Secret City* mini-series. But Gil—and I don’t know if it was because of illness or cold feet or whatever—withdrawed at the last minute, and Ditko inherited the series.

Now, Ditko’s a great talent. I’d been a fan of his *Captain Atom* in the late ‘50s, even before *Spider-Man*, and I feel privileged to have dialogued two of his “Dr. Strange” stories in ‘65. But, in working with him on that Topps series, I discovered that—well, it’s not that Steve wasn’t interested in adding anything to whatever plot was given to him—it’s that I feel he was absolutely interested in *not* adding anything to that plot, or in giving back one iota more than the plot required him to. Maybe he felt, as I suspect Kirby did, that

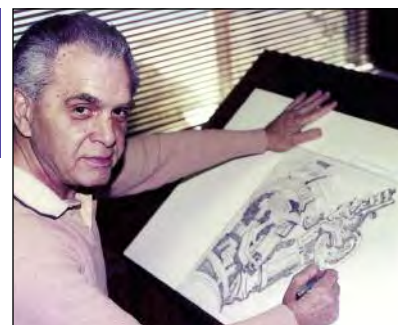
he was this thoroughbred, and that a bunch of mediocre jockeys had saddled him up and ridden him to glory once too often in the past, and he wasn’t going to give back one atom more than they handed him on a piece of paper. When you do that, though, you actually end up giving *less* than you were given, because a Marvel-style plot, or even a full script for that matter, is really just the blueprint for an artist to work his wonders with. If the artist willfully decides he’s not going to work any wonders, he’ll just do a prosaic job. Ditko is capable of much, much more... but as far as I’m concerned, we didn’t get that at Topps, and everybody was the loser for it. Steve may well have a different perspective on that, and I’d be glad to print it... but that’s my honest view. It was then, and it is now.

**JA:** So everything at Topps was Marvel-style then?

**THOMAS:** In that series, yes. The only thing I nixed in the main *Secret City* series was—this was early ‘93, and Bill Clinton was the new President and was showing up in lots of comic books, and someone high up at Topps wanted a major plot point of *Secret City* to involve kidnapping and menacing Clinton. Maybe it’s partly because JFK was assassinated on my 23rd birthday, but I really resisted putting the President in great peril in a comic book, and Len backed me up, because he opposed that idea, too. As finally done, there was relatively little menace to Clinton.

**JA:** But you’d had President Nixon show up in *Fantastic Four* in the ‘70s.

**THOMAS:** That was different... just a cameo. And in “3-D Man,” Jim Craig and I had revealed that Nixon was actually a Skrull.



Jack Kirby

What can we say? He was the King! Still is.



that really doomed Topps' comics from the start was that they decided to plastic-bag the comics and put trading cards in with them—understandable, since trading cards are one of Topps' main things. They're the makers, after all, of Bazooka Bubble Gum and all those baseball and other sports cards over the years. Unfortunately, that meant that, because the comics arrived at the comics stores in sealed if transparent bags, people couldn't open them and page through the comics to decide if they really wanted to buy them.

**JA:** Yeah, I thought it was a bad idea. Did you have any contact with Kirby at this time?

**THOMAS:** I don't think so. Topps just sent me drawings of characters I either had to use or had the option of using. Captain Glory was a Captain America type... Bombast and Night Glider, a little weaker. I don't think they were Kirby's best concepts, but even second- or third-tier Kirby still has some value, and maybe I could have done a bit better by the concept. But I did try.

**JA:** When you did *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs* for Topps, did you have much conversation with Mark Schultz about it?

**THOMAS:** Once or twice by phone, I think. And he obligingly wrote several pages for us about his concept, the Xenozoic world, so that Topps would be on the same page he was. I followed that guide slavishly, because this was Mark's world. I was just hired to add to it.

The main problem we had to solve was how to handle the Topps series while Mark was still creating new stories about that world, more *Xenozoic Tales* that would be published elsewhere. You can't do stories set *after* the last one that's been printed without risking that the next new Schultz story may contradict them. So I decided to find one moment, late in Mark's published stories, when the main characters were all in place and before something irretrievably changed that mix. Well, I found that moment, which probably didn't exist for more than a few seconds, really—just after Wilhelmina Scharnhorst took over the City by the Sea, in case anybody's tracking—and I set every one of the *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs* stories I wrote in what I think of as "the hour that stretches" right after that. I borrowed that phrase from a science-fiction talk-radio show in L.A. that came on late-nights on Saturdays in the '70s and '80s; it was called *Hour 25*.

Our *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs* series was great fun—and, as far as I'm concerned, of considerable quality, though naturally not with the kind of *auteur* intensity Mark brought to the original series. The first of Topps' three-issue series was drawn by Dick Giordano. We made it a sequel to the earliest of the "Xenozoic Tales," done for an underground comic, in which Mark had created these mutated, malevolent brains running around via tentacles. I figured that if they used those tentacles to animate human and dinosaur



Mark Schultz

#### Other Possible Titles: *Cars* (Or *Chrome*) & *Carnosaurs*

Although the original title of Mark Schultz's series for Kitchen Sink Press was *Xenozoic Tales* ("Xenozoic" means "strange life"), it was the contrast between giant primordial reptiles and vintage Detroit automobiles that gave the series its special cachet, as evidenced by the cover of #2 (April 1987). For the series' later and better-known title, *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs*—used on reprints, a TV series, and Topps' comics series—Schultz had to get special permission from General Motors. [TM & © Mark Schultz.]

skeletons, it would look cool. And it did.

Another thing I liked in the series: for some reason, the people in Mark's stories had totally forgotten the old names for dinosaurs, so they'd made up new ones. Instead of "tyrannosaurus" or whatever, they had descriptive names like "slithers" or "cutters" or "honkers"—no, wait, that last one's from *Turok, Son of Stone*, but they were in that vein. The dinosaurs were sometimes named after a person or thing, like a "wonmug" named after the time-travel doc in *Alley Oop*; so, in our first issue, I had a previously unnamed species of dinosaur chasing after the hero's Caddy, and I christened it a "krenkel," [Jim laughs] which I thought was a nice name for a dinosaur. I wish that series could've gone on forever.

We did four three-issue series. Three of them were published—and there's a *fourth* one that exists almost totally complete in photocopy form, with the lead stories totally drawn and written, but not lettered. Its main artist was a talented young Englishman named David Roach.

*Cadillacs and Dinosaurs* was a tremendously pleasurable project, even though the basic concept has gaps in logic and credibility you could drive a Mack truck—or a krenkel—through. You just have to wink at a few minor details like being able to drive 1950s cars through a primeval jungle.

**JA:** Especially when the fossil fuel was still alive!

**THOMAS:** Yes. [laughs] Well, Mark came up with explanations to try to make things plausible, like finding this whole cache of vintage cars. All that's needed is the willing suspension of disbelief, and you can have tremendous fun with that series.

Each Topps issue for the first two story arcs had two different covers in different editions, in that tail-end of the spec era. A high-profile artist would do an artsy cover, and the regular artist—





contract lapse, even though sales were good. They just couldn't deal with it any more. And the interesting thing is that I don't think any other comics company picked up the license after Topps dropped it, despite the show being a hit of sorts. The word must've got around. [mutual laughter] I've still got the other five scripts, all of which I was paid for, sitting in a drawer somewhere.

Show-biz types could be nuts about likenesses. My favorite story, actually, is one Len Wein tells about when he was editor of Disney's comics and they were adapting Warren Beatty's *Dick Tracy* movie. They were having trouble getting Beatty to sign off on the third cover, I think it was, because he didn't like the way his face was drawn there. So, after trying various things unsuccessfully, Len had an idea. There was an earlier cover whose likeness Beatty had loved... so Len figured all they had to do was "flop" that face, turn it into a mirror image, and it was bound to be approved, right? So they did that and sent it on. And Beatty looked at it and said... "That's not my best side." [mutual laughter]

**JA:** When I did *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Patrick Stewart and Whoopi Goldberg had control and say-so over their likenesses. Whoopi

decided we didn't make her as pretty as she thought she was.

And when I did *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* at Dark Horse, I was asked to fix a drawing of Sarah Michelle Geller's nose because she said it didn't have that big bulb at the end that the artist drew, which of course it did. I was supposed to make the bulb smaller when I inked her. I asked, "Did she ever look in the mirror?" They laughed. [mutual chuckling]

**THOMAS:** I want to stress, it wasn't the *X-Files* actors who were causing the problem, probably not even Chris Carter himself. I really liked the show. It just didn't make sense for the TV people to exercise such microscopic control. They knew TV—but they didn't know from comics, and they didn't want to know. Ultimately, they made it impossible for Topps to do the comic book profitably. I was really sorry about it, because I was making the best per-week take-home of my life when I worked on the *X-Files* comic. Plus I enjoyed doing it.

**JA:** Was Topps paying better than Marvel?

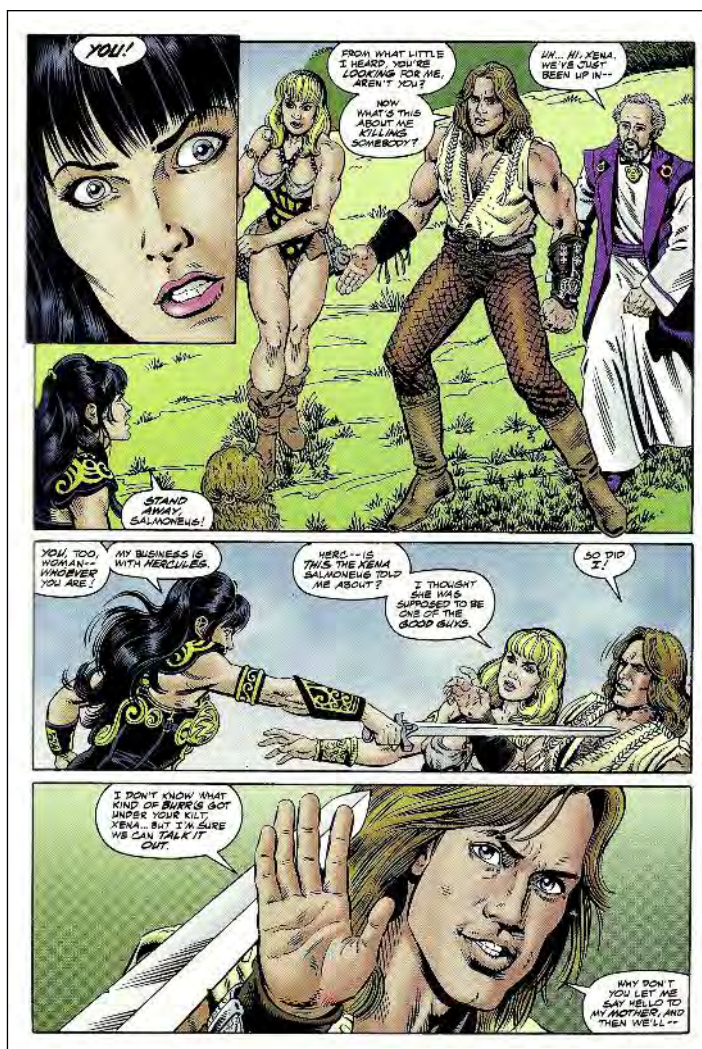
**THOMAS:** About the same, if I recall rightly. I didn't know how long this gig would last, so I cajoled my dear old mother back in Missouri, who was then about the same age I am now, to get home from Bingo in time to tape *X-Files* episodes and mail them to me. [Jim laughs] She was also taping another TV thing I did at Topps—*Xena*. I've still got all those *X-Files* tapes, though I eventually taped over the *Xena* ones.

One thing about *X-Files* that drove me nuts was that Scully remained skeptical about the supernatural, week after week after week. You'd think that by about the third or fourth week, she'd figure out, "Hey, maybe there really is something to this 'supernatural' business!" [Jim chuckles] But I really liked working on the comic, even though I never had any burning desire to write new *X-Files* stories. Actually, at one late stage, at Topps' request, I worked with Dann on a synopsis for a story titled "Singapore Sling" for what was to be the first issue of a comic called *The X-Files Black-and-White*. I don't think anything with that title ever came out, though. *Xena* was fun to write new stories for, but with *X-Files*, I was happy just doing the adaptations.

**JA:** Before we get to *Xena*—you first did five issues of the *Hercules* TV series. I assume Topps came to you for that? Were those original stories or adaptations?

**THOMAS:** They must've come to me, because I wasn't familiar with the shows previously. I don't think anything I did in *Hercules: The Incredible Journeys* or *Xena: Warrior Princess* was an adaptation. If I recall a-right, they were all new stories. They sent me scripts of some shows, including of the first couple of TV movies of *Hercules*—I'm not sure they sent any videotapes. Of course, *Hercules* spawned *Xena*, which became even more popular. When I started on *Xena*, they only had a handful of scripts, no tapes, because the show hadn't yet aired.

Like *Hercules*, *Xena* made good use of the old Greek myths, but treated them with a modern and irreverent sensibility. Even the dialogue had a modern cast. It was a very offbeat take, at a time when that was far more unusual. I had the option of treating the myths fairly traditionally, or I could take liberties. I got a chance to use a lot of things I never thought I'd be able to use in comics, like the *Gilgamesh* legend—well, come to think of it, Dann and I had already used *Gilgamesh* in *Arak, Son of Thunder*. But there were other things, like *The Seven against Thebes*... and I still have a one-page proposal for a *Xena and Hercules Special: Atlas Shrugs*, a riff on the ancient myth in which Hercules was tricked into taking Atlas' place holding up the heavens. *Xena* got him out of that gig, of course. I don't think we ever got around to doing that one. There



### When Hercules Met Xena

Though *Xena*'s debut in the 1990s *Hercules* TV series wasn't adapted, here's the first comic book page that features the two of them, with Herc framed for kidnapping her mother. *Xena* had encountered a *Hercules* imposter earlier, but that doesn't count, does it? Script by RT; pencils by Jeff Butler; inks by Steve Montano. From Topps' *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* #3 (Aug. 1996). [TM & © Universal Television Enterprises, Inc.]





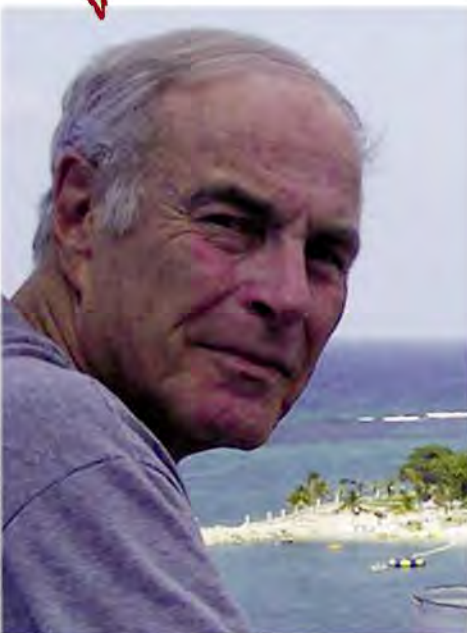
**Vulture's Brood**  
 Kayanan pencil studies of four of the principals from "The Shadow of the Vulture," done in preparation for the comics adaptation. (Clockwise from top left:) Red Sonya of Rogatino—Gottfried von Kalmbach (the tale's hero, a German knight)—Roxelana, mistress of the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent and an actual historical personage (in the REH story, Sonya is her sister)—and the merciless Turkish soldier Mikhal Oglu, a.k.a. "The Vulture." [Art © 2016 Rafael Kayanan.]





HI, READERS! I'M STANLEY TAFFET, AND IN APRIL 1943 I WON A CONTEST BY WRITING ABOUT MY FAVORITE MLJ CHARACTER! YOU CAN SEE MY PICTURE IN TOP-NOTCH COMICS #35, ON THE RIGHT.

I WAS PRETTY THRILLED, LET ME TELL YOU! BUT WHAT HAPPENED NEXT WAS EVERY COMIC FAN'S WORST NIGHTMARE!



*Readers' Page*

PRESENTING YOUR FAVORITE CONTEST—WHERE YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO WIN A PORTRAIT OF YOURSELF, HAND DRAWN BY ONE OF OUR ARTISTS, AND WHERE YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY LOSE!  
HERE IS HOW YOU ENTER!  
YOU JUST SEND US A PHOTOGRAPH OF YOURSELF AND A LETTER TELLING US WHICH CHARACTER IN *TOP-NOTCH LAUGH COMICS* IS YOUR FAVORITE ----AND WHY!  
IF YOUR LETTER IS CHOSEN AS THE BEST, YOUR PORTRAIT WILL BE DRAWN BY ONE OF OUR ARTISTS! IF NOT YOUR PICTURE WILL APPEAR ON THIS PAGE!

**THE WINNER** -----AND HIS WINNING LETTER!



STANLEY TAFFET  
119 ATTORNEY ST.  
NEW YORK, N. Y.

*My favorite character in Top-Notch Laugh Comics is Stormy Gus. I like Stormy Gus because he is very funny and every time he steals a body. He flies out of it.*  
Stanley Taffet

**HONORABLE MENTION**

|   |   |  |   |   |
|---|---|--|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| JEANNE SCOTT<br>THAYER, MISSOURI  | ELEANOR GIORDANO<br>4515 BARKURLL AVE.<br>CLEVELAND, OHIO                           | MORRIS CUTLER<br>1911 64 <sup>TH</sup> ST.<br>BROOKLYN, N. Y.                        | CONCETTA DASTEFANO<br>520 WILLIAMS<br>OMAHA, NEBRASKA                                 | JOE BURDETTE<br>PIEDMONT, S. C.   |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| MILLIE SAIRANUS<br>177 HANOVER ST.<br>FORSYTHAM, N. H.                              | GERALDINE MAUGHAN<br>2900 WEST MARKHAM<br>LITTLE ROCK, ARK.                         | MILDRED THOMPSON<br>120-07 143 AVE.<br>COLLEGE POINT, N. Y. C.                       | FRANCES BROOKS<br>2077 WALLACE AVE.<br>BRONX, N. Y.                                   | SYRREL GERSHEN<br>71 OCEAN P'KWAY<br>BROOKLYN, N. Y.                                  |

**The Winnah!**  
Readers' page from *Top-Notch Laugh Comics* #35 (April 1943).  
[TM & © Archie Comic Publications, Inc.]



# Introduction

by Michael T. Gilbert

**S**ometimes I'd find a name on an old Golden Age comic's letters page and think, "Wonder what ever happened to that kid?" Or I'd spot some young contest-winner's photo from decades past and wonder what was it like to be published in a comic book way back when.

Well, Shaun Clancy did *more* than wonder. He tracked down one of the kids seventy years later and asked him. Stanley Taffet was that boy, and his story includes an EC-style shock ending you won't want to miss! And now, without further ado, we present...

## Stanley Taffet Interview

by Shaun Clancy (2/4/11)

**SHAUN CLANCY:** *This is gonna be a weird phone call for you, but I found your name in an "Archie" comic book from 1943. Did you collect comics as a child?*

**STANLEY TAFFET:** Yes.

**SC:** *The reason I bring that up is you supposedly won the Top Notch Laugh #36 contest. In it, they drew your picture.*

**TAFFET:** Right.



### A Top Notch Entry!

*Top Notch Laugh Comics #36 (May 1943) printed Stan Taffet's portrait (see next page). Art by Don Dean. The hyphen in "Top-Notch," incidentally, never appeared in the comic's indicia. [TM & © Archie Comic Publications, Inc.]*

**SC:** *So, you do remember this?*

**TAFFET:** I was eleven years old at the time.

**SC:** *I'm writing a book on Archie comics and I wanted to see if the people they mention inside here are real people or not. You're the first person on my list to call, and the only Stanley Taffet in the phone book.*

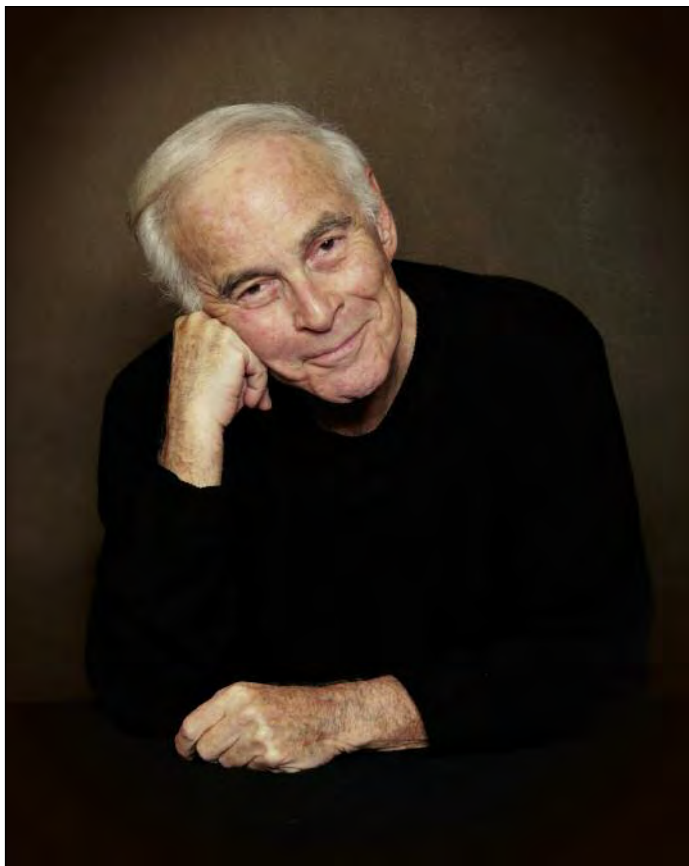
**TAFFET:** Taffet is an unusual name. When I was a kid, I used to read comic books avidly.

**SC:** *You remember this particular comic book after all these years because...*

**TAFFET:** Yes, because I won the contest. I remember I entered the contest and sent a little postage-stamp-sized photo, and I ran with my mother to the newsstand to pick up this comic book. It was called the Readers Page, if I recall. I went to that page and I'm looking down at the bottom of the page and said, "Ma, it's not here. My picture's not here." And she said, "Of course not. It's on top of the page. You won it." [mutual laughter]

**SC:** *Did you see the picture they drew of you?*

**TAFFET:** Now wait a minute. That picture was a photo, but enlarged rather than the postage stamp and my essay.



### Picture Perfect!

A more recent Stanley Taffet photo. Hey, he still looks good!  
[© 2016 Stanley Taffet].



# A FINGER In Every Plot!

## The 1965 JERRY G. BAILS Article That First Pointed A Finger At The Co-Creator Of Batman

Guest Introduction by Roy Thomas – Presented by Bill Schelly

In the September 15, 2015, edition of *The Hollywood Reporter*, DC Entertainment stunned any comics fans who read that entertainment-industry trade paper by announcing that, beginning with the Warner Bros. TV series *Gotham* and the forthcoming film *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, Bill Finger would receive credit for his “contributions” to Batman, whom DC has long heralded as having been created solely by artist Bob Kane.

That announcement left in limbo, however, the question of when—or if—Finger, who died on January 18, 1974, would receive similar credit on DC’s Batman-related comic books.

Happily, not many weeks afterward, though accompanied by no fanfare whatsoever, Finger was given a “co-creator” byline in the comic books *Batman and Robin Eternal* #3 and *Batman: Arkham Knight Genesis* #3, with more to follow. *Hurrah!*

Various sources have rightly given some of the credit for this dramatic turnabout (I’m tempted to call it a “dawn of justice”) to Marc Tyler Nobleman’s recent and excellent book *Bill the Boy Wonder*, as well as to veteran comics writer (and then DC staffer) Mike W. Barr, who back in the 1980s aroused the wrath of his so-called superiors by championing the cause of recognizing Finger as Batman’s co-creator. (Someone told me—rightly or wrongly, I dunno—that the first time Finger was acknowledged in anything like that role in a publication from DC Comics itself was in my introduction to the 2005 hardcover *The Robin Archives*, Vol. 1, where I

referred to him as “the unindicted co-conspirator in the 1939 creation of Batman, working with originator/artist Bob Kane”; but even if that’s true, it was at most a minor milestone along the way... the amazing thing being, perhaps, that that phrase made it into print! Probably just slipped by.)



### You Can’t Draw Drawing!

While not in any way claiming that Bob Kane wasn’t the co-creator of Batman, we’re overjoyed to see Bill Finger finally receiving his overdue credit. If not for Finger, Kane wouldn’t have had anything to *draw* in this undated Batman and Robin sketch, which was sold several years ago by Heritage Comics Auctions. Thanks to Dominic Bongo. [Batman & Robin TM & © DC Comics.]

Happily, some of those same sources that tipped the hat to Nobleman and Barr have also pointed out that this “movement” really began in 1965, when Jerry G. Bails, the original editor/publisher of *Alter Ego*, printed his article “If the Truth Be Known, or, ‘A Finger in Every Plot!’” It appeared in the 12th issue of his spirit-duplicator apa (amateur press alliance) fanzine *CAPA-alpha*, soon after the night Jerry, Dave Kaler, and I visited Bill in his Greenwich Village apartment at the time of the 1965 New York comics convention—and instantly aroused the wrath of Bob Kane. Kane wrote a seething 6-page letter that Biljo

White felt obliged to print later in ‘65 in his own fanzine, *Batmania*. In the winter of 1999, Kane’s vitriolic letter was reprinted in full in *Alter Ego*, Vol. 2, #3 (which was a flip section of *Comic Book Artist* V1#3), then later in the TwoMorrows trade paperback *Alter Ego: The Comic Book Artist Collection*. In *A/E* V2#5, also reprinted in that *Collection*, we featured Jerry’s lengthy rebuttal to Kane’s screed.

Recently, however, CFA editor Bill Schelly and I realized that, although Bill had quoted from Jerry’s article when spotlighting Kane’s letter, *Alter Ego* itself had never reprinted Jerry’s simple two-page piece that started the ball rolling for the eventual recognition of Bill Finger’s rightful place as the co-creator of Batman.

We hereby remedy that situation on the following two pages, by reproducing that article from scans of the actual pages of *CAPA-alpha* [k-a] #12. Jerry made a couple of errors in his recounting, but the appeal nonetheless stands as a landmark in the history of comic books....



Bob Kane



Bill Finger



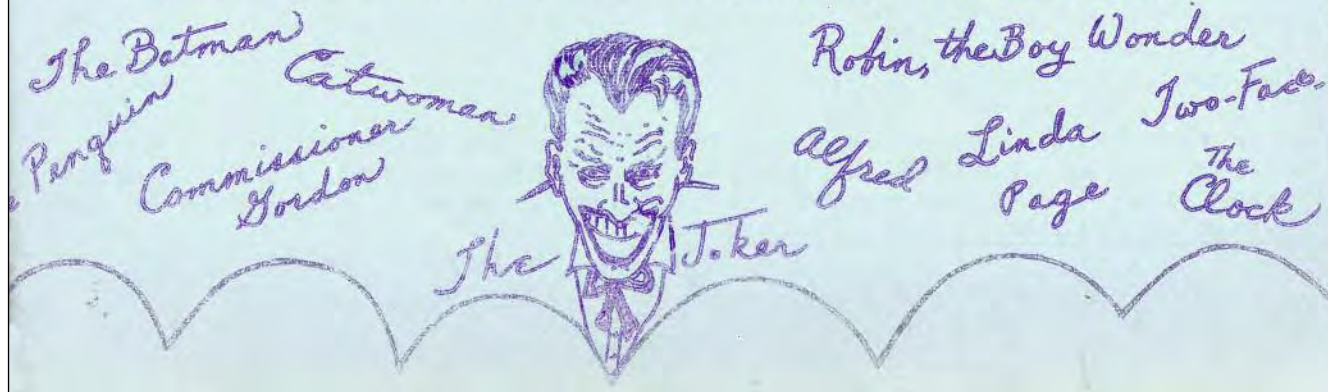
# IF THE TRUTH BE KNOWN

OR

## "A Finger in Every Plot!"

Somewhere today in Greenwich Village there is a small piece of notepaper; tucked away in a desk drawer along with other mementos, it is mute testimony of a famous episode in the unheralded career of the man who gave life to Comickdom's most memorable cast of characters. The episode? The birth of Robin, the Boy Wonder! What name should be given to the Cowled Crusader's dynamic, young, pun-cracking sidekick? Both sides of the notepaper are crammed with possible names--all short, snappy monikers, like Pepper, Socko, Tiger, and Wildcat--nothing as blah as Batboy, Kid Bat, or Batlad. No, this was to be the trade-mark for "the Greatest Character Find of 1940." Only he wasn't found, he was created--like all the other early characters of the Batman strip--in the still hours of the morning, at the hot and imaginative typer of Bill Finger, the Silent Legend Behind the Batman!

Bill is an unassuming man, who was, by his own admission, the last to recognize his talent for writing for the new medium of the comics. Cartoonist Bob Kane was the first to recognize this talent, and immediately hired Bill to write "Rusty and His Pals" and later "the Batman." With Batman's success, Bill began working directly for DC, creating such famous strips as "Green Lantern" and "Wildcat." Batman had appeared in DETECTIVE COMICS, NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR 1940, WORLD'S FINEST, and his own magazine BATMAN before Bill discovered that his basic story ideas were being picked up and used in other strips. At that moment it first dawned on Bill that he had an enviable talent. Sure, he realized that he could adapt the free-wheeling style of the pulps to the four-color panels, and break down the action of a Douglas Fairbanks-type adventurer into a panel-by-panel description for the artist, but little had he realized that he was adding original touches of pathos that were imparting immortality to his characters. The fact that the Batman was, admittedly, inspired by the pulp hero, the Shadow, and even picked up his utility belt





P.C. HAMERLINCK'S

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Fawcett Collectors of America

#198  
May 2016



Portrait by Vic Dowd, 2/26/45;  
Captain Marvel figure by Ray Harford (Whiz Comics #31, 6/42).  
Shazam hero™ & © DC Comics.

# Ray Harford and the Ghost Army



# Fawcett Artist RAY HARFORD & The Ghost Army

## Part I – From Binder Barn To Battle

by P.C. Hamerlinck

**C.C.**

Beck called him the closest of any of the Fawcett artists to matching his art style.

Ray Harford was one of the integral Fawcett comic book artists who had a hand in pre-war "Captain Marvel" artwork, and later he went on to use those same artistic abilities to dupe the enemy in a top-secret Army unit during World War II.

### Pratt Pals

Raymond Dell Harford was born on July 21, 1920, in the Paramus, New Jersey, area.

He enrolled at Pratt Institute, located in Brooklyn, New York, to study illustration, beginning in the autumn of 1938. It was there that Harford met friends Bob Boyajian, Vic Dowd, and Ken Bald. Harford's new classmates were also studying illustration. They would soon refer to themselves as "The Four Musketeers."



### Rays Of Hope

Ray Harford in 1942, with his ever-present pipe, working at Fawcett Publications illustrating a "Captain Marvel" story (specifically, page 24 from *America's Greatest Comics* #3, for which see p. 94).

Seen at left are Harford's cover for *America's Greatest Comics* #4, (Aug.-Nov. 1942), along with a scan of his original black-&-white art. [Shazam hero, Spy Smasher, & Bulletman TM & © DC Comics.]





Out of the Four Musketeers, Ray Harford was the quiet one, according to Vic Dowd: "He smoked a pipe... looked very English. He came from a nice, refined family. We visited each other's homes and got to know each other's parents."

Harford married Edith Taylor while he was still attending Pratt. Bob Boyajian was Ray Harford's best man at the wedding. The newlyweds resided in Teaneck, New Jersey. (Edith later moved to Rochester, New York, with her parents after Ray enlisted in the Army.)

### The Binder Barn

Harford, Boyajian, Dowd, Bald, and several other 1941 Pratt graduates (including Kurt Schaffenberger, Nat

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#### ALTER EGO #139

JIM AMASH interviews ROY THOMAS about his 1990s work on Conan, the stillborn Marvel/Excelsior line launched by STAN LEE, writing for Cross Plains, Topps, DC, and others! Art by KAYANAN, DITKO, BUSCEMA, MAROTO, GIORDANO, ST. AUBIN, SIMONSON, MIGNOLA, LARK, secrets of Dr. Strange's sorcerous "177A Bleecker Street" address, and more! Cover by RAFAEL KAYANAN!

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#### Illustrate This!

Pratt Institute's 1940 Illustration II class had several students who would soon make their name in the comic book industry. Ray Harford is in the third row—he's the 3rd one in from left. To his right is Bob Boyajian, then Kurt Schaffenberger. In row 2 (counting from the top), the 4th one in from the second guy over to his left is Ken Bald. Bottom row: first from left is Vincent Costello, the fourth guy in. If you can identify Jimmy Potter, Dick Rylands, John Westlake, and Bob Butts, you'll be the head of the class—and get a free copy of *Alter Ego!* Fawcett should've sent a recruiter to Pratt. It would have saved themselves a lot of time! Thanks to Shaun Clancy.

The four young men (sometimes along with another future professional comic book artist, Kurt Schaffenberger) spent a lot of their free time together. Ken Bald later recalled that they all socialized with each other over the weekends and "would all go out together with their girlfriends." (Harford, Schaffenberger, and Bald actually all married the girls that they dated at Pratt.)

Fawcett's Smash early "Public Dave"

Butts, John Dick Rylands, and right over to Jack in his backyard New Jersey. Binder t pages for assembly-line l, a year ahead of old the guys Binder's.

r barn, he helped bk artwork largest account, cible," "Spy lunchback," and or Better ne Champ," Lev Gleason



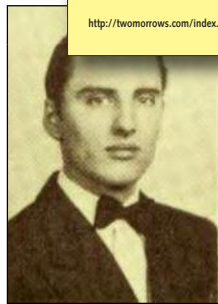
Ray Harford



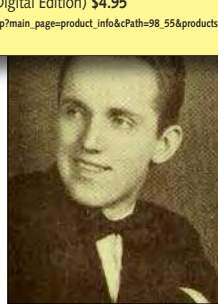
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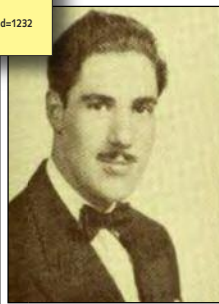
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First Vice-President; Bargain Party Committee; Pirate Dance Committee; Football.



**ALFRED DUCA**  
539 Somerville Avenue  
Somerville, Mass.  
Football.

#### Class Act of '41

A close-up of Ray Harford's photo from the Pratt Class of '41 *Agora* Inter-fraternity yearbook—juxtaposed with photos taken from another page in that same book that spotlight his friends Bob Boyajian, Vic Dowd, and Ken Bald. Jimmy Potter, another artist that headed over to the Jack Binder shop after graduation, is also featured on the page—as is Al Duca, who also would draw for Fawcett. Thanks to Shaun Clancy. As it would happen, Boyajian, Dowd, and Bald were all interviewed by Jim Amash for *Alter Ego* #55—still available from TwoMorrrows.